

EVERY DOG MAY HAVE ITS DAY

City Council to consider whether to allow dogs downtown again for trial period



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

The Santa Cruz City Council will decide if dogs should be allowed in downtown Santa Cruz for a three-month trial period.

Pacific Avenue
By J.M. BROWN

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SANTA CRUZ — The Jacksons and Kruegers are exactly the kind of customers downtown merchants don't see enough of these days.

Rebekah Jackson and her husband, Archie, came over the hill from San Jose several years ago to visit Santa Cruz with buddies Aimee and Chris Krueger. As the two couples often do on weekend get-aways, they brought their dogs — a 4-year-old Yorkiepoo named Odie and Capo, a 7-year-old German shepherd whose name means "captain" in Italian.

They piled out of their vehicle downtown only to see a sign warning them dogs weren't allowed.

"We just got back in our car and left," Archie Jackson said on a recent Saturday afternoon, while having lunch with his wife and friends at PortaBella, a Mediterranean bistro on Carmel's Ocean Avenue.

In Carmel, dogs are not just allowed downtown, they're embraced with very few reported incidents. Several

IF YOU GO SANTA CRUZ CITY COUNCIL

WHAT: Discussion of proposed suspension of downtown dog ban for three-month trial period

WHEN: 7 p.m. Tuesday

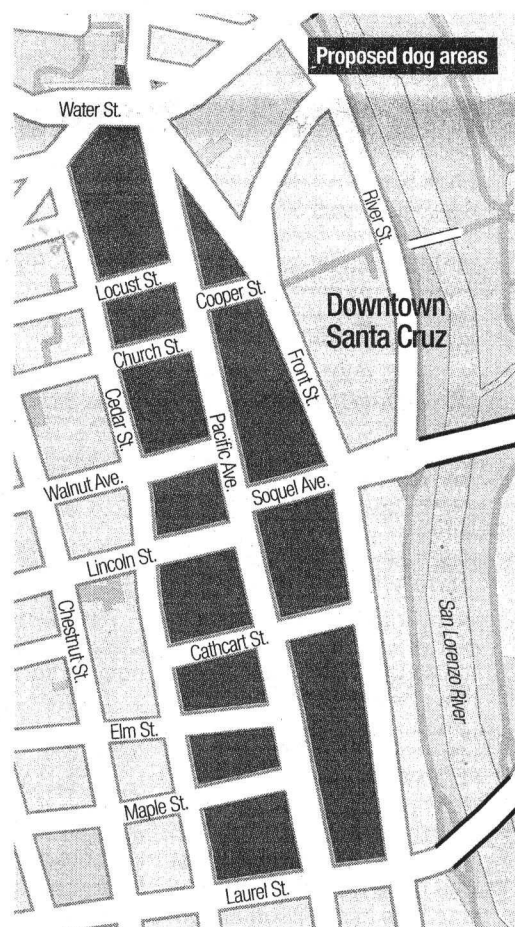
WHERE: Council chamber, 809 Center St.

other regional shopping areas, Capitola Village, Los Gatos, Pacific Grove and Santana Row in San Jose, also welcome dogs.

At the request of merchants who believe they're missing out on a huge market, the Santa Cruz City Council on Tuesday will consider temporarily overturning a 35-year rule banning pooches on Pacific Avenue. And it's apparent there are more than enough votes to make it happen.

During a three-month trial,

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ANTHONY L. SOLIS/SENTINEL

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DOGS

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licensed and vaccinated dogs would be allowed on Pacific Avenue and several feeder streets during daylight hours as long as they're leashed, attended at all times, cleaned up after and not used in panhandling. If passed, the revised ordinance would go into effect within 30 days and be made permanent after Nov. 30 unless the council changed its mind or tweaked the rules after the test period.

The city must still work out how and where to place waste collection bags downtown and how much that might cost. City officials estimate the cost will be minimal, but dog advocates are already vowing to help.

