

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

March 20, 2017

Building 455 County Center, Redwood City
1st Floor, Room 101 – 2:30-4:00 PM

Committee Members Present: Rafael Avendano, Faye Brophy, Christine Corwin, Nic Erridge, Aaron Gonzales, Jerry Hearn, Chris Johnson, Neil Merrilees, Jim Sullivan
Staff: Sarah Birkeland, Brenda Bennett, Carla Schoof
Facilitator: Pat Brown

Welcome, Introductions

Chair Neil Merrilees opened the meeting and asked Committee members and alternates to introduce themselves.

Pat Brown briefly reviewed the process map and agenda and reminded committee members that all documents provided to the group are posted on Parks Department website. She reminded the Committee of its group agreements and the goal of working for consensus as decisions are being made.

Public Comment

Several community members addressed the Committee expressing their concerns about the following issues:

- opening parks to dogs who are predators by nature and may disrupt the presence of wild life
- potential conflicts between dogs and horses
- ilimited opportunities for equestrians to access parks

Chair and Member Reports

- Jim spoke briefly about his tour of the Sheriff's Honor Camp site
- Nic noted that the emails that have been sent to date seem to point to the need to limit dog access but the community meetings were more in favor of expanding access

Questions/Comments on Community Input

Committee members expressed appreciation for community members who submitted thoughtful expressions of concern via email and they noted that this input must be encouraged to continue throughout the process of developing and finalizing recommendations. The compared the input from community meetings (mostly supportive of increasing access for dogs) and the emails that largely supported the status quo.

Proposed approach to next phase of Committee Work

Sarah Birkeland, Acting Parks Department Director, proposed the following approach for the Committee's consideration.

1. **Craft broad policy statement** (*Statement of intent*)
 - Initially the Committee should review existing policy statements and the Committee's own mission statement and then begin to craft a broad policy statement to guide the Department relative to dogs in SMC parks.
2. **Develop specific policy guidelines** (*Relates to specific issues heard by the Committee*)
 - Are there considerations that need to be added, changed, or dropped?
 - Is the order of these considerations important? Should some considerations be applied first as an initial screen?
 - Recognize that the policy statement and considerations/implementation guidelines can be refined through application and an iterative process. [*Parks - consider how these considerations and this process step can be captured. E.g., through a list and narrative? A decision matrix?*]
3. **Consider whether to design & recommend a pilot project** (*Opportunity to test policy in an iterative process*)
 - Discuss whether the Committee should recommend implementation of the Dog Management Policy through identification of a pilot site. If so, next steps could include:
 - Working with staff to use the considerations/implementation guidelines to evaluate potential park sites. Discussion of analysis and information gathering tasks [*Do we start with a limited selection of obvious candidates, or evaluate all parks? Can we structure the implementation guidelines so that they take us quickly and efficiently to a few potential park pilot sites for more detailed analysis?*]
 - Considering how public input gathered to date plays a role and how it can play a role in future.
4. **Determine if recommendations require ordinance change**
 - Currently, the County ordinance does not allow for dogs in parks. Any changes recommended by this Committee that would require enforcement would require a change in the ordinance.

After discussion, Committee members unanimously approved this approach to developing a recommendation for the Parks Commission.

Review Considerations/Implementation Guidelines Identified by Committee and approved at the December 2016 Committee meeting.

Sarah then reviewed the following information previously approved by the Committee. In each issue area, she provided the Committee with sample policy language and in some areas she suggested guidance on how the issue may influence the development of a pilot project.

a) Provide a variety of visitor experiences and locations

- Consider front and backcountry experiences
- Consider on leash and off leash
- Continue to provide areas where dogs are prohibited
- Consider opportunities

Sample policy: Provide a variety of visitor experiences and locations that includes front and backcountry experiences and on- and off-leash opportunities. Continue to provide areas where dogs are prohibited.

b) Throughout the county where there is demand

- Consider opportunities adjacent to urban areas/neighborhoods where there is demand for dog walking
- Consider sensible connection with adjacent properties: both dog-friendly and dog prohibited areas.

Sample Policy: Consider public demand when evaluating areas for potential dog access.

Pilot = Analyze demand based on public input. Develop staff analysis of relationships between SMC parks and adjacent properties.

c) Protect natural and cultural resources and natural process --avoid impacts on sensitive habitat

- Consider the integrity of the habitat – is it disturbed from past uses?
- Very sensitive?

Sample Policy: Ensure that damage to sensitive resources will be avoided or minimized.

Pilot = Develop staff analysis of sensitive species and habitats within SMC parks.

d) Avoid visitor (use) conflicts and conflicts with adjacent land uses (agriculture)

- Consider levels of use, types of uses and size of park/trail
- Consider zoning or uses by day of week and time of day
- Consider adequate parking and facilities for increased demand
- Consider education such as etiquette on multi-use trail and off-leash, voice and sight control training.
- Consider a tag or certification process for people who want to walk their dog off leash
- Consider a permitting process for commercial dog walkers

Sample Policy: Provide educational materials in connection with introducing dog access where it did not exist before.

Pilot = Test allowing use by time of day? Consider special tag for off-lease use? Etc.

e) Clear (ex: signage), well designed (ex: Parking) and enforceable

- Consider budget and staffing: are they adequate for this additional use?
- Are staff members adequately trained to enforce new uses?
- Can we partner with nonprofit organizations and other groups on training and educational signage?

Sample Policy: Encourage partnerships to facilitate training, education, and signage. Budget, staffing, and staff training should be adequate to manage new use and meet policy objectives.

Pilot = Develop staff training materials. Develop volunteer or other partnership for implementation.

f) History of dog use prior to park acquisition

- What types of uses occurred prior to park acquisition/transfer?

Sarah stressed that the sample policies were provided to show the Committee how it might address specific issue areas that relate to a broad policy statement about dogs in parks.

Initial discussion of a policy statement

The Committee then was asked to take a look at its mission statement, originally developed as an internal statement to guide its work. Several times recently, the mission statement was identified as the kind of language that could be contained in a broad policy statement to guide the Parks Department in decisions about dogs in parks.

Committee members were asked to comment on the mission statement. If it were to be considered the basis for a policy recommendation, what would need to be changed?

Rafael suggested that Committee members review a visitors study posted on the Parks Website: <http://parks.smcgov.org/press-release/study-shows-smc-parks-valued-exercise-and-recreation-opportunities> He noted it is a very detailed report that was conducted ethically and strategically representing the interests of many of our constituents who cannot make our meetings due to work, transportation or other forms of access or opportunities.

Review Committee mission statement: *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*

The following ideas were contributed by Committee members:

- Proactive
- Reflect intention to expand current level of dog access
- In concert with/considering public input
- Equity
- Add “trails” to existing language

Committee members were asked to think about the elements of a broad statement of intention relating to dogs in parks and come prepared to discuss their ideas at the next meeting. Some suggested they might draft and submit language prior to the meeting.

Public Comments

- Suggest that Committee provide information about its intentions as soon as possible to alleviate fears in the community
- Get information about current dog access to parks in the county
- Look at how other jurisdictions handle mixed uses (walkers, bikes, horses, dogs)

Confirm Agreements/Reporting out/Appreciations

Today the Committee received and discussed suggestions about how to approach the recommendation development segment of its work. An approach was approved and the next step will be to work on a broad statement of policy that will be supplemented by more specific policy guidelines relating to key issues. The April meeting will focus on the broad statement of intention.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 PM.