

# Watsonville approves tattoo parlors — but only in certain spots

*Body Piercing + Tattooing*  
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9-12-07

**WATSONVILLE** — After 45 years, tattoo parlors can open in Watsonville — if they can find a spot. And that might not be easy.

In a 4-3 vote Tuesday, the City Council approved an ordinance that overturned a 1962 rule that essentially banned body artists from plying their trade in Watsonville.

But civil rights lawyer Kate Wells, who's been battling for her son's right to open a shop for the better part of the year, says the new rules too severely restrict where tattoo parlors can locate. She plans to file a lawsuit to force the

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## Tattoos

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city to open up more territory.

"They're obviously not acting in good faith," Wells said Tuesday night of city officials. "They want to ban tattoos and they've effectively done it again."

City Councilman Oscar Rios acknowledged the rules were tough and said he would have liked to see fewer restrictions. But he called it a compromise measure that would put the city on firmer legal ground if Wells takes the issue to court.

"Watsonville opened a door," Rios said. "We've opened a possibility, maybe not for them. But maybe for some other tattoo person who can live with that."

Though there's been little or no public outcry about tattoo parlors, the issue has riled some on the council, who expressed concern that such businesses would jeopardize public health, promote

gang activity and blacken Watsonville's image.

Twice previously a majority on the council had shot down proposed ordinances, sending staff back to tighten rules — even though staff, including Police Chief Terry Medina, said the proposals adequately dealt with public health and crime concerns.

The latest version prohibits tattoo parlors from locating within 750 feet of each other and requires an annual review by the Planning Commission. It also calls for parents to provide notarized permission and to be present during the tattooing of anyone younger than 18.

The ordinance also restricts how close tattoo shops can be from schools, parks and liquor stores, as well as putting some areas, such as downtown, off limits altogether.

That leaves about 60 parcels in the city for consideration, and more than half of them are banks, gas stations, homes and convenience stores, said Jeff Wells, the would-be tattoo shop operator. He

wanted the city to let him set up his business on an Airport Boulevard parcel zoned for industrial use, but officials said it wasn't the best way to use scarce land for economic development.

All of the available parcels are zoned for commercial, not industrial use.

The issue grabbed the attention of a crowd of Watsonville High School students, who attended the meeting as a government class assignment.

"Ridiculous," said Jessica Cobos, 17, who shook her head as she listened to Councilman Greg Caput say Watsonville wasn't ready for tattoo parlors. No one hears of problems at tattoo shops in Santa Cruz, she said after the meeting.

"As long as it's clean and sanitary and has a permit, I don't see a problem," agreed Joey Barrera, who said he plans to get a tattoo once he turns 18 in December.

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