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## More Uncertainty at Rancho Laguna Park

*By Sophie Braccini*

Moraga Town Staff announced on February 23 that the Council will consider rescinding a December 14 decision to create a physical separation, at Rancho Laguna Park, between off-leash canines and other park users.

The decision is being challenged in a Petition by Moraga resident Steven Smith, who asks the court to issue an order to rescind the decision.

Town Staff indicated that the motivation to consider rescinding the decision was the Council's priority to spend its limited resources wisely.

In a written statement sent to us February 26 on behalf of the directors of Lamorinda Dogs, Bill Carman said, "Our position is that it is wise for the Moraga Town Council to revisit their December 14th resolution. We agree with the Council's apparent re-prioritization of much-needed playground safety compliance and road repair."

The basis for the petition to the court is Moraga's alleged failure to follow California's Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). "It seeks to void the 'Notice of Exemption' the Town had filed in an apparent effort to bypass CEQA environmental review of the project," says Seth Freeman, a Moraga resident and member of the Lamorinda Dogs group.

In his petition, Smith indicates that the Rancho Laguna ecosystem includes species such as the dusky footed wood rat, a species of special concern according to the California Department of Fish and Game; as well as other wildlife, fish and plants. He explains that the spatial separation plan proposed by the Town would irreparably damage the habitat along the tributary of the San Leandro Reservoir, and that the increased use by people and domestic animals will directly impact the ecosystem.

Planning staff will provide options for the Council's consideration regarding off-leash dog hours at the park. If the Town recognizes the existence of a sensitive habitat in the northern part of the park, the new options will have to provide for its protection.

At this time, the park is open to off-leash dogs in the morning and evening.

"We see this as a double-edged sword," the Lamorinda Dogs' statement continued, "Council has the opportunity to improve the outcome for park users, which we hope they will do. However, if the Council elects a punitive path to curtail our 30 year off-leash tradition, they will further split the entire community. Donations and civic fundraising have already suffered as a result...We wish the Council the wisdom they will need to serve all constituents."

The Council is scheduled to consider the matter on March 14.

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