

Fiesta Island Dog Owners (FIDO)-Talking Points

The dog owners are the largest year round user group on Fiesta Island. Yet, we are the only group that is 'losing'. The bikers, joggers, Over-The-Line, rocketry club, jet ski enthusiasts, sailboarders, and others are all keeping their spaces. With the current plan our 97 acres fenced exercise area is being cut in half by a road, parking lots, and fences, making it difficult to move from one side to the other and making it difficult for us to continue using it as an exercise area for those of us who choose to walk, run and bike with our dogs. Additionally, two areas are being planned within our fenced area where 'special events' will be held, forcing us from the areas when these events are held.

The proposed road through our area will access a paddleboat/aquatic center at the south end of our fenced area. The paddleboat clubs and other users will hold special events in this area that will make the area inaccessible for our use. It will also create conflict as dog owners and these other new users try to use the same beach along the south end of the island. FIDO has shown that South Shores already has the necessary infrastructure that the paddle center needs and would save millions of dollars by placing it there.

Another special events area is being planned in the north end of our fenced area (adjacent to the current parking lot at the north end). Again, when special events are planned in this area we will not be able to access this entire area.

We have been willing to compromise and to date, are losing significant off-leash acreage in other parts of the island. However, our main objective is to maintain the current fenced area intact and undivided. To do so would require that the paddleboat area be relocated (potentially to South Shores) and that the roads, parking lots and fences be removed or relocated.

Below are facts supporting our request to keep our off-leash exercise space intact and undivided:

1. The Department of Park and Recreation maintains about 40,000 acres of public lands. Approximately 416 acres (1%) are available as off-leash areas for dogs. If you subtract the 375 acres of Fiesta Island that will leave only 41 acres available as off leash! Of the small neighborhood off-leash parks that comprise the 41 acres, most are severely overcrowded. This creates situations where accidents and injuries are more likely to occur. Plus, these areas do not allow for human exercise which is the number one use of our area by its citizens. For these reasons, many dog owners choose to avoid these small, overcrowded parks and instead, use Fiesta Island.

2. Animal Control estimates that there are currently over 300,000 dogs living within San Diego city limits. This figure is almost 700,000 within the County of San Diego. These figures will increase annually as the human population expands. Fiesta Island is a regional park that is used by county as well as city residents.

3. Dog owners use Fiesta Island differently than those that go to the small neighborhood dog parks where the humans stand around while the dogs play. Fiesta Island is an active human recreational area where owners walk, run and bike with their dogs. It is the only place in San Diego where they can swim, do water sports, and exercise with their dogs.

For that reason we hope to retain the open, undivided 91 acres that we currently have for our use. If it becomes divided into small areas it will become just like the small neighborhood parks where there is no room for the dogs to run, much less allow their owners to exercise. Fiesta is also the only place in the city where the sporting dogs and water rescue dogs can do their training in the interior of the island, and along the shoreline.

4. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, almost 70% of American households have a pet. Nearly 40% of all households have a dog and that percentage is continually increasing. (The average is 1.6 dogs per household) We need to take the needs of this growing population of dog owners into account when making decisions regarding the future use of city lands. The city says it needs to develop Fiesta Island to accommodate future recreational users. Our current space is the only area that can meet the future recreational needs for off-leash activity, the least planned for user group in the city.

5. Veterinarians recognize the need to exercise and socialize dogs if they are going to coexist in our society. Without proper socialization, without exposure to new and different situations away from their own yard, a dog is much more likely to develop behavioral problems such as dog aggressiveness or even become a danger to human beings. This requires appropriate open spaces. (The San Diego County Veterinary Medical Association and the San Diego Humane Society have written letters to Mayor Sanders requesting that off-leash areas be preserved on the island).

6. San Diego's population is growing by increasing the density in existing city limits. That will mean more people (and their dogs) will be living in less space.

7. Studies to measure use of the island must consider how the public uses the rest of Mission Bay parkland differently than Fiesta Island. It appears that studies to determine use of the park were accomplished by counting cars that were parked at different locations within the park.

-- People who use the surrounding Mission Bay parkland to picnic, swim, boat or enjoy their RV's park their vehicle and spend the day. They are there all day so you can count vehicles at any given time and the numbers are probably pretty consistent.

-- Dog owners come for an hour or two and then leave. As they leave, others come. Thus, over the entire day, the total number of 'dog' cars on Fiesta Island is actually more than those that are using other areas of Mission Bay Park.

