

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Angel Rios, Jr.
Edgardo Garcia

**SUBJECT: PARK RANGER PROGRAM
ANNUAL REPORT**

DATE: April 13, 2018

Approved



Date

4/13/18

SUPPLEMENTAL

REASON FOR SUPPLEMENTAL

This memorandum responds to a request from the Public Safety, Finance & Strategic Support Committee made during the March 15, 2018 meeting to evaluate the Park Ranger Program in relation to issues raised by the 2017 Park Ranger Program Annual Report.

BACKGROUND

Since its inception in 1972, the City of San José Park Ranger Program has experienced numerous changes and persisted through considerable challenges. The program evolved from the main functions of park rules education, land management, and visitor services to having an increased role in parks ordinance enforcement. In 1983, the full-time Park Rangers were granted Peace Officer status through §830.31 (b) of the California Penal Code. Additional components to the Park Ranger Program included police academy training, advanced safety equipment, and Code-3 emergency vehicles. However, the Park Ranger Program has remained consistent in its mission to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all park users and promote a better understanding of park values.

At its peak in FY 1998-1999, the Park Ranger Program had 27.3 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions (1 Senior Park Ranger, 17 full-time Park Rangers, 8.8 FTE part-time Park Rangers, and 0.5 FTE part-time Trainees). Program resources were diminished due to budget shortfalls in FY 2011-2012, resulting in an all-time staffing low of 8.47 total FTE. This FTE count has increased incrementally and we are currently at 24.59 FTE in FY 2017-2018. In a strategic effort to build forward and develop the Park Ranger Program, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS), has recently accomplished the following:

- Improved wage and compensation of the Park Ranger classifications;
- Instituted a multi-tiered career track for Park Rangers;

- Reorganized the lines of supervision;
- Prioritized Park Ranger hiring; and
- Initiated a new deployment model.

Improvements made in the last 18 months address persistent staff retention and recruitment challenges by providing professional growth and promotional opportunities to existing Park Ranger employees. In 2017, following a completed a classification and compensation study, City Council approved a 9.13% Park Ranger classification pay increase. This was in addition to a 10.41% salary adjustment in 2015. Compensation for the other classifications in the series increased respectively. The resulting salary schedule brought the Park Ranger classification series within 95% to 100% of the market average.

In addition to the new salary schedule, City Council also approved the creation of the new Park Ranger Classification Series. Prior to August 2017, the program had 18 full-time Park Rangers and one Senior Park Ranger. The expanded ranks provided added management and field supervision, consisting of 2 Supervising Park Rangers (formerly known as Senior Park Rangers), 4 Senior Park Rangers (a newly created classification), 13 full-time Park Rangers, 2.25 FTE part-time benefited Park Rangers, and 3.34 FTE part-time unbenefited Park Rangers (24.59 total FTE). With the new series in place, PRNS continues to be funded for 19 full-time peace officer Park Ranger positions. The classification series change moved the program forward to align with comparable agencies, which typically have several ranks in their Park Ranger Programs.

PRNS is also building forward by prioritizing Park Ranger Program vacancies and boosting hiring efforts. PRNS worked with the Human Resources Department (HR) to expedite a cascade recruitment for the newly added Supervising Park Ranger and Senior Park Ranger positions. It is evident this collaboration and the new, more competitive salary schedule and classification series has helped attract more qualified candidates. For example, the new Supervising Park Ranger brings over 24 years of previous experience as a Police Patrol Officer, Police Sergeant, and Public Safety Academy Instructor, and his California POST Instructor certification to the program.

The Park Ranger Program classification improvements have also helped to facilitate recruitment. The recently added Supervising Park Ranger and 4 Senior Park Ranger positions have all been filled. While internal promotions have contributed to the current vacancies, PRNS and HR are consistently hiring through ongoing open job postings and expediting the recruitment process. Currently, there are 6 vacant Park Ranger positions; 5 full-time Park Ranger positions and 1 part-time benefited Park Ranger position (5.75 total FTE). There are 2 full-time Park Ranger candidates in the process of completing background checks; when complete, there will be 3.75 total FTE Park Ranger Program vacant positions.

In 2018, PRNS will modify current deployment assignments to accommodate the program's expanded scope of work in the City's watersheds and downtown core, by moving toward a Citywide patrol district model. This pilot model will use a centrally dispatched system, managed by the new supervisory staff, to deploy Park Rangers where they are needed throughout the City. This differs from the current fixed post system, in that the Park Rangers will no longer be

assigned to a specific regional park, with the exception of the 4.0 FTE Park Rangers dedicated to “hot spot” trail patrols on the Watershed Protection Team. Under the Citywide patrol model, Park Rangers will still fulfill their generalist role of providing land management, visitor services, and public safety at City parks.

ANALYSIS

On March 15, 2018, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) presented an update to the Public Safety, Finance & Strategic Support Committee on the 2017 Park Ranger Program Annual Report¹. The update included information about program highlights, the Watershed Protection Team activities, Saint James Park patrols, resource successes, staffing retention challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Additionally, the report indicated a key focus for PRNS, over the next year, is to re-evaluate the Park Ranger service delivery model in relation to meeting resident needs in a safe and efficient manner as well as to evaluate Park Ranger duties and resource needs to fulfill those duties.

Following the presentation, community members and Committee members raised concerns about the safety of Park Rangers as they perform the functions of their job. The Committee held a lengthy discussion regarding the need for additional safety equipment and considered the possibility of arming Park Rangers and reassigning them to the Police Department. The Committee directed the Administration to cross-reference this report to the full City Council.

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform City Council of the recommendation by the Administration for the San José Police Department (SJPD), PRNS, San José Fire Department (SJFD), the Housing Department, and the Environmental Services Department, in collaboration with the Santa Clara Valley Water District, U.S. and California Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California State Water Resources Control Board, to establish a working group to review the current Park Ranger service delivery model and evaluate current work practices under that model. Objectives for the inter-departmental working group include, but are not limited to:

- Defining and clarifying the main roles of a Park Ranger;
- Defining the types and levels of service needed in creek areas, neighborhood parks, regional parks, and trails;
- Identifying and addressing community and Park Ranger safety concerns;
- Reviewing and analyzing the need for Park Rangers to be armed, relative to the necessary scope of services provided by the Park Ranger classification, and respond with a recommendation on this issue;
- Defining the appropriate level of safety equipment for Park Rangers;
- Reviewing Park Ranger training needs for part-time and full-time staff;
- Defining the funding needs for the recommended Park Ranger Service delivery model;

¹ The 2017 Park Ranger Program Annual Report may be viewed at
<https://sanjose.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3350338&GUID=4B478A43-2DAA-4EB4-B9E2-DE5326AB5E1C&Options=&Search=>

- Delineating and designating Police and Park Ranger priority responses for various types of park safety conditions and incidents;
- Identifying alternative options to the Park Ranger service delivery model and explore how identified alternatives would impact the Park Ranger Program and the City; and
- Conducting an examination of whether the Park Ranger Program would fit existing community needs more efficiently by being placed under the supervision of the Police Department.

The working group will be a collaboration between PRNS, its Park Rangers, and key staff from the aforementioned City departments and agencies, working together to utilize all available resources, find efficiencies and opportunities, and discover how to best serve the community. PRNS will also consult with creek cleanup partner organizations including Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful and South Bay Clean Creeks Coalition. These objectives will be achieved via a systematic evaluation in the following phases:

- Phase I* Identification of the current Park Ranger program service model accountabilities of the City, Departments, and stakeholders as they align with relevant policies and directives of the City, Departments, community, and stakeholders.
- Phase II* Identification of current and future service delivery targets in comparison to available and sustainable resources and funding.
- Phase III* Identification of specific resources, tools, and equipment, areas to improve, and opportunities for strategic alignment if program targets cannot be met with current resources and funding.
- Phase IV* Formulation of the working group's proposal for a detailed action plan including any contingencies and possible alternatives.

At minimum, a thorough evaluation process will take an estimated six months. Whereas any resulting proposals for program improvements affecting the Park Ranger classification series would also need review by the City Manager's Office of Employee Relations, and may be subject to the meet and confer process with the relevant bargaining units.

In the meantime, PRNS will continue to build and develop measures to address the Park Ranger safety concerns raised during the Public Safety, Finance & Strategic Support Committee meeting on March 15, 2018. PRNS will work with SJPd to prioritize incidents requiring additional police response. Also, Park Rangers will continue to be directed to use their discretion to determine if they should "stand down" and call for backup where event escalation is imminent or known to occur and their safety is at risk.

The Watershed Protection Team is responsible for locating encampments in environmentally sensitive riparian corridors, contacting the occupants, and working to connect these individuals with appropriate services. Park Rangers assigned to the team are also responsible for posting and abating camps and enforcing local ordinances and state and federal laws, as applicable. Here,

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Park Ranger safety is of upmost concern. In consideration of current agreements and obligations, PRNS is working with SJPD, SJFD, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, creek cleanup partner organizations (Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful and South Bay Clean Creeks Coalition), the Environmental Services Department, and the Housing Department to adjust safety protocols and modify Watershed Protection Team operations.

Initial work toward modifying safety procedures has already started. On April 12, 2018, the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, PRNS Executive Staff, and Park Rangers sat down together to openly dialogue about the Park Ranger safety concerns as they exist along the watershed, trails, and neighborhood and regional parks. Conversations with the Administration, PRNS Executive Staff, and Park Rangers will continue to develop immediate solutions and address concerns.

The Administration recommends that the Police Department and PRNS return to City Council in late fall of 2018 with a report on the outcomes of the working group. As previously noted, the outcomes may be subject to the meet and confer process.

/s/

ANGEL RIOS, JR.
Director, Parks, Recreation and
Neighborhood Services

/s/

EDGARDO GARCIA
Chief of Police

For questions, please contact Justin Long, Parks Division Deputy Director, at 408-793-5579.