

Tattoo parlor ordinance passes 4-3

Body piercing
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Parlors allowed within 30 days

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In a month, Watsonville officially will allow tattoo parlors in limited sections of the city.

On Tuesday, the City Council held its second reading of an ordinance that clears the way for tattoo parlors in a commercial thoroughfare zoning district, with a host of requirements.

The ordinance cleared its first reading on Sept. 11. This second vote, as required, was more of a formality. The City Council pulled the ordinance from the consent agenda and passed it 4-3 as a separate item at Tuesday's meeting.

Now, the new rule takes effect in 30 days.

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On Sept. 11, the City Council rebuffed minor amendments to the new ordinance by a 5-2 vote, with Edward Din and Oscar Rios in the minority, and adopted staff's proposed ordinance by 4-3, with a majority consisting of Mayor Manuel Quintero Bersamin, Mayor Pro Tem Kimberly Petersen, Dale Skillicorn and Rios. Voting against the ordinance were Greg Caput, Din and Antonio Rivas.

Previously, the City Council voted to uphold a 1962 ban on tattoo parlors and preserve a moratorium.

City Council members have raised concerns about the public health and safety effects of allowing tattoo parlors.

Santa Cruz resident Geoff Wells and his mother, Kate Wells, a civil rights attorney, said they will sue the city over its restrictions — on body art businesses — historically a ban, prior to the votes taken at the last two meetings. The Wellses have cited statistics defending body art businesses as safe and sanitary.

One of the liveliest debates took place at the Sept. 11 meeting.

"People are not just objecting to the tattoos," Caput said. "They are objecting to what you are going to be near."

"The reason I got elected here was to make sure that we provide for the health and safety of our community," Rivas added.

Kate Wells defended her son's occupation.

"He doesn't want to open up a strip joint or some sort of adult entertainment with alcohol that's going to attract some sort of criminal element," Kate Wells said. "That's not the case. In a challenge, that's what we're going to say, that you can't say that this is going to cause more crime, when the statistics prove that is not true."

John Doughty, community development director for the city, argued against allowing tattoo parlors in industrial areas.

"The city has struggled mightily to maintain and through annexations and other

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— Greg Caput

sources to provide adequate lands for economic development and job development and job growth. The loss of any area of industrially zoned land and industrially designated land, one parcel, is too much," he said.

"There are adequate areas for commercial enterprise down Freedom Boulevard, Main Street and other areas such as East Lake," he said.

Kate Wells scoffed at this reasoning, arguing that buildings in the industrial area near the Watsonville Airport have remained vacant for years.

"It's bad faith for you to characterize a 7-11 market as a potential location for a tattoo studio. It's bad faith for you to identify a storage place as a potential site for a tattoo parlor, a hotel, a private residence, a gas station. All of these are included in the little blocked-out places where you said there can be a tattoo parlor."

Some council members wanted a more rigorous ordinance. Caput urged a 750-foot buffer from public or private schools and wanted to add requirements for libraries with 300-foot buffers. Rivas urged additional 500-foot buffers from liquor stores and bars. Neither proposal survived.

"To go beyond what staff is recommending, I think we're going back to where we were before, zero," Rios said. "It shows also from the presentation of Mr. Wells and Mrs. Wells that they are not satisfied with this anyway. They are going to continue on their road because they feel that what staff are recommending is not good enough. Why go through the whole process again of giving them more ammunition? They're not happy anyway, they want something else."