

State backs off on restaurant plan

Seacliff site spared further development

By ERIN K. QUIRK

Sentinel staff writer

SEACLIFF — Residents in the Seacliff Park area can breathe a sigh of relief knowing their beloved bluff above the Cement Ship will remain open space — for now.

Last year the state Department of Parks and Recreation, which owns the seven-acre parcel next to Seacliff State Beach, commissioned a study of development possibilities. A four-star, Chart House-style restaurant was proposed in an effort to bring extra revenue into the state parks system. But that plan is no longer in the works, state parks officials said.

"It's not on the front burner and probably won't be resurrected," said Chief Ranger and Acting Superintendent Bob Culbertson.

Neighbors who have long walked their dogs, picnicked and watched sunsets from the bluff bemoaned the idea of losing prime open space to restaurant development. Residents also questioned state parks' suitability as a restaurant landlord. Victor Ogrey, one opponent and neighbor of the property, spent hours surveying local restaurateurs and poking holes in the feasibility study prepared by a Sacramento State marketing professor.

"What a wonderful New Year's gift," Ogrey said upon hearing the project had been shelved. "I am just so pleased."

Culbertson said if the restaurant plan were to progress it would require an amendment to the state parks general plan. That means lengthy public hearings and undoubtedly heavy controversy. Culbertson said each parks district



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In a drive to make state parks more self-supporting, officials were considering putting a restaurant on this 7-acre parcel on the bluffs above Seacliff State beach.

in the state had to come up with revenue-generating ideas, and several others were not only better suited economically but had more public support. The department is now selecting the top projects.

"It was sort of, where could you get the most bang for your buck?" Culbertson said.

Last year, each district in the state parks system submitted several revenue-generating plans that could compensate for years of budget cuts within the department. The local district came

up with three plans: an RV park adjacent to Wilder Ranch, 20 new tent cabins at Henry Cowell State Park; and a restaurant on the seven-acre bluff above the Cement Ship. Massive public outcries demolished the plans for the RV Park at Wilder and the tent cabins at Henry Cowell. The restaurant project is the third local proposal to be shelved.

Culbertson said the entire state parks system is based on public/private partnerships. In fact, Seacliff, Natural Bridges and Sunset State Beaches were all

established in the 1930's with matching private dollars. Therefore, Culbertson said, it is critical the public support the department's proposals. The restaurant project is not completely dead, he added. The study cost the department about \$25,000 and can be used in the future if necessary.

State parks currently has a contract with the Seacliff Beach concessionaire. Culbertson said when that contract comes up for negotiation, several years from now, the department may seek some type of upgrade.