

# Waves, sands of time threaten Santa Cruz landmark

MOVE SEEN FOR ABBOTT LIGHTHOUSE AND SURFING MUSEUM

By David L. Beck

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Abbott Lighthouse and Surfing Museum, a Santa Cruz landmark that guards the entrance to Cowell Cove and looks down on one of the world's best-known surf breaks, is in danger from the sea and eventu-

ally must be moved or replaced, according to a proposed governing document for that stretch of coastline.

A new general plan for Lighthouse Field State Beach says the city must "at some future date relocate the existing lighthouse/Surf-

ing Museum or construct a new facility farther inland" close to West Cliff Drive or on its other side.

The plan, which goes to the city council tonight, sets no time limit but acknowledges the inevitability of erosion. The storms of 1983 knocked about 75 feet off Lighthouse Point. Half that much damage in another storm would render

the lighthouse unsafe, experts say.

It represents the first written acknowledgment of the ever-shorter distance from the lighthouse to the edge of the cliff.

The document, which revises the original 1984 general plan, contemplates protecting areas of willow

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and eucalyptus trees on the inland side of Lighthouse Field, as well as rebuilding the public restrooms.

It does not deal with specific off-leash hours for dogs in the field and on the beach. The California Parks Department considers that a local administrative issue that need not be addressed in the general plan; the city council has set a meeting on that subject for May 22.

Lighthouse Field is sacred ground for Santa Cruz progressives because it was there that they battled plans for convention centers in the 1960s and '70s, and won. The state purchased the land — all but Lighthouse Point — in 1978.

The city owns Lighthouse Point and manages the entire park for the state. An image of Abbott Lighthouse is on the city seal.

Surrounded by lawn, the lighthouse is a frequent backdrop for open-air weddings and even church services on weekends, while during the week dog owners play frisbee with their pets in its shadow. Steamer Lane carries surfers enjoying big winter waves into the cove from nearly half a mile offshore.

But the point is shrinking and is undercut on two sides by sea caves. An attempt

The current red-brick structure, built in 1967, was a gift from Chuck and Esther Abbott commemorating their son Mark, who died while bodysurfing near Pleasure Point, a few miles east of Lighthouse Point.

was made in the early 1980s to block the mouth of the one most directly threatening the lighthouse with a concrete seawall, which lies in ruins.

The lighthouse sits about 60 feet from the edge, and less than that from where the city has once again blocked off the paved path, which was undercut during the December 2002 storms.

"That path has been moved a number of times," said Frank Perry, author of "Lighthouse Point." "They keep moving it back."

The first Santa Cruz lighthouse was built in 1869 close to where the current one is, and it lasted only 10 years. A replacement, consisting of a white frame house for the lighthouse keeper and his family, with a small tower on top, was built on the inland side of the road.

In 1941, with lighthouses becoming more automated, the Coast Guard aban-

doned the keeper's home and built a wooden tower and navigational light closer to the sea.

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When the insurance company handed the Abbotts a life-insurance check for \$20,000 — double the face amount of Mark's policy because his death was accidental — they wanted to do something with the money. "We couldn't spend it on Mark," said Esther Abbott, now 91. "Our first thought was to put in bathrooms at Pleasure Point."

Denied permission, they turned to Lighthouse Point. Instead of rebuilding the old lighthouse on the inland side, they put the new one near the Coast Guard beacon. "We naturally thought that was where they wanted it," she said. She admits that may have been a mistake.

"They will have to move it someday," she said. "The sea is going to win. The sea always does."

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