

Anti-bias law changes appearance

By JOHN ROBINSON
Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ — The most controversial element of a proposed anti-discrimination ordinance — that of personal appearance — was largely removed Wednesday by a task force rewriting the measure.

That means pierced tongues, purple hair, tattoos and styles of dress will not be protected under the latest draft of the ordinance, as the committee members tried to make the measure more acceptable to business interests. It was unclear whether

the original ordinance offered that protection.

The ordinance, as proposed, would still outlaw job and housing discrimination due to sexual orientation, height and weight.

"It still covers the majority of what I intended, especially for most women's issues," said Dawn Atkins, one of the measure's initial backers. "But employers still have the right to tell you what to wear."

The section on personal appearance was replaced with one concerning "physical characteristics," which has a much narrower definition than personal appear-

ance.

Under the rewritten ordinance, it would be illegal to discriminate against someone due to a physical characteristic, defined as "a bodily condition which is from birth, accident, or disease, or from any natural physical development or any other event outside control of that person including individual physical mannerisms." Neither pierced tongues nor hair dyed purple would fit that definition.

The city attorney expects to complete a final draft of the ordinance next week. It will then go before the City Council on

March 24 for a first reading, followed by a public hearing two weeks later.

John Lisher, outgoing Chamber of Commerce director, said that great progress was made on the ordinance, but that its reception in the business community remains to be seen.

"I think it's more acceptable than it was," Lisher said. "The key is what finally is approved by the council. I think tremendous strides were made at these (task force) meetings."

The conflict over personal appearance divided the task force. Chamber of Com-

merce representatives said they could not support those aspects in the ordinance.

Councilman Neal Coonerty requested a break in Wednesday's meeting to meet privately with members of a coalition backing the ordinance. The group, which included representatives from the disabled and lesbian community, returned and agreed to drop the personal appearance aspects, saying it was important to be unified in their support of the ordinance.

"They are really going the extra mile to

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accommodate the business community," Coonerty said. "I think we now have a strong ordinance that is well-written and I hope it is acceptable."

According to Rita Risser, an attorney representing the chamber, the ordinance is not that far different from a gay-rights ordinance offered as a compromise by Councilman Louis Rittenhouse.

The ordinance offered by Rittenhouse was based on AB101, a state measure vetoed by Gov. Pete Wilson.

That veto provided the spark for a local ordinance outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation. Backers of the ordi-

nance, which was sponsored by Coonerty, expanded it to include height, weight and personal appearance.

The personal appearance clauses had created the most controversy for Coonerty and other backers. The ordinance drew national media attention and ridicule.

After hours of testimony and discussion at a crowded council meeting Feb. 11 in the Civic Auditorium, the council could not agree on the ordinance and voted 5-2 to name a task force to rewrite it.

The removal of the difficult-to-define personal appearance aspects of the ordinance should help make it less controversial for employers and others in business, task force members said.