



Reimagining the Griffith Park Pony Rides Site

Summary of Public Comments Received between December 2022 and August 2023

Background

Over the past 75 years, the Park Pony Rides had been a highly used activity in Griffith Park. The City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) held a concessions agreement that oversaw the operations with a private business whose contract expired in December, 2022. After careful consideration RAP decided not to extend the concessions agreement to operate the Pony Rides and requested feedback from the public regarding the future use of the site.

At the time of the closure, RAP established a Feedback Form to gather ideas, input, and comments from the public regarding the future of the Pony Rides Site while the Department initiated a more comprehensive public engagement effort with the broader public (which is currently under way). As of August 2023, RAP has received and reviewed over 1,000 comments, emails, and letters from members of the public regarding the future of the Pony Rides site through the online public Feedback Form.

The Feedback Form was closed on August 31, 2023. Nine hundred forty (940) comments were received, and 83 additional letters and emails sent directly to RAP staff. Together, these public comments provide over 1,000 points of public input immediately following the closure of the pony rides that have served as a starting point for discussions on the reimagining of the site.

In addition, a list of 11,588 names in support of a non-animal model was presented to the RAP Board of Commissioners at a meeting held on November 2nd, 2023. This list will be provided to decision makers as part of the compilation of public comments and input received over the duration of the outreach process.

This summary document provides a high-level overview of the key themes and ideas shared in the public comments and is intended to be a companion document to the full set of public comments (with names and emails redacted for privacy) that can be found in in a separate companion document for a complete public record of initial feedback.

Overview of Comments Received

In general, the responses received mentioned one of five general topics:

- Support for a Pony Ride use
- Support for another use
- Mention of site’s historic and/or cultural value
- Mention of need for affordability/accessibility
- Mention of need education

In addition, comments were identified with a responder’s affiliation if identified (i.e. equestrian community or another formal organization or group). Figure 1 shows the number of comments either supporting or opposed to the return of a pony riding activity of some kind. The split is close to equal, with 419 commenters against pony riding of any kind, and 432 commenters in support of the return of a pony ride concession. 22 commenters did not have a clear opinion either for or against pony riding.

Figure 2 shows the three additional “big ideas” most frequently appearing in the comments received, by order of frequency. Historic and/or cultural heritage was the most frequently mentioned topic, appearing



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in 136 comments (15.5 percent of all comments). Affordability and/or accessibility was the second most frequently mentioned topic, appearing in 124 comments (14.2 percent). Education (85 comments, 9.7 percent) followed.

Figure 1. Position on the Pony Rides

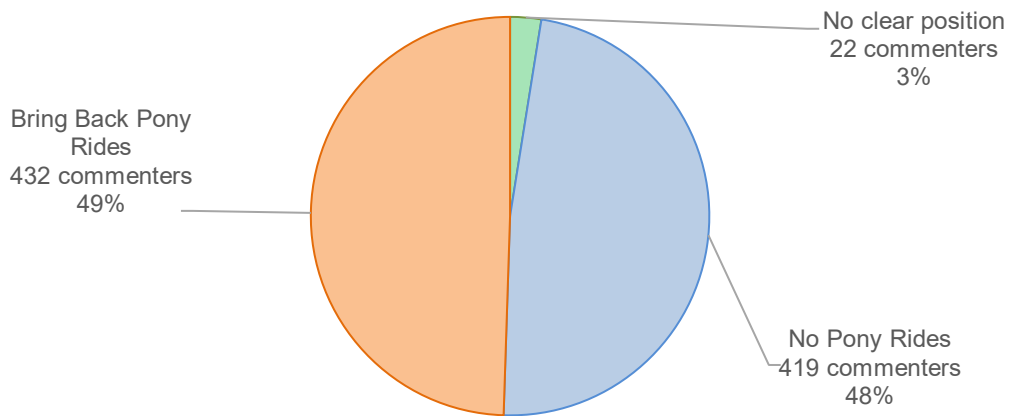
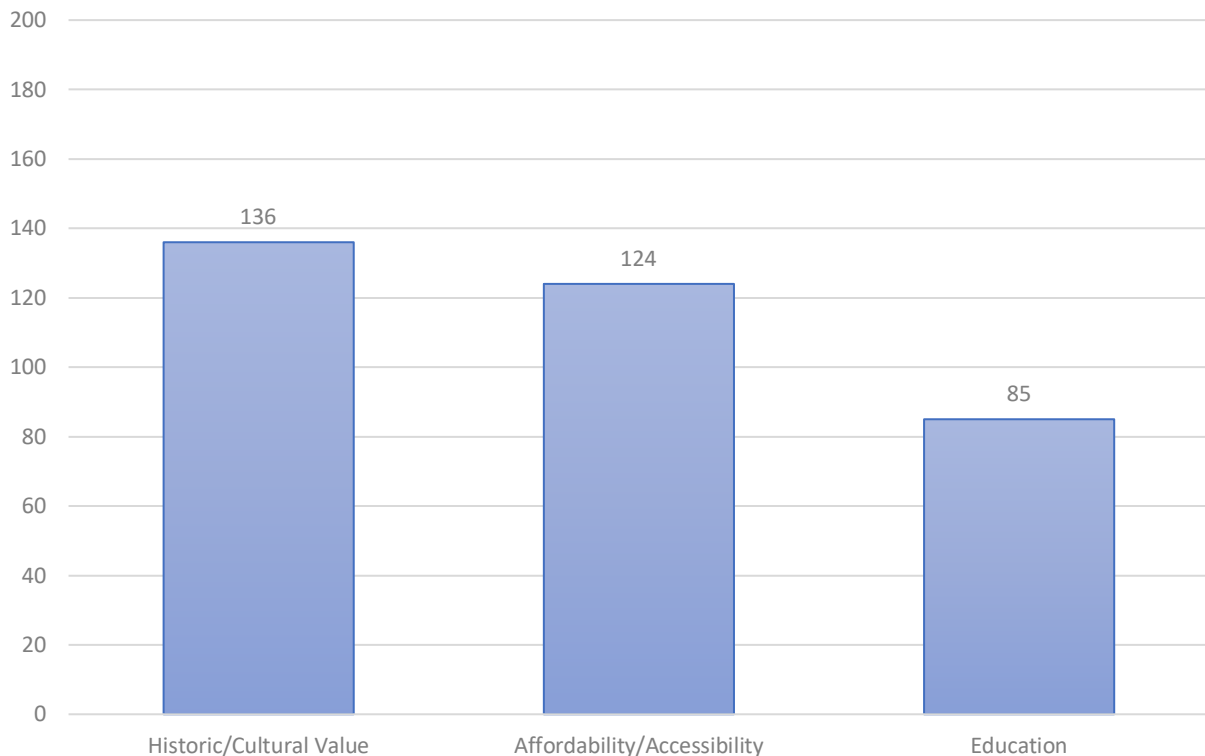


Figure 2. Number of Comments Related to Each General Topic





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General Community Sentiment

SUPPORT FOR A PONY RIDE USE

Comments shared a range of reasons for their support of a pony ride concession. Commenters frequently cited their perception of the ride's positive impact on children and families. Thirty-one percent also mention historic/cultural values, 26 percent also mention affordability and accessibility, 12 percent also mention the commenter's affiliation with the equestrian community, and 8 percent mention the educational benefits of human interaction with animals. Many comments express a desire to restore the pony rides exactly as they were, or do not mention the previous concession, but focus on ponies and perceived benefits of pony riding more generally. Several comments recommend improvements to a potential new pony ride concession.

SUPPORT FOR ANOTHER USE

Comments in this group mainly express concern regarding the general wellbeing of ponies and ethical principles about the use of animals for human-centered recreational purposes. Comments also discuss perceived problems in the management and regulation of the treatment of animals generally and specifically, as well as rider safety. Nearly 80 percent of the comments in this group recommend specific alternatives to a pony riding concession. While most of these comments advocate for a completely non-animal use, several comments recommend other animal-related activities, primarily animal sanctuaries or rescue/adoption centers.

Observations Moving Forward

The initial feedback received by RAP was open-ended and was not conducted as a statistically valid survey representing the mix and diversity of residents and park users in the City. It does, however, start to paint a picture of the issues that are most important to the community and helps to serve as a starting point for discussions in the current outreach effort.

Many of the comments offered suggestions that related to the need to provide an educational component, made requests for better management and oversight of any new vendors and called for accountability of new vendors to the City and the community. This feedback was used to develop the RAP Priorities and Considerations that are serving as the overarching guideposts for the review and consideration of new uses.