

Council passes anti-bias law

Heated discussions on homosexuality

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SANTA CRUZ — Discrimination was officially banned in Santa Cruz Tuesday night when the City Council added an anti-bias law to its books.

The 5-2 decision came Tuesday after about 90 minutes of public testimony at a crowded Civic Auditorium. Comments were dominated by discussions ques-

tioning the the morality homosexuality.

"I feel bashed, I feel badly bashed again," said lesbian activist Wendy Chapkis after the decision. "There was no one from the lesbian and gay community that wanted to be here," she added, saying that she wanted to "go home and lick my wounds and cry."

But Chapkis said she will also "breathe a lot easier now" knowing that she has a legal resource to back her up if she is ever the victim of discrimination.

The ordinance, first introduced in January, makes it illegal to discriminate in hiring or housing against anyone on the basis of age, race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, sex, gender, sexual orientation, height, weight or physical characteristic. Violating the ordinance could

lead to an infraction charge and a \$100 fine.

Mayor Don Lane, who anticipated dissension from an obviously split crowd, opened the public hearing by pleading with the audience to "watch your language" and avoid using "pointedly offensive" terms.

The hearing went downhill from there, as supporters and opposition took turns expressing their views, and more than 350 audience members applauded and booed in response.

Missi Gilchrist, who was introduced as an ex-homosexual and Gender Identification Awareness speaker, was among the first to speak.

"We do desire to have Santa Cruz living by God's holy standards, and yes, we believe homosexuals are a deviation from God's standards," she said.

Gilchrist said she was rejected and abused as a child, and that she turned to lesbian girlfriends in high school before seeking God and changing her ways.

"No law will rid people's hearts from the kind of hate that is discrimination," she said, urging the crowd to seek help from the church.

Gilchrist's religious argument was countered by several pro-gay rights pastors from the community, including Presbyterian Rev. Marjorie Pearson who said she is "tired of the religious right's claims to be the interpretation of Christian spiritual law."

Pearson said the major thrust of the Bible is about law and justice, and that "an anti-discrimination ordi-

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nance fits well within these parameters."

Tom Quinn, a satellite television salesman, opposed the ordinance, saying it will take the rights away from businesses to hire whom they please. After saying a prayer which was largely drowned by catcalls, Quinn urged those opposing the ordinance to "organize and remove these people (the council members) from office if they keep proposing laws like this."

Mark Hamilton also spoke against the measure, saying the city has been wasting time and money on the issue.

"This isn't about homosexuality, this isn't about Christianity, this is about economics," he said. "As a

citizen and a taxpayer, I am completely and totally offended by this entire proceeding."

Councilman John Mahaney and Louis Rittenhouse voted against the ordinance, saying it doubles existing laws and is ambiguous in many areas.

"I don't think the ordinance per se will change anybody's ideas," Mahaney said. "I think we need to educate each other and work together."

Councilman Neal Coonerty, who introduced the original ordinance and adamantly supported it's final passage, concluded his testimony by telling the crowd, "Tonight is a night of celebration. Tonight is the night Santa Cruz expresses its values."