

# Pet-breeding ban packs meeting

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SANTA CRUZ — A hotly debated ban on pet breeding is back to the drawing board after a long and emotional hearing before the Board of Supervisors.

But animal lovers on both sides of the issue said Wednesday that the ordinance is getting closer to something they can live with.

"I'm happy," said Marilee Geyer of the Santa Cruz Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which authored the ordinance. "I'm real happy."

"Cautious optimism" was the term used by Karen Lindstrom, a breeder of golden retrievers who had opposed the proposal requiring dog and cat breeders to obtain permits before allowing their animals to reproduce.

"It's a long way between the tea cup and the lip," said Lindstrom, adding that at least both sides finally are going to hash out their differences.

Geyer and Lindstrom were part of an overflow audience that crammed the board chamber Tuesday and spilled out into the hallways.

First considered in Scotts Valley, the ordinance has drawn large crowds of

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animal lovers, both pro and con, each time it's been discussed publicly.

The proposed ordinance would require all dogs and cats more than six months old to be spayed or neutered unless their owner bought a breeding permit. The program would be run by the Santa Cruz SPCA, and violators would face fines of up to \$500.

If adopted, the ordinance would cover the unincorporated areas of the county. SPCA workers hope to get it adopted by the county's four cities as well.

Supporters say the law is needed to stem a pet population boom that sends thousands of unwanted animals to their deaths each year.

Opponents contend it singles out dog breeders when most of the surplus ani-

mals are cats without owners. Others say it will be impossible to enforce and is the wrong approach. And they say once pet owners learn they'll face fines of up to \$500 if their animals breed without permission, more will dump unwanted litters by the roadside instead of taking them to the SPCA shelter.

Public comment ran well after 11 p.m. Because of the late hour, supervisors cut short discussion.

They asked their staff to meet with representatives of the SPCA, the Animal Issues Alliance of Santa Cruz County and the Santa Cruz Veterinary Medical Association and bring back revisions March 8.

At Supervisor Fred Keeley's sugges-

tion, county workers will look at exempting breeders who belong to professional organizations from the permit requirement.

Testimony at the hearing was at times highly charged.

One woman sobbed as she spoke. Shelter workers described the trauma of euthanizing otherwise healthy animals simply because they had no homes.

Proponents brought a paper chain representing collars of animals killed at the SPCA, and photos of the dead animals were on display.

Most of the 150 people at the hearing supported the proposed law. Opponents included dog breeders and veterinarians.

Many spoke to the need for truly cheap or free spay-neuter programs. Some 20 veterinarians now participate in the SPCA's program. Fees vary, however, said Geyer, and can range from a low of \$25 to neuter a tom cat to more than \$100 to spay a large canine bitch.

Supervisors asked staff to come up with a list of community-based low-cost spay-neuter programs.