

Pet Policy
San Francisco Dog Owners Group (SFDOG)

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0.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document sets out ways in which families with and without pets may share the parks. It recognizes the variety of activities under the term “off-leash recreation,” and also recognizes that not all areas are appropriate for dogs and their guardians at all times. However, it takes the stance that, wherever and whenever possible, parkland should be shared.

What’s wrong with the RPD’s Draft Dog Policy?

RPD’s Draft Dog Policy was developed from the standpoint that off-leash recreation is inherently less desirable and more dangerous than other park uses. Therefore, its recommendations are not aimed at accommodating off-leash recreation, but at restricting and minimizing it. RPD’s proposal to relegate dog owners and dogs to fully enclosed, separate spaces is expensive, inefficient and destructive to the shared beauty of our parks. The proposal is also unrealistic, in that it requires compliance from dog owners while not considering their input or meeting their needs.

What do dog owners want?

A quarter of San Francisco’s households includes a dog, and playing with one’s dog is among the most popular forms of recreation in the city. Dog owners seek a policy that recognizes and supports this healthy, enjoyable, community-building pastime, and sets forth guidelines for safe, responsible sharing of the city’s parks by dog owners and other responsible users.

Formula for successful shared use

- **A Flexible, Equitable Plan:** emphasizing shared use and offering viable alternatives (dog-use hours, off-leash zones, etc.), while also recognizing the need for on-leash and dog-free spaces, results in a more equitable resource allocation for park users who enjoy dogs and those who do not (Secs. 3.0-1).
- **Public Education:** a multi-faceted public education program, focusing on responsible park use and dog ownership. This could be launched immediately, is far less expensive than developing dog pens, and would have wide-ranging and lasting benefits for our parks (Sec. 4.0).
- **Community Input:** the local community should be an integral part in decision-making about their neighborhood parks. Impartial park surveys and well-publicized community meetings should determine a course of action for each park. When park users themselves help to develop the plan, compliance will be ensured (Sec. 5.0-1; 8.2).
- **Targeted Enforcement:** Owners who refuse to control aggressive dogs or who do not pick up their dog’s feces should be cited and fined. The pervasiveness of public education, as set forth in this plan, removes the excuse of ignorance, and the targeted approach makes enforcement more realistic and less expensive (Secs. 4.0, 10.0-4).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The San Francisco Recreation & Park Department (RPD) recognizes the necessity for a variety of experiences to meet the needs of thousands of responsible, tax-paying park users who recreate with their dogs. However, dogs are currently allowed off-leash in only 18 designated areas. As a start to rectifying this situation, the 1999 Off-Leash Task Force recommended establishing an additional 18 sites.¹

The aim of this policy is to:

- Clarify the need of dogs and their owners/caretakers for access to the city's parks and recreation areas
- Improve the city's understanding of the benefits of varied off-leash recreation to dogs, their owners and the general public
- Recommend strategies and solutions for improving the quality of the park experience for dogs, their owners, and other park users
- Provide for the most efficient management of these policies

RPD believes, and SFDOG concurs, that the off-leash issue is not entirely about dogs but rather is also a discussion about appropriate uses for, and stewardship of, urban parklands and open spaces. The basic premise of this policy is that dogs can be granted off-leash access to much of SF's estimated 3500 acres of city parkland and open space without adversely affecting those areas, the plants and animals they contain, or their human users.

This policy supports widespread education about responsible park use (with and without a dog). It outlines rules and guidelines to allow all citizens to share urban parks and open spaces, which belong to all of us and to future generations.

A balanced and varied approach to accommodating responsible off-leash dog recreation is the best policy for San Francisco. Such an approach respects the popularity of dogs, the well-documented positive effects they have on humans, the importance of minimizing pet relinquishment and inappropriate behavior, as well as the accepted proposition that higher levels of compliance result from a policy that is fair.

Simply put, the most effective way to have a workable Dog Policy is to take into account the dog owners' needs along with the constraints and to provide adequate and varied opportunities for off-leash recreation.

1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF URBAN PARKS

All too often, our treasured green space is treated as an area ripe and ready for compartmentalization. Rather than treating the parks as areas of beauty and open space for all to enjoy, they are divided and subdivided at the behest of the highest bidder or the most vociferous lobbyist.

Ultimately, parks should be maintained as parks: as shared open spaces of grass and trees, places where a child can fly a kite, a group of teens can play a pick-up ball game, and a dog can catch a Frisbee. This scene, played out daily in our local parks, is the essence of community and the soul of our neighborhoods. It is possible, it works, and it

¹ The Task Force findings were never presented to the full Board of Supervisors, and thus never reached the Recreation and Parks Commission for consideration.

should be promoted and encouraged. It has been truly said that in San Francisco, our parks are our back yards. Through mutual respect, planning, good management and education, we can keep our open space open, appreciate our diverse communities, and enhance our enjoyment of our shared common ground.

