

COMMITTEE ON DOG MANAGEMENT IN SAN MATEO COUNTY PARKS

Mission: To provide healthy spaces for humans and canines, to promote positive experiences for dogs and other park users and to protect natural resources in San Mateo County Parks

Notes from Meeting

February 27, 2017

Building 455 County Center, Redwood City

Members present: Darrick Emil, Chris Johnson, Rafael Avendano, Jim Sullivan, Faye Brophy, Christine Corwin. Aaron Gonzales (alternate)

Others: Sarah Birkeland, Carla Schoof, Pat Brown

Neil Merrilees, chair, was unable to be present, so the meeting was opened by Pat Brown, facilitator.

Approval of Meeting Notes

Committee members approved notes January 23rd meeting with no changes.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present to comment.

Chair and Member Reports

- Chris reported on a recent road trip to Arizona, where he visited parks along the way, noting any relevant dog management approaches. He shared one brochure that indicated the park was “dog friendly”.
- Faye shared a product that made responsible dog walking easier with a retractable leash, a poop bag dispenser and a fabric bag to carry user poop bags and deposit them in a receptacle with no need to touch them again.

Input from Alternates Attending the Meeting

There was no input from Aaron, the only alternate present at the meeting.

Follow up on Community Outreach Meetings

Committee members provided positive feedback on the three community meetings held in the past two weeks. The two-part meetings provided information about the committee’s assignment, scope of work, information gathered to date and the next steps in the planned process.

Then, the meetings were opened to community input addressing the following question: *Please identify specific issues/concerns the Committee should consider as it develops its recommendation for the San Mateo County Parks Commission.*

The participants in all meetings were engaged and respectful and seemed to appreciate the effort this committee was making to listen to community concerns and ideas as it was preparing to develop the draft recommendations to the Park Commission.

Committee representatives at the South San Francisco, Pacifica and Belmont meetings then reviewed with the full committee the specific input received at each of the three locations:

South San Francisco – 2/15/17

1. Dog waste:
 - Adequate trash facilities/disposal
 - Adequate maintenance
 - Possible role for volunteers?
2. Distinguish this effort (from the GGRNA process) – interest in maximizing dog access.
3. Park/trail design considerations that account for dogs and dog walkers – seasons of use and dedicated trails.
4. It is not an either/or proposition – dogs vs. conservation.
5. Education and appropriate signage.
6. Awareness of different sensitivities
 - Education
 - Rules
7. Unfixed, unleashed dogs have effects on other dogs.
8. Off-leash areas that aren't dog parks – more space.

Pacifica – 2/22/17

1. We are aware that areas in the parks need to be protected but we want access to the parks with our dogs.
2. We suggest a change in the current ordinance of “no dogs allowed” to allow dogs in areas where it makes sense.
3. Use science (information from Water Quality Boards) to identify the source of bacteria contaminating water.
4. Access to the outdoors and time with their dogs is beneficial for overall health for community members. Consider areas that allow for varied use and access.
5. I live in proximity to a park (5 minutes) but can't use it because I exercise with my dog. We need to use space close to where we live. I question the use of data relating to the number of dog licenses in an area as a good source of information about the number of dogs.
6. This issue is about people – not just dogs.
7. Walking with dogs is a safety issue.
8. Re. access levels – account for what is happening in other areas within the County.
9. No trails exist within the redwoods where you can walk your dog.
10. It is important that public meetings continue to provide for and solicit the input of residents. There is some concern that interest groups have dominated other meetings.
11. Dog owners can (or would probably be willing to) pay for a dog park.
12. Bay Area Ridge Trail should allow dogs.
13. Smaller dog parks are a problem – 5 acres is a good size.
14. Flood Park should be considered for access because of its location surrounded by homes.

15. East Bay Regional Parks are a good example to consider.
16. Look to experts – dog trainers, AKC.
17. Look at connections to parks that allow (or don't allow) dogs.
18. More off leash areas (X4)
19. Dog walking access –professional dog walkers.
20. Consider certain days/times for dogs or no dogs.
21. Commercial dog walkers – too many dogs at one time can be a problem – it is not possible to monitor well. Three dogs is probably the limit. Look at the Fort Funston model.
22. Concern that dog areas with current access may be continue to be available when property transfers occur.
23. Consider impact of dogs on water quality in residential areas as well as open space.
24. Survey/count input from park users regarding their dog use preferences, off leash use, etc.
25. Quarry Park/Pillar Point are working laboratories that can be looked to.
26. Areas of the County outside of the coast should have similar opportunities to what is available on the coast.
27. Should allow commercial dog walkers.
28. Don't punish everybody for a few people's misdeeds.
29. City of San Francisco has numerous resources that we can look to.
30. Marin Humane Society is also a good resource.
31. Point Isabelle in the East Bay – has specific rules and is another good resource.

