

November 13 1997

SUBJECT: DOGS ON PARKS PILOT PROJECT

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

THAT the Board request City Council, through the city's Legal Department, to amend the City's Animal Control Bylaw #7528 Section 4.1 and 4.2 pertaining to the leash law for dogs to state "that all dogs must be on leash except where officially posted".

THAT the Board approve a pilot project at several Parks where early morning and late evening off leash times for dogs can be tested following the revision of the City's current animal control bylaw and the Park Board Bylaw referring to dogs.

THAT staff report back to the Board by April 1998 assessing the pilot project and giving recommendations for its future.

### **REPORT**

Following much public debate including extensive media attention, over 500 citizen proposals received, staff input and a public meeting attended by over 400 people regarding dogs off leash in general parks and beaches, the Vancouver Park Board in their resolution of July 1997, gave staff the option to test several ideas, mainly off leash times in parks for dogs, over the ensuing months before making final recommendations. The Board also stressed that it was enthusiastic about some sort of certification for dogs which would identify those canines under the voice control of their handlers.

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#### **Dog Command Response Certification**

Staff investigated this proposal extensively with well respected professional dog trainers and had devised a simple certification program for off leash dogs. However, when this proposed program was reviewed by the city's Risk Management and Legal Departments we were advised that such a program could pose great liabilities to the City of Vancouver and, hence, were advised to exclude this section from the off leash area proposal.(See Attachment A)

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#### **Pilot Park Sites**

Staff, following consultation with the SMT, have selected **three** general park sites for initial trials, one near the east side of Vancouver, the other on the west, and the last one in the West End in order to test out several scenarios. Staff also met with the Community Centre Association Boards whose area of influence the selected parks fell under, namely, Dunbar and Riley Park. The Associations involved passed resolutions of support for the proposed pilot projects.

( Since the idea to add Nelson Park is recent, the West End Community Centre Association will discuss this with staff at their next Executive Meeting on November 25th.) The proposed parks are **Balaclava Park, Hillcrest Park and Nelson Park**. Each of these sites are already receiving a substantial number of dog visits and are neighbourhood oriented opposed to larger city-wide parks.

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### **The Process**

Once the Park Board approves the pilot projects, staff will pamphlet the residents within a three block radius of the proposed parks to explain the goals of the pilot projects and how it will all work. Comments will be received via our project feedback telephone line, fax machine and email. Staff intend to proceed with the pilot projects barring any unforeseen circumstances or reactions.

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### **The Plan**

The plan is, once the existing dog bylaws are amended to allow off leash times, that **early morning and late evening off leash times for dogs be permitted in the pilot parks**. Times suggested are **dawn to 10 am and 5 pm to midnight**. The expected trial period is February and March 1998. Hours will be reviewed and revised for the summer months if the pilots are extended. This of course would be preceded by a community information drop surrounding the designated parks and would be bolstered by the posting of detailed signs. Sensitive areas, if any, will be flagged, under the direction of the Wildlife Manager and or Recreation staff, leaving a wide enough berth so as not to even threaten indigenous habitat. However, the sites which have been selected for this project were chosen for their **perceived absence of wildlife concerns**.

"Off leash times" was selected as a pilot project in response to the experience of other cities the size of Vancouver where similar off leash programs are in effect. By choosing times for the entire park space opposed to cordoned off areas all the time, the Park Board maintains a standard of open park space for all people. This would also prevent the degrading of landscape which has more often than not been the result of fenced-off areas. Off leash times will also make the animal control officer' s job more focused to specific core hours and thereby easier to patrol. Off leash times, more than anything, will present the dog handler with **options** for their daily walks.

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### **Advertising and Signage on Pilot Parks**

It is imperative to notify the public at large about the pilot programs and to erect large and easy to understand signs ( icons will also be employed) at the major park gateways to ensure that patrons are advised of the temporary rules. Postings at Community Centres and all other Park Board facilities plus newspaper advertising and a notification drop (around the specific park areas) along with the expected media attention will serve the public well with respect to advance warning for the pilot program.