1.2 DOGS: A PART OF URBAN LIFE

There are 120,000 dogs in San Francisco; one in four families in the city includes a dog. Children often learn responsibility through care of a family pet, while the pet brings love, devotion, joy and sometimes solace to its family. With changing demographics, many households are composed of singles or the elderly, where a dog is a significant source of comfort and companionship.

When neighbors meet at the local park to exercise their dogs or simply to watch the dogs at play, communities are created and urban isolation is mitigated. In parks where dogs and their owners are present, criminal activity is reduced. The very presence of this “neighborhood watch” keeps the park a safe haven for the community, rather than a hunting ground for drug dealers and thieves.

Like their owners, dogs require daily exercise and socialization for good mental and physical health. This cannot be achieved inside a house or apartment or, for most dogs, on a leash or in an enclosed dog pen. Responsible dog ownership requires teaching the dog to behave appropriately among other dogs and with people. And exercise means more than walking at human pace. Indeed, for the elderly or disabled, it is even more important to be able to exercise one’s dog off-leash; it can be detrimental for both owner and pet to be restricted to on-leash activity only.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

To provide consistency in this document, the following terms will apply throughout:

RPD: San Francisco Recreation and Park Department

OLA: Off-leash Area

Shared Use: The default situation, whereby parks are designated as accessible for off-leash dog use where notice is properly given that these parks are to be shared by all responsible park users

Timed Use: Areas where notice is properly given that off-leash dog recreation is permitted during certain hours of the day. Such areas may be shared or used solely by dogs and their owners during the designated hours

Zoned Use: A system by which areas within a park are designated off-leash, while other areas of that same park may be designated on-leash, Timed Use or off-limits to dogs

Single Use: A designated, enclosed park space for off-leash recreation only

Owner/Caretaker: any person who possesses, has title to or an interest in, harbors or has control, custody or possession of an animal, and the verb forms of ‘to own’ shall include all those shades of meaning. (SF Health Code, section 41.g)

Children's Play Area: Any area that is in immediate proximity to children's play structure or apparatus and sandbox

Significant Natural Resource Area: The Significant Natural Resources Management Plan (SNRAMP), adopted by the Recreation and Park Commission in 1995, lists over 30 open spaces throughout the city as Significant Natural Resource Areas (SNRAs). Significant Natural Resource Areas are generally remnants of San Francisco's original landscape and support important plant and animal populations and habitats.

The list in the SNRAMP provides a framework for identifying SNRAs, but it is general and is not necessarily reflective of on-the-ground resources. For example, not all land within a designated SNRA is an important natural resource area (e. g., lawns or areas where the landforms and vegetation have been highly altered). Therefore, each park and open space must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis in order to determine the boundaries of the SNRA. Where any forms of recreation are allowed near such areas, off-leash dog recreation shall receive the same consideration and acceptance as other forms of recreation. See also Section 3.8 for further discussion.

3.0 OFF-LEASH AREAS (OLAs)

Shared use of park space is the best, most equitable, and most efficient solution. This solution should be applied to the vast majority of San Francisco's parks. But park-use models will vary according to geography, demographics, density of dog population and community input. It is important for RPD to work closely with the Dog Advisory Group and community partners to provide the largest number and greatest variety of OLA opportunities possible in the San Francisco park system. The following is a multi-tiered solution, tailored to the individual nature of parks and communities, which designates several types of off-leash areas and allows for many spaces without off-leash dogs as well.

3.1 TYPES OF OLAs AND CRITERIA FOR DESIGN & USE

Shared-Use Areas

Shared-Use Areas should be neighborhood and park-user friendly. There should be proper notice to other park users that such areas are to be shared with responsible dog caretakers who have their dogs under voice control.

All forms of unstructured recreation, including off-leash, are permitted, with fences/barriers only as necessary to protect users from arterial traffic or to enclose children's play areas (as is done in cities across the country). Shared use shall include trails within such parks, and between contiguous parks.

Suggested Signage: "Dogs welcome on-leash or under voice control." Additional signage regarding feces removal should be required and a sign regarding park etiquette strongly recommended (See also Sections 9 & 10.2)

Timed-Use Areas

Timed-Use Areas should be neighborhood and park-user friendly. There should be proper notice to other park users that such areas are to be shared with responsible dog caretakers who have their dogs under voice control, or that the area is reserved for off-

leash dog recreation during certain posted hours. This may be an appropriate solution in some smaller more crowded neighborhood parks. Designated hours for off-leash recreation should be guided by logical use patterns.

