

# Santa Cruz passes law on 'looksism'

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

The Santa Cruz City Council has approved its so-called "looks law" that prohibits employment or housing discrimination on the basis of height, weight, sexual orientation or appearance.

The sweeping law was approved by the council on a 5-2 vote yesterday, with council members John Mahaney and Louis Rittenhouse dissenting, and was to take effect in 30 days.

"This bill serves as a statement that bigotry will not be tolerated in Santa Cruz," said Corin Drummond, a 23-year-old Cabrillo College student who said he was assaulted last month because he is gay.

About 350 people attended the council meeting at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium. Some carried signs and quoted sections of the Declaration of Independence.

Twenty-two local churches signed a letter opposing the law. Most of those who voiced opposition at the meeting were critical of the sexual-orientation clause.

"If you pass this law, you will be legislating immorality," said Jinny Zack of Capitola.

State law already prohibits employment or housing discrimination on the basis of age, gender, race, color, creed, religion, national origin, marital status or disability.

See LOOKS / back of section ►

## LOOKS

► From Page 1

The Santa Cruz measure had been ridiculed by some who believed it provided protection for people with idiosyncrasies like unusual hairstyles or extreme tattoos. Business leaders, including the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Association and the Seaside Company, which owns the Boardwalk, initially opposed the law.

But a five-member task force changed the wording from "personal appearance" to "physical characteristics" to address the concerns.

Supporters said the law approved yesterday does not protect voluntary body changes such as strange haircuts, but it does protect people who have disfiguring birth defects or burns.

"The ambiguities which concerned me a couple of months ago

have been resolved," A.C. Smith, the owner of Bento Baki, a sushi restaurant, told the San Jose Mercury News.

A violation of the new law brings a \$100 fine, and provides for an independent mediator to hammer out disputes before they go to civil court.

"I think that it truly shows a picture of the community, when we (in Watsonville) are talking about economic revitalization, job creation and infrastructure, and they are talking about the way people look," said Watsonville's Vice Mayor Lowell Hurst. Last night, at the same time the Santa Cruz council was discussing the anti-bias law, Watsonville's City Council was taking public comments on a proposed redevelopment plan.

Hurst said he didn't fault the people of Santa Cruz, saying only that there was a contrast in priorities between the two cities. He said he had heard of no move for a similar ordinance in Watsonville, and added that racial discrimination and economic discrimination were the more pressing issues here.