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WEDNESDAY

# Homeless Campground denied

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council voted early today against a controversial plan to build a temporary campground for the homeless.

Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt, John Laird and Jane Yokoyama joined Joe Ghio and John Mahaney in opposing the campground. By doing so, the three progressives broke ranks with the Santa Cruz Action Network, which voted almost unanimously Sunday to support the plan. SCAN arose out of Wormhoudt and Laird's first elections to the council and since has backed progressive candidates and causes.

Don Lane and Katherine Beiers cast the council's two "yes" votes.

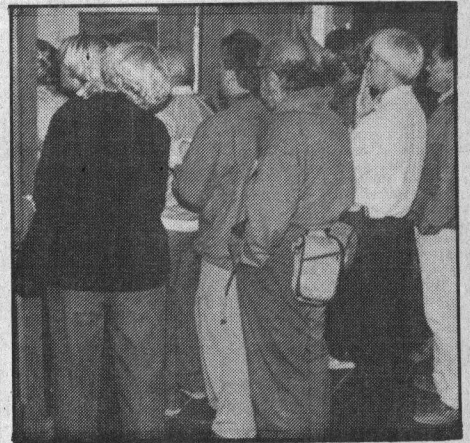
Laird said a campground "would not

break the cycle of homelessness" that is necessary. Campgrounds for the homeless have not worked in other communities, he said.

That vote followed a two-hour public debate over what lengths the city should go to accommodate the homeless, including those homeless by choice.

The debate mirrored the controversy that has simmered for 20 years in the community.

By banning nighttime camping in public places, the city has put people without shelter in a bind, said Sherry Conable, coordinator of the Coalition for a Safe Place to Sleep which wants to build a temporary campground behind the River Street homeless shelter.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Large crowd watched debate.

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## Campground

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Without that campground, Conable said, some people's only choice is to violate the law.

"When those of us who have homes leave here, we'll go to a warm bed and perhaps a cup of tea. Those who don't will leave and look for a place where they won't be ticketed, or worse, where they won't be beaten or raped," Conable said.

"God didn't write the camping ban. We did," she said. "Now we have the responsibility for answering the legitimate needs for those in risk," she said.

In an impassioned plea, Conable said the proposal for the campground represented "a real effort to bring the community to peace on an issue that has divided us for so long." She urged the council to seize a golden opportunity to join the effort.

Conable's plea was echoed by many church people, advocates for the poor and local lawyers, including a representative of the Gay and Lesbian Legal Alliance, who likened recent male-sex sweeps at Vista Point to treatment of the homeless.

"The homeless are asking for very little. Just for government to leave them alone," said another attorney, Margaret Mara, who said she represents four persons cited for illegal camping.

Testimony in favor of the temporary campground, which would



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Speakers showed support for a homeless campground.

provide sleeping places for 150 people on top of plywood platforms, far outstripped that in opposition.

Organizers of a giant July 4th rally at City Hall in favor of the city's camping ban had advertised for supporters to attend Tuesday night's hearing. But unlike the thousand or so who had attended the rally, the turnout Tuesday night was small.

Few spoke.

Anthony Correia of Capitola said it was "ridiculous" to bring what he called a group of lawbreakers and alcohol and drug abusers to a campground and call it a "safe place to sleep."

"It's a red herring the size of a blue whale," Correia charged. "Why do we the people of Santa Cruz have to pay for these people's bad, gross and disgusting behavior?" he asked. The question was answered by hisses and groans.

Attorney Mitchell Page also drew moans from the other side when he said the opposition's slogan "Take Back Our Town" sounded more like "kick 'em out of town."

"We ought to kick you out of town," came one reply.

But for having the two sides jammed inside small quarters, there was little confrontation throughout the night. Jane Imler, one of the former leaders of the effort to overturn the camping ban, spoke in opposition to the plan, but for different reasons. She said she supported the idea of an emergency sanctuary, but not at the shelter location.

Imler said she now is homeless, and if told to go there would answer, "Hell no, I won't go." She contended that the ground is contaminated.