

Santa Cruz Sleeping Ban

from page two

WE'RE COMPASSIONATE BUT...

Gil Garcetti, treasurer of the Downtown Neighborhood Association, read a letter he said typified his group's attitude: "While I am distressed about the homeless situation, especially the mentally ill, lifting the camping ban altogether is no solution."

Nancy Stewart, a housed neighbor, warned that "removing the sleeping sections will make the ordinance totally unenforceable." She spoke of feeling "intimidated by a small but vocal minority" of homeless people and advocates, and encouraged Mayor Beiers to "remove any member of the public" from public meetings if they should disrupt them.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY SPEAKS OUT

Margaret Pierson, a Presbyterian minister, held up a copy of the Santa Cruz camping ordinance and said, "When I read this, I thought, 'Oh my gosh, it's as bad as people said.' Isn't there a part of you that knows, in your heart of hearts, that fining people who are homeless for sleeping is wrong? For someone who is homeless, to sleep in their car, or to find some place they can bunk out — what dif-

ference does it make?"

The Santa Cruz Quakers sent John deValcourt with a statement for the council: "All have a need to sleep. None of us has a completely safe and secure life. Those of us with more security have a responsibility for those with less security. We are appalled that police are taking blankets and protective covering from homeless people trying to survive."

A dreadlocked, self-proclaimed missionary spoke next. "I'm only here because my van broke and I don't have the money to fix it. I am homeless and I spent four hours last night trying to find a place to sleep. I just want to be able to sleep when I'm tired. I don't want to break the law."

A speaker said he was moved after meeting a homeless man on the beach one day. "The man had a beautiful robe on. He said, 'I am from South America and I'm going to Canada. I bathe in the ocean. I have my robe to keep me warm.' I asked him, 'Well, how do you eat?' He pulled out a beautiful wooden animal. 'I carve these and trade them for food.' He was what I call a successful nonconformist."

Robert Nose warned of the recent 9th Circuit Court ruling filed on January 20, the Eichhorn decision. "What this means for us," he said, "is everyone now charged

with a camping ban ticket may now mount a defense. If there's no legal space to sleep, I had to sleep out of necessity. If police harass and arrest them anyway, the City will be vulnerable for the damages."

Laura Tucker, a formerly homeless mom, told the council, "If someone has a driveway and is willing to share their bathroom, that definitely should be legal."

HOMELESS WOMEN AT RISK

Linda Lemaster spoke on behalf of the Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women. She declared, "The camping ban as written and enforced increases the chance of rape, molestation, isolation, stalking, and illness for homeless women. There are people here who are victims of that."

Karen Turcotte, known alternately as the "Bubble Lady" due to her recent arrest for blowing bubbles near an intersection, told of her own displacement due to leaving a battering relationship. Not on the streets, but sleeping on friends' couches, she was recently stopped in her car by a police officer who suspected her of camping when he saw blankets in her car. "I wasn't camping," she said. "I was just taking the blankets to the laundromat to be washed."

Two UC Santa Cruz students spoke out against fining the homeless for sleeping. "Just because you tell people they can't

camp on the streets doesn't get rid of the homeless. Just because you don't give people a place to be doesn't mean they are going to vanish into thin air or suddenly have houses to go to."

The "Fidget Man" offered an allegory: "What you've got here is you have someone and you chop his legs off. He goes out and gets prosthetic legs, and can just barely keep it together. And you go and kick those legs out: that's cruel and unusual punishment."

Emily Reilly, who owns a bakery, spoke of the recent cold spell: "I was so glad I was warm and have a warm place to sleep. I was sad to think that anyone should have to sleep outside if they didn't want to. But then to not be allowed to sleep outside is appalling."

A homeless woman told of a recent encounter with the police: "I was in my car eating a burrito across from Planet Burrito. I'm told I'm camping. I'm told I'm loitering. I live in this community, I shop here, my family stays in hotels when they visit and we go out to eat. I buy Christmas gifts, I fully participate in community activities. I work full time. I'm as much a part of this community as anyone."

For information about the camping ban, contact Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom at (831) 423-4833.