



PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Fenced-in Dog Park and Off-Leash Hours Program Proposals
Staff and Dog Park Subcommittee Report



Prepared for Public Workshops - February 2020

BACKGROUND

In Fiscal Year 2008-2009, City Council budgeted a dog park project that was later placed on hold until a site was selected. The Los Altos Parks Plan (Parks Plan) was adopted by City Council on May 8, 2012. The Parks Plan includes recommended goals and aspirations based on a comprehensive park assessment and is intended to guide future development and planning including the aspiration to identify a location for a fenced-in dog park. The following excerpt is from pages 28 and 29 in the adopted 2012 Parks Plan:

The difficulty in building a dog park is that such parks typically generate a strong, negative reaction by immediate neighbors. Currently, there is not overwhelming support for building a dog park in the City. In a [scientific] survey conducted in 2010 by Godbe Research for the Parks Plan, a dog park was rated “Very Important” or “Somewhat Important” as a facility they would like to have available in Los Altos by 53% of respondents (45% of respondents answered “Not Important”). As of 2011, dogs are allowed, on-leash, in all Los Altos Parks and dogs and owners are frequently seen in the parks. Whether or not a dog park is built, the City should continue to allow dogs on-leash in all City parks.

In planning for a dog park, certain criteria should be met before designing such a park. At a minimum, a site should include:

- Sufficient room for off-leash activities for dogs of all sizes (at least one-half acre)
- Sufficient parking for park-use
- Sufficient buffer between the park and surrounding residential areas to mitigate impact from the park on homes
- Access to water (drinking fountain or spigot)
- Seating located away from perimeter fence
- Covered trashcans/waste disposal stations

None of the parks in Los Altos, meet all the criteria. As such, a site outside of the current park system that includes all the above criteria should be identified before funds are allocated for a dog park. A dog park should include the following within the design:

- A 4' to 6' fence surrounding the dog area
- Adequate drainage
- Nearby parking
- Clear and well-placed signs for park rules
- Shade and water for both dogs and owners
- Seating located away from perimeter fence
- Covered trashcans/waste disposal stations

Dog Park Definitions

A “**fenced-in dog park**” is defined as an enclosed and dedicated 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 hours program**” is defined as an unenclosed area 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.

On July 12, 2017, the Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) established the original Dog Park Subcommittee (Subcommittee) to investigate opportunities for dog activity through the development of a dog park in existing City parks. Various PARC and Dog Park Subcommittees have explored the feasibility of establishing off-leash areas as well as fenced-in dog parks over the last two and a half years. In recognition of the work of past Subcommittee members, the current Subcommittee has built upon the previous work of Tanya Lindermeier, Mike Ellerin and Grace Lilygren.

The 2017 Subcommittee drafted and refined an online Dog Park & Off-Leash Hours for Dogs Survey. The “electronic” survey was posted on the City website between January 29 and March 8, 2018. The survey was viewed 1,127 times and included a total of 868 responses in a 1,776-page report. A summary of the report is attached (Attachment 1):

	<u>Fenced-in Dog park</u>	<u>Off-leash Hours</u>
Yes	78.1 %	56.6 %
No	16.4 %	33.4 %
Unsure	5.6 %	10.0 %

Top Four Preferred Locations:

Lincoln Park	33.3 %	Grant Park	31.2 %
Hillview Park	31.7 %	Lincoln Park	27.8 %
Grant Park	31.6 %	Hillview Park	27.7 %
Heritage Oaks Park	25.4 %	Heritage Oaks Park	26.5 %

Based on the survey results, the Subcommittee presented a report (Attachment B) to the PARC at its regular meeting of May 9, 2018, including the following recommendations:

Dog Park Criteria (in addition to the Parks Plan Criteria)

1. A minimum of 10,000 square feet for off-leash activities for dogs of all sizes
2. Access to bathrooms
3. ADA compliant
4. Appropriate hours including periods closed for maintenance
5. Double entry system
6. Surface medium and maintenance regimen that ensures sanitary conditions and a pleasant visit
7. Small tables
8. Covered trashcans

9. Free doggie bags

Off-leash Criteria

1. Trial (pilot) area should not be used as a sports field
2. At least one trial (pilot) location should be convenient to north and south Los Altos
3. Sufficient parking
4. Sufficient buffer between the park and residences/places of worship
5. Clear and well-placed signs that post off-leash park rules
6. Covered trashcans
7. Free doggie bags
8. Waste disposal Stations

The Subcommittee also presented the pros and cons of nine (9) City parks considered for a fenced-in dog park and eleven (11) City parks considered for off-leash hours program.

The PARC recommended that the Subcommittee explore an off-leash hours program.

At its regular meeting of July 11, 2018, the Subcommittee recommended off-leash hours program rules, further review of six (6) suitable parks including McKenzie, Shoup, Lincoln, Hillview Baseball Field, Heritage Oaks and Marymead. In addition, the Subcommittee recommended preferred hours to be sunrise to 9am during school and sunrise to 8am during the summer with a recommended pilot period of 12 months, which could be cancelled at any time by staff should serious issues or complaints arise. The PARC accepted the Subcommittee's recommendation and forwarded it to City Council (Attachment C).

At its regular meeting of February 12, 2019, City Council directed staff to prepare a proposal for a pilot off-leash hours program at no more than two parks, and for staff to work with PARC to recommend a fenced-in dog park:

The City 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 April 10, 2019, the Subcommittee presented a report to the PARC including an overview of 1) the need for a dog park in Los Altos; 2) gating issues; 3) alternative locations; 4) potential programs; 5) design features; 6) dog park rules and 7) ongoing changes in the community (Attachment D). The Subcommittee recommended that the PARC forward a recommendation to the City Council to approve McKenzie Park for the development of a fenced-in dog park.

The recommended design features include the following:

1. Considering the tennis court fence, fencing the remaining perimeter
2. Divide fenced area into two separate areas, one for larger dogs, and the other for smaller or

- gentler dogs
3. Install two double-gated “airlocks,” with self-closing gate, for entrance and exit into each of the two areas
 4. Replace 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
 5. Grading to ensure adequate runoff
 6. Install additional landscaping along the perimeter where McKenzie Park shares with the Altos Oaks properties
 7. Retain tables and benches in each section
 8. Removal of climbing wall (play equipment) and consider replacing with dog agility equipment
 9. Consider removing small trees and install fencing around other larger trees
 10. Install plastic bag dispensers and waste containers
 11. Provide additional handicapped parking spaces adjacent to the site
 12. Install a community bulletin board to post scheduled events and dog-related services
 13. Install appropriate signage and dog park rules

The McKenzie Dog Park recommendation has not yet been forwarded to the City Council.

DISCUSSION

At its regular PARC meeting of August 14, 2019, Vice Chair Stuart Eckmann and Commissioner Scott Spielman volunteered and were appointed to serve on the Off-Leash Areas and Fenced-in Dog Park Subcommittee. Commissioner Teresa Morris was recently appointed to the Subcommittee, on February 3, 2020. The Subcommittee has worked closely with staff to evaluate options and gather information for the reports that have been prepared since October 2019. The following information has been a combined effort.

Off-leash Hours Areas

At its special meeting of October 16, 2019, the PARC discussed establishing a twelve-month pilot program for off-leash areas at the Hillview Baseball Field and Heritage Oaks Park, as suggested by staff. These sites and hours were discussed by the PARC. Due to existing field use, the availability of afternoon and evening access is limited.

While the hours are limited, staff and PARC are recommending the following pilot hours for a consistent schedule and appropriate signage for the public. Shown below, are the current scheduled uses at each off-leash location, followed by proposed hours for the off-leash program.