Suggested Signage: "Dogs allowed off-leash, under voice control, from X - X a.m. and from X - X p.m. During all other hours, off-leash dogs will be reported and their guardians cited and fined." Additional signage regarding feces/litter removal should be required, and a sign regarding park etiquette is strongly recommended (See also Sections 9 & 10.2).

Zoned-Use Areas

Zoned-Use Areas should be neighborhood and park-user friendly. There should be proper notice to other park users that such zones are to be shared with responsible dog caretakers who have their dogs under voice control, or that the area is reserved for off-leash dog recreation.

In some parks, unfenced zones of dog use may be most logical arrangement. For instance, half the park may be off-leash and the other half on-leash (as is currently the case in Alamo Square), with clear signage demarcating the two zones. Parks all over the world use this method of off-leash accommodation. A very large park, such as Golden Gate Park, could have several zones, ranging from "off-leash" to "on-leash except in dog play areas" to "no dogs allowed" (for the Japanese Tea Garden, Arboretum, Children's Play Areas, etc.).

Suggested Signage: Signs would be zone-specific and would follow suit with those in the other usage descriptions listed here (See also Sections 9 & 10.2).

Single-Use Areas

Single-Use Areas should be neighborhood friendly and located and designed so that they will not compromise the intent of the single-use area to allow dogs and owners to exercise and socialize safely.

Single-use, fenced (or otherwise separated) areas will be primarily used by owners of puppies and dogs not under voice control. A sufficient number of these already exist in the city (one in Golden Gate Park, one at Corona Heights and one at Upper Noe). These existing fenced areas should be made safe, attractive and comfortable for users both canine and human. Fences should be mended and proper gates installed (see Sections 3.4, 3.7), foxtails and other hazards removed, surface options (including hardy turf) researched and implemented, and signage installed to educate users regarding the rules and regulations of the space.

Suggested Signage:

Outside single-use area: "Dogs Allowed Off-leash in Dog Play Area Only"

Inside single-use area: Standard rules and suggestions, and additional single-use area rules (See Sections 9 & 10.2).

Siting shall also take into account the following:

Single Use Areas shall comply with all codes and regulations as they apply to the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and California Title 24. Such compliance shall not delay the identification and development of an OLA, but a high priority should be given to making sites accessible and usable by people with limited or restricted mobility, including, but not limited to having level walks, entrances without steps, multiple entrances, nearby parking, etc.

On-Leash Only Areas

In certain areas, such as some sections of specific significant natural resource areas, on-leash-only usage may make the most sense.

Suggested Signage: "Dogs Welcome On-leash Only." Additional signage regarding feces/litter removal required (see Section 9.1).

No-Dog Areas

While dogs are allowed in most park areas, dogs are not allowed in the following areas:

- Children's Play Areas

- Particularly sensitive sections of significant natural resource areas (see Sections 2.0 and 3.8)

- Areas prohibited in Park Code Sec.5.02

Suggested Signage: "No Dogs Allowed"

3.2 SIZE OF OLAs

Since the acreage of city parks varies greatly, it is difficult to provide a uniform description of the size of OLAs. To ensure the OLAs blend in with the surrounding environment, every effort should be made to mirror the landscape of the whole park.

3.3 CAPACITY

There is no capacity limit for shared areas, time-use areas or zoned areas. However, strict enforcement of nuisance laws as well as voice-control regulations are to be followed.

RPD will post each Single-Use Area with a recommended occupancy. The occupancy is the recommended maximum number of dogs that can effectively and safely use a given single-use area at any one time. Users are expected to self regulate to the posted recommended occupancy.

Following national standards, Single-Use Areas shall be no smaller than 10,000 square feet. The capacity of a single-use area shall be 400 square feet per 1 (one) dog. Thus, a single-use area of 1 acre (435,000 square feet) shall have a recommended occupancy of 108 dogs inside the area at any one time. This is a recommended occupancy, and owners are responsible for ensuring proper interaction of their dogs regardless of the dog occupancy.

3.4 BOUNDARIES/BARRIERS

Shared, Timed and Zoned-Use areas do not require barriers for delineation. The boundaries of a Zoned area may be as simple as a sign or a sidewalk. In certain parks, further delineation may be incorporated.

Single-Use Areas require adequate delineation, natural or human-made, to protect dogs from vehicles, steep cliffs, and other hazards as well as to prevent conflicts with other park users.

