

Exhibit A

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.

The Committee wanted to develop an overarching policy that would capture its intent to ensure that all park users would continue to be able to use and enjoy San Mateo County parks. In its deliberations the Committee kept in mind that the Parks Department also has other policies, as well as a strategic plan, that guide Parks' management of its park resources and visitors. The dog management policies must be read in conjunction with these other policies and the strategic plan.

Secondary Policies:

***Education:* Dog owner education is an essential component of effective management of dog access, including avoiding user conflicts and protecting natural resources.**

- a) Provide clear signage stating the responsibilities of park users who bring dogs into the parks.**
- b) Explore the use of other media to promote dog owner education around park usage.**
- c) Assure that the messaging has a positive tone and clarifies the reasons behind dog user responsibilities.**
- d) Foster partnerships with dog and neighborhood organizations to support the messaging around appropriate activities and behaviors for dogs and their owners in parks.**

The Committee strongly believes that education is key to effective, fair, and efficient management of dogs in San Mateo County Parks. The Committee recognized that clear communication is essential to setting expectations regarding the use of parks, and that providing the "why" behind the rules could improve the likelihood that park visitors will act responsibly. The Committee also recognized that education efforts should not exclusively focus on dog owners, but also will need to address all park users so that a common understanding of trail etiquette can be cultivated. The Committee stressed the importance of education when staff resources are scarce, and that partnerships offer a way to leverage park resources and greatly extend the reach of any educational effort.

***Variety of experiences:* Provide a variety of recreational opportunities, increasing park access for a wider range of San Mateo County residents and visitors.**

- a) Consider designated off-leash areas. If off-leash areas are to be provided, guidelines specific to off-leash use must be developed.**
- b) Consider dog walking opportunities in both front and back country locations.**
- c) Continue to provide areas where dogs are prohibited.**

Providing access to parks for people with dogs is one component of the broad spectrum of recreational opportunities the Parks Department seeks to make available to the public. The Committee supports expanding and diversifying the range of visitors to SMC parks, and recognized that additional dog opportunities may help achieve this aim. At the same time, the Committee recognized the need to continue to provide opportunities for park enjoyment without the presence of dogs, as this too represents a part of the spectrum of appropriate and desired uses of SMC parks. The Committee also discussed the importance of providing a diversity of experience for dogs and their owners in those locations where dog access is provided, including areas close to cities (front country) and those in more rural and/or remote locations (back country).

This policy is focused on the experience of the user, and, as with all dog management policies, must be understood within the context of the other policies. For example, in the implementation phase, the Parks Department would seek to meet the “variety of experiences” policy while also meeting the policies regarding natural resources management and minimization of conflicts. The Committee also recognized that if off-leash areas are to be provided, additional guidance for off-leash use must be developed. The Committee reiterated the expectation that all the policies would continue to apply in all off-leash areas.

***Avoidance of conflicts:* Minimize conflicts with established uses within the park, such as equestrian use, and with adjacent land uses, such as agriculture.**

The Committee engaged in extensive discussion about the topic of avoiding or minimizing conflicts between the various users of park lands. The Committee identified education, signage, enforcement, and good trail design and planning as key ingredients to meeting this objective. Education, signage, and enforcement are all addressed through policies identified here; trail design and planning typically occur at the site-specific level and with public input. The Committee also discussed approaches other agencies have taken to managing conflict, including a certification process for dog owners to bring dogs into parks, particularly off leash. The Committee determined that such a program would be too costly

and administratively burdensome for the Parks Department to implement, and thus did not include a recommendation for such a program.

The avoidance of conflict policy recognizes an aspect of the conflict conundrum, which is that the introduction of a new use to a park, whether it is dog access or something else, heightens the need to consider and address conflicts with uses that are already established within the park. Equestrian use is just one example and is noted here because San Mateo County has several parks in which equestrian use has an extensive history and volunteer horse patrols have long contributed significantly to park management, including at Wunderlich and Huddart parks. But this policy is intended to focus not only on equestrian or agriculture uses. Rather it is to remind park managers and planners of the need to consider the established and adjacent uses when making decisions about dog access, and to use the various tools and techniques available to land managers to minimize any potential conflicts.

In evaluating public comments on this policy, the Committee realized that the term “avoidance” was more prohibitive than intended. Instead, the Committee believes that conflicts should be minimized as much as possible, while considering the other policies, goals, and objectives that govern park management. Inherent in all park management is the need to balance the various uses of parks, and not all uses can always be accommodated everywhere. However, the Committee believes that the term “minimize,” as opposed to “avoid,” is a better reflection of the Committee’s intent.

***Pre-existing uses:* Where dog use occurred prior to a transfer or acquisition of park property, favor continuing that use, if consistent with other policies and objectives.**

As with the policy above regarding conflicts, this policy recognizes that it can be disruptive to park users to overturn established uses. Accordingly, this policy gives some weight to continuing dog use where it occurred prior to the County’s acquisition of a property. At the same time, that continued use should also meet the management policies that apply to dog access throughout the San Mateo County park system.

