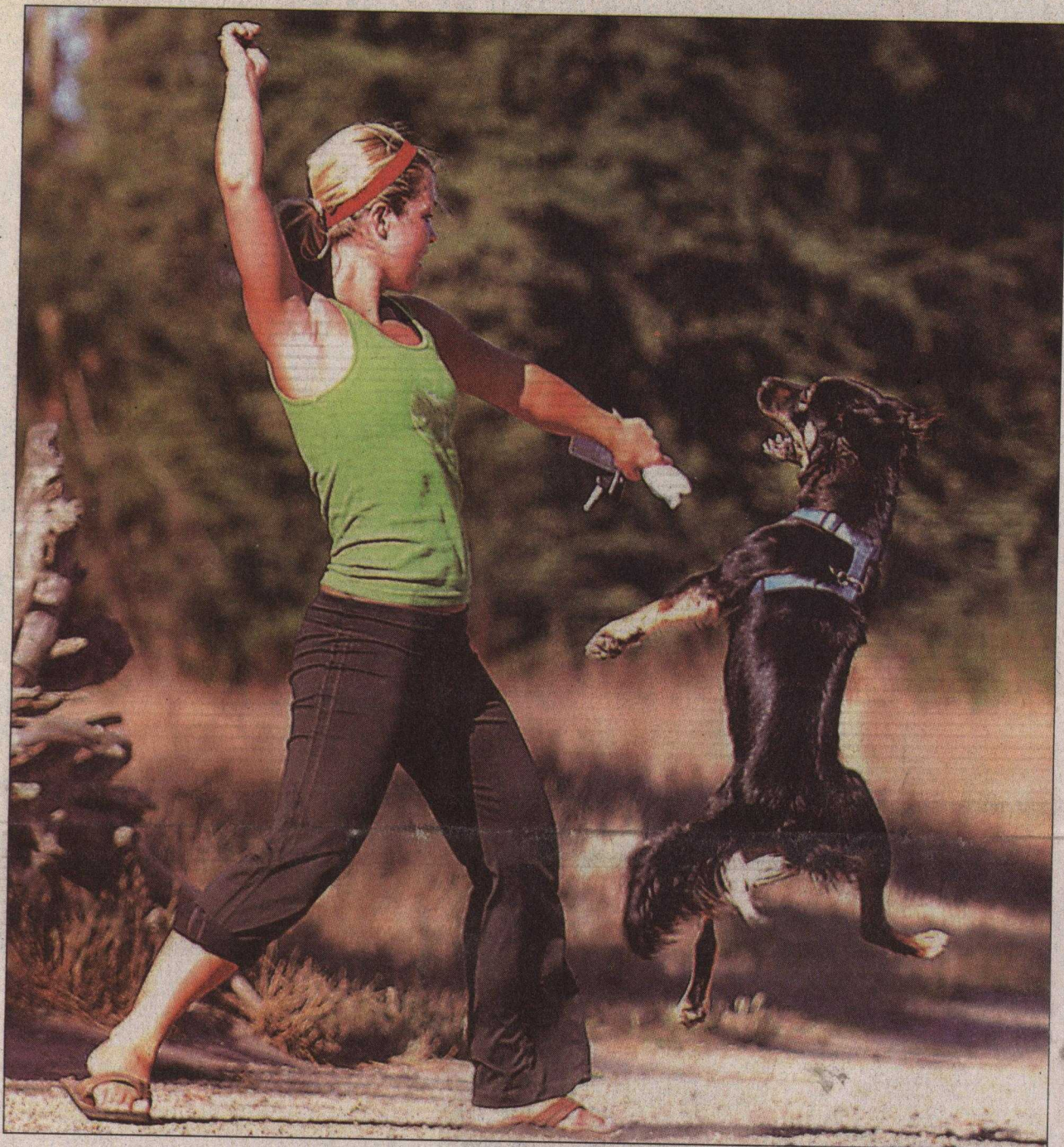


# Going to the dogs: City, state working on deal that would keep Lighthouse Field open to pets



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Salsa can't contain her excitement as Lauren Mitchell tosses a stick for the dog at Lighthouse Field on Monday.

## Santa Cruz could purchase park; price big unknown

By **SHANNA McCORD**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

**SANTA CRUZ** — Future ownership of Lighthouse Field State Beach, and ultimately whether dogs are allowed to run without a leash there, are tied up in the state's budget standoff.

Assemblyman John Laird, D-Santa Cruz, has proposed giving State Parks Director Ruth Coleman the authority to

sell the 37-acre West Cliff Drive state park to Santa Cruz. His plan is part of the proposed 2007-08 state budget currently hung up in the Senate.

"If the city and state can make a deal, great," said Laird, who was encouraged by city and state officials to help make a sale possible. "They can't do this without expressed authority from the Legislature. I think it's an idea worthy of exploration."

The city, which now maintains the park, would gain by owning the land because it could permanently call the shots, and more than likely allow dogs to run off-leash, which is not permitted by the state.

The state has expressed an interest in unloading the property to avoid escalating maintenance costs, and would enjoy

See **DOGS** on **PAGE A12**





Lighthouse Avenue resident Eli Ledwith takes Buddy out for his daily constitutional at Lighthouse Field in Santa Cruz on Monday.

Shmuel Thaler/  
Sentinel

## Dogs

Continued from Page A1

the extra revenue from a sale.

As it stands, the state Department of Parks and Recreation is set to resume control of Lighthouse Field on Nov. 15, the expiration date on a 30-year contract between the city and state for Santa Cruz's management of the park.

The contract has allowed city leaders to create the rules and policies for how Lighthouse Field State Beach, which includes Its Beach, has been used since 1977. Off-leash hours, though criticized by state officials, started in 1993 and continue to this day. Santa Cruz has footed the bill for maintaining the field and beach.

The November management change would mean the city would save thousands of dollars annually and the state would be in turn saddled with the cost of managing the park, which is more than \$200,000 a year.

Managing the park isn't part of the state's proposed spending plan, which could spark motivation to sell, Laird said.

"If a sale doesn't happen, we'll have to come back and figure out

how to fund the park's maintenance because it's not in the state budget," Laird said. "It'll shift almost \$300,000 to state costs."

If Laird's proposal is adopted as part of the state budget, the state would seek an appraisal of Lighthouse Field State Beach and set a selling price for the land. The park's estimated value is not known; however, city officials estimate it won't be as expensive as land that could be developed for housing. Lighthouse Field State Beach must remain park land in perpetuity, a mandate in Laird's proposed legislation.

City officials, though faced with an ongoing budget shortfall of their own, have expressed interest in owning the park. They've been heavily lobbied by several hundred dog owners across the county who don't want to see Lighthouse Field management fall back into the hands of the state.

"The issue has definitely been made more visible by the off-leash dog advocates. That's probably the primary motivation for this," Councilwoman Cynthia Mathews said. "We're open to a number of resolutions, they just have to make sense for the city."

Assistant City Manager Mar-

tin Bernal said it's up to the City Council to decide if purchasing Lighthouse Field State Beach is in the public's interest.

Despite budget woes, a moderate price and longterm payment plan with the state that carries little or no interest could make the purchase a reality, Bernal said.

"It would have to be very favorable in terms of very long-term financing and moderate pricing," Bernal said. "Something we could pay for over a long period of time is much more doable than coming up with the money now."

Grant Weseman, a longtime critic of the city's off-leash dog policy, believes the city's possible purchase of Lighthouse Field would create the world's most expensive dog park.

"The city is catering to a special interest group by keeping it as a dog park," Weseman said. "It's a waste of money unless the city is just looking for ways to throw money down the drain."

Laird's proposal must be approved by the Senate and signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger before a sale can go forward.

Contact Shanna McCord at  
smccord@santacruzsentinel.com.