

# Lighthouse Point at the crossroads

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SANTA CRUZ — After years of planning and debate, the last thing local officials want is more delay in the development of a state park at Lighthouse Field.

The state Parks and Recreation Commission will meet Friday to consider a master plan for the park. Local officials say that quick approval hinges on a united front from the Santa Cruz community. But some residents plan to take their criticisms of the master plan to the meeting, whether it divides the community or not.

Some residents fear that once the plan is approved, the city will lose control of Lighthouse Point. They are worried that the state could remove the parking lot, a favorite spot for surfers and sea-gazers alike.

A public hearing will be at 9 a.m. at City Hall on the Lighthouse Field State Beach General Plan.

Discussions on the fate of Lighthouse Field have been going on for the last 15 years.

During that time, the "Save Lighthouse Field" movement has inched along bureaucratic hallways in the city, county and Sacramento to transform a vacant and valuable beachfront parcel into a public park.

In 1969, Santa Cruz resident Jim Franks was a member of a grassroots movement to "Save Lighthouse Field" off West Cliff Drive from development as a convention center and helped convince state officials to buy the open field for a park.

Today, Franks is the chairman of the

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## Lighthouse Field

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city/county Lighthouse Field Advisory Committee — a committee that has been meeting for years to decide plans for the 36-acre Lighthouse Field State Beach Park located across West Cliff Drive from Lighthouse Point.

Friday is a "real, real big day," in Franks' words, for those involved with the park plans.

Local residents have waited for about two years for the hearing. It was to be held last fall, but a bureaucratic foul-up caused a postponement.

After years of local public hearings, workshops, meetings, arguments, disappointments, small victories and reports, the state parks commissioners have the power to approve the basic park plan.

Local officials hope approval will come quickly, so the city and county can proceed with the business of developing, staffing and maintaining the park.

The master plan calls for a park for strollers, sitters, picnickers and frisbee throwers, but not for baseball games, soccer fields and swings.

"The people really want the area to be preserved in open space," said City Councilwoman Mardi Wormhoudt.

Wormhoudt, Franks and others hope for approval Friday by the state officials.

Officials toured Lighthouse Field today. Four commissioners are newly appointed.

Local officials worry if approval is de-

layed park development will be put off for another six months, a year, or more.

"I think we feel a great urgency to have the plan resolved to begin some maintenance in the field, and an effort to stop the deterioration of one of the most beautiful pieces of open space in Santa Cruz County," said Wormhoudt.

Wormhoudt and Franks agree with those who believe the basic plan should be approved Friday, with details to be worked out later on the local level.

Those details include placement for picnic tables, parking spaces, bathrooms and what's to become of the Lighthouse Point parking lot.

"Obviously, there is dissension on some items. But I think we can work out the details later," commented Wormhoudt.

Others, including residents, surfers and members of a group called the West Cliff Drive Preservation Committee — are more concerned about the "details" than the basic park concept.

They say the plans have been mishandled by local officials, they view the advisory committee with distrust and maintain the committee has made "ambiguous" decisions.

"If I can't have confidence in the local boards, then I say, 'Let's lose the park,'" said Gus Michel, a spokesman for the Preservation Committee.

During the controversy at the local committee level, Advisory Committee Chairman Robert Bell resigned in December after six years on the job.

"I'm getting tired," he had said at the time of his resignation.

Franks, a former city Parks and Recreation commissioner, was appointed to replace Bell by a unanimous vote of the council and Board of Supervisors.

West Cliff Drive Preservationists Michel and longtime surfer Wes Reed spoke at a recent public hearing to protest a section in the plan that called for moving West Cliff Drive back from its route along the beach cliffs.

Speakers at the public hearing convinced the council to make a "minor amendment" to the plan to keep West Cliff Drive intact.

Local officials believe state commissioners will go along with this "minor" change.

But there are other details that Michel and Reed say they will bring to the attention of the state commissioners at Friday's meeting.

"There's no reason for the Point to become part of the state park system," said Reed. "We can't afford to lose it."

Reed fears the Point will pass out of the control of the city and fall into the hands of the state.

It is the Point and West Cliff Drive — not Lighthouse Field — that are the city's most valuable assets, says Reed.

"The park is a piddling nothing compared to the Point and West Cliff Drive," Reed commented.