

**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*

**Meeting Notes**

May 15, 2017

Building 455 County Center, Redwood City - 4<sup>th</sup> Floor

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

Staff: Sarah Birkeland, Carla Schoof, Pat Brown

Neil Merrilees called the meeting to order at 2:35 PM.

The notes from the April 17<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved as submitted.

Members reviewed the group agreements and goal of action by consensus.

**Public Comment**

One member of the community spoke to the Committee about the need to continue to prohibit dog access in the four parks currently used by horses. She also suggested using data from surrounding park and open space agencies rather than conducting a pilot program in San Mateo County.

**Member Sharing**

Jim Sullivan reminded the group that the Quarry Park community meeting for the purpose of updating the master plan was scheduled for Tuesday evening, 5/16 at El Granada School.

**Revised Committee Timeline**

Sarah reviewed the following modified Committee Timeline with the group. Members supported the extension of time allocated to policy development and agreed with the concept of a pilot program advisory group.

- **May:** approve a draft overarching policy statement and begin work on the list of more specific (secondary) policies that will be key in assuring that the intention of the overarching policy is clear and implementable.
- **June:** continue work on secondary policies
- **July:** complete work on secondary policies
- **August:** prepare to gather community input on draft policy recommendations
- **September:** conduct community meetings and gather other feedback on recommended policy statements
- **October:** consider feedback received and modify recommended policies as needed
- **November:** present proposed policy recommendations to the Parks Commission for feedback and include the recommendation that a pilot program precede the formal adoption of the policies

### **Sources of information during a Policy Development Process**

Sarah Birkeland then reminded the Committee of the need to consider community input as one of a number of sources of information needed in the process of policy development. The extensive information gathering process used by this Committee as it was beginning its work provided an excellent factual resource for considering the questions associated with policy development. The Committee itself, constructed to represent the perspectives of key stakeholder groups, is another approach to ensuring the policy recommendations will reflect the variety of interests that must be considered. Finally, thoughtful design of the process itself, which invites ongoing community input and “focused” input at two points (as deliberations started and as draft recommendations have been developed) encourages interested community members to share their thinking with the Committee.

### **Discussion of Broad Policy Recommendation**

There are many approaches to writing policy and a great degree of flexibility, but a typical structure is to have a broad policy statement, followed by more specific guidance. The aim is to provide an organization-level (in this case the San Mateo County Park Department,) policy that describes acceptable methods, approaches, and/or behaviors.

Faye, Christine, Chris volunteered at the April meeting to refine the overarching policy recommendation that had been discussed. They worked to have a succinct and clear statement of intention to guide the Park Department in decision-making. They presented the following draft:

***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.***

### **Approval of Draft Policy Recommendation**

Committee members talked about the statement and came to consensus to move forward in seeking community feedback about it.

### **Determine which Secondary Policy Recommendations the Committee will develop**

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 that are managing dog access. They also reflect input the Committee has received from the public.

The Committee then reviewed the list (with draft policy language developed by Sarah Birkeland) of potential “secondary” policy recommendations that would guide the Park Department in specific areas related to dog access.

The Committee agreed to address the following topics:

i. Education	vi. Enforcement
ii. Variety of experiences	vii. Playgrounds and play areas
iii. Pre-existing uses	viii. Leashes
iv. Considering new areas for dog access	ix. Number of dogs per person
v. Protection of natural resources	

Members reviewed the proposed language for the nine topical areas one at a time. They determined that some areas need more work before being presented for community feedback.

***Policy goals and guidelines for managing dog use in SMC Parks:***

1. *Education*: Education is essential to effectively managing dog access and avoiding user conflicts. Provide clear signage regarding the responsibilities of park users and explore the use of other media to promote visitor education. Partnerships are a valuable tool for furthering park visitor education and should be fostered.

*Jerry will work on the Education Policy draft:*

- *Educational efforts should try to help community members understand the reason(s) why a rule/restriction exists*
- *The policy will emphasize the need for “a positive approach” to messaging information*

2. *Variety of experiences*: Provide a variety of visitor experiences and locations that considers both front and backcountry experiences and on and off-leash opportunities. Continue to provide areas where dogs are prohibited.

*Jerry and Neil will refine the language for “variety of experiences”.*

3. *Pre-existing uses*: Where dog use occurred prior to a transfer or acquisition of park property, favor continuing that use, if other policies and objectives can also be met.

*Current language is acceptable to publish for community feedback.*

4. *When considering new areas for dog access*:

- a. Avoid conflicts with established uses within the park, such as equestrian use, and with adjacent land uses, such as agriculture.
- b. Look for opportunities adjacent to urban areas and neighborhoods where there is demand for dog walking.
- c. Ensure adequate staffing, staff training, and facilities can be provided to effectively manage the new use and address any increase in demand.

*Language added to first draft;*

- d. *Ensure that other policies and objectives can also be met.*
- e. *Create stand-alone policy for avoiding conflicts. (Sarah)*

5. *Protection of natural resources*: Ensure that damage to sensitive resources and disturbance to wildlife is avoided or minimized.
  - a. Dogs should not be permitted to harass wildlife.
  - b. Dogs should not be permitted in marshes, streams, ponds, or other sensitive areas.
  - c. Dog waste must be bagged and deposited in a trash receptacle. Do not leave bagged waste on the ground at any time.

*Jerry will review this proposed policy and bring forward any proposed changes.*

The following proposed policy recommendations will be discussed for the first time at the next Committee meeting.

6. *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.
7. *Playgrounds and play areas*: Dogs should not enter playground or play areas (enclosed or unenclosed).
8. *Leashes*: Dogs must be leashed at all times, unless otherwise provided. The leash must be 6' long or less.
9. *Number of dogs per person*: Visitors may have no more than three (3) dogs per person.

Note: the specific suggested guidelines regarding *leashes* and *number of dogs per person* are based on the guidelines used in other park areas in the region.

The next meeting on June 19<sup>th</sup> will focus on “secondary” policy recommendations that will be presented, along with the overarching policy recommendation, to the public for feedback later this year.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 PM.