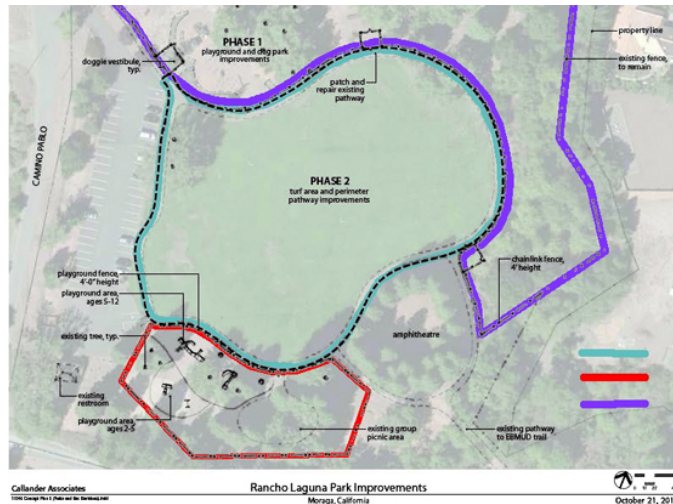


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## December Decision Resolves Dog Park Debate

By Sophie Braccini



Park and Recreation Commission Recommended  
Conceptual Design Courtesy Staff Report

per year. "Your first priority should be to construct a tot lot and not to incur additional expense by changing the configuration of the park," Gerding stated. Lamorinda Dogs also presented the Council with a petition signed by 111 people supporting the view that the space at Rancho Laguna should remain open.

Off-leash supporters were hopeful when the Council's debate began with Trotter's statement that he would support not changing the park. "I am fiscally conservative and would be happy with a Phase 1 that would just create and fence a tot lot according to AB 1144 (California Playground Regulations Update)," Trotter said, "let's not cut the park, but let's make it safe for small children."

But Trotter was the only Council member opposed to modifying the park. "I have no problem cutting the park in half," said Metcalf. He explained that his priorities were to separate kids from dogs, that the park should provide multi-use for Moraga residents, and that he had no interest in turning the park into a sports field. "This is a place for informal play and general enjoyment," he said. Metcalf supported an option that would have included some of the existing turf area on which dogs could run.

Mendonca, along with Council Members Howard Harpham and Ken Chew, supported the Parks and Recreation Commission's plan. "We have different constituencies with different needs and they have to share a scarce resource," said Mendonca, "we want to provide access to everybody all through the day." Under the new plan, dog owners would be able to let their dogs run off-leash in the dedicated area all day long.

Bill Cosden, of Lamorinda Dogs, later commented, "It's surreal," he said, "the system (off-leash hours at Rancho Laguna) worked for decades - it has enriched the life of countless people. I can't justify why they are spending the money to fix something that is not broken. I hope we can fight this decision."

After the meeting, Jay Ingram discussed the implementation of the plan. His cost estimate is \$143,300 to \$155,300 for a first phase that would see the construction of a new kids' playground and a fence separating the north side of the park from the lawn. If the Town wants to clear the brush, sod for turf and create a new path, it would have to spend another \$29,075. "We have money left from the WW fund measure," said Ingram, "we have to submit a plan by March 31 to the East Bay Regional Park District. Our objective is to bring a contract for Council's approval in February."

The Town of Moraga's outgoing mayor, Karen Mendonca, can claim that the long-running debate involving off-leash dogs at Rancho Laguna Park was finally resolved during her tenure, as the issue went to a vote of the Town Council prior to the annual passing of the gavel.

After 32 months of intense discussions and a few dramatic turns of event, on December 14 the Council decided on a 3-2 vote to adopt the Park and Recreation Commission's recommendation to implement a spatial separation between off-leash dogs and the rest of the parks' users. Council Member Dave Trotter and then-Vice Mayor Mike Metcalf cast the dissenting votes.

The partition approved by the Council will create a 1.1 acre dedicated dog park along one side and the back of the municipal property, a woody area that has no grass at this time. The timing of the implementation of the new park configuration will depend on finding an adequate funding source.

The organization Lamorinda Dogs was not happy with the decision. "We are the main users of the park," said Lamorinda Dogs member Chris Gerding, who added that the group estimates the park gets 57,000 visits by dog owners

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[back](#)

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