



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item-No Attachments (PDF)

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REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Review of Park Use Policies and Related User Fees (Study Issue)

BACKGROUND

The Parks and Recreation Commission sponsored, and Council ranked, the Review of Park Use Policies and Related User Fees Study Issue for 2014 (Attachment 1). The Study Issue includes a review of the following:

1. To determine if current policy sufficiently addresses the increasing demand for City of Sunnyvale parks.
2. To determine if established priorities for issuing use permits and agreements to groups and organizations are effective.
3. A comparison of user fees and policies from other municipalities.
4. A comparison of best practice information from professional organizations and associations.

Staff subsequently completed the following:

- Extensive review and analysis of City policy to determine how well existing practices support those policies and where there are gaps in policy.
- Extensive benchmarking of neighboring jurisdictions and best practices, including fee structures and rates.
- Review and revisions of administrative policy guidelines.
- Analysis of existing practices with respect to equity of access to facilities.
- Analysis of how different fees or administrative practices would impact existing users.
- Analysis of Special Use Agreements and outreach to Special Agreement groups regarding their priorities.
- Community outreach on the adequacy and effectiveness of existing facility use policies.

The Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed this report at their February 11, 2015 meeting and unanimously voted to recommend that Council approve the staff recommendation of Alternatives 1 and 2. (Attachment 2)

EXISTING POLICY

Sunnyvale Municipal Code

Chapter 9.62 Public Parks (Attachment 3)

General Plan - Land Use and Transportation - *Adequate and Balanced Open Space*: GOAL LT -8, Policy-8.1 (Attachment 4)

General Plan - Community Character - *Wide Range of Recreation Programming*

GOAL CC-11, Policy CC-11.1, 11.2, 12.3, 12.4 - Outlines priority of services and those who will be

given priority access. (Attachment 4)

Council Policy 2.2.1 Open Space and Recreation Policies, Policy 2.2 B8-10, E7, E8, E11 - Reserved and non-reserved access to open space and recreation facilities, prioritizing residents. (Attachment 4)

Council Policy 7.2.4 Relationships with Outside Groups - Special use agreements and support provided by the City to outside groups. (Attachment 4)

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This activity does not require environmental review because it is not a project that has the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. (CEQA Guideline 15061(b)(3))

DISCUSSION

As part of the Study Issue, staff took a multi-step approach to determine opportunities and options for Sunnyvale. This included benchmarking with other jurisdictions, identifying best practices and gathering community input.

Benchmarking

The following cities were chosen for benchmarking purposes: Campbell, Cupertino, Mountain View, San Jose and Santa Clara. Benchmarking topics included fees, priorities, policies, inventory, and best practices. (Attachment 5)

Best Practices

In general, Sunnyvale's practices and policies are consistent with the benchmarked cities. However, staff's review provided an opportunity to identify small adjustments to administrative practices that could benefit Sunnyvale. For example, some cities implement an allocation of field time for youth sports groups to maintain equity amongst groups and to distribute City resources fairly. Others commonly utilize a three strikes policy as a strategy to eliminate inappropriate and recurring behavior in permitted groups; hold lotteries as an alternate method to determine priority order in processing field reservations; charge itemized fees for services such as storage, equipment use and snack shack access. In addition, some cities use social media and online reservation software in ways Sunnyvale might consider adopting. Social media has been used to communicate field closures and construction updates while reservation software can provide real time access to field availability and permitting.

Community Input

Community input was incorporated through review of past customer concerns and issues, meetings with current user groups, a public outreach meeting and an on-line survey (Attachment 6). In response to the three primary questions posed to the community, the following input was received.

Are current policies and rules for issuing permits to individuals or groups to Sunnyvale park facilities effective in managing the use and demand of these facilities?

- 76% of written survey respondents said current policies and rules are effective.
- Current user groups and survey respondents raised issues of supply and demand, enforcement, and transparency of policies and rules.

Do you have any suggestions for policy changes in regards to park use and permits?

- 68% of written survey respondents had no suggestions for policy changes.
- With the exception of suggestions for more dog parks, there were no consistent themes in the current user groups' and survey respondents' comments.

Should large groups be required to obtain permits for general park use?

- 80% of written survey respondents felt large groups should be required to obtain permits for general park use.
- Outreach meeting attendees expressed concerns about the capacity of non-reservable amenities such as playgrounds and restrooms to handle large, drop-in groups.

Throughout the outreach process, various members of the community expressed satisfaction with the quality, condition and availability of Sunnyvale parks. The community requested that the City make better use of technology such as making permits and schedules available on-line; publicizing field conditions; and allowing more on-line transactions.