--Dog owners use the island differently depending on the time of year but they use it year round! For example, during the summer months they tend to go in the greatest numbers in the morning or evening when it's cooler. During winter, they go mid-day.

--Use of the rest of the parkland is very low on weekdays and even lower during the winter months. Dog people use Fiesta Island seven days a week and twelve months out of the year. Is it fair that they will be displaced permanently so certain users, such as those who will use the new swimming beach, can use these areas for 3 months out of the year?

8. As the city has grown, many of the areas that dog owners once used as off-leash areas have been developed. Open spaces, canyons, and utility easements are no longer available. It is short sighted to decrease the off-leash areas on Fiesta Island, the only large, open space still available, in light of the projected increases in the human/dog population. This will ultimately force the dog owners to illegally run their dogs in other parks, canyons and spaces.

9. As the city has been developed, there is less and less open public space. It is important to maintain some open, spacious and undeveloped areas for the public's enjoyment. The island is unique in the fact that it is the only area where people can enjoy limited solitude in the middle of a developed city.

10. The estimated cost to develop the island is almost \$200 million. The Department of Park and Recreation has had to cut staff, discontinue programs and close neighborhood swimming pools due to budget cuts. Why not spend the money on those uses.

11. The city's infrastructure is in a shambles. Roads, water supplies and sewer lines are all in need of repair or replacement. We simply cannot justify spending millions of dollars on Fiesta Island development or maintenance.

12. The city states that the island is currently underutilized. How was this determined? Torrey Pines Golf has some of the most spectacular views in the city, and while its 192 acres of fairway and rough average only 252 users per day, no one has suggested opening it up to picnics and hiking or chopping it up into sports fields.

13. We, as taxpayers, all choose to use our public lands in different ways. Many dog owners may never use public parklands to picnic, RV camp, boat, golf or swim. Instead, we choose to use Fiesta Island as an off-leash area as our use of the public lands that we are financially supporting. We request that we be allowed to continue using our tiny piece of land for our enjoyment just as the others are allowed to use other areas to picnic, camp, golf, etc

14. The city may want to improve Fiesta Island to make it inviting to tourists. It is more likely that dog owners planning a vacation would choose San Diego if they knew they would have a beautiful area to exercise their dogs. Dog Fancy Magazine just selected San Diego as one of the top 5 dog-friendly cities in the country based partially on the existence of Fiesta Island. Forbes Magazine also lists San Diego as one of its most dog friendly cities.

15. It was stated at a recent meeting that the dog owners must 'learn to share' the island. The dog owners already share the island. Anyone can use Fiesta Island to do whatever activity they choose. On any given Saturday morning, cyclist are doing their time trials, people are walking and running, people are fishing, RV's are parked by the shoreline, the rocket club is doing their thing. Everyone is coexisting and using the island for their own individual pleasure. The majority of people want the island to stay as it is, - off leash and multi-purpose as it is currently being used.

16. If the dog owners lose the majority of Fiesta Island, there is no other place they can go. The obedience clubs and other organized dog clubs that meet there to train have no other place to go as they are not allowed in other off leash parks, which are too small to accommodate them. On the other hand there are dozens of places where people can go to

picnic, swim and park their RV's. Our enjoyment of Fiesta should be no less important than the interests of others.

17. One of our primary arguments is not what the dogs need ("it's for the dogs") but what the people who own the dogs need – an opportunity to use and participate in San Diego's jewel of a park to picnic, swim, hike, and enjoy the view with their friends, family and dogs. This is the only area in the park where dogs are permitted, on leash or off, during daylight hours.

18. At the time the general plan was developed, leash free parks were not an issue. The city's population was significantly smaller and there were large tracts of open space where dog owners could exercise their dogs. As these areas have been developed and the human/dog population has grown, dog owners have increasingly turned to local city parks. We need to preserve at least one large, regional area where dog owners can go, i.e. - Fiesta Island. Fiesta Island could someday become the location of large organized dog events, attracting a new class of visitor, and a new source of income to the city.

19. We are greatly concerned as to where the funds for maintenance and upkeep will come from. This includes increased costs for personnel, water, power, trash pickup, building and fence maintenance, turf maintenance, traffic management, road maintenance, rule enforcement and police protection. Provided money is available to fund the development, where will the city find the money to maintain it after it is built?

20. We also feel that the city should be looking for more sustainable solutions for the plan. Large areas of turf that will require water, fertilizer and constant maintenance could be replaced by more native landscape.