



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: April 24, 2019
TO: Parks and Recreation Commission
FROM: Administration Division, Parks and Recreation Department
SUBJECT: Parks and Recreation Facility Public Use and Misuse Update

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Commission receive an update on public use and misuse issues at City parks and recreation facilities.

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this report is to provide the Commission with an update on public use and misuse of parks and recreation facilities, and ongoing efforts to manage the associated impacts. The City Council will receive a comprehensive report on the citywide response to homelessness on Tuesday, April 30.

In a report to the Parks and Recreation Commission in December 2016 and subsequent update in February 2017, the Department outlined the range of issues and impacts associated with park misuse, vandalism, and overnight occupancy. Impacts included the public perception and experience with unsafe park conditions, lost revenue due to declined program participation and facility rentals, impacts to department staff, and increased costs for clean-ups and repairs. In addition, the need for staff resources for park clean-ups diverts from their ability to maintain and enhance park amenities.

Since 2017, these impacts have grown, along with reduced revenue from facility rentals and program participation, as community members and visitors avoid recreation areas as a result of encampments and aggressive behavior.

Parks Division

Parks Division staff resources are frequently redirected to address encampment clean-ups, as opposed to completing regular maintenance needs for the 60 parks and facilities within the city. Since 2016, encampment clean-up has grown specifically in the areas identified in the table below:

Location	2016		2017		2018	
	Camps	Hours	Camps	Hours	Camps	Hours
DFP	6	21	5	16	8	61
Oak Park	4	4	5	11	4	6
Castillo Underpass	6	35	2	9	4	26
East Beach - (Stearns Wharf - Bird Refuge)	3	8	2	11	21	37
La Mesa Park	1	1	4	7	3	7
Fig Tree	8	20	11	19	15	46
Shoreline	2	1	5	8	3	2
Plaza Vera Cruz	16	41	18	31	26	58
Garden Street Parking Lot	3	2	3	1	0	0
Santa Barbara St & Gray Ave.	4	2	3	7	0	0
MacKenzie Park	28	51	30	44	35	48
Bird Refuge	8	45	4	16	3	15
Micheltorena Overpass	3	3	3	6	0	0
TOTALS	92	234	95	186	122	306
				TOTAL CAMPS	309	
				TOTAL HOURS	726	

While this represents just over 700 hours for the last three years, the staff time spent addressing misuse issues during regular and ongoing park maintenance far exceeds these hours. Parks staff are exposed to verbal abuse and health and safety concerns associated with human waste, and daily tasks that include excessive trash removal and safe disposal of used syringes.

Parks staff, using a combination of analytical tools, including Scantron data, staff observations, account reconciliation, and contractual agreements for services, estimate the annual cost, including encampment clean-up, to be \$565,080.

Park Rangers also play a critical role in supporting Parks Division and Recreation Division. It is estimated that the equivalent of 65% of one Park Ranger's time is spent responding to the impacts of misuse of public parks and recreation facilities.

Recreation Division

The Recreation Division is charged with generating revenue to support and provide high quality programs for youth and adults, as well as coordinating community special events and rentals. Of the 60 park and recreation facilities within the City, over 30% are impacted by homeless activity, including sport fields where youth and adult programs are conducted and beachfront rental facilities.

Recreation staff have frequent interactions with the homeless that negatively impact the ability to develop and implement youth and adult programs in City recreation facilities, sports fields, and parks, as well as coordinate community special events and facility rentals.

As a result of homeless/transient misuse, some parents choose to withdraw their child from recreation programming and find alternative service providers in the community. Potential clients looking to rent a beachfront facility for a private event or gathering are often dismayed to find the homeless camped out on patios, and trash and human waste in the surrounding landscape. The staff cost associated with homeless related issues for the Recreation Division is estimated at \$53,054 per year.

Creeks Division

City creek areas are regularly misused for human habitation. The Creeks Division allocates significant time and resources into cleaning trash and encampments located in and around watercourses to improve water quality and habitat.

The Code Enforcement Officer spends 40% of his time locating, posting and managing contract clean-up of encampment sites, the Creeks Division annually funds and manages a \$180,000 contract to remove approximately 502 encampments, litter, and other pollutants from City creeks and beaches, and expends \$3,720 for fencing and two portable restrooms deployed in locations with chronic fecal incidents.

Since 2014, the number of encampment site clean-ups and the volume of removed litter and pollutants has steadily increased as noted in the table below.

