

## SMC Parks Dog Pilot Project Work Group

### Work Group Goals:

1. Recommend to the Parks Department 1-2 park sites where on-leash dog access can be piloted and evaluated, based on the work of the Dog Management Committee, and
2. Provide a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors about a possible off-leash pilot location

## Notes from Meeting

January 7, 2019

455 County Center, Room 402, Redwood City

**Work Group Members Present:** Bonilla, Cervantes, Corwin, Del Carlo, Erridge, Merrilees, O'Brien, Sullivan **Excused:** Brophy, Hearn

**Staff:** Jensen, Finnegan

**Facilitator:** Brown

### Goals for this meeting:

1. Introduce and welcome Work Group members
2. Review the purpose of the Work Group
3. Review overriding and secondary policies developed by the Dog Management Committee
4. Review Parks Department assessment of parks lands that could be open to on-leash dogs (based on policies developed by the Dog Management Committee) and areas that should not be open to dog recreation
5. Come to agreement about park locations that are not suitable for dog recreation
6. Confirm the 2019 work group meeting schedule

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 pm. Pat Brown, facilitator, introduced herself and asked work group members and staff to introduce themselves. She then described how this group is different than the Dog Management Committee. The Work Group is:

- working on implementation rather than policy development
- composed of community representatives and Parks Department staff
- charged by the Board of Supervisors with implementation and evaluation of pilot sites to test the feasibility of dog access to SMC Parks

Pat proposed the use of consensus decision-making within the Work Group, with voting as back-up. She explained the Fist to Five approach and the group agreed to its use.

Pat also presented and obtained the Work Group's approval of the following group agreements:

- Members prepare for meetings by reading meeting packet
- Speak respectfully during meetings

- Listen for understanding
- Allow the facilitator to guide the process

### **Public Comment**

There were about ten community members present.

Pat explained that at this point in the agenda they were invited to address the work group and they were asked to keep their comments brief and relevant.

Comments addressed the following points:

- Dog owners are responsible users of the parks and willing to help protect natural resources
- Dog owners should be seen as “stewards” of the parks and potential helpers to park staff
- SMC Parks have less dog access than other park districts in the area
- There should be more opportunity for public input as this process moves forward
- Dogs and their owners need opportunities for off-leash exercise

Peggy Jensen, Acting Parks Director, then reviewed the ordinance adopted by the Board of Supervisors in November and talked about the purpose of this Work Group. She noted that the new ordinance incorporated four of the Dog Management Committee policy recommendations. She then defined the Board of Supervisors’ assignment to the Work Group:

1. Identify one or two additional SMC Parks in which to pilot on-leash dog recreation opportunities by July 2019.
2. Identify one possible off-leash pilot area by December 2019.
3. Use the policies developed by the Dog Management Committee, with the results of the staff assessment of the new ordinance, to select suitable pilot locations.

Laurel Finnegan, Visitor Services Ranger, then reviewed the Communication Plan for the New Dog Ordinance. It includes the following:

- The ranger training program and educational materials for use with rangers and members of the public
- The Data Collection Plan and process

Pat then briefly reviewed the policy recommendations developed by the Dog Management Committee. These recommendations will be used by this Work Group to define the best locations for piloting dog access.

### **Overarching Policy:**

It is the policy of the SMC Parks Department, in managing dog access to County parks, to promote healthy, safe and varied experiences for all park users and to protect natural resources.

### **Secondary Policies:**

#### **Education:**

Dog owner education is an essential component of effective management of dog access, including avoiding user conflicts and protecting natural resources.

- a) Provide clear signage stating the responsibilities of park users who bring dogs into the parks.
- b) Explore the use of other media to promote dog owner education around park usage.

- c) Assure that the messaging has a positive tone and clarifies the reasons behind dog user responsibilities.
- d) Foster partnerships with dog and neighborhood organizations to support the messaging around appropriate activities and behaviors of dogs and their owners in parks.

**Variety of experiences:**

Provide a variety of recreational opportunities, increasing park access for a wider range of San Mateo County residents and visitors.

- a) Consider dog walking opportunities in both front and back country locations.
- b) Consider designated off-leash areas. If off-leash areas are to be provided, guidelines specific to off-leash use must be developed.
- c) Continue to provide areas where dogs are prohibited.

**Avoidance of conflicts:**

Minimize conflicts with established users within the park, such as equestrian use, and with adjacent park uses, such as agriculture.

