

Santa Cruz conservatives protest new anti-discrimination ordinance

SANTA CRUZ (AP) — A proposal to protect job and housing rights of this city's diverse denizens, from hippies to homosexuals, has turned into a morality play with conservatives coming out of the closet to protest.

After City Councilman Neal Coonerty introduced his anti-discrimination ordinance Tuesday night, citizens from all walks of life came forward to say a few fiery words, although a public hearing isn't scheduled until Feb. 11.

"We need this kind of protection," Wendy Chapkis said, drawing loud applause. "This idea isn't weird. I'm not weird. I am a lesbian and I have no protections in jobs or housing because of that."

But business owners — who drew even louder applause from a crowd of some 100 who came to the meeting — said the proposal would leave employers vulnerable to lawsuits and take away their rights to freely choose workers.

"We feel like it's almost reverse discrimination," said Michael McGee, representing the local restaurant association. "It's just gone too far."

Some speakers attacked the homosexual lifestyle, saying such people shouldn't have civil rights protection.

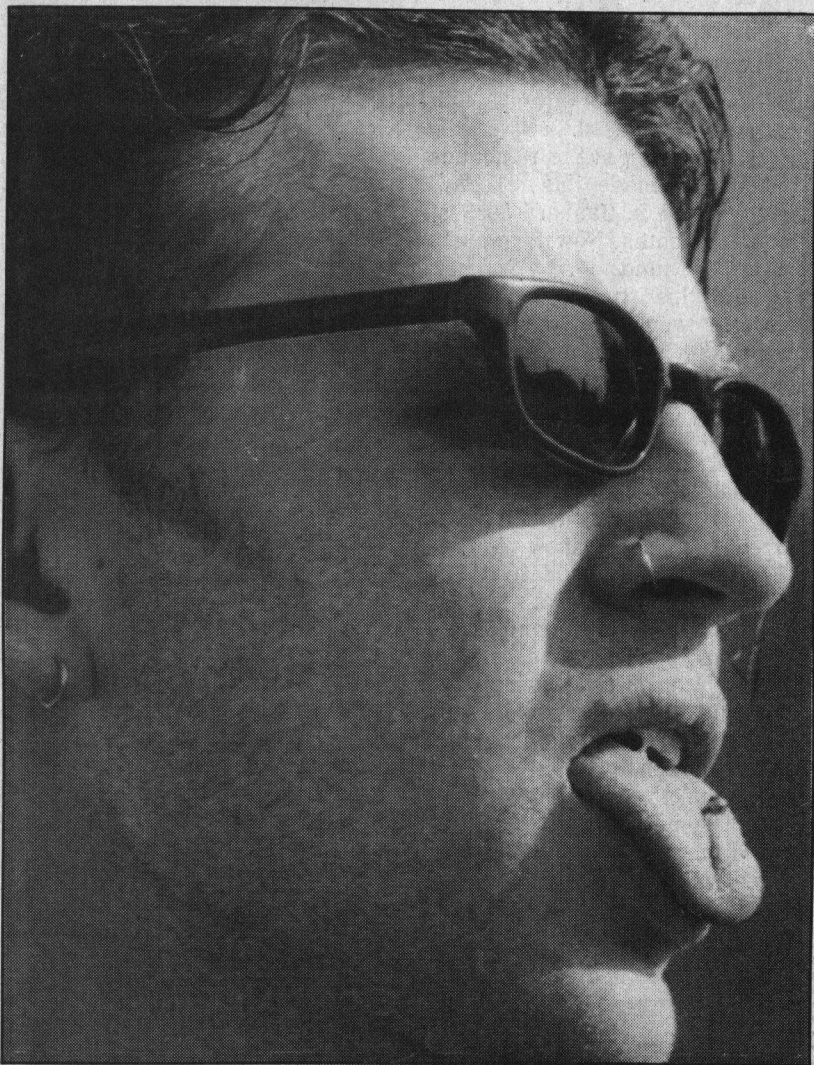
"Homosexual behavior is destructive behavior," Mike Shuler said, drawing hisses and boos and applause from the emotional crowd. "We really don't need government telling us to accept what we don't agree with."

Merrie Schaller, a lesbian, responded, "I'm a practicing Christian and proud of that fact. My rights aren't wacky, kinky or anything else."

The proposed ordinance, apparently the nation's broadest in the protections it would afford, would make it illegal for employers or landlords to discriminate based on appearance or sexual orientation.

Pierced people, dyed people, fat people, short people, transgender people, gay people or just plain funny-looking people would be protected under the ordinance in this city of 49,000 known for its eclectic electorate.

From its famous boardwalk to its bohemian shops and restaurants, this city 90 miles south



Associated Press

Cooper Hazen displays ear, nose and tongue jewelry.

of San Francisco has long tolerated diversity. Its population includes hippies, surfers, punks, homosexuals and conservatives. But like most cities, it has no laws to protect specific groups.

Under the ordinance, someone denied a job or housing could challenge the rejection through a city-designated mediator. If no solution were reached, the person claiming bias could sue for damages or

other redress.

The proposed ordinance allows some flexibility. Employers could enforce grooming standards and dress codes and, in some cases, physical requirements for work such as firefighting.

In Michigan, people can't be discriminated against based on height and weight. In Washington, D.C., residents' personal appearance is protected.