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CITY OF MANHATTAN BEACH
MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

November 14, 2005
6:30 P.M.

CONTENTS

Page

05/1114.1 – Consideration of a Small Off-leash Dog Run Area behind
Pay and Play in Marine Avenue Park.....1

ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Cohen, Gill, Harris, Lamb, Lear, Marrill and Paralusz

Absent: None

Others Present: Parks and Recreation Director Richard Gill, Recreation Services
Manager Idris J. Al-Oboudi and Recording Secretary Jane Grace

AGENDA CHANGES

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the July 25, 2005 Commission were approved as written.

CEREMONIAL

None

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

None

GENERAL BUSINESS

05/1114.1 – Consideration of a Small Off-leash Dog Run Area behind Pay and Play in Marine
Avenue Park

Mr. Gill reported that the City opened on off-leash dog play area in Live Oak Park beyond the center field fence at Dorsey Field. The dog run was made permanent recently by the City Council because of its great success. The dog run at Live Oak has had almost no problems and has become a social gathering place for many dog owners. When making the Live Oak dog run permanent, the City Council directed staff to move its dog obedience classes from that site to

open up more time for the public to use the facility. The Council also stated that if other locations are discovered for a dog run that doesn't impact the surrounding neighbors, they should be brought forward.

Mr. Gill reported that staff believes it has found a site for the dog obedience classes that can also be used as a small off-leash area for dogs. The area is behind the racquetball/handball Pay and Play courts at Marine Avenue Park. Unlike the Dorsey area which is long and narrow, this site is triangular in shape. The area works well for dog obedience classes but it may be only suitable for small dogs off leash, as it is a fairly small area.

Mr. Gill reported that staff discussed this area with the dog-issues committee and they stated that they support the project but it does not fulfill the needs of those living east of Sepulveda. Mr. Gill indicated that staff never intended for this site to satisfy the need for several more off-leash areas throughout the city. Staff believes that the Commission and City Council should analyze each site as they are proposed and, if feasible, open them for a trial period. If the site is approved, staff would implement the same policy and rules as the ones in use for the dog run at Dorsey. However, unlike Dorsey, there is not always staff on duty at Marine.

Mr. Gill reported that staff notified the homes across from Marine Park about Monday's meeting and also identified the perimeter for the off-leash area at Marine with cones and caution tape so the public would have an idea as to the dimensions.

Commissioner Lear indicated that the notices mailed to the public did not contain the date of the Commission meeting and inquired whether there had been any feedback from the public. Mr. Gill reported that there were notices in the local newspapers and on the city web site and the notice did contain contact information for the Parks and Recreation Department if further information was needed.

Mr. Gill reported that he has only received three phone calls regarding the proposed site, none of them against the site but expressing concern that the site is small and not sufficient for large dogs.

During a discussion among the Commissioners, the following points were made:

1. Commissioner Lear questioned whether there should be enforcement to keep large dogs out of the area or whether owners of big dogs simply won't choose to go there. Mr. Gill indicated that we now have a mix of small and large dogs in the Dorsey location and the owners themselves sort out the situation. Suggestions have been received asking the City to provide an area for larger dogs. A suggestion box, like the one at Dorsey, would be set up in the Marine Avenue location.
2. Commissioner Harris asked whether the City is open to allowing additional training classes, i.e. the American Kennel Association and S.P.C.A. behavior and agility classes. Mr. Gill indicated that these groups should submit a proposal to the department.
3. Commissioner Lamb inquired whether the department would be monitoring the area closely at first if City Council does approve the new location. Mr. Gill indicated that the Park Ranger and Recreation Leaders would monitor the area when available but there is

no budget for additional staff other than 3:00-10:00 p.m. Survey forms would be made available for users.

