

Recommendations for a Dog Park

Dog Park Subcommittee

Parks and Recreation Commission

City of Los Altos

Need for a Dog Park. Los Altos and Palo Alto have many demographics in common. Each has two ZIP codes among the top 10 most expensive ZIP codes in the country.¹ Mountain View, which is listed as the 18th most expensive ZIP in the country, also shares many things with Los Altos, including an elementary school district which serves both communities. Another thing these communities share in common is that they are all “dog” cities. Palo Alto has five fenced-in dog parks. Mountain View has two fenced-in dog parks, one at Shoreline and the other as part of the San Antonio mall complex. Los Altos residents would also like a dog park. In a recent survey, 83.2% of those residents participating said they would like a fenced-in dog park in Los Altos², an unprecedented number of positive responses for any recent city survey. This level of interest is backed up by hard numbers: the Palo Alto animal control officer estimates that there are 3800 active dog licenses in Los Altos.³ The role of pets in this community is further reinforced by the fact that one of the top ten businesses in the City is one of its companion animal veterinary practices.⁴ However one might extrapolate the number of adults per household, that’s a lot of Los Altos voters who would benefit from a dog park.

Gating Issues. The absence of a dog park in Los Altos has not been for lack of trying. Some of the issues that have united citizens in their desire for one have also impeded choice of any specific location: With the city spread out, what single location would be convenient to both North and South Los Altos? If a dog park goes into an existing park in my neighborhood, what park space would we be giving up? How would the additional traffic impact the neighborhood? How would noise levels impact nearby residents? And with comparatively less parkland than surrounding communities, do we even have enough land to dedicate to the dog community? Those of us on the Parks and Recreation Commission Dog Park (PARC) Subcommittee view these not as impediments to a successful outcome, but rather as useful input for selecting a location that addresses citizen concerns.

Location Recommendation. The PARC Dog Park Subcommittee recommendations have previously been that an ideal dog park would be at least 10,000 square feet.⁵ More recently, the Subcommittee has identified a location which, while only about 7,000 square feet, meets many criteria for a dog park site. The location is the part of McKenzie Park that borders on Fremont Avenue. This triangular site backs up on the City’s tennis courts on one side and commercial (medical offices) on the other side. Residential properties on one side are buffered by offices on both sides of Altos Oaks. Residential properties on the other side are buffered by Fremont and Foothill Expressway. When the City of Beverly Hills did a noise mitigation study for a dog park⁶, they concluded that the change in noise level would be minimal (3 decibels) and in the Los Altos location this Subcommittee is recommending the existing traffic is likely contribute more noise than a dog park would.

The McKenzie Park location has more than adequate parking, currently used by City employees working at the adjacent City maintenance yard, as well as by residents using the two City tennis courts. According to City staff, excess parking is typically used by employees at the adjacent medical offices. The location is not currently used for any of the Parks and

Recreation programs, so no program would need to be terminated or relocated. There are easily-accessible rest rooms serving both parts of McKenzie Park. The location is easily accessible to both North Los Altos and South Los Altos residents via the City's main thoroughfares, without creating any additional traffic on any residential streets.

Alternative or additional locations. The Dog Park Subcommittee has identified other locations that are large enough to accommodate a dog park and can also be subdivided into two separate areas. One is the space on the Hillview campus adjacent to the Bus Barn and the soccer field. It currently has two older oak trees that have been evaluated by an arborist. Assuming that the site would be safe for both tree health and public use, it could house a fenced-in dog park. Like the other site, it has nearby parking and rest rooms. It is also fairly central to North Los Altos. Another location could be adjacent to the new community center. It would have the same advantages of the Hillview site adjacent to the Bus Barn, with the disadvantage that implementation would be delayed until completion of the community center. These other locations are not being submitted as recommendations, but rather to document the Subcommittee's process in its review of different sites.

Programs. A fenced-in dog park offers the Los Altos dog community a *de facto* community center. Drawing from programs that other cities have implemented for their dog parks, a McKenzie Park fenced-in dog park could provide:

- Unstructured time: a chance for dogs to play, and an opportunity for owners to socialize;
- Dog instruction: obedience, agility, conformation (dog showing), and puppy training classes, as well as testing for the Canine Good Citizen (CGC) designation. The Deep Peninsula Dog Training Club and the West Valley Dog Training Club have both offered well-attended classes in Mountain View;
- A special needs meet-and-greet: an all-inclusive opportunity for those with special needs to bring their dogs (emotional support and otherwise), meet with other families with similar needs, and socialize with others who want to join them. This is being done in other communities, such as Cincinnati, which has done this as a "pop-up park" concept that has been very well received⁷; and
- An animal shelter and rescue group meet-and-greet: where these groups would have the opportunity to introduce adoptable dogs to the community.

A fenced-in dog park in Los Altos could serve additional purposes. It could provide those who do not have a dog in their family and opportunity to come, spend time in the dog park, and see if a dog is right for their family. If the City of Los Altos were to create a fenced-in dog park and work out relationships with dog training clubs, as Mountain View has, it could allow the Parks Department to expand its programming under the aegis of such clubs, without additional programming costs.

Design. The McKenzie Park location has a fence on one side for the tennis courts. Buildout for a dog park would require:

- fencing the rest of the perimeter;
- a fenced divider to demarcate two separate areas, one for larger dogs, and the other for smaller or gentler dogs;
- two double-gated "airlocks," with self-closing gate, for entrance and exit into each of the two areas;
- replacement of the surface with hardy grass varieties, such as Buffalo or Red Creeping grass, or more likely a decomposed granite (DG) surface to deal with normal wear and tear;
- possible grading to ensure adequate runoff;

- possible additional landscaping along the perimeter that McKenzie park shares with the Altos Oaks properties;
- retention of tables and benches in each section;
- removal of playground equipment and possible replacement with dog agility equipment;
- possible removal of some small trees and fencing around other larger trees;
- plastic bag dispensers and waste containers;
- additional handicapped parking spaces adjacent to the site;
- a community bulletin board to post scheduled events, dog-related service; and
- signage for the park's rules.

Dog Park Rules. Many municipal dog parks are divided into two distinct areas. Some divide their parks into large and small dogs. Others divide them into large and smaller or gentler dogs. The Dog Park Subcommittee prefers the latter, because some older dogs, while large in size, may be more docile. Other posted rules typically include adult supervision (no dogs brought in by people under a specific age), number of dogs allowed, pickup requirements, vaccination compliance, and dog park etiquette. The Subcommittee will be submitting photo examples of rules and signage used for other dog parks. To our knowledge, no changes in our City code or ordinances would be required for a fenced-in off-leash dog park.

Ongoing Changes in the Community. All Bay Area communities are facing housing challenges. The State of California is mandating additional housing units, and the City of Los Altos is addressing this with Accessory Dwelling Units and higher-density multifamily development where developers are seeking variances in allowable square footage and setback requirements. Another fact of Bay Area living in 2019 is that dogs are, and will continue to be, part of the social and emotional fabric of families. The confluence of higher-density living, an overall decrease in per capita yard size, and the desire for families to include a companion animal, all work together to put pressure on our finite park space, and we expect that will put greater pressure on the City of Los Altos for use of our parks. In what we, the Dog Park Subcommittee, believe to be an extremely inclusive process, Los Altos citizens have had ample opportunity to present, in their comments to the Parks and Recreation Commission, their views regarding a dog park. The overall consensus is “yes” to a definite need for a dog park and “no” to various locations. The Dog Park Subcommittee has listened, done its due diligence on various locations, and believes that the site it is recommending takes into consideration the views of the City's residence and represents the best of all possible options. Furthermore, it believes that providing 3800 households or approximately 1 dog owner for every 2 square feet of park space is a useful and reasonable metric for any cost/benefit analysis of use of its park space.

Recommendations. The Dog Park Subcommittee is recommending that the Parks and Recreation Commission approve the McKenzie Park site for forwarding on to City Council for their consideration and approval. The Dog Park Subcommittee further requests that PARC approve submitting this entire report, both as documentation of the thoroughness of this process and as a recommendation for a site of choice and alternative sites, to City Council for their consideration and approval.

¹ 24/7 Wall Street report, reported on in 12/17/2018 article in USA Today
<https://247wallst.com/special-report/2018/12/07/these-are-the-most-expensive-zip-codes-in-2018>

² City of Los Altos dog park survey https://www.losaltosca.gov/community/page/open-city-hall#peak_democracy

³ May 10, 2018 email communication with Cody Macartney, Interim Superintendent, Animal Services Division, Palo Alto Police Department (The City of Palo Alto oversees Los Altos pet licensing)

⁴ Wikipedia article https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Altos,_California , reporting on City of Los Altos Comprehensive Annual Financial Report
http://www.losaltosca.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/Finance%20and%20Technology/page/875/cafr_fy2009-2010.pdf

⁵ From Dog Park Criteria submitted by the Parks and Recreation Commission Subcommittee as Attachment A of the May 2018 meeting

⁶ City of Beverly Hills Draft Initial Study Mitigated Negative Declaration, Dog Park Project
<http://www.beverlyhills-ca.gov/cbhfiles/storage/files/1622915470371464222/DogParkMNDDraft.pdf>

⁷ WLWT television report on pop-up dog park in Cincinnati, OH
<https://www.wlwt.com/article/teen-with-rare-disability-connects-community-through-pop-up-puppy-park/22551295>