

Holbrook-Palmer Park
October 2, 2019
Enclosed, off-leash
dog area

Park and Recreation Committee Proposal

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Holbrook-Palmer Park, 150 Watkins Avenue, Atherton, CA 94027

Executive Summary

The purpose of this proposal is to consider the need for an off-leash dog area within Atherton's 22 acre Holbrook-Palmer Park, the pro's and con's associated with this potential project, and potential costs, related expenses and funding options available to potentially support and maintain it.

Since off-leashed dogs are not allowed within Holbrook-Palmer Park, the committee is considering the option of recommending an off-leash dog area, per HP Park Master Plan [2015], to be funded by annual access fees, private donations from both resident and non-resident dog owners throughout Atherton and adjoining towns/cities, and through special events involving all future dog park members.

Per Atherton's Holbrook-Palmer Park Master Plan [2015], the recommended off-leash dog area would be ideally located between the tennis courts and the pre-school, and would be designed to blend in to existing features around the park.

The Park and Recreation Committee is being asked to consider all aspects this potential project, next steps and, if approved, vote to forward this proposal on for consideration by Atherton's Town Council. Town Council would be asked for approval to move ahead with the following options: to seek additional resident/non-resident feedback, to generate a formal set of project design specifications and estimated cost, and to move forward with donor outreach in an effort to raise necessary funds to support the project.

History

Holbrook-Palmer Park is a 22-acre area that was once a private residence with plenty of open space. Located in the heart of Atherton, the property was eventually donated as a gift in 1950 by Olive Holbrook-Palmer, and accepted by the Town in 1964.

This gift stipulated that “the development of the property be funded by donations” for changing the property into a viable and usable park.

Today Holbrook-Palmer Park offers many amenities to the community including walking paths, tennis courts, a children’s playground, a little league field, exercise equipment, a preschool and facilities to support public and private events.

The Holbrook-Palmer Park Master Plan, 2005, was created with the goal to “build on the existing character of the park to make a place the community will use and enjoy while serving the diverse needs of the residents”.

Historically, dog owners have been allowed to let their dogs off-leash, providing they did so on Holbrook-Palmer Park’s North Lawn. This created the opportunity for dog owners throughout the community to meet daily and to provide their dogs with the opportunity to run, play, interact and socialize with other dogs, under supervision of their owners. A new community of dog owners meeting within the park resulted.

Sometime around 2012, the Town Council voted to change the off-leash regulations due to an increase in non-dog owner complaints within the park. This resulted in new rules allowing only on-leash dogs within Holbrook Palmer Park. This left resident dog owners with no other local off-leash option accept to visit neighboring dog parks in Menlo Park, Redwood City, and Woodside. The community of dog owners disbanded for other off-leash options.

Statistics/Feedback

Town of Atherton: (Key Findings)

The Town of Atherton is comprised of approximately 7,000 residents living in approximately 2,500 homes over 6 square miles. Though the Town has a complete database of residence names, addresses and contact information, to-date, the Town has no official record of dog-owner/resident totals. This raises the question of how many residents actually own one or more dogs. More to the point, the question would be of those resident dog owners, how many want an off-leash dog area easily accessible to them? Because we lack this data we have considered related data from dog-related businesses.

According to AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) and NAPHA (North American Pet Health Insurance Association) U.S. pet ownership surveys showed that, in the state of California, over 51% of residents own at least 1 dog/per household. 24% of those dog owners have more than one dog/per household. By calculation this would suggest that Atherton has at least 1,275 dog owner households with another 300 dogs added to the grand total of approx. 1,575 potential resident dogs in Atherton.

HP Park Master Plan [2015]: (Key Findings)

According to the Park and Recreation Committee's Holbrook-Palmer Park Master Plan {2015} the greatest park use was daily use of open spaces, lawns, trails and paths. This suggests use by walkers and runners. It also suggests walkers with dogs. Additionally this plan noted that over 90% of feedback respondents lived in Atherton with Menlo Park and Redwood City users in second and third place. 51% of those daily park users walked there directly from their residence. This suggests walkers and joggers are the largest users. It also suggests walkers with dogs. When participants were asked what new activities should be allowed in Holbrook-Palmer Park, respondents requested that ***dogs be allowed off-leash***, primarily in a confined area.

The resulting no.1 recommendation of the Holbrook-Palmer Park Master Plan {2015} was for the creation of an ***off-leash dog area within Holbrook-Palmer Park***.

Statistics/Feedback (Continued)

During Atherton's Holbrook-Palmer Park, Park and Recreation Committee March meeting, the Park and Recreation Committee asked the author to gather feedback from daily park users regarding any potential interest or lack of interest in an enclosed, off-leash dog area as described in the Holbrook-Palmer Park Master Plan {2015}. When in Town between June '19-August '19, the author spoke with other park users while walking her dog daily through Holbrook-Palmer Park. Though the interactions were informal, this on-site walking survey produced the following results. Approximately 102 people were surveyed while using Holbrook-Palmer Park and were asked if they would support/not support an enclosed, off-leash dog area as outlined in HP Park Master Plan [2015] with the following findings:

- 73 park users were Atherton residents
 - 29 park users were not residents (Menlo Park, Redwood City, Woodside)
 - 100 park users supported an enclosed, off-leash dog area
 - 2 park users did not support an enclosed, off-leash dog area
 - @20% of park users surveyed did not own a dog
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Pros and Cons

For the past few years the Park and Recreation Committee and the Town Council have entertained the possibility of considering the addition of an off-leash dog area within Holbrook-Palmer Park. From meeting notes and notes taken during the on-site survey the following *concerns* were noted:

- Increase in number of dogs/owners using HP Park
 - Increase in number of non-resident dogs/owners and dog walkers using HP Park
 - Increase in parking concerns/traffic needs
 - Increase in liability issues including dog fights, bites, and noise
 - Residents with ample acreage might not need an enclosed, off-leash dog area
 - The Town's major focus for the next 2 years is on the funding and completion of a new Town Center
 - Funds needed to build and maintain an off-leash dog area will need to come through private donations, sponsorships and special events
 - Noise ordinances must be honored and ceaseless barking hampered to support our neighbors in Atherton and Felton Gables
 - Potential off-leash violators may continue regardless of off-leash dog area
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Pros and Cons (Continued)

From meeting notes and notes taken during the on-site survey the following *positive comments* were noted:

- Per dog owner best practices most healthy dogs need 30 minutes to 2 hours of daily, physical activity including exercise and socialization for physical and mental health reasons in a safe, clean environment
 - Increase in resident/non-resident use, support, and physical and financial involvement in HP Park by using the off-leash dog area
 - Increase in resident/non-resident dog owner support for the Town of Atherton
 - Increase in dog population overall physical health and mental well-being through regular off-leash play, interaction, and socialization with other dogs
 - Decrease in pet waste issues throughout other areas of the park
 - Decrease in possibility of off-leash dog play/complaints by other park users
 - Increase in safety for non dog owners using the park; less possibility of jumping/interaction
 - Decrease in police supported interaction with off-leash dog owner violators
 - Increase in dog owner sense of community by meeting regularly with other dog owners
 - On-line annual fee renewal keyless services like “August” (a universal entry system centrally operated) could provide for a seamless, keyless, on/off access controlled database backed by an automated, annual, fee-charging system that will help support ongoing park access, fees, operations and maintenance costs
 - “August” or similar on-line service could be used for all HP Park access (tennis courts, park gate, other) for centralized fee charging and access control
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Specifications:

According to the Park and Recreation Committee's Holbrook-Palmer Park Master Plan [2015] and various on-line "Dog Park Best Practices" resources the following was recommended for an enclosed, off-leash dog area measuring less than ½ acre or less than 2,100 square feet (the approximate size of the proposed off-leash dog area within the Master Plan {2015}):

Items/Requirements:

- Circumference of off-leash area to be protected by approximately 800 linear feet of picket-type see-through fencing approximately 5' high
 - Dog park surface to be made of decomposed granite for dog health, durability and minimal upkeep that is environmentally friendly
 - 2 self-closing double gates with staging area placed mid-center facing the parking lot and again on opposite side along existing park walkway
 - 2-3 sets of aluminum benches/side tables (easiest to clean/maintain)
 - 1 High-Low Water Fountain with a running water supply (prevents spread of disease and mosquitos)
 - 2 Pet waste stations (including poop bags and garbage receptacles)
 - Keyless on-line access service (example: "August"): for keyless dog area access using a cellular phone
 - Signage including name, hours of operation, local contact information, information on how to obtain dog park access, and rules/regulations
 - Donor Wall to include donors, donor levels by brick size, dog's name, family name, and paw print
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Estimated Cost:

Items/Requirements:

- 5' wooden fence approx. \$20.00/linear foot, approx. 800 linear feet:
\$16,000.00
 - 2,100 sq. ft. of ground covered w/decomposed granite, approx.
\$20.00/sq. ft.:
\$42,000.00
 - 2-3 aluminum benches/tables @300.00/each:
\$ 1,800.00
 - Signage 2-3 signs (info/contact/rules/name):
\$ 3,000.00
 - 2 Pet waste stations @\$280.00/unit (bags/garbage) :
\$ 560.00
 - Donor wall:
TBD
 - Enclosed off-leash dog area keyless access control service (August):
TBD
 - Ongoing maintenance:
TBD
 - Bid package preparation in-house:
\$ 2,000.00
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Estimated Cost (Continued):

Items/Requirements:

- Bid package preparation by consultant:
\$10,000.00

- Total cost estimates between:
\$65,000-\$100,000.00

Potential Funding/Labor Sources:

- **Donations:** Resident, non-resident dog owners, and dog walkers
- **Annual access fees:** Resident, non-resident dog owners, and dog walkers
- **Event sponsorships:** Local veterinarians/groomers/dog walkers and sitters
- **Event possibilities/fees:** Halloween dog costume contest, holiday walkathon, and more
- **Membership maintenance event possibilities:**
 - “Spring cleanup”/refurbishment/BBQ
 - “Fall(en) Leaf Cleanup”/hot apple cider/dog treats, and more

Alternate/Short Term Solutions:

- Vote to return to “off-leash” dogs allowed on North Lawn with limited hours
- Establish a temporary off-leash area by enclosing recommended area with temporary enclosures
- Establish temporary, enclosed off-leash dog area on Entry Lawn

Next Steps: Park and Recreation Committee

Circling back, the purpose of this proposal is for the Park and Recreation Committee to consider the need for an off-leash dog area within Atherton’s 22 acre Holbrook-Palmer Park, the pro’s and con’s associated with this potential project, and potential costs, related expenses and funding options available to potentially support and maintain it. The following are potential next steps:

- Analyze site, dog park elements, and confirm project estimated costs
 - Estimate potential project time-line
 - Recommend to seek or not to seek additional, authorized community input via
 - on-line e-mails
 - in-person testimonials (Park and Rec Meetings)
 - mail surveys
 - on site surveys
 - Felton Gables survey
 - Consider presentation of project to Town Council
 - Request Town Council to authorize Park and Recreation to move forward with specifications, bid preparations, and fund raising activities
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October 2, 2019

13

Questions/Comments:
