

Coastal Commission could fine city over Lunada Bay

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Palos Verdes Estates could face repercussions from the California Coastal Commission — including up to \$11,000 a day in fines — if it doesn't meet public access requirements for Lunada Bay, a California Coastal Commission enforcement agent said Friday.

In the second letter to the city this week, commission staff pushed for improvements to the blufftop above Lunada Bay to encourage public access. The improvements are meant to make it clear that

the area is a public park, and hopefully put a stop to instances of localism that have kept some visitors away, according to the letter.

Andrew Willis, lead Coastal Commission enforcement agent for Southern California, said hefty fines are one of an array of options available to the commission if the city does not make the necessary changes to create a welcoming atmosphere in the area, but wouldn't necessarily be the first step to elicit compliance from the city.

"There's powerful tools in the Coastal Act to protect public access to the coast," Willis said. "We're

still optimistic that we'll still move forward with the city on a public access program for the park ... and we can create a new experience where the public feels invited and welcome."

Palos Verdes Estates City Manager Tony Dahlerbruch said Friday the city was still evaluating the commission's most recent letter, which it received Thursday afternoon.

In the first letter to the city, enforcement officer Jordan Sanchez called on Palos Verdes Estates to open the area along the blufftop to the public with amenities like improved signage, public seating and observation binoculars. The same letter asked the



FILE PHOTO BY STEVE MCCRANK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Big winter waves often hit Lunada Bay in Palos Verdes Estates.

city to address an unpermitted patio — which Sanchez called a "fort" in the letter — built on the shore of Lunada Bay.

In his response to the initial letter Wednesday, Dahlerbruch outlined the city's plans to address the patio, but didn't mention

any plans to improve the parklands along the cliff-top.

The letter Thursday from the commission called for a response to the suggestions for blufftop improvements. Those suggestions were meant to be taken as interim measures to make the area more welcoming while the city addressed the more extensive project of either permitting or removing the patio on the shoreline, Sanchez said in the letter.

"All indications from reports we have received and from our last meeting suggest that you are not moving forward with these improvements; however, we hope that this is not the case," he said.

Dahlerbruch said Friday that city officials do plan to take into account the commission's suggestions to make the bluff above Lunada Bay more welcoming to the public, but for now they're focusing on the illegally built fort on the beach below.

"(The commission has) interesting ideas — it will all be taken into consideration at an appropriate time, but our focus on ... the issue now is the patio," Dahlerbruch said.

One reason why the city has yet to make plans for the parklands along the blufftop is that staff wants public input before it moves forward with any of the commission's suggestions, he said.

"The process to determine how to proceed involves public input. We want to include public input, which takes time," Dahlerbruch said.

Previous attempts to add amenities, such as public seating, to the bluffs above Lunada Bay were met with vehement opposition from Lunada Bay residents.

In a memo detailing a meeting with the Lunada Bay Homeowners Association Board of Directors in March, Dahlerbruch said board members wanted

the city instead to focus on the "behavior of individuals who bully and intimidate others." By addressing those issues the, residents hoped the illegal patio would be rendered irrelevant, Dahlerbruch said in the memo, which was obtained by the Daily Breeze as part of a public records request.

Plans to address the patio on the beach won't be enough to fully comply with the Coastal Commission's direction, Willis said.

Signage, trail maps and other improvements to the area along the bluffs above Lunada Bay will make it clear to visitors that the area is a public park. That, in turn, will help put a stop to instances of localism that have put Lunada Bay in the spotlight recently, Willis said.

"We want to try to open up this area to the public as much as possible through better signage and access improvements," he said.

Lunada Bay has gained more attention recently for the hostile behavior of a group of local surfers known as the Bay Boys. A class-action lawsuit filed earlier this year alleges the group is a criminal gang, using violent tactics to keep outsiders away from the bay's prime surf break.

Those allegations aren't new, Willis acknowledged, but the situation in Lunada Bay requires special attention.

"The whole issue of localism in surfing isn't necessarily unique to Lunada Bay," Willis said. "It's certainly an acute problem in Lunada Bay, and, for that reason, we have tried to work with the city closely to address this issue."

Despite the city's plans not to make any immediate changes in the area, Willis said the commission staff is hopeful it will be able to work with the officials to use signage and other amenities to change the atmosphere in Lunada Bay.