

Lighthouse Field plans ready for final OK

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SANTA CRUZ — Fourteen years after a grassroots movement began to "Save Lighthouse Field" for a park, City Council members are finally poised to call for construction bids on the park project.

Council members will consider approving plans Tuesday for the Lighthouse Field State Beach project, and calling for sealed bids from interested developers. The plans were recently approved by state officials.

The city, county and state project is designed to turn a 33-acre field off West Cliff Drive across from Lighthouse Point into a coastal park for daytime visitors. The parkland also includes three acres of city-owned land at the point.

Architects' plans call for four parking lots, landscaping the field, paths through the field, an observation area at the Steamer Lane surfing spot, a new restroom, two stairways to the beach and a "native-plant interpretive area."

The stairways would be built at Steamer Lane to replace the existing stairway and at "It's Beach" on the west side of Lighthouse Point.

Council members will also jointly

consider calling for bids on construction of a seawall for sections of West Cliff Drive that bisect the parkland. This portion of the project is designed to prevent the Drive and cliffside parkland from eroding into the bay in the future.

A citizens' group called the West Cliff Drive Preservation Committee was partially successful in a 1984-85 campaign to block the moving of any part of the drive away from the coast. The realignment of the road for erosion-control reasons had been proposed as part of the preliminary park plans, but committee members maintained the drive is a historic, scenic route that should be preserved. They also argued that the erosion was caused by the city's lack of maintenance.

Council members in March 1985 voted to scale down the realignment proposal and to move the drive away from the cliff's edge only in the most severely eroded spots. That decision marked a shift in a previous council decision to oppose any realignment whatsoever.

The park and seawall construction cost is estimated at \$1.2 million, said Parks and Recreation Director Jim Lang.

The seawall construction — including some demolition of the drive — will cost an estimated \$172,000 of that amount. Lang said \$75,000 will be paid by the state's "environmental license plate" fund. A West Cliff Drive water main will be replaced by the city Water Department in conjunction with the project at an estimated cost of \$67,000 in Water Department funds.

The park itself will be financed from a variety of sources, including \$250,000 each from the city and county and a \$235,000 grant from the state Coastal Conservancy Agency.

The state has agreed to contribute up to one-fourth of total construction costs, Lang said.

The project is rooted in a 1972 citizens' campaign to block the development of a convention center on the ocean-view parcel.

At that time, the council and county Board of Supervisors were part-

ners in the convention-center project with the former owner of 28 acres of the field, Teachers Management and Investment Co.

Business leaders lobbied for the project as a boost to the local economy, but a citizens' group — called "Save Lighthouse Field Association" — successfully promoted a citywide ballot measure to stop development.

While the political battle endured on the local level for several years, federal officials at the Economic Development Administration decided to ax a \$1.6 million grant for the convention center project from its budget.

In 1974, voters passed the ballot measure. The leaders of the preservation movement included lawyer Gary Patton, now a county supervisor in his fourth term; and his aide, Andy Schiffren, now a city Planning Commissioner.

In 1980 TMI agreed to sell the field property to the state for park purposes, for about \$6 million.

The park has been in planning ever since.