



January 24, 2022

Midcoast Community Council

*Submitted via email*

RE: Please Support the Off-Leash Pilot Program at Pillar Point Bluff and Quarry Park (1/26 agenda item 4.b)

Dear Midcoast Community Council Members:

On behalf of Coastside DOG of San Mateo County ([www.coast-sidedog.org](http://www.coast-sidedog.org)), I am writing to urge you to support San Mateo County Parks' proposed 12-month off-leash pilot program at Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff. The off-leash pilots plan has undergone a rigorous public and environmental review process, including CEQA review. While it contains the strictest off-leash dog walking polices in California (compromises were made), it is a solid plan that should move forward.

Coastside residents have walked their dogs off-leash at Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff for 50+ years. It is a valuable part of the Coastside's culture and a large contributor to the quality of life for our dog-friendly community. Dog owners care deeply about protecting these spaces and have served as the primary stewards of these lands, picking up trash and working with Peninsula Open Space Trust to protect Pillar Point Blufftop from development before County Parks acquired it.

After decades of de facto off-leash dog walking, County Parks' off-leash pilots program offers a chance to test and manage this long-practiced activity at Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff. It is a solid plan that you should feel confident in supporting for the following reasons:

- **The off-leash plan and dog walking rules were developed via a multi-year, intensive public process. Since fall 2016, County Parks has held 31 public Dog Work Group/Committee meetings.**
- **The process was led by San Mateo County Parks in conjunction with its multi-stakeholder Dog Work Group composed of environmental, equestrian, dog walking, mountain biking, and other community group representatives, as well as two Parks Commissioners and three park rangers.** Within parameters provided by County Parks, the Dog Work Group was required to reach consensus on every aspect of its off-leash pilots recommendation from the park sites to the trail plan to the off-leash rules. This required thorough discussion, studying of the issues, and compromise to reach a plan that all members support.
- **Areas at Pillar Point Bluff and Quarry Park that are included in the off-leash pilot are NOT environmentally sensitive.** Pillar Point Bluff is a former dairy farm and zoned agricultural according to San Mateo County's LCP. Quarry Park is mostly eucalyptus forest. Dogs have been walked off-leash at both sites for 50+ years. During the Dog Work Group process, County Parks' Natural Resource staff conducted an environmental review of both Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff. Off-leash trails were designated only in areas not deemed sensitive. In addition, a CEQA review, including the development of an Adaptive Management Plan (AMP), was conducted by consulting firm WRA. As a result, no

potential significant environmental impacts are expected from the pilot program. Lastly, according to San Mateo County's LCP Midcoast Sensitive Habitats map, the off-leash pilot program is not in sensitive habitat areas.

- **The off-leash pilot program will provide greater environmental and visitor use protection to Pillar Point Bluffs and Quarry Park.** For decades, off-leash dog walking (the norm) has been unmanaged at both sites. For the first time, the pilot project will provide dog owners with clear demarcation of which trails are okay for recreational off-leash dog walking and which are not. It also lays out strict guidelines for dogs and their owners to minimize impact on the environment and on others without dogs or leashed dogs. The pilot includes the strictest off-leash rules in CA and limits the number of dogs that can be off-leash at two per person. It includes a detailed monitoring plan to track any impacts.
- **There is overwhelming public support for off-leash trails at both Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff.** Members of the public wrote comments and showed up to every single off-leash pilot meeting to voice their support for legal off-leash trails at Pillar Point Bluff and Quarry Park, far outnumbering the few in opposition. At one meeting, residents presented a petition with more than 250 signatures in support of off-leash dog walking specifically at Pillar Point Bluff.
- **The off-leash pilot program is NOT expected to significantly increase park usage.** Other Bay Area counties offer a wealth of off-leash dog walking trails for their residents to enjoy on their doorsteps—a more enticing option than navigating heavy weekend traffic. In addition, the reality is that the pilot's strict rules and two-dog limit will keep many dog owners away.

When considering your draft comment letter to the Parks Commission on January 26, we sincerely hope that you trust in this four-year public, multi-stakeholder process and revise your letter to support County Parks' off-leash pilot plan. The off-leash pilot rules, trail plan, and CEQA AMP address every single one of the concerns outlined in your draft letter to the Parks Commission. The plan is supported by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors (4-1 vote) and the San Mateo County Parks Commission.

Thank you for your consideration. Coastside DOG hopes to have the opportunity to work with the San Mateo County Parks Department to make the pilot program a success.

Sincerely,

*Bill Bechtell*

Bill Bechtell  
Coastside DOG of San Mateo County