

Talking Points

for Planning Commission 2-9-22 Hearing to Grant a Coastal Development Permit (CDP) for the Off-leash Pilot Program at Pillar Point Bluff and Quarry Park

TAKE ACTION: If you want legal off-leash trails at Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff, please email the San Mateo County Planning Commission NOW and urge them to grant the Coastal Development Permit (CDP).

Emails should be sent to: planning-commission@smcgov.org, jlujan@smcgov.org, Erik.Martinez@coastal.ca.gov and BCCed to info@PeninsulaDogPAC.org.

Public Comments should be made at the Planning Commission's VIRTUAL meeting on February 9th @ 9am. Your presence matters and a short comment expressing your support for the off-leash pilot program will help make it happen. The 2/9 Planning Commission agenda with the link to the zoom meeting will be posted 72 hours in advance at <https://planning.smcgov.org/events/planning-commission-hearing-25>.

We are expecting some vocal anti-off-leash folks. It is critical that off-leash supporters attend and voice their support. **Thanks for making a difference!**

TALKING POINTS & BACKGROUND INFO:

The off-leash trails at BOTH Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff must be included in the Pilot Program as they benefit, attract and are necessary for very different dog owners. Quarry Park is hilly and steep, perfect for a hike in a mostly eucalyptus forest by fit, active people. The limited off-leash dog trails at Pillar Point Bluff, only 1.8 miles of trails that are level and easy to traverse, are perfect for families, the elderly, the disabled, and people who want to take a casual stroll with friends and their dog with some ocean views (usually a 1-1.5 mile loop through parts of the Ross Cove and Jean Lauer trails). The Dog Work Group and Board of Supervisors chose trails at both parks for the Pilot Program specifically because they are different and meet the needs of different users, so can provide a true test of whether off-leash trails will work as they have in every other Bay Area county.

Pillar Point Bluff is an historically off-leash dog walking area. There have been dogs traversing the Bluffs since the Ohlone tribes resided there. Everyone who lives on the coastside knows that this is a place where owners walk with their dogs both on-leash and off-leash. It is part of the Coastside's culture. As Supervisor Horsley noted during the Board of Supervisors hearing on November 7th when they voted 4-1 to adopt the Pilot Program, Pillar Point Bluff has allowed dogs off-leash forever. This is not new. Before POST bought the lands in 2004, dogs were allowed off-leash. The County only has posted signs requiring dogs on-leash for about a decade and this has not been enforced till very recently. We are not sure why a Coastal Development Permit is necessary as this is not a change in use for these park trails.

The two Pillar Point Bluff pilot program trails are not environmentally sensitive and have undergone extensive environmental review. Pillar Point Bluff is a former dairy farm

sandwiched between industrial Airport Road and a 150-foot cliff that the San Mateo County “Midcoast Land Use” zoned agricultural land. During the extensive, 5+ year Dog Work Group process, County Parks’ Natural Resource staff conducted an in-depth environmental review. The two off-leash trails are in areas not deemed sensitive according to the San Mateo County’s LCP Midcoast Sensitive Habitats map. In addition, a CEQA review, including the Final Initial Study-Mitigated Negative Declaration, concluded “no potential significant environmental impacts are expected from the pilot program.” The environmentalist on the Work Group favored these off-leash trails at the Bluff (and Quarry Park) noting that they had less environmental impact than other SMC parks. The sole purpose of the SMC 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, was to determine which county parks should allow increased dog access, both additional on-leash and off-leash access. After 31 public meetings, environmental studies and intensive discussion, review and analysis, they carefully chose specific trails at these two County parks as the ideal place to test off-leash dog recreation.

Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and Ross Cove are sensitive habitats that should be protected.

There is no doubt that dogs should not be allowed in these areas. We agree that there needs to be better enforcement of regulations against dogs at Ross Cove beach. We also advocate putting up visible barriers (entry fences like Redwood City Parks use at Stulsaft Park) and clear signs indicating where dogs can and cannot be off-leash. As environmentalists, we want to protect sensitive habitats. The two trails allowing off-leash dog access on the Bluff are not sensitive habitats.

