



CHAPTER 3

POLICY AND PLANNING PROCESS

3.1 EXISTING POLICIES

In 2006 and again in 2011, the City of La Mesa conducted citizen surveys to garner resident satisfaction with city services. Over 90% and 92% of the residents respectively thought the city was well run, but residents did indicate that improved community park playgrounds and restrooms would be the best way to invest limited resources in parks. In December 2006, the non-profit La Mesa Park and Recreation Foundation requested approval from the City Council to embark on a \$1 million capital campaign to raise funds to renovate five community park playgrounds. The campaign called “It’s Child’s Play” includes funding a new playground for Collier Park. The Foundation requested the City to coordinate with the Foundation for additional improvements and upgrades in the identified parks to maximize the Foundation’s gifts.

3.2 HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Overweight and obesity has become epidemic at a national level. The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency reports the East Region, which includes the City of La Mesa, has the highest rates of obesity with 40% of the adult population overweight, and an additional 23% considered obese. In 2006 the City of La Mesa embarked on a campaign to address this issue on a local level. Initial dialogue with the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District and other community partners resulted in the establishment of “ready...set...Live Well” (Live Well). Live Well is an initiative that extends and integrates efforts to support healthy eating and physical activity in the community, focusing primarily on environmental change and policy strategies. The collaborative mission of all partners is to enhance environments to promote physical activity and healthy eating. Practices employed in support of this mission include Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention (CX3), and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). A CX3 study, conducted through the La Mesa Park and Recreation Foundation with a grant from the Grossmont Healthcare District, identified physical barriers to park access as well as access to healthy food choices at markets in the area surrounding Collier Park. A representative from the La Mesa Police Department’s Crime Prevention Unit participated in the public workshops to assist with incorporation of CPTED elements into the design concepts as a proactive way to discourage illicit activities and increase safety in the park, as well as improve the effectiveness of public safety personnel responding to any incident that might arise.



In 2009 the City received a \$50,000 Kaiser Foundation grant to incorporate policies related to health and sustainability into the General Plan to address new laws and initiatives related to childhood obesity and sustainability. The firm of CityPlace Planning was retained to assist with drafting a Health and Wellness Element for incorporation into the City’s General Plan. Community input was solicited through a series of

surveys, walk audits, and public workshops, and a Health and Wellness Element was added to the 2012 General Plan Update.

The Health and Wellness Element describes the measures that La Mesa will take to make the health of the community a priority and to achieve its vision of being the healthiest and most livable city in the San Diego Region. The Health and Wellness Element offers policy guidance that enables La Mesa residents to achieve an active lifestyle; have access to healthy food choices; enjoy a safe,

livable community; and raise healthy, active children. Key objectives and policy points within the Health and Wellness Element, specifically with regards to parks and recreational facilities, include:

- Adopt a way finding program to direct those who live and work in La Mesa to the City's sites that provide opportunities for health and wellness programs and activities, such as designated routes for walking and biking, stairs, and parks and recreational facilities.
- Increase safety and security in public places – such as parks, recreation facilities, sidewalks, transit stops and facilities, and trails – by providing adequate lighting, maintaining landscaping to maximize visibility and reduce hiding places, removing graffiti immediately, removing trash, debris, weeds, etc. from public areas with ongoing maintenance of those public areas, and conducting regular police and volunteer (crime watch) patrols.
- Ensure that all City park and recreational facilities are well-marked and visible from streets, sidewalks, and bike paths.

3.3 CITYWIDE PARKS MASTER PLAN

3.3.1 Introduction

In 2011 a \$75,000 Healthy Communities Planning Grant, administered through the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), was awarded to the City and provided funding for a citywide Parks Master Plan. The completed Parks Master Plan enhances the Recreation and Open Space Element in the 2012 General Plan Update. The goals of the citywide Parks Master Plan were as follows:

- Provide the public outreach and documentation of meaningful public input through the planning process.
- Evaluate and make recommendations regarding open space, recreation facility needs, and circulation in and around Collier Park.
- Evaluate the existing historic Spring House in Collier Park and make recommendations to optimize its value as an historic interpretive center.
- Research and identify viable sources of funding for park improvements and historic preservation.
- Finalize a master plan for future development of Collier Park to create a more effective use of open space and recreational opportunities.

