

Body Piercing & Tattoos

# City Council puts tattoo parlor debate on hold Divisions surface over stereotypes

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With divisions surfacing over the health and safety of allowing tattoo parlors in Watsonville, the City Council voted to table new regulations Tuesday that would have permitted body art shops away from Main Street and schools and bars.

See TATTOO, page 6

## TATTOO

From page 1

The council will return to the issue of tattoo parlors in August, when it will also review health guidelines based on similar procedures in Monterey County, which would require body art practitioners to attend bloodborne pathogen exposure control training and offer proof of Hepatitis B vaccination.

During Tuesday's discussion, Councilmember Antonio Rivas voiced concerns about tattoo parlors, adding that gangs and white supremacists can use tattoos as hate tools. Rivas also said he has seen high school students infected by bad tattoos and worried about AIDS, hepatitis and allergic reactions.

"I am very concerned about the health and safety of our city of Watsonville ... What kind of people come to tattoo parlors?" Rivas questioned. "This is something that scares me."

But other councilmembers questioned stereotypes about body art customers and practitioners.

"I think we also need to recognize that it's not just a bad element that gets tattoos," said Councilmember Kimberly Petersen. "People have the right to get tattoos. We have to be open to respecting everybody's rights."

"These days, even grandparents get tattoos," Councilmember Oscar Rios added.

City staff had proposed regulations to allow tattoo parlors only in the "thoroughfare commercial zoning district," meaning that body art shops would largely be limited to stretches of Airport Boulevard and Free-

dom Boulevard. Under the proposal, approved May 1 by the Planning Commission, new parlors would need a Body Artist Permit from the Watsonville Police Department, including fingerprinting, identification and a background check. The shops would not be allowed within 300 feet of liquor stores or bars or 500 feet from schools, parks, playgrounds or other body art facilities.

When the council returns to its discussion, Rivas suggested increasing limits to force tattoo parlors 1,000 feet from libraries, schools and health and government facilities.

If accepted, the new rules would revamp a 1962 city ordinance that required doctors to supervise all tattoos, effectively banning tattooing. The issue re-emerged when officials realized the ordinance could be out of step with draft state rules. Santa Cruz attorney Kate Wells also warned that the city could open itself up to a lawsuit over first amendment rights to self-expression by limiting tattoo parlors.

In response, the council approved a moratorium on body art shops in January.

City Manager Carlos Palacios said Tuesday that a decision to leave the existing ordinance as is could come mean a costly legal battle.

"We, nor the planning commission, are making a moral or ethical judgment," he said. "The issue at hand is that there is clearly a first amendment right for people to get tattoos. Absolutely, crystal clear. It is not an option, any more than you can prevent people from buying cigarettes or alcohol. You cannot make restrictions so restrictive that it would prevent coming to Watsonville."