***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.**

- a) Dogs should not be permitted to harass wildlife or be allowed to dig in the ground.**
- b) Dogs should not be allowed to enter sensitive habitat areas, such as watercourses, marshes and ponds, areas under restoration and areas that are inhabited by species of special concern.**

- c) In areas where dogs are allowed, sensitive habitats should be clearly demarcated with signage or fencing, where appropriate.**
- d) Unless otherwise provided for, dogs should be constrained to trails and fire roads at all times.**
- e) Dog owners shall be required to bag their dog's waste and deposit it in the receptacles provided for that purpose. Bagged dog waste left on the ground will be considered litter.**
- f) Appropriate waste containers and bags should be located strategically at dog accessible park sites. Such containers should be easily serviceable on a regular basis by staff and/or volunteers in order to effectively to manage dog waste.**

This policy reflects the Committee's acknowledgement that protection of natural resources is central to the work and mission of the Parks Department. It also reflects the notion that to sustain park access over the long term requires a sound and vigorous natural resource protection policy. The policy is supported by materials and a presentation the Committee received from Ramona Arechiga, Natural Resource Manager for San Mateo County Parks, about the effects that both dogs and people can have on parks' natural resources, as well as the dual role the Department plays in providing opportunities for outdoor recreation while safeguarding the rich biodiversity present in San Mateo County. The policy was also informed by the material provided by Brittany Bohlke from the San Mateo County Resource Conservation District regarding water quality considerations associated with dog waste.

Considering New Areas for Dog Access: When considering new areas for dog access:

- a) Look for opportunities adjacent to urban areas and neighborhoods where there is demand for dog walking;**
- b) Ensure adequate staffing, staff training and facilities can be provided to effectively manage the new use and address any increase in demand;**
- c) Consider adjacent uses and whether connecting trails that allow dogs can be continued;**
- d) Consider opportunities for dog access that are restricted by time of day or day of the week as needed or appropriate to balance park uses and provide a variety of park experiences;**
- e) Ensure that all other policies regarding managing dog access can be met.**

These policies capture a number of considerations important to the Committee, as well as feedback that was received from the public. The Committee recognized that to be successful, the introduction of dogs where they were not present before must be supported by adequate staffing and facilities. The public emphasized the importance of providing connections to existing trails that allow dogs. It was also suggested that conflicts between users could be minimized and access expanded by designating set days and times for dog use.

Enforcement: Enforcement mechanisms should be adequate to deter behavior that is not compliant with dog ordinances intended to protect park users and resources. Consider a structure of warnings and/or fines for infractions, with escalating fines for repeat offenders.

Committee members were made aware that current parks enforcement tools can be limited and ineffective, because they can require Parks Rangers to attend court proceedings for the violations they write. In addition, the volume of citations in the courts mean that many are thrown out. The Committee proposed following examples from other jurisdictions where a tracking database is used and an infraction system is in place, often with a set of escalating fines, to deter misbehavior. The Committee also discussed the importance of education as the first and most important step in ensuring park users follow the rules, with enforcement the secondary tool. This approach is consistent with current Ranger practice.

Playgrounds and Play Areas: Dogs should not enter playgrounds or play areas where it is posted that no dogs are allowed.

The Committee agreed that dogs and playgrounds sometimes do not mix well together. However, it also recognized that there are playgrounds or play areas that can become community gathering places where dogs may be included. To give the Department the flexibility to allow dogs under appropriate circumstances and where there is community support, the Committee suggested that signage determine the use.

Leashes: Dogs must be leashed at all times, unless otherwise posted. All leashes must be no longer than 6 feet when encountering others on trails.

The Committee decided that the default policy should be that dogs are leashed in San Mateo County parks, but also that there should be opportunities for the Parks Department to make off-leash opportunities available to the public. Current County Ordinance requires dogs to be leashed. 6.04.070.

There was also extensive discussion of what type of leash and what length should be recommended. In addition to considering the public input received on this policy, the

Committee members brought their own diverse experiences with this issue to the discussion. All Committee members agreed that long leashes can pose a hazard to other park users, and also that the appropriate length of leash can depend on the dog, the owner, and the circumstances. Because it is not possible to write a policy that would anticipate and provide for every circumstance, and the Committee determined that this is an important issue connected to the safety and enjoyment of park users, a reasonable compromise was struck. The intent behind the leash length policy is to ensure that owners make sure their dogs are under control when encountering other park users. Note that County Ordinances already require dog owners to prevent their dog from physically harassing any person or from causing substantial injury to another domestic animal. 6.04.060.

Number of Dogs per Person: Visitors may have no more than three (3) dogs per person.

The Committee developed this policy largely on the recommendation of fellow land management agencies, as well as each member's own judgment, experience, and understanding of what number of dogs can reasonably be managed in a recreation setting. The Committee received many comments suggesting that two dogs per person would ensure a more manageable experience for all park users. It also received a number of comments, mostly from individuals interested in commercial dog walking, that 3 dogs per person is too few. Commercial uses of County parks raise a host of different issues the Committee was not intended or prepared to tackle. The Parks Department will be examining commercial use in its parks as part of a comprehensive review of its fee program. Commercial dog walking will be included in that effort.