



## City Council Work Session

448 E 1st Street, Room 190 Salida, Colorado 81201

June 1, 2026 at 6:00 PM

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### Agenda

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#### Discussion Items

1. Dogs on-leash within city limits discussion

#### Adjourn

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# City Council Work Session Memo

<b>Department</b> Arts, Parks, Recreation and Culture	<b>Presented By</b> Diesel Post - APRC Director	<b>Date</b> June 1, 2026
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## Agenda Item

Dogs on leash in city limits — Ordinance Review and Staff Recommendation

## Background

The City of Salida’s code of ordinances currently contains two provisions relevant to dogs on city property: a parks-specific prohibition on dogs and a citywide requirement that all dogs within city limits be kept on leash. Together, these provisions mean that dogs are not permitted in city parks at all and must be leashed everywhere else in the city.

The recent annexation of the South Ark / Vandaveer Ranch area into the city has created a code enforcement conflict. Residents and visitors had long used this open space for off-leash dog walking. With annexation, city ordinance now applies — requiring on-leash compliance — and enforcement of this change has generated community backlash. The community is genuinely divided, and staff has received written input on both sides.

Staff has engaged key stakeholders. The Greater Arkansas Recreation Area Nature Association (GARNA) provided a letter — with board support, though not formally signed by all board members — recommending dogs be on leash in the South Ark neighborhood, citing the ecological sensitivity of the riparian corridor. Less than 2% of Chaffee County falls within a riparian area, yet more than 75% of wildlife species depend on these habitats. Salida Parks, Open Space and Trails (SPOT) was also contacted; the board president sought a statement supporting off-leash use in South Ark and on-leash access in other parks, but the full SPOT board did not adopt a formal position. Additionally, community member Chris Miller submitted written input personally advocating for on-leash dog access in select parks and an off-leash area at Vandaveer.

Staff recommends removing the parks-specific dog prohibition from the code of ordinances and relying on the existing citywide leash requirement to govern all dog use uniformly. This approach aligns Salida with peer communities across Colorado, simplifies enforcement, and addresses the underlying issue created by the South Ark annexation. Dogs would be permitted in city parks and in the South Ark neighborhood — on leash. For residents seeking off-leash access, adjacent BLM and county lands beyond city limits remain available. Staff further recommends beginning a planning process to identify a designated off-leash facility, with another Park and the future Vandaveer Regional Park as primary candidate sites.

## Requested Direction from Council

Option A — Staff Recommendation (Preferred): Direct staff to draft ordinance language removing the parks-specific dog prohibition for first reading, with the citywide leash requirement remaining in effect. Direct staff to begin site assessment for a designated off-leash facility at another Park or within the Vandaveer Regional Park master plan.



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Option B — Partial Change: Designate specific parks (locations to be determined) as dog-friendly on leash while retaining the general prohibition in other parks. More complex to administer and communicate but responsive to community input requesting a phased approach.

Option C — No Change: Retain current ordinance as written. Continue enforcement in South Ark and all city parks. This option carries ongoing community friction given the annexation context and does not resolve the underlying transition management challenge.

Staff recommends Option A. The presentation attached to this memo provides full detail on the ordinance analysis, stakeholder input, environmental considerations, peer community comparisons, and off-leash facility options for Council's consideration.

# Dogs On Leash in City Limits

Ordinance Review & Staff Recommendation | Arts, Parks, Recreation & Culture





# Current Code: What the Ordinance Says

- **Parks-Specific Dog Prohibition**

- City code currently prohibits dogs in city parks entirely. This provision is separate from general animal control language and creates a higher bar than most comparable Colorado communities.

- **Citywide Leash Requirement**

- A separate provision requires all dogs within city limits to be on leash. This applies everywhere — streets, open space, and annexed areas — regardless of the parks prohibition.

- **Staff Recommendation: Simplify the Code**

- Remove the parks-specific prohibition. The citywide leash ordinance then applies uniformly. Dogs are permitted in parks and in South Ark — on leash. Clean, enforceable, consistent.

- **Effect on South Ark Neighborhood**

- Dogs walking into the South Ark neighborhood from adjacent BLM or county land must be leashed once inside city limits. Once they exit city limits, leash laws no longer apply — providing practical off-leash access nearby.



# Stakeholder Input

- **GARNA — Greater Arkansas Recreation Area Nature Association**

- Provided a letter with board support (though not formally signed by all members) identifying South Ark as ecologically sensitive. Position: dogs on leash in South Ark to protect wildlife habitat, reduce erosion, and prevent bacterial loading in the river.

- **SPOT — Salida Parks, Open Space & Trails**

- Board president sought a statement supporting off-leash in South Ark and on-leash in other parks. The full board declined to adopt that position. This is not opposition to the staff recommendation — it reflects internal disagreement about a specific off-leash accommodation.

- **Community Letters Received**

- Letters from Chris Miller (personal, with support from others — not a board position) advocate for on-leash parks access and an off-leash zone at Vandaveer. Included as public input, not organizational positions.



# Stakeholder Input (continued)

- **Community Is Divided**

- Public sentiment is genuinely split. The staff recommendation reflects the most defensible, equitable, and legally consistent path forward — not the path of least resistance.

- **Framing for Council**

- GARNA supports on-leash in South Ark. SPOT took no formal position. Chris Miller's letters represent personal and community advocacy — not an organizational stance. Staff recommendation is aligned with the strongest third-party voice (GARNA) and is independently defensible on public safety, ecological, and legal grounds.





# Considerations: South Ark/Vandaveer Area

- **A Sensitive Ecological Zone**

- Less than 2% of Chaffee County falls within a riparian corridor — yet more than 75% of wildlife species depend on these areas. The South Ark neighborhood sits within this corridor.

- **Documented Impacts of Uncontrolled Dog Activity**

- Ground-nesting bird disruption, riparian vegetation loss, stream bank erosion, increased sedimentation and turbidity, and elevated bacterial loading in the river have all been observed in areas with unmanaged dog use.

- **Leash Requirement Mitigates Risk**

- Requiring on-leash use in this area is consistent with the ecological sensitivity of the corridor and aligns with GARNA's board-supported recommendation. It is the responsible baseline for a newly annexed natural area.

- **Poop Bag Infrastructure**

- Any expansion of dog access into parks should include installation of poop bag dispensers and trash receptacles. This is a low-cost, high-visibility commitment to responsible use.

- **Dog vs. Human conflict**

- Recent dog attacks in the South Ark neighborhood area and in other parks, like Riverside, have strengthened some people's beliefs that dogs MUST be on a leash and possibly not in parks at all.





# What Other Communities Do

- **Buena Vista**

- Dogs on leash permitted in town parks. Designated off-leash area at the river corridor park. Leash rules enforced in sensitive riparian sections.

- **Steamboat Springs**

- Dogs on leash in most parks. Designated off-leash zones at specific parks with fencing. Timed off-leash windows at select locations (early morning) reduce conflict with other users.

- **Gunnison**

- Dogs permitted on leash in parks citywide. No parks-specific prohibition. Leash ordinance serves as the primary regulatory tool.

- **Common Pattern**

- Salida is the outlier. Most comparable Colorado mountain communities allow dogs on leash in parks as a baseline and layer in designated off-leash options separately. The staff recommendation moves Salida into alignment with regional peers.





# Off-Leash Alternatives: Meeting a Real Community Need

- **Another Park Area Designated Off-Leash Area**

- A fenced off-leash section within another Park is feasible given available space, existing parking, and proximity to residents.

- **Vandaveer Regional Park — Plan It In Now**

- The Vandaveer property is in early planning stages. An off-leash zone with river access (5–10 acres, ~300 yards of waterfront) can be incorporated into the master plan before development locks in the layout. This is the highest-leverage opportunity.

- **Timed Off-Leash Windows**

- Early morning off-leash hours in lower-use park areas — a model used in Steamboat and other mountain communities — could reduce conflict while expanding access. Lower infrastructure cost than a fenced facility.

- **Chaffee County Partnership**

- A county-managed off-leash area on county land adjacent to the city could serve both residents and visitors. Given the South Ark situation, the county may have appetite for a collaborative solution



# Staff Recommendation

- **Remove the Parks-Specific Dog Prohibition**

- Eliminate the ordinance language that specifically bans dogs from city parks. This is the structural fix. The citywide leash requirement then governs all dog use — in parks, in South Ark, and throughout the city.

- **Uniform Leash Requirement Applies Citywide**

- All dogs within city limits must be on leash. This includes the South Ark neighborhood and all city parks. Simple, consistent, and legally defensible.

- **Add Poop Bag Infrastructure at Dog-Friendly Parks**

- As access expands, staff recommends installing dispensers and receptacles at Riverside, Alpine, and Centennial parks as a first phase. Partner with a volunteer group for ongoing clean-up support.

- **Begin Planning for Off-Leash Facility**

- Direct staff to identify a preferred site and scope for a designated off-leash area — either at Centennial Park or integrated into the Vandaveer Regional Park master plan — and return with a concept and preliminary cost estimate.



# Requested Direction from Council

- **Option A — Staff Recommendation (Preferred)**

- Approve removal of the parks-specific dog prohibition. Direct staff to draft revised ordinance language for first reading. Direct staff to begin site assessment for a designated off-leash area.

- **Option B — Partial Change**

- Designate specific parks as dog-friendly on leash (e.g., Riverside, Alpine, and one additional park) while retaining the general prohibition elsewhere. More complex to administer and communicate, but responsive to community input, requesting a phased approach.

- **Option C — No Change**

- Retain current ordinance as written. Continue enforcement in South Ark and all parks. This path carries ongoing community friction given annexation expectations and does not address the underlying transition issue.

- **Staff Recommends Option A**

- The uniform leash ordinance is the cleanest, most equitable, and most enforceable solution. It aligns Salida with peer communities and opens the door to a meaningful off-leash facility conversation.