



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: PARKS

File #: 21-1023

Board Meeting Date: 12/14/2021

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director
Subject: San Mateo County Parks Department's Mariposa Program

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution amending the San Mateo County Parks Department's Fee Schedule to eliminate vehicle entrance fees for San Mateo County residents who receive Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and/or San Mateo County Access and Care for Everyone (ACE) benefits.

BACKGROUND:

The San Mateo County Parks Department ("Department") manages 24 county parks and recreation areas, which includes over 16,000 acres of land, almost 200 miles of trails, eight playgrounds, and numerous picnic sites and campsites. With parks located throughout the county, the Department serves approximately 2.7 million visitors annually.

Seven of the parks and recreation areas in the San Mateo County park system currently charge a \$6 vehicle entrance fee. These include the Coyote Point Recreation Area, Huddart Park, Sam McDonald Park, Memorial Park, San Pedro Valley Park, Junipero Serra Park, and San Bruno Mountain State and County Park. The vehicle entrance fee provides park visitors with access to all Day Use facilities in the respective park, including trails, playgrounds, drop-in picnic areas, visitor centers, and various recreational amenities. The vehicle entrance fee, however, does not authorize visitors to use group reservation sites or overnight camping facilities.

In Fiscal Year ("FY") 2018-19-the last full fiscal year before the pandemic-the Department generated approximately \$1.13 million, or about 22 percent of its annual revenue, from vehicle entrance fees. In FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21, the Department generated almost \$850,000 and \$1.06 million respectively in revenue from vehicle entrance fees. The Department primarily uses these funds to maintain park facilities including restrooms, playgrounds, picnic areas, and reservation sites, as well as to remediate hazard trees in high-use areas.

DISCUSSION:

In recognition of the fact that the vehicle entrance fee is a barrier to access for the most vulnerable residents of San Mateo County, the Department is proposing to launch the Mariposa Program

("Program") to provide more equitable access to county parks. Upon approval of the Program, San Mateo County residents who receive Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and/or San Mateo County Access and Care for Everyone ("ACE") benefits will be exempted from paying vehicle entrance fees when they show their Medi-Cal card, CalFresh card, or ACE card during entry to each park. Providing specified county residents with free park access upon presentation of one of the aforementioned cards avoids the creation of new barriers to access because residents will not have to complete additional forms, pay fees, or provide financial documentation to receive the benefits.

According to the San Mateo County Human Services Agency, there are currently 157,773 individuals in San Mateo County that are enrolled in Medi-Cal and 26,872 individuals that are enrolled in CalFresh. As reported by the Health Plan of San Mateo, there are approximately 25,500 San Mateo County residents enrolled in ACE. Because there are likely individuals who receive benefits from multiple eligible programs, the Department estimates that the Program could provide free access to county parks for approximately 185,000 county residents.

If the Board authorizes this Program, the Department will distribute monitoring procedures to each park that charges a vehicle entrance fee and will collect visitor data to understand the effectiveness and impacts of the Program. This data will be used to revise the Program to be more effective.

At its December 2, 2021 meeting, the County's Parks and Recreation Commission voted to recommend that the Board of Supervisors authorize the Program. During its deliberation, the Commission discussed the idea of recommending that all vehicle entrance fees be eliminated, but concluded that supporting the Program as recommended by the Department was most appropriate.

County Counsel has reviewed and approved the resolution as to form and content.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Insufficient data exists to accurately forecast the financial impact of the Program; however, the Department reasonably estimates that many individuals who would be eligible for free access under the new Program are not currently visiting county parks at least in part due to the cost of vehicle entrance fees. Based on this premise, the Department anticipates a negligible decrease in revenue and a moderate increase in visitors. As a result, the Department will absorb the lost revenue and no Net County Cost is anticipated.