



DATE: November 13, 2019

AGENDA ITEM # 5

**TO:** Parks & Recreation Commission

**FROM:** Recreation & Community Services Director Donna Legge, Staff Liaison  
Off-Leash Areas and Fenced-in Dog Park Subcommittee

**SUBJECT:** Pilot Off-Leash Areas and Fenced-in Dog Park Proposal

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Receive updated staff and Subcommittee report regarding proposed pilot program for off-leash areas and fenced-in dog park. Provide input, recommend one or two dog parks to be included in the public process and schedule a public workshop prior to forwarding a recommendation to City Council

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**BACKGROUND**

At its regular Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) meeting of August 14, 2019, Vice Chair Eckmann and Commissioner Spielman volunteered and were appointed to serve on the Off-Leash Areas and Fenced-in Dog Park Subcommittee (Subcommittee).

The Subcommittee has worked closely with staff to evaluate options and gather information for the reports that have been prepared for the October and November 2019 meetings. The following report is a joint effort.

**Need for a Dog Park**

According to USA Today, Los Altos and Palo Alto have many demographics in common. Each have two ZIP codes among the top 10 most expensive ZIP codes in the country. Mountain View, which is listed as the 18th most expensive ZIP in the country, also shares many things with Los Altos, including the Mountain View Los Altos School District. In addition, the communities are all “dog” cities. The City of Palo Alto has three fenced-in dog parks. The City of Mountain View has one fenced-in dog park at the entrance of Shoreline Park, at the corner of Shoreline Blvd and North Roads, as well as eight designated off-leash areas. Los Altos residents would also like a dog park.

In a recent survey conducted by the City of Los Altos in spring 2018, 83.2% of those residents participating said they would like a fenced-in dog park in Los Altos. According to the City of Palo Alto, the level of interest is backed up by hard numbers: a Palo Alto animal control officer estimates that there are 3800 active dog licenses in Los Altos - approximately 35% of all households in Los Altos have a dog. The prominence of pets is reinforced by the fact that one of the top ten businesses in Los Altos is a companion animal veterinary practice, which was revealed in the 2010

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City of Los Altos Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. It is perceived that many Los Altos voters would benefit from a local dog park.

### **Dog Park Definitions**

For the purpose of this report, the Subcommittee has established the following definitions:

A “**dog park**” is defined as a dedicated fenced-in area, which is often divided into two separate areas, one for larger/more active dogs and the other for smaller, shyer dogs. Dogs run off-leash in these dog parks. A fenced-in dog park typically is open from sunrise to sunset.

An “**off-leash area**” is defined as unenclosed areas where dogs can run but the owner(s) must manage their dogs so that they do not go beyond the designated off-leash areas, unless they are leashed. Off-leash areas typically have specific hours in the morning and afternoon/evening.

Since July 2017, the PARC and various subcommittees have explored the feasibility of establishing off-leash areas as well as fenced-in dog parks in Los Altos. The PARC approved forwarding a recommendation to City Council, at its regular meeting of July 11, 2018.

At its regular meeting of February 12, 2019, City Council directed staff to prepare a proposal for a City of Los Altos pilot off-leash areas program at no more than two parks.

Per the approved minutes, City Council direction was as follows:

Direction: The Council directed staff to work with the Parks and Recreation Commission to fully develop a pilot program proposal with an implementation plan to include off-leash dog hours at one or two parks, with limited hours, a public noticing plan and educational signage. Concurrently, staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission shall further explore and develop a recommendation for a designated, fenced-in dog park. The proposal for the off-leash hours shall come back to Council for final review before implementation, along with the PARC recommendation for a fenced-in dog park.

At its regular meeting of October 16, 2019, the PARC discussed establishing a twelve-month pilot program for off-leash areas at the Hillview Baseball Field (Attachment 1) and Heritage Oaks Park. (Attachment 2). The PARC recommended that staff expand the off-leash hours. Staff is recommending the following:

#### **Hillview Park Baseball Field (July 1 – February 28)**

Monday to Sunday 6 to 9:10am & 6:00pm to sunset (July-September)

\* Baseball uses the field until 7 pm

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Monday to Friday 7 to 9:10am & 4pm to sunset (October-February)

- \* Baseball uses the field until 4 pm
- \* Dog Obedience has a class once a week that starts at 9 am
- \* Field is closed for maintenance from October to January

### **Heritage Oaks Park:**

Monday to Friday 6:30 to 9:10am

Saturday & Sunday 7 to 8:30am

While the PARC has determined that McKenzie Park (Attachment 3) is a feasible option to designate as a fenced-in dog park, the PARC supported the Subcommittee's recommendation to work with staff and return at the November PARC meeting with South Lincoln Park (Attachment 4) as a second alternative to be considered.

