

# City panel zeroes in on downtown performers

## ID badges proposed

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SANTA CRUZ — Imagine an avenue filled with permit-carrying clowns, fiddlers and bongo artists.

There's a chance it could happen, now that two City Council members have suggested a "permitting system" for street acts that solicit donations. One proposal, drawn up by city staff, includes a plan for an ID card to be carried by street buskers. A similar plan is in place in Santa Monica.

### 'Are they going to arrest Christmas carolers?'

NEAL COONERTY, OWNER,  
BOOKSHOP SANTA CRUZ,  
OPPOSES PROPOSALS

Council members Ed Porter and Emily Reilly, during a Tuesday meeting of the council's downtown working group, said the permit holders would be exempt from downtown space restrictions

that keep panhandlers 14 feet from crosswalks, kiosks, benches and storefronts. They said the permitting system would be a more formal, city-regulated version of an old set of "voluntary guidelines."

"None of this is written in stone," Reilly stressed. But street musicians at the meeting had lukewarm-to-scathing reactions.

The city's street musicians are hailed as local color by some and dismissed by others as noise pollution. But they've become a key aspect of the dispute over downtown's future.

A musician who goes by the name "Cosmic Chris" said he's often hassled for playing in the wrong place, even though the City Council voted in July to temporarily

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

A musician performs on Pacific Avenue in downtown Santa Cruz on Tuesday afternoon.

## Downtown

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exempt musicians from the space rules affecting panhandlers. He also said he doesn't like the fact that permit-holding musicians would have to abide by so many rules, such as moving whenever they are asked.

"Who asks you to move? An irate merchant? Anybody in a bad mood?" he said before storming out of the chamber.

Porter and Reilly emphasized that all aspects of the proposal

yet to go before the full council. Another city panel, the Downtown Commission, will discuss the proposal at 8:30 a.m. Thursday in City Hall.

An attempt to set up "exemption zones" for street acts — areas where the panhandler space rules would not apply — stalled in the face of merchant resistance.

Accordionist Frank Lima, who goes by the name "Morgani," said he wouldn't mind signing an agreement but didn't like the idea of carrying an ID card. He said he knows many street artists who would have a problem signing an

by certain rules.

He was concerned about accusations of special treatment by homeless activists, who oppose the panhandler rules, "and that's where it could really bite us in the butt."

Some demanded a blanket space-rules exemption for all musicians.

Others said the city must answer serious questions about the permitting system: How much power would police have to yank a permit? Would a permit plan give the city undue control over the creative process? Would it allow police to crack down on

don't work closely with merchants?

Porter insisted the permit idea is "not to jury performance, just make sure performers know what is reasonably expected of them."

Bookshop Santa Cruz owner Neal Coonerty said it's "stupid" to have musicians carry ID cards or apply for special permits. Coonerty, who helped draft the city's 1994 space restrictions on panhandlers when he was a councilman, said the city might humiliate itself.

"Are they going to arrest Christmas carolers?" Coonerty asked.

Musicians were more receptive about a proposed "busker's guild," with benefits for those who join, though several were skeptical about the city being involved.

In July, the council voted 5-2 to approve new rules that greatly increase space restrictions on panhandlers, and ban all after-dark beggars and street "sports" like Hackey Sack. Most new rules — drafted in response to complaints about harassment and drug dealing — are now being enforced.

But the council, responding to activist outcry, agreed in July to give money-soliciting musicians and political tablers a seven-month reprieve from the rules, which keep beggars 14 feet away from kiosks, crosswalks, benches and storefronts.

Activist Sherry Conable said the entire discussion about granting exemptions for downtown musicians struck her as nonsensical because musicians aren't

anyhow.

"We are trying to fix a problem that doesn't exist."

Downtown Association executive director Keith Holtaway said he thought the permit idea could work, but worried it would create excessive work for downtown hosts who have to educate people about the new rules.

Another rule supporter is downtown resident Jan Tait, who said she loves the street musicians but wants a more respectful downtown, and says drummers often wake her up.

The permitted musicians would have to agree to various stipulations:

■ They would be issued an ID cards and have to show it upon request of police and others. One version of the plan would require the ID to be worn at all times.

■ They could not obstruct an open store entrance, and would need to move along when asked.

■ They would have to keep the sidewalk open for passers-by, and clean up any mess before leaving.

■ They could perform in one space for no longer than a set period of time that is yet to be determined.

The draft proposal mentions the possibility of fees being charged for the permits, but Porter and Reilly said they both oppose that.

Porter and Reilly said that no matter what happens with the permitting idea, they will push the rest of the council to change downtown ordinances "so performers can accept offerings in more locations."

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