



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** PARKS COMMISSION

Board Meeting Date: 10/3/2019

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**Special Notice / Hearing:** None  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Parks and Recreation Commission  
**From:** Peggy Jensen, Interim Parks Director  
**Subject:** Draft Land Acquisition and Management Policy

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Make a recommendation to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors that it adopt the Draft Land Acquisition and Management Policy.

**BACKGROUND:**

The San Mateo County Parks Department ("Department") manages 23 parks and recreation areas, which are comprised of over 16,000 acres of parkland and almost 200 miles of trails. To maintain recreation and visitor serving facilities for the benefit of the public and restore and preserve natural resources to support native flora and fauna, the Department employs 75 full time employees and has an annual budget of approximately \$47 million.

To provide park visitors with the highest quality experience possible, the Department conducts routine maintenance and operation activities in each park. These activities include, among others:

- Opening and closing each park daily;
- Maintaining trail surfaces and brushing back vegetation, especially poison oak;
- Repairing, improving, and upgrading park facilities, including restrooms, visitor centers, playgrounds, and reservation sites to support passive recreation, education, programming, and special events;
- Maintaining campgrounds, including fire pits and BBQs for seasonal and year-round camping;
- Enforcement of applicable rules and regulations; and
- Conducting vegetation management activities to reduce fire fuels and restore and preserve natural resources.

Equally important is the time Department staff spends providing direct visitor services. Together, the maintenance and operations activities and the high-quality direct visitor services have contributed to the San Mateo County Parks system receiving an overall customer satisfaction rating of over 90% for each of the past five years.

Providing quality visitor services, preventative maintenance, and year-round operations for 23 parks and recreation areas requires adequate funding and staffing. Any additions to the current park system - whether increasing owned acreage or adding management responsibility for property owned by other organizations - would almost certainly impact services at other parks in the system. To avoid this situation, the California State Park System developed a service-based budgeting process that considers opportunities, costs, and obligations associated with expanding State Park's responsibilities. It is this process that the Department based the Policy.

### **DISCUSSION:**

The Department has prepared a Draft Land Acquisition and Management Policy ("Policy"), which is based on California State Parks' service-based budgeting. A copy of the Policy can be found as Attachment 1, which includes a process flow diagram. The Department is proposing the policy to ensure all pertinent information is collected and presented to the Board of Supervisors ("Board") prior to its consideration of purchasing and/or managing new property for recreation and/or preservation purposes ("Property"). The Policy includes multiple steps.

### **Initial Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis**

When the Department is asked to consider expanding the parks system, Department staff will prepare two documents, a draft Initial Assessment and a draft Cost-Benefit Analysis. These documents will be provided to the Board and the County Manager's Office. The draft Initial Assessment shall include, but not be limited to:

- New recreation and program opportunities created by County ownership and/or management of a Property;
- The ecological value of a Property;
- Existing improvements and facilities on a Property; and
- How ownership and/or management of a Property may support or adversely impact other County parks and programs.

The draft Cost-Benefit Analysis will consist of:

- An estimate of the annual operating cost (including staffing) to manage a Property as a County park;
- Estimated cost to plan, permit, design, and construct the visitor serving amenities necessary to convert a Property into a County park;
- Habitat restoration and preservation efforts needed to restore and preserve the ecological value of a Property; and
- Details on how County ownership and/or management of a Property could benefit or adversely impact other County parks.

The draft Initial Assessment and draft Cost-Benefit Analysis will be presented to the Board in Closed Session where the Board will provide direction on how the County and Department should proceed. As it is not likely that a private property owner would allow the County to conduct a site visit prior to entering into contract to acquire a Property, a site visit is not required for the preparation of the draft Initial Assessment or draft Cost-Benefit Analysis. Should the Department have the ability to conduct a site visit, one will be coordinated. Additionally, to ensure the process is conducted in a fiscally responsible manner, no consultants will be hired to prepare any reports or studies until such time as the Board has directed.

**Additional Steps for Property Purchase**

Should the Board desire to purchase a Property after reviewing the draft Initial Assessment and draft Cost-Benefit Analysis, the Department will conduct a detailed due diligence process in collaboration with the Real Property Services Division. Due diligence information will be incorporated into a revised Initial Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis and presented to the Board at another Closed Session. The updated documents will include a 10-year projection of expenses associated with improving a Property with visitor serving amenities and managing the Property as a County park. Based on the information presented, the Board will determine if the County is to purchase a Property or not. Before the end of the due diligence period, and prior to the Board's final consideration of the matter, the Department will provide a Closed Session presentation to the Parks Commission.

**Additional Steps for Property Management**

When the Board is interested in having the Department manage a new property, the Board will create an Ad Hoc Committee to further review the management opportunity. The Department will conduct a site visit, update the Initial Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis based on potential management responsibilities, and make a recommendation to the Ad Hoc Committee. Should the Ad Hoc Committee support the recommendation made by the Department, or a variation thereof, the management recommendation will be presented to the full Board for consideration. Should the Ad Hoc Committee adopt the Department's recommendation or a variation thereof, the Department shall present the adopted recommendation to the Parks Commission prior to the Board's consideration of the matter.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with adopting this policy.