

Lighthouse

# Museum Jam Revives Park Allies

Relocation process renews activism to protect Lighthouse Field

by Helen Meservey

**IT IS A FINE DILEMMA:** SANTA CRUZ so loves its natural history museum that the 80-year-old facility has outgrown its current home. But Santa Cruz so loves its open space that the notion of sacrificing any of it for development — even for a museum — is wrought with conflict.

The current 5,000-square-foot Santa Cruz City Museum of Natural History on East Cliff Drive has no classrooms and no meeting rooms. It must turn away 25 percent of the school groups who want to visit it every year. The basement floods and some collections can't be displayed due to lack of space.

A cursory glance at the predicament reveals a lively community discussion over where to locate a new, larger resource. A closer look gives way to what has become a revived effort to save from any development some hard-won open space, namely Lighthouse Field State Park.

A task force charged with determining a suitable site for a proposed 15,000 - 25,000 square-foot museum was expected to vote on a final recommendation April 29. That date had been scheduled because a meeting April 15 inspired some 200 community members to offer vehement, sometimes tearful opposition to any recommendation that the new facility be built in Lighthouse Field.

The 35-acre park is one of five sites that remained under consideration. Other possibilities included UC Santa Cruz (on a parcel near the Arboretum), privately-owned property near 7th Avenue and outside city borders, Natural Bridges State Park and the Union Pacific depot site on Washington Street. Committee members say an additional possibility, on Third Street near the Boardwalk, is also being reconsidered.

The site selection committee evaluated qualifying locations by several criteria. Not only



zoning board. "The only reasons I've heard are ruled by emotion and fear. It may turn out that the yard stick that this community uses and is content with is emotion."

Museum Association President Jean Gervais, also a proponent of Lighthouse Field for the museum, fears that the ultimate tragedy is that the issue won't be resolved and the museum will continue to strain against its current limitations.

"What we really want to do with the museum is to teach people about their own environment and their own environmental responsibility and stewardship," she explains. "We are environmentalists. I hope that people understand that."

West side resident and community activist Ralph Meyberg, an opponent of building on Lighthouse Field, says community support should outweigh every other consideration.

"How many times do you have to fight the same battle before it's secured? he says. "There are so many other marvelous options."

The debate is far from over. The task force was expected to vote on a recommendation April 29 (after *GOOD TIMES'* deadline). The recommendation would be evaluated by the

Museum Association, which would in turn report to the city's department of Parks and Recreation. That board then would seek approval from the Santa Cruz City Council. Finally, if any of the sites are state lands, such as Lighthouse Field or Natural Bridges, the city would then work with the state parks department or the Coastal Commission.

"I love the museum," says Julia Sauer, chief coordinator for the non-profit Museum Association, which also runs the Surfing Museum. "What I don't want to see is the museum stuck some place because nobody objected to it there. I don't want to see us getting the booby prize."

**To the Lighthouse: The campaign to find a suitable new site for the Santa Cruz City Museum of Natural History has revived efforts to save Lighthouse Field State Park from any development. Museum planners had identified Lighthouse as a prime option.**

must a new museum be situated near a natural habitat, it must also be accessible to visitors and acceptable to the community at large. There must be adequate parking and no need to raise funds to acquire the site.

## Lighthouse in the spotlight

Thus, the committee evaluated the options and found Lighthouse Field scored the highest average. It ranked lowest, however, in the category of public support. Development of any kind proposed for Lighthouse Field scores low on that index, a consistency since the 1970s, when nearby residents and environmentalists thwarted a plan to build a convention center there.

"I got my political start as an original member of Save Lighthouse Field," remembers City Councilwoman Katherine Beiers, who also sits on the relocation task force. "As ideas come up to put things there, we have maintained that it was fought for and won for to keep as open space."

Some proponents of Lighthouse Field as a museum site argue that resistance largely comes from neighbors of that area and from those who don't agree that 2.5 acres on a 35-acre lot is reasonable.

"There's no rational reason not to put it there," argues site selection committee member Mark Primack, who also serves on the city's