

PASSING THE TORCH

This little light of ours

City of Santa Cruz could take ownership of Abbott Lighthouse beam from Coast Guard

Lighthouse

7.9.13



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

The navigation beacon atop the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse shines through the darkness Saturday night. The city's Parks and Recreation Commission is weighing a request to take ownership of the light from the Coast Guard.

By J.M. BROWN

jbrown@santacruzsentinel.com

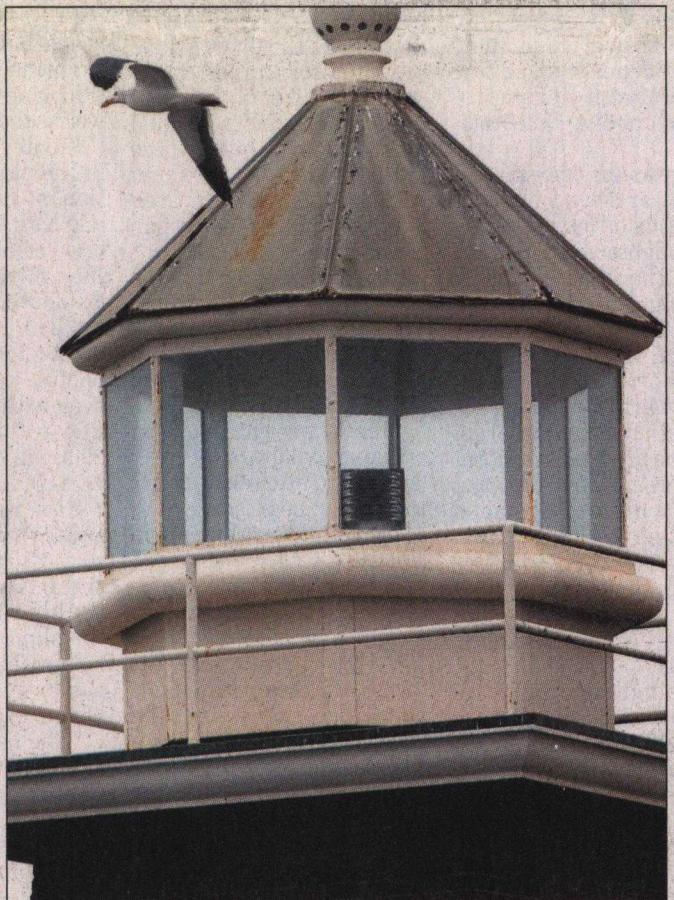
SANTA CRUZ — The navigational light atop West Cliff Drive's iconic lighthouse will flash no more under a proposal to return the beacon to a solid beam, a move that requires the city to take ownership from the U.S. Coast Guard.

The Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation Commission voted unanimously Monday to recommend the City Council approve the ownership change and switch of lighting styles once final details are worked out with the Coast Guard.

The move officially would reclassify the navigational light inside the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse from a "major aid" to a "private aid" for vessels and require the city to maintain the beacon, which would sweep across the sky rather than blink.

The city owns the brick lighthouse, which was built in 1967 on the site of an original one-story wooden lighthouse that dated to 1868 and was torn down after 80 years. Named for a surfer who drowned near Lighthouse Point, the current structure houses the Santa Cruz Surfing Museum and is depicted in the city's official logo.