The boundaries of Single-Use Areas will be identified with barriers, preferably natural. All barriers will strive to be aesthetically pleasing, using landscape features such as shrubs and vines. Type of barrier, size and location will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

3.5 SURFACING

Grass is the preferred surfacing material for most park users, and is known to be the most healthful surfacing material for dogs. In accordance with RPD's turf management practices, single-use areas with turf surfaces may be subject to closure during inclement weather. While alternate materials may have some cost effectiveness, they may adversely impact the health and safety of dogs and their owners. Turf surfacing has been insufficiently researched, and more research is welcomed. Combinations of materials may be used, but only upon the approval of the Advisory Committee, which shall not be unreasonably withheld.

3.6 HOURS OF OPERATION

Off-leash areas, unless labeled as Timed-Use Areas, shall be open seven days per week, within the posted and/or legal hours for any RPD park. Hours of lighted facilities shall be worked out with affected residents/neighborhood and civic associations.

3.7 AMENITIES

With few exceptions, the amenities needed for a good off-leash park are the same as those needed for any other park and (if not barricaded behind fences) will enhance the park experience for all park users.

All parks, whether they welcome dogs or not, should have the following basic amenities:

- Signage - clear and visible
- Benches
- Trash cans (RPD to service)
- Lighting

Barriers should be used only as necessary to protect all park users from automobile traffic and steep drop-offs, and to guide free-running dogs away from children's play areas. These barriers should be as attractive or unobtrusive as possible, rather than wire fencing.

Parks that welcome dogs, off-leash or on, should have the following:

- Bag dispensers - to be stocked by dog owners with recycled bags

Additional amenities and enhancements should include, where possible:

- Fountains
- Informational kiosks/bulletin boards (outdoor) to hold notices of clean-up days and other events.
- Shelter (inclement weather)

Single-Use off-leash spaces should have all the basic amenities described above (lighting is high-priority), plus any of the additional amenities possible. If fencing is necessary, it should be attractively designed, and have a double-gate entry and single-gate emergency exit.

3.8 AREAS OF SPECIAL CONCERN

Significant Natural Resource Areas

There is no scientific data to support the assertion that off-leash recreation is incompatible with habitat protection. In many parks the two have coincided perfectly well for decades, and with creative planning and cross-education, such joint usage can and should continue.

Distinctions must be made between true habitat conservation and native plant gardening. Many of our parks are human-made environments created for the sole purpose of recreation and relaxation in this dense urban setting. The landscaping decisions made for those spaces should take into account all recreational uses of the space.

In areas where recreation and habitat preservation are to co-exist, emphasis should be placed on constructive and creative solutions that preserve access, such as:

- Creative use of native shrubs and other landscaping to guide recreational traffic away from fragile or sensitive areas
- Hardy plants adjacent to pathways and trails, since most dogs and children tend to stay fairly near the path
- Adequate signage at trailheads and in places of heightened sensitivity
- Cross-educational programs to foster recognition and respect for plants and animals among recreational park users, including dog owners
- Encouraging redirection and dispersal by providing adequate non-sensitive space nearby for recreational use
- Dog-toilet stations near trailheads, to encourage dogs to eliminate prior to entering the habitat area
- Leashing or removal from the area of dogs disturbing wildlife or digging

Children's Play Areas

A Children's Play Area is defined by RPD as "any area that is in immediate proximity to children's play structure or apparatus and sand box." These areas should be off-limits to dogs, and dogs should be kept from the area by means of barriers, natural or man-made, which are as attractive or unobtrusive as possible.² In many situations, the barrier need

² The playground in Duboce Park is a good model. The tile retaining wall, funded by community contributions, bears the hand and paw-prints of people and dogs from the

not be solid and impermeable. A row of benches, shrubs or raised flower beds is often all that is needed to guide dogs away from any given area.

Athletic Fields

Like other casual recreational park users, dogs and their guardians should not be allowed on athletic fields during an active game or practice. The times of these events should be posted in advance, so that dog owners, sunbathers, etc., can make other plans for their recreation on those days. When a game or practice is not in progress, all forms of casual recreation, from pick-up games to dog play, should be allowed on these fields, and each set of users should tolerate and accommodate the others.

Recently, off-leash recreation has been banished from athletic fields, and the two reasons most often cited are maintenance and health issues. In fact, more and more athletic fields in San Francisco are being locked up to prevent casual usage of any kind; a more inclusive approach would permit more efficient and widespread use of park space. In addition, and inappropriately, the definition of an “athletic fields” is being extended to include all the associated parkland. An athletic field should be no more than the space normally used for that specific activity and, as noted above, access to others should be precluded only during the times that that athletic activity is being carried out.

