

DATE: January 24, 2018
COMMISSION MEETING DATE: February 1, 2018

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission
FROM: Jonathan Gervais, Parks Director
SUBJECT: Update on County Park Shuttle Program

BACKGROUND:

In 2015, the Parks Department, in partnership with San Francisco State University, conducted a Visitor Use/Non-Use Parks Study to evaluate public use of county parks and to understand what prevents non users from visiting parks. The study included focus group studies in four targeted communities, park intercept surveys and follow-up electronic surveys. The resulting data identified a transportation void to parks in some communities, the need for Spanish language materials and community outreach to underserved communities in San Mateo County, including East Palo Alto and North Fair Oaks.

County parks conferred with area land management agencies, including Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, San Mateo County Parks Foundation and staff from Board Supervisors in Districts III and IV to understand their program approach and ideas for addressing lack of accessible transportation to parks. It has been documented that few county parks can be accessed via SamTrans bus and shuttle schedules. The Department held stakeholder meetings with park partner groups, including the Friends of Edgewood Park and the Friends of Huddart and Wunderlich Parks.

To launch the pilot Park Shuttle program, County Parks secured a \$201,056 two-year Local Shuttle Program grant from the San Mateo County Transportation Authority and received a \$50,000 grant match from the San Mateo County Parks Foundation to run two park shuttles continuously on Saturdays and Sundays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. for two years.

For shuttle destinations, the Department selected Wunderlich County Park and Edgewood County Park as both parks are iconic examples of Santa Cruz Mountain natural habitats, have active Friends groups, park programming and education centers. In addition, both locations have heavily impacted parking areas.

Prior to the shuttle launch, presentations were made to the North Fair Oaks Community Council, East Palo Alto City Council and Redwood City's City Council. Numerous meetings were held with staff at the cities of East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Redwood City.

Parks staff contracted with a graphic designer to create a Park Shuttle graphic and created shuttle stop signs, brochures, route maps, flyers, and posters in English and Spanish. Self-guided tour brochures and quarterly activity calendars were developed to align with the shuttle schedules and Friends groups hikes, docent tours and events.

The Wunderlich Line starts at Market Place Park in Belle Haven with intermediate stops at the Fair Oaks Community Center and downtown Redwood City before arriving at Wunderlich Park. The Edgewood Line starts at East Palo Alto City Hall with intermediate stops at Fair Oaks Community Center and downtown Redwood City before ending at Edgewood Park. The Edgewood shuttle route takes approximately 40 minutes from its starting point to park arrival. The travel time for the Wunderlich shuttle is 45-minutes long.

The Department hired bi-lingual weekend park aides to serve as park ambassadors and greet every shuttle at an information table stocked with park brochures, Spanish language materials, shuttle schedules and branded marketing items. The park aides also greet, orient and inform other park visitors who arrive by foot, bicycle or car.

During the first year, the Department focused on promotions, partnerships and ridership. Two student interns assisted with presentations, and made contacts with community groups and local businesses. The Department also initiated a shuttle scheduling service to support group visits on the shuttle and arrange hikes, tours and programs in coordination with Park volunteers. The service allowed park staff to ensure a positive shuttle experience and add additional shuttles when the group size exceeded shuttle capacity. The Department had success in engaging some community groups, including the Siena Youth Center and the East Palo Alto Library, in consistent use of the Park Shuttle.

In August 2017 county Parks held an annual Park Shuttle review meeting with program and field staff, Friends groups, Park Foundation representatives, and Board Supervisor's staff. Ridership data for year one was reviewed, shuttle stops and use of Park aides were discussed along with park and Friends group programs.

DISCUSSION:

The Park Shuttle program is an effort to create a demand for park visits in San Mateo County communities that, as indicated by the visitor survey, are underserved for parks. However, that demand has not developed and with less than one year left in the grant, the shuttle program is not meeting the expected ridership. Ridership is averaging 89

trips per month with an average monthly cost of \$8,610. That means, on average, each trip costs \$97.

The Department proposes changes in the schedule and shuttle stops to encourage ridership. This would be achieved by eliminating the lowest performing route times and by moving the Menlo Park shuttle stop from its current location to the Menlo Park Community

Center on Terminal Way where there is regular activity. It is anticipated that these steps will increase ridership per trip statistics during the remainder of the grant period.

However, even if the changes lead to some increase in participation, the cost of ridership is not sustainable for the Department and does not justify continuing the service past the current cycle, which ends in September 2018. The Department does not intend to apply for next round of grant funding.

The Department is examining a more cost-effective and direct method to connect underserved communities to parks by working with the San Mateo County Parks Foundation to promote its Youth Environmental Education Field Trips program (<http://supportparks.org/our-work/youth-environmental-education-field-trips/>). The program addresses the high transportation costs associated with outdoor programs by funding bus costs. When transportation costs are covered, park visitation can become a field trip opportunity that is educational and inspirational. The Department will continue to partner with park Friends groups to provide programs and guided hikes while at the same time, strive to make rangers available to welcome the groups. The Department will look to support the Foundation in its efforts to increase donations to the program, and explore additional funding opportunities.

