



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Sgt. Tom Watson meets with Soquel resident Caroline Busenhart, who was among those applying for a permit.

Residents plan protest of their own

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SANTA CRUZ — A group of angry long-time residents said Wednesday it will hold a counter-protest to one planned on the Fourth of July by homeless activists.

Several hundred homeless activists are expected to protest the city's camping ban at a demonstration that day in front of City Hall.

News that street people would be coming in from up and down the state for that protest moved Soquel merchant Carolyn Busenhart to action. "How much are we going to take?" she said as she and about 25 others entered the Police Department Wednesday afternoon to apply for permits to hold their counter-demonstration. "I'm here because I'm tired of

taking care of grown-ups who should be able to take care of themselves," said 26-year-old John Clements. "Nobody's giving me a hand-out. I have to work for everything," said Clements, a fourth-generation Santa Cruzan who said he is putting himself through college.

"As taxpayers, we're very tired of paying the bills for a bunch of freeloaders," added Bill Kirby, who said he is a life-long Santa Cruz resident. "They want a meal in the morning and a meal in the evening and they want to sleep on the mall. If they get sick, they want free medical care. I'd like that, too, but I'm in a bad situation — I started working 40 years ago and I can't quit," Kirby said.

The residents, who've adopted the name "Take Back our Town," told top police offi-

cial that they draw a distinction between the truly homeless who need to be helped and those who are homeless by choice.

"Santa Cruz has bent over backward to help the truly homeless," said Jan Alexander, who said she has lived in the county since 1967. "But these people have come here to use our riverbeds, sidewalks and doorways as their bedrooms and bathrooms. That's asking too much," she said.

Busenhart told police officials that she hopes as many as 1,000 residents show up to support the city's camping ban. She promised the 10-to-noon counter-protest would be peaceful. "We don't want any 'troll-busters,'" she said.

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Deputy Chief Mike Dunbaugh said afterward that he would issue the group a permit. "I don't really have any concerns as long as they conduct themselves in such a manner that police services are not needed," Dunbaugh said. The Police Department, he said, will be taxed to the limit by regular Fourth of July activities.

"I'm satisfied that these are all respectable citizens," Dunbaugh said.

He said the homeless activists have applied for permits to use lower DeLaveaga Park and Laurel Street Park on July 4. He said they have not applied for a permit for a parade or demonstration, although, he said, he has heard a demonstration at City Hall is planned.

"No one has contacted us or has expressed any willingness to tell us just what their plans are," Dunbaugh said.

City Councilman Don Lane told The Sentinel he has reservations about the planned protest against the camping ban, "I just can't ever discourage people from expressing their political opinions," he said, "but as a matter of politics this isn't

necessarily a wise approach.

"It's a very hot situation (homeless issue) and they're making it hotter. The concept of calling attention to it has merit, but if it really turns people off and divides people even more, then I have very mixed feelings about it," Lanes said.

Lane said he had spoken with one of the organizers of the planned protest and "...I told them this is a dumb idea to come here on July Fourth. If there is a counter-demonstration the volatility of the situation will be quite high."

Lane said he expects about 300 homeless activists to take part in the protest. "The organizers sense the possibility that if it's too big they can't keep it organized. They want an effective, positive demonstration of closed size," Lane said.

Judith Beinert, a local opponent of the camping ban, had a different crowd estimate. "This thing in July is going to be huge. The town will probably be filled with homeless from all over the state, and even other states. The word has gone out through every network there is," she said.

Sentinel staff writer Greg Beebe contributed to this report.