DATA TYPE	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	TOTALS
Sites	872	908	1,180	1,294	1,508	5,762
Pounds	83,800	87,680	134,360	84,502	113,727	504,069

Department Impact Summary

Parks and Recreation Department data shows that 21,624 staff hours, at a cost of \$1,275,345, were spent between January 2017 and December 2018 addressing issues related to misuse of Park land and facilities by homeless individuals. This was in addition to direct costs and lost revenue of over \$406,440.

Parks and Recreation Department Impact			
<u>Division Staffing</u>	Cost	Hours	FTE
Parks			
• Operations	\$ 676,904	10,800	5.19
• Encampment Clean-Up	\$ 40,000	984	0.47
• Restroom Maintenance	\$ 244,152	3,190	1.53
• Park Rangers	\$ 122,437	2,704	1.30
Recreation	\$ 106,107	2,282	1.10
Creeks	\$ 85,744	1,664	0.80
	\$ 1,275,345	21,624	10.40
<u>Contract Work</u>			
Creeks	\$ 360,000		
<u>Equipment</u>			
Parks and Recreation	\$ 8,500		
Creeks	\$ 7,440		
	\$ 15,940		
<u>Lost Revenue</u>			
Recreation	\$ 30,500		
TOTAL	\$ 1,681,785	21,624	10.40

Challenges/Constraints

While the Department strives to ensure all parks and recreation facilities are clean and ready for community use, there are ongoing challenges in managing misuse impacts. These include: limited staffing and funding; staff safety and health concerns associated with cleaning up human waste and safely disposing of used syringes; and lack of enforcement power and prosecution. Additionally, there is resistance and apathy among the homeless to citation/arrest/incarceration. Often they are simply moved from one location to another with no real resolution.

Management Strategies

Despite the challenges, the Department works with other agencies and departments to improve communication and coordination, and identify opportunities to reduce negative misuse impacts.

Communication and Coordination

The Creeks Division participates in quarterly meetings with staff from the District Attorney's Office, Environmental Services, SBPD, and Cal Trans to discuss multijurisdictional hotspots and solutions, which has greatly improved the ability to coordinate clean-up efforts. Additionally, the Parks and Recreation Divisions meet quarterly with SBPD Beat Coordinators and Restorative Policing Officers to share observations, communicate challenges, and strategize on how to maximize resources to reduce misuse in parks and recreation facilities. The Recreation Division provides the SBPD and Park Rangers with quarterly calendars coinciding with peak camp and program activity to proactively deter misuse behaviors scheduled in parks or recreation facilities where misuse often occurs.

Increasing Activity in Parks

The Recreation Division actively works with local sport organizations, such as PONY Baseball, Santa Barbara Special Olympics, and a variety of youth soccer programs, to maximize activity in parks and deter misuse behavior. For instance, the installation of a temporary homerun fence at Ortega Park provided PONY Baseball with a resource to expand practices at this location, and Revolution youth soccer league hosts weekend games at Ortega Park. The increased use of sports fields reduces the amount of misuse behavior at the park.

Defining and Enforcing Reservable and Permitted Locations

The Department recently implemented improvements to define reserved and permitted locations for the patios at Chase Palm Park Center, Carousel House, and MacKenzie Center. Temporary cables were installed at these locations to define the reservable space and prevent individuals from gathering on the patios with shopping carts containing large volumes of personal belongings or illegal overnight camping. The cable system is easily removed when the facility is shown to potential clients or during a permitted event. Signage that includes facility hours and use by permit only (S.B.M.C 15.16.220) is included on the cables to assist with enforcement. Additionally, new signage and the consistent closure of the parking lot swing gate to coincide with the park hours for La Mesa Park was implemented in October 2018. This operational change decreased number of illegal overnight camping at the park and alleviated neighborhood concerns regarding misuse and illegal behavior.

Enhanced Management Options

As part of a citywide effort to increase response and improve management of misuse and homeless issues, the Department has identified a number of options. These include: standardized opening and closing times for park sites to support enforcement of park hours; increased contract funding to target encampment clean-up; and hiring an additional Park Ranger to legally post and supervise encampment clean-up, monitor special events, and lock park gates and restrooms daily.

The Department is currently working on amendments to the Municipal Code to standardize park hours and update park signage. The Fiscal Year 2020 operating budget includes \$20,000 within the Environmental Services Division for contract support with encampment and trash cleanups. Although not proposed as part of the Fiscal Year 2020 budget, an additional Park Ranger would require \$81,441 annually.

Next Steps

On April 30, 2019, the City Council will receive a report from staff on City efforts to manage homelessness and its associated impacts on the community, and provide direction to staff on potential options to further manager homeless related-impacts

SUBMITTED BY: Rich Hanna, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director

APPROVED BY: Jill E. Zachary, Parks and Recreation Director