

SMC Parks Dog Pilot Project Work Group

Work Group Goals:

- Recommend to the Parks Department 1-2 park sites where on-leash dog access can be piloted and evaluated, based on the work of the Dog Management Committee, and
- Provide a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors about possible off-leash dog access.

Meeting NOTES

September 9, 2019

400 County Center, Supervisors' Chambers, Redwood City

Work Group Members Present: Bonilla, Cervantes, Corwin, Erridge, Hearn, Johnson, Merrilees, Sullivan, Del Carlo, O'Brien

Work Group Members Absent: Brophy

Staff: Alvarez, Dallman, Jensen, Ormshaw, Schoof

Facilitator: Brown

Goals for this meeting:

1. Based on member survey results, discuss possible options for off-leash dog access, with focus on locations and structure for each location
2. Receive Member's Memo on status of on-leash pilot programs

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 pm. Pat Brown, facilitator, introduced herself and asked work group members and staff to introduce themselves. She then described how this group is different than the Dog Management Committee. The Work Group is:

- working on implementation rather than policy development
- composed of community representatives and Parks Department staff
- charged by the Board of Supervisors with implementation and evaluation of on-leash pilot sites to test the feasibility of dog access to SMC Parks, and developing a recommendation about possible off-leash access.

Pat reminded the group of their agreement to use consensus decision-making within the Work Group using the fist-five method (3 fingers means the member can live with the decision and will not undermine it; below 3 fingers means the member does not agree, and more than 3 fingers indicates the level of agreement). She mentioned that if the group cannot reach consensus, it can resolve the issue with a majority vote. She also referenced the process map which outlines the timeline for this work group, and reviewed the proposed meeting agenda.

Pat then presented and obtained the Work Group's approval of the following group agreements:

- Members prepare for meetings by reading meeting packet
- Speak respectfully during meetings
- Listen for understanding
- Allow the facilitator to guide the process

Review notes from Previous Work Group Meeting

There were no changes suggested for the work group meeting notes from August 5th.

Written Public Comments

Peggy Jensen mentioned 40 written comments were submitted to the Parks Department and that all comments have been shared with the work group members and have been posted on the Parks Department Dog Work Group webpage. 32 comments expressed general support for off-leash dog access areas in San Mateo County. There were 5 comments in support of off-leash dog access at Pillar Point Bluff. There were 8 comments that did not support off-leash dog access at Pillar Point Bluff, expressing concern regarding conflict with other park visitors and wildlife, including Harbor Seals. There were 12 comments in support of off-leash dog access at Quarry Park.

Work Group Members Survey

At the August 5, 2019, meeting, the work group members identified the following locations as potential off-leash dog pilot parks. In preparation for the September meeting, work group members were asked to rank the park locations in order of preference (1 as most preferred and 11 as least preferred). The survey results are included below, with the most preferred location at the top with the fewest points, and the least preferred location at the bottom with the most points. Park locations marked with an asterisk (*) already allow on-leash dog recreation.

1. Quarry Park* (17)
2. Pillar Point Bluff* (41)
3. Mirada Surf* (49)
4. Flood Park (56)
5. Devil's Slide Trail* (61)
6. Sheep Camp Trail (63)
7. Memorial Park (71)
8. Huddart Park - Meadow Picnic Area (73)
9. Sam McDonald Park (77)
10. Pescadero Creek County Park (78)
11. Edgewood Park - 0.6mi trail before entering park (84)

Parks Department Presentation of Options for Potential Off-Leash Pilot Locations

The Department reviewed the policies developed by the Dog Management Committee, which guide the options for the off-leash dog access pilot:

- Dog Management Committee Overarching Policy: It is the policy of the SMC Parks Department, in managing dog access to County parks, to promote healthy, safe and varied experiences for all park users and to protect natural resources.
 - Avoidance of Conflicts: Minimize conflicts with established uses within the park, such as equestrian use, and with adjacent land uses, such as agriculture.
 - Protection of Natural Resources: Protection and enhancement of the County's natural resources is one of two purposes stated in the mission of the Parks Department. Ensure that impacts to sensitive resources and disturbances to wildlife are avoided or minimized.
 - Playgrounds and Play Areas: Dogs should not enter playgrounds or play areas where it is posted that no dogs are allowed.

Based on the survey results and the policies developed by the Dog Management Committee, the Parks Department presented 3 options for the Dog Pilot Project Work Group to consider for the off-leash dog access pilot program. The Department also provided a high-level analysis based on assessment criteria for each location, including visitor conflict potential, environmental impacts (vegetation, wildlife, and water quality), and Park Resources (infrastructure improvements and ranger workload).

- 1) Option 1: Off-leash fenced dog park at Quarry park adjacent to the tot lot of about 7,000 to 12,000 square feet (larger size requires some tree removal and earth work)
 - Visitor conflict is limited to fenced area only.
 - Potential environmental impacts are limited to fenced area only.
 - Would require fencing, signs, staffing to clean-up, and site amenities.
 - Liability would be low.
- 2) Option 2: Off-leash dog access at Quarry Park on all multiple-use designated trails
 - There is potential for visitor conflict with equestrian, bicyclists and hikers.
 - Potential for environmental impact on wildlife and vegetation throughout the park.
 - Would require signs and staffing to ensure compliance.
 - Liability would be high.
- 3) Option 3: Off-leash dog access at Pillar Point Bluff on the Jean Lauer Trail only
 - There is potential for visitor conflict with equestrian, bicyclists and hikers.
 - Potential for environmental impact on wildlife, vegetation and water quality throughout the park; adjacent to protected marine reserve.
 - Would require signs and staffing to ensure compliance.
 - Liability would be high.

Work Group Discussion of Off-Leash Options Presented by Parks Department

The work group discussed the location and structure options and the following comments were shared by work group members for each location:

- Work Group member comments regarding Quarry Park:
 - Suggestion to combine Mirada and Quarry Park
 - Suggestion to provide off-leash access east and west of Highway 1 (Quarry and Pillar Point Bluff)

- Mentioned enclosed dog run site is not adequate for off-leash dog access
- Concern regarding off-leash access at Mirada Surf due to proximity to Highway 1
- Request for more parking at Quarry Park
- From a management perspective, enclosed dog park is easier to manage
- Suggestion to fence off the playground at Quarry Park
- Work Group member comments regarding Pillar Point Bluff:
 - Mentioned Jean Lauer Trail alone is not sufficient
 - Suggest that signage be updated to ensure people know where not to bring dogs
 - Suggestion for zero tolerance policy that would fine people who bring their dogs on the beach
 - Ranger mentioned Park policy is education first, and then enforcement
 - Suggest that an assessment be done to look at environmental impacts, including what endangered species exist
 - Mentioned there are issues with people bringing dogs to the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve protected areas
 - Concerns were expressed regarding environmental impacts at this location

Public Comment

There were about 20 community members present at the meeting. Pat explained that at this point in the agenda, members of the public were invited to address the work group and were asked to keep their comments brief and relevant. She also mentioned that in order to allow time for the work group to accomplish the meeting goals, a total of 15 minutes is set aside for verbal public comments at this meeting. Each speaker may address the work group for up to two minutes. It was also mentioned that there are written comment forms if attendees prefer to submit their input to the workgroup in writing, or if there is not sufficient time for everyone to address the work group verbally. In total, 11 speaker slips were submitted, and 7 people shared verbal public comments during the public comment period.

Verbal public Comments addressed the following points:

- Expressed support for off-leash at Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff
- Mentioned that enclosed dog park will not address all needs of dog owners
- Request for additional spaces for dogs to run off-leash
- Request to keep dogs on-leash at Pillar Point Bluff to ensure unique intertidal area is protected and to ensure enjoyment of other park visitors including children; noted there are many trails from bluff to beach
- Suggestion to fine any dog owners who bring their dogs on to the beach near Pillar Point Bluff
- Suggestion to move enclosed dog run at Quarry Park to the open meadow area
- Though County Parks does not allow off-leash dog access in parks, resident mentioned many people have walked dogs off-leash at Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff for years

Further Work Group Discussion and Check for Consensus with Fist-5 (related to possible locations and structures)

Pat checked for preliminary consensus among the group on the options presented by the Department, and specifically regarding the off-leash access location and structure.

- There was preliminary consensus among the work group in support of Quarry Park as a preferred location for off-leash dog access.
- There was not preliminary consensus to have an enclosed dog park at Quarry Park.
- There was preliminary consensus regarding allowing off-leash dog access on multiple-use trails only, though some members would like additional information.

In regard to Pillar Point Bluff, there was no preliminary consensus among the group as a location for off-leash dog access. Some work group members mentioned they would like additional information.

Questions/Comments related to Members Memo re. On-Leash Pilots

There were no questions or comments regarding the Board of Supervisors Members Memo on the on-leash dog pilot (see the document attached below)

Timeline to develop recommendation to Parks Department and submit it to the Parks Commission and Board of Supervisors

Next steps include the following:

- Finalize the location and structure of the off-leash dog access pilot
- Develop policies and evaluation criteria for the off-leash dog access pilot
- Report to Parks Commission
- Report to Board of Supervisors
- Report back to Work Group

Thanks to All and Adjourn – 4:00pm

San Mateo County Dog Pilot Work Group 2019 Roster

Members

Barbara Bonilla, SMC Parks Commission

Faye Brophy, Equestrian Trails and Recreation Advisory Council*

Joel Cervantes, District 2, Ranger III (Huddart, Wunderlich, Edgewood, Flood, Friendship)

Christine Corwin, Coastside Dog Owners Group of San Mateo County*

Matthew Del Carlo, District 4, Ranger IV (San Pedro Valley, Devil's Slide, Sanchez Adobe, Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, Moss Beach Park, Pillar Point Bluff, Quarry, Mirada Surf, Tunitas)

Nic Erridge, Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council*

Jerry Hearn, Conservation community*

Chris Johnson, Coastside resident*

Neil Merrilees, SMC Parks Commission*

Kevin O'Brien, District 1, Ranger III (Coyote Point and Crystal Springs Trail)

Jim Sullivan, Pacifica Open Space Council and Mountain Biker*

**Served on Dog Management Committee*

Parks Department Staff

Peggy Jensen, Acting Parks Director

Ellie Dallman, On Special Assignment

Laurel Finnegan, Ranger IV

Priscilla Alvarez, Ranger IV

Carla Schoof, Public Information/Communication

Hannah Ormshaw, Natural Resource Coordinator

Facilitator

Pat Brown

Members Memorandum

Date: August 30, 2019

To: Honorable Members, Board of Supervisors

From: Peggy Jensen, Interim Parks Director

Subject: On-Leash Dog Access Pilot Progress Update:
Junipero Serra & Coyote Point Recreation Area

The purpose of this memo is to provide your Board with preliminary information regarding progress of the six-month On-Leash Dog Access Pilot Program initiated at Coyote Point Recreation Area and Junipero Serra Park on June 15, 2019.

Summary

In collaboration with the Dog Pilot Project Work Group (“Work Group”), the Parks Department (“Department”) developed a list of evaluation criteria for the on-leash dog access pilot parks. Evaluation criteria categories approved by the Work Group include: environmental impacts, including vegetation, wildlife and water quality; visitor interactions; parks resources; and park use. The pilot has been under way at Coyote Point Recreation Area and Junipero Serra Park for about two-and-a-half months and Parks staff has begun gathering baseline and preliminary information regarding the evaluation criteria. Thus far, staff has not observed any significant environmental impacts. Visitor interactions have been mostly positive. Staff will continue to gather information through ranger tracking forms and visitor surveys. Parks staff continues to track the one-time and ongoing costs associated with on-leash dog access at the pilot parks, including staff workload as well as infrastructure and signage costs. Park use will be measured using data provided by trail counters and through the visitor survey responses.

After piloting on-leash dog access for six months, the Department will present a report to the Board outlining findings for the evaluation criteria categories mentioned above.

Background

In spring of 2016, the San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Commission (“Commission”) formed the Dog Management Committee (“Committee”), which was tasked with advising the Commission on the development of new dog management policies for the Parks Department (“Department”). The Committee was comprised of representatives from the Commission,

Department, Midcoast Community Council, Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council, North Fair Oaks Community Council, and dog owner, environmentalist, equestrian, and cyclist communities. The Department also implemented an extensive communication and community engagement process to support the Committee's work and gather further public input.

After meeting for approximately 15 months, the Committee developed an overarching policy: "It is the policy of the [San Mateo County] Parks Department, in managing dog access to County Parks, to promote healthy, safe, and varied experiences for all park users and to protect natural resources." The Committee also developed secondary policies to serve as guiding principles for the Department in assessing which locations are appropriate for dog recreation. The secondary policies focus on education; providing a variety of experiences; avoiding conflicts; protecting preexisting uses and natural resources; managing access to playgrounds and play areas; considering new areas for dogs; enforcement; and requirements concerning leash length and the number of dogs allowed per person.

At the same meeting, the Commission recommended next steps to be implemented in sequential order. The first step was to amend the County ordinance sections that govern dog recreation within County parks and recreation areas to ensure consistency with existing management practices (completed in fall 2018). The second step entailed development and implementation of a dog management pilot program to inform possible further revisions to the ordinance and/or Department dog-management policies and practices, which is currently underway.

Prior to the Board's revision of the dog recreation ordinance for County Parks in 2018, County ordinance prohibited dog access in all County parks and recreation areas. The newly established ordinance allows dogs on-leash within designated and signed areas in the following parks: Quarry Park, Mirada Surf, Bay Trail through Coyote Point, Coastal Trail along Devil's Slide, Pillar Point Bluff and Dardenelle Trail.

In January 2019, the Department held its first meeting with the San Mateo County Parks Dog Pilot Project Work Group ("Work Group"), composed of community members who served on the Dog Management Committee, two park commissioners and park staff. Work Group meetings are held monthly and are open to the public. Meeting agendas and notes are posted on the Department's website, and public comment is accepted during meetings and through email. The goals of the Work Group are to:

- a) recommend to the Department one or two park sites where on-leash dog access can be piloted and evaluated, based on the work and policies developed by the Dog Management Committee, and
- b) provide a recommendation to the Parks Department and Board of Supervisors about possible off-leash dog access.

Based on the policies established by the Dog Management Committee, the Dog Work Group confirmed two locations to pilot on-leash dog access for six months starting June 15, 2019: Coyote Point Recreation Area and Junipero Serra Park.

CC: Mike Callagy, County Manager
San Mateo County Parks and Recreation Commission
San Mateo County Dog Pilot Project Work Group
Laurel Finnegan, San Mateo County Parks Ranger IV
Priscilla Alvarez, San Mateo County Parks Ranger IV