**Pre-existing uses:** Where dog use occurred prior to a transfer or acquisition of park property, favor continuing that use, if consistent with other policies and objectives.

**Incorporated into ordinance**

**Protection of Natural Resources:** Protection and enhancement of the County's natural resources is one of two purposes stated in the mission of the Parks Department. Ensure that impacts to sensitive resources and disturbances to wildlife are avoided or minimized.

- a) Dogs should not be permitted to harass wildlife or be allowed to dig in the ground.
- b) Dogs should not be allowed to enter sensitive habitat areas, such as watercourses, marshes and ponds, areas under restoration and areas that are inhabited by species of special concern.
- c) In areas where dogs are allowed, sensitive habitats should be clearly demarcated with signage or fencing, where appropriate.
- d) Unless otherwise provided for, dogs should be constrained to trails and fire roads at all times.
- e) Dog owners shall be required to bag their dog's waste and deposit it in the receptacles provided for that purpose. Bagged dog waste left on the ground will be considered litter.
- f) Appropriate waste containers and bags should be located strategically at dog accessible park sites. Such containers should be easily serviceable on a regular basis by staff and/or volunteers in order to effectively to manage dog waste.

**Considering New Areas for Dog Access:** When considering new areas for dog access:

- a) Look for opportunities adjacent to urban areas and neighborhoods where there is demand for dog walking;
- b) Ensure adequate staffing, staff training and facilities can be provided to effectively manage the new use and address any increase in demand;

- c) Consider adjacent uses and whether connecting trails that allow dogs can be continued;
- d) Consider opportunities for dog access that are restricted by time of day or day of the week as needed or appropriate to balance park uses and provide a variety of park experiences;
- e) Ensure that all other policies regarding managing dog access can be met.

**Enforcement:** Enforcement mechanisms should be adequate to deter behavior that is not compliant with dog ordinances intended to protect park users and resources. Consider a structure of warnings and/or fines for infractions, with escalating fines for repeat offenders. **Incorporated into ordinance**

**Playgrounds and Play Areas:** Dogs should not enter playgrounds or play areas where it is posted that no dogs are allowed.

**Leashes:** Dogs must be leashed at all times, unless otherwise posted. All leashes must be no longer than 6 feet when encountering others on trails. **Incorporated into ordinance**

**Number of Dogs per Person:** Visitors may have no more than three (3) dogs per person. **Incorporated into ordinance**

#### **Parks Department Initial Assessment**

Laurel Finnegan then presented the Parks Department's initial assessment of areas that should not be opened to dogs (based on Primary and Secondary Policy Recommendations)

She noted that with passage of the new ordinance, dogs are now *legally* allowed in the following parks:

1. Devil's Slide Trail
2. Pillar Point Bluff
3. Quarry Park
4. Mirada Surf
5. California Coastal Trail/Dardanelle Trail (FMR)
6. Bay Trail (Coyote Point Park)

The following parks are not recommended for dog access based on the cited criteria:

- Historic/Cultural Resources present: Sanchez Adobe, Woodside Store
- Natural Preserves with special status plants/wildlife: Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, Edgewood Park and Natural Preserve, San Bruno Mountain
- Equestrian use: Wunderlich Park, Huddart Park, Sam McDonald Park, Pescadero Creek County Park, San Pedro Valley Park

*Locations not considered because of non-county property ownership: Tunitas Creek Park, Friendship Park, Crystal Springs Regional Trail and South County Trails*

#### **Discussion**

Work Group members had a number of questions and concerns about this initial assessment.

Members felt that a number of locations on the “not recommended” list had potential for dog access and should be considered. Members also recognize that their task is to select one or two sites for piloting dog access and if these pilots are successful, additional sites might be opened in the future.

Since time available for discussion was limited, the group agreed to determine which sites on the not recommended list they could agree on as not appropriate.

### **Agreement**

Using the Fist to Five method, the following locations were identified by group consensus as not appropriate for consideration:

- Woodside Store
- Fitzgerald Marine Reserve
- Wunderlich Park

The other sites will be discussed further in upcoming meetings.

Work group members requested Parks staff to bring to the next meeting any available information about challenges associated with dog access in currently used locations.

### **Confirm Work Group Timeline and Meeting Schedule**

Pat briefly reviewed the process timeline for the Work Group and noted that the next meeting is scheduled for **Monday, February 4<sup>th</sup> at 2pm**. The location and meeting agenda will be provided to the Work Group and posted for the public on the Parks Department website.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 pm.