3.3.2 Vision Statement and Overall Goal

The Collier Park Master Plan aligns with the following citywide Parks Master Plan vision statement which supports the City of La Mesa General Plan.

“A City that encourages active and healthy lifestyles by offering a diverse range of recreational activities and facilities in La Mesa.”

The Collier Park Master Plan also aligns with the overall goal of the citywide Parks Master Plan which is the following:

“To create a roadmap for upgrades, expansion, potential additions, and improved access to the City of La Mesa’s park facilities. This goal includes the community’s needs for easy access to parks, open space, and urban respite areas that can contribute to the public’s health.”

Ultimately, the desired outcome of the citywide Parks Master Plan is to create more access to physical activity by creating new parks where possible, expanding existing parks, creating more access points to parks, and eliminating walking barriers to parks.

3.3.3 Policies Related to Collier Park

The following policies from the citywide Parks Master Plan should be considered as they relate directly to Collier Park:

Policy 1.1.3: Work to develop and improve connectivity to parks.

Policy 1.2.1: Include both passive and active recreational opportunities within park sites when space allows.

Policy 1.2.2: Design and improve parks to accommodate a community varying in age, athletic ability, physical agility, and recreational interest.

Policy 4.1.1: Look for opportunities to increase connectivity to parks.

Policy 4.1.2: Park entrances should be well marked with signage, well lit, easily identifiable, and universally accessible.

Policy 4.2.4: Integrate urban forestry concepts and benefits into walkability improvements, as well as into park development or renovation activities.

Policy 4.3.2: City park and recreational facilities should be well-marked and highly visible from streets, sidewalks, and bike paths to assure a safe public environment.

Policy 5.1.2: Increase safety and security in public parks (including parks, recreational facilities, walkways, and trails) by providing adequate lighting; maintaining landscaping to maximize visibility; removing graffiti as soon as possible; removing trash, debris, weeds, etc. from public areas with ongoing maintenance of those public areas; and conducting regular police patrols and providing public safety information.

Policy 6.1.2: Maintain the City’s park and open space in a manner that encourages the use and enjoyment by residents and visitors while protecting the long-term aesthetic and environmental quality of these areas.

Policy 6.1.5: Continue to search for opportunities in grants and to encourage private donations. Identify other effective funding sources for

park and recreational programs, such as trusts and other fundraising activities.

