

STORE'S HANGERS-ON RANKLE NEARBY SHOPS

Oregonian, The (Portland, OR) - November 12, 2002

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Summary: Businesses near **Peterson** 's, a convenience store on Morrison downtown, complain about transients

Trixie Byrne shuttered her store, Byrne's Luggage, in downtown Portland two weeks ago because she'd had enough of the long hours it takes to run a small business.

She'd also grown tired of something else: the panhandlers, the street toughs and the homeless who routinely harassed her customers.

Byrne said she has seen vagrants verbally assail customers if they won't hand over change. Others urinate in doorways or deal drugs if the police aren't around.

Whatever the case, she said the "unsavory" element always seemed to congregate outside her store at 940 S.W. Morrison St., one of a handful of businesses occupying the first floor of the city of Portland-owned Smart Park garage.

The culprits, she and other business operators said, are some of the customers who frequent **Peterson** 's, a convenience store at 922 S.W. Morrison St. that's open 24 hours a day. They say the store creates a poor business climate when the retail industry is already reeling.

"Twenty years ago, this was a viable location," Byrne said. "Now I think they're going to have a hard time finding someone to take my spot."

Byrne and other business operators in the area long have complained to city officials about **Peterson** 's. Their complaints, they say, aren't being addressed.

"I hate to say bad things about other people trying to do business downtown, but the way that store is operated is worrisome," said Tim Greve, who operates Carl Greve Jewelers at 731 S.W. Morrison St.

"It attracts transients and street people all day and night. It makes it very difficult for other retailers to do business around here. The city needs to limit the hours or do something because it's making it bad for all of us."

Doug **Peterson** , who owns and operates the convenience store, dismissed his neighbors' complaints. He said he's run a reputable business at the location for 17 years and is being taken to task for something that's beyond his control.

"I don't see us as being the bad guys here," said **Peterson** , who operates two other convenience stores in downtown. "We appeal to all types of people. I can't control what

happens outside of my store."

Peterson said he doesn't sell malt liquor, fortified wine or any alcohol in more than 16-ounce containers. He also invested in a scanning machine that prompts clerks to ask customers for identification for any alcoholic beverages that get rung up.

Nestled in the center of the block next to a MAX light-rail stop, **Peterson** 's is usually a hive of activity. Most of the sidewalks along the block are covered by the overhang of upper-floor parking, offering protection from the rain.

Teens and street kids who hang out in Pioneer Courthouse Square migrate to the store and its surrounding area at dark. A few homeless people sit outside the store, asking anyone who passes by for spare change.

Some customers will buy alcohol and enter the garage above the store -- considered a public place because the city owns it -- for protection from the cold.

It's not uncommon for street people to sit in the doorways or under the awnings near the store because it's one of the few places still open.

Some business operators said police have responded quickly when called to clear the sidewalks, but once they leave, the problems return. And when they open in the morning, they're often met with the aftermath: garbage strewn about and dirty sidewalks.

"The way I look at it, the city is no better than a slum landlord for letting this kind of stuff happen," Byrne said. "We've asked them to cut back on the store's hours, but they won't touch it."

Greve put it more bluntly: "The city has been asked to do the right thing for the benefit of the neighborhood, and they won't."

Diane Lee Holuka, the city's property manager, said officials are aware of the problems associated with the store. She said she decided that the city won't renew **Peterson** 's lease once it expires in January 2005, and a convenience store won't be "in the plans for that building anymore."

Holuka said she will continue to monitor any problems that come up and will address them on a case-by-case basis with **Peterson** . That's the best she can do, she said, because she doesn't have the authority to dictate the store's hours under the current lease.

"It's all a very difficult situation," she said. "As the landlord, we're concerned about people's safety. But Mr. **Peterson** also has the right to run his store.

"I've spoken to him by phone about the problems and in some cases contacted him through letters. I've found that he is responsive. But we'll keep watching."