"I think the economic benefits to our downtown merchants will be most welcome," said Councilman Tony Madrigal, who owns a miniature dachshund named Shortie and is one of three council members proposing the rule change. "My hope is that by allowing dogs on a trial basis, more people will feel welcome to come downtown with their pets, many of whom they consider part of the family."

Although the Santa Cruz Downtown Association board voted unanimously this spring to pursue a change in the city's dog ordinance, not all merchants agree it's a good idea.

Opponents fear some dog handlers won't pick up waste or control their animals. Others worry panhandlers will take on dogs when asking for spare change, a problem authorities have faced when warning people about dogs downtown only to hear dubious claims that the dog is a service animal.

Although he is the owner of three chihuahuas, Rick Tedrow, a salesman at Stephan's Fine Jewelry, is concerned permitting dogs will increase the number of transients who hang out downtown. He doesn't mind well-groomed dogs coming in the store, but overall, he said, "It would not be a great place for dogs."

A LONG TIME COMING

The city banned dogs on the



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Shoppers at O'Neill's in downtown Santa Cruz have their little dog in tow.

TRIAL PERIOD KEY

Council members say a trial period is key to giving dogs a chance downtown.

Councilwoman Katherine Beiers said a number of constituents raised safety concerns with her when the Downtown Association first looked to change the rules. But this time around, she said only a handful of residents have contacted her.

As a frequent jogger who lives near the dog-popular West Cliff Drive, Beiers is worried about how canines will mix downtown. While she hasn't made up her mind, she appreciates that there is a trial period proposed.

"I've never been excited about having dogs back on Pacific Avenue," she said, adding that, "half of the people don't clean up after their dogs" on West Cliff Drive.

Mayor Ryan Coonerty and Councilwoman Hilary Bryant are in favor of the proposal, having submitted it for consideration along with Madrigal. That leaves Vice Mayor Don Lane and Councilmembers David Terrazas and Lynn

because they can't bring their dogs," she said. "They go to Los Gatos and Carmel."

But some critics say comparisons with Carmel and Los Gatos are unfair — that as small, upscale towns, they don't face the same amount of transients hanging out and asking for money, sometimes accompanied by dogs.

But San Luis Obispo, which at 45,000 in population is more similarly sized to Santa Cruz, is a college town with a vibe closer to downtown Santa Cruz. San Luis Obispo requires dogs be leashed downtown, but the city hasn't had problems with behavior or waste that might inspire a ban.

"If we ever were to raise that — and no one has brought that up — we think there would be quite an outcry," said Doug Davidson, acting directing of community development. "They have always been allowed."

Susan Marshall of Carmel visited Pacific Avenue with friend Diane Parks of Watsonville last month, but without their dogs. They said their companions, an Austro-

PROPOSED DOG ORDINANCE

The Santa Cruz City Council on Tuesday will consider temporarily suspending a long-standing 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 that is 3 to 5 feet long, 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 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, the ban will be lifted in 30 days and, unless the council reverses the suspension before Nov. 30, dogs will be permanently allowed.

SOURCE: City of Santa Cruz

percent of the estimated number of dogs countywide last year, which was 54,010.

Despite the tickets issued, Police Chief Kevin Vogel said officers treat dogs as a low priority in terms of overall

later side streets several years later after numerous complaints about out-of-control dogs and neglected waste.

But three decades later, amid a consensus that dog owners are generally more responsible now, the Downtown Association board voted in March 2010 to ask the council to loosen the rules.

However, a May 2010 riot that left numerous downtown businesses with broken windows, graffiti-covered walls and other damage, pushed the issue to the back burner. At the time, the city had other big problems to deal with, including a spike in gang-related violence, a mounting budget deficit, and persistent problems with aggressive panhandling and other problems on Pacific Avenue.

Linnaea Hölgers James, owner of Artisans Gallery, cast the board's sole dissenting vote on dogs last year. She said there were too many distractions to add another controversial element.

But a year later, after the city has stationed First Alarm security guards downtown, James said the "climate has improved" and she changed her vote. Although she is still concerned dogs could lead to bad behavior at a time when many merchants are still struggling in a bad economy, she believes the numerous restrictions proposed by the city should minimize problems.