A. MAINTENANCE: Off-leash recreation is no more damaging to turf than any other type of active recreation; dogs and their guardians can use a field with much less resulting damage than is caused by athletes with cleats running and sliding. And dog owners can be a good source of volunteer maintenance, filling gopher holes, top-dressing fields and picking up litter as they socialize with their neighbors and dogs.

B. HEALTH: The health discussion generally centers on feces, and its potential for transmitting disease from dog to human. In fact, dogs in San Francisco are regularly vaccinated and medicated. According to the San Francisco Department of Public Health, there has not been a case of dog-feces-borne illness in San Francisco in more than 50 years.

Likewise, the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently listed 52 infectious diseases that were significantly reportable nationwide. According to this report, in the most recent year from which statistics are available (1997), there were NO cases of rabies in California. NONE of the other nationally reportable diseases are commonly caused by contact with dog feces or urine.

4.0 EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Education is the key to successful sharing of our urban parks. To reach the largest number of people possible, the public education effort must be multi-pronged, including different types of media and combining outreach with readily available information for those who are seeking it.

neighborhood; the wall is shaped into two thrones for fantasy play. An attractive fence surrounds the playground and an adjacent garden area. The fence is appreciated by local parents, because it protects running children from arterial train and automobile traffic, and lets the parents monitor who is entering the playground (and whether any children are trying to leave!)

Funds which might have been used to segregate park users can better be used to bring them together harmoniously.

On the most basic level, education will include:

Signage - Clear and well-placed signage informing dog owners of their responsibilities and letting others know that dogs are playing off-leash in the area.

Brochures - A series of brochures to educate dog owners and other park users on proper park "petiquette" (or, how to behave with and toward dogs), plus one that lists all the off-leash parks in the city.

Website - The existing Friends of Recreation & Park and RPD websites can be used to publish the same information as is prepared for the brochures, plus other, more time-sensitive information, such as class schedules and clean-up days. Other groups can link to this web page from their own.

Outreach:

- Periodic "Dog Days" can be held in the parks, schools, libraries and rec centers, perhaps with the help of the SPCA's Dog Talk program and volunteers from SFDOG, PAWS and other dog groups to share information on dogs in the parks and touch base with dog owners and other park users.
- In association with the SPCA and other animal welfare groups, classes can be organized for dog-owners and their dogs, to ensure that they are appropriately schooled for optimal interaction in the community.
- Classes can also be held for non-dog-owners to familiarize them with appropriate behavior towards dogs, and to understand canine body language and responses.

Information Kiosks - Wherever possible, in shared-use parks in particular, outdoor kiosks should be installed. They will become places for RPD to post alerts and event schedules (including sporting event times), for dog-owner groups and other park stewards to post petiquette and park clean-up info, etc.

At the next level of complexity (to boost effectiveness greatly), Public Education would include:

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) - cheap to produce and easy to get on the air. PSAs would bring petiquette tips and other vital information to a broad audience.

Outdoor Advertising - Bus-stop posters and bus-side billboards can focus on one or two vital elements, such as poop pick-up, in fun, memorable, effective ways. New York had great success with its "Don't Block The Box" campaign years ago, reducing traffic jams at four-way stops considerably with the help of that easy-to-remember slogan. A campaign successfully instituted elsewhere for cleaning up after one's dog, with the slogan, "Be caught holding the bag!" could be equally effective in San Francisco.

Other Advertising - Ads on newspaper bags (which many dog-owners use for poop retrieval) and inside the paper itself would bolster the Public Education campaign. The latter are inexpensive to produce and, in papers such as the Guardian, can be very affordable to place. Suggestions such as, "Carry a bag, a spare, and one to share!" could be incorporated in this advertising.

4.1 GOLD BONE PROGRAM

The benefits of education are not limited to people in the parks, but rather shall be extended also to pets. Thus, dogs who have completed a prescribed obedience course, and/or can demonstrate that they are sufficiently well-behaved and responsive to relevant off-leash commands, will be awarded a “gold bone” medal, or color-coded collar, to identify them as particularly well behaved and obedient. Upon certification, such dogs will be accorded additional privileges in the parks.

RPD and the Advisory Board will identify available funding, in order to provide a granting program to participants in the designated obedience training, so that the program can be fully accessible.

5.0 PARTNERSHIPS

Dog owners are among the most dedicated park advocates and they are a virtually untapped source of volunteer assistance to RPD. In addition to their individual efforts, dog owners regularly come together in groups to conduct park clean-ups. Until now, they have conducted these volunteer activities with little or no support or acknowledgment. RPD could harness the energy and good will of dog owners and use it to help maintain the parks. Support for dog owner groups and legalization of the spaces they already use and love will contribute to making off-leash recreation work well citywide.

