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Police Crackdown Ordered For Mall

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Sentinel Staff Writer

A police crackdown against drunks, panhandlers, foul-mouthed and abusive habitues of the Pacific Avenue Mall was ordered Tuesday by the Santa Cruz City Council.

Police patrols will be beefed up to make it clear to law violators, petty or otherwise, that action will be taken to safeguard peaceful use of the entire mall by all who wish to use it.

The council order came following a written complaint to Mayor Joseph Ghio from owners and employees of the Plaza Mediterranean that stated in part, "The problem is the transient street people. This group does not include students, nor necessarily musicians (who we generally enjoy, thinking they add much enjoyment and atmosphere to the mall)."

The complainants added:

"Upon arrival at 7 a.m. we notice the first gathering of street people with what seems to be all their worldly belongings wrapped up in a blanket, backpack or?

"Many times they are simply sitting on the sidewalk draped in the blankets, still sleeping or starting to wake. The balance of the day represents almost complete inactivity except to panhandle for food, beer or cigarettes. During the course of the day there is just a constant string of petty annoyances and petty violations of the law. Annoyances such as congregating on the sidewalks in front of the store, blocking passage to customers coming into the store, unbelievably filthy and verbally abusing other people.

"Violations: littering, panhandling, verbal abuse, drinking alcoholic beverages on the mall, dogs on the mall . . ."

Councilwoman Charlotte Melville said, "I totally agree with what that letter is saying. My daughter and I cannot walk at that end of the mall without verbal abuse."

Councilman Bert Muhly said he agreed with others on the council concerned about the problem. He added:

"I see benches full of people who come out from under the San Lorenzo bridges. I feel sorry for people trying to run a business here, I really do. My heart goes out to them. The delicatessen can't keep sweet wine on the shelf any more. These are not students, these are adults who sleep under the bridge and get on the mall to beg, and they do abuse."

Vice Mayor Larry Edler called for police to concentrate on this end of the mall "and get it cleaned up." But he also called for discussions with merchants to determine what some may be doing to create a problem for themselves.

Councilman John Mahaney brushed aside talk that law enforcement on the mall is difficult, saying: "I just can't believe we can't do anything, I can't believe that."

City Manager David Koester said the problem is not simple. "It is part of a broad social problem in the community. It is a zoo down there (the north end of the mall), we know that."

Ghio said: "It's gotten worse. I can't believe what has been happening there these past few weeks."