

Protect the Poor and Public Access for All

Notes to the Coastal Commission on item 16e by Robert Norse 8-10-16

This law does not meet the public access and recreation requirements of the Coastal Act. The operative phrase is “to maximize public recreational opportunities.” This law clearly restricts if not excludes them for low-income folks who suddenly have no place to park their vans at night.

The alleged problems are “parking related to public safety, public nuisance, inappropriate camping, and other issues”. These have not been “clearly identified and substantiated” in terms other than anecdotal. The 400 “illegal parking” citations are 4 instances of illegal dumping in one year are the only specifics. Even here the “makeshift RV’s” language is ambiguous.

The evidence presented show no documented arrests, much less convictions stats for any of the crimes alleged. The real “crime” motivating this law is the very presence of people in RV’s which makes well-to-do residents uncomfortable. Where’s the documented connection with RV’s? Instead prejudice and suspicion has replaced careful documentation and common sense. It is clear from Council debates, this fear is what prompted this law. A litany of offenses falsely and prejudicially charged against the homeless community without clear evidence or statistical documentation from police authorities or other agencies is unacceptable.

The City has reduced the proposed law’s sweep. But the ordinance is city-wide and specifically tailored to impact the poorest. If the Coastal Commission finds that there is no substantial issue here and subsequently approves this law it would essential be banning RV parking late at night throughout the entire City. This would certainly limit coastal access by those in RV’s, who would have to leave town to park at night. The poor are a part of the public. They too have access rights.

Unlike Santa Barbara, there has been no attempt to provide public safe parking places. And permits are not available for the poor. Very few churches and no businesses that I know of actually allow RV’s to park in town. To have coastal access for the poor, it’s a necessity to park at night.

If you neither rent nor own property, there is no process to get a permit. This specifically and intentionally excludes those outside whose only home is their vehicle. The objective is clear: to remove homeless-owned RV’s and do so without appearing to discriminate by removing all RV’s unless connected to residents.

This gated NIMBY policy ignores whether or not those who own them are law-abiding, environmentally-conscious, and respectful of their neighbors. It denies their right and that of visitors to have reasonable access to the coast. Asserting a “problem” is not to substantiate it. That is, it ignores whether RV’s as a class specifically or even generally create these problems to a degree that would require this draconian ban.

Unlike in other city’s, neighborhoods would not have the option to vote on this law—as is the case in Santa Cruz itself with other vehicle bans

Nor is the impact considered. There’s no clear documentation of the number of vehicles impacted, the number of families who life in vehicles impacted, nor the alternate resources available for parking RV’s.

While I appreciate the staff’s interest in finding a compromise, this plan is not it. City Council needs to reexamine the law, more carefully and accurately document real problems, and devise a more carefully considered law that does not violate broader coastal access and, frankly, the welfare of the most vulnerable.

Flier by Norse of HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship & Freedom) 831-423-4833 www.huffsantacruz.org 309 Cedar PMB #14B S/C. 8-10-16