

# Opposition bristles over museum site

## Crowd at meeting denounces Lighthouse Field suggestion

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SANTA CRUZ — Listening to dozens of angry people took so much time Wednesday that the natural history museum relocation task force decided to conduct another meeting on April 29 before making a recommendation.

It appeared the weight of public opinion, however, was causing at least some task force members to back away from supporting Lighthouse Field as the best site for a new museum.

"I'm pleased people were willing to take another meeting to consider other sites," said Councilwoman Katherine Beiers, a member of the task force and staunch opponent of building on Lighthouse Field.

Going into Wednesday's meeting, the task force as a whole had ranked Lighthouse Field as the site that met the the majority of criteria established for building a successful natural history museum.

The only sticking point was the category for successfully alleviating neighborhood and community concerns. On that point, the task

force rated Lighthouse Field the lowest.

And based on Wednesday's packed house at the Loudon Nelson Community Center auditorium, they were right.

"I don't know how Lighthouse Field even got on this list," said Erica Walz, one of 40 people who spoke at the meeting, mostly against building a 15,000-square-foot museum on a 2.5-acre site at Pelton Avenue and West Cliff Drive. "The people in this community worked too hard to be bitten in the butt by people who should be on their side."

Task force members knew even considering Lighthouse Field would be controversial. Santa Cruz residents spearheaded a successful crusade to save Lighthouse Field from development 25 years ago when a seven-story convention center was in the planning process.

"A building is a building is a building," said Jim Basye. "It doesn't matter. That place has a soul, and you'll kill it. ... And you can never bring that place back

Please see MUSEUM — BACK PAGE

## Museum site

Continued from Page A1  
once you kill it."

The natural history museum is bursting at the seams in its current location on East Cliff Drive. After six weeks of work, the task force had narrowed its final list of choices to four sites in addition to Lighthouse Field:

- A parcel off Delaware Avenue in Natural Bridges State Park.
- The old depot lot on Washington Street that the city hopes to buy for a park and a parking lot.
- A privately owned parcel in the county near 7th Avenue and Brommer Street next to Arana Gulch.
- A piece of land at UC Santa Cruz between the arboretum and the farm and garden.

On April 29, task force members will take a closer look at the old rail depot site, as well the one near Arana Gulch. Both had supporters at the meeting, although the City Council has said it won't consider a site outside Santa Cruz city.

Ultimately, the Santa Cruz Museum Association will decide what site it wants based on the task force's recommendation. That decision was to come on May 13, but the additional task force meeting will delay the vote.

The final decision, however, rests with the City Council.

The crowd that turned out Wednesday made it clear to the task force that any of the sites would be better than Lighthouse Field.

"The whole idea of destroying nature to create a monument to natural history, I think that speaks for itself," said Barry Dumont.

One of the most important criteria in the formula used by the task force to pinpoint a location is that it must already be drawing sizable crowds of tourists and locals alike.

Museum association president Jean Gervais has said that's because the proposed museum would be too small to be a "destination site" like the Monterey Bay Aquar-

ium.

And the museum has to draw a lot of visitors to help sustain it through admission charges and gift-shop purchases, said Gervais.

Another important consideration is finding a site that would be donated for the museum, such as a state park- or city-owned land.

Gervais said the association is committed to raising \$6 million to build and furnish the museum, but having to buy the land would be too much.

Lighthouse Field fit the bill on many categories, but speaker after speaker echoed the comments of one woman on Wednesday: "You're going to have the biggest fight of your life if you go through with this."

The April 29 meeting will be from 7:15 to 9:15 p.m. in Loudon Nelson Community Center. Only a small amount of time will be set aside for additional public comments so the task force can consider its recommendation.