

Plan draws praise, wrath

Most at council meeting support new laws to make Pacific Ave. safer

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SANTA CRUZ — Tension ran high at City Hall on Tuesday night, as about 300 people packed the City Council chamber and more spilled outside, most to petition city leaders to crack down on aggressive panhandling, public drunkenness, drug use, theft and other illegal activity downtown.

At issue are 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 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.

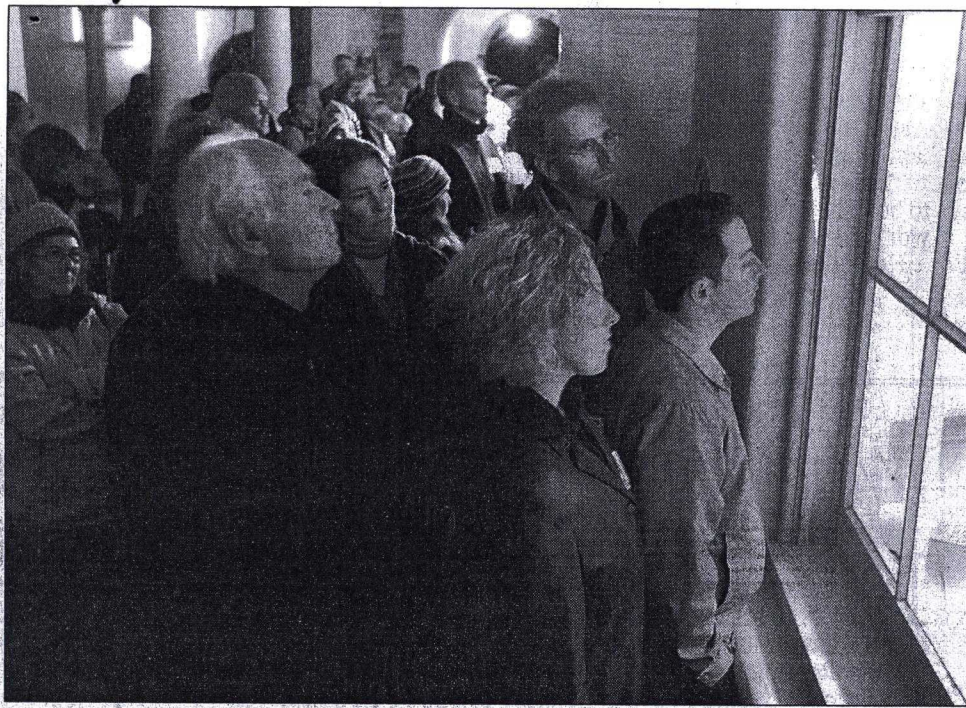
Those against the measures were not shy about screaming that the mayor was fascist for letting someone in support speak longer than the allotted time limit. Those in support told how Giro, John Stewart Co. and other

SEE RULES ON A2



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

The Santa Cruz City Council chamber is packed during Tuesday night's meeting.



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

The overflow crowd watches the Santa Cruz City Council proceedings through a City Hall window on Tuesday night.

RULES

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homegrown businesses are leaving downtown or the city because their clients and co-workers don't feel safe.

Meanwhile, those against the proposed measures called them an attack on homelessness.

"The real problems downtown are select enforcement and police abuse," said Robert Norse with Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom.

Those in favor said they were not against homelessness but offensive and illegal behavior.

"I see things downtown that if I saw them as a visitor, I wouldn't come back

here," said Teresa Thomae, director of Cabrillo College's Small Business Development Center.

Council members had not voted by 10 p.m., but many spoke in favor of the proposals before public comment began.

Mayor Cynthia Mathews spoke about the \$380,000 that the city spends on social services to help the homeless, while Councilman Ryan Coonerty railed against the court system for a decision two years ago that sends ignored civil citations to a collection agency instead of issuing a warrant for that person's arrest. That decision, Coonerty said, rendered citations ineffective for many who don't care about their credit.

Councilwoman Lynn Robinson agreed, and pulled out a citation that she found "just crumpled up and tossed on the ground."

PROPOSED RULES

- Revising 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 months 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