Partnerships are not meant to replace the RPD employees and staff, and ultimately, the maintenance of the parks and the enforcement of rules for all off-leash dog recreation are the responsibility of the city and county of San Francisco.

5.1 RPD/PARTNER RESPONSIBILITIES

RPD and off-leash area users shall share the responsibility for monitoring off-leash areas. The following are general guidelines for each.

RPD Responsibilities

- Maintain and repair surfaces
- Maintain surrounding landscape
- Repair or replace basic amenities including lighting and water fountains
- Maintain informational signs
- Produce off-leash area rules and other educational materials to be distributed by partners
- Empty waste receptacles
- Liaison with Animal Care & Control
- Enforce hours of operation for OLAs
- Regulate hours to best serve maintenance needs
- Provide cost estimates for new or renovated off-leash areas
- Provide necessary regulatory permits such as CEQA.
- Provide necessary regulatory permits for Professional Dog-Walkers

PARTNER Responsibilities

- Stewardship of OLA to uphold policy standards
- Develop & distribute OLA rules and other educational materials to park users
- Serve as good role models
- Alert RPD and the Dog Advisory Committee to maintenance needs
- Help establish priorities for repair and renovation

- Schedule cleanup/workdays as necessary
- Fundraising activities to support amenities above and beyond the basic amenities provided by RPD. Such fundraising shall be administered by an appropriate 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

6.0 ADVISORY COMMITTEE

An advisory committee will be formed of representatives of various stakeholder groups promoting park advocacy and animal welfare. Organizations of recognized accreditation and standing will be invited to nominate representatives to this body. The advisory committee will be moderated by RPD, and the members will be appointed by the Supervisors' Neighborhood Services and Parks Committee.

Non-voting members shall be from the following city organizations:

SF Police Department
 SF Animal Care & Control
 Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services

Responsibilities of the advisory committee shall include, but are not limited to, the following items:

- Identify partnership opportunities
- Consider community requests for new off-leash areas or new amenities
- Develop partner-group recognition/support programs
- Organize educational and recreational events (obedience, agility and flyball classes, canine good citizen tests, programming for kids and dogs, etc.)
- Assist in developing and distributing educational information
- Assist in the mediation of neighborhood park issues related to dogs
- Document and assist in resolving complaints regarding dogs in specific parks
- Solicit and identify funding for amenities, programs and improvements not provided by RPD
- Act as a liaison between local residents, RPD and relevant organizations in matters concerning dogs in the parks
- Make recommendations to RPD, the Supervisors Neighborhood Services & Parks Committee and the Recreation & Parks Commission, as appropriate
- Meet every other month, unless deemed otherwise
- Conduct meetings in accordance with all City and State public meeting regulations

7.0 PROFESSIONAL DOG WALKERS

RPD requires that professional dog walkers using the parks have RPD Permits, which will be issued on a sliding scale, based on the cost of the walker's business license (i.e. \$50.00 license/\$50.00 permit; \$150.00 license/\$150.00 permit). Funds raised by the issuance of permits would go to city-sponsored animal welfare programs, education and training. These funds would not be placed in the general fund.

RPD also requires that walkers sign an Animal Care & Control agreement form. Dog walkers are required to have a maximum 8-foot leash in their possession for each dog. Animal Care and Control recommends that professional dog walkers not have more than six (6) dogs in their control at any one time. RPD requires no more than six (6) dogs per person be off leash at any one time in a single-use area.

8.0 ESTABLISHING AN OLA

8.1 FIRST STEPS

The 18 parks that were designated as officially off-leash in 1976 should be preserved, with amenities upgraded per Section 3.7 of this document.

Beyond those 18, there are several “de facto” off-leash parks in San Francisco – places where off-leash recreation has been taking place for many years, works well and is generally accepted by the community. These parks should be among the first considered for legitimization as off-leash spaces. Animal welfare groups such as SPCA and SFDOG can help the Dog Advisory Committee identify these traditionally-used parks.

In addition, serious consideration should be given to the parks listed in the Off-Leash Task Force Report. These parks were identified through a collaborative process that lasted more than a year and included many park stakeholder groups.

8.2 HOW TO ESTABLISH A NEW OLA/COMMUNITY PROCESS

In general, users and neighbors and/or a park partner organization can submit a written request to the Dog Advisory Committee regarding the establishment of off-leash privileges in a given park. The Advisory Committee will evaluate the request and make a recommendation to RPD within 60 days. Before determining whether a new park will be designated off-leash, the request will be subject to the community-based planning process outlined below.

A) An impartial firm or party will be contracted to perform a survey of the park. The survey will look at park use at all times of day on both week days and weekends and will be conducted during a logical time of year (e.g., not during the rainy season). The surveyors will be discreet and the survey schedule will be undisclosed to ensure an accurate reading of park use. The survey will also note the number, proximity and adequacy of off-leash opportunities in the neighborhood. Surveys shall be made available under the applicable sunshine laws and ordinances.

B) Facilitated community meetings will be conducted in each neighborhood to discuss the results of the surveys on that neighborhood’s parks and to gather input from residents as to how each park should be designated. No fewer than two (2) meetings will be held, and they will be in a location and at times convenient to local residents. Relevant experts (in dog behavior, landscape architecture, native habitats, child development, etc.) will be on hand to answer questions. Failing that, questions will be gathered at the first meeting and relayed to experts so that answers can be provided at the follow-up meeting. Childcare will be provided.

Community input requires public notification and opportunities for input for users and neighbors, RPD and relevant civic associations.

8.3 FUNDING

RPD will work with other government agencies, the Dog Advisory Committee and partner groups to identify funding sources and other support through city money, grants, private and corporate funding, agency partnerships and pro-bono contributions of goods and services (such as advertising space or landscaping supplies).

Items that require funding will include, but not be limited to:

- Park-use surveys and facilitated meetings
- Elements of public education, including signage (see Sections 4.0, 9.0)
- Additional or upgraded amenities (see Section 3.7)

8.4 EVALUATING OLAs

Evaluations shall be carried out one (1) year after an OLA is first sited, established, and/or significant renovation has been completed. An OLA may be evaluated after three (3) years, if this is warranted by particular conditions. Further evaluations would be carried out only if authorized by the Advisory Committee. Existing OLAs shall be evaluated within 90 days of this policy's approval after the appropriate public comment process, but such time issues will not prohibit the continued off-leash recreation opportunities that currently exist.

A committee comprised of representatives from RPD, the Advisory Committee, the neighborhood, Animal Care & Control and relevant local associations will conduct OLA evaluations. The evaluation instrument will be developed with the Advisory Committee and RPD. The evaluations should include utilization, community and fiscal impacts.

The evaluation should also include a satisfaction survey, conducted by an impartial party, of users and neighbors. The evaluation process will consider the number, severity, and resolution of complaints and issues raised during the evaluation period, as well as the positive responses to the OLA.

9.0 SIGNS

There are three types of signs that will be required in order to have workable OLAs in the city of San Francisco: regulatory, advisory, and warning. The choice of sign, its location, the size, and the content of its message are the responsibility of RPD. The intent of providing signs is to identify, educate and provide a clear and consistent understanding of the expectations of dog owners within OLAs and other parks throughout the city.

The RPD shall provide and install signs at all OLAs that outline the rules and regulations for those spaces. These signs will be developed with the Dog Advisory Committee (see also Section 3.1). Language will reflect simplified rules and regulations. When appropriate, directional signs to the OLA will also be installed. In addition, RPD will install informational signs, which will accompany bag dispensers, at on-leash sites that are used by the dog walking community.

These signs, which outline several current San Francisco laws and ordinances, also contain information that has proven effective in managing off-leash facilities in other cities.

9.1 SIGNS FOR ON-LEASH PARK SPACES

(These signs will accompany bag dispenser)

Your neighbors and the Recreation and Park Department appreciate responsible dog ownership

Please:

- Pick up and remove dog waste
- Leash your dog(s) with a maximum 8-foot standard leash or 15-foot retractable lead
- Control excessive barking and noise
- Prevent digging and destructive behavior
- Keep your dog's vaccinations and license current

Thank you.

For information regarding dogs in parks, please contact the RPD @ (415) 831-2700 or Animal Care & Control @ (415) 554-6364

Health Code 40 A&B; 41.12 A-D, 41.15
Park Code 3.02

10.0 ENFORCEMENT

In all areas where dogs are allowed, off-leash or on, the pooper-scooper law should be enforced.

In areas designated on-leash, the leash law will also be enforced; however, this enforcement will not begin until (and unless) adequate space is designated for off-leash recreation. Following the designation of adequate off-leash space in every neighborhood, a 90-day Public Education period will begin, after which the leash law will be enforced where and when necessary.

10.1 COMPLAINTS

Complaints and concerns regarding dogs in specific parks will be brought to the attention of the Dog Advisory Committee. The Committee shall document and analyze the situation, contextualizing the complaint within the over-all performance of that park. If mediation/mitigation is possible, the Committee will perform same to resolve the complaint. A detailed database of complaints will be kept, both to identify repeat offenders and to identify repeat complainers.

