



STAFF REPORT

To: Parks and Recreation Commission

Date: October 16, 2025

From: Kevin Gresh, Recreation Supervisor – (650) 558-7312

Subject: Review of the Off-Leash Summer Pilot Program at Washington Field

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend that the Commission review the information provided regarding the off-leash summer pilot program at Washington Field and consider extending its pilot program status for an additional summer.

BACKGROUND

Ten years ago, the City had three designated off-leash dog areas: Bayside Dog Exercise Park, Washington Park (near the rose garden), and the upper grass area at Cuernavaca Park. Over time, based on community feedback and extensive public outreach, the City Council approved additional off-leash locations, including Washington Ballfield, Skyline Park, Adrian Dog Park, and Ray Dog Park.

Despite these additional off-leash opportunities, dog owners continue to express interest in additional locations and hours of access.

In May 2024, staff received correspondence from a small group of residents requesting expanded off-leash hours at Washington Park Ballfield. Over the following months, staff met with these residents to discuss their proposal, which included adding summer off-leash hours from 6:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m., Monday through Friday. No changes to existing school-year off-leash hours were requested.

In January 2025, the Dog Advisory Group and City staff met to review the proposal. The discussion included an evaluation of current off-leash summer hours, the proposed expanded hours, and the potential operational impacts on city programs and park maintenance activities. For example, during the summer months, camps begin at 9:00 a.m., with program setup starting as early as 8:30 a.m. In addition, Parks Division staff typically perform field maintenance on Monday mornings; however, maintenance schedules may vary depending on field conditions, workload priorities, and staffing levels.

To ensure uninterrupted field maintenance and operational efficiency, the volunteer group that submitted the proposal committed to managing on-site activity during the expanded morning off-leash hours. This included ensuring that all dogs and dog owners are clear of the maintenance areas during staff operations. The group also proposed establishing a daily volunteer schedule. Staff requested that this schedule be shared with City personnel to allow for direct coordination with the designated volunteer in the event of operational conflicts.

In March 2025, the Parks and Recreation Commission and City Council approved a pilot program authorizing expanded summer off-leash hours at Washington Park Field. Staff also recommended returning to the Commission at the conclusion of the summer season to provide an evaluation of the pilot program and determine whether the expanded hours should be continued, modified, or discontinued for another summer.

DISCUSSION

From June to August 2025, the Off-Leash Summer Pilot Program at Washington Field was conducted under the supervision of Supervisor Gresh, who worked closely with the volunteer group throughout its duration. Early in the program, minor logistical adjustments were implemented to improve field safety and sustainability. These included using vests for the volunteer leads so that Parks staff knew who to speak with when necessary and providing a bucket of dirt to fill in the holes on the field caused by the dogs. Historically, the summer months provided Parks staff with uninterrupted morning hours to perform field maintenance, as dogs were not permitted during this period. The implementation of the pilot program, however, introduced the same operational inconsistencies staff experienced during the rest of the year while maintaining the field.

While many regular patrons adhered to the established guidelines, staff continued to observe community members using the field outside of permitted hours daily. Issues with dog waste pickup persisted despite the volunteer group conducting daily walkthroughs. Staff received photos and phone calls from community members regarding these concerns every week. Overall, the volunteers of the pilot program remained communicative and responsive during their assigned time slots, but staff continued to receive communication from the public regarding dogs on the field in general. To address this issue citywide, Field Monitor shifts have been increased, and additional calls have been made to the Burlingame Police Department. However, this is a citywide concern and is not directly related to the Summer Hours Pilot Program at Washington Field.

Staff recommend that the Commission extend the Off-Leash Summer Pilot Program at Washington Field for an additional summer. This will allow staff and program volunteers to continue collaborating on improvements to better meet the needs of the community. Staff will provide another update at the end of summer 2026.

FISCAL IMPACT

One summer was not sufficient to fully assess if there are long-term costs associated with the additional off-leash use of the field. Staff will continue to monitor conditions and provide an updated report at the end of summer 2026. In addition, the pilot program did not increase in staff time, as the Field Monitors, Supervisor Gresh, and the Burlingame Police Department would have been present regardless.