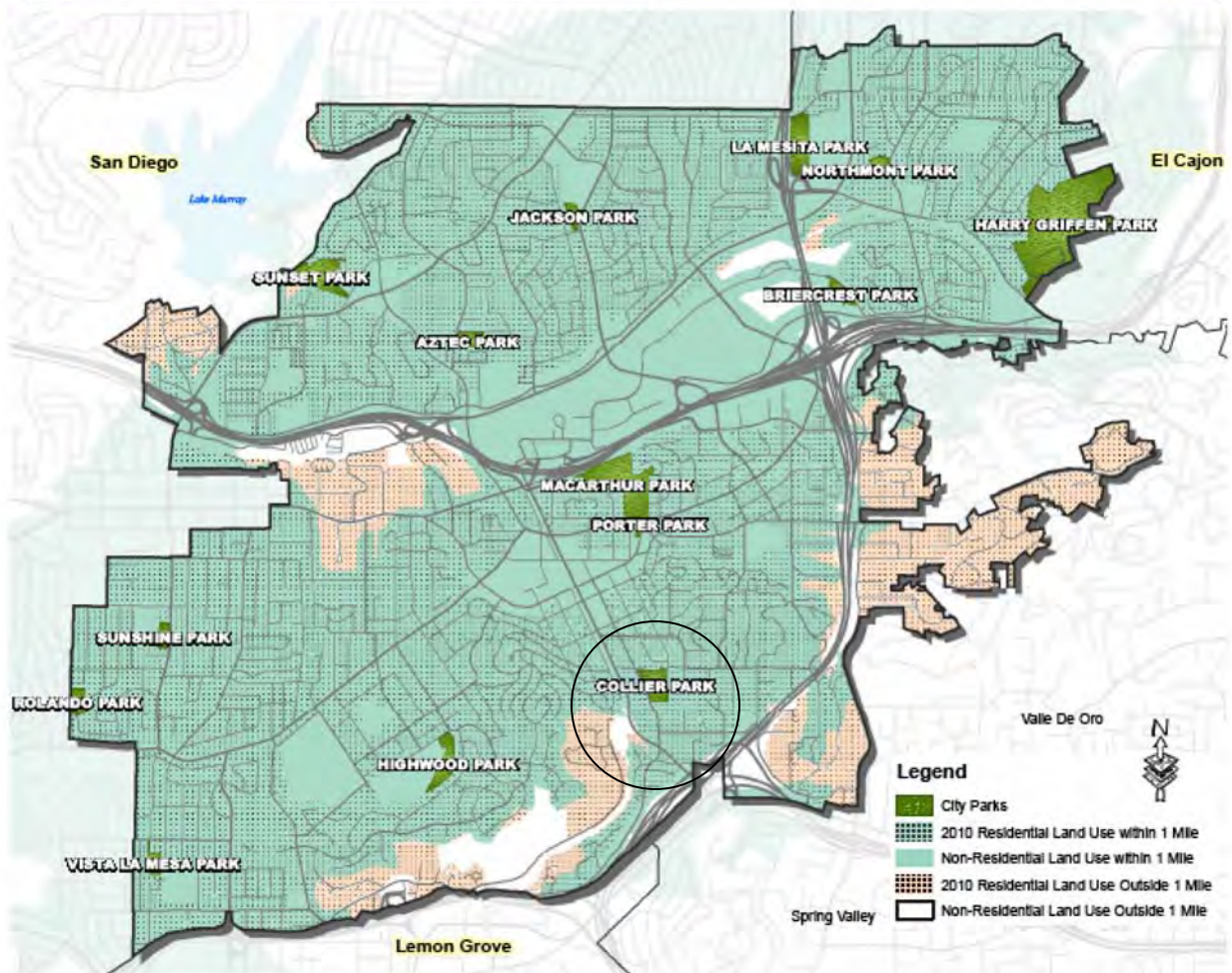
3.3.4 Existing Park Service Area Analysis of Collier Park

The following information extracted from the Parks Master Plan identifies an existing gap in service for residential access to Collier Park:

“The existing park service area analysis was completed using GIS modeling. The [previously] adopted General Plan [1996] includes a policy that park facilities should be situated so that no residential unit is more than one mile from a recreational facility. The City is currently meeting this policy.” (See Figure 4.1)

According to Active Living Research, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “Regular physical activity increases longevity, well being,