Belmont- 2/23/17

1. Factor in other land and uses – ideally they are complementary adjacent land uses.
2. Safety
3. Search and Rescue Dog Program opportunities. Dogs are off leash for training and under permit.
4. Some dog use sites create community.
5. Dogs love grass – this can create an issue with athletic fields.
6. Programmed activities as opposed to being open all the time.
7. Think about temporary fencing for off leash area – long, narrow areas are not good.
8. If off leash area is too big, dog management may be an issue.
9. Diversity within an off leash area.
10. Sense of welcome for dogs.
11. Allowing dogs will bring more people into the parks and generate more support for the parks.
12. Education – especially important for dog parks.
13. Can the County be an information hub for all dog access opportunities?
14. Examination of all the operational requirements needed to make dog access successful.
15. Can rangers enforce outside of County Parks (e.g. cities)?
16. Pulgas Ridge Trail does it well and is a great model.
17. Quarry Park
18. Consider an agility area for dogs.
19. Opportunities for a shared facility.
20. Establish a way to get feedback from a pilot program.
21. Establish measures of success for a pilot program.
22. Dog friendly concessions associated with a park.

23. Dog area surfacing – challenges. Sand?
24. For parks that are further away, the interest would be in trails. Would not drive far for a dog park.
25. Fines for people who are not carrying dog bags?

Next steps following Community Meetings

The information from the three meetings will be compiled into one document organized by issue and will be provided to the committee as it begins its deliberations next month. In addition, the notes will be posted by location on the Parks website.

Proposed approach to next phase of Committee Work

Sarah Birkeland provided the committee with information about the need for a **broad policy statement** regarding dogs in County parks (there is currently no policy to guide the department regarding dogs in parks). She cited the committee’s mission statement as the kind of broad language that is useful in a policy statement. It reflects the intention of actions taken by the Park Department. She suggested that the committee might like to review samples of policy statements to guide its thinking.

Sarah also suggested that a set of considerations/criteria to guide the Park Department in its implementation of the adopted policy would be most useful. These considerations, some of which have already been identified, would help to evaluate park locations best suited to dog access.

As the committee is aware, a new policy is likely to require a change in the County’s Ordinances to reflect recommended changes in dog policies and codifying acceptable dog recreation opportunities. The development of ordinance language is where the advice of County Counsel will be very valuable.

The committee’s recommendation may suggest the use of **pilot projects** to enable the Department to monitor and track results such as compliance, waste, complaints, and changes in park use levels. This committee might want to identify potential locations for pilot projects based on information gathered about geographical need, environmental sensitivities and other issues.

The committee’s recommendation might also address Infrastructure needs in locations where dog access is going to be allowed. These could include waste stations, trail design and signage.

Other components of a recommendation might address the following topics:

1. **Training:** Describe information and educational materials needed for park visitors bringing their dogs. Identify important training for Park rangers making contacts with dog owners to gain compliance.
2. **Enforcement:** Determine staffing needed to patrol. Determine best methods for warnings, citations and tracking repeat offenders.
3. **Budget:** Recognize the increased resources needed for additional staff, training, and equipment.

Finally, the committee may make suggestions about a possible role for committee in pilot evaluation

A request was made of staff to help the committee understand the current structure and usage of county parks by compiling this information into a matrix.

Discussion of proposed next steps for the Committee

As the meeting was ending, committee members agreed that they are ready to begin the work of developing a set of draft recommendations.

- Review existing policy
- Develop draft policy statement based on research and discussion of issues suggested in community meetings
- Present draft recommendation to community
- Consider input from community and revise draft as needed to present to the Parks Commission

Confirm Agreements/Reporting out/Appreciations

Pat summarized the information review and discussion that occurred at this meeting so members could report to their constituencies and community members.

Members also recognized the dedication of staff and committee members as they are teaming up on this project.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.