

Capitola City Council

Agenda Report



Meeting: July 25, 2024

From: Police Department

Subject: Dogs at City Parks and Capitola Beach

Recommended Action: Receive a presentation on current dog regulations at City Parks and City Beaches and either a) take no further action, or b) identify potential changes to dog regulations and direct staff to return at a noticed future City Council meeting.

Background: For many years, the City of Capitola has sought to provide facilities where dog owners can exercise their dogs. In 2002, the Capitola City Council amended the municipal code to allow leashed dogs in designated city parks. The City Council has also periodically considered allowing dogs on all or parts of the beach and evaluated the feasibility of adding off-leash access in parks, with the most recent review taking place in 2012.

Among the 12 designated City parks/locations, one location allows for dogs off-leash (Ozzi Dog Park at McGregor Park), seven parks have leash law requirements, and three (Beach, Wharf, Hidden Park) do not allow dogs. In comparison, the City of Santa Cruz does not allow dogs on Main Beach; however, Santa Cruz does have other dedicated dog beaches. Neighboring jurisdictions allow dogs on-leash in both the county and state parks.

Capitola has adopted a leash law that requires dogs to be on a leash no longer than six feet in length in public places. In a separate section, the Municipal Code identifies specific parks where dogs are prohibited or where leashes are required. In addition, the Code also allows the City to post other public locations where dogs are prohibited. Below is a list of City parks and beaches with dog regulations.

Location	Off Leash Dogs Allowed	Dogs Allowed On Leash	How Regulated	Notes
McGregor "Ozzi" Dog Park	Yes	Yes	Posted signs	Allowed off-lease in Fenced Dog Park
Soquel Creek Park		Yes	Code	
Jade Street Park		Yes	Code	Dogs prohibited from lawn and tennis court areas
Esplanade Park		Yes	Code	Dog prohibited from the lawn area
Monterey Ave Park		Yes	Code	
Noble Gulch Park		Yes	Code	
Peery Park		Yes	Code	
Hihn Park		Yes	Leash Law	
Park at Rispin Mansion		Yes	Leash Law	Under construction
Capitola Beach		No	Code	
Capitola Wharf		No	Code	
Cortez Park (Hidden Park)		No	Posted signs	

Discussion: Capitola Municipal Code Section 6.14.200 and Section 6.14.320 outline the City's current regulations for dogs in public spaces and parks. Copies of these code sections are included in Attachment 1. Copies of the meeting minutes from the City Council meeting when 6.14.200 was adopted are included as Attachment 2.

The following is an outline of general considerations for specific public spaces

Capitola Beach

- Capitola Beach is approximately 400 yards of municipal beach that becomes very popular during the high season (May – October). Similar to Main Beach in Santa Cruz, Capitola Beach does not allow dogs due in part to density issues.
- During the off-season, the Police Department receives weekly complaints about dogs being off-leash or defecating on the beach.
- During the high season (May – October), increased beach usage by visitors, Junior Lifeguards, and other sanctioned events compounds these issues, results in a higher number of contacts and complaints for dog violations.
- Officers from the Police Department and Santa Cruz County Animal Services have issued citations for violations, although many interactions with dog owners are educational.
- Changes to dog regulations on the beach may require some level of Coastal Commission review.

Capitola Wharf

- Municipal wharfs have high concentrations of people within confined spaces, which can exacerbate territorial and/or poor behavior in dogs, leading to conflicts between dogs or between dogs and people. The current Wharf plan includes fishing activities and other distractions that can cause dogs to act unpredictably, creating potential hazards, including wildlife hazards.
- Managing dog waste on a wharf can be challenging. Dog waste can create unpleasant conditions for visitors, environmental hazards, pose health risks, and can be difficult to clean on wooden surfaces.

Park Regulations

- Monterey and Jade Street Parks have programmed organized sports/youth activities. In prior reviews of this subject matter, the Soquel Unified Elementary School District and the City's Recreation staff have expressed concerns regarding the impacts of off-leash dog use at these parks. The Superintendent of the Soquel Unified Elementary School District has provided comments as Attachment 3.
- Staff has identified upper Noble Gulch Park as the most feasible location to potentially test another off-leash dog park due to the lack of conflict with current park uses and park layout. Implementing such a project would require an amendment to the Municipal Code and a budget allocation for new fencing and signage.

Should the City Council want to change regulations regarding dogs in City parks and beaches, staff recommends clear and identifiable boundaries (example: "leashed/unleashed dogs are allowed in [specific location] only") rather than time-of-use rules (example: "dogs allowed from 4-7 pm"). Staff has found it easier for the public to understand and staff to enforce consistent location-based rules.

There is no required action with this presentation. Should the City Council seek changes to the regulations for dogs at a specific location, staff could return to a future noticed meeting with documentation necessary to implement the new regulations.

Fiscal Impact: The cost of implementing and enforcing any program will greatly depend on the issues outlined above. Staff would return to the City Council with a plan and schedule with specific financial details for any change that is requested.

Attachments:

1. CMC 6.14.200 and 6.14.320
2. Excerpt from City Council Meeting Minutes from September 27, 2001
3. SUESD Comments

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