

‘Saggin’ measure dropped

By Chris Sykes Staff Writer

The Orange City Council last week voted to table a measure to ban the baggy, saggy fashion of wearing jeans and pants in a way to expose boxer shorts or other under wear.

The Dec. 1 meeting was scheduled for the second reading and final vote of the proposed ordinance by East Ward Councilwoman Lisa Perkins which she said was written by City Attorney Marvin Braker at her request. When it came time for the council to vote, however, she pre-empted the vote by making a motion to table the measure.

The vote to withdraw the legislation was unanimous. City Clerk Dwight Mitchell said the proposed ordinance will appear on the agenda of future meetings until it is removed to voted upon.

Before the vote, Perkins explained why she would eventually table her ordinance. Even though she reiterated her reasons for having it authored, she acknowledged it may need more revision before it is ready.

“A lot of this behavior comes out of the prison and jail culture where they don’t have belts to hold up their pants so they have to wear them sag gin’ and hanging off of their back sides. Where are you going to find a job wearing saggy pants?” said Perkins.

“I can appreciate the comments made by the mayor and the police director and it may need some tinkering before this ordinance actually becomes the law,” she continued. “But I think we need to start drawing a line when it comes to behavior that we don’t agree with or approve of. That is why I sponsored this legislation in the first place.”

As the Dec. 1 council vote illustrated, the devil may be in the details when it comes to elected officials and socially conscious individuals trying to, in their opinion, positively affect public behavior and decorum among young people without infringing on constitutional rights.

Other municipalities in New Jersey, such as Paterson and Irvington, have tried and failed to implement the kind of public-decorum laws Perkins said she had in mind when she initially proposed the anti-saggin’ ordinance.

The reasons for those failures ranged from the intervention of the American Civil Liberties Union, with its concerns about the possible infringement on citizens’ rights to self-expression, to judges ruling there already were public decency laws which could be used if clothing, such as the exposure of under wear, crossed into the realm of public indecency.

Perkins’ proposed ordinance may have been a response to residents of Orange and other municipalities who do not accept the saggy, baggy “hip-hop style” clothing and fashion aesthetics which have become synonymous with crime, drugs and gang activity. Some local residents have stated they have wanted to see action taken.

As one former city resident recently put it: “I don’t want my mother or grandmother or anybody else’s daughter or female family member to have to see that when they come out of the house to go to the store or whatever.”