



STUDY SESSION

Agenda Item # 7

AGENDA REPORT SUMMARY

Meeting Date: February 12, 2019

Subject: Parks and Recreation Commission Recommendation on Off-leash Dog Hours in City Parks

Prepared by: Manny A. Hernandez, Maintenance Services Director

Approved by: Chris Jordan, City Manager

Attachment(s):

1. Off-leash Pilot Program

Initiated by:

Parks and Recreation Commission

Previous Council Consideration:

None

Fiscal Impact:

Staff time for further research into an off-leash program recommendation.

Environmental Review:

Not applicable

Policy Question(s) for Council Consideration:

- Does Council want to consider allowing dogs to run off-leash in City parks, contrary to LAMC 5.08.010?
- Does Council want staff to develop and possibly implement an Off-leash Pilot Program as outlined in the Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) recommendation?

Summary:

- Currently, dogs are not allowed off-leash in any City parks in accordance with LAMC 5.08.010
- Los Altos does not have a fenced dog park within the City for dogs to run off-leash
- The PARC recommends restricting off-leash hours to early morning only at the six designated locations
- Cities such as Mountain View, Burlingame, and Foster City currently have off-leash hours in designated city parks

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends conducting additional research on off-leash dog hours in City parks to formulate a recommended pilot program for further City Council review

Reviewed By:

City Manager

City Attorney

Finance Director



Subject: Parks and Recreation Commission Recommendation on Off-leash Dog hours in City Parks

Purpose

Consider the recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) for a pilot off-leash program in existing parks.

Background

In July of 2017, the PARC created a Dog Park subcommittee to investigate how the City might create opportunities for dog activity through fenced dog parks and/or off-leash dog hours in existing City parks. The subcommittee met on several occasions and reported back to the Commission on a regular basis over a 12-month period of analysis. The subcommittee took tours of parks and City-owned land to better understand possibilities for dog activity. The PARC discussed the feasibility of a fenced dog park at several different Los Altos parks as well as off-leash hours in existing City parks.

During that time, the Dog Park subcommittee reviewed the Parks Plan criteria for a dog park in Los Altos. After considering that criteria, the PARC was unable to find a suitable location for the installation of a fenced dog park. Ultimately, at the July 2018 meeting, the PARC did not formulate a recommendation for a fenced dog park at any of the current City owned properties. At that meeting a proposal was brought forward for off-leash dog hours at existing City parks. The program recommendation is outlined in Attachment 1.

Discussion/Analysis

The Dog Park subcommittee defined a ‘fenced dog park’ as a space surrounded by a low-level fence where dogs could enter with their owners and run free within the fenced space. Many surrounding cities, such as Los Altos Hills, have a fenced dog park. Fenced dog parks are known for bringing the dog owning community together at a specified location and giving the dogs an opportunity to run off-leash in a safe, confined space. The initial capital costs for building a fenced dog park on park open space combined with ongoing maintenance costs significantly exceed the costs that are associated with simply maintaining that park open space without the addition of a dog park. In addition to the costs of such a project, the PARC considered the criteria outlined in the 2012 Parks Plan, such as park size, parking, and the presence of a buffer between residential homes.

The Dog Park subcommittee also investigated off-leash hours in existing City parks. ‘Off-leash’ is defined by the Dog Park subcommittee as the utilization of existing park open space to allow dogs to run off-leash at designated locations during specified times. Advantages of this type of program include the absence of capital costs and lower maintenance costs, partially due to the ability to limit the usage times at any given location. Another advantage is that multiple locations throughout the City can be designated as off-leash, increasing accessibility to different areas of the City. Drawbacks include concern for the safety of dogs who might run into the streets as well the interaction between off-leash dogs and non-dog park users.



Subject: Parks and Recreation Commission Recommendation on Off-leash Dog hours in City Parks

At its July 11, 2018 meeting, PARC Commissioner Lilygren made the following motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Heley:

“The Parks and Recreation Commission recommends the City adopt an off-leash pilot program. Prior to advancing the recommendation to Council, the Dog Park subcommittee will work with City staff to identify the best locations and hours.” The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

After the PARC made this recommendation, they maintained the Dog Park subcommittee, which is still looking into options for a fenced dog park in Los Altos. With some recent findings by the Dog Park subcommittee, the PARC may have a recommendation on a fenced dog park in the near future.