Figure 4.1—Existing Composite Park Service Area- 1 Mile Distance

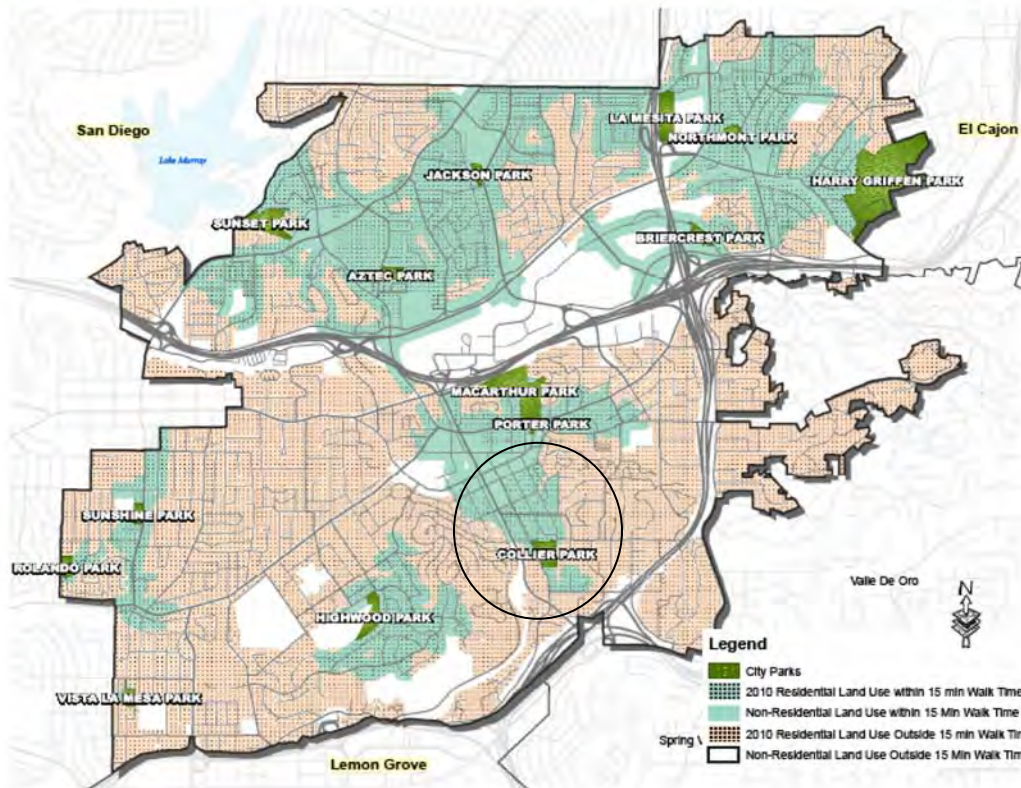


helps children and adults maintain a healthy weight, and can reduce the risk for obesity and its related health consequences. Parks and playgrounds provide a wide variety of opportunities for physical activity and they have the potential to

help many Americans lead a more active lifestyle.”¹ In the research synthesis prepared by Active Living Research quoting a study by Kaczynski and Henderson, “Park proximity is associated with higher levels of park use and physical activity among a variety of populations, particularly youth.”¹

A goal of this study is to convert the one-mile policy into a 15-minute walk to parks policy. Based on existing walking facilities and connections, both a one-mile distance and a 15-minute walk time distance has been calculated from existing parks to residential areas. Non-residential land uses are not included in the analysis, since the policy is based on residential access to parks. The resulting service areas take into account all access to parks via the existing walkway network, including any trails, or access across major paved areas open to the public, such as large parking lots. The road networks in neighborhoods that by current policy have been approved without the requirement for sidewalks were included in the access study. The analysis assumes that individuals in these neighborhoods commonly walk in the street and would continue to do so. Through this analysis, gaps in service areas are quickly revealed (see Figure 4.2 below)¹.

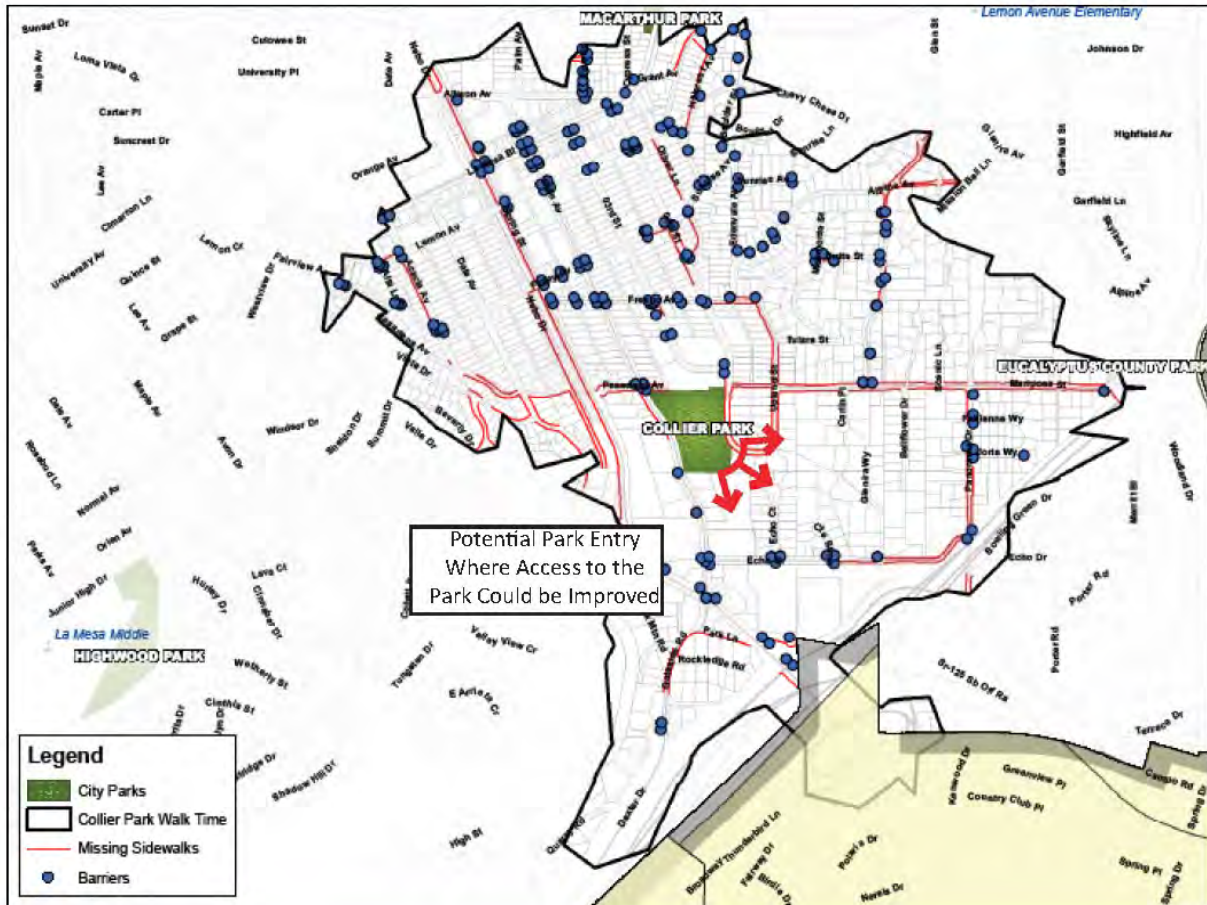
Figure 4.2—Existing Composite Park Service Area- 15 Minute Walk Time Distance (using existing walkway network)



