



Date: April 17, 2000

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Dogs Off-Leash Program

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Board support the Council report from the Community Services Group requesting funding to increase the enforcement capability of the City Pound.**
- B. THAT the Board maintain the current twenty-nine (29) off-leash locations and consider changes on an annual basis with Community input.**
- C. THAT the Board move the off-leash area in Vanier Park from the area west of the Maritime Museum to the area north of the boat launch.**
- D. THAT the Board approve ongoing use of Balaclava Park as an off-leash location on the condition that no dogs be permitted on the designated sports fields during the months of April, May and June.**

BACKGROUND

In response to the growing demand for dog off-leash areas in 1997, the Park Board approved a pilot project that would allow dogs off-leash at Nelson, Balaclava, Hillcrest and Killarney Parks during morning and evening hours.

After reviewing the pilot on December 7, 1998, the Park Board added twenty-five (25) new sites to its list of dog off-leash locations. The sites selected by the Board allow most Vancouver residents access to a dog off-leash area within a 4-6 block walking distance of their home and in locations where impact on wildlife and sport group activities are minimal. The pilot projects also identified the problems created by dogs digging holes on sports fields and with owners not picking up after their dog, and as a result the Board withdrew off-leash privileges at Hillcrest and Balaclava Parks. After hearing from the public on April 26, 1999, the Board subsequently approved an off-leash site south of Nat Bailey Stadium as compensation for the loss of Hillcrest Park; approved a one-year off-leash trail for Balaclava Park; and changed the off-leash approval from Burrardview Park to Dusty Greenwell Park.

Appendix A is the April 26/99 list of approved off-leash locations.

DISCUSSION

The long-term goal of the Park Board and City is to work with the GVRD and stakeholders to find the best ways of managing the demand for dog off-leash locations. The Park Board and City are presently working with other jurisdictions to develop dog management strategies that are consistent within the lower Mainland region.

Over the past year staff have worked with the City Pound to inform the public on the rules related to the off-leash program. Signage, brochures, and one-on-one discussions with individuals with questions or concerns have helped to make the program a success. The primary role of the Park Board will be education while the City Pound will focus on enforcement.

Involving the public in ongoing dog management issues is critical. Over the next year staff will work with Community Association Boards and develop recommendations for how the dog off-leash program should evolve within their catchment area.

Park Board and City staff have resolved the confusion related to by-law enforcement. The City has agreed to pursue enforcement on park land given the existing by-law language. The Animal Control By-Law amendment is presently being drafted to reflect the Dogs Off-Leash program. As part of this process, the Park By-law will also be changed to ensure maximum effectiveness. We expect that a report recommending these changes will be available in June.

Now that the signage and educational components of the program are in place, increased enforcement is recommended to deal with problem locations during the peak season. As the weather warms and the activities within parks increase so the number of complaints related to off-leash dogs. Over the last few years it appears that more and more people are allowing their dogs off leash in areas requiring that dogs be on leash. To respect park users who do not want to deal with off-leash dogs increased enforcement will help to ensure the Park Board satisfies the needs of all park users.

While the twenty-nine (29) approved off-leash locations are generally working well, the Vanier and Balaclava sites need modification.

Given the number of complaints with the off-leash location at Vanier Park, an alternate location within that Park is being recommended. During the past year we have received numerous phone calls and letters requesting that the off-leash area at Vanier Park be moved because of dogs interfering with people using the beach area for sunbathing and swimming. After discussing alternate sites with members of the general public, it is generally agreed that the site north of the boat launch is the best location for off-leash dogs in Vanier Park. (See Appendix B - a map showing the existing location and the proposed new location.) By moving the dog off-leash location to a non-swimming area, most park users are expected to be satisfied.

Balaclava Park was approved as an off-leash location in April, 1999 for a one-year trial. The reason for the trial was to allow people to demonstrate that dog droppings and holes dug by dogs would not be a problem for the sports groups. While the group wanting off-leash privileges for this park have worked hard at resolving the problems related to off-leash dogs, it appears there may be a few people who are ruining it for the majority. After reviewing the trial period, it is recommended that Balaclava Park receive ongoing approval as an off-leash location from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. on the condition that no dogs be permitted on designated sports fields during the months of April, May and June. Signage to inform the public of the seasonal nature of this off-leash privilege would be installed. An evaluation of this approach will help the users of Balaclava Park determine the recommendation that is best suited for this park.

SUMMARY

Encouraging community involvement, directing enforcement at problem areas and conducting annual reviews of the Dog Off-Leash Program will help to ensure Vancouver parks are clean, safe and enjoyed by all park users.

Prepared by:

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BM/rml