

'Leave us alone'

Homeless people praise effort to ease camping ban; residents near sleeping areas fear plan will backfire



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Cathy Humphrey and Terry Holladay live in their camper, parked here along Shaffer Road on the outskirts of Santa Cruz.

By **DARREL W. COLE**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Terry Holladay wants a place to park his 1983 Chevy camper and sleep in it without fear of being cited.

John Carr wants the same thing for homeless folks like Holladay, but not if that means they'll be parked in front of his veterinary clinic on Mission Street. Carr says the city's creation of "safe-sleeping zones" in two industrial parks will only create conflict.

At Cowell Beach on Wednesday, a young homeless man who called himself Pathfinder Red Wolf said the safe zones have been a long time coming, and he thinks many people will use them. But he'd prefer a place closer to the beach and plans to continue to "disappear" at night to secret sleeping areas.

Those most affected by the pending sleeping-zone plan are the homeless, who say they don't feel safe now, and area residents and merchants, who fear their neighborhoods soon will be overrun.

The City Council voted 4-2 Tuesday to allow overnight sleeping in cars or on the sidewalks in parts of the industrial areas around Harvey West Park and Natural Bridges State Beach, reversing decades of council opposition

to such an idea. If given final council approval in two weeks, the safe-sleeping zones could be in place in July and remain in effect until at least the Nov. 7 election, when city voters will be asked whether to make them permanent.

City officials say the change will amount to an improvement. A number of homeless already sleep in cars and campers in the industrial areas, and now the city plans to add portable toilets, garbage bins and a police officer dedicated to patrolling just those areas.

The Harvey West Park area already is home to a homeless shelter and several programs serving the homeless.

Current city regulations prohibit sleeping outside on public or private property or in vehicles between 11 p.m. and 8:30 a.m.

The change, expected mainly to affect people living in vehicles, would allow sleeping in the safe zones between 9 p.m. and 7 p.m. but not within 300 feet of any residence.

After three nights in one spot, the sleepers would have to move to another spot at least 500 feet away.

Wednesday morning, campers, cars and recreational vehicles lined the streets in both industrial zones, a com-



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Brothers Scooter and Thomas Harper, on the road from Oklahoma, agreed with the less-restrictive measures on the homeless.

mon sight in the area. Some of the people staying in the vehicles said they welcome the sleeping zones because they will feel less like targets.

Holladay and his partner, Cathy Humphrey, have lived in their small camper for a year. Several months ago, while parked on Shaffer Road near the

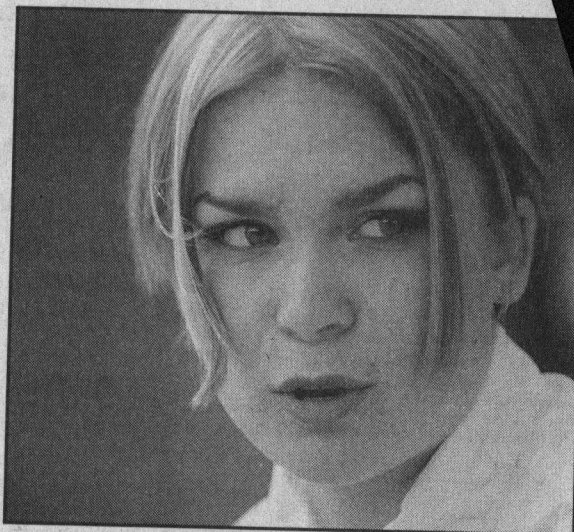
Homeless Garden Project, Holladay was ticketed.

"This is a good idea for us," said Holladay, who works at the garden with Humphrey. "The fact that they will leave us alone. That's all we want."

Please see HOMELESS — PAGE A3

Westside resident Cherise West believes the relaxed camping rules will give the homeless a safe place to sleep.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel



Homeless

Continued from Page A1

Other homeless people without vehicles said they might take advantage of the safe zones but are hesitant about sleeping on sidewalks out in the open.

"Why not set it up in a field somewhere?" asked Scooter Harper, a homeless Santa Cruz man, standing near Cowell Beach with a group of homeless friends.

"Because they don't want us out in the open," blurted out his brother, Thomas Harper.

Tom Ball, 44, said he's been homeless since he was 16. Standing behind the Safeway supermarket on Mission Street, he said he has learned to find his own places to sleep, staying away from others and hiding well enough to avoid citations.

"Anyone can camp if they are smart enough to hide," Ball said. He said he didn't think he would bother with the safe zones.

"I don't like that," he said. "It's too concentrated an area for me. I like my own space."

While RVs and pickups with campers are no strange sight on the streets of the industrial areas, some residents and businesses say the safe zone will only cause more problems. Some complained that the city didn't discuss the proposal with them beforehand.

"It's fairly obvious, ... they are just dumping the problem away from City Hall and downtown," said Carr, owner of Ark Animal Hospital in the Natural Bridges safe zone.

Carr said the concentration of homeless will aggravate existing problems such as unruly behavior and unsanitary conditions.

"We have grave concerns out here because there are already problems," Carr said. "It's now setting up a situation where the city can't police the situation. I think there will be confrontations and it will have to be changed."

Resident Shaku Atre, who lives on Encinal Street near Harvey West Park, said she was "blown away" by the change because the city did not contact her about it.

"This is going to be terrible," said Atre, who owns a small software company. "I come home late from work, and how will I walk through or drive when I will be scared stiff? I will fight against it."

Dan Fulton, formerly homeless, has been renting a room for three months while working at the Home-

less Garden project. But for nine months he struggled to find shelter and slept in different churches through a shelter program.

He thinks the safe zone will work, especially if there is a police officer, restrooms and garbage bins.

"I think you'll see people use it," Fulton said. "The idea is good, but it's also not without problems, though I really think it will help the homeless situation. A lot now live in fear about just trying to sleep."

Cherise West lives and works on the Westside. She said "it made her day" when she read in the newspaper that the city was establishing sleeping zones.

"All they are trying to do is sleep," said West, sitting outside Safeway, where she works. "A few are my friends and they just want to be treated fair."