

Adelina Del Real

From: Bette H [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 22, 2022 3:41 PM
To: Public Comment
Subject: Re: PUBLIC COMMENT - AGENDA ITEM 12 - Tuesday, March 8th // and Special Item - Tuesday, March 22nd

Categories: Yellow category

Again, if I had more time, I'd write more concisely...

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

Scott Spielman reached out to speak with me yesterday. He gave me some additional context on his commission work as well as his public comments, so I'd like to share some thoughts on my March 8th public comments letter below. I just noticed that commission applications will be reviewed at tonight's council meeting, so I'll say I am no longer opposed to whether he is appointed to the PARC commission and I actually support him.

The two points of additional context concern 1) his public outreach efforts and 2) his 10/26/21 public comments regarding the use of enforcement during the Hillview pilot.

1. I admit I showed up at Hillview to off-leash my dog just as the pilot was getting underway so I didn't have a full understanding of why Hillview was the only site selected when I criticized his work. Scott told me that during his public outreach he worked with nearby neighbors at Heritage Oaks on both sides of the issue and the PARC commission actually voted 4:3 in favor of a pilot there, but it was nixed 3:2 by council. So he did what he could to get to "yes" at Heritage Oaks, but he wasn't part of the final decision. These are difficult community decisions with people strongly for and against off-leash, so we all play our parts and hold some responsibility for the outcomes.
2. In his public comments last October, Scott said, "I believe that the enforcement of the hours was inadequate and therefore I think the field got more abuse than it should have because our hours were supposed to be limited." In our conversation yesterday, he clarified that his stance on enforcement is generally more about protecting the public from vicious dogs, so the 10/26/21 statement doesn't give the full picture.

While I'm still vehemently opposed to the use of law enforcement to regulate severely limited off-leash time frames, and I don't think enforcing the time frames would have improved the condition of the field, *I am strongly supportive of protecting the public from vicious dogs.* There have been multiple cases of dog attacks - in at least a couple of cases dogs were killed. My own dog was attacked both in Palo Alto and in Mountain View. Also as the email hub for over 400 off-leash supporters these past seven months, I have a unique vantage point of what's happening with dogs here in Los Altos - and many of the stories are very concerning.

After listening to Scott's 10/26/21 public comments again, I noticed that he recommended pressing forward with the Hillview off-leash park while looking at other options, "If you were to stop this program you would eliminate something that's been in the works for 12 years and I believe that some of the issues like fencing and conditioning could be remedied."

There was actually an effort to fight for off-leash as far back as 2003, so it's been almost 20 years of struggle. Luckily, Council proceeded to authorize two dog parks, one in North Los Altos, one in South.

I strongly believe in safe, legal off-leash as a means to socializing, exercising, and protecting our dogs and the community at large. I also believe the need for off-leash spaces will increase as we add more housing - and thus more dogs - due to the new state mandates. Los Altos absolutely needs to press forward on this issue. Whatever happens with this commission appointment, we should also have a citizen's advisory group - consisting of people from all sides of the debate, who are committed to working together in the best interests of the whole community.

If I've missed anything, I'm open to feedback and continuing the conversation.

Sincerely,

Bette Houtchens

On Tue, Mar 8, 2022 at 4:28 PM Bette H [REDACTED] wrote:

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. Speilman 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. Speilman 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.

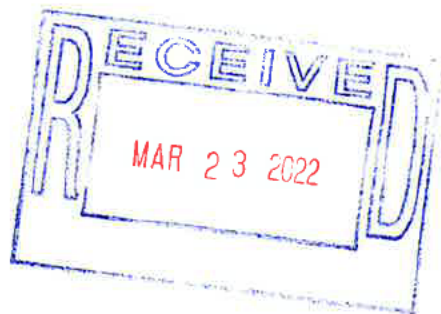
Is the City willing to establish multiple off-leash parks throughout the city in the near term? Or should we continue with the current more gradual approach - the two parks in the works, with a second phase proposed for Hillview - and then possibly look for additional legal, safe, fenced play spaces 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

March 18, 2022



Mr. Jonathan Weinberg
Los Altos City Council
Los Altos, CA. 94022

Re: Public Comment Special Agenda Item A (Commission Appointments) – March 22, 2022

Dear Councilmember Weinberg,

I write this unsolicited letter to urge you to support Scott Spielman's re-appointment to the Parks and Recreation Commission.