Hillview Baseball Field – Scheduled Uses

Program	Days	Times	Months (#)
Dog Obedience	Wednesdays	9 to 11 am	Jan to Dec (12)
Little League	Monday to Friday	4 to 7 pm	Feb to July (6)
	Saturday & Sunday	9 am to 5 pm	Feb to July (6)

Hillview Baseball Field – Scheduled Uses (Continued)

Program	Days	Times	Months (#)
Little League	Mon, Wed, Fri	5 to 7 pm	Aug to Mid-Nov (4.5)
Pony League	Tues & Thurs	4 to 7 pm	Aug to Mid-Nov (4.5)
Annual Maintenance	Monday to Sunday	sunrise to sunset	Mid-Nov to Jan (2.5)

Hillview Park Baseball Field: Proposed Hours - February to Mid-November (9.5 months)

<u>Days</u>	<u>Morning</u>	<u>Afternoon/Evening</u>
Monday to Friday	6 to 9 am	7 pm to sunset
Saturday and Sunday	6 to 9 am	4 pm to sunset

Pros

- Close to restrooms
- Central to Civic Center and close to downtown
- Available benches and shade
- More available hours on weekends in afternoon/evening
- More available hours in morning, Monday through Friday
- Dog obedience classes already use park

Cons

- Limited afternoon/evening hours during week and fall and winter months (day light hours)
- Current construction is a perceived obstacle (can be mitigated)
- Temporary limited parking until construction is complete
- Possible negative impact to turf conditions/maintenance

Heritage Oaks Park – Scheduled Uses

Program	Days	Times	Months (#)
Youth Soccer	Mon, Wed, Fri	4:15 to 5:15 pm	Sept to Mid-Nov, Feb to June (6.5)
MVLA Soccer	Thursday	4 to 5 pm	Sept to Mid-Nov, Feb to June (6.5)
Youth Soccer	Tuesday	12:30 to 1:30 pm	Sept to Mid-Nov, Feb to June (6.5)
Youth Soccer	Friday	10 to 11 am	Sept to Mid-Nov, Feb to June (6.5)

Heritage Oaks Park – Scheduled Uses (Continued)

Program	Days	Times	Months (#)
Youth Soccer	Saturday	9 to 11 am	Sept to Mid-Nov, Feb to June (6.5)
Youth Soccer	Monday to Friday	9 am to 1 pm	June to Aug (3)
Annual Maintenance	Monday to Sunday	sunrise to sunset	Mid-Nov to Jan (2.5)

Heritage Oaks Park: Proposed Hours

September to Mid-November, February to May (6.5 months)		
<u>Days</u>	<u>Morning</u>	<u>Afternoon/Evening</u>
Monday to Sunday	6 to 9 am	
Saturday and Sunday		4 pm to sunset
Monday through Friday		5:30 pm to sunset
June to August (3 months)		
<u>Days</u>	<u>Morning</u>	<u>Afternoon/Evening</u>
Monday to Sunday	6 to 9 am	4 pm to sunset

Pros

- Close to restrooms
- Available benches and shade
- Variety of terrain available
- More available and consistent hours
- Located farther in south side of town

Cons

- Will likely require a more substantial fence along Portland Avenue
- Possible negative impact to turf conditions/maintenance
- Limited parking

Off-Leash Hours Program Cost

While the off-leash hours program will cost less than a dedicated fenced-in dog park, there are some expected costs to start and maintain the pilot program. Expenses include staff time for set-up and maintenance, as well as materials. Here is a sample list of expected costs including estimates for a 12month pilot program:

Signs, 18” x 24,” purchase and installation (7)	\$1,350
Dog bag dispenser purchase (7)	\$2,450
Dog bag dispenser maintenance (1-roll per station/mo.)	<u>\$3,300</u>
	Total \$7,100

Funding for this program is available in the existing Park Maintenance operating budget

Measuring Success

As a pilot program, staff will evaluate its feasibility as an ongoing program. Factors that will be taken into consideration over the course of the pilot program will include: 1) feedback from residents and users regarding the program; 2) evaluation of incidents reported to Animal Control and the Police Department; 3) evaluation of actual cost vs expected costs; 4) legal issues; 5) field conditions and 6) attendance.

