

COMMITTEE ON DOG MANAGEMENT IN SAN MATEO COUNTY PARKS

Mission: To provide healthy spaces for humans and canines, to promote positive experiences for dogs and other park users and to protect natural resources in San Mateo County Parks

Meeting Notes

September 18, 2017

Building 455 County Center, Redwood City - 4th Floor

Members Present: Neil Merrilees, Jim Sullivan, Christine Corwin, Darrick Emil, Chris Johnson, Jerry Hearn

Staff: Sarah Birkeland, Carla Schoof, Lori Mrizek, Pat Brown (Facilitator)

Chairman Neil Merrilees opened the meeting at 2:30 PM.

Facilitator Pat Brown reviewed the proposed agenda for the meeting.

The notes from the August 21st Committee meeting were approved as submitted.

Next meetings

The Committee agreed to meet as usual on the third Monday in October (October 16th). The November meeting will be held on the second Monday, November 13th, to avoid the Thanksgiving holiday week. The Committee will be presenting its recommendations to the Park Commission on Thursday, December 7, 4-6 PM.

No members of the public were present.

Chair and Member Reports

Carla reminded Committee members that Brittani Bohlke, Water Resources Specialist, has invited their participation in a water sampling event called First Flush – the activity will take place in late September/early October in between Montara and Half Moon Bay. Interested volunteers should call 650-712-7765 x 117.

Debrief of Community Meetings

Committee members then spent time debriefing the three community meetings held recently in Redwood City, Burlingame and Pacifica to gather feedback on the proposed draft recommendations for managing dogs in parks and reviewing input from the community. The group first talked about the meeting design. There was agreement that the approach to gathering specific feedback on the draft policies was effective. Then the Committee looked at the written feedback collected at each meeting and shared any verbal feedback they had received individually at the meetings.

General Feedback on Proposed Policy Recommendations

From Redwood City Meeting, September 7, 2017

- “I support Overarching Policy.”
- “I do not support odd/even days for dogs ok/no dog days, or horse ok, no horse days. Too hard to enforce and on a regional basis equestrian trails are quite uncommon. I strongly support no dogs in environmentally sensitive areas. I do support having a few off-leash areas in less environmentally sensitive, non-equestrian areas.”
- “It feels like in general, many dog policies and procedures and guidelines are highly reactive to a couple of isolated experiences involving the worst actions. Rather than punish everyone, and further restrict dogs...why not find solutions that curb and do not encourage bad actions...”
 - Idea #1: Dogs go through a training program to be approved for off-leash areas...this could be done through existing training program or through dog adoption centers.
 - Idea #2: Remind the community of the benefits pets, especially dogs (unclear?) the larger community...helping people exercise...helping people with mental health issues...giving children and families unconditional love...all which ripple back to form a healthier and more vibrant community at large.”
- “Create spaces for small dogs.”
- “A system to identify “problem dogs” and provide them training to socialize them better.”
- “Forced dog parks are insufficient...dog need wide open spaces.”
- “Most off leash parks don’t work because they are too small; too contentious.”
- “I would love to be able to walk my dog on leash on the Skyline/upper Alambique loop trail in Wunderlich Park. It is more like a fire road so plenty of room for everyone, or anywhere really.”

From San Pedro Valley Meeting, September 14, 2017

- “#1 concern is dog feces.”
- “We would love to have open spaces for off leash dog walking so that our four legged family members can get their exercise (run, play, etc.) at the same time as the two legged ones.”

Committee additions:

- Since there were a number of questions about how many dogs live in SMC, the Committee asked that this data, provided to the group during its information gathering efforts, should be made more visible and accessible on the Parks Website.
- While there was some feedback that alternating days and times for usage could be confusing, the Committee feels this may be a viable strategy to make the most of limited resources.
- While some community members felt the policies were developed because of a few experiences, Committee members agreed that their research and deliberations balanced the approach to articulating guidelines and they are not over-reactive as written.
- Some members of the public can get confused about which jurisdiction is responsible for specific parks and also about the name/location of specific parks (ex. Edgewood and Pulgas Ridge)

- Instead of these recommendations representing the need for higher standards for dog owners, the Committee understands the assignment by the Parks Commission resulted from the need for the Park Department to have policy guidelines for dog access.
- Some uses are now managed by master plans for specific parks.

