

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
PARKS DEPARTMENT

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Peggy Jensen, Interim Director
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DATE: June 6, 2019

SUBJECT: Update on the Dog Work Group

This memo provides background on the Parks Department Dog Management Committee and updates on the most recent action by the Dog Work Group, which was followed the Committee. The most recent action by the Work Group was selection of two park locations for the 6-month on-leash dog access pilots which will start June 15, 2019 at Coyote Point Recreation Area and Junipero Serra Park.

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 over the course of 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 for the Department to use as guiding principles 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 identified 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 entails developing and implementing 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 approval of the dog management policies in 2018, County policy 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.

Discussion

A. Initiation of the Dog Pilot Project Work group

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 of the Dog Management Committee, and
- b) provide a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors regarding off-leash dog access policies and a possible park site where off-leash dog access can be piloted and evaluated.

B. On-Leash Dog Access Pilot Site Implementation

Based on the guidelines established by the Dog Management Committee, the Dog Work Group confirmed two locations to pilot on-leash dog access for 6 months starting June 15, 2019: Coyote Point Recreation Area and Junipero Serra Park.

In preparation for June 15, staff will install informational signs stating regulations and marking areas where dogs are not allowed. Fencing will also be installed around playgrounds and other areas where dogs are not allowed. In response to concerns raised by CuriOdyssey Science Playground and Zoo regarding on-leash dog access at Coyote Point, the Department will install additional signage and fencing to limit dog access on trails directly adjacent to CuriOdyssey to minimize potential impact. The attached map highlights the trails surrounding CuriOdyssey where dogs will not be allowed.

Park visitors, area residents, neighboring cities and agencies as well as picnic reservation holders will receive information about the on-leash dog access pilot projects at Coyote Point and Junipero Serra Park. Information regarding the project will also be posted on the Department's social media accounts, monthly newsletter, and website.

Additionally, a 'meet and greet' event will be held at Junipero Serra Park on Friday, June 14, 2019, from 5:30pm to 7:00pm, to encourage area residents and all park users to meet rangers, learn about the rules, and help park users feel welcome to visit Junipero Serra and Coyote Point with their dogs. The Board and their dogs are welcome to join the June 14th gathering.

After piloting on-leash dog access for 6 months at Coyote Point and Junipero Serra Park, the Department will report back to the Board in early 2020. The report will include information regarding the following evaluation criteria categories approved by the Work Group: environmental impacts including vegetation, wildlife and water quality; visitor interactions; Parks resources; and park use. Results of a visitor survey will also be included in the report to the Board along with a summary of costs related to staff time, infrastructure and materials required to initiate and run the on-leash dog access pilots. Materials and infrastructure will include fencing of playground areas, educational and regulatory signage, wildlife cameras, and printed materials.

C. Off-Leash Dog Access Next Steps

Next month, the Work Group will begin discussing off-leash dog access in San Mateo County parks. With input from the Work Group, the Department will develop and present a recommendation to your Board regarding off-leash dog access policies, including a possible park site where off-leash dog access can be piloted and evaluated, later this year.