

Hello, this is Tom Cookman with a Community Comment.

If you have lived in Humboldt County for any length of time, you may have grown accustomed to the sheer volume of down and out street people we have. But visitors to our area are always shocked. Last weekend, my wife spoke to a man who was travelling in our neck of the woods. He said he really liked the area, but was disturbed to see so many vagrants. This is not the first time my wife or I have had to discuss the state of our city with tourists. We always tell them it's easy to get welfare in our county, and this, along with our rampant drug culture, actually attracts people looking for a street life. It's unfortunate, but true. We have wonderful, loving members of our community who devote their entire lives to helping those less fortunate. This is admirable, but this increase in that segment of our population, brings a multitude of problems. Of course there is more crime, but I want to address some serious safety issues that need immediate attention. The motels on Broadway across from the bowling alley have been converted into housing for many of our poor, and now we have a high concentration of individuals who are on drugs in this neighborhood. I work on the other side of Broadway, and every single day I see people wandering the streets talking to telephone poles or waving their arms and screaming at motorists. At least three times a week I witness a street person illegally crossing Broadway, which is Highway 101. They jay-walk across four lanes of traffic, and if you're lucky, they might stop in the turn lane, between north and south bound cars, to wait for traffic to clear. But, most of the time they are not cautious at all. They just mindlessly wander into traffic without a care to motorists trying to avoid them. At least once a year a pedestrian is hit and killed while jay-walking in this area. Although this is a tragedy for the individual and his family,

it is also devastating for the driver. Last week I was following a Eureka Police Department car when one of these druggies staggered across Broadway into the turn lane. The officer just drove by within three feet of this guy, and I happened to follow him to Seventh Street where he turned off at the Police Station. It really didn't hit me until later that we have become so accustomed to this type of behaviour that even our law enforcement ignores it. I know jay-walking is a petty crime, but if our police personnel would start arresting the offenders, it would be a deterrent to keep them from putting both themselves and the motorists on Broadway in danger. I know that arresting them would be a huge inconvenience to the officers, and we don't have the capacity at the jail to detain them, but maybe holding them at the Courthouse for four hours would not only help them sober up a little, but it might keep them from doing it again. This is a huge safety issue. I think back to the discussions of creating the Safety Corridor between Eureka and Arcata and how public safety was the key reason stated by our officials to move forward with the project. But, there are more pedestrians killed on Broadway than there were fatal traffic collisions between Eureka and Arcata. I know that it's easy to discount it when a drug-induced person wanders out into the street and is killed, but we must remember that they are somebody's son or brother or father or uncle or friend. Their death is a tragedy to someone. We are so concerned with providing them a sandwich or a food card or a room, but we don't care that they blindly walk among moving vehicles. Each time it happens, they put themselves and other innocent people in harm's way. It needs to stop. I hope our new City Manager puts some resources into this very real safety issue.

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