

# Meeting Minutes from Community Discussion of Proposed Off-Leash Dog Use at Sacramento Field

Wednesday, May 22, 2019

- Introduction (staff)
  - Daniel Wolf (Community Development Department) provided some background about how the meeting came about:
    - At the end of the community planning process for Sacramento Field, before construction, Lisa Peterson (Deputy City Manager) issued a memo to document certain outcomes from that process. That memo says: "The final off-leash dog policy is still undetermined. Based on community interest, the City has agreed to explore a pilot off-leash hours approach that will allow for dogs to be off leash during designated hours (dogs and owners must be in compliance with the City's off-leash regulations). A final policy will be determined at a later date."
  - John Nardone (Department of Public Works) provided an update about current conditions of the field and ongoing City efforts to remediate a drainage issue caused by soil compaction.
  - Gary Chan (Community Development Department) spoke about how the City has approached the topic of planning for off-leash space over the past couple of decades. Detail on that can be found [here](#).
  - Mark McCabe (Animal Commission) spoke about the Animal Commission's approach to management and enforcement of rules and etiquette in off-leash spaces.
  - Daniel Wolf provided some additional background and summarized some early feedback from nearby entities:
    - School Council: Spoke with the Baldwin School principal and she brought up the topic at a School Council meeting. The school community requested that any off-leash hours not conflict with school PE hours, which start as early as 9:15am. Otherwise they didn't relay any concerns about having an off-leash program
    - Agassiz Neighborhood Council: Attended a meeting and didn't have an extended conversation, but generally people seemed supportive of the idea. There were some concerns about the current condition of the field.
    - Preschool: Education site director said they're supportive of the idea. They typically use the site in the afternoon. They haven't found waste to be a problem or concern.
    - Riverside Community Care Outpatient Clinic (formerly Guidance Center): Program Director mentioned that some of their clients have histories of trauma and some are afraid of dogs. The clinicians often take young clients out to use the field while doing therapy. But he said if there was little to no overlap between the clinic's working hours and off-leash hours, then this would not be a concern. They open at 9am (including weekends).
- Discussion [note: each bullet below summarizes a set of comments made by a separate individual and represents that person's view]:

- Camp and educational programs use fields all day including in morning (around 8:00 AM); mixing dogs and kids is a concern; field is used extensively; Off-Leash Working Group's recommendations (from 2015) do not specify this location as "underserved"; Sacramento Field is unofficially in school grounds and recommendations had suggested avoiding school grounds for off-leash use
- Off-leash use provides social time for community of dog owners; park is underused outside of peak hours; an off-leash program would concentrate dog use in time; the nearest off-leash spaces are about a mile away
- Dog barking is a constant nuisance for neighbors; dog owners often don't follow the rules; commenter referred to a petition against off-leash use for which he collected 35 signatures; concerns about contamination in the field caused by unmanaged dog waste; important to separate kids and dogs; a teacher had told him that dog waste is an issue in the park; some people are afraid of dogs; lots of kids use the park; the space already feels like a dog park; we should separate small and large dogs; noise is a concern as an abutter; residue from waste is a concern
- Field is underutilized; off-leash hours would be a good use of the resource; commenter believes dog owners are respectful of others and rules; important to share the resource; would improve neighborhood dynamics; should allow time for another petition
- It's best not to mix off-leash use with other uses – ideally minimal/no overlap; ideally off-leash space would be fenced off
- Commenter supports limited off-leash hours, in the morning and possibly evening as well; commenter leashes their dog whenever a child is present; mixing can sometimes work
- In the past, the school didn't use the park much; commenter never sees dog waste in the park; the nearest off-leash spaces being a mile away – not realistic to expect people to walk that distance for this kind of activity; there are few dogs or people after dark in the park; 6:00-9:00 AM as off-leash hours is a useless time for the commenter because he's typically asleep then; there are lots of dogs in the immediate area; abutter concerns are legitimate; animal control is effective; we should consider having a program to familiarize kids with dogs
- Commenter self-describes as a conscientious dog owner; suggests we monitor how a pilot goes
- Commenter says that if off-leash hours were in place during the morning, there would be virtually no conflicts
- Commenter is in favor of off-leash hours, including both morning and/or evening hours; barking and dog waste can happen even without off-leash hours
- Commenter who was part of the Off-Leash Working Group process says this area is part of the Mid-Cambridge area identified in the report; during the process she was surprised by how much support there was generally for off-leash spaces in the city; it is difficult to always provide fenced-off space for off-leash use; the space belongs to everyone; suggests perhaps 6:00 to 9:00 AM hours for off-leash along with evening hours
- Commenter supports morning and maybe seasonal evening hours; says dog owners collaborate to take care of the space

- Commenter supports morning and evening off-leash hours; hasn't found dog waste to be an issue in the park
- Commenter supports morning and evening off-leash hours; commenter (a youth) says his experience encountering dogs is fun
- Commenter says it's an issue to mix small kids and off-leash use, but notes that the field already has a fenced off area for small children; most dogs are harmless; there should be off-leash hours to concentrate dog time
- Off-leash use provide exercise and social time for dogs which contributes to dogs' health; needing to drive to reach dog parks adds to traffic; supports 6:00 to 9:00 AM off-leash hours
- Commenter supports morning and seasonal evening off-leash hours; dogs bark on and off-leash so shouldn't be a factor
- Animal Commission enforcement has prevented off-leash use; need designated off-leash hours
- Previously the park wasn't fenced off; now it's better for dogs (enclosed space); commenter's dog can't cross Mass Ave; commenter has only seen dogs and their owners at 7:00 AM in the park; there's a social benefit to off-leash use; supports morning off-leash hours
- Off-leash hours has a community building effect; benefits include: discouraging negative uses, encouraging people to pitch in; necessary to make compromises in a shared community space; pilot off-leash hours is a good path forward
- Commenter got a dog because of the community; has been aggressively self-monitoring; sympathetic to conflicts with kids; park had previously been desolate and considered by some as private, belonging to abutters; now much better state – community stewards the park; about 8 years with broken bottles, etc.
- Commenter tries to be aware when around kids
- Commenter supports off-leash hours
- Dog is important to commenter; it's a public park for all – can we share it? Better to cordon off time than space; school use is mostly in warmer months, whereas dog use is year round
- Commenter's dog needs aerobic exercise; supports morning or evening off-leash hours
- Only way to test (issues such as excessive waste or barking) is to have a pilot; supports 6:00 to 9:00 AM off-leash hours (before drop-off time)
- Commenter has a service dog, never makes a mess; park belongs to the neighborhood; should put aside a couple hours for dogs to run free
- Commenter has never seen waste issues; never had a problem with another dog
- Commenter asks: would there be any off-limits areas? Suggests making tot lot area(s) off limits