

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Parks Department



DATE: March 28, 2015

COMMISSION MEETING DATE: April 9, 2015

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Marlene Finley, Parks Director

SUBJECT: Mini-park Policy

RECOMMENDATION:

Review and recommend to the Board of Supervisors approval of the Mini-park Policy.

BACKGROUND:

In 2014, San Mateo County Parks Department acquired two mini-parks: Friendship Park and Moss Beach Park respectively located in North Fair Oaks and Moss Beach. Both parks are less than an acre in size and provide services to both residents and others who visit the neighborhoods. These mini-parks are prime examples of the growing demand for smaller parks closer to urban areas, specifically within unincorporated areas of the County where there are no governmental agencies that currently serve this purpose.

It has not been a traditional role of the Parks Department to manage mini-parks as there is no reference or guidance legitimizing the classification of mini-parks within the General Plan, and no existing policies on the creation or management of mini-parks. The purpose of the mini-parks subcommittee was to draft a policy that would establish the definition, goals, and policies for the need, acceptance, requirements, and management of mini-parks. Commissioners Merrilees and Okelo volunteered to co-chair the mini-parks subcommittee and recruited a representative from each unincorporated community council in the county. Monthly meetings were held to draft the policy.

This policy is intended to serve as a guiding document for the Parks Department's efforts to manage future adopted or created mini-parks within the County. The policy outlines the process of submitting a formal proposal to the Director of County Parks for the purchase of land, the construction of a park facility, and/or the adoption of a mini-park.

The requirements and criteria include:

- An applicant being a public agency or an active non-profit organization
- Demonstrate and prove need and community support for a park in the neighborhood of the proposed park
- Consider partnership with the applicant and/or other entities if there is an unmet need that could be filled in the particular community
- County in its discretion may purchase, lease, or transfer land for a mini-park
- Consider partnering with an existing agency to take on the management and maintenance of an existing park

A proposal must provide:

- Name of the organization
- List of collaborating entities
- Location, size and history of considered parcel
- Mini-park conceptual site plan
- Clearly demonstrate the need and support of the community
- Estimated costs and funding model for the mini-park

Though the operation of mini-parks may require different personnel or expertise, management will be consistent with the current administration of the Parks Department.

DISCUSSION:

Approval of this policy is essential to achieve the County Parks' strategic vision of providing a unique system of natural parks and a broad spectrum of recreational facilities. Additionally, the policy embraces the Shared Vision 2025 of San Mateo County for a healthy and safe, prosperous, livable environmentally conscious and collaborative community.

It will integrate mini-parks within the jurisdiction of County Parks and embrace the operation and maintenance of these specialized facilities. Through this policy, the County will add mini-parks to the County Parks classification system within the San Mateo County General Plan, and thus provide a balance of park types and locations.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No immediate fiscal impact from the adoption of the policy, however there could be fiscal impact from the resources required for management of new mini-parks in the future which would depend on the nature of the park, partnership, and other factors specific to each mini-park.

Attachment: Mini-park Policy

MINI-PARK POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Since 1924, San Mateo County Parks Department has provided quality settings for outdoor recreation while preserving the County's natural and cultural treasures. Throughout this history, the County Parks system has been primarily oriented toward the preservation of natural areas, providing basic facilities in primarily rural areas consisting of medium to large acreage. As the population of the County increases and housing density increases, there will be growing demand for smaller parks closer to urban areas. Healthy people and healthy communities begin where we live, work, learn, and play, and local parks contribute significantly to the quality of life of residents and others who use these facilities. San Mateo County is dedicated to providing parks and recreational facilities for community members and seeks to provide a balance of park types and locations. Because San Mateo County Parks does not currently have a policy that embraces the operation and maintenance of mini-parks, this policy will include mini-parks within the jurisdiction of County Parks.

Through this policy, the County will add Mini-parks to the County Parks classification system within the San Mateo County General Plan, which includes: Park, Recreation Area, Natural Preserve, Wild Area, Linear Park and trail, and Historic Site.

This policy document establishes the definition, goals, and policies for the need, acceptance, requirements, and management of mini-parks.

The mini-park policy supports priorities of the Shared Vision 2025 of San Mateo County for a healthy and safe, prosperous, livable, environmentally conscious, and collaborative community.

FINDINGS

- Mini-parks are essential components for achieving the County Parks' strategic vision of providing a unique system of natural parks and a broad spectrum of recreational facilities and opportunities that accommodate people of all abilities, needs, and interests. A County mini-park policy aligns with and supports the overall priorities of the Shared Vision 2025 of San Mateo County for a healthy, safe, prosperous, livable, environmentally conscious, and collaborative community.
- Parks are essential for the health and well-being of all people and their communities.
- Many residents within these unincorporated areas do not have easy access to recreation facilities in the form of highly developed parks for active play.
- There is a need to provide park infrastructure, such as playgrounds, rest, restroom, and exercise facilities, in the form of mini-parks, to serve the needs of residents in unincorporated areas of the County.

