

Council gives first OK to pooches downtown



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Molly the Irish terrier checks out the Santa Cruz City Hall courtyard with her owner, downtown resident Ann Miller, while the City Council hears comments on lifting the downtown dog ban Tuesday night.

Attempt to lift restriction against panhandling fails

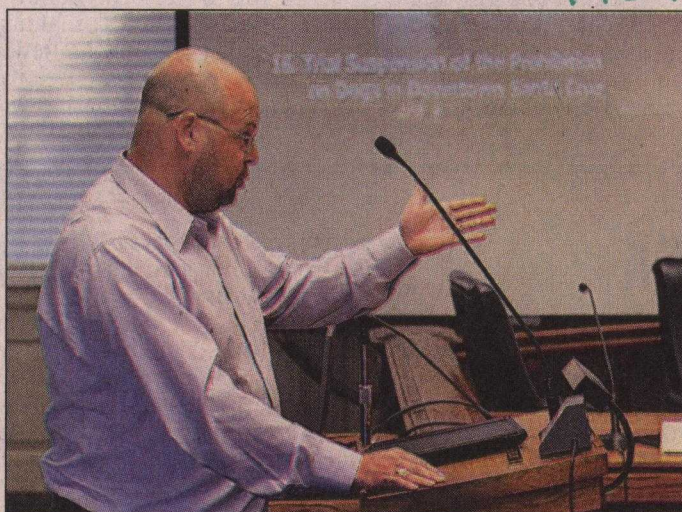
Pacific Avenue
By J.M. BROWN

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jbrown@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — On a narrow vote, the City Council on Tuesday preliminarily approved lifting a 35-year ban on dogs downtown.

The council voted 4-2 to support a draft ordinance that would allow dogs on Pacific Avenue and feeder streets for a three-month trial period so long as they are leashed, under control and cleaned up after by their handlers. Dogs will not be allowed after dark, gather in packs or be with anyone panhandling.

Mayor Ryan Coonerty and Councilmembers Hilary Bryant, Lynn Robinson and Tony Madrigal supported the rule change requested by downtown merchant eager to welcome new customers



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz resident James Wright tells the City Council he supports lifting the downtown ban on dogs.

SEE DOGS ON B3

DOGS

Continued from B1

who routinely shop or dine with their dogs. If the council takes a final vote in two weeks, the ban would be lifted in late August and will become permanent after Nov. 30 unless the council changes its mind.

"It's up to dog owners to make this work," said Bryant, who co-owns a veterinary business near downtown.

The Downtown Association representing more than 500 merchants said businesses are losing customers to Los Gatos, Carmel and other dog-friendly downtowns. Businesses currently may choose whether to permit dogs inside, and the ordinance does not change that.

"We need to keep the money in our county," said Judi Wyant, who has owned an antiques store on Pacific Avenue for more than 25 years and said she isn't worried about dog accidents. "It's fair to give it a try."

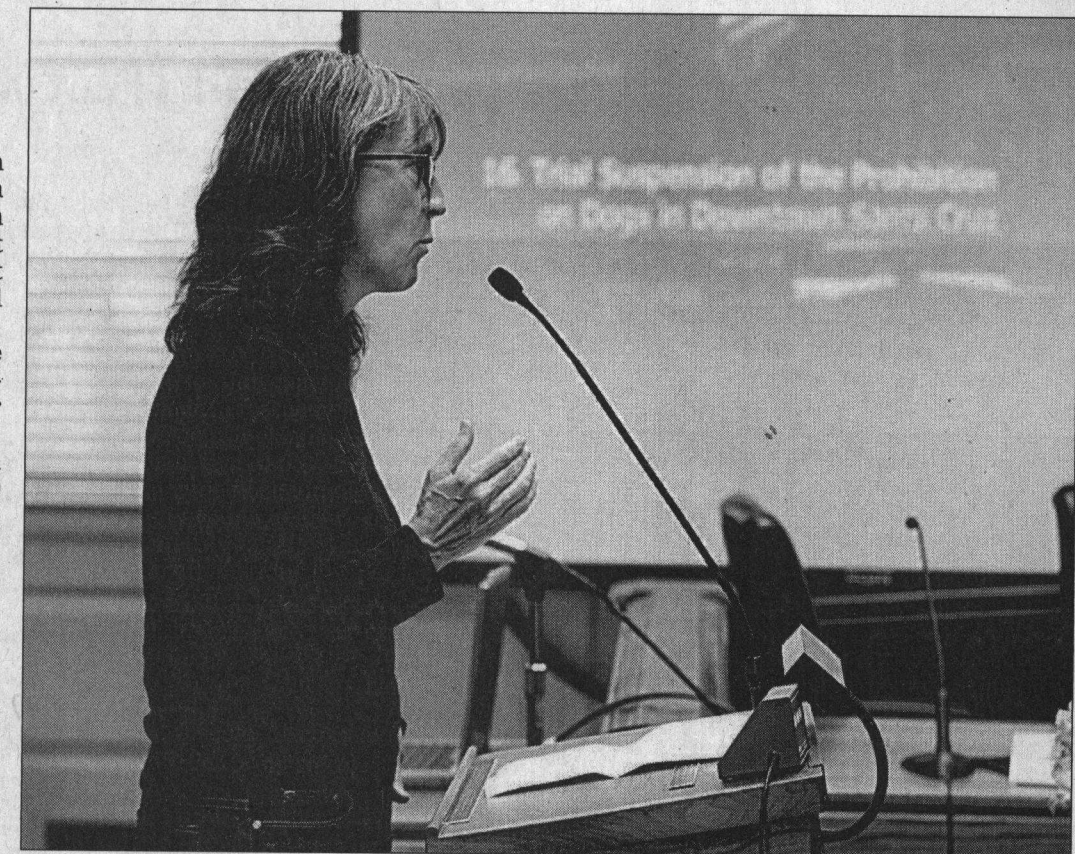
Vice Mayor Don Lane and Councilwoman Katherine Beiers dissented, citing concerns about the panhandling restriction. On a 3-3 vote, Lane unsuccessfully sought to block the prohibition, saying the city already has an aggressive panhandling ordinance and that a homeless person who owns a dog may not have any other place to put it.

"I actually support having dogs downtown for this trial period, but I believe poor people should be included in the experiment," Lane said after the meeting.

In explaining the restriction on panhandling, Coonerty said, "People use dogs as a way to garner sympathy. We thought that was an inappropriate use of an animal in this situation."

Police and downtown hospitality staff have also dealt with people claiming their dog is a service animal but provide no verification. Police Chief Kevin Vogel said officers recently began asking such dog owners for documentation, and if they can't provide it, they are given citations.

Beiers and Madrigal supported Lane's call for leniency on panhandling with a dog, but Beiers also questioned the financial toll to the city. She cited the concern most echoed by com-



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Friends of Lighthouse field spokesperson Betsy Firebaugh tells the City Council the city is losing out on tourist dollars from visitors with dogs.

DOG ORDINANCE

The Santa Cruz City Council approved on first reading Tuesday a trial suspension of a 35-year ban on dogs on Pacific Avenue and feeder streets with the following provisions:

- The ban will be lifted for a three-month trial period for the downtown area bounded by Water, Laurel, Cedar and Front streets, and including the Town Clock and Scope Park.
- Dogs must be tethered to a leash no more than three feet from handlers, and dogs are restricted to one per leash.
- Dogs must be under the control of their owner.
- Dogs may not be left unattended or tied up outside; any dog left unattended may be taken immediately by police or animal services authorities.
- Dogs may not be in the company of more than two other dogs.
- Dogs will be allowed only from sunrise to sunset.
- Dogs must display collar tags demonstrating they have been licensed and vaccinated against rabies as required by the county.
- Panhandling, carrying signs or collecting signatures with a dog is not allowed.
- Violation of the rules may result in a citation, and any subsequent violation committed within 48 hours will constitute a misdemeanor.
- Rule change would not affect dog ban in effect on some beaches and the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf.
- If approved on second reading July 28, the ban will be lifted within 30 days and, unless the council reverses the suspension before Nov. 30, dogs will be permanently allowed.

SOURCE: City of Santa Cruz

munity members opposed to relaxing the ban: Cleaning up neglected waste.

"We are going forward with a significant ordinance, a significant change for downtown,

without any sense of what it's going to cost; it's going to cost something," Beiers said, adding there will be safety issues with economic consequences. "For every new shopper we're going

to lose a community shopper."

Before the July 28 meeting, city staff will hammer out plans and cost estimates for changing signs warning against dogs, as well cleaning up neglected waste and placing collection bags. However, parks and public works officials told the council that an increase in dogs downtown since initial publicity about a possible ban lifting last year has not caused a substantial problem with unattended urine or feces.

Whitney Wilde, founder of the dog advocacy group Woofers & Walkers, said the organization donate 5,000 biodegradable waste collection bags and provide bag disposal stations to place on every corner of Pacific Avenue from Cooper to Cathcart streets.

In approving the trial period, the council tweaked the ordinance from how it was originally drafted last week. Dogs will not be able to congregate in groups of three or more and must be within three feet of owners at all times even if on a leash of six feet or longer. Handlers can't carry any sign or solicit signatures for petitions with dogs present.

Councilman David Terrazas was absent but had signaled he would support the move.