Complaints that will be considered by the Committee will include but not be limited to:

- Excessive or inappropriate noise on the part of dogs and their guardians (as with any recreational activity, some noise is expected)
- Destruction of park resources by digging in places not set aside for this activity
- Unchecked entry of dogs into tot-lot areas
- Unscooped dog feces
- Abandonment of hazardous trash in off-leash parks (including chicken bones and other picnic trash, broken glass, dirty diapers, etc.)
- Maintenance issues of concern to dog owners or specific to off-leash use, which have been brought to the attention of RPD but remain unresolved after a reasonable period of time (e.g. foxtail removal, broken fountains, turf maintenance, trash-can emptying)

Complaints that will not be considered:

- Those that are unsubstantiated or constitute harassment

- Those that are better left to Animal Care & Control (e.g. vicious dogs, organized dog-fighting, stray dogs, etc)
- Those that are better left to the police (i.e.: vandalism of dog-related amenities, conflicts between human park users, etc)
- Those that are not related to dogs or off-leash recreation

10.2 RULES

Your neighbors and the Recreation and Park Department appreciate responsible dog ownership. The following rules will be widely disseminated.

- All dogs should be licensed and vaccinated
- No dog under 4 months old should be permitted in an OLA
- Female dogs in heat should be on-leash
- Professional dog trainers may not use an OLA for the conduct of their business, unless sponsored by RPD or by obtaining a permit from RPD
- Animals must be leashed when entering and exiting any OLA
- Owners shall have a leash for each dog at all times with maximum 8-foot leash, unless it is a retractable flexi-leash which may be no more than 15 feet
- Dogs must be under control of their owners at all times
- Control excessive barking and noise
- Pick up and dispose of dog waste in a proper manner
- Dogs acting aggressively must be leashed immediately

In the single-use areas, the following rules will also apply:

- No human food is allowed within the boundaries of the single-use area
- Female dogs in heat are not permitted in single-use areas
- Owners are to fill in holes dug by their dogs prior to leaving the single-use area
- Dog bathing is not allowed in any single-use area

10.3 PENALTIES

Failure to pick up dog poop

First offense: Class in dog-owner etiquette and responsibility, or \$75 fine

Second offense: \$75 fine

Third and subsequent offenses: \$150 fine

Having dog off-leash in on-leash area

Class in dog-owner etiquette and responsibility, or \$30 fine

Given that fines collected in these categories are pet-related, all funds received will be allocated to ACC for animal welfare, or for education, training and information dissemination regarding pets.

11.0 CONCLUSION

It is 25 years since San Francisco officially sanctioned the importance of off-leash recreation through the recognition of eighteen off-leash areas in the city parks. Since that time, the number of dogs in the city has greatly increased, in some areas exceeding 3,000 dogs per square mile. The number of off-leash areas has not increased, although San Francisco boasts 270 parks.

Families with dogs represent the most frequent and dedicated users of San Francisco parks. Rain or shine, summer and winter, people are in the parks recreating with their dogs. Responsible pet owners clean up after their pets, individually and in organized groups (and often clean up “people litter” in the process). They control their dogs and seek to maintain rapport with the community. They are a large part of “the community.” They are taxpayers and property owners, seeking and expecting shared access to our parks. A family with a dog should be able to play together and picnic together in their neighborhood park, without being separated by a chain-link fence. Restrictive access is inequitable and counterproductive, and a guaranteed source of conflict and dissension in the community.

In the city of Saint Francis, we must move towards a more humane policy of sharing our parks, respecting nature and its creatures, and educating pet owners and others of their community responsibilities in this finite urban world. We should improve and expand our open green space, rather than fencing it into parcels and removing turf. This will yield great benefits for both present and future generations.

12.0 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following documents were particularly useful both for background information on the San Francisco context, and for providing best practices models and suggestions.

“Managing Off-Leash Recreation in Urban Parks”
San Francisco Dog Owners Group, May 1999
<http://www.sfdog.org/features/olrmpdf.htm>

“Public Open Space & Dogs: A design and management guide for open space professionals and local government,” 1995
<http://www.petnet.com.au/openspace/frontis.html>

“Report of the Advisory Dogs Off-Leash Task Force”
May 1999

“Report Card on the City's System of Official Off-Leash Dog Runs”
San Francisco Dog Owners Group, 1999
<http://www.sfdog.org/features/reportcard.htm>

“Statement to the City and County of San Francisco Advisory Dogs Off-Leash Task Force”
The San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 1999
http://www.sfspca.org/gifs/pdf_dogleash/app1.pdf

Letters and emails from San Francisco citizens in response to the Draft Dog Policy released June 12, 2001 by the Recreation & Parks Department, copied to SFDOG (more than 1000).