



Friends of Lighthouse Field



January 31, 2006

City of Santa Cruz Parks & Recreation Commission
809 Center St.
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
parksandrec@ci.santa-cruz.ca.us

Dear Parks & Recreation Commission,

On behalf of thousands of Santa Cruz citizens, we at Friends of Lighthouse Field are asking for your help to protect an important part of the life of our City.

The current status at Lighthouse Field State Beach is **exactly what you'd like to have in a park**. A broad cross section of City residents has formed a community centered on the park experience. They pleasantly socialize with each other while their dogs also become more social as well. They watch over the park. They sponsor park cleanups. They act when they observe crime, camping or dumping.

Lighthouse Field State Beach provides virtually all of the space available within the City to meet a key quality-of-life requirement for a large number of families. (A recent Santa Cruz Animal Services survey indicates 41% of local homes have dogs.) Our use is not exclusive – cyclists, walkers, mothers with baby carriages, surfers and others share the space while we're there. And our needs are served during only half of the daylight hours, a compromise to meet the objections of a small number of people who feel we have no place in any park – at least not "their" park.

Acting with no notice and no public hearings, a State bureaucrat ordered you to terminate access for people with off-leash dogs by November 2007. If allowed to stand, this action will have a severe detrimental impact on many of us in Santa Cruz. **We are asking you to act to support the community** by formally recommending these actions to City Council:

- Clearly declare your unequivocal opposition to what the State is attempting to do. Request the State to reverse its decision. Make State officials aware of the great harm they will do to the daily quality of life for so many local citizens.
- Request that the State decision be the subject of public hearings and open review.
- Declare now that the City of Santa Cruz wishes to see this important aspect of our community permanently defended in any renewal of the park lease. Alternatively, ask the State to transfer ownership of the park to the City.
- Ask the City Attorney to research legal means to reverse the State's order.
- Request the State to establish a joint Parks & Recreation / community working group to define a model for how this important public recreational need can be successfully provided.

We believe that "moving us somewhere else" is not a practical answer. Any acceptable replacement would need require 30-40 acres, centrally located, unfenced, convenient to pedestrians, with adequate parking, wheelchair accessible, and capable of providing an excellent outdoor experience to the people using it – i.e. not simply a fenced pen, unused parking lot, landfill or gravel pit. Such a replacement would have to be fully operational, with community support, and with any environmental impact reports accepted no later than November 2007.

During a period of nearly two years, the Parks and Recreation staff, the Commission and the City Council gave careful consideration to the management of Lighthouse Field State Beach and particularly the issue of whether people with off-leash dogs would continue to enjoy a beautiful outdoor experience shared among a supportive community that actively protects and enhances this special place.

During extensive hearings and countless hours of staff work, you and the City Council considered the issues of safety, environment, and public needs. Thousands of residents signed petitions; hundreds testified at Commission and City Council hearings or made written submissions. The overwhelming consensus of the community supported the current reasonable compromise. This did not satisfy a disgruntled few who had the time and money to sue in an effort to bully the City to impose their will. Although the lawsuit has failed on all points except one technicality, the California State Department of Parks and Recreation recently misused the lawsuit as an excuse to slap Santa Cruz in the face. This decision is contrary to the best interests of community and it should not go unchallenged.

In what other Santa Cruz park do community members organize park cleanups every few months? Lighthouse Field has a great deal of dense vegetation and is near heavily traveled areas. What would happen to safety and the crime rate in Lighthouse Field if we are driven out? And in what other park do community members spontaneously make financial contributions to enhance the park in memory of beloved park workers who have passed on?

We know that reversing the State dictate will take time and effort. We also appreciate past and future efforts to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for people with off-leash dogs. We're prepared to do our part to help, including continued park stewardship efforts, public communication to encourage compliance with current rules, volunteering to participate in City/community working groups to develop solutions, and public support for a City that supports the community. We're open to other creative ideas.

Lighthouse Field State Beach has a unique place in the social fabric of Santa Cruz – please defend it.

Sincerely,

Michael Tilson
On behalf of Friends of Lighthouse Field

Cc: D. Shoemaker