On March 9, 2021 when the City Council was considering the re-appointment of three Parks and Recreation Commissioners, you indicated that you would not support Vice Chair Scott Spielman's reappointment. Unfortunately, as we all later learned, the rationale for not reappointing Mr. Spielman was based on information that was not accurate.

At the March 23, 2021 City Council meeting, Mr. Spielman raised his concerns about an inaccurate recitation of his record being used to justify not re-appointing him to the commission. You demonstrated courage and integrity when you acknowledged your error and apologized publicly.

Everyone makes mistakes. A genuine apology, however, requires taking affirmative, corrective action. The vote on March 22 is an opportunity to demonstrate to residents that commission re-appointments are based on an accurate record of public service. Re-appointing Mr. Spielman would give residents an experienced, dedicated commissioner. Not only would this be in the best interests of Los Altos residents and homeowners, it would also establish the commission appointment process as one that members of the City Council desire to be based on an accurate factual record of public service.

In addition to ensuring the integrity of the commission appointment process, Mr. Spielman should be re-appointed because he is eminently qualified to serve. Mr. Spielman served on the commission for approximately 18 months and was named Vice Chair. He has experience with the commission, positive working relationships with current commissioners, and important background and familiarity with the issues that are presently before the commission.

Mr. Spielman is also the only candidate for the single open position on the Parks and Recreation Commission. To appoint anyone who did not prioritize the Parks and Recreation Commission in applying and who would not have Mr. Spielman's experience or his long-standing tenure as a resident would be a disservice to our community.

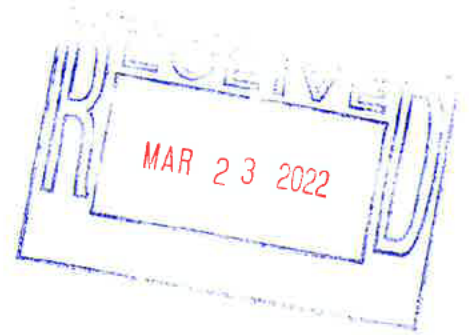
Finally, to the extent there is any question about Mr. Spielman's effectiveness, his demeanor, or his ability to be collaborative, I would encourage you to speak with Commissioner Teresa Morris who worked closely with him on the dog park subcommittee. Indeed, thanks to Commissioners Morris and former Commissioner Spielman's collaboration and dedication, the City Council has made progress on this important matter with the designation of dog parks at Hillview and McKenzie parks.

I appreciate your service to the community. That said, residents hope you will be receptive to this request to re-appoint Mr. Spielman to the Parks & Recreation Commission. When you campaigned, you told residents you would approach the challenges facing Los Altos with integrity, honesty and commitment. We hope you will seize this opportunity to follow through on this promise.

Thank you for your consideration,


Jim Jolly

March 18, 2022



Ms. Sally Meadows
Los Altos City Council
Los Altos, CA. 94022

Re: Public Comment Special Agenda Item A (Commission Appointments) – March 22, 2022

Dear Vice Mayor Meadows,

I write this unsolicited letter to urge you to support Scott Spielman's re-appointment to the Parks and Recreation Commission.

On March 9, 2021, when the City Council was considering the re-appointment of three Parks and Recreation Commissioners, you expressed concern about re-appointing Vice Chair Scott Spielman to the commission. The rationale you offered was that city staff had set a direction for the discussion of Halsey House at the February 10, 2021 meeting, but that Vice Chair Spielman took the conversation in a different direction. That was not accurate. As Mr. Spielman stated at the April 13, 2021 City Council meeting, staff knew exactly what the presentation would cover. In fact, as Mr. Spielman advised the City Council, Director Donna Legge confirmed to Mr. Spielman that the presentation fell within the scope of the discussion.