Feedback on Education Policy

- From Redwood City Meeting, September 7, 2017
- “I support the Education Secondary Policies.”
- “Encourage common sense and courteousness...if someone is uncomfortable around your dog, be polite. Also...if someone looks uncomfortable, talk to them.”
- “When dogs owners pay their yearly or every 3-year registration...require them to pass a quiz on the guidelines and laws...maybe provide a discount if the pass with 90% accuracy.”
- “An App showing all parks and dog resources in the area, including training opportunities to improve bad behaviors.”
- “Make the signs fun and uplifting.”
- “Encourage common sense and being a good person...maybe hire an artist to create public service style announcements to, for example, encourage someone to leash their dog if a young mother looks nervous around you or if someone asks you to leash your dog until they pass you on the walk.”

From Burlingame Meeting, September 8, 2017

- “Possible good neighbor certifications for dogs and/or owners who have been trained and are compliant.”

From San Pedro Valley Meeting, September 14, 2017

- “Agree with all!!”
- “Regarding c) Consider using “opportunity” instead of “responsibility”. Keep the language inclusive and positive, for instance: “Provide clear signage stating the opportunities of all park users where dogs [dog owners] are welcome.” Note that it is everyone’s “responsibility”.”

Committee additions: Education

- Continued agreement that education is positive and when people understand the “why” of a rule, most are willing to comply.
- A discussion of how to use/design signage so it is effective – graphics can be useful
- Ranger input that word of mouth is more effective than signage
- Suggestion that educational messages can be added to nature videos in visitor centers.

Feedback re. Variety of Experiences

From Redwood City Meeting, September 7, 2017

- “I support the Variety of Experiences Secondary Policies.”
- “Please, there are so many trails – hear me, and so few that I can take my dogs on, and I walk daily.”

- Under 2b) Consider designated off leash areas: “Especially off-leash areas...my dogs need to be off-leash...it’s just not a walk it it’s not off-leash.”
- “My dogs to be properly cared for in terms of their wellbeing, including physical, mental, and emotional health need access to off-leash areas, especially large open spaces and trails. This is really the only way for them to be what they are...dogs. A dog needs to be free - free to sprint, smell, run, and explore. Dog parks under (unclear?) grass freeway just don’t cut it.”

From San Pedro Valley Meeting, September 14, 2017

- “Agree with “c”! Too many off leash dogs leave behind feces – the owner doesn’t see the deposit. I do love dogs!”
- “I would like some leashed walking near Loma-Mar; La Honda, or Pescadero.”
- “Hiking with a dog both on and off leash is a valuable healthful form of recreation.”
- “I don’t think “c” is needed. It already exists.”
- “Consider “hiking” off leash areas.”
- “Dog Parks get boring for active dogs and owners.”
- “Item B. Consider off leash areas. Include hiking areas, not enclosed spaces. I like to hike with my dogs. They do not like to play at enclosed dog parks.”
- “There are plenty of parks where dogs are not allowed. We need many more parks and trails that allow dogs. If you don’t like dogs go to State parks.”
- “More off leash!!! The best times we’ve had with our kids as they were growing up was hiking or biking with our shelter dog in the East Bay Regional hills. We never went to State parks because dogs weren’t allowed. Now our dog is old but loves Surfer’s Beach, Pillar Point...”
- “I don’t want to interact with dogs when I go to the park or nature. I want peace and quiet. No dogs in parks.” --El Granada Resident
- “If you can regulate, dogs permitted with leash just in parking lot areas in SPV Park.”

