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Seacliff State Beach recovery effort hosts community input meeting



Community members turn out to New Brighton Middle School to hear a community update about the rebuilding process for storm damage at Seacliff and New Brighton State Beaches. (Gabrielle Gillette — Santa Cruz Sentinel)



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APTOS — Over 100 community members packed the New Brighton Middle School Performing Arts Center Tuesday evening to give community input on how officials should proceed with the rebuilding process for storm damage at Seacliff and New Brighton state beaches.

In late 2022 and early 2023, powerful swells and high tides wrecked Aptos' Seacliff State Beach, destroying its beachfront campground and damaging the now-demolished pier leading to the SS Palo Alto, also known as the Cement Ship. The beach's seawalls and walkways also suffered damage, as well as parts of New Brighton State Beach.

Since then, California State Parks and Friends of California State Parks have been working on rebuilding the beaches to ensure environmental sustainability amid climate change and rising sea level concerns.

"I appreciate your time and feedback," said Jordan Burgess, deputy district superintendent for the Santa Cruz district of the California Department of Parks and Recreation. "We know that change is happening along our coast and we are currently planning for adaptations that will increase resilience at Seacliff and New Brighton."



To determine the best vision for the area's future, Seacliff Resilience, a collaboration between California State Parks, Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks and Parks California, has been conducting surveys and studies since 2023. The project is currently in Phase 3, building on earlier studies and examining potential shoreline adaptation strategies, according to the Seacliff Resilience website.

At Tuesday's meeting, presenters provided a full audience with updates about the current phase of the Seacliff and New Brighton State Beaches Recovery Project and gave information about two planning efforts.

First, the audience learned about the coastal facilities management plan to develop goals for the design, implementation and management for the two beaches to increase resilience by 2050, said C.C. LaGrange, senior associate at Placeworks — the planning and design company on the project. The plan includes five sites that are vulnerable to hazards: New Brighton State Beach, the Seacliff State Beach campground area, the Seacliff State Beach day use area, Rio Del Mar State Beach Esplanade and the Platforms Beach area at Rio Del Mar State Beach.

Recommended actions throughout the various sites included projects such as new beach access routes, restroom relocation, vegetation installation, seawall replacement, parking consolidation or expansion and additional guardrails, among others.

The project sites are designed to increase resilience at the beaches for conditions predicted in the near term in 2050, though what they may look like further into the future, such as 2070, or into the next century, are harder to predict.

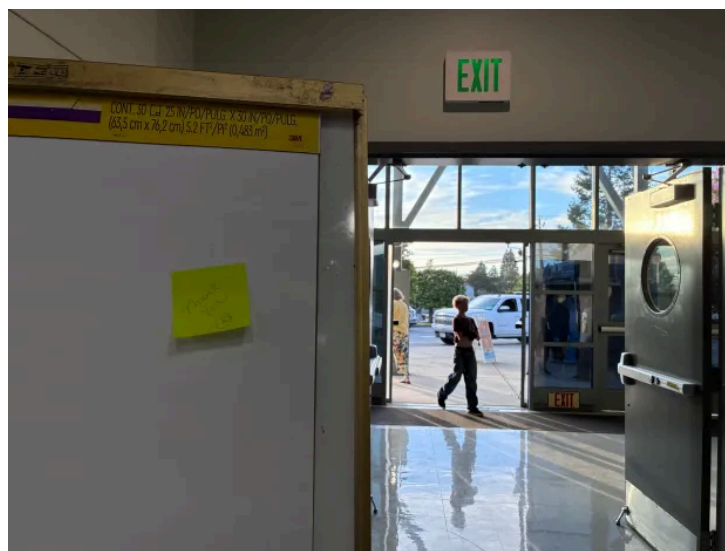
"Though we know for certain that things will change in the coming decades, we don't know yet exactly how much they will change," LaGrange said. "But our actions today will help us plan for the effects that we are most confident about, while laying the groundwork for success in the future."

LaGrange then moved into information about the project's Camping Feasibility Study, which aims to relocate the RV campground at Seacliff State Beach after being identified as vulnerable in an earlier study.

The Camping Feasibility Study explored different locations for RV or another type of camping, ways to minimize impact to natural resources and ensure camping opportunities can be economically and operationally sustainable, LaGrange said in the presentation. Potential locations include the Porter-Sesnon area of New Brighton State Beach, Seacliff State Beach upper bluffs, Sunset State Beach or revamping the existing camping area at New Brighton State Beach.

However, several of the options were met with booing and chatter from the audience, who turned out in swaths to voice their opinions on the visual changes potentially coming to their neighborhoods. The presentation did not have a Q&A period, but instead had stations set up around the room with diagrams of each concept from both the Coastal Facilities Management Plan and the Camping Feasibility Study for participants to write comments on sticky notes and talk one-on-one with representatives from the California State Parks.

The method of community input proved contentious, however, as audience members groaned upon learning that there would not be a Q&A session. Gigi Marie said she felt like she was back in kindergarten, putting dots and sticky notes on poster boards.



A sticky note posted on a poster board reads "Thank you," after a community input meeting for the rebuilding process at Seacliff and New Brighton state beaches. Attendees put their questions and comments on sticky notes at stations around the room to be considered by officials as the project continues into its next phase. (Gabrielle Gillette — Santa Cruz Sentinel)

Marie has lived in the Seacliff neighborhood for two years and attended the meeting with her two neighbors, Deb Murray, who has lived in Seacliff for 30 years, and Lisa Jaspers, who moved to the neighborhood in April.

Murray came to the meeting to learn about the development process and voice her opposition for development on the Seacliff upper bluffs — especially the Seacliff upper bluffs concept No. 3, which suggests adding walk-in cabins between Seacliff Drive and the beach.

“I know things move quickly that you don’t want to move quickly, so we wanted to come out for us to say that we want to protect our town,” Murray said.

Though Jaspers is new to the area, she said she came to the meeting in support of her neighbors, especially the ones across the street from where the proposed campsite would sit on the Seacliff upper bluffs.

“We don’t have a lot of green open space for animals, for wildlife, for flowers and all that stuff, everything is just developed and built up,” Jaspers said.

The three neighbors agreed that they wanted to see the campgrounds stay in the New Brighton area or moved to Sunset State Beach.

Cherie Bobbe, a resident of the Seacliff neighborhood since 1975, said she attended the meeting in hopes of learning about the financial aspect of replacing the campgrounds. Though she would not be personally impacted by a campground project at Seacliff State Beach, she was in favor of putting campgrounds at Sunset State Beach as a way to make the project run smoother and have less impact on nearby residents.

In addition to community input from Tuesday’s meeting, community members can also take a survey on the Seacliff Resilience website at myinput.com/seacliffresilience to provide feedback on the proposed plans.

Community input from the meeting and from online feedback will inform the Camping Feasibility Study and the Coastal Facilities Management Plan, and revised concepts will be evaluated for feasibility to be added into the draft management plan.

The draft Coastal Facilities Management Plan is anticipated for winter or spring 2027 and will be shared with the public for the next round of community participation.

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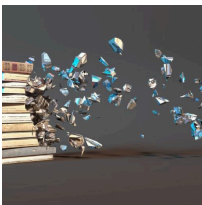
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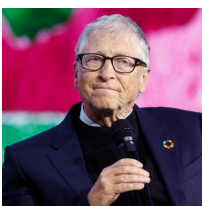
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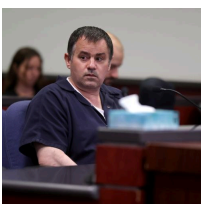
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