This carefully drawn Pilot Program actually will REDUCE the areas where off leash dogs currently walk on the Bluff. The parts of the two trails in the Pilot Program, an approx. 1.5 mile loop, only includes about half the bluff trails and, of course, does not allow dogs at Ross Cove or FMR. These specific parts of trails were chosen by the Dog Work Group, County Parks and the Board of Supervisors because there is NO access to the beach (100-150’ cliff provides a great natural barrier) and the trails are not near sensitive habitats. In addition, part of the Pilot Program includes installing fencing and additional signage clearly delineating where off-leash dogs are not allowed. By sanctioning off-leash dogs in parts of the Bluff, the Pilot Program will reduce off-leash dogs in the other parts of the Bluff. The clear demarcation of the off-leash and on-leash trails also will make enforcement easier. This is a win for opponents who want to keep off-leash dogs further away from Ross Cove and any access to the beach and a win for dog owners who get access to a few trails where they can walk their dogs off-leash. A true win-win. Of the over 40 miles of coastsides in SMC, the one area that will allow off-leash dogs is under one mile.

Enforcement of Pilot Program rules will be better with all park users seeking to have the rules followed. Park rangers can’t be everywhere and they need users of the parks to help ensure rules are followed. Sanctioning a part of 2 trails on the Bluff to be off-leash as part of Pilot Program will lead good dog owners, who are most likely to know the few bad dog owners, to police those dog owners who cause problems. Why? Dog owners want to keep the sanctioned off-leash trails and know that if rules are not followed, they will lose their legal off-leash trails and never get additional off-leash trails at other County parks. At Stulsaft Park, a 40+ acre park in Redwood City that allows about 15 acres off leash, we have found dog owners mostly stay in the approximately 15-acre section and dog owners pick up their and other dogs’ waste. The dog owners see this part of Stulsaft Park that allows off-leash as something special that they want to keep and know that problem dog owners could be the downfall of a great thing.

Pillar Point Bluff is NOT FMR or Ross Cove, and the 2 trails allowing off-leash dogs on the Bluff were carefully selected to ensure no sensitive habitats would be harmed.

According to the Pillar Point Bluff Off-leash Pilot Program Trail Map, the Dog Work Group and SMC Parks only are sanctioning off-leash dog access on the Jean Lauer trail and the northern half of the Ross Cove Trail, under 2 miles of trails. There is NO access to the beach, ocean or Fitzgerald Marine Reserve near any of these trails. Nature has provided the perfect barrier, a 100-150 foot cliff. Access to the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is only possible at the most southerly end of Pillar Point Bluff (over half a mile further south on the Ross Cove trail, just south of marker 16). These trails were carefully selected after years of study only to allow off-leash dog access where it posed little or no environmental effect.

The Pilot Program creates the STRICTEST off-leash dog rules and regulations in CA. This Pilot Program includes off-leash rules that ensure all other park users are not negatively affected. For example, if a person without a dog or a leashed dog is approaching, the owner must put their dog on-leash. An owner can have no more than 2 dogs off-leash. It also includes a detailed monitoring plan to track any impacts enabling the County and public to evaluate the 1 year pilot program.

San Mateo County has NO off-leash trails and only 8% of the trails allow dogs on-leash, the least by far of any Bay Area county. Over 40% of San Mateo County households include a dog (2016 study indicated 41.5% households in CA) and it's probably closer to 50% now due to Covid adoptions (ASPCA May 2021 survey determined 20% of households added a dog/cat during the pandemic). Yet, San Mateo County lags far behind every other Bay Area county in terms of dog walking access in its County parks. While most county park systems allow dogs on 70-90% of their trails, our county currently provides only 8% trails access. In addition, San Mateo County is the **ONLY** Bay Area county that does not have **ANY** sanctioned off-leash dog walking trails for its residents. No family goes on a hike leaving family members behind, and that includes their dogs. And it makes no sense to take a hike or walk with the rest of your family, and then come home and walk your dog.

There is overwhelming public support for off-leash trails at both Quarry Park and Pillar Point Bluff. Over the last couple of years, dog owners have gained a lot of momentum. Peninsula Dog PAC has over doubled in membership and Coastside DOG continues to grow. The vast majority of people who have expressed comments and opinions on the SMC off-leash dog pilot program have been strongly in favor of the program. 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, local residents presented a petition with more than 250 signatures in support of off-leash dog walking specifically at Pillar Point Bluff. Before the Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to adopt the pilot program on 11/9/21, over 100 emails and letters were sent in support and about 25 people spoke in support at the public meeting.

Dog owner groups' success and growth is attributed to our focus on being respectful of all trail users. We believe in protecting sensitive habitats and protecting our ocean waters from contaminants. Coastside DOG and Peninsula DOG PAC have held clean-up events with County Parks at Pillar Point Bluff. We teach dog owners proper trail behavior through our website and at in-person events.