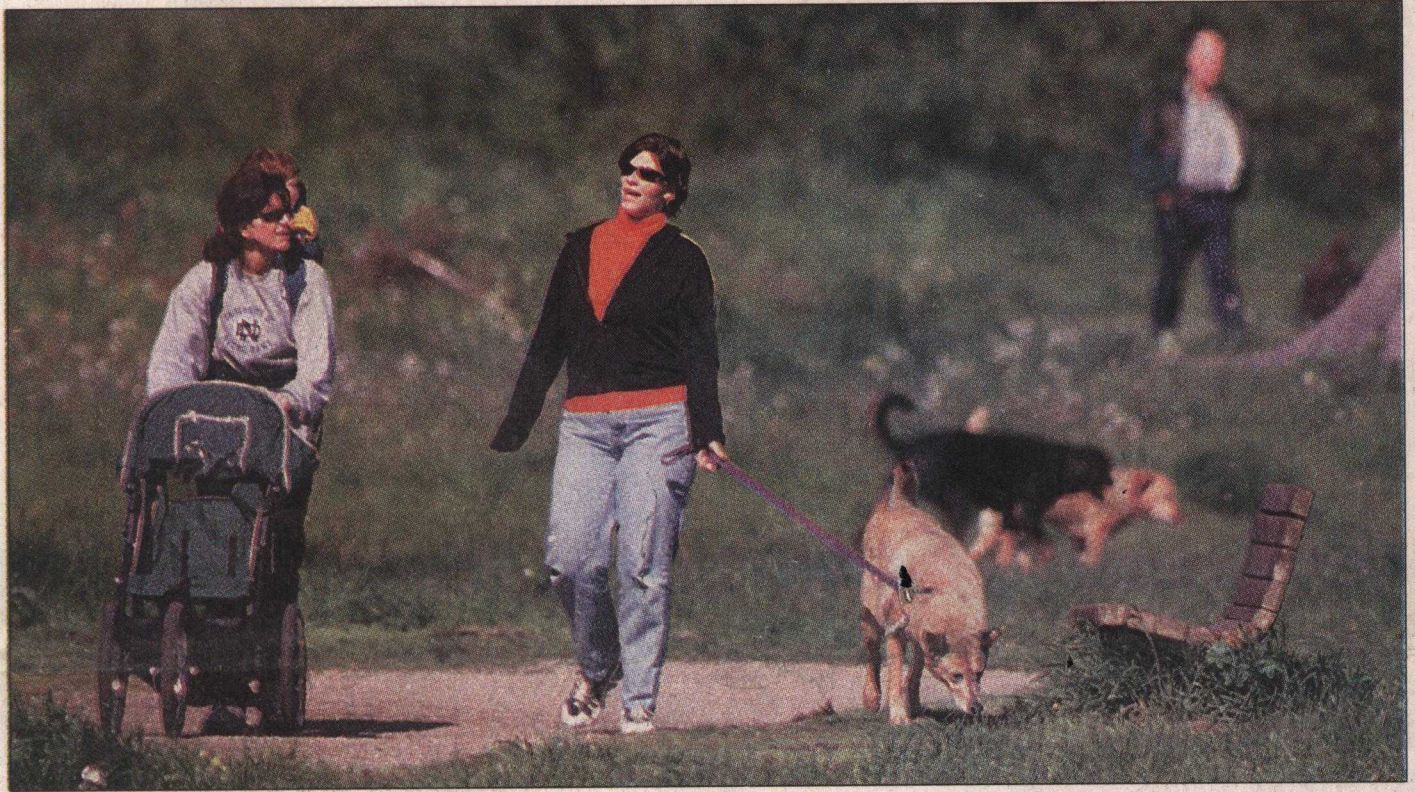


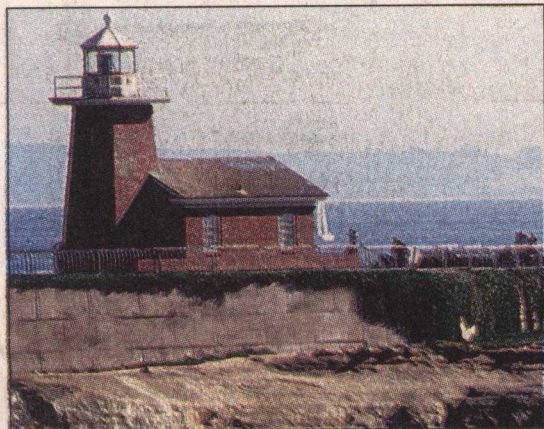
City plans field's future



'It has mythic drawing power.'

PATRICIA MATEJCEK, CITY PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Many changes, ideas afoot for Westside park



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

ABOVE: Erosion threatens to send Mark Abbot Lighthouse tumbling into the ocean.

TOP: Walkers with dogs and strollers abound Tuesday at Lighthouse Field.

By **BRIAN SEALS**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — What to do when the lighthouse threatens to tumble into the sea, when to allow dogs to run off-leash, and making sure the treasured monarch butterfly has suitable space to visit — all are being discussed as part of the future of Lighthouse Field.

The 33-acre Westside park is adding another chapter in its storied history as the city lays out a management blueprint for the next 20 years. The city's Parks and Recreation Commission is considering a string of concepts for the park. They will be unveiled Thursday, and public input collected April 1.

Among the items on the table:

- Extending the hours dog owners can legally allow their pets to play off-leash.
- Restricting dogs and bikes in sensitive habitat areas.

- Upgrading restrooms.

- Deciding where to relocate the Mark Abbot Lighthouse, which doubles as the Surfing Museum, when ongoing erosion imminently threatens it.

City officials don't track visitors to the park, which is jointly managed by the city and state parks department, but it is one of the city's busiest. Any given day sees joggers, dog-walkers, surfers

and others basking in the sun, gazing at the Monterey Bay.

"It has mythic drawing power," said Patricia Matejcek, who serves on the city Parks and Recreation Commission.

A landmark fight

Lighthouse Field symbolizes all that is Santa Cruz.

The lighthouse is a landmark. It overlooks Steamer Lane, one of Northern California's top surf spots. Walkers, bikers and runners visit the area daily.

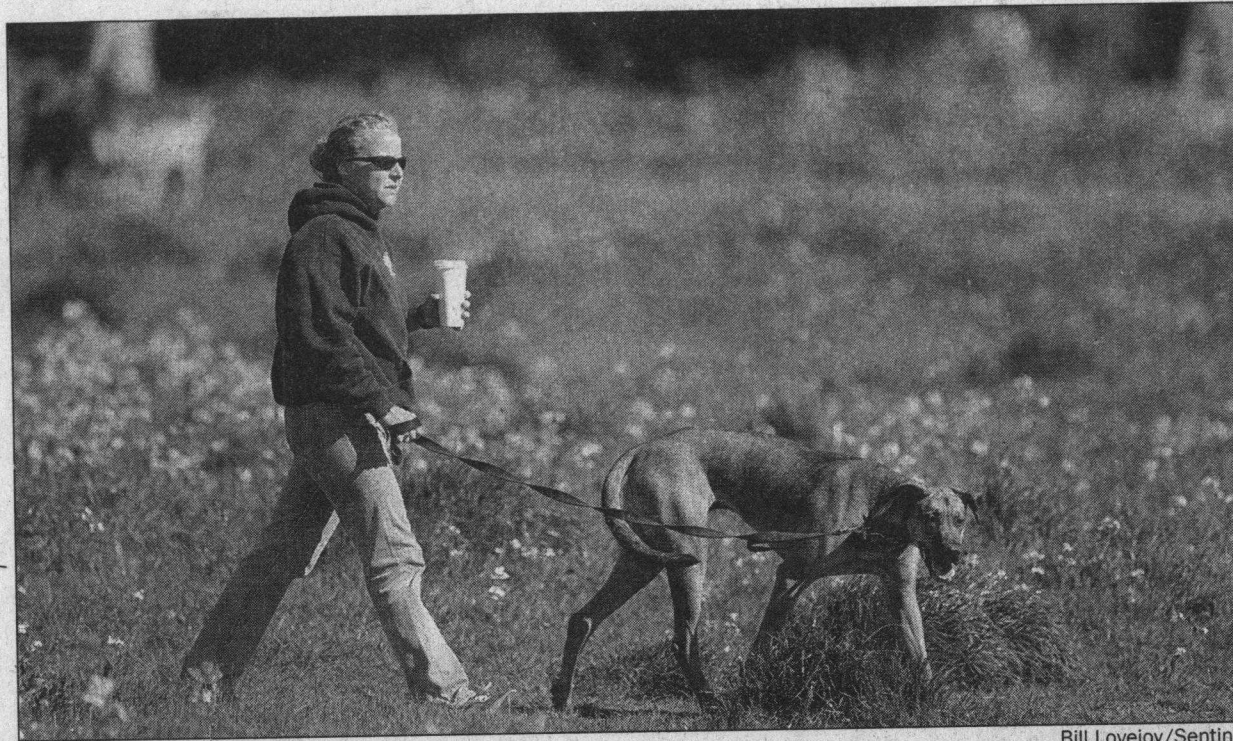
Perhaps most importantly, the successful fight in the mid-1970s to preserve the field from development — a conference center and hotel were proposed — is considered a turning point in the city's slow-growth political movement.

Many fledgling Santa Cruz leaders cut their political teeth on the fight to preserve Lighthouse Field.

"This started my political career," Katherine Beiers, a former Santa Cruz mayor, said Tuesday while on a run in the area.

Talk of a hotel and convention center at the site first surfaced in the late 1960s. But by 1974, opposition had grown so strong that voters rejected a proposed conference center nearly 2-to-1 margin.

Please see **LIGHTHOUSE** on Page A6



Susan Down walks her dog, Ethel, Tuesday morning in Lighthouse Field.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Lighthouse

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Eventually the state bought the land for about \$6 million. After the property was acquired, city leaders grappled with what kind of park it would be.

It generally remains the minimalist park it was then. Trees lie where they fall. Paths are unpaved. Gophers still have the run of the wide open spaces.

Petlon Avenue resident Donald O'Regan summed up the feeling of many Westsiders.

"Leave it alone. It's beautiful," O'Regan said.

The lighthouse

The lighthouse was built in 1967 as a tribute to Mark Abbott, a teen surfer who had died nearby two years earlier.

But while the museum doubles as a tribute to surfers, the surf is taking its toll on the bluff where it sits. It is eroding and underground caves are encroaching on the point, said Susan Harris of the city parks department.

A concept under consideration calls

for the museum and lighthouse to be relocated to the inland side of West Cliff Drive should the bluff erode to the point of endangering the facility. How soon that will be is anyone's guess, but the parks department wants a plan in place when that day comes.

"That stuff is never predictable, but it is inevitable," Commissioner Geoffrey Dunn said of the erosion. "Nature bats last."

Another change under consideration is allowing dogs off-leash from sunrise to sunset in certain areas. Lighthouse Field is one of the few public spaces where that can happen, but it is currently limited to before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m.

But the commission is considering closing other areas considered sensitive to dogs and bikers.

"I think there will be some sort of trade-off," Dunn said.

Most dog owners surveyed Tuesday

at the park said longer hours would be welcome.

Susan Down of Ben Lomond said she comes from the mountains to enjoy the park.

"It's surprising how few places there are where your dogs can walk off-leash," Down said.

Harris said the city hopes to have a draft management plan in place by fall. The final plan will need the approval of a string of government bodies: City Council, county Board of Supervisors, state Parks and Recreation Department and the California Coastal Commission.

Thursday's meeting is at 7:30 p.m. in the community room of the police station, 155 Center St. Public input will be accepted at a second meeting at 4 p.m. April 1 in the City Council chamber, 809 Center St.

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