

NEWS

New Vallejo Neighborhood Law Program set for public launch Thursday



Eli Flushman, left, and Ryan Griffith will be meeting the public on Thursday as the city's new 'Neighborhood Law' attorneys, working in a program modeled after one in Oakland. (Mike Jory/Times-Herald)

By **JESSICA A. YORK** |

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Vallejo's newest team of pavement-pounders looking out for the community's welfare will more likely be wearing ties than badges.

The duo of attorneys Eli Flushman and Ryan Griffith have been hired as part of the city's new two-year pilot program, the Neighborhood Law Project.

On Thursday night, they will host a bit of a coming out party for the community – even with refreshments.

"Really, what we're hoping is to introduce ourselves, me and Ryan, to let you know who we are and put a face to this program," Flushman said last week. "We're going to explain what our job is, explain how we're going to do it."

For Flushman, a Berkeley-bred attorney whose relatives — his great-grandfather down through his mother — have called Vallejo home, the job was a natural fit. He said he carries his mother's pride in the community, and would like to be part of improving it, maybe by going after property owners who are not keeping out squatters.

"(This job) just spoke to me because I knew this was going to be a good. Whatever I did here, it was going to be good," said Flushman, 31. "If you just fix one house, that's already better than what it was before. Obviously, our goal is much, much higher than that."

The program's kickoff meeting is scheduled for 4 p.m. Thursday at the John F. Kennedy Library's Joseph Room, 505 Santa Clara St.

A key to the Neighborhood Law Project's success is to be clear that it is not the attorney's program – it's the community's, Flushman said.

"This program is just starting. So a lot of it, at least initially, is going to be just listening to the community and trying to find out what our reality can be – where we can make the most dents," Flushman said.

Not every community member concern will be right for the program – limited staff time also will determine how many cases the attorneys can shoulder – Flushman stressed that taking the issue to court should not be the first step in solving a problem, either.

"A lot of times, I think of it as (attorneys are) a closer, like in baseball. We finish off things – at least, that's what we're hoping to do. We're hoping to finish some of these long-standing problems that can't quite get finished through the administrative process the city has," Flushman said.

“I think, for a lot of attorneys, the courtroom is the final thing that you do. Before you get to the courtroom, though, you try to reach out and contact the actual property owner, and you try to get them to voluntarily take care of the issue. The next step is to use whatever legal arms you have.”

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