Committee additions: Variety of experiences

- Discussion of the limited usefulness of small, fenced dog parks for off leash experience.
- Feeling that large areas for off leash use are better than small ones, but expect it will be difficult to find appropriate areas.
- Consider that on the coast people do have their “favorite spots” for off leash walking
- Consider establishing expectations for users of “off leash” areas – maybe require Boulder type education process/Ethics for Dog Owners.
- Add the idea of expectations to the policy recommendation re. consideration of off-leash areas

Feedback re. Avoidance of Conflicts, Pre-existing uses, Protection of Natural Resources

From Redwood City Meeting, September 7, 2017

Avoidance of Conflicts

- “I support Avoidance of Conflicts Secondary Policy.”
- “I disagree with #3, Avoidance of Conflicts Secondary Policy.”

- “Conflicts, such as dog/horse/bike, are more equitably shared by splitting days of the week, alternating days out of phase with nearby parks. So if Park A allows dogs M, W, F, S, then Park B would allow them T, Th, S. This has proven fair and effective in many parks across the country.”
- “There are many equitable ways to share coveted resources between horses and dogs. With the changing needs of the demographics and with dog ownership being much more common and realistic for most people compared to horse ownership, we should revisit and reevaluate how we share our open spaces. Our space utilization needs to evolve with our society and not reflect the needs of a past society that now excludes the needs of the many. As much as I personally enjoy seeing a horse on the trail, I know many people who find them terrifying for their size and unpredictability. Proposed solution: Horses get even days and dogs get odd days.”

Pre-existing uses

- “I support the Pre-existing uses Secondary Policy.”
- “I disagree with this...land use must evolve as the community evolves.”

Protection of Natural Resources

- “I support the Protection of Natural Resources Secondary Policies.”
- Under 5f) re: Appropriate waste containers...“The more receptacles, the better.”
- “Natural habitats” in urban areas are already unrecognizably influenced by human activity and it would be silly to sacrifice societal function by over-restricting dog access in a vain attempt to protect urbanized wildlife. If it’s not already a designated bird watching area, like Shoreline Park, then there is little dogs can do to disturb it more than cities and freeways, screaming children, horses, and chatty hikers.”
- “In such a dense urban area, recreation should be given priority over conservation. We need people connecting with nature...getting off their screens...choosing conservation over recreation in the Bay Area is penny-wise and pound-foolish...it’s failing to see the larger ‘forest through the trees’ ”...
- “I have three dogs...I pick up a lot of dog poop...I even go out of my way to pick up a lot of other people’s dog’s poop. But I get it...dog poop is a problem. In Paris, dog poop is DNA’d and \$200+ fines are mailed. All dogs, registered in Paris, have their (unclear?). So when authorities find dog poop...they get a fine. Another implementation I have read about is a “carrot” approach to the same problem. In this case, placing dog poop in the container, gives you some sort of feedback, like 10 minutes of cell phone charging.”
- “Horses and people in the County Parks have gotten along together well for many decades. Including up to the present time. Horses and dog interaction can be very serious. The horse will run like the wind if scarred by a dog, or kick the dog into the next zip code! I recommend some parks to be reserved just for horses, with no Dogs. I recommend the County Parks of Huddart, Wunderlich, Edgewood, and Pescadero. They are heavily travelled and used by horses. Other county parks can be used by dogs on a pilot basis.”
- “Preserve Edgewood as a Natural Preserve.”

Natural Resources - From Burlingame Meeting, September 8, 2017

- “Keep Edgewood as a preserve.”
- “Preserve wildflowers and natural environment.”

- “Edgewood Park is also our only Natural Preserve: flora and fauna need to be protected.”