4. Commissioner Cohen suggested that contact numbers for the Parks and Recreation Department and Police Department should be posted at the site along with the rules and regulations. Mr. Al-Oboudi indicated that numbers are posted at the sites. He reported that suggestions and information are now received through park monitors and the suggestion box.
5. Commissioner Paralusz inquired whether a Mutt Mitt dispenser would be available at the Marine site; Mr. Gill indicated that a dispenser is available at Dorsey and would be placed at the Marine site as well.
6. Commissioner Gill inquired whether the proposed Marine dog run site would replace the proposed skate park site at Marine. Mr. Gill reported that there were two sites suggested for the proposed skate park; behind the baseball field or replacing one of the basketball courts. The proposed dog run would not replace either of these sites.
7. Commissioner Harris suggested that the proposed site at Marine Park is way too small but she could see it used as an education area for dog owners. She is also concerned that if the site it opened, the perception will be that the City has filled the requirements for another dog area. Commissioner Harris indicated that she would be “OK” if the area was designated for small dogs only.
8. Commissioner Lamb suggested that the area was designated for small dogs only; the users would have to be self-policing regarding size of dogs since staff would not be there to regulate the users. Commissioner Paralusz suggested that small dog owners would call the authorities if larger dogs were misusing the area.
9. Commissioner Lear suggested that since it is such a small area, large-dog owners will choose not to use the area.
10. Commissioner Paralusz suggested that this would be a pilot program and if it doesn't work out it could be shut down. Mr. Gill indicated that he is open to limiting the area to small dogs as well as a small number of dogs.
11. Commissioner Harris is concerned that there are potential problems with too many dogs using the area and the project could receive “bad press.”
12. Commissioner Lear expressed his concern that bringing big dogs into the site could potentially destroy the good will that has been created in the last year. The Commission and City Council are committed to analyzing each site as they are proposed and Commissioner Lear's concern is that if there is a negative reaction to having big dogs in a small-dog run, City Council might not continue with the program. Commissioner Lear asked if staff would consider limiting the area to dogs up to 20 pounds. Mr. Gill indicated that staff could work with F.I.D.O. to determine what size would be appropriate.

Dog Committee member Jon Vogl is reluctant to open the area for dog obedience classes and play area for residents at the same time, running the risk that we could receive

negative vibes. If the area was opened, he suggested that it is opened for dogs 15 pounds and smaller (like the Redondo Beach dog park). He suggested that the criteria set by the dog committee has not been met by this area. Mr. Vogl suggested that we open up the area for dog obedience classes and then ask for public comment on opening it up for a dog run.

13. Commissioner Marrill suggested that we should not spend money on something that might not work and save it for future needs. Mr. Gill indicated that the area will be opened up for dog obedience classes whether we include a dog run or not.
14. Commissioner Lear suggested that the public was given appropriate notice and they would have a second chance to comment at the City Council meeting where the Commission's recommendation would be heard. Since this is a pilot program, the public would also have an opportunity to voice any displeasure after the run is opened.
15. Commissioner Harris suggested that the reason we haven't had people commenting on this proposal is because 1) the other run has been successful and 2) this location is not in a residential neighborhood. She suggested that the area be opened for dog obedience classes and make comment cards available asking whether they would use the area as a dog run.
16. Commissioner Lear suggested that the area should be opened for dog obedience classes as well as for dogs 15 pounds and less.
17. Commissioner Lamb inquired whether it would be fruitful to again recommend the original proposals. Mr. Gill suggested that until we have a success with other areas, we should not propose the Veterans Parkway sites.
18. Commissioner Lamb proposed that the department be given the discretion to operate the area in the best interest of all, experimenting with the size of dogs and regulating activity.

Marty Friedman, dog committee member, suggested that limiting the area to a specific size dog is too rigid but indicated that the preference for the area is small dogs.

A motion was made to recommend to City Council approval of an off-leash area at Marine Park for dog obedience classes and general use by the public in a manner that promotes use by owners of small dogs. (MSC: Paralusz/Gill – Unanimous)

Mr. Gill reported that staff will come back to the Commission at the January meeting with a draft of guidelines for the proposed dog run at Marine Avenue Park.

REPORTS

Mr. Gill reported that the Veteran's Day Ceremony is scheduled for Friday, November 11 at 11:00 a.m. on Veteran's Parkway. Pier Lighting is scheduled for Saturday, December 3 and the Holiday Fireworks is scheduled for Sunday, December 11.

Mr. Gill reported that there is a grass roots push by our senior citizens. A Manhattan Beach Senior Resources Committee is attempting to merge the two senior clubs in an effort to convince the City to create an independent senior center. The City will be undertaking a facility strategic plan in the spring. In the meantime, the City will be dedicating one room in Joslyn Center full time for senior citizens when the Fire Department moves into their new facility.

OTHER COMMISSION BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m. to the next scheduled meeting on January 23, 2005.