

'Pet guardian' wins in council

Animals

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Pet guardian. Get used to saying it because it may be law in Santa Cruz soon.

The City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to change the city's municipal code syntax from "pet owner" to "pet guardian." But not without dissent on the council about how important the issue is.

Councilman Mark Primack noted "some would question whether we should spend time doing this."

But others decided at worst, it's changing syntax and is a symbolic move that won't change anything. At best, Mayor Tim Fitzmaurice said it could help change the way people think of themselves in connection with their pets.

"A writer once said that a myth does not describe a situation. It attempts to bring it about," he said. "That's what this is attempting to do."

The city attorney will bring back to the council a revised copy of Title 8 of the municipal codes with the language changes. The council will have two readings of the new ordinance, in the next two months, before it changes the language.

Several residents asked the City Council to change the language. Delcianna Winders, who organized the Feb. 13 lobbying and spoke in favor of the move Tuesday, said she hopes the change will cause people to think more about their pets and treat them with more respect.

"It is hard to measure the effects," she said. "But it does draw more attention to it, and that's the important thing."

Other cities, including Berkeley and West Hollywood, have considered such language changes. West Hollywood passed the change Feb. 20. Berkeley considered it Tuesday. The move is part of a campaign by the Bay Area-based group, In Defense of Animals.

In other city news, the council voted unanimously to sponsor a visit by the San Francisco Mime Troupe. The troupe has visited the city for the last two years. Organizers Rachel O'Malley and Jim Lang said they couldn't fund it by themselves. They asked the council to sponsor the group so it could get a grant from the state Arts Commission. The application is due Thursday.

The city will allocate \$5,000 for the troupe. A state grant would pay for \$2,000 of the \$5,000. Organizers said if donations from the event didn't cover the remaining \$3,000, they would make up the difference, meaning the city would not be spending money to bring the troupe here.

The city wouldn't be financially liable and O'Malley and Lang said they would sign a letter promising to pay any overrun. But not everyone supported the move. Primack and Councilwoman Emily Reilly said they didn't like the way the issue was brought to them.

Instead of going through the usual channels, from the commissions to the council, the issue went directly to the council. Primack said the move smacked of cronyism, since O'Malley is married to Vice Mayor Christopher Krohn and Lang is the director of the city's Parks and Recreation Department.

After objections from Primack over an apparent conflict of interest, Krohn abstained from voting.

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