

Boat-mooring proposal floated in Santa Cruz

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Plans are afloat in Santa Cruz to create a public mooring area near the end of the Municipal Wharf — sort of a floating parking lot — that city officials hope will draw tourist dollars from visiting boaters and add seaside character.

This week through Oct. 23, the city council is soliciting proposals from contractors to install 75 buoys in about 25 feet of water between the east end of the wharf and Santa Cruz Main Beach.

The buoys would be attached to heavy cement anchors on the sea floor, allowing boaters to safely tie up their vessels for several days or weeks at a time.

Councilman Neal Coonerty, one of the leaders of the effort, said the city could earn money from daily mooring

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fees, while beach area businesses would benefit from increased tourist dollars.

There are less tangible benefits as well, said Coonerty.

"A large part of it is to continue to make the beach area reminiscent of what people expect from a seaside town," he said. "Boats in the harbor is part of that."

As it stands now, many of the thousands of sailing enthusiasts who pass through Monterey Bay every year cannot stay overnight in Santa Cruz. They are unable to tie boats to the

wharf because wave action batters the boats against pilings, damaging both.

Space is limited in the yacht harbor. Worse, sailors who toss anchors into the sandy bottom off the beach boardwalk area often return to find their boats have drifted or washed up on the beach.

"I've seen it happen many, many times," said Skip Tara, whose family has owned Stagnaro Brothers restaurant on the wharf since 1937.

Tara said the Wharf Leasee's Association has endorsed the idea.

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"I think it would be a good deal," he said. 1B

Santa Cruz holds a permit from the California Coastal Commission to operate up to 75 mooring buoys. Planners from the city council and the parks department also want to create some sort of floating shuttle service that would deliver sailors from their boats to wharf restaurants or the beach.

If good proposals come in and details are worked out over the winter, the plan could be up and running by next spring, said Coonerty.

Coonerty said the moorings would be run by a concessionaire, which would split profits with the city.

Capitola operates a similar public mooring program with 36 buoys off the Capitola Wharf. It operates from May 1 to Sept. 30, when seas are calm.