

KAREN T. BORCHERS — MERCURY NEWS

If it is approved by the Coastal Commission, a new lighthouse will help navigate boats to the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor on the east side of the city.

Surf City ready to break ground for lighthouse at yacht harbor

AGENCY EXPECTED TO OK PROJECT NEXT WEEK; STRUCTURE WILL HAVE A TRADITIONAL DESIGN

By David L. Beck
Mercury News

By the time the pelicans fly south for the winter, Santa Cruz will be a two-lighthouse town, thanks to the efforts of boaters, neighbors and the Port District, which runs the yacht harbor on the east side of town.

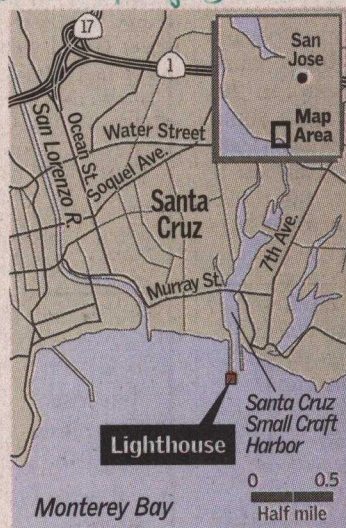
"Hey, it's a happening thing," said Brian Foss, the port director. "If the Coastal Commission passes it next week, we're breaking ground here in about three weeks."

That seems likely. The Coastal Commission staff has recommended approval. The commission will vote on the,

Port District's application Tuesday when it meets in Redondo Beach.

Until now, if you mentioned "the lighthouse" in Santa Cruz, you were referring to the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse on the west side, which contains a surfing museum and overlooks Steamer Lane, a surfing mecca. It's at the entrance to Cowell Cove, on a spot that has held some kind of navigation light since 1868.

But when the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor was built in the early 1960s in the Live Oak area, it needed a light, too,



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to mark the mouth of the harbor. The district put a box on stilts at the end of the west jetty.

When that rusted away, it was replaced in the early 1990s by what everyone describes as the Water Heater — a round, white metal tower.

That, in turn, gave way two years ago to a basket-on-a-stick contraption.

The new navigation aid will be a round concrete tower — 42 feet high — in the traditional lighthouse style, 14 feet in diameter at the base, tapering to 8 feet just below the light platform, with an internal spiral staircase giving access to the light chamber.

The Port District will own and maintain the structure. The U.S. Coast Guard will maintain the light and the foghorn.

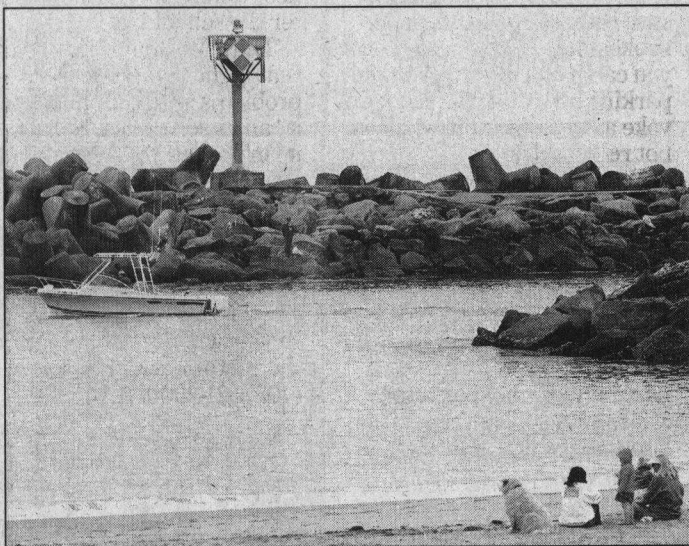
The Army Corps of Engineers built the harbor and owns the jetty. It signed off on the plans this week, after its experts agreed that the jetty could support a 56-ton structure. The jetty is already a popular local landmark, thanks to the "tetrapods" that the corps used instead of boulders to bolster and stabilize it. They look like jacks — a giant's toys.

The jetty itself is a tetrahedron, like a pyramid with its top sliced off, much wider at its base on the sea floor than at the top, where it measures 18 feet in diameter.

"After almost 40 years, the jetty is lying true," Foss said. "It hasn't subsided at all. The corps doesn't get much kudos from anything, but they did a good job on the jetty."

Walton Lighthouse

The new lighthouse will cost about \$350,000, he said, and will be named the Walton Lighthouse after its largest single donor, Charles Walton. Walton, a Los Gatos electronics manufacturer who keeps a boat in the harbor, is dedicating it to his late seafaring



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Santa Cruz will be one of two cities in the state with two lighthouses. San Diego is the other one.

brother, Derek, and his father, Stanley. The navigation equipment will remain officially the Santa Cruz Harbor Light.

The Port District approved \$30,000 for the project last winter. The pot is still a little bit light — "We have most of the money," Foss said — but a local outfit, Devcon Construction, is going ahead anyway.

In addition to improving what is already a widely admired sunset view, the new lighthouse, taller than the pole it replaces, will pay practical benefits to those at sea.

"Basically, I think every boater will use it every day," Foss said. "Here's why: When you come in this harbor, you're usually using visual references, and it's kind of hard to pick out during the day. The gray rocks blend in with the background, and you kind of have to stare at it."

This is especially true for those in very small craft, he said, such as kayaks and rowboats. "It's going to be a lot easier to see a lot farther away."

Keeping with tradition

The Coast Guard main-

tains navigation aids all up and down the West Coast, but traditional-looking lighthouses, even replicas like those in Santa Cruz, are rare. The U.S. Lighthouse Society counts only 37 original light stations on the California coast, not all of them intact or even functioning.

The Oakland Harbor light, for example, was moved and became part of a restaurant, while its lantern room is now part of Abbott Light in Santa Cruz.

The society lists only one place in California, San Diego's Point Loma, with two lighthouses. In the San Francisco area, there are two, Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay and East Brother Light in San Pablo Bay. Alcatraz is a state park; East Brother is a bed-and-breakfast.

Others are spotted several miles apart along the coast, from Point Sur in Big Sur to the Marin Headlands, with Pigeon Point and Montara in between.

Contact David L. Beck at dbeck@sjmercury.com or at (831) 423-0960.