

# Santa Cruz hopes to clean up downtown

New regulations  
aim to eliminate  
disruptive behavior

*Pacific Avenue*  
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SANTA CRUZ — In response to the “growing intensity” of complaints about crime and aggressive panhandling downtown, city leaders on Tuesday will consider new rules cracking down on chronic, unruly drunks, harassing panhandlers and other activities in an effort to clean up Pacific Avenue and Main Beach.

“This is an outgrowth of very deep, widespread community concern,” said Mayor Cynthia Mathews. “It’s risen and fallen over the years, but certainly in the last six months or so I would say there’s a growing intensity (of complaints).”

At issue is seven proposed measures that would restrict panhandling around public art and directories; limit time on public benches to one hour; stop the sale of booze to those arrested more than five times

## Rules

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in six months for alcohol-related crimes; and issue criminal warrants for anyone who does not address three or more civil citations, among other things.

The new measures were put together by Mathews and Council members Lynn Robinson and Ryan Coonerty in response to what they say is increased frustration by women who do not feel safe walking downtown alone; parents who will not let their kids spend time on Pacific Avenue; and others annoyed with being asked for their leftover lunch by people sitting on the sidewalk, among other complaints.

In the City Council race last fall, many candidates said the top requests of their constituents involved cleaning up Pacific Avenue. And as the city looks to boost local businesses during a recession, leaders hope the rules will leave more shoppers comfortable in downtown and beachfront stores.

The proposed rules would tighten those passed in 2002, which banned hackey sacks, panhandling with a sign after dark, blocking sidewalks with personal belongings and sitting closer than 14 feet from crosswalks, kiosks and benches. In 2007, city leaders banned loitering in parking garages and lots for more than 15 minutes.

But those like Homeless Services Center director Ken Cole, who works with many of the people who often panhandle on

## Proposed downtown and beach rules

- Revise existing ordinances to ban panhandling within 14 feet of public art, benches, directory signs and trash compactors.
- Add a new municipal code section stating that three unanswered civil citations will result in a criminal warrant for that person’s arrest.
- Include the city in the Downtown Association’s upcoming program to discourage panhandling and encourage donors to give spare change to groups that help the homeless.
- Let liquor shop owners and other alcohol retailers know who has been arrested five times in the last six month for public drunkenness, and ban the sale of alcohol to those people.
- Work with the county’s district attorney on stronger enforcement of graffiti laws and stay-away orders for those banned from downtown and the beach area.
- Meet with the county sheriff to address the current practice of releasing all jail inmates in Santa Cruz, instead of where that person lives or where the crime occurred.
- Explore ways to increase the number of police officers downtown without tapping the city’s general fund.
- Begin a downtown visitor restroom program that identifies local businesses providing public restrooms.

SOURCE: City of Santa Cruz

Pacific Avenue, said the rules might backfire and result in a polarizing community fight.

While Cole and the center are not taking a position on the proposed measures, “I see it as it’s almost a predictable cycle,” Cole said. “The merchants are extremely stressed and worried about their bottom line, the economy is slipping, everyone is frantic and things have been perceived to be rougher downtown.”

The new rules, he said, will “make it more difficult for people that are on the margins to be downtown, and I think it’s also going to cause a political battle that’s inevitable,” Cole said.

Mathews said the new ordinances would cost the city little

money and employ already-available resources.

Santa Cruz Police Department Capt. Steve Clark said he would welcome the measures, which he hopes will “make it an area that is welcoming and attractive for everyone in the community.”

The measures should be enforceable, Clark said, because they would refine existing ordinances and make it easier for police to crack down on repeat offenders.

The issue will be discussed 7 p.m. Tuesday in the City Council chamber, 809 Center St., Santa Cruz. For information visit [www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us](http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us).

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