

City Council will outlaw aggressive panhandling

Ben Moebius
Oregon Daily Emerald

Aggressive panhandling will be outlawed in about 30 days due to an ordinance approved by the City Council in a work session yesterday.

The ordinance was drafted in response to complaints from business owners and citizens who said they were being intimidated by the aggressive tactics of some panhandlers.

Councilor Barbara Keller stressed that the law would not, not infringe upon anyone's free speech rights. "We are not talking about stopping panhandling here," she said.

According to city attorney Bill Gary, the ordinance goes one step beyond the current harassment law. The current law can only be used when a person is actually assaulted or touched in some way, he said.

The new ordinance will make attempts to block passage or cause physical harm offenses also, even if no actual contact is made.

The ordinance was passed with some changes to the wording that specifically excluded "lawful protesting activity and picketing activity."

Councilors in the work session, and citizens in a public hearing Monday, asked how the ordinance will be implemented and how the public will learn of it.

"This raises questions of how to inform those who are involved in these kind of activities," said Councilor Kevin Hornbuckle.

Sgt. Tim McCarthy, of the Eugene public safety department, said he will devel-

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— Barbara Keller
City Councilor

op written guidelines on how the ordinance will be implemented and will organize methods of informing the public about it during the 30 days before the ordinance is implemented.

"The first thing is to draft a policy and to talk to the officers covering the most-affected areas," McCarthy said. East 13th Avenue near campus is expected to be one of the areas that will be heavily impacted.

The council also voted to submit a proposal to the public on opening Willamette Street through the downtown mall.

The proposal was tentatively chosen to go to the voters in the May 16 election. Many council members were worried that a complete proposal would take more time.

"This is too complicated of a motion," Keller said, "especially for a May election."

A subcommittee was charged with creating a design for reopening the street based mostly on concepts from the opening of Olive Street. The estimated cost of the project is \$1.3 million.

The Urban Renewal fund, which is used to rebuild downtown areas, will pay for an estimated \$400,000 of the project. The other \$900,000 is expected to come from the city road fund.

Panhandlers disapprove

Suzanne Marta
Oregon Daily Emerald

The new aggressive panhandling ordinance passed by the Eugene City Council Wednesday made many panhandlers upset.

"I think it's just another ordinance to protect the stupid yuppies in town," said Ander, an 18-year-old who has been living on the streets for two years.

"Some people don't know how to ask for money except aggressively," he said. "Now those people will have to steal stuff or mug people to get money. It's just another way for the community to ignore the problem."

He said the term "aggressive" was vague and could be interpreted in different ways.

"Some people consider my walking up to them and asking for money aggressive, but I don't think it is," Ander said. "It makes me feel like they're going to outlaw panhandling period."

He said many panhandlers do not have any alternatives.

"I'm here not by choice, but by circumstance," he said. "Someone stole

my ID so I can't even get a job."

"Tom" and "Tiny" were panhandling outside of Guido's on Alder Street and 13th Avenue.

"Hey buddy, I'm a penny short of a million, could you spare some change," Tiny called out to some passersby.

One man stopped, dropped some coins into the paper cup, wished Tiny good luck and went on his way.

"I don't aggressively panhandle, I try to make people laugh," said Tiny, 44, who has lived on the street since he was 13 years old.

Although their panhandling is generally non-aggressive, Tom and Tiny were upset about the ordinance's passage.

"It's just another way to harass homeless people," Tiny said.

Both men said they were concerned about the implementation of the ordinance.

"You try to stay away from cops and then they hunt you down," Tom said. "They could apply the ordinance to everyone [who panhandles]."

Bob Lee, owner of Face the Music and an active supporter of the ordinance, said it was a positive step for the city.

"It doesn't curtail anybody's freedom to ask for money," Lee said. "It just ensures that if I choose not to respond to that request, the interaction should be over."



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