



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: February 25, 2015

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Administration Division, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Draft Off Leash Dog Areas Feasibility Study

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Commission receives a presentation on the Draft Off Leash Dog Areas Feasibility Study and recommends further evaluation of Dwight Murphy Field, Ortega Park, MacKenzie Park, and the Sheffield Open Space for off leash dog facilities.

DISCUSSION:

The Parks and Recreation Department manages a diverse parks system of almost 1,600 acres. This includes 360 acres of developed parkland and 1,183 acres of open space. Of the total open space acreage, only an estimated 350 acres is accessible due to steep slopes and undeveloped terrain. Within this system of parks, dogs are allowed on leash with two exceptions: Plaza de la Guerra and the beach from the Shoreline Park Steps to the easterly city limit. The Douglas Family Preserve, the beach between Arroyo Burro Estuary and the Shoreline Park Steps, Hale Park, and privately operated Elings Park provide an estimated 305 acres of unfenced dog off leash recreation.

In fall 2014, the Parks and Recreation Department (Department) initiated a review of City park and recreation facilities for the potential to develop additional off leash dog facilities. To complete the review, as discussed in the attached draft *Off Leash Dog Areas Feasibility Study*, staff conducted research related to off leash areas in other communities, completed field visits to off leash locations in the Santa Barbara south coast, developed general considerations for the development of new off leash facilities, and evaluated the feasibility of expanding recreation to include off leash dog areas in City parks and recreation facilities. Staff completed an internal review of the draft study, discussed the study findings with City Animal Control Officers, and met with the Public Works Department which owns the Sheffield Reservoir Open Space. Concurrent with this effort, the Department updated its FY 2016-2021 Capital Improvement Program to include a funding request for park improvements to accommodate off leash dog areas.

Considerations for Off Leash Locations

As outlined in further detail in the draft Study, there are a number of design and management considerations for developing off leash dog areas. These include site location and size, fencing requirements, site amenities, vegetation, trees and turf management, parking, neighborhood compatibility, park compatibility and programming. For Santa Barbara, staff determined that the minimum size of an off leash area within an established park would be 1/3 acre, but a more ideal size would be up to 1 acre. In addition, based on other communities and the Department's experience with the off leash areas of the Douglas Family Preserve and beach, staff determined that fenced off leash areas would be most suitable to minimize the potential for conflict with other park uses, protect park resources, facilitate site management and enforcement, and enhance safety for both dogs and park users. Neighborhood compatibility issues included noise and need for parking. Any new off leash area would include some level of amenities depending on the location and require additional turf and overall park management.

Evaluation of Existing Parks and Open Spaces

As outlined in the attached report, staff evaluated 49 park and open space areas as well as the Sheffield Open Space for the development of off leash dog recreation. After an initial review, many of these areas were not considered further, due to potential conflicts with other recreational uses, existing intensity of park use, park location, site size, presence of sensitive resources, and concerns about neighborhood compatibility. Since there are existing off leash areas located on the Mesa and in Las Positas Valley, staff also prioritized the identification of locations that would serve other areas of the City.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Based on its review, the Department recommends further evaluation of Dwight Murphy Field, Ortega Park, MacKenzie Park, and the Sheffield Open Space as potential locations for fenced off leash dog facilities. These locations could accommodate a fenced area that could also be compatible with other park uses and the surrounding neighborhood. Further review includes developing conceptual designs for site improvements, neighborhood meetings with stakeholders and residents for each park location, technical studies, and City design review and permitting. Further evaluation is dependent on funding.

ATTACHMENT: Draft Off Leash Dog Areas Feasibility Study, February 19, 2015

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