The vote on March 22 is an opportunity to demonstrate to residents that commission re-appointments are based on an accurate record of public service. Re-appointing Mr. Spielman would give residents an experienced, dedicated commissioner. Not only would this be in the best interests of Los Altos residents and homeowners, it would also establish the commission appointment process as one that members of the City Council desire to be based on an accurate factual record of public service.

In addition to preserving the integrity of the commission appointment process, Mr. Spielman should be re-appointed because he is eminently qualified to serve. Mr. Spielman served on the commission for approximately 18 months and was named Vice Chair by his fellow commissioners. He has experience with the commission, positive working relationships with current commissioners, and important background and familiarity with issues that are presently before the commission.

Mr. Spielman is also the only candidate for the single open position on the Parks and Recreation Commission. To appoint anyone who did not prioritize the Parks and Recreation Commission in applying and who would not have Mr. Spielman's experience or his long-standing tenure as a resident would be a disservice to our community.

Finally, to the extent there is any question about Mr. Spielman's effectiveness, his demeanor, or his ability to be collaborative, I would encourage you to speak with

Commissioner Teresa Morris who worked closely with him on the dog park subcommittee. Indeed, thanks to Commissioner Morris and former Commissioner Spielman's collaboration and dedication, the City Council has finally made progress on this important matter with the designation of dog parks at Hillview and McKenzie parks.

I appreciate your service to the community. That said, residents hope you will be receptive to this request to re-appoint Mr. Spielman to the Parks & Recreation Commission.

Thank you for your consideration,


Jim Jolly

March 18, 2022



Ms. Neysa Fligor
Los Altos City Council
Los Altos, CA. 94022

Re: Public Comment Special Agenda Item A (Commission Appointments) – March 22, 2022

Dear Councilmember Fligor,

I write this unsolicited letter to request your support of Scott Spielman's re-appointment to the Parks and Recreation Commission.

On March 9, 2021 when the City Council was considering the re-appointment of three Parks and Recreation Commissioners, Councilmember Meadows and Councilmember Weinberg did not support the re-appointment of Vice Chair Scott Spielman to the commission. The rationale offered by Mr. Weinberg was proven to be unsupported by the facts. To his credit, Mr. Weinberg apologized. Similarly, Councilmember Meadows gave a rationale at the City Council meeting that was also proven to be without factual support by Mr. Spielman.

When individuals volunteer to serve on commissions, they do so based on a desire to serve our community. It is imperative that the process for commission appointments be transparent and based on facts. Mr. Spielman should have been re-appointed. Had the City Council acted on Mr. Spielman's actual record of service, he would have been re-appointed as both Mayor Enander and Councilmember Lee Eng supported Mr. Spielman's re-appointment.

The vote on March 22 is an opportunity to demonstrate to residents that commission re-appointments are based on an accurate record of public service. Re-appointing Mr. Spielman would not only correct an unfortunate decision that was not based on accurate information, it would also give residents an experienced, dedicated commissioner. Not only would this be in the best interests of Los Altos residents and homeowners, it would also establish the commission appointment process as one that is based on facts and, thus, fair.

In addition to preserving the integrity of the commission appointment process, Mr. Spielman should be re-appointed because he is eminently qualified to serve based on his experience with the commission and familiarity with important issues that are presently before the commission. Moreover, he is the only candidate for the single open position on the Parks and Recreation Commission. To appoint anyone who did not prioritize the Parks and Recreation Commission in applying and who would not have Mr. Spielman's experience or his long-standing tenure as a resident would be a disservice to our community.

During commission interviews last year, you stated that it was important for commissioners to respect each other and to work well together. To the extent you have any question or concern about Mr. Spielman's effectiveness, his demeanor, or his ability to be collaborative, I would encourage you to speak with Director Donna Legge or Commissioner Teresa Morris who both worked closely with Mr. Spielman on the dog park topic. Indeed, thanks to Commissioner Morris and former Commissioner Spielman's collaboration and dedication, the City Council has finally made progress on this important matter with the designation of dog parks at Hillview and McKenzie parks.

I appreciate your service to the community. That said, residents hope you will be receptive to this request to re-appoint Mr. Spielman to the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jim Jolly