Options

- 1) Direct staff to develop a pilot Off-leash Dog Program proposal in existing City parks, utilizing the PARC recommendation while considering risk mitigation strategies and learning from the experiences of neighboring agencies with off-leash programs

Advantages: Staff will be able to gather information from other agencies on current off-leash dog programs. Staff will have the opportunity to work with Risk Management services to assess the level of risk that might be assumed by the City through such a program

Disadvantages: None

- 2) Direct staff to not invest further time looking into an off-leash dog program as recommended by the PARC

Advantages: Savings in staff time

Disadvantages: None

Recommendation

The staff recommends Option 1.

The dog park subcommittee has been directed by the rest of the commission to focus on researching the possibility of implementing off leash hours at certain parks. This report from the subcommittee will:

- 1) Make an updated recommendation of parks suitable for off leash dog activity during certain designated hours
- 2) Present rules for off leash dogs and owners

Off Leash Pilot

The subcommittee recommends that dogs be allowed off leash at certain parks from Sunrise-9am when school is in session, and Sunrise- 8am during summertime in order to minimize the interaction between children and off leash dogs. The test period for this program would last for 12 months, and can be cancelled at anytime by city staff if serious issues or complaints arise.

Suitable Parks for Off-Leash Hours

- 1) **McKenzie Park**- This park is currently very popular amongst dog owners and is a great place for dogs to exercise. The grassy area where dogs run around is located between 2 playgrounds that are commonly used, however, the given hours are designed to prevent any issues between children and dogs. This location also provides a space for South Los Altos residents to exercise their dogs off leash.
- 2) **Shoup Park**- The grassy area of Shoup park is a very popular place for dog owners to convene in the morning, and the park provides suitable space for dogs to exercise.
- 3) **Lincoln Park**- The section of Lincoln Park located between Edith and Main Street is frequently used by dog owners as a place to exercise their dogs. The fencing along Lincoln Park provides a sufficient buffer from Foothill Expressway in order to ensure safety of the dogs. However, if frisbees and throwing devices were to be permitted at Lincoln Park, the subcommittee recommends that a driving range type netting be added or a tall chain link fence along Foothill Expressway in order to prevent objects from interfering with vehicles and bicycles on the busy thoroughfare. An example of an attractive, very high, black chain link fence can be viewed bordering the west side of the new El Camino Park in Palo Alto located between Alma and the El Camino across from the Stanford Shopping center.
- 4) **Little League Field at Hillview Park**- Although the Little League field was previously disregarded as a possible trial location, the subcommittee has decided to include it as a suitable location for off leash hours since it is currently used for dog obedience training. In order to preserve the condition of the field, the subcommittee recommends that dogs

be allowed off leash only when Little League is not in season. Damages to the field will be monitored in order to maintain the field's condition.

- 5) **Heritage Oaks Park-** The grassy area of Heritage Oaks is a popular place for dog owners to allow their dogs to run around. However, given the parks proximity to Portland Avenue, the subcommittee recommends that a fence be added. This fence would help ensure the safety of dogs along with children from running into a busy street
- 6) **Marymeade Park-** The field of Marymeade Park is spacious and would serve as a good place for dogs to run around. However, this park is very close to Fremont Road. The subcommittee recommends that a fence be added in order to prevent dogs from running into traffic.

Rules for Off Leash Dogs

- 1) Dogs are only allowed off leash during the designated hours, and they must be kept on a leash at all other times
- 2) All dogs must remain within the designated area while off leash
- 3) Frisbees or throwing devices would be allowed or disallowed as posted on the list of Rules based on the Park
- 4) Dogs must be under voice command
- 5) Owners must clean up after their dog
- 6) Dogs must be up to date with vaccinations
- 7) Owners must supervise their dog at all times
- 8) Owners must be able to control their dog at all times
- 9) Dogs are not allowed off-leash on playgrounds or sports fields (other than seasonally allowed at specified times on the Hillview Little League field)