

I, Dolores

Where you stand on the 'culture shift' at the Mission park depends on who you are.

By Jeremy Lybarger

Dolores Park's joie de vivre

lasted 48 hours. Just two days after its northern half reopened following a 15-month, \$8 million renovation, park rangers either performed a necessary public service or inaugurated a new Dolores police state — it depends who you ask.

In the crosshairs was Chris Hirst (aka Robot Dance Party), a guy in a robot suit who roves around the park playing music and delighting giddy toddlers. On June 20, rangers cited him for amplified sound, thus unleashing a torrent of laments and beleaguered emoticons online.

The incident became a cause célèbre on local blogs including *Uptown Almanac*, which posted the June 23 story "Dolores Park 'Culture Shift' in Full Effect." The headline was a reference to Supervisor Scott Wiener's 2013 comment that a revamped Dolores would need "a culture shift ... to get people to stop trashing it." For *Uptown Almanac*, Wiener's remark betrayed an "apparent goal of reining in the free-wheeling community space that is Dolores Park."

Wiener says his words were taken out of context: "It's false reporting, if you can even call it reporting. I don't support the removal of the robot, or the removal of six-packs, or the removal of entertainment." And, for the record, he doesn't want to nix beach chairs or macaws from the park either.

In an email to *SF Weekly*, *Uptown Almanac* responded, "Wiener has routinely advocated for increased policing in Dolores Park. The recent crackdown on petty crimes that do not impact the littering situation ... was an obvious result of his push. If this came as a surprise to him, then his stunning lack of foresight should be concerning to all of us."

Such contretemps are the lifeblood of local blogs, but the 16-acre Dolores Park has played an outsized role in San Francisco's culture war. Its evolution from verdant ghetto to neighborhood jewel to hipster-frat-techbro colony parallels the city's recent socioeconomic turbulence.

For Robert Brust, co-founder of the nonprofit advocacy group Dolores Park Works, "the war is over and they have won" — they being the young, mostly white transplants who have embraced the Mission.

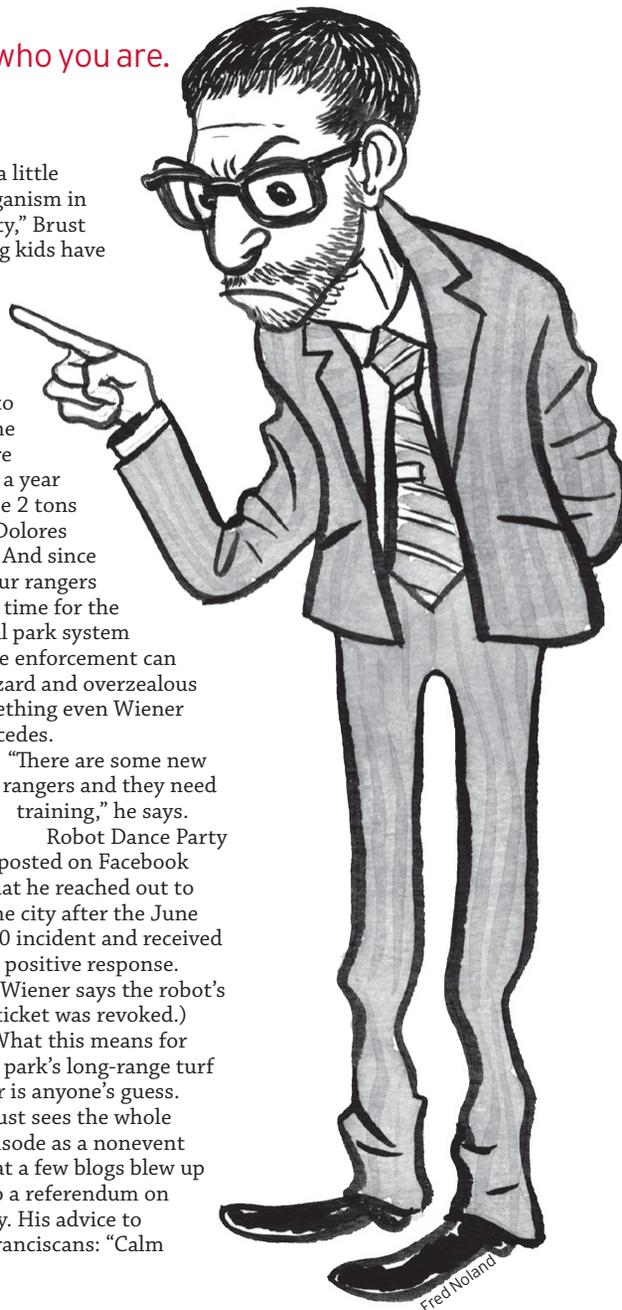
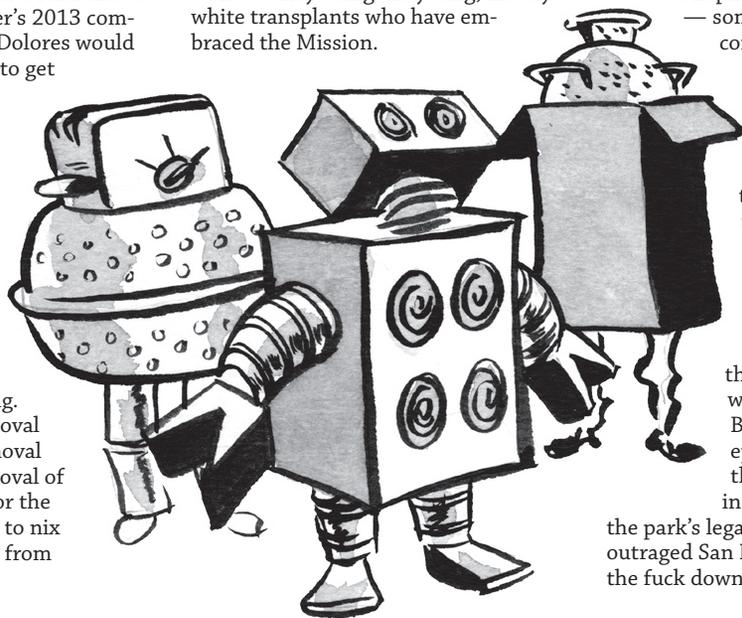
"The park is a little exotic living organism in the big, dirty city," Brust says, and "young kids have not been instructed how to deal with it."

