



November 8, 2021

San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
Hall of Justice
400 County Center
Redwood City, CA 94063

RE: Agenda Item #9: Vote YES for the Off-Leash Pilot Program at Pillar Point Bluff and Quarry Park

Dear Honorable Board of Supervisors:

On behalf of Coastside DOG of San Mateo County and as a member of County Parks' Dog Work Group, I am writing to voice my strong support for 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 Coastside DOG hopes you support on November 9.

Coastside DOG (www.coast-sidedog.org) is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting responsible dog walking and to advocating for dog-friendly open space on the San Mateo County coast. We deeply appreciate San Mateo County taking up the issue of dog walking access in County Parks and forming its Dog Work Group/Committee, on which I have served since its start in fall 2016.

Currently, San Mateo County lags behind every other San Francisco Bay Area county in terms of dog walking access in its County Parks system. While most county park systems allow dogs on 70-90% of their trails, our county currently provides 8% trails access. In addition, our county is the only San Francisco Bay Area county that does not provide sanctioned off-leash dog walking trails for its residents.

Coastside DOG and the more than 40% of San Mateo County residents with dogs (probably closer to 50% now due to Covid adoptions) appreciate the Board of Supervisors' and the County Parks Department's efforts to address this inequity. After years of planning and public meetings, San Mateo County Parks' 12-month off-leash pilot program is a chance to help meet this need and to modernize. The reality is that off-leash dog walking is common throughout California and our country (even Central Park in New York City has off-leash hours on its trails). It is also common practice on the San Mateo County Coast. People have walked their dogs off-leash at Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff for 50+ years. It is part of the Coastside's culture. Providing some sanctioned off-leash trails and rules is a good thing.

County Parks' 12-month off-leash pilots program is a solid plan that you should feel confident in supporting.

- **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.
- **County Parks and the Dog Work Group recommended that two sites—Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff—be included in the 12-month pilot program.** These parks were selected based on their long history of off-leash use, overwhelming public support for off-leash trails at these sites, and natural resource considerations (other parks had more sensitive habitat – Quarry Park is a eucalyptus forest and Pillar Point Bluff is a former dairy farm sandwiched between industrial Airport Road and a 150-foot cliff). In addition, having two sites would help avoid overcrowding and ensure that off-leash dog walking recreation would be available to everyone (some people are unable to scale the steep hills at Quarry Park).
- **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 plan has undergone extensive environmental review.** 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.

*(*Note: The Parks Department made two changes to the Dog Work Group's Off-Leash Pilots Recommendation, which are included in the Department's final recommendation. At Pillar Point Bluff, the Department changed the blufftop trail above Ross Cove beach from off-leash to on-leash, and added a provision mandating that all dog owners participating in off-leash recreation physically restrain their dog when encountering anyone without a dog or a dog on-leash.)*

On a related note, it has come to our attention that some environmental group representatives who sat on the sidelines during the process are now coming forward in the 11th hour with objections. Our question is where were they when the hard work was being done? There was a multi-year formal public process with lots of environmental review.

When voting this Tuesday, we sincerely hope that you trust in this four-year public, multi-stakeholder process and approve County Parks' off-leash pilots recommendation. The Dog Work Group and public participated in this long process in good faith spending hundreds of hours attending meetings, providing input, and doing the hard work to help County Parks come up with the plan before you today.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine Corwin".

Christine Corwin
President, Coastside DOG of San Mateo County