

City of San Diego
Park and Recreation Department
Proposed Off-Leash Area Approval Process
December 2018

The following process must be initiated and carried out by a sponsoring group interested in establishing an off-leash area. The Parks and Recreation Department (P&R) does not initiate this process. The off-leash sponsor group is fully responsible for ushering their proposal through the approval process and obtaining the necessary funding for the design, construction and long-term enhanced maintenance of the off-leash area.

This process was developed in 2002 (Manager's Report #2-130) and modified in 2004 (Manager's Report #04-130) to establish a one-year trial period for any off-leash area proposed to be placed in an existing park. An existing park includes any park in which a General Development Plan (GDP) has been approved by the City's Park and Recreation Board that does not indicate an off-leash area, whether that park is fully constructed or not. This process would also be required for proposed Off-Leash Areas in new parks.

The following process is based on the two Manager's Reports listed above. Though this outline is meant to be comprehensive and give a sponsor group a thorough understanding of the process to establish a one-year trial off-leash area in an existing park or a new park, additional steps may be necessary or steps indicated may be deleted by the Director of the Parks and Recreation Department.

1. The sponsor group should review the existing facilities and the GDP to identify several options where they believe an off-leash area would be appropriate or any new sites that would be appropriate.
 - a. An off-leash area should be approximately 3 acres in size. This allows for 3 pens to be established, one for small dogs, one for larger dogs and one that can be rotated to allow one of the other pens to recover from the damage caused by off-leash activities.

Pen sizes can be reduced, but an alternative surface to natural turf, such as organic mulch or decomposed granite, will have to be proposed. It has been P&R experience that these surfaces are not as desirable for off-leash area users. P&R experience has been that areas smaller than 1 acre do not withstand the off-leash activities causing the off-leash areas to be closed for extended periods of time to allow the turf to recover. Additional design criteria for off-leash areas are currently being refined by P&R.
 - b. Once the sponsor group has identified several potential areas, they need to schedule an on-site meeting with P&R operations staff to discuss these alternatives to determine which one, if any, can be supported by P&R. P&R will evaluate each proposed location based on the park's program and maintenance

requirements. Before a site can be supported by P&R, it must have the approval of the Department's Director.

2. Publicly noticed meetings, in accordance with Council Policy 600-33, are to be scheduled to gather the community's comments regarding an off-leash area. P&R will develop the meeting announcement flyer to be mailed to the residents and property owners within 300' of the proposed Off-Leash Area. To make the meeting more meaningful, the notices should also be mailed to homeowners' associations, business organizations and other civil and community groups within and in the vicinity of the proposed Off-Leash Area. This approach helps avoid the "I wasn't notified" comments that may come up as the proposal moves through the approval process. In most cases, the addition of an Off-Leash Area will require a GDP amendment as discussed in Council Policy 600-33.

The sponsor group will be responsible to present their proposed location of the off-leash area and provide background information indicating the need for this un-met recreational demand. If there appears to be a favorable response by the public indicating that a one-year trial off-leash area within the proposed Off-Leash Area would be acceptable, the recreation advisory group may conceptually approve the idea of an off-leash area and will ask the sponsor group to return to a future meeting with more precise information on the proposed improvements, funding and long-term maintenance strategy.

3. With conceptual approval from the recreation advisory group, the sponsor group will develop detailed plans on how the off-leash area is to be configured. This will include, but not be limited to, fencing, gates, walkways, picnic tables and benches, accessibility for disabled users, parking, landscaping, irrigation systems, etc. P&R will review the plans and return comments to the sponsor group. All improvements are to be to City standards as identified by P&R.
4. Upon approval of the detailed plans, the sponsor group will again do a public notice of an upcoming meeting in the same manner as item 2 above.
5. The second public meeting will be facilitated by the recreation advisory group. The sponsor group will be responsible to present their detailed plans for review and discussion. The sponsor group will also provide cost estimates and identify funding sources for the implementation of the improvements indicated on the plan. The City will provide routine maintenance of the off-leash area. This is equivalent to the standard maintenance practices of P&R if the area was to be used as a passive turf. The sponsor group will need to identify a long-term funding strategy showing how maintenance costs over and above those provided by the City will be secured. If there remains a favorable response to the detailed proposal, the recreation advisory group will approve the specific off-leash area.

