

# Activists Charge 'Bad Faith' as Santa Cruz Upholds Sleeping Ban

by Robert Norse

In what was alternately described as incompetence, lack of nerve, or bad faith, the Task Force to Examine the Camping Ordinance in Santa Cruz ended its three months of "deliberation" with a prearranged City Council vote. The March 23rd decision kept sleeping and covering up with blankets a \$54 crime by a unanimous 7-0 vote.

Before a largely angry and disappointed public, Mayor Katherine Beiers, the key vote and leading player, dumbfounded the audience by announcing that "there was no consensus or dialogue" between bigots and civil rights advocates and hence no mandate to act. Why hadn't she revealed this crucial decision earlier? Since when were civil rights a matter of "consensus?" Beiers was silent on these questions.

Critics noted that Beiers' "process" involved no opportunity for dialogue: the Task Force neither encouraged nor facilitated it. It had no civil rights advocacy: Task Force members refused to speak up on behalf of homeless civil rights. There was little internal debate: Beiers herself shut down any real discussion, even among



A homeless protester seeks support for ending the Sleeping Ban. Alene Smith photo

councilmembers themselves, by announcing there would be no restoration of the right to sleep. The new progressive members of the Santa Cruz City Council — Christopher Krohn, Tim Fitzmaurice, and Keith Sugar — failed to speak out for the rights of the poor, with fitful exceptions.

Beiers scheduled the public hearings

during the UCSC student break, making it difficult for student supporters to attend. Homeless people were generally denied participation through Beiers' refusal to authorize late-night busing from the hearings to the only legal shelter space.

Also, police and vigilantes harassed homeless people during the Task Force

period, since Beiers' City Council refused to suspend the Sleeping and Camping Bans pending council resolution.

Disproportionate weight and concern were given to largely illusory concerns of some merchants and residents. Their wildly paranoid, frequently bigoted and habitually off-target testimony became Beiers' prime concern. When members of the audience erupted in anger and humor at hateful stereotypes of homeless people as *child molesters and criminals*, Beiers threatened to expel them as she proceeded with her pre-arranged agenda. The Council that silenced homeless protest and cut back homeless input was particularly protective of the paranoid sensibilities of conservative cranks.

Students Against the Sleeping Ban, the Committee to Repeal the Sleeping Ban, Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom (HUFF), and Lawyers Against the Sleeping Ban announced a strategy of direct action protest and legal challenge once students return from Spring break.

For more information call HUFF: 831/413-4833, or e-mail [wmofofstl@cruzio.com](mailto:wmofofstl@cruzio.com)