Since news of the Downtown Association's push to allow dogs again, the Downtown Management Corp., which oversees the Downtown Host Program, reported a 7 percent increase dog-related contacts made by its hospitality crews — up to 1,922 in 2010 from 1,792 in 2009.

And the Police Department is on track to issue as many dog-related citations this year as last. In 2010, the department issued 77 tickets for people having dogs on Pacific Avenue, and so far this year, they have given out 35.

Yeyen Gunawan, owner of La Vie Pure Food Collective, risks getting tickets by walking Louie, her 3-year-old black yorkie terrier mix, for short stints on Pacific Avenue. She hopes the rules about cleaning up and controlling dogs will work during the trial period, but said, "If it fails, it's back to the people."

Councilman David Terrazas plans to support the trial, saying, "Anything we can try to make our downtown visitor-friendly. It gives us a chance to look at the impact of revisiting the rules and having the opportunity to weigh in on things moving forward."

Vice Mayor Don Lane agreed, saying, "It's worth us trying to make this work. There are some details I want to discuss about enforcement, but the general idea is a good one."

EFFECT ON BUSINESS

There's no exact way to track how dogs affect economic and safety conditions in downtown shopping areas, but anecdotally the experience is positive.

Csaba Ajan, managing partner of PortaBella in Carmel, estimated 20 percent of his business stems from customers accompanied by dogs. They are allowed on the back or front patios, and are often brought water bowls by the wait staff.

Only twice in 16 years does he remember a problem arising — one from a customer complaint, another when a dog urinated.

"Your council needs a canine education," he said with a grin.

His customers, the Jacksons and Kruegers of San Jose, said they would visit Santa Cruz more often if they could bring their dogs. When the friends go wine tasting or seek out the beach, they are apt to take longer trips if the dogs are with them.

"It costs us a lot of money in the long run when we have to find somewhere for boarding," said Rebekah Jackson.

Aimee Krueger, who recently gave birth to twins Noah and Elijah, said she isn't worried about fights or other problems walking her dog in commercial areas.

"You get an idea when the owner has control of the dog," she said. "If there is a problem, I just go to the other side of the street."

Judy Huyck, owner of Chefworks on Santa Cruz's Pacific Avenue, brings her Shetland sheepdogs, Millie and Aleigh, to work everyday and they are often fawned over by customers.

"There are a lot of people who don't shop downtown

dogs at home. and an acre called Fess, would get too worked up by all the hustle and bustle.

Although Parks said allowing dogs downtown "makes it a more friendly place," she repeated concerns about panhandlers using dogs and was happy to hear the city's proposed restrictions would outlaw it.

Huyck said she doesn't believe allowing dogs on Pacific Avenue will actually attract more transients with dogs.

"I think it's only going to make it more fair," she said.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Melanie Sobel, general manager of Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter, said she also supports the city's proposal, as long as dogs are licensed, under control and on leashes.

"The more dogs get socialized, the better behaved they are," she said.

The agency requires all dogs in the county older than 4 months be licensed, vaccinated against rabies, and spayed or neutered. But Sobel said the number of dogs licensed, just under 8,000 in 2010, is only 14

rules put police in an awkward position of telling tourists and residents to put their dogs away. He said he doesn't foresee any major problems allowing dogs back.

"The success or failure hinges on dog owners themselves," he said. "It's worth giving it a try."

Whitney Wilde, founder of the social group Woofers and Walkers, agrees dogs won't present a health or safety risk. She plans to offer the city 5,000 biodegradable waste collection bags to place downtown if the measure is approved.

"If you think you are going to have all of these wild dogs downtown, you're not," said Wilde, who has a 90-pound Belgian malinois. "It's going to be people who enjoy being with their dog and taking the dog places on a regular basis."

Unattended urine and feces are the biggest worry for Andrea Paradise, manager of Petroglyph. She said she is fine with dogs, but, "If I saw that owners weren't cleaning up after them, I might have a different opinion."



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Louie is brought downtown by his owner and downtown business owner Yeyen Gunawan.