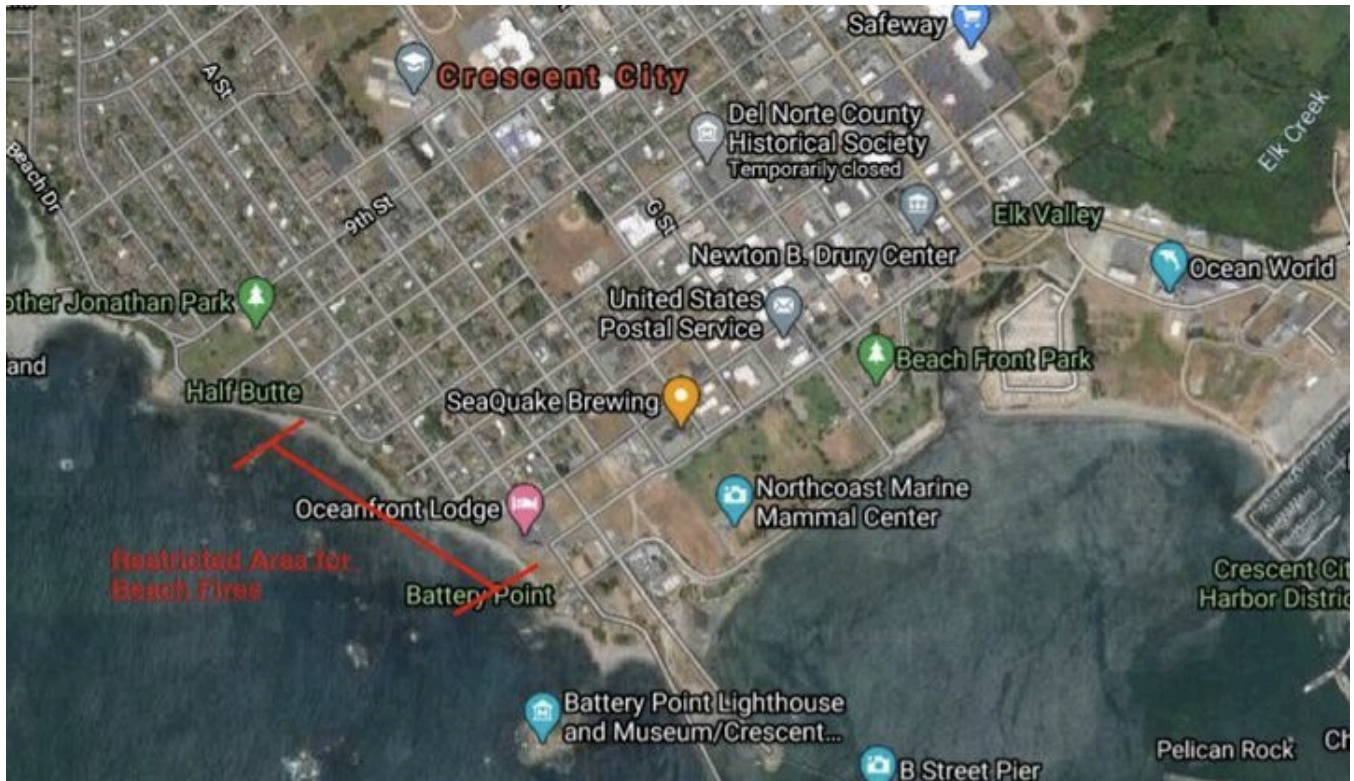


Council discussion heats over beach fire ban

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A discussion of a 40-year-old beach fire ordinance got heated Aug. 7 between City Council members, with some fearing an infringement on personal liberties and others arguing for the greater good of Crescent City residents' safety.

It took nearly two hours of back and forth arguments before the City Council reached a unanimous vote to update the ordinance that prohibits beach fires between Front and 6th streets.

Mayor Blake Inscore and Councilor Alex Fallman favored extending the ban to include the area south of Front Street to the end of Lighthouse Way and north of 6th Street to Preston Island along Pebble Beach Drive.

Councilor Isaiah Wright also called for installing fire rings near the access trail to Battery Point.

Crescent City Municipal Code 12.20.030 states that individuals may only start fires in city-provided rings on the beach between Front and 6th streets. However there are no fire rings in that stretch. Currently the city only has four fire rings along Howe Drive near Beachfront Park.

Mayor Pro Tem Heidi Kime and Councilor Jason Greenough felt better enforcing the current ordinance with signs that more clearly outline the rules of beach fires was a better way to address the issue than extending a ban.

“We’re not enforcing an ordinance that’s been in effect since 1980,” Kime said. “Why don’t we start enforcing it and see how things roll out?”

The municipal code prohibits abandoning fires on public beaches until it’s completely out and assesses a \$300 fine per offense.

Fire Chief Bill Gillespie explained to the City Council that beach fires have been an ongoing problem. To make his point, he dug up the reports from June 1 through the end of Labor Day. He said Crescent City Fire & Rescue responded to 32 calls for beach fires that had gotten out of control. About 10 of those were during the July 4 holiday, with eight calls occurring between Front and 6th streets and another 14 calls in other parts of the city. Many of those were between Front Street and Battery Point Lighthouse, Gillespie said.

“They are a concern because typically people build them next to the brush — typically in the logs because the firewood’s handy there. Those building fires are actually on private property,” he said. “It is a unique opportunity to be able to go to the beach to have a campfire, but at the same time, we can’t have beach fires going on where they’re going to cause problems. It’s going to be dangerous.”

City staff have placed temporary signs at beach access points in that area to inform people of the beach fire ban between Front and 6th streets City Manager Eric Wier said. Those signs will be replaced by permanent notices soon, he added.

Kime said one of her favorite things as a homeowner across from the shoreline is the ability to have a bonfire. But, she added, she did have to notify the fire department of a beach fire that got out of control on June 28.

“I don’t want to put anyone in peril,” Kime explained. “But I just want to be very careful before we take away this beautiful opportunity of people gathering at the beach, having a bonfire, bringing their guitar and roasting s’mores — whatever it is. That is a quintessential California activity they can’t do in Southern California because things are too restrictive.”

Inscore argued in favor of implementing a consistent ordinance for all property owners through Lighthouse Way.

“To simply say we’re going to do a better job of enforcement is not an acceptable solution from my standpoint,” Inscore said. “If we simply extend it to that point and we do nothing else, and work on enforcement, that is at least consistency for the public. One thing we don’t want to do is give mixed messages to the public and expect compliance.”