

COMMITTEE ON DOG MANAGEMENT IN SAN MATEO COUNTY PARKS

Mission: To provide healthy spaces for humans and canines, to promote positive experiences for dogs and other park users and to protect natural resources in San Mateo County Parks

Notes from Meeting

June 19, 2017

Building 455 County Center, Redwood City - 4th Floor

Members Present: Neil Merrilees, Nic Erridge, Jim Sullivan, Christine Corwin, Jerry Hearn, Darrick Emil, Faye Brophy, Chris Johnson

Staff: Sarah Birkeland, Carla Schoof, Pat Brown, Lori Mrizek

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Neil Merrilies at 2:30 PM.

Facilitator Pat Brown reviewed the proposed agenda.

The notes from the May 15th meeting were approved as presented.

Members affirmed 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

Members also confirmed their commitment to consensus decision-making (with voting as a backup).

No members of the public were present and there were no member updates.

Work on Policy Recommendations

The Committee continued to work on the development of a set of policy recommendations to guide the Park Department in managing dogs in parks.

1. Overarching policy draft – **approved by consensus at the May 15th meeting** to present for community input

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.

2. Secondary policies

These secondary policies are grounded in materials the Committee has received from water quality and natural resource management experts, specialists in dog behavior, and other land management agencies who are managing dog access. They also reflect input the Committee has received from the public.

NOTE: The policies in blue below reflect new or additional language.

1. *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 the dog user responsibilities
 - d) Foster partnerships with dog and neighborhood organizations to support the messaging around appropriate activities and behaviors for dogs and their owners in parks.

Committee agreed that this language is acceptable to publish for community feedback- 6/19/17

2. 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
 - c) Continue to provide areas where dogs are prohibited

Committee would like to review this language before approving for public input

3. Avoidance of conflicts: Avoid conflicts with established uses within the park, such as equestrian use, and with adjacent land uses, such as agriculture.

Committee agreed that this language is acceptable to publish for community feedback – 6/19/17

4. 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.

- ***Committee agreed that this language is acceptable to publish for community feedback – 6/19/17.***

5. *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.

- a) Ensure that impacts to sensitive resources and disturbance to wildlife is avoided or minimized.
- b) Dogs should not be permitted to harass wildlife. Dogs should not be allowed to dig in the ground in any area in which dog access is permitted.
- c) Dogs should not be allowed to enter any sensitive habitat areas, such as riparian corridors, marshes, ponds or areas that are under restoration or are inhabited by species of special concern.
Need to define riparian
- d) In areas where dogs are allowed, sensitive habitats should be clearly demarcated with signage and fencing, where appropriate.
- e) Unless otherwise provided for, dogs should be constrained to trails at all times.
- f) Dog waste must be bagged and deposited in a trash receptacle. Do not leave bagged waste on the ground at any time.
- g) Appropriate waste containers and bags should be located at every access point to parks in which dog access is allowed. Such containers should be serviced on a regular basis in order to function effectively to manage dog waste.

Discussed 6/19/17 but not approved – needs further discussion

The following draft policies will be discussed at the July Committee meeting:

- 6. *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
 - d) Ensure that all other policies regarding managing dog access can be met.
- 7. *Enforcement:* Enforcement mechanisms should be adequate to deter behavior that is not consistent with dog ordinances intended to protect park users and resources. Consider a system of fines for infractions, with escalating fines for repeat offenders.
- 8. *Playgrounds and play areas:* Dogs should not enter playground or play areas (enclosed or unenclosed).

9. *Leashes*: Dogs must be leashed at all times, unless otherwise provided. The leash must be 6' long or less. [Self-retracting leashes are allowed with a maximum extended length of 25 feet.](#)
10. *Number of dogs per person*: Visitors may have no more than three (3) dogs per person.

Process for Community Input on Proposed Policies

Carla presented the Committee with a summary of issues so far identified by community members in meetings, emails and public comments at Committee meetings.

Issues Identified Through Public Meetings and Comments

1. Safety:
 - a. For park users: concerns about injury and harm to themselves or their children from aggressive dogs.
 - b. Concerns about visiting parks without a dog, particularly from women (don't feel safe without dog).
 - c. For equestrians: concern that there is the potential for injury to rider, horse, or dog from encounters with dogs that are not well-controlled.
2. Quality of the park experience:
 - a. Desire to experience parks with dogs
 - b. Want serenity of parks without dogs
 - c. Like the idea of dogs, horses and people on trails
 - d. Concern by those who are afraid of dogs (adults and youth)
 - e. Alignment of adjacent lands and use – complimentary
3. Historic and/or established uses:
 - a. Concern that there will be a loss of opportunities for equestrians if dogs are introduced to Wunderlich or Huddart Parks.
4. Commercial dog walking:
 - a. Request that SMC Parks consider allowing commercial dog walking and providing trail design that accommodates commercial dog walking.
 - b. Request that SMC Parks not allow commercial dog walking.
5. Dogs off leash
 - a. Request that dogs be allowed off leash.
 - b. Request that only on-leash dog access be allowed.
 - c. Request that SMC Parks consider time-of-day allowances and restrictions – as just one example, that mornings or evenings be open to dogs off leash, but other times be restricted to dogs on leash.
 - d. Requests for dog park (enclosed area for dogs off-leash)
6. Dog waste
 - a. Concern that allowing dogs will introduce dog waste into Parks with its adverse effects on Parks resources and the park user's experience.

- b. Concern that Parks staff will have to deal with dog waste/won't have adequate resources to address dog waste.
 - c. Concern that adequate infrastructure won't be provided to address dog waste.
7. Enforcement
- a. Concern that there will not be adequate staff to enforce
8. Dog Access
- a. Desires access to all parks
 - b. Desires access to some parks

In upcoming Committee meetings we will be discussing the approach to soliciting community input on the proposed policy recommendations. We are working on putting together information about the process used by the Committee to learn about key issues, identify best practices in San Mateo County and elsewhere and to work to find language that will be helpful to the Park Department as it makes decisions about dogs in San Mateo County parks.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.