### **DISCUSSION**

The cost to design and develop a dog park is earmarked for FY 20-21. The funds will not be officially allocated until the project is approved by City Council. The source of funds is from Park in Lieu Funds. The Subcommittee is anticipating that the cost to design and develop McKenzie Park will be more than South Lincoln Park.

The Subcommittee has made the following observations, related to the pros and cons of two, alternative fenced-in dog parks:

#### **McKenzie Park**

At its regular meeting of May 9, 2018, the PARC established dog park location criteria based on the 2012 Park Plan. The Subcommittee has identified a location which meets many of the criteria for a dog park. The location includes a portion of McKenzie Park that borders on Fremont Avenue and Altos Oak Drive. The triangular footprint backs up to 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. Included in a 2015 Initial Study-Mitigated Negative Declaration for a dog park in the City of Beverly Hills, a noise mitigation study concluded that the change in noise level would be minimal. The Subcommittee has concluded that the existing traffic is likely to contribute more noise than a dog park.



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### Pros

- No contiguous residential properties
- Driving access without the need to go on residential streets
- Adjacent parking (pending enforcement of parking regulations) The parking lot is currently being used by City employees working at the adjacent City maintenance yard; people accessing the medical offices on Altos Oaks Avenues; and those using the two City tennis courts or playground at the east end of the park.
- Restrooms
- The location is not currently being used for specific parks and recreation programs. As a result, no program would need to be terminated or relocated.
- There are easily-accessible restrooms serving both parts (east and west) of McKenzie Park.
- The location is easily accessible to both north and south Los Altos residents via the City's main thoroughfares, without creating additional traffic on residential streets

### Cons

- Parking regulations are currently not enforced. The Subcommittee has observed over time that this lot is usually at capacity or close to capacity. This may be a challenge but could be mitigated by changing or enforcing parking regulations. the Subcommittee will rely on City staff for a better understanding of what would be done to ensure adequate parking
- Grading and drainage work
- Wide tree coverage, which may adversely impact the drying time in rainy weather, possibly creating a muddy environment
- Fencing complexity
- Potential impact to trees

### **South Lincoln Park**

The Subcommittee has identified a second location for consideration of a fenced-in dog park: the south end of Lincoln Park. This is a long, narrow area along Foothill Expressway, which is located between Foothill Expressway and Lincoln Avenue. The footprint can support two areas for large/active dogs and smaller/shy dogs, either contiguously or close to each other. The long/narrow space would allow more running opportunities than the McKenzie Park configuration. There is ample parking immediately adjacent to park. The properties closest to the park, are churches, separated by Lincoln Avenue with angled parking on both sides (Attachment A). This location could accommodate a two-zone fenced-in dog park of up to approximately 21,000 square feet.



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### Pros

According to the Subcommittee, South Lincoln Park appears to have some advantages over the McKenzie Park. These include:

- Adequate drainage
- Comparatively fewer trees than the McKenzie Park
- Appears it may dry out quicker during rainy season
- Parking is more than ample during the week
- Proximity to downtown businesses
- Centrally located for both north and south Los Altos residents
- Public restrooms available in nearby in Shoup Park

### Cons

- Potential parking issues on Sunday, which could be easily addressed by coordinating with nearby churches and closing the dog park for Sunday services
- Public restrooms – while close by – still require a walk to Shoup Park, with a steep grade.
- Traffic flow by three residential properties
- As with McKenzie Park, any noise from a dog park is not likely to be greater than that already generated by traffic on Foothill Expressway
- Proximity to major expressway and fencing adjustments to block small dogs. Other cities, such as Riverside, Ca, have created dog park environments adjacent to major highways, and photo examples of this park and its fencing are being provided as an example of how Los Altos could address this

### **Other scenarios: off-leash areas and no areas for dogs**

According to the subcommittee, off-leash areas are typically established in an existing park space and is shared with other activities with limited hours. In addition, when dog owners do not pick up after their dogs, it impacts the experience residents have during non-scheduled times of the off-leash hours. Many dog owners run their dogs off-leash in many of the City parks. Having off-leash areas and/or a fenced-in dog park provides choices and intended goal to reduce non-compliance with existing ordinances around leashed dogs in parks and curbing. Alternative off-leash areas and a dog park are anticipated to support enforcement of ordinances as well as reducing recurring costs associated to turf maintenance in other parks.

