



Date: July 5, 2001

TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation
FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: CHARLESON PARK DOGS-OFF-LEASH

RECOMMENDATION

THAT designated dogs off-leash areas in Charleson Park be defined in accordance with this report.

POLICY

The Park Board has an initiative to provide parks, or areas within parks, where owners can have their dogs run off-leash. On December 7, 1998, the Board approved the dogs off-leash locations and times noted in the November 27, 1998 Board Report. The report included Charleson Park and the times were from 6:00 am to 10:00 am and 5:00 pm to 10:00 pm.

BACKGROUND

In 1998, the Board designated a dog off-leash area in Charleson Park. The intended off-leash area was the meadow to the west of the duck pond and the off-leash hours were between 6:00 am to 10:00 am and 5:00 pm and 10:00 pm. Unfortunately the designated area was not clearly signed and this led to conflict between dog owners, some of whom thought that the entire park was off-leash, and other park users. Recently, a group of dog owners established a committee to work towards a solution which would address the needs, issues and concerns of all park users. During the past year, Park Board staff have communicated with this group as well as other stakeholders in the Park - the False Creek Elementary School and Parents Committee and the Montessori Preschool and Kindergarten.

Through the consultation process, there appeared to be general agreement in designating these areas of Charleson Park with respect to dogs as:

Meadow Area:	off-leash all day 6:00 am to 10:00 pm (also called Grass Bowl)
Sportsfield:	no dogs allowed at any time
Playground:	no dogs allowed at any time.

All other areas of the park would be designated as on-leash. However, an area which required additional community consultation was the waterfall pond area, especially during the summer months. Suggested designations for this area included dogs permitted off-leash at all times during the winter months, and the summer months to be designated as either:

- a. Dogs on-leash at all times, or
- b. Dogs off leash: 6:00 am to 10:00 am and
7:00 pm to 10:00 pm

Dogs would be required to be on-leash between 10:00 am and 7:00 pm in the waterfall pond area during the summer.

DISCUSSION

As a result of communication between staff and the various stakeholders, a community meeting was held on June 14, 2001 at the False Creek Community Centre. The discussions at that meeting are reflected in the matrix below.

Issues and Concerns	Comments
Signage	Important to install two map signs identifying the different areas and individual signs to clearly designate dog off-leash areas. This would assist the public and enable the City Pound to enforce the Board's dog by-law.
Separation between the off-leash area, paths and the seawalk, especially for children walking to school	Any separation between dog-off leash areas and pathways would reduce conflicts between dogs and other park users. In addition, separation would serve to more clearly defined the dog off-leash area. The separation could be in the form of a low level landscaping or fencing. Both would be expensive to install and maintain and if needed, would have to be phased as money became available.
Areas off-limits to dogs	The existing Park By-law does not allow for dogs in the playground equipment areas. Due to surface damage from digging, staff do not recommend that dogs be allowed on the Park's sand-based turf sportsfield. Also the school principal does not want children returning to class with feces on them.

Issues and Concerns	Comments
Enforcement of dog By-laws	The City's enforcement department for dog by-laws is the City Pound. A change to the by-laws that permits impounding dogs will allow for more effective enforcement. The lack of enforcement was continuously noted. "Good" dog owners feel they are getting a bad reputation because of a few uncontrolled "bad" dog owners. Due to limited resources, enforcement can only be recognized as one component to solving the problem.
Drainage in the park	The entire park is poorly drained, especially the entire area below the sportsfield which includes the meadow area. During periods of inclement weather, the park is less than optimal for recreational purposes. Staff will investigate if the meadow area can be improved by tining and sanding but the sportsfield may be a more expensive challenge.
Access to the waterfall/pond is important to both dog owners and families with young children	Both groups feel strongly that the waterfall/pond area is a special pleasure that they deserve access to enjoy. Dog owners want water access for dog drinking and washing. Families want to be able to have their children play in the water feature without being intimidated by large, free running dogs. While the meeting ended inconclusively on this matter, staff recommend the accommodation of both interests by allowing unleashed dog access to the area from October through May. June through September off leash dogs would only be permitted prior to 10 am or after 7:00 p.m.
The quality of water in the waterfall is compromised by dogs using the pond	The natural flushing action of the pond may ensure that water quality is acceptable. This will be sampled periodically in the summer to confirm this assumption.
Dog feces in the park	Signage should help. Dog owners said they try to encourage the people who neglect to remove feces to do so.

Proposed Designations:

Staff recommend that the signage in Charleson Park be improved to define these areas with respect to dogs - (see attached plan)

1. Meadow Area - off-leash 6:00 am to 10:00 pm 12 months per year.

2. Sportsfield - no dogs allowed at any time.
3. Playground (the activity area and the swing area) no dogs allowed at any time.
4. Waterfall Pond - on-leash from June through September between 10:00 am and 7:00 pm and off-leash the rest of the time.
5. Remainder of Park - on-leash at all times.

Implementation

New explicit signage will be installed in the park. Staff will request the City Pound to increase patrols and enforcement to assist in compliance with the off-leash by-law. Dog owners and the neighbourhood dog committee will be requested to self monitor by providing information and education to other dog owners using the park. Staff will monitor the proposed accommodation at the waterfall/pond and reassess the situation in October. Staff would consider this dog off-leash initiative a success if the number of complaints are considerably reduced and if there were an active neighbourhood committee to help make this off-leash initiative a success.

Staff will investigate improving the drainage in the park. Drainage improvements may require a submission for consideration for funding in the next capital plan (2003 - 2005).

Prepared by:

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