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Tonight: Off-Leash Dogs Return to the Council

By Sophie Braccini

Tonight, March 14, the Moraga Town Council will once again consider the fate of off-leash dogs at Rancho Laguna Park. The Council's November 2011 decision to fence in the dogs is expected to be rescinded in order to avoid a legal confrontation by residents who believe the plan was adopted without the required environmental analysis.

In its place, Town staff has proposed four options:

The first would authorize off-leash dogs at Rancho Laguna Park in the early hours of the morning only.

Option two would authorize off-leash dogs at Rancho Laguna Park in the late hours of the afternoon only.

The third option is to develop, somewhere in Moraga, a dedicated fenced dog park not to exceed 1.5 acres. Off-leash hours would no longer be in effect outside of a fenced area.

Option four would cancel all off-leash hours.

The rationale for the first two options was not explained in the staff report. Option three was recommended by staff, while option four was designated to have the least fiscal impact.

Option 3 does not come with a proposed location or a drawing, but Rancho Laguna Park is cited as a possible location for a future fenced dog park. If that option is approved, the issue goes back to square one and off-leash hours will be terminated at Rancho Laguna Park in the mean time.

In the staff report, the timeline of the Rancho Laguna Park saga is spelled out. It started in November of 2008, when a County employee issued a citation to a dog owner for allowing his animal to run off leash. Three years later, the problem that started as a simple matter of rule clarification remains unresolved. It's unlikely that March 14 will see the end of confrontation between dog owners, who want the park to just stay the way it is with the rules that they say have worked for more than 20 years, and the Town that wants to create a physical separation between off-leash dogs and other park users.

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