

'We may have lost the project.'

TOM BURNS, COUNTY PLANNING DIRECTOR

E.Cliff seawall rejected

Beach Erosion
Coastal panel
wants to see
alternatives

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By BRIAN SEALS

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✓ PLEASURE POINT — A decision Friday by the California Coastal Commission could doom the East Cliff Drive seawall project.

Meeting in Los Angeles, commissioners unanimously rejected a county-backed plan for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build a 1,100-foot seawall between 32nd and 36th avenues, near the world-famous Pleasure Point surf break.

Commissioners said more alternatives need to be studied.

What happens next remains to be seen; the plan isn't necessarily dead.

But outgoing county Redevelopment Agency director Tom Burns said it could be. "That's certainly a possibility," Burns said Friday. "We may have lost the project."

Burns, who has taken over as director of the county Planning Department, said the county would consult with Coastal Commission staff about what commissioners want to see happen.

He said a decision on whether to proceed must be made by the county Board of Supervisors, and said that probably won't happen until early next year.

"The serious options, we think, have been explored," Burns said. "To get to this point and have this much of a surprise, it's a little disconcerting."

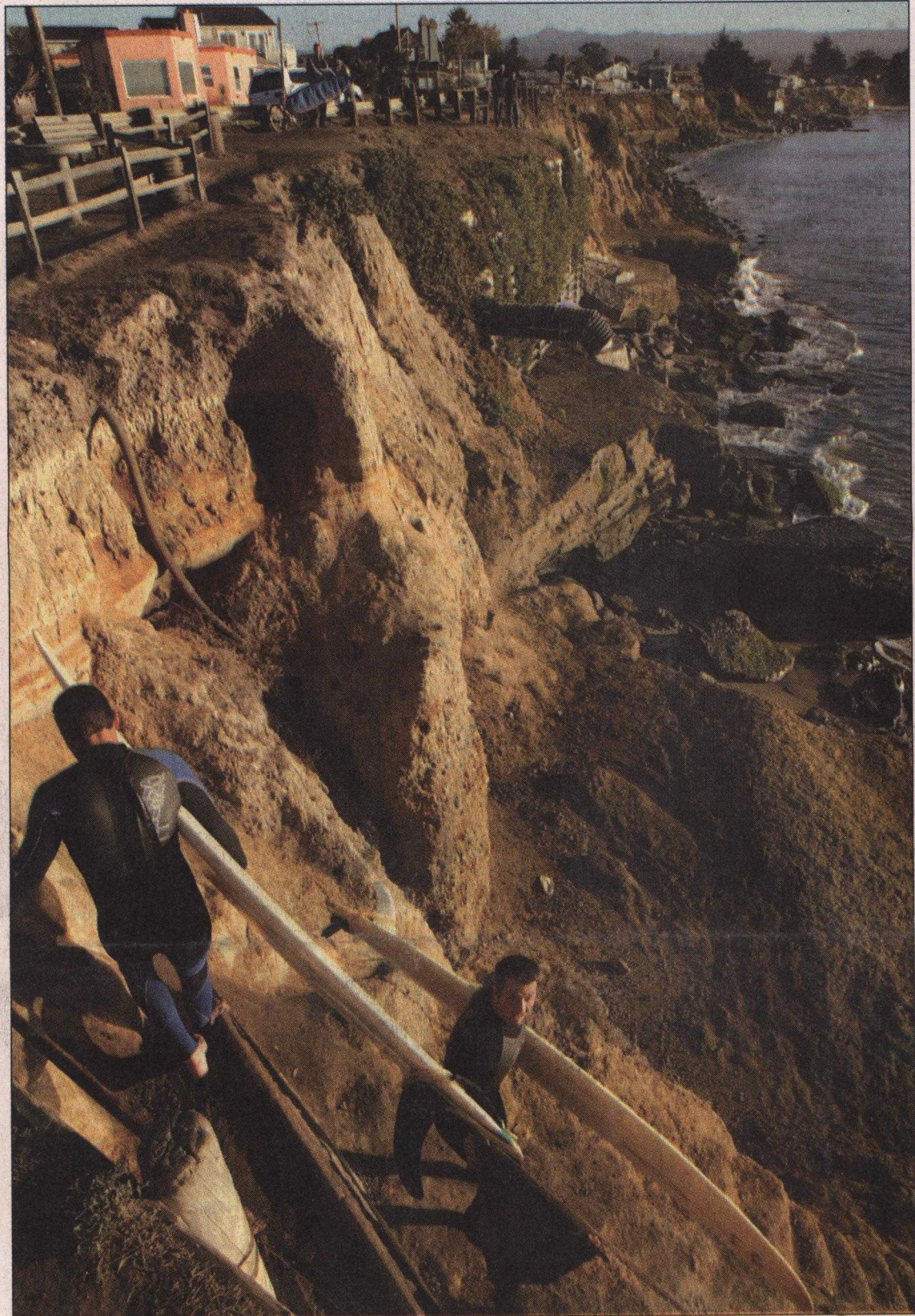
Coastal Commissioner Dave Potter of Monterey County said the commission was concerned about the unique character of the Pleasure Point area.

"This kind of project had not been thoroughly analyzed for alternatives," Potter said. "As it was designed right now, it had no support (from commissioners)."

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The bluff along East Cliff Drive is losing about 1 foot every year, but opponents worry that a seawall would harm the area, especially the world-famous Pleasure Point surf break.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file



Seawall

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He said the commission wanted an analysis of an alternative to a seawall.

"I think there's a project out there, what it would look like I don't know," Potter said.

If the Army Corps and county want to press on with the project, there is a mediation process for such federal and state squabbles that could take place. Or more study could be done, as the Coastal Commission requested, and the project re-submitted for approval.

Years in the making, the plan to build the wall sparked controversy.

Supporters said the wall would stabilize an eroding cliff and preserve access for everybody by saving East Cliff Drive. Thousands of bikers, walkers and surfers use the thoroughfare daily.

Allowing the bluff to erode into the road would only rob people of that access, supporters said.

But the plan's critics said more natural solutions were not studied.

Groups like the Surfrider Foundation had favored a plan



that would plant more vegetation to stabilize the bluff top, set weight limits on vehicles traveling East Cliff Drive — then re-study the erosion in the future.

Fears abounded that the famed surf break could be harmed by the wall, but UC Santa Cruz geologist Gary Griggs, who analyzed the project, said

that was not the case.

And the Sierra Club favored an approach that would let nature take its course and allow the bluff eat into the road.

About 1 foot of the bluff erodes each year, but harsh weather could always speed the process. The former two-lane road was reduced to one lane during the mid-1990s.

Moreover, sewer lines lie beneath the well-worn road.

Commission staffers wanted more study of alternative methods to stabilize the bluff, but had recommended approving the project with some fairly minor tweaks.

The wall was to be designed to look natural, restoring the bluff face to the point it was about two

years ago.

The seawall plan was part of a larger project to refurbish the bike path that runs along the road, and also called for an 800-foot wall to be built in the future at the end of 41st Avenue.

Supporters of the seawall, which has been under consideration for years, say it would save the road and bike and pedestrian path along East Cliff Drive, and preserve access for all to the scenic area. But opponents worry about its effects on the environment.

Dan Coyro/
Sentinel file

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