



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published May 23rd, 2012

The Dog Days are Over Town Council votes to end off-leash hours at Rancho Laguna Park; approves a reconfiguration plan

By *Sophie Braccini*

The long tradition of allowing off-leash dogs to romp at Rancho Laguna Park during the early morning and evening hours will come to an end on June 9, and will not resume until and unless a fenced dog park is constructed. The decision came at the May 9 Moraga Town Council meeting after hours of tense discussion. The Council also declined to accept a plan recommended by a committee of residents and opted instead for a reconfiguration of the park that would include a small, fenced dog area and a U12 soccer field.

The next question is: where will the money for this construction come from? The Town made it clear that it was not interested in footing the bill, at least not in full.

In late March, the Council gave interested residents a deadline of May 9 to come up with a plan for Rancho Laguna Park that would satisfy all stakeholders. A group of 14 residents volunteered to serve on a Committee; some came forward on their own and others were recommended by the Town Manager. They met three times and produced a plan for a roughly two-acre fenced dog park, encompassing about 40 percent of the grass area at Rancho Laguna Park (called Plan C). In addition, two dissenting members of the Committee presented alternate plans (D1 and D2) for a smaller dog park of about one acre.

Many residents spoke at the Council meeting, most in support of Plan C. "We were asked to compromise our position from wanting to leave the park as is, to accepting a fenced solution. We did, and we agreed on Plan C," said Committee member Tina Briar. She went on to cite all of the instances when four of the five Council members were on record indicating that they liked, or could support, Plan C.

Plan C supporters also pleaded with the Council not to have the second reading of the ordinance that would end the off-leash hours at the park until a fenced area was built.

Other residents, in smaller numbers, supported ending the off-leash hours immediately. "We stopped going [to the park] when my younger son was knocked over by an off-leash golden retriever who wanted to play," said Amy Kikugawa. "I encourage you to not table the second reading of the ordinance."

Council members debated between Plan C and Plan D2, and whether or not to end the off-leash hours as a fenced area was being constructed. Vice Mayor Howard Harpham seemed torn, and cast the swing vote—Council Members Karen Mendonca and Ken Chew wanted to end off-leash hours, while Mayor Mike Metcalf and Council Member Dave Trotter wanted to continue them.

The ordinance was approved on 3-2 vote and will be effective June 9. It does not change the rules at the Mulholland Open Space Preserve, where animals that are under a person's control are permitted in designated paved areas without a leash.

Two members of the Committee recommended that a smaller area be dedicated to off-leash hours. One of them, John Chambers, noted, "The American Kennel Club says that you can have an ideal dog park if you have 1 acre." Resident Bob Reynolds also supported a smaller dog park. "I like dogs, I want to have a dog park in Moraga, but I am not convinced that taking a large chunk of the only public flat land we have is the solution," he said.

The three Council members who voted to end off-leash hours also supported a plan for a smaller dog park (D2). "I have never been in favor of cutting this park in half and that is what C does," said Mendonca. "D1 and D2 are almost the same, D2 protects the picnic tables better and I like that." Harpham and Chew agreed. After trying to leave the door open for both C and D2 to be studied simultaneously, Metcalf joined the majority and Plan D2 passed on a 4-1 vote; Trotter opposed.

Committee chair Cherie Grant, who is not a dog owner, indicated that she was disappointed that the plan recommended by the Committee was not approved by the Town. "The Committee's plan took the needs of all users into consideration," she said.

Lamorinda Dogs' Jeanne Moreau, who also served on the Committee, later described Plan D2 as "an incredibly more costly plan than C, because it will require the whole reconfiguration of the park." Moreau continued, "The majority plan was not approved by the Council, and now they want us to finance another, more expensive, configuration that shows less consideration for different types of park users."

The total cost of implementing Plan D2 has not been calculated. In addition to fencing, it entails adding pathways, doors, turf and irrigation, and moving picnic tables. The Town will pay up to \$25,000 to fund the required environmental reporting. As for the rest of the cost, Metcalf stated that the first priority in Moraga is the roads and that he didn't see the Town spending money for a dog park.

A letter from several members of the Committee appears in Public Forum, page A9.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA