



PUBLIC CORRESPONDENCE

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To send correspondence to the City Council, on matters listed on the agenda please email PublicComment@losaltosca.gov

March 7, 2022

VIA EMAIL

Los Altos City Council
Los Altos City Hall
1 North San Antonio Road
Los Altos, CA 94022

Re: Public Comment Agenda Item #12 - March 8, 2022 Meeting –
Commission Appointments

Dear Mayor Enander, Vice Mayor Meadows, Councilmember Lee Eng, Councilmember Weinberg, and Councilmember Fligor,

We are Los Altos residents and submit this unsolicited letter in support of Scott Spielman's re-appointment to the Parks and Recreation Commission.

1. Mr. Spielman has demonstrated a commitment to representing the interests of the community at-large.

Section 4.1 of the City Council Norms and Procedures provides that commissioners represent the interests of the community at large. During his tenure as a commissioner on the Parks and Recreation Commission, Mr. Spielman was a role model of representing the interests of the community at large. As an example, when the commission was considering a site for a fenced-in dog park, many of us expressed our concern about the process during public comment. Mr. Spielman responded to our concern by proactively proposing a meeting with our neighborhood. He spent hours listening to our concerns and helping us understand the process. He also facilitated educating other commissioners about the concerns and issues we raised. His dedication to reaching out to residents was a role model for seeking to represent the interests of the community at-large. Moreover, we believe his efforts contributed to enabling the city to move forward with the plan that the City Council recently approved.

2. Mr. Spielman is uniquely qualified to serve on the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Mr. Spielman served on the commission for approximately 18 months. His effectiveness was recognized when he was elected Vice Chair. At a time when the Parks and Recreation Commission is considering many important matters, we believe the City Council and the commission will benefit from Mr. Spielman's prior experience, familiarity with the current matters before the commission, as well as his pre-existing, positive working relationships with the current commission members.

We ask that each of you vote to re-appoint Mr. Spielman to the Parks and Recreation Commission. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Corrigan¹, Harry Guy, Daryl Shafran, Michael Shafran, Mark Homan, Parisa Naserlavi, Sarah S. Shreve, and Kim Lorz

¹ Signatory submits this letter as a resident of Los Altos and not as a member of the Public Arts Commission

From: [Joe Beninato](#)
To: [Public Comment](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT AGENDA ITEM #12 - MARCH 8, 2022
Date: Thursday, March 3, 2022 5:06:52 PM


Hello Los Altos City Council,

I watched the commission interviews Tuesday and today via video, and was very encouraged to see at least one resident who is relatively new to Los Altos volunteering to serve. I hope we can find a way to take advantage of the enthusiasm and energy of our new neighbors who might be running up against a full slate of incumbents returning to a commission. Hopefully there are other commissions you can interest them in considering.

I also noticed that one of the elements missing from the appointment considerations is feedback from their commission colleagues and staff liasons who work directly with the candidates. Many of us in our professional lives have experienced 360 degree reviews from our peers, subordinates and managers. I would hope that past performance of the incumbents and their relationships with other commissioners is somehow taken into account as you consider your appointments.

Thank you,

Joe

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Joe Beninato


From: [Bette H](#)
To: [Public Comment](#)
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - AGENDA ITEM 12 - Tuesday, March 8th
Date: Tuesday, March 8, 2022 4:29:04 PM

As Mark Twain once famously said, if I had more time I would have been more concise.

To: City Council, City Manager, City Staff, and Public Comments

Cc: PARC Chair Dailey (to forward to PARC)

I have significant concerns regarding the possible re-appointment of former PARC Commission Steven Spielman to the PARC Commission, which I will detail below. First, I wish to clearly state that I'm only speaking for myself - and I am thus sending this email from my personal address. Quite frankly I don't know to what extent my non-optimistic opinion regarding Mr. Spielman's candidacy may or may not represent the HDPPS steering committee or the off-leash supporter mailing list.

Some history: Mr. Spielman was on PARC when the off-leash pilot was designed and he stated in his March 1st commission interview that he was responsible for public outreach and that he did an excellent job of it. Mr. Spielman called particular attention to his public outreach work at Lincoln Park, Grant Park, and Heritage Oaks - all parks which ended up not being included in the pilot. How a pilot is designed and structured absolutely influences its results. Unless "no dog parks" is the City's goal, please consider carefully whether to re-appoint him.

Also if public outreach had been excellent, I still don't fully understand why the off-leash community's desires and needs were not acknowledged with respect to the chosen timeframes. During a relentlessly-difficult pandemic, we dog owners were expected to adhere to significantly limited inconvenient hours despite a field that was empty for most of each day. After the pilot closed, we learned the time constraints were designed to get us accustomed to sharing the field with Little League - although the league was on a hiatus of an unknown duration due to Covid 19. We were restricted to morning hours when many dog owners needed to help get their families and children ready for online work and school; preparing for work themselves; and then restricted to after-dark, mosquito-filled evening hours.

I spent at least 300 hours on the field for the six-month duration of the pilot (one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening) and during all that time I didn't meet a single off-leash dog owner who thought the pilot hours did an adequate job of considering our needs. The limited hours presented multiple issues and challenges including forced congestion leading to more barking due to dogs getting riled up by the crowding, making the occasional passerby feel threatened and/or uncomfortable, as well as scaring off more timid dogs and puppies, and making it more difficult for owners to control their dogs when group play became too intense.

The overcrowding also led to some aggressive interactions, which likely wouldn't have happened if we'd been allowed to use the parks throughout the day - easing congestion, noise and frustration on the part of people on the field, nearby neighbors and anyone passing by. And while admittedly our dogs and our galoshes had an impact on the grass - imho the bulk of the damage was due to standing water leading to a grub infestation which brought in flocks of crows and possibly some raccoons as well, as under-watering due to some broken irrigation lines. I'd call it a comedy of errors, except it wasn't funny.

As the owner of a now two-year-old dog, I have been following the dog park issue very closely. Mr. Spielman has also indicated a desire for more enforcement on several occasions. I remember a specific comment in the October 26, 2021 council meeting (which I located at the 3:29 time stamp) where Mr. Spielman stated the problems with the original implementation of Hillview were due to the recommendations not being completely followed. He said the City needed more of a team to monitor the pilot, "I believe the enforcement of the hours was inadequate and the field got more abuse than it should have because the hours were supposed to be limited."

From this statement, I gather a) Mr. Spielman doesn't understand that short hours didn't mean less use of the field - our dogs still needed to socialize and play - we just all had to go at the same time, which as above led to congestion, dog fights, and more; and b) neither did he understand how the limited hours led to an "us versus them" mindset between people who had previously been cordial-enough-and-even-friendly neighbors.

Even residents who didn't believe in the short time friends called police - probably to have some measure of control over the lack of fencing and the large influx of dog owners from all over the city who were looking for a safe-enough and legal place to off-leash. When opponents of off-leash can harass the off-leash community with constant police calls we end up with what near the end of the pilot felt like overtones of the Stanford Prison Experiment.

We dog owners are mostly highly capable adults with families, jobs, and multiple responsibilities. Do we really need to be supervised like a bunch of grade schoolers? What about acknowledging the pilot time constraints were overbearing and extremely inconvenient, in some cases precluding people's abilities to off-leash their dogs at all? And instead of overreaching enforcement - and creating an atmosphere of ill-will and harassment - we might have opened up the hours to all-day play - and added a fence along the north side for a protective barrier between off-leash activity and people walking by.

While many off-leash dog owners across our city have been warned on occasion by animal control or the police that they are in violation of dog ordinances, I've never heard anyone actually get fined. I think that's because the City isn't prepared and quite frankly doesn't have the resources to round us all up. Bring on the paddy wagons?? Once that hit the news, we might become the laughing stock of the country - as one of the most expensive places to live - but no safe and legal places for our dogs to play yet.

As for public outreach, maybe Mr. Spielman's work at the other parks was fine, but at Hillview I heard off-leashers say they would start reserving a budget to pay for fines. Others said they wish we could all just go back to being unlawful and ignored. What I say is this: we've reached a turning point where the City needs to make a choice on how to proceed. If the city appoints a PARC commissioner committed to increasing enforcement - the city should prepare to fully acknowledge that Los Altos is not meeting a basic need for possibly fifty percent of our residents.

Is the City willing to establish multiple off-leash parks throughout the city in the near term? Or should we continue with the current more gradual approach - the two parks in the works, with a second phase proposed for Hillview - and then possibly look for additional legal, safe, fenced play spaces further down the road. It has been a long and windy road to get here, but now the choices are pretty clear. Choosing a commissioner committed to enforcement, will force the city's hand to deal with this sooner than later.

With much more work needed to ensure a smooth-enough deployment of the Hillview and MPW dog parks, we need to treat this commission appointment like a real job and actively recruit for someone with high-level required skills and knowledge. We don't just need volunteers with good intentions, we need volunteers with good intentions and relevant skill sets - perhaps market or other research. While Mr. Speilman's public outreach work may well be the best thing in the history of Los Altos, we want a better future for our dogs.

Sincerely,

Bette Houtchens