

Midcoast Community Council

*An elected Advisory Council to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
representing Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Princeton, and Miramar
PO Box 248, Moss Beach, CA 94038-0248 | midcoastcommunitycouncil.org*

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Chair Vice-Chair Treasurer Secretary

Date: January 26, 2022

To: Mike Schaller, Nicholas Calderon, Planning Commission, Erik Martinez (CCC)

From: Midcoast Community Council

Subject: Comments on the Pilot Off-Leash Dog-Walking Program

Thank you for sending a referral for PLN2021-00333 (Pilot Off-Leash Dog-Walking Program for Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluffs) to the Midcoast Community Council

We recognize the huge amount of work and coordination San Mateo County Parks and community members have devoted to get to this point. We know that dogs play an important part in the lives of many people in our community and that recreating with dogs off-leash can be a value to both people and animals. Some of us are dog owners and have experienced that.

But we also have concerns.

It is unfortunate that both proposed locations are on the Midcoast. It would seem better in many ways if there were more opportunities for recreation with dogs throughout the County rather than concentrated in a single area. We are concerned that publicizing these Coastside locations as uniquely available for off-leash dogs will lead to overcrowding of limited resources and will discourage non-dog owners, including families with children, from freely and safely using these parks. It is all too often the case that off-leash dogs are not well trained and controlled by a minority of dog owners. This minority leads to significant problems.

We recognize that Quarry Park is highly used by dog owners and that it has very little sensitive habitat at this time, so we recommend that the Pilot Program proceed in that location.

However, we have significant concerns about proceeding with the Pilot Program at Pillar Point Bluff, especially with regard to the environmental consequences of expanded use. This is especially true given that enforcement resources seem to be so limited. While dog walkers have used this area both on and off-leash for many years, the numbers have increased significantly over time, and this pilot will likely increase the numbers even further.

Maps and descriptions of the environmental characteristics of that park do not adequately reflect the flora and fauna that is actually present, which makes it hard to know what to protect. Much of the park contains highly-sensitive and well-developed coastal scrub, as well as coastal prairie which warrants protection (the Neg Dec fails to mention the coastal prairie, even though it appears in earlier studies such as the 2002 Fitzgerald Marine Reserve studies). Watersheds

there are complex. Drainage of dog waste to wetlands is a problem that will increase in magnitude as more dogs are present, particularly since the southern cross-trail goes through a seasonal wetland. Wildlife including coyote, gray fox, deer, bobcat, and numerous species of rodents and birds populate the area and would be placed at risk by the presence of off-leash dogs. Informal side-trails are an invitation to expand dog-access areas beyond what is noted on maps.

If this Pilot Program is to proceed, we ask that signage be extremely clear in delineating which trails are open to on- and off-leash dogs. We think that the cross-trails that run east-west must only allow dogs on-leash, because they lead to the Ross Cove trail, which is on-leash only, and they traverse sensitive habitat, including seasonal wetlands. These east-west trails must be clearly signed at the east end of the side-trails.

We also ask for additional in-person enforcement in order to ensure that the standards listed in the plan are heeded. It seems especially important to limit the size of any group of people with dogs in order to provide better supervision of dogs.

Pillar Point Bluff is a rare environmental and geological resource. Damage to it would be irreparable. We would prefer it to be limited to passive recreation. If dogs are to be allowed off-leash at all, we request that guidelines, signage and enforcement be upgraded.

s/Claire Toutant, Chair