

To: Parks and Recreation Commission
From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director
Subject: Amendment to the San Mateo County Parks Department's Fee Schedule

RECOMMENDATION

Make a Recommendation to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors to Amend the San Mateo County Parks Department's Fee Schedule by (i) Eliminating Group Tour Reservation Fees at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and (ii) Adjusting Online, Telephone, and In-Person Reservation Service Fees to be Consistent.

BACKGROUND

In Fiscal Year 2021-22, the San Mateo County Parks Department ("Department") will conduct a comprehensive assessment of its fee schedule to ensure its fees are comparable to those charged by other park agencies in the Bay Area. For the first time, the Department will also consider equitable access to park facilities and services in the assessment process.

However, the Department has identified changes that it recommends be made prior to conducting the fee schedule assessment to address fees that may be serving as barriers for some groups and individuals to accessing services. These fees include those charged for group tour reservations at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and service fees charged when making camping and group picnic reservations.

Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

The Fitzgerald Marine Reserve was established in 1969 to protect marine life and serve as an educational resource for the public. In 1999, Fitzgerald Marine Reserve was designated part of the Montara State Marine Reserve and a Marine Protected Area by the State of California. The Department has an established history of collaborating with the Friends of Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, a nonprofit volunteer organization that provides tidepool tours and offers other educational experiences centered on marine life. Tour reservations at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve are required for groups of 25 or more individuals to minimize impacts to the tidepools. A \$35 fee is currently charged for a group of 35.

Reservation Service Fee

In 2008, the Board adopted Resolution 069361 which authorized the Department to charge an administrative service fee of \$7 for a reservation made online. Additionally, in 2009, the Board adopted Resolution 070578 which authorized the Department to charge an administrative service fee of \$10 per reservation made by phone. The Department did not recommend, nor did the Board ever authorize, a reservation fee for

reservations made in person. The current reservation service fee structure is inconsistent, charging \$7 for each online reservation; \$10 for reservations made by phone, and no fee charged for in-person reservations made in the park or the Department office.

Pursuant to Section 2.63.020 of the County Ordinance Code, the Parks Commission “shall adopt, and forward to the Board of Supervisors, recommendations regarding fees to be charged for the use” of County parks. Further, Article 3 of the Parks Commission’s bylaws states that “[t]he Commission shall adopt, and forward to the Board of Supervisors, recommendations regarding fees to be charged” in County parks.

DISCUSSION

Fitzgerald Marine Reserve

The Department proposes to eliminate the group tour reservation fee at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve to make this educational resource more accessible to all visitors, including programs at schools that receive federal funding through Title 1. Schools qualify for Title 1 funds when children from low-income households make up at least 40 percent of enrollment. These funds are used to support effective, evidence-based educational strategies that close the achievement gap and enable students to meet the state’s academic standards. The Department recognizes that the cost of off-campus educational visits, which includes high-cost bus transportation, can be a barrier to learning experiences for many schools with limited resources. For this reason, it is recommended that the group tour reservation fee at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve be eliminated.

Reservation Service Fee

To remedy inconsistencies in the reservation service fee structure, the Department recommends modifying its reservation service fees to be \$7 per reservation regardless of how a reservation is made. Doing so will simplify the reservation fee structure, and lower the cost of reservations made by phone which is often the preferred method for those who don’t have access to a computer or the internet.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Department estimates the loss in revenue due to the recommended fee schedule changes is \$9,500 per fiscal year -- \$5,000 attributed to the elimination of the group reservation fee at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and \$4,500 attributed to changes in the general reservation service fees.

It is important to note that both phone and in-person reservations have been declining every year since FY 2016-17, thus the loss in revenue from the changes to reservation service fees may decrease over time. To address the lost revenue related to elimination of the Fitzgerald Marine reservation fee, the Department has initiated fundraising discussions with the San Mateo County Parks Foundation.