



Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Councilmember Raul Peralez
Councilmember Chappie Jones

SUBJECT: PARK RANGER PROGRAM
ANNUAL REPORT

DATE: April 13, 2018

Approved

Date

4/13/2018

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the 2017 Park Ranger Program Annual Report as well as the actions outlined in the staff supplemental memorandum dated April 13 and include:

1. Consideration of the Park Ranger Program to be included under the oversight of the Independent Police Auditor (IPA).

BACKGROUND

Our Park Ranger Program was spawned in 1972 from community outcry to the increase of crime and vandalism deterring the use of our City Park System¹. The Park Ranger Unit was housed in the Department of Parks and Recreation with the original park rangers appointed as "Auxiliary Police Officers" under San José Municipal Code 1.08.050 and California Penal Code 830.6(a). The Park Ranger training and selection process required them to undergo police academy training, and they were provided with equipment to allow them to handle higher levels of enforcement calls without needing to be armed.² In 1983, with the passage of California Penal Code 830.31(b), park rangers became considered peace officers if they were employed full-time for the protection of park property and preservation of peace. The City Manager's Office rescinded the Auxiliary Police Officer status and appointed the San José Park Rangers as peace officers. In 1985, under new park ranger directive, park patrols were to focus on observation and municipal code enforcement even as their role as park law enforcement has progressively grown.

¹ Angel Rios, Jr. (2015). Park Ranger Program Annual Report. *Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee*. Retrieved from <http://sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/42141>.

² Angel Rios, Jr. (2016). Park Ranger Program Annual Report. *Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee*. Retrieved from http://sanjose.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?meta_id=568642.

ANALYSIS

Our Park Ranger Program has evolved through transitional periods of training methods and staffing capacities. What has not changed is the need for park rangers to create a welcoming environment at local parks. Over the years as public safety continues to be a growing issue at our parks, it has given us pause on whether their role should be more focused by consolidating under our primary public safety agency. A transition as such would open doors for our park rangers to tap into additional resources.

Currently, the Park Ranger Program does not have a centralized system to track all calls for service nor are synchronized with the police, fire, and sheriff's office. Thus, even when park rangers play a role in many park incidents, the totality of their work is not accounted for. We need a more thorough mechanism that will provide us with an overview of their workload, similar to Sacramento County Park Ranger's monthly activity log which includes the types of infractions, arrests, calls for service, crime reports not associated with arrests, illegal camping and other incidents. This will help determine the proper direction for the program and whether any additional oversight is appropriate as well.

With more robust data, we can also have a more informed discussion of what equipment is necessary for park ranger duties, especially in response to a growing sentiment that the current tools provided to park rangers may not be sufficient. This discussion should include expanding our current inventory of batons, restraining devices, and chemical agents to all our park rangers. Furthermore, there should be consideration on issuing electronic control weapons to our park rangers similar to how the National Park Rangers³ and California State Peace Officer Rangers⁴ provide to their own.

However, if we do go down this path of arming our park rangers, it is worth noting that while the trend for fully-armed park rangers is growing, so is the concern for excessive force and unjustified shootings. It would be prudent that we place safeguards such as proper training and oversight before considering arming any of our park rangers. For San José, this should include expanding the IPA's role to include additional oversight which currently under our City Charter, the IPA does not have the authority to investigate any community complaints against a park ranger.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of our park rangers is to ensure that community members have safe access to all of our community parks and open space. In order to support our rangers in fulfilling their responsibility, an evaluation of the Park Ranger Program and consideration of enhancements should be conducted. This will help us determine the next evolution of the program, as well as determine if more comprehensive oversight is required. Any

³ U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service. (2015 March). *Law Enforcement Program: Reference Manual-9*. Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/foia/upload/RM-9-redacted-V-2.pdf>

⁴ California Department of Parks and Recreation. (2018). *State Park Peace Officer (Ranger)*. Retrieved from https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=851.

enhancements to the program will help our park rangers to patrol with confident authority, improve our level of service, and ultimately make our parks safer for everyone.