6. Upon receipt from the recreation advisory group's favorable recommendation, the sponsor group shall request to be placed on the Park and Recreation Board agenda for the Board's consideration of the off-leash proposal. However, prior to presenting to the Board, the sponsor group shall be responsible for securing a draft environmental statement from the Development Services Department through the Public Project Assessment process, Bulletin 510. This draft environmental statement must be included in the staff report to the Board.
7. Upon receipt of a favorable recommendation from the Park and Recreation Board and the Director of the Parks and Recreation Department, the sponsor group shall request a public hearing at the Public Safety and Livable Neighborhoods Committee (Committee) to consider a one-year trial off-leash area. The sponsor group shall again be responsible for presenting their proposal at the Committee in a format acceptable to that City Council committee.
8. If there is a favorable vote by the Public Safety and Livable Neighborhoods Committee, the sponsor shall request a public hearing at the full City Council. The sponsor group shall be responsible for presentation to the City Council in a format acceptable to the City Council.
9. After P&R approves the final construction plans for the off-leash area, P&R will issue a Right of Entry Permit to the sponsor group's selected contractor and construction may begin. P&R will review the construction as it progresses and provide direction to the contractor. P&R will not be responsible for administering the contract between the sponsor group and the contractor. The contractor will be required to post a performance bond to allow the City to complete the work should the contractor default on the construction contract. The sponsor group will be responsible for all cost overruns associated with the construction of the off-leash area. Upon completion of the construction, a letter from the P&R Director shall be sent to the Council District office stating the start date of the one-year trial period.
10. At the end of one year, P&R will evaluate the trial. The evaluation will consider follow-up input specifically requested by P&R from park neighbors, park maintenance staff, San Diego Police Department, San Diego Humane Society and the lead contact for the sponsor group as well as input received by P&R over the course of the trial from local community groups in the form of written records, such as compliments, commendations, complaints, warnings/citations. Within 13 months of the beginning of the one-year trial (with the trial continuing until a final decision on the evaluation of the trial), the P&R will make a written determination whether to continue, modify or revoke the trial off-leash status of the park area.
 - a. If the intention is to continue or modify the off-leash status, the Director will notify the lead contact for the sponsor group in writing. Modifications are to be made and reviewed by P&R.

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- b. If the intention is to revoke the off-leash status, the Director will notify the lead contact for the sponsor group in writing. The Director will offer only the sponsor group's three liaisons an opportunity to meet and discuss the issues. After that meeting, if the Director's decision is still to revoke the off-leash status, a final notice of this intended action will be sent to the lead contact for the sponsor group. In addition, written notice of the revoked status will be posted on-site 60 days prior to the effective date. The sponsor group shall be responsible for paying all costs associated with the removal of the improvements as directed by P&R.
11. If the sponsor group receives a letter from the P&R Director to continue the off-leash status, the sponsor group shall return to the Council Committee and the full City Council to seek permanent status for the off-leash area.

The above process can be lengthy and expensive for the sponsor group and requires a strong, long-term commitment. Again, this document only describes the general overall steps necessary. The sponsor group will need to work closely with P&R staff to identify and cover all steps necessary for the specific proposal being made.

Significantly changing the use of an area within an exiting park or creating a new Off-Leash Area can affect a number of park users or the community. It is the intent of this process to confirm that the community, elected officials and San Diegans as a whole are well aware of and support the proposed change in park use.

Please feel free to look up any of the above-noted documents on the City's website at www.sandiego.gov .