### **Programs**

A fenced-in dog park offers the Los Altos community a *de facto* dog community center. Drawing from other city dog park programs, the City of los Altos can offer the following programs:

- Unstructured time: a chance for dogs to play, and an opportunity for owners to socialize

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- 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: program in Clifton, Cincinnati, Ohio includes 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 as a “pop-up park” concept that has been very well received. (Attachment 5).
- An animal shelter and rescue group meet-and-greet: where these groups would have the opportunity to introduce adoptable dogs to the community
- Provide those who do not have a dog in their family, an opportunity to visit, spend time in the dog park, and see if a dog is right for their family. If the City of Los Altos were to develop a fenced-in dog park and work out relationships with dog training clubs, as Mountain View has, it may be an opportunity to expand its programming under the aegis of such clubs, without additional programming costs

#### **Design** (Attachments 7 and 8)

The McKenzie Park location has a fence on one side for the tennis courts. The South Lincoln Park location has a fence separating it from Foothill Expressway. Buildout for both dog park sites would require:

- Fencing the rest of the perimeter;
- Divider to define two separate areas, for large and small dogs
- Two double-gated “airlocks,” that are self-closing 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 a decomposed granite (DG) surface to deal with normal wear and tear
- Possible grading to ensure adequate runoff
- Tables and benches in each section
- 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
- Signage for the park’s rules
- Water



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Specific to McKenzie Park

- Additional landscaping for the border it shares with the Altos Oaks properties
- Removal of playground equipment and possible replacement with dog agility equipment
- Possible removal of some small trees and fencing around other larger trees

### **Dog Park Rules** (Attachment 6)

Many municipal dog parks are divided into two distinct areas for large dogs and small dogs. The Subcommittee recommends a division between large dogs and smaller or gentler/passive dogs because some older dogs, while large, may be more docile. Other posted rules include adult supervision, prohibiting supervision by individuals under a specific age. In addition, signs define the number of dogs allowed, pickup requirements, vaccination compliance, and dog park etiquette. No changes in our City code or ordinances would be required for a fenced-in or off-leash dog park.

### **Ongoing Changes in the Community** (Attachment 9)

Presented by the Subcommittee: 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 whereby developers seek variances in allowable square footage and setback requirements. In 2019 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. It is expected that this trend will put greater pressure on the parks in the City of Los Altos. The Subcommittee recommends an extremely inclusive process to encourage residents to provide input and their views regarding a dog park. The survey and previous public input indicate that there is a consensus for a dog park and “no” to suggested locations. The Subcommittee has received input and evaluated various locations. The Subcommittee believes that providing 3,800 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 park use for a dog park.

### **ADA Considerations**

The Department of Justice (DOJ) published the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design in September 2010. ADA compliance requires that any Parks and Recreation Department programs be equally accessible to all citizens, regardless of their limitations, or that reasonable accommodation be provided. The Subcommittee recommends that a fenced-in dog park provides reasonable accommodation for individuals who are unable to run after their dog. Without there would be no reasonable accommodation. A fenced-in dog park would provide the barriers necessary to allow dogs to run and socialize without fear of their dog running after someone, running into traffic, or running away.

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### **Subcommittee Recommendations**

The Subcommittee is recommending that the PARC consider including both South Lincoln Park and McKenzie Park as alternative sites for the public to consider for the development of a dedicated fenced-in dog park at a public workshop to receive resident comments, with the intent of forwarding this on to City Council for their consideration and approval. The Subcommittee further recommends that the PARC approve the inclusion of this report, as documentation of a thorough process and recommendation for alternatives sites with a site of choice, to City Council for their consideration and approval.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Receive updated staff and Subcommittee report regarding proposed pilot program for off-leash areas and fenced-in dog park. Provide input, recommend one or two dog parks to be included in the public process and schedule a public workshop prior to forwarding a recommendation to City Council.

Attachments:

1. Hillview Baseball Field – Off-leash Area
2. Heritage Oaks Park – Off-leash Area
3. McKenzie Park – Fenced-in Dog Park
4. South Lincoln Park – Fenced-in Dog Park
5. Sample Program – Clifton Cincinnati, Ohio
6. Sample Dog Park Signs
7. Sample Dog Park Areas
8. Sample Dog Park Fencing
9. City Map – Dog Park Locations