



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item

24-0120

Agenda Date: 2/15/2024

2024 COUNCIL STUDY ISSUE

NUMBER

DPW 20-11

TITLE Evaluate Feasibility of Dog Off-leash Hours in Select Sunnyvale Park(s)

BACKGROUND

Lead Department: Department of Public Works

Support Departments: Office of the City Manager
Office of the City Attorney
Library and Recreation Services

Sponsor(s): Parks and Recreation Commission

History: 1 year ago: Deferred by Council
2 years ago: Ranked, Below the Line

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

What precipitated this Study?

A group of residents attended the City Council meeting of February 27, 2020 and the Park and Recreation Commission meetings of October 9, 2019, November 13, 2019, January 8, 2020 and February 12, 2020 requesting off-leash dog hours at one or more City parks. Residents suggested that City parks should have specified hours during the day where the public can let their dogs run off-leash in selected areas. Some of the benefits of increasing accessibility of off-leash dog parks identified by the residents included: promoting good canine health and socialization; building community; and decreasing travel to remote dog parks.

Nearby cities, such as Mountain View, Foster City and Cupertino, currently provide off-leash dog hours in selected City parks.

What are the key elements of the Study?

This Study will consider the impact of allowing off-leash dogs during specified hours in City parks. In addition to analyzing the positive benefits of allowing dogs to be off leash, the Study will analyze the potential effect on other park users, such as soccer and little league baseball, the effect on park maintenance and exposure to potential legal liabilities for both the City and residents. The Study will also provide recommendations related to best practices for allowing off-leash dog areas in City parks (e.g., rules, park location, hours, etc.) including a possible pilot project.

Completion of this Study will provide data to assist in evaluating the feasibility of allowing off-leash dog hours in Sunnyvale parks.

Estimated years to complete Study: 1 year

FISCAL IMPACT**Cost to Conduct Study**

Level of staff effort required (opportunity cost):	Moderate
Funding Required for Non-Budgeted Costs:	\$75,000
Funding Source:	Will seek budget supplement

The cost associated with the Study is to hire a consultant to conduct the feasibility study. The level of effort is considered moderate as staff will be facilitating public outreach, meeting with the consultant to advise on current and past practices, reviewing park locations and history, and making any necessary changes to the Sunnyvale Municipal Code. The Study would also include an assessment of potential costs including operating and capital.

Cost to Implement Study Results

Unknown. Study would assess potential costs.

EXPECTED CITY COUNCIL, BOARD OR COMMISSION PARTICIPATION

Council-Approved Work Plan: No

Council Study Session: Yes

Reviewed by Boards/Commissions: Parks and Recreation Commission

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Support. This policy issue merits discussion at the 2024 Study Issues Workshop.

Currently, the only public areas in the City where dogs are allowed off-leash are the fenced in dog parks at Las Palmas Park, Seven Seas Park, Fair Oaks Park and Muwékma Park. The Study will give staff and Council the necessary information to determine if they want to move forward with allowing dogs to be off leash during certain hours at select City parks.

Previously in 2013, the feasibility of off-leash alternatives was looked at as part of *Study Issue DPW 13-14 Feasibility of Establishing Additional Dog Parks and Alternatives in Sunnyvale's Park System*. On July 23, 2013, Council considered this item in RTC No. 13-178, *Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Feasibility of Establishing Additional Dog Parks and Off-Leash Alternatives in Sunnyvale's Park System and Budget Modification No. 2*. City Council voted in favor of Alternative 1 - Approve Budget Modification No. 2 to appropriate \$100,000 from the Park Dedication Fund in FY 2013/14 for the purpose of making improvements to Las Palmas Dog Park, including the addition of natural grass and a separate area for small dogs. Council also approved Alternative 2 - Approve inclusion of new dog parks at Lakewood and Fair Oaks Parks as part of the scope of work for the approved major renovation capital projects at each site in the Park Dedication Fund 20-year plan. However, Council did not approve Alternative 3 which would have directed staff to amend the Sunnyvale Municipal Code to allow dogs off-leash at designated locations and times in Sunnyvale's Park system and establish rules for such under the authority of the Director of Public Works. At that time, there were concerns from a risk management and liability perspective that unfenced, off-leash options posed a substantial risk due to the unpredictability of dog behavior. Many residents who frequently use parks also opposed having off-leash areas, based on negative experiences with off-leash dogs.

Since there are new pilot and trial studies in nearby cities, the data from those studies would help

provide additional information for this analysis that may be different from the previous analysis in 2013.

Prepared by: Jim Stark, Superintendent of Parks and Golf

Reviewed by: Damon Sparacino, Superintendent of Recreation Services

Reviewed by: Michelle Perera, Director, Library and Recreation Services

Reviewed by: Chip Taylor, Director, Department of Public Works

Reviewed by: Teri Silva, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Kent Steffens, City Manager