



Washoe County

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Operations Division

Public Input Meeting
Proposed off-leash area at Hidden Valley Regional Park
August 28, 2014 – Vista Pavilion

MEETING MINUTES

❖ **Introductions**

- 27 members of the public attended. Staff present: Eric Crump, Operations Division Director; Colleen Wallace-Barnum, District Park Manager; Jennifer Budge, Park Planner.
- Participants were provided with an agenda, park map, public input survey, postage paid envelopes and trails guides. Large scale park maps were available. A copy of the survey and park map (provided) are attached to the minutes.

❖ **Background on proposal for additional off-leash area**

- The meeting was scheduled as a result of the Hidden Valley Homeowners Association meeting held in April, 2014 and the numerous comments (pros and cons) about dogs' off-leash at the park and citizen requests to designate a portion of the park for this use.

❖ **Description of current park programming**

- Eric Crump provided an overview of Hidden Valley Regional Park, including the existing developed areas and surrounding uses. The park is 480-acres and was acquired through a Recreation and Public-Purposes Lease-Patent process from the Bureau of Land Management. Washoe County has the Patent (Deed) on the land and manages the property through its Community Services Department. The lands to the north and west are residential, to the east/south are private (owned by Story County Props. LLC and Sunny Hills Ranchos).
- Many participants were surprised to hear that the lands east and south are private, as several individuals were under the impression that these were BLM public lands. At one time, Park Rangers did allow dogs off leash in the "back 40". Once the Link Piazza Dog Park was created, the leash law was requested by the Director to be enforced everywhere else in the park. . This misconception and change of leash enforcement could have contributed to the large amount of dogs off leash along the eastern and southern park boundaries.
- Eric Crump provided an overview of the existing rules and regulations, including Chapter 95 of the Washoe County Code and identified the two areas within the park system where there is a designated off-leash area. A brief discussion about Animal Control and Chapter 55 of the County Code was also provided. Washoe

County Park Rangers do not have citation authority, but can ask park users to leave the park and can call Animal Control and/or the Sheriff if the problem persists.

- Eric also provided an overview of the more than 62% cuts to the parks operating budget in the last 5 years and the limited amount of funding to improve an area for a new designated use. There are no funds for fencing, but some limited signage may be able to be installed depending on the outcome of the public process.

❖ **Discussion and input on proposal** (*Citizen comments in black italics, staff response in blue*)

- *Will the eastern boundary of the park be marked?*
There are currently no plans or identified funding to mark the boundary; however, there may be a consideration to do so in the future.
- *Where is the eastern boundary of the park? Unsure of the boundary and where exactly you are entering private lands?*
The eastern boundary is not currently fenced or marked, but extends up into the hills to the east, beyond the existing fencing. The existing fencing was installed to keep the wild horses to the east.
- *Is there a specific proposal or an actual proposed area? Where did this request come from?*
There is not a specific proposal at this time. This was brought about by a large contingent of individuals at the Hidden Valley Homeowners Association meeting. We are simply providing a forum for public input and discussion on the possibility of adding a designated area for use as an off leash area which may or may not be considered in the future.
- *Concern about Rangers being aggressive with users with dogs off leash.*
If there is a staff issue or concern about inappropriate conduct, please contact Colleen or Eric to address the issue immediately.
- *Are the current rules even enforceable?*
Due to the existing staff resources it is difficult, but enforced as staff is available consistent throughout the County's park system.
- *Extend the existing Link Piazza Dog Park fence to include a natural area (no turf to maintain). This would provide an ADA accessible facility and a larger controlled area environment without impacting the rest of the park.*
- *Park Rangers are targeting people in the undeveloped portions of the park.*
- *Have the Inner Loop be designated as the off leash area with the "road" as the boundary.*
- *The off leash area should be in the hills to the east, the leashed area should be close to the "developed" areas to reduce conflicts.*
- *Where the horses roam is more dangerous than where the dogs roam, if the horses can, the dogs should be able to.*
- *It would be difficult for the Rangers to enforce the Inner Loop area if designated as an off leash area.*
- *The eastern portion of the park should be off leash-leading into the hills*

- *There is an “assumption” from the general public already that everything east of the fence is already designated for off leash uses.*
This is not the case. Only the Link Piazza Dog Park has been designated as an off-leash area.
- *When did the leash law begin and why?*
Chapter 95 of the County Code was created at the inception of the Parks Department to identify rules and regulations throughout the County’s park system. The last time it was updated was quite some time ago and staff and the Parks Commission are looking at a public review of the entire code currently. The leash law was created to address public/dog safety concerns.
- *If the eastern portion is designated, it is difficult terrain and would be hard to keep up, not as visible to the public. Concerns for waste in the park.*
- *East of the perimeter loop has been the off leash area for years.*
- *How do you enforce this here and at other County parks?*
Park Rangers do not have citation authority, but do ask users to put their dog on leash. If the problem persists, users are asked to leave the park and the Sheriff or Animal Control as appropriate.
- *What is the penalty?*
There is not a fine. Park Rangers do not have citation authority, but if citizens submit a formal complaint to Animal Services, under County Code Chapter 55, a Notice of Civil Penalty is issued.
- *Don’t believe there really are any issues and these are just “phantom complaints.”*
Staff will follow up with those that signed in or filled out the survey to anonymously share the comments and concerns of the complaints about dogs off leash to demonstrate the variety of issues and citizen concerns. Staff tracks all complaints and there are numerous concerns from the public about these issues.
- *Can we still use a leash on our dog and where exactly?*
Yes, thank you. You can walk your dog on a leash anywhere except the two designated off leash areas within our park system: Link Piazza Dog Park and the off leash area at Rancho San Rafael Regional Park.
- *Citizens have a duty to help enforce rules and safety, we can’t always rely on the Park Rangers, but we need signage to assist us for a visual boundary. Park users need to be “stewards” of the park.*
- *As the Link Piazza Dog Park opened and became more popular, the rest of the park did too. Concerns about users not cleaning up after their pets and the health and safety issues associated with that. It is scary for park users with so many dogs off leash. Some users won’t come back to this park because of that.*
The health/safety concerns with this are community-wide, not just at this park. We take these concerns seriously and collaborate with Animal Services on signage, enforcement and other related matters. Should another designated area be added to the park, the park use will most likely increase as well, as off leash areas are greatly desired by the public.
- *Can there be dog waste containers, with bags/cans? Will that create problems for the Park Rangers or will it help?*

Due to budget cuts, parks have reduced the amount of trash cans due to limited staff resources to remove trash liners. There are strategically placed dumpsters at parks to still provide this service. This could be a consideration to add to the park depending on the proposal, but funds are limited.

- *There are opportunities to volunteer at the park, with the HOA or not, to help with park clean ups etc.*

The Hidden Valley HOA is extremely proactive and opens/closes park gates and helps with park projects and clean ups. Washoe County also has a Volunteer Coordinator, Denise Evans if you would like to become more involved. Denise can be reached at devans@washoecounty.us or at 785.4512 x107.

- *What is the most “saleable” option to present to the public/commission? Tonight we are simply seeking public input. We will be putting together a staff report for the Park Commission meeting next Tuesday, September 2nd. This is also another opportunity to provide input on this subject.*

- *Is there data on park usage? What is the annual park attendance?*

There are car counters at most regional parks. While this doesn’t capture foot traffic, we use a formula to accommodate this and large group use. Annual park usage at Hidden Valley is estimated at 203,000.

- *Could there be different days of the week designated for different user groups or areas?*

Tahoe Rim Trail has tried this, but has been unsuccessful. This is difficult to enforce and users typically won’t abide by this based upon their availability, days off work etc.

Voting Exercise: (27 attendees) Which areas would you like to see designated as an off-leash area, but still allowing hiking/biking and other permitted uses?

- ❖ INNER LOOP– 9 VOTES
- ❖ EAST OF FENCE/Perimeter Loop into hills – 18 VOTES
- ❖ NORTH AND EAST – 6 VOTES
- ❖ ALL “UNDEVELOPED AREAS” of the Park – 17 VOTES
- ❖ NO ADDITIONAL OFF LEASH AREAS – 0 VOTES

❖ Survey

- Hard copies of the survey with postage paid envelopes were available for participants. The survey is also available on-line at: www.surveymonkey.com/s/HIDDENVALLEY. The survey will be open until September 15. As of this meeting, there were 44 respondents.
- A follow up survey with further options may be considered.

❖ Next Steps

- An overview of this meeting and a continuation of the discussion will continue at the Washoe County Regional Open Space and Parks Commission meeting to be held at the Washoe County Administration Complex located at 1001 East 9th Street, Reno in the Commission Chambers, September 2, 2014 at 2:30pm.
- No decisions will be made after this meeting or after the Park Commission meeting. Staff will continue to review/update the survey and discuss all options and

proposals with the Park Commission and members of the public for review and consideration. Staff anticipates a recommendation to the Park Commission for consideration in October, 2014.

- Staff will prepare a meeting summary and distribute it to those in attendance and that filled out survey.