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City studies funds for rescue boat

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SANTA CRUZ — For years, public safety officials have been trying to get the city to buy a surf rescue boat to help them reach stricken swimmers and surfers, many of whom drown because the closest vessel often must come from Monterey.

The city has shown little interest. Until now. Joe Weis, a longtime beachgoer and ocean-lover, has offered to donate \$10,000 to buy a rescue boat.

Money talks in government, so the City Council may take a different view when it's asked to accept the money at its meeting Tuesday night.

The city Parks and Recreation Commission, which has been considering the donation for a couple of months, will recommend the City Council accept the gift, according to Recreation Superintendent Dee Herren.

The city lifeguard program is organized under the Parks and Recreation Department.

"We are not calling it a rescue boat. We're deliberately calling it a beach services boat," says Parks and Recreation Director Jim Lang. He foresees additional uses for a vessel, including monitoring a mooring program the city hopes to launch. The boat also could be moored off the rivermouth on week-

ends and serve as a floating lifeguard tower, he said.

The boat, he said, would be operated by city lifeguards. It would only be available during the summer season, however, when the lifeguards are on duty. There have been several informal proposals for lifeguard service on weekends and holidays, but the city has no definite plans for adding off-season coverage, according to Lang.

Ironically, most drownings off city beaches and cliffs don't happen in the summer; usually it's the winter and spring months.

Though not charged with that responsibility, the harbor patrol voluntarily responds to water rescue calls within the city — when the patrol boat is able to leave the harbor. Last year, the harbor patrol made 160 rescue runs, including 51 in city waters. Of the total number of calls, 21 were for overturned Hobie Cats with persons in the water, 25 swimmers in distress and five windsurfers in distress, according to Deputy Harbormaster Kevin Reno. All of the patrol's rescue efforts last year were successful.

But, the harbor patrol boat is prone to being grounded by winter shoaling of the channel entrance. That was the case last Saturday when the harbor

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patrol was summoned to rescue a man in a flimsy raft who was being swept out to sea. The patrol boat couldn't get out through the channel because of the buildup of the winter sandbar.

The Coast Guard dispatched two vessels from Monterey, but travel time is a minimum of 45 minutes — a long time for someone to tread water.

As a result, the rafter, Randy Keen Farr of San Jose, remains missing and now is presumed drowned.

The Parks and Recreation Department has been looking at a rescue boat being offered for sale by Huntington Beach, but no specific purchase recommendation will be made to the City Council on Tuesday, according to Lang. The city, he said, would follow normal purchasing procedures.

Harbormaster Steve Scheiblauber says the city should be able to find an adequate rescue boat, one that can be launched from davits, for the money it's about to get.