Best Practices Opportunities

The Study Issue process provided staff an opportunity to affirm that Council policy is generally sufficient to address the demand for parks and that the current process for issuing use permits and agreements to groups and organizations is effective. It also allowed staff to look at some possible new options, all operational in nature. An overall summary is provided below:

1. Sunnyvale adjusts its fees regularly to be, on average, in the mid-range in comparison to its neighboring cities. Benchmarking and analysis of current fee patterns show that there are opportunities to adjust some fees and to add fee categories to more clearly articulate and reflect the City's policies and priorities. It is important to note though that, in some cases, the fees do not provide for full cost recovery, where the annualized infrastructure and maintenance costs of a particular amenity, such as a lighted ball field, could not, as a practical matter, be recouped.

Proposed Operational Response: Consistent with Council direction providing the Director of Library and Community Services the authority to administratively set activity and facility use fees for recreation activities and services, continue to use pricing, staying within average mid-range of benchmarked cities, to help manage demand and to reflect Council policy priorities and fees. Incorporate more itemized fees for services such as storage, equipment use and snack shack access. Although the City does not recover the full cost to operate park facilities, the City will continue to offer this core service and recover at least the incremental use costs, with fees in line with benchmarked cities.

2. User groups are increasingly requesting facilities for use outside of their core mission/season for events such as socials, and travel team play. Although Council policy establishes priorities for use, benchmarking with other cities shows that there are additional processes that can be implemented to help address increasing and conflicting demands for Sunnyvale facilities.

Proposed Operational Response: Use a range of operational systems and administrative practices to equitably manage facility use, including, but not limited to: formulas and fees which can equitably allocate resources; differentiation between primary and secondary seasons; lotteries in which groups requesting to use the same facilities (e.g., field or picnic

area) are considered in random order to promote fair distribution of facilities; special use agreements; pre-qualification of non-profits to expedite reservation requests; and deposits to minimize City loss of damaged resources.

3. As with many neighboring cities, Sunnyvale provides comprehensive policy documents for rules and practices around facility rentals. Staff identified that Sunnyvale has the opportunity to clarify practices through policies and provide more detailed direction for sports field use. Sunnyvale's facility use information, while complete, is spread among multiple documents and is difficult for the public to navigate.

Proposed Operational Response: Staff is in the process of updating policies to provide consistent and detailed procedures for all areas. As sections are finalized and implementation dates are scheduled, this information will be posted and notices made available to current users and the public at large. In addition, as a response to the public's concern about larger user groups dropping in to non-reservable areas of parks, staff will initiate an outreach and education effort to solicit prior notification for drop-in group park use in order to assist City staff to anticipate park maintenance needs.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no direct fiscal impact from action on this report. The operational changes in progress as a result of completing this Study Issue will only be implemented if they have a neutral or positive impact on net revenues.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

A community input meeting was held on November 20, 2014, with 30 in attendance. All stakeholder groups, including youth non-profit groups, Special Agreement groups, neighborhood associations and the Friends of Parks & Recreation received e-mail notification of the meeting and of the on-line survey, also posted on the City's web page. 149 people completed the survey. Input was also sought at the bi-annual meetings of youth sports' presidents.

The Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed this report at their February 11, 2015 meeting and unanimously voted to recommend that Council approve the staff recommendation of Alternatives 1 and 2. (Attachment 2)

ALTERNATIVES

1. Reaffirm existing Council policy as the basis for park use policies and related user fees.
2. Acknowledge staff's proposed operational responses, as outlined in this report, to address issues identified throughout the course of the study.
3. Other direction as deemed appropriate.

STAFF AND COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Alternatives 1 and 2: 1) Reaffirm existing Council policy as the basis for park use policies and related user fees; and 2) Acknowledge staff's proposed operational responses, as outlined in the report, to

address issues identified throughout the course of the study.

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Reviewed by: Joan Borger, City Attorney

Reviewed by: Lisa G. Rosenblum, Director, Library and Community Services

Reviewed by: Manuel Pineda, Director, Public Works

Reviewed by: Robert A. Walker, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Deanna J. Santana, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. Study Issue Paper LCS 14-02
2. Excerpt of Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes of 2/11/15
3. Sunnyvale Municipal Code Chapter 9.62 Public Parks
4. Relevant Policies: Excerpts of General Plan and Council Policies 2.2.1 and 7.2.4
5. Benchmarking Detail
6. Survey Responses