It is also suggested that the Pound, with Park Board Public Affairs assistance, produce one simple pamphlet or panel explaining the pilot program, including interpretation in the city' s major languages, for distribution before and during the program. The Vancouver Dog Owner' s Association is keen to assist us in any of these public information blitzes.

### **Partnership with the City Pound, City Communications Division, Community Centre Associations**

One thing is very clear. Total cooperation between Park Board and City staff at the levels mentioned above is imperative in order for this pilot to gel properly. As well, staff have been assured that the Vancouver City Pound will pay special attention to these parks during the on leash times, with a **grace/education period** at first to be followed by **strict enforcement of the bylaw**. The Pound will also be requested to assess the pilot parks throughout the winter months with recommendations to the Park Board by late March.

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### **Summary of other Major Cities**

The staff have contacted many cities the size of Vancouver as well as neighbouring municipalities to check their collective "dog pulse" . We could be perceived to be alone in the wilderness on this issue as we have, until now, taken a wait and see attitude. The first steps of our public process are behind us and we have excellent information on how all is going in other cities to influence our recommendations. Here is than, briefly, what is happening elsewhere.

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#### **Seattle:**

A two year trial period is coming to an end in which specific areas were set aside in certain parks for dogs only. Commissioner McDiarmid visited Seattle to see first hand how the trial was going and has suggested that the special times for off leash on most parks is superior to dog only sections on a few. Damage to these restricted areas is widespread and effectively takes large areas of public land out of use. Please see the web site information from a group of citizens concerned about this situation. They strongly suggest that the city look for other city owned lands that are not designated for parks for dog runs. The pilot programs have already cost the city of Seattle over \$40,000 excluding staff salaries and park rehabilitation. ( attached is info from UNCOLA group pointing out interesting public concerns.

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#### **Calgary:**

The process by which Calgary selected their off leash areas employed an excellent system. Though it falls short of being adhered to by much of the public ie: a large percentage still take their dogs to the nearest park be it an approved area or not, it was unique as they established certain criteria for such dog parks and then fed it into the computer which matched up the appropriate parks. An excellent model if only people would obey the rules.

Park Commissioner McDiarmid visited Calgary recently and was very impressed with their park selection process.

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### **Burnaby:**

Just in the process of piloting several locations. Strong enforcement to be done on other parks.

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### **GVRD:**

Currently has 6 off leash areas in their park system. Their system seems to work well largely, they think, because the size of the areas, which are not fenced off but merely identified, are so vast and not attracting huge crowds of visitors. Their staff are empowered to issue tickets with a warning first time and a \$100 ticket the next.

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### **West Vancouver:**

A smattering of on and off leash areas with two very popular beach access spots at Ambleside and Lighthouse Park. There are 21 parks where dogs are not allowed at all, 12 where they're permitted on leash and 11 where they can be off leash but under the control of their handler. City bylaw officers issue fines.

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### **Enforcement is Key**

All the staff we spoke with from these various cities reiterated that without adequate and continual enforcement of the leash laws in prohibited areas, the program is doomed to failure, if not in the eyes of the dog owners, most definitely in the eyes of the non-dog owner. The fact that the Vancouver City Pound has been able to successfully ticket offenders through the summer is a hopeful note for us when contemplating this pilot program. We have been assured of their full support.

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### **The Future after the pilot project**

Public Affairs at the Park Board have delivered a very extensive public input process. With over 500 proposals received and computed and an extremely well attended public information meeting and resultant pilot project, the foundation for the expansion of dog privileges on parks has been laid. It is recommended that a special Park Board committee including recreation (beaches & pools staff), planning (park development staff) and operations (wildlife, building trades and grounds maintenance staff) be brought together to course the future for this project in conjunction with the City of Vancouver's Pound all the while consulting with stakeholders such as the Vancouver Dog Owners Association and other interested citizens.

Our goal is to expand the off leash times, if the pilots are successful, to as many parks as possible while working within the boundaries of public opinion, health & safety and environmental concerns.

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