The proposed pilot period would allow for the program to be evaluated through all four seasons of the year. Experiencing the program through the different weather and field conditions will allow for a more comprehensive evaluation.

Fenced-in Dog Park – Separate Proposal

While staff and the PARC have determined that McKenzie Park is a feasible option to consider as a fenced-in dog park, the PARC supported the Subcommittee’s recommendation to further work with staff. At the November 13, 2019 meeting, PARC recommended South Lincoln Park as a second alternative to be considered.

The potential cost to design and develop a dog park is earmarked for FY 2020-21. The budget allows up to \$250,000. The funds will not be officially allocated until the project and estimate is approved by City Council. The source of funds is from Park in Lieu Funds. The approval process will include the solicitation of public input on aspects such as location, design and programming that will be facilitated months in advance of construction. A landscape architect will be hired by staff to design and estimate the cost of the project. The process will include review by the PARC and City Council.

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

McKenzie Park

Staff and the PARC have identified a location which meets many of the criteria for a dog park, with the exception of size. The location includes a portion of McKenzie Park that borders on Fremont Avenue and Altos Oaks Drive. The site is approximately 7,700 square feet of usable space. 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.

The Subcommittee believes that the existing traffic is likely to contribute more noise than a dog park.

Pros

- No contiguous residential properties
- Driving access without the need to go on residential streets
- Adjacent parking
- The location is not currently being used for specific organized parks or recreation programs
- There are restrooms serving both sides of McKenzie Park (east and west)
- The location is easily accessible to both north and south Los Altos residents

Cons

- Parking lot is often full - regulations are currently not enforced (Altos Oaks and Commuters)
- Substantial grading and drainage work are needed
- Wide tree coverage, which may adversely impact the drying time in rainy weather, possibly creating a muddy environment
- Possible caterpillar threat – will require signage and mitigation
- Arborist evaluation upon design – possible impact to trees
- Fencing complexity because of an irregular boundary
- Removal of outdated playground climber
- Possible negative impact to turf conditions/maintenance

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. There is ample parking immediately adjacent to the park. The properties closest to the park, are churches, separated by Lincoln Avenue with angled parking on both sides. At its regular meeting of February 3, 2020, the Subcommittee recommended reducing the size to 6,400 square feet. This location could accommodate a two-zone fenced-in dog park. There are no Parks and Recreation Department activities on this site, current or planned.

Pros

- Adequate drainage
- Fewer trees
- May dry out quicker during rainy season
- Parking is more than ample during the week
- Proximity to downtown businesses and proximity to major expressway
- Public restrooms available nearby in Shoup Park
- Less grading and land preparation
- Any noise from a dog park is not likely to be greater than that already generated by traffic on Foothill Expressway

Cons

- Potential parking issues on Sunday, which could be 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
- Impact to Chamber of Commerce restrooms (can be mitigated)

- Close proximity to Foothill Expressway – limits play with balls and Frisbees

Dog Park Rules and Signage

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.

ADA Considerations

The City of Los Altos is required to meet the standards for accessibility in public facility design in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Public Outreach

At a special meeting on December 11, 2019, the PARC established the following public workshop schedule:

Wednesday, February 12, from 7 to 8 pm and 8 to 9 pm
Garden House – Informational Presentation at 7 and 8 pm

Saturday, February 29, from 10 am to 11 am and 11 am to 12 pm
Grant Park Multi-Purpose Room - Informational Presentation at 10 am and 11 am

The workshops are intended to engage and will be promoted and designed to solicit input from neighbors, dog owners and the general public. The PARC scheduled a special meeting on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, to discuss a final recommendation for City Council, related to the proposed fenced-in dog parks and pilot off-leash hours.

Attachments:

- A. Dog Park Survey
- B. May 9, 2018 Subcommittee Report
- C. February 12, 2019 City Council Staff and Subcommittee Report
- D. April 10, 2019 Subcommittee Report