



**DATE:** April 22, 2014

**CATEGORY:** New Business

**DEPT.:** Community Services

**TITLE:** **Off-Leash Dog Venues**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Parks and Recreation Commission recommend:

1. Create two fenced off-leash dog areas, one at Rengstorff Park and another on City land on the southwest corner of Latham Street and South Shoreline Boulevard. Also, have staff hold further meetings to determine rules and hours under the authority of the Community Services Director.
2. Designate unfenced off-leash dog areas for a one-year trial at Cuesta and Whisman Parks with staff being directed to hold public meetings to discuss the logistics, time, and establish rules under the authority of the Community Services Director.

### **BACKGROUND**

In late 2013, the Council asked the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) to explore issues related to dog parks. On February 12, 2014, the PRC held a public meeting to gather community input and provide recommendations to the City Council on fenced dog parks and off-leash dog areas (Attachment 1). The PRC reviewed Mountain View's current rules for dogs and off-leash training areas, a survey of other jurisdictions with off-leash areas, and reviewed and evaluated potential sites for fenced dog areas at Cuesta, Rengstorff, Cooper, and Whisman Parks and other potential areas.

Mountain View currently has one 0.59-acre fenced off-leash dog park for its population. National standards recommend one dog park per 50,000 residents or one more for a community Mountain View's size. The dog park is located at the north end of Shoreline Boulevard on North Road. Its location at the north end of the City can make access difficult for residents. Recently, a small dog park was installed by the developer of San Antonio Center that is available for public use.

A survey of 30 agencies in Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Alameda counties showed every agency has at least one fenced park. Foster City, San Carlos, Menlo Park, and San Francisco provide unfenced off-leash areas for dogs. Dogs may be off-leash (but under control) during specified days and hours. Most commonly, these unfenced off-leash areas are permitted Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Foster City has five parks where dogs are permitted off-leash. Their staff reported the unfenced off-leash areas work well, though staff periodically has to educate new users regarding hours of operation.

An August 2013 online City survey with 744 respondents indicated 66.8 percent support for the concept of unfenced off-leash alternatives. Staff identified nine feasible park sites for this activity. The parks included Bubb, Cooper, Cuesta, Eagle, McKelvey, Rengstorff, Sylvan, Thaddeus, and Whisman. The park distribution would provide off-leash opportunities in most neighborhoods. A total of 25 speakers addressed this issue at the February PRC meeting. After listening to their input both for and against unfenced off-leash areas, the PRC recommended a smaller, one-year pilot program at the current off-leash training areas in Cuesta and Whisman Parks.

Staff also evaluated several locations for dedicated fenced off-leash dog parks. Dedicated fenced parks present challenges as many of the large parks are on school district property and cannot be used. Other parks and open space areas abut residential areas. Staff identified the current off-leash training areas at Cuesta, Rengstorff, and Whisman Parks along with the Shoreline Boulevard and Bryant Avenue/Diericx Drive parcels as potential areas for fenced dog parks. After much discussion, the PRC recommended moving forward with fencing the Rengstorff Park area and the open space parcel on the southwest corner of Shoreline Boulevard and Latham Street. It should be noted that there has also been public interest in placing a community garden at this parcel. If this were to be considered, the fenced dog park could be built on the open space parcel located on the northeast corner of Shoreline Boulevard and Church Street. In addition, there has been no direct outreach to neighbors of these sites.

## **DISCUSSION**

Numerous dog owners currently allow their dogs to be off-leash in Mountain View parks in violation of the City Code. This has caused friction with other park users on occasion. Dog owners have requested the City consider the option of providing unfenced off-leash areas in parks.

Mountain View is a fully built-out community with limited public open space that does not already accommodate multiple uses. As a result, locations for dedicated fenced off-leash dog parks present some challenges. The recommended new fenced parks at the

Rengstorff Park off-leash training area by the tennis courts and the Shoreline Boulevard open space parcel abut residential properties. Potential issues of noise could be somewhat mitigated with the installation of a boundary fence between the dog park and residents' backyard fences. Also, hours of operation could be restricted so residents are not disturbed by early morning or late evening activity.

As noted earlier, there are cities that have successful off-leash programs. Rules for these areas normally restrict them to weekday use in the mornings. The benefit of an unfenced area is it allows for other uses of the space later in the day when most park users are present. A one-year pilot program would provide dog advocates an opportunity to demonstrate the viability of this type of park.

Dog owners using unfenced off-leash areas are supposed to have their dogs under control at all times. The challenge can be individual interpretation of what "under control" means. It should mean the owner has voice control over the actions of the dog in all situations and it is trained to respond to verbal commands of stay, down, sit, and no.

A possible option to address concerns regarding dogs' responsiveness to verbal commands might be a simple field examination. This could be conducted by Silicon Valley Animal Control Authority or other provider. If the animal and owner pass, they could be issued a certificate. It is unknown what costs might be associated with this service. Staff could explore this further if desired.

PRC members also recommended that neighborhood meetings be conducted if Council recommends proceeding to discuss specific times, days, and rules related to fenced sites adjacent to neighborhoods and meetings to discuss rules and hours for unfenced off-leash areas.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Unfenced off-leash areas could cost \$250 to \$1,000 per area for signage and dog bag dispensers. Depending on the intensity of use, there could be additional maintenance costs associated with turf renovation.

Fenced off-leash dog parks are significantly more expensive depending on size, linear feet of fencing, type of surfacing, benches, water for dogs and people, trash receptacles, etc.

- Rengstorff Park would require approximately 690 linear feet of fencing, a double-gated entry, and benches. The existing turf can be utilized for the surface.

Construction cost is estimated at \$25,000 to \$30,000. Depending on the intensity of use, additional turf renovation costs could be incurred annually.

- The Shoreline Boulevard parcel would require approximately 840 linear feet of fencing, double-gated entry, water, trash receptacles, and benches. Construction costs vary depending on the type of surface treatment for the dog park. If constructed with minimal improvements of a wood chip surface, the construction costs would be approximately \$35,000 to \$40,000.
- Adding 8,500 square feet of turf with an irrigation system and controller adds approximately \$20,000. Again, depending on intensity of use, additional turf renovation costs would be incurred annually. Installing a synthetic turf surface with irrigation to syringe urine through the carpet adds an estimated \$40,000. Synthetic turf needs replacement every 8 to 10 years.

There currently is no dedicated funding identified for these projects. New fenced dog parks would require ongoing maintenance by staff.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Maintain the current status of Mountain View's dog policy and make no changes regarding additional fenced dog parks and unfenced off-leash dog areas.
2. Direct staff to investigate other potential areas for fenced dog parks, other than those recommended.
3. Direct staff to investigate other unfenced off-leash areas, other than those recommended.
4. Provide other direction.

**PUBLIC NOTICING**

Agenda posting and placement on City website and Community Services Department web page, announcement in the *Mountain View Voice* and via [Nextdoor.com](http://Nextdoor.com) with notices posted at Cuesta, Rengstorff, and Whisman Parks.

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BH/2/CAM  
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Attachment: 1. February 12, 2014 Parks and Recreation Commission Report