



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** PARKS

**File #:** 21-727

Board Meeting Date: 9/14/2021

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

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors  
**From:** Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director  
**Subject:** Amendment to the San Mateo County Parks Department's Fee Schedule

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt a resolution authorizing an amendment to the San Mateo County Parks Department's Fee Schedule by (i) eliminating group tour reservation fees at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and (ii) adjusting online, telephone, and in-person reservation service fees to a consistent flat fee of \$7 per reservation.

**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, this assessment process will include consideration of equitable access to park facilities and services.

The Department, however, has identified changes that it recommends be made even before conducting the fee schedule assessment so as to address fees which the Department thinks have created a barrier for some groups and individuals-in particularly certain school groups-which might otherwise access these services. These fees include those charged for group tour reservations at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and reservation 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, the State of California designated FMR as part of the Montara State Marina Reserve and a Marine Protected Area. 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 the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve are required for groups of 10 or more individuals to minimize impacts to the tidepools. A \$35 fee is currently charged for groups of up to 35

people; a \$70 fee is charged for groups larger than 35 people. No group is allowed to exceed 100 people. Tours at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve are the only events of their kind in the San Mateo County Parks system that charge a fee.

#### *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. As a result, the current reservation service fee structure is inconsistent, with park patrons paying different amounts (\$7 for each online reservation, \$10 for phone reservations, and no fee for in-person reservations) depending on how the reservation is made.

Pursuant to the San Mateo County Ordinance Code, the Board of Supervisors establishes the fees to be charged for the use of County parks and recreation areas, as informed by recommendations from the Department and the Parks and Recreation Commission (“Parks Commission”).

#### **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. Moreover, tours at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve are the only events of their kind in the San Mateo County Parks system that charge a fee. For this reason, it is recommended that the group tour reservation fee at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve be eliminated.

#### *Reservation Service Fee*

To ameliorate inconsistencies in the reservation service fee structure, the Department recommends modifying its reservation service fees to a consistent fee of \$7 per reservation regardless of how the reservation is made, to account for the Department’s cost of providing park reservation services. 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 may not have easy access to a computer or the internet, or who cannot take time off of work to make a reservation in person.

At its August 5, 2021 meeting, the Parks Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the Board of Supervisors authorize the proposed amendment to the San Mateo County Parks Department’s fee schedule.

#### **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.