

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
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