- There are many unincorporated areas that do not have public agencies that provide recreational amenities.
- While some unincorporated areas, notably the recently established Granada Community Services District and the Highland Recreation District, have associated public agencies that provide direct recreational services and facilities to populations within their jurisdictions, many unincorporated areas have no public agency with the ability to provide parks other than San Mateo County.
- The most densely populated area in unincorporated San Mateo County, North Fair Oaks, has .03 acres of active parks per 1000 people in a densely urbanized environment not close to state or county parks. There are community members within North Fair Oaks that have organized to construct and maintain park facilities in their neighborhoods. However, such groups have had a checkered history in terms of ability to maintain parks that they have created.
- Groups from some unincorporated areas have asked the County for assistance with constructing and maintaining parks facilities.
- County Parks has and will continue to manage large parks in urban areas such as community parks as well as other parks.

POLICY STATEMENT

The County of San Mateo believes that parks are essential for the health and well-being of all County residents. To the extent possible, the San Mateo County Parks Department will ensure access to such facilities.

County management of adopted or created mini-parks will be consistent with its management of other County parks, notwithstanding that the management and operation of mini-parks may require different expertise and personnel than traditional regional parks.

DEFINITIONS

Unincorporated areas: Areas of the County that are not part of cities or other jurisdictions created to provide municipal services, including recreation.

Mini-park: A specialized facility smaller than 5 acres that is located within a neighborhood, walkable and/or in close proximity to residents, parking, and other densely populated areas, and that serves a concentrated population or specific groups such as tots, senior citizens, and visitors.

Applicant: Any entity which submits a proposal for a park.

Nonprofit organization: A legal entity that is tax-exempt under California Revenue & Taxation Code Section 23701d or Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3) or Section 501(c)(4).

Public agency: A government entity, which may be an agency of the federal, state, or local government or a local district.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Applicant

The applicant must be a public agency or an active nonprofit organization, as defined above, with a board of directors that meets regularly and formally records its deliberations.

2. Need and Community Support

The applicant must demonstrate and prove need and community support for a park in the neighborhood of the proposed park. Applicant may show community support by such means as petitions, public gatherings, surveys, and demand analysis.

3. Partnership

The County will consider partnering with the applicant and/or other entities if there is an unmet need that could be filled in the particular community.

4. Land Acquisition

If necessary, the County in its discretion may purchase, lease, or transfer land for a mini-park.

5. Existing Parks

The County may consider partnering with an existing agency, non-profit, or for-profit organization to take on the management and maintenance of an existing park.

PROCESS

An applicant must submit a formal proposal to the Director of County Parks for the purchase of land, the construction of a park facility, and/or the adoption of a mini-park.

1. Proposals for new mini-parks will be reviewed by the Parks Director.
 - The Parks Department will prepare staff reports to accompany proposals to the Parks and Recreation Commission as well as to the Board of Supervisors.
2. Recommendations will be presented to the County Parks and Recreation Commission.
 - The Commission shall provide specific recommendations to the Board of Supervisors with detailed reasons as to why a proposal should be approved or denied.
3. Once reviewed, proposals will be presented to the County Board of Supervisors.
 - If the Board of Supervisors accepts a mini-park proposal, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) will be developed between the County and the applicant.

Proposal must provide the following information:

- A. Name of the organization (including the name of an individual person as a single point of contact) proposing the mini-park.
- B. List of other collaborating entities that may or should be involved in the project and a description of any efforts that have been undertaken to ensure their involvement.
 - Cooperation among providers and other interested parties is to avoid duplication and ensure efficient and cost-effective use of public resources.
- C. Location, size, and history of the parcel being recommended.
 - Ownership of Parcel
 - Is donation of parcel a possibility?
 - Is it likely the community can raise funds for purchase?
 - If parcel is owned by other another agency, can a lease agreement or MOU be arranged?
- D. A mini-park conceptual site plan or general concept map.
- E. Need and Support.
 - 1. Is there demonstrated need and demand for a park in this location?
 - 2. How will the proposed park add to community health and quality of life for County residents?
 - 3. What is the level of local/public support? Does the proposed park have an established friends or neighborhood group to support the park?
 - 4. Is there another public entity in close proximity that is better suited to manage the park?
 - 5. Does the applicant intend to partner with the Parks Department to build, maintain, and operate the park on an ongoing basis?
- F. Costs.
 - 1. What is the cost to acquire and build the park? What are the projected ongoing costs to keep the park open?
 - 2. Is there an adequate funding model for the mini-park, including the following:
 - An estimate of costs for short- and long-term construction costs and maintenance.
 - An examination of current operation strategies and ideas for appropriate cost-saving measures if applicable.
 - A list of opportunities for volunteer or/and docent programs to support County staff as an effective way to expand park resources and services without incurring significant costs.
 - A collaborative funding model documenting the necessary resources and partnering for potential funding options. Potential funding models may include but aren't limited to the following:

- Advertising potential
- Commemorative bench and picnic table program
- Corporate sponsorship
- Cost recovery
- Fees
- Fundraising
- Grants
- In-kind contributions
- In-lieu or development mitigation fees
- Naming rights
- Tax revenue
- Volunteers

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The MOU may include, but would not necessarily be limited to, the following elements:

1. A list of operation and maintenance components and identification of the responsibilities of partnering parties.
2. A clear and formal agreement for management and fundraising responsibilities.
3. Co-management protocols with all partnering parties.
4. County agreement to conduct required inspections.
5. Insurance requirements as appropriate.
6. Periodic evaluation mechanisms to determine the effectiveness of the relationship between County Parks and a successful applicant in terms of operation, maintenance, recreational use, and visitor satisfaction for an approved mini-park.
7. Term of the agreement.