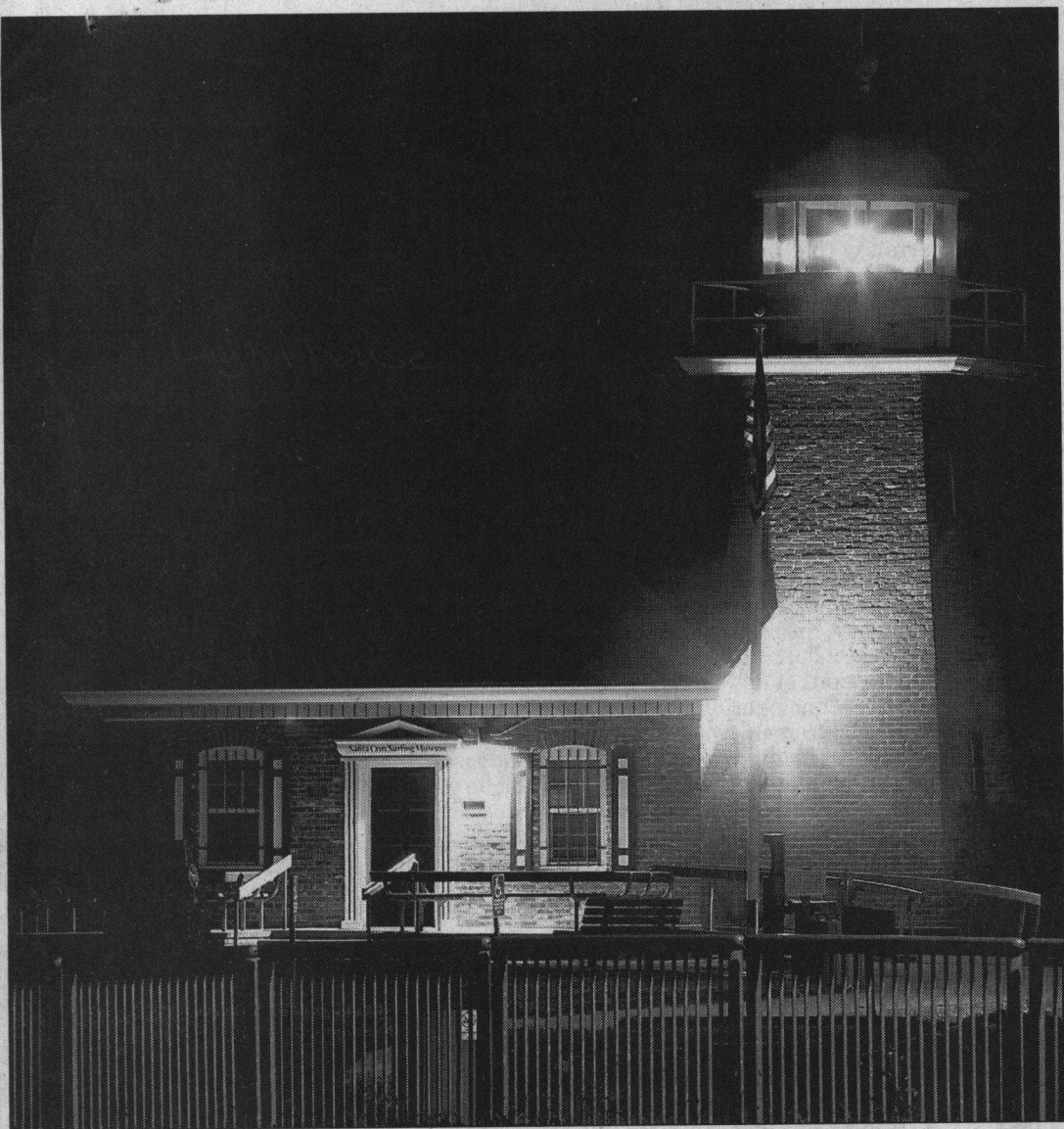
But the Coast Guard owns and maintains the actual light. Two years ago, the agency replaced the solid beam with



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The navigation light sits atop the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse at Lighthouse Point.

SEE LIGHTHOUSE ON A6



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The Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse is the home of the Santa Cruz Surfing Museum.

LIGHTHOUSE

Continued from A1

a flickering light, which got the attention of lighthouse lovers Bill Simpkins and Jim Thoits. The Live Oak residents approached the Parks and Recreation Department about getting the solid beam back because it was more attractive and historically fitting.

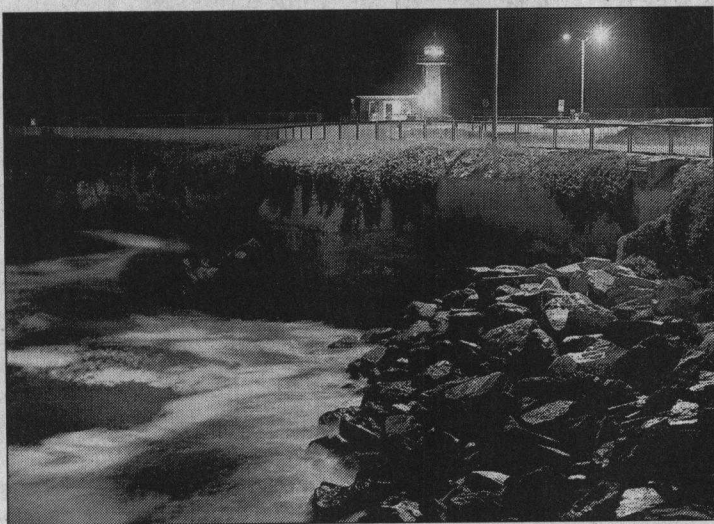
Simpkins told the commission the light went out for an extended period two years ago and "when it came back with the strobe, we said, 'What is that?'"

Simpkins and Thoits, who were instrumental in fundraising to build the 11-year-old Walton Lighthouse at the Santa Cruz harbor, offered to cover the cost of replacing the light on West Cliff Drive.

But the city's recreation superintendent, Carol Scurich, said that hopefully won't be necessary.

She said the Coast Guard is amenable to making the switch, offering to install one of their old solid lights. But she said the switch would require an ownership change that "obligates the city to keep it in working order."

The light would still be an aid to mariners although its status



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

A navigation beacon operates atop the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse at Lighthouse Point.

would change to private ownership. Scurich said modern navigational technology has made vessels less reliant on lighthouses.

Simpkins said the solid beam is expected to last 20 years or more because it will be encased in glass and possibly be attached to a battery to better withstand weather and power outages.

Randy Widera, a parks and recreation commissioner who is involved in the restoration of

Pigeon Point Lighthouse near Pescadero, said he appreciated the efforts of the two local residents.

"It is the light that is part of the historic fabric," Widera said.

Scurich said she will continue working with the Coast Guard on a written agreement for the transfer before the City Council reviews the proposal.

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