

City of San Diego
Park and Recreation Department
Proposed Off-Leash Area Approval Process
02-12-07

The following process must be initiated and carried out by a sponsoring group interested in establishing an off-leash area. The Park 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 Park 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 and Park Planning 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. After alternative sites are identified, the sponsor group shall provide P&R with funding in the amount of \$5,000 to pay for P&R staff time to assist the sponsor group in proceeding through the approval process. This is only an estimate. If staff time is increased for unforeseen reasons, the sponsor group shall provide additional funding for staff time. If staff time is kept to a minimum, unused funding will be returned to the sponsor group.
3. A publicly noticed meeting, in accordance with Council Policy 600-33, is 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.
4. The next advisory body for P&R is the Recreation Council. This Council is made up of various community individuals who have many years of experience in addressing recreational issues within their communities, including off-leash areas.

The item will be listed as an action item on the agenda. 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 Council will approve the conceptual 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.

5. With conceptual approval from the Recreation Council, 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.
6. 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 3 above.
7. The second public meeting will be facilitated by the Recreation Council. 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 Council will approve the specific off-leash area.

8. Upon receipt from the Recreation Council of a favorable recommendation, the sponsor group shall request a public hearing at the Land Use and Housing Committee to consider a one year trial off-leash area. The sponsor group shall again be responsible for presenting their proposal at the LU&HC in a format acceptable to that City Council committee. A public notice of the LU&HC shall be mailed similar to item 3 above.
9. If there is a favorable vote by the LU&HC, the sponsor shall request a public hearing at the full City Council. The sponsor group shall be responsible for presentation to the City Council. A public notice of the City Council meeting shall be mailed similar to item 3 above.
10. If the proposed Off-Leash Area is not indicated on the approved GDP for an existing park or if it is a new park, the sponsor group shall be responsible for processing an amendment to the park's GDP or processing a new GDP. This involves 2 more presentations and approvals.
 - a. The first presentation is to the Park and Recreation Board's Design Review Committee (DRC). The DRC reviews projects from a more technical standpoint and the sponsor group must be prepared to discuss the details of the materials to be used to implement the approved plan. This includes, but is not limited to, fence materials, colors and finishes of benches, tables, shade structures, kiosks, etc. The DRC will also review the functional relationship between the off-leash area and other park uses.
 - b. The second presentation is to the Park and Recreation Board. This is to be a publicly noticed meeting per item 3 above. The Park and Recreation Board will review past approvals and how comments received from other advisory bodies were addressed in the final plan. Upon approval of the Park and Recreation Board, the sponsor group will be able to proceed to the construction phase of the off-leash area.
11. 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.

12. 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, County Animal Control 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.
 - 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.
13. 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 LU&HC and the full City Council to seek permanent status for the off-leash area. Both these meetings shall be publicly noticed per item 3 above.

The above process can be lengthy and expensive for the sponsor group and requires a strong, long-term commitment. Significantly changing the use of an area within an existing 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.