¹ Parks, Playgrounds and Active Living. (February 2010). Active Living Research

As part of the analysis of the citywide Parks Master Plan, it is recommended that access points into the parks be added, obstacles in existing sidewalks be removed, and new sidewalks be added. The diagram below from the citywide Parks Master Plan shows potential additional entry points that would improve pedestrian access to Collier Park from the surrounding neighborhood.

Project B.12—Improved Neighborhood Connections to Collier Park



3.4 WATER CONSERVATION ORDINANCE

Ordinance 2009-2805 creating La Mesa Municipal Code Section 14.29 – Water Efficient Landscape Regulations, was adopted in response to Assembly Bill 1881 (Water Conservation in Landscaping Act of 2006) to address California’s limited water supply and the need to utilize this limited resource in the most efficient way possible. La Mesa’s regulations under this section apply to industrial, commercial, institutional, and multi-family residential landscapes as well as public agency projects that contain a landscaped area of 2,500 square feet or more. The area of Collier Park under consideration for renovation exceeds 2,500



square feet; therefore, making water efficient landscaping and irrigation a required consideration within the master plan. The potential for use of spring water, possibly available on the park site, for irrigation and water conservation education opportunities were important elements brought forth during public workshops.

3.5 PLANNING PROCESS

Based on direction from City Council, a project team was created and a consultant hired to assist with public outreach and creation of a draft park master plan. The consultant worked with City staff to compile a cross section of community stakeholders who were then invited to provide input via a combination of written surveys, individual interviews, and public workshops. A summary of all survey and interview comments was compiled and became the starting point for community workshops. In the preliminary surveys and interviews, the following items were identified as common issues of concern or desirable concepts to be considered as part of a master plan for Collier Park:

- Increase feeling of safety to encourage legitimate park use and discourage homeless encampments and illicit activities
- Provide additional gates and pathways from surrounding neighborhoods for easier access
- Preserve the historical nature of the site
- Explore the possibility of using onsite spring water to provide or supplement landscape irrigation and/or a water feature

3.5.1 Key Elements - Community Workshops

Community workshops were held on March 1, and April 26, 2008, and July 16, 2009. Residents and property owners in the vicinity of Collier Park were invited to participate in the workshops. Additionally, a general invitation was extended through the City website to anyone who was interested in participating in the planning process. Following are key elements that were developed during these workshops:

- Improve accessibility, walkways, lighting, recreational opportunities, and divided parking to strengthen the feeling of park safety
- Incorporate a variety of open space and outdoor facilities for individual and groups into the new design
- Modify the topography of the site to improve drainage and limit the amount of water that leaves the site
- Emphasize the use of native, low maintenance, and drought tolerant landscaping
- If feasible, use existing spring water flow for irrigation
- Develop the eastern terraced portion of the site with various forms of native plant and drought tolerant gardens, accessible paths, and provide for possible future community gardens
- Retrofit Pasadena Avenue for traffic calming through the park to reduce vehicle speeds and cut through traffic
- Expand the green space to the northern portion of the park site rather than consider adding a potential development
- Explore options for the Spring House that would acknowledge the historical significance of the structure and the entire park site
- Consider including educational activities and interpretive installations for local history and water conservation
- Explore opportunities for revenue generation to assist with master plan implementation and ongoing maintenance of the park

During the public input process there was much discussion concerning the possibility of a community garden in the eastern undeveloped portion of the park, now referred to as the History Hill area. Workshop participants acknowledged that a community garden would require a significant amount of management and supervision and concluded that unless an organization comes forward offering to provide such



services the specifics of such a use should not be included in the Master Plan. It was further suggested that if a community garden were to become a future reality, it should emphasize low water and indigenous plantings for food, flowers, and herbs.

When asked to rank proposed improvements, workshop participants listed security, Spring House, playground, and new development as the most important elements they would like to see in a new park design and gave lower rankings to parking, traffic calming, walking paths, and gathering areas.

3.5.2 Key Feedback on Collier Park - Parks Master Plan Community Sensing

As a result of input from surveys and community workshops during the citywide Parks Master Plan process, the community commented on the quality of Collier Park and provided input concerning potential additions, reuse, and redesign of the park. Following is a sampling of the feedback comments received during the Parks Master Plan that are specific to Collier Park:

- Collier Park needs regular policing to be safe for kids and families. Right now it's more of an outdoor drug den and homeless shelter
- I used to take my son to Collier Park almost daily but now a bunch of thugs hang out there drinking and smoking their drugs and yelling foul language it is no place for children any more
- We live near Collier Park and would use it if there weren't homeless types there
- Collier Park [needs] less creepy people hanging out
- I used to play tennis at Collier Park but never felt safe there. It's too hidden from the road and if someone were attacked there, it's possible no one would hear them
- Collier Park entrance is confusing and easily missed. Plus, driving down that little road adds to the unsafe feeling of being trapped down there with your car out of view from the street
- Collier Park [needs to be] safer and updated play equipment
- Collier Park has an unsafe and not family friendly feel due to a lack of playground equipment and worn out tennis courts
- Collier Park needs a better access path from the south
- Feel unsafe at park (this comment only applies to Collier Park. Other parks feel safe)
- The nearest park (Collier) has no special attraction and seems unsafe when transients are present
- Collier Park has the potential of becoming a terrific community park

3.6 RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

The mandated Recreation and Open Space Element of the City's General Plan establishes goals, objectives, and policies to meet the City's current and future open space and recreational needs. The backbone of the City's open space plan is the City's 14 parks and open space resources provided at school sites located in La Mesa. In addition, private open space within residential developments and commercial recreational opportunities are important components of the recreation and open space resources needed to maintain a high quality of life in



the City. The open space section of the Recreation and Open Space Element establishes policies for balancing the demands placed on the City's parks and open space areas. There is a close relationship between measures needed to conserve natural resources and those needed to provide open space to sustain the quality of life for La Mesa's citizens.

3.7 CONSIDERATION OF AN OFF-LEASH DOG RUN AT COLLIER PARK

On July 27, 2004, the Friends of Canine Corners received City Council approval of expanding the off-leash area in Harry Griffen Park. During the same City Council meeting a resident requested that the City Council consider a second off-leash dog run area at Highwood Park. That request was later denied by the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District, property owner of the Highwood Park site. City Staff identified Collier Park as an alternative location and the City Council directed staff to solicit community input regarding that location.

On January 12, 2005 the Community Services Commission hosted a community workshop to solicit input on establishing an off-leash dog run in the park. The people who spoke were against the dog park. Becky Rice, volunteer coordinator at that time from Canine Corners at Harry Griffen Park, spoke about her concerns over the financial and volunteer capacity of La Mesa to support two dog runs. After consideration of public comments, the Community Services Commission voted unanimously that the City Council should not pursue a proposed dog run in Collier Park.