Whether young kids are to blame or not, the city spends more than \$1 million a year hauling away the 2 tons of trash left in Dolores every weekend. And since only three or four rangers are on duty at a time for the entire municipal park system (220 parks), rule enforcement can be haphazard and overzealous — something even Wiener concedes.

"There are some new rangers and they need training," he says.

Robot Dance Party posted on Facebook that he reached out to the city after the June 20 incident and received a positive response. (Wiener says the robot's ticket was revoked.) What this means for the park's long-range turf war is anyone's guess. Brust sees the whole episode as a nonevent that a few blogs blew up into a referendum on

the park's legacy. His advice to outraged San Franciscans: "Calm the fuck down."



Pole Dancing

Bay Area has long history of flag-related protest.

Since the massacre of nine African-American churchgoers in Charleston, S.C., the nation has busied itself with bringing down the Confederate flag. On June 27, activist Bree Newsome scaled the flagpole at South Carolina's capitol and removed the Stars and Bars herself.

The Bay Area has seen its own flagpole protests. In December, a #BlackLivesMatter demonstrator climbed the Oakland Police Department's flagpole, removed the American flag, and replaced it with one featuring portraits of African-Americans killed by police. During Saturday's Pride celebrations in San Francisco, a protester climbed the flagpole at Harvey Milk Plaza to fly a yellow-and-black flag reading "QTIPOC Liberation & Resistance" in an effort to "reclaim Pride" to its radical roots. (QTIPOC is an acronym for Queer Transgender Intersex People of Color.)

With so much attention on flags, it's appropriate that Oakland design journalist Roman Mars has launched a campaign (sponsored by Autodesk) to redesign SF's city flag, which resembles a Boy Scouts merit badge for birding. Mars told *Wired* the new flag should embody SF's values of "inclusiveness and change."

But why bother designing a new flag when we already have Airbnb's "Bélo," the faintly vaginal logo the company rolled out last summer? Inclusiveness of tourists in residential units, changing local zoning laws, plus corporate sponsorship? It's a San Francisco trifecta. **Julia Carrie Wong**

Out on a Limb

Property owners throw shade on city's tree transfer program.

In 2011, San Francisco began making property owners responsible for maintaining the trees along the city's sidewalks. Facing a \$380 million general fund deficit, City Hall had to slash budgets somewhere, and trees don't compete well against priorities like transportation, homelessness, or policing.

Since then, nearly 7,000 trees have been transferred, with another 12,657 on the list. Meanwhile, citizens have fomented a kind of slow-growth rebellion.

On May 17, almost three dozen Mission District residents calling themselves Friends of Folsom Street Trees sent a letter to Mohammed Nuru, director of Public Works, urging a repeal of the transfer program on the grounds that it puts trees at risk and is based on outdated economics. Even more galling: "[Public Works] does not discuss that this plan makes

property owners liable for public safety and damage caused by the street trees that [Public Works] planted."

Not only are property owners liable for damage, they're also financially responsible for pruning trees, which can cost \$300 to \$1,000 per visit depending on the tree's size (the city recommends having trees serviced every three to five years). If a tree's roots upset the sidewalk, property owners are also responsible for replacing it at a cost of \$100 to \$150 per slab. Neglecting tree care can elicit a fine of \$1,799 or more.

And that figure goes up to \$1,847 on July 1.

Public Works isn't crazy about the program. "This is the last thing we want to do," says Rachel Gordon, director of policy and communications. But the department has little choice: The city's tree budget is \$4.5 million. Ideally, Gordon says, it should be \$20 million. With only 10 full-time arborists — down from a pre-recession high of 19 — it's nearly impossible for the department to keep up with demand.

According to Supervisor Scott

Wiener, some low-income residents hire bargain arborists who leave trees "butchered." Although Public Works inspects for disease prior to transfer, if a tree does die on a property owner's watch, he or she is responsible for the removal bill. Wiener thinks a parcel tax is one way to remedy the budget shortfall.

It's a matter of priorities, Friends of Folsom Street Trees says. How can the city afford body cameras for police officers when it can't pay for routine pruning? City Hall apparently can't see the forest for the trees. **JL**