



Department Source: Parks and Recreation

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: July 15, 2019

Re: Report on Visitor Perceptions of Columbia's Dog Parks

Executive Summary

The Parks and Recreation Department has been working with Ms. Lily Bennett, a Masters Candidate working under the direction of Dr. Sonja Wilhem Stanis, Interim Associate Director of the School of Natural Resources regarding a yearlong study of users of Columbia's three dog parks: Twin Lakes, Garth Nature Area, and Indian Hills. The Department is interested in user demographics, motivations and constraints, desired amenities and willingness to pay entry fees. Out of 210 surveys, 180 were completed for an 83.7% response rate. Nearly 30% of users were between ages of 18-24 with over 50% being under age 30. Over half spent an hour or more at the dog park, with primary use in later afternoon or evening, with most use occurring during the spring and summer. Greatest motivation for visiting the dog parks are dog centered, citing exercise and playing with other dogs. Key constraints to use was lack of time and worry about dogs that are too aggressive. Desired amenities included shade, maintenance, adequate trash cans, secure fencing, seating, lights and attractive trees and landscaping. Since Columbia does not currently charge dog park entry fees it was expected that over 25% were opposed to fees. The largest support (44%) was for paying less than \$25 per year but only indicated a willingness to pay if desired improvements such as lighting, more seating, improvements to terrain and landscaping, and restroom facilities were added. Staff feels it's important to keep dog parks free to the public, but as users continue to request more services and amenities, there may become a point where fees are charged or a new dog park is constructed at a location to be determined that requires a fee.

The Visitor Perceptions of Columbia's Dog Parks Technical Report is attached and is for Council information only. It will be shared with the Parks and Recreation Commission at their July 18 meeting. Park staff will continue to research and meet with dog park users regarding the results of this report.

Discussion

The City of Columbia's Parks and Recreation Department has a long history of working with various departments at the University of Missouri regarding studies, evaluations and even park and facility planning efforts by students in both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. The Department currently is working with Ms. Lily Bennett who is getting her MS degree from the Department of Parks, Recreation and Sport.

A number of studies have been conducted nationwide regarding dog parks, but there's been a lack of independent research that examined public perceptions of Columbia's dog parks. After meeting with park staff and researching various survey instruments, Ms. Bennett developed an on-site survey questionnaire that was implemented between May-August of 2018 at various periods throughout the week, weekends and holidays. The study was



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restricted to the department's fenced in dog parks (Twin Lakes, Garth Nature Area and Indian Hills), and did not include leash-free areas at Grindstone Nature Area and the Bear Creek Nature Area located at the north end of Cosmo Park.

Staff will continue to meet with dog park users to develop a list of desired amenities and a related budget. Once a priority project list is developed, these projects will appear on the list of potential projects for Council to consider for funding in the 2021 Park Sales Tax renewal.

Depending on the user priority list, any service or amenity that greatly increases park maintenance costs could be offset with the implementation of an entry fee or annual membership. For example, if the priority is to install lights that provide extended hours in the early morning or evening, the additional utility cost may need to be offset if operational funding becomes an issue.

Another option is to consider development of a fourth dog park at another location that has all of the desired amenities and services, but requires an annual membership fee to gain access. Examples of additional services include the requirement of owners to license their dogs, provide proof of required vaccinations and the ability for staff to monitor and if needed, prohibit overly aggressive dogs or owners that fail to clean up after their dogs.

This report provides the City Council and the public with information to begin these discussions regarding the future of Columbia's dog parks.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: None

Long-Term Impact: None

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Not Applicable, Secondary Impact: Not Applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Not Applicable, Secondary Impact: Not applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Legislative History

Date	Action
None	None

Suggested Council Action

Report is for information purposes only. Staff will continue to meet and evaluate dog park users' needs; and if action is needed, will return to Council at a later date.