From San Pedro Valley Meeting, September 14, 2017

- “Worried rangers have so much they are doing...how will they regulate dog waste and dogs on trail.”
- “As humans (and horses) are far more destructive to habitat, I am unclear where the “data” comes from on this area. I would like to see an acknowledgement of how little of an impacts on the environment especially when well trained.”
- “Most people have common sense when overseeing their dogs...”
- “I think humans are worse...like fireworks.”
- “Do dogs really harm wildlife? Research?”
- “Dogs should not be allowed in Quarry Park – leashed or unleashed – because it disturbs the wildlife. We used to see deer and other animals in Quarry Park 20 years ago but no more.”--El Granada Resident
- “Allow dogs in Quarry Park only if there is a fenced off-leash area at entrance to the park.” – El Granada Resident
- “No barking or frightening wildlife or other users of park.”
- “Provide dog waste cans throughout trails, not just at beginning and end of trails.”
- “Agree to everything on this list of Protection of Natural Resources!”

Committee additions: Pre-existing uses and Protection of Natural Resources

- Discussion of idea of land use evolving
- Recognition of more dogs and more people in the County now
- Continued commitment to preserving natural resources as a high priority for the parks
- Discussion of the idea that some park managers may use restoration as an excuse to restrict/exclude those seeking to use parks for recreation
- No mention of climate change in these proposed policies – be aware of the opportunity to engage those concerned about the environment as “Friends of the parks”

Feedback re. Considering New Areas for Dog Access

From Redwood City Meeting, September 7, 2017

- “I support Considering New Areas for Dog Access Secondary Policies. I propose a new sub-policy: f) New dog areas should be established as temporary pilot programs and evaluated before becoming permanent.”
- “Suggestion for off-leash areas: specific trails, alternating days, specific parks, designated zones/areas within a park.”

From Burlingame Meeting, September 8, 2017

- “In dire need of off-leash options. It is not natural for a dog to be constantly on a leash. My dog’s greatest joy in life is running free, interacting and playing with other dogs. PLEASE convert leash requirements to off leash, respecting even if designated areas or alternating days.”
- “If off leash policies are to be considered please be transparent and list guidelines for those policies such that it’s clear to all what is and is not allowed for off leash. Off leash areas are needed for the overall experience for dog owners.”

- “Waste bags and garbage bins are essential for compliance. A local dog friendly park I take my dog to has no trash cans so people are forced to drop their bags, not pick up, or bring bags back home. Another park has rigid off leash hours that restrict dog owners to coming during typical work hours which is unfair.”
- “Need more off-leash areas as well as off-leash fenced-in area. I live in San Mateo but am speaking to general off-leash areas period.”

From San Pedro Valley Meeting, September 14, 2017

- “Open more parks to dogs along the bay so people don’t have to drive to the coast.”
- “Provide wide trails that allow all users of the park to pass. For example Pillar Point Bluffs have very wide trails that allow bikes, runners and dogs to move without conflicts.”
- “Please allow off leash areas a PP Bluffs as most dogs are off leash.”
- “Leave just one (at least) beach, and one (at least) park dog free for those that fear dogs.”
- “Want dog access in San Pedro.”
- “See off leash areas: Recognize off leash hiking with a dog is a valuable form of recreation.”

Committee additions: New Areas

- There may be opportunities in shared jurisdictions: San Bruno Mountain
- Possible to look at Edgewood Park west of Highway 280

Feedback re. Enforcement

From Redwood City Meeting, September 7, 2017

- “I support the Enforcement Secondary Policy.”

From San Pedro Valley Meeting, September 14, 2017

- “Key to enforcement is dog owners enforcing the rules themselves...dog owners should be encouraged to make sure everyone follows the rules and clean up after others.”
- “Enforcement of not picking up dog feces #1 problem. More park staff to pick up feces.”
- “Consider the use of “education” as Neil mentioned when discussing this. “Education” is a better word than “warning”.”
- “Use large fines every time the dog owner does not follow the posted rules as a deterrent. No exceptions.”
- “Once in maybe complicated to regulate more work with rangers.”

Committee additions: Enforcement

- Recognition of impact on Park Staff

Feedback re. Playgrounds and Play Areas, Leashes, Number of Dogs per Person

From Redwood City Meeting, September 7, 2017

- “I support the Playgrounds and Play Areas, Leashes, and Number of Dogs per Person Secondary Policies.”
- #8: “Makes sense.”

Leashes/# of Dogs per Person

- “Rules that punish everyone for the actions of a handful of bad actors are fundamentally unjust, as is the case with laws like the 6 ft. leash law. The language could be adjusted to say dogs must be under voice command, or on a leash, or must be leashed if someone on the trail requests it.”
- “6-foot leashes would be an excessively punitive requirement harming the vast majority of responsible dog owners with little benefit. A reasonable compromise would be to require dogs be ‘under voice control OR on a leash, and a leash must be carried at all times and used if directly requested by another park attendee.’ Excessive restrictions will lead to undesirable uses when there is no difference between a park and a trail.”
- “I walk my dog on a 6’ leash sometimes and on a twenty-foot leash sometimes. They are fundamentally different experiences for both of us. She is under my control with both leashes.”
- “A 6’ leash is too far (per Bari Halperin, a pro-dog person); 3’ is better for control; use a service dog model; calm, respectful, not goofy.”

From Burlingame Meeting, September 8, 2017

- “Conflicting policies about leash requirement, and anything that may be off-leash.”

From San Pedro Valley Meeting, September 14, 2017

- “3 dogs per person is good, but what if a group of people, each with multiple dogs, meet up? Then there’s a huge pack.” -El Granada resident
- “The policy needs to address commercial dog walking explicitly. Particularly off-leash.”
- “Are you kidding 3 dogs per person? What about the wildlife and the other people that are using the park.”
- “I’ve also seen professional dog walkers with 5 have no problem. A policy re: professional dog care people.”
- “Agree” (with policy as stated)
- “Leashes/yes definitely!!”
- “Agree to 6ft.”
- “Number of dogs – would prefer 1 and max 2. 3 is trouble – I have seen it!”
- “Agree” (with policy as stated)
- “Do not like meeting dogs off leash.”
- “Dogs should only be off leash when in an enclosed area.”
- “Dogs ok in parks but must be on leash.”
- “Agree with 6 ft. max leash length but must be at a controllable distance in a timely way.”
- “If they must be off leash, it should be enclosed area for health of dogs.”
- “Provide space for them to be dogs.”
- “There should not be a limit of three dogs on a walk at one time, because if your pack of dogs are under control or not under control really doesn’t have to do with size, but with the owner or handler. We sometimes foster for Muttnville, a senior dog rescue group, and might have up to 5 dogs, but have never had any issues...it depends on the owner/handler to know what he/she can handle...just like being in charge of a group of kids.”

Playgrounds and Play areas -

From San Pedro Valley Meeting, September 14, 2017

- “No dogs in playgrounds.”
- “Agree” (with policy as stated)
- “Agree” (with policy as stated)

Committee additions: Playgrounds, leashes, # of dogs

- Committee had no additions re. playgrounds
- Committee feels that the Leash and # of dogs guidelines represent their best effort at finding a middle ground among issues.
- Leash policy recommendation may need some additional clarification

Next Steps with Draft Recommendations

- Develop staff report (including a process description) to accompany draft recommendations
 - Pat will draft for review at October meeting
 - Include some background on Committee discussions relating to identifying specific areas for dog access policies: Committee worked hard to find the right balance relative to leash length and # of dogs per person. These recommendations may need revision in the future, based on experience.
 - Include Committee’s recommendation that areas selected for dog access should be subject to a pilot/trial period, to evaluate how they work.
- Based on community feedback, determine if there are policy recommendations that should be modified
 - Identify policy recommendations that will be addressed/revisited at the November meetings
- Determine language to describe Committee’s interest in piloting new policies

Homework in preparation for October meeting

Committee members were asked to read through the compiled survey results (406 surveys) with comments and highlight areas for discussion under each policy area. This task will be addressed at the October Committee meeting.

Appreciation

Committee members expressed appreciation to the Parks Department staff for their work in supporting the community meetings and providing a fast turnaround of information.

Chairman Merrilees adjourned the meeting at 4 P.M.