

LOCAL NEWS

Royal Calkins, city editor, 429-2410
rcalkins@santa-cruz.com

Safe-sleeping proposal killed

Homeless - Jesus
'I am back-pedaling,'
Beiers acknowledges

By HEATHER BOERNER
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Two weeks after the City Council stunned homeless activists with its silence on safe-sleeping zones, council members surprised them once again early Wednesday by voting narrowly to put an end to the proposal once and for all.

Most adamant about killing the proposal, which once seemed headed for adoption, was Councilwoman Katherine Beiers, one of the four-member majority that initially approved the proposal in May.

The proposal would have established two industrial areas as places where homeless people could park and sleep without being cited for violating the city's camping ordinance.

The city also planned to provide portable toilets, trash cans and social workers in the areas.

Though the council approved the plan once, it required a second vote. That was scheduled

for two weeks ago. But after community opposition poured in, it never came about.

After Tuesday's council meeting stretched into Wednesday morning, Beiers said she had changed her mind so much that she also did not want the council to create a November ballot initiative asking voters to decide whether to repeal the sleeping ban citywide.

"We can determine at this moment not to have a second reading (of the safe sleeping zones) and not to put (the November ballot measure proposal) on the agenda," Beiers said around 1 a.m. "I am back-pedaling, that's absolutely true. I feel bad that the zones didn't work. They absolutely didn't work. I had great hopes they would work. It made sense. But I was wrong and I'm recognizing that I'm wrong."

The council voted 4-3 to remove the ordinance from a second reading, killing the proposal.

But the council is scheduled to discuss the sleeping-ban ballot measure July 11.

Mayor Keith Sugar said later that he was surprised by Beier's reversal and hopes he can find a fourth vote the council to get the sleeping ban on the ballot.

"I'm not mad at Katherine, I just don't know where she's coming from," Sugar said Wednesday.

day. "Originally, Katherine came along with Tim (Fitzmaurice) and I in supporting this and now she's backing away. It's unfortunate and confusing."

The council also voted Tuesday to search for city businesses and homes where owners would permit homeless people to camp under current rules. They allow up to three vans to camp in one parking lot for three days at a time.

The city also will lobby state officials to open the National Guard armory at DeLaveaga Park to year-round use as a homeless campground. The council supported that idea unanimously.

Armory officials told City Manager Dick Wilson on Friday that the armory would not be available for such use, even though it's used as a shelter 137 days a year already.

Wednesday's votes come after months of controversy about the issue.

First, the city gained national notoriety as the first city in the country to propose allowing homeless people to sleep on its streets without penalty. Then homeless people began camping in the proposed zones near Harvey West Park and Natural Bridges State Park before the law was formally enacted. That elicited protests from residents and business

owners in the zones.

They charged that the camps were creating waste, noise and other problems. After a deluge of e-mails, calls and faxes, council members quietly dropped the second reading of the ordinance from discussion June 13.

Activists say they're horrified both at Beier's reversal and the way in which the safe zones proposal was disposed of.

"It is 1:10 a.m.," activist Robert Norse told the council. "You're bringing this up late at night, when very few of the interested parties are present. And this change will affect hundreds of homeless people who live in this city and are harassed on a constant basis."

David Silva, who led a month-long hunger strike earlier this year against the sleeping ban, said Wednesday he was resuming his fast and collecting signatures for his own ballot initiative. He said he doesn't think he'll be able to amass the more than 3,000 signatures he needs by the July 15 deadline, but hopes the petitions will prove persuasive.

"Katherine Beiers told me off and on throughout the year that she supported the decriminalization of sleep but she's done nothing but undermine our legal petition," Silva said. "I will change her mind."

6-29-00