



Date: January 4, 2001

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

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Board limit the dog off-leash privileges at Heather Park to between 6:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.**
- B. THAT the Board approve an additional Dog Off-Leash site -- a portion of Queen Elizabeth Park off 37th Avenue west of the entrance roadway-- to be used for off-leash dogs from 6:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m.**
- C. THAT the Board designate Hillcrest Park as a site where no dogs would be permitted on sports fields.**

BACKGROUND

When looking at the existing parks within Vancouver for the Dogs Off-Leash Program it is difficult to find locations that are within a reasonable walking distance of homes, that are large enough to accommodate the expected number of dogs and that are away from playground equipment, play fields and environmentally sensitive areas. However, 29 sites were approved by the Board in 1998.

In addition to finding appropriate off-leash dog locations, staff recognize the challenges providing a balance between the competing needs of various park users and the need to make on-going improvements to the dog off-leash program.

This report describes three (3) park sites where the issues around dogs in parks, both on and off-leash, require changes in approach.

DISCUSSION

Heather Park

Over the past two years the Board has received a number of complaints regarding off-leash dogs at Heather Park. During the past summer Park Rangers and staff from Animal Control monitored off-leash dog activities at Heather Park and found no significant problems.

After continuing to hear that off-leash dogs were causing problems staff held a public meeting on October 30, 2000 to hear what the local community had to say about the issue. At the meeting the opinions ranged from “leave the program as it is” to “withdraw all dog off-leash privileges from Heather Park”. (Appendix 1 - Copy of October 30th Meeting Proceedings) Several suggestions involved looking at other larger and more conducive sites.

Staff are recommending a compromise solution which will continue to allow dogs off-leash at Heather Park during morning hours and provide another dog off-leash location in Queen Elizabeth Park. This will provide the local community with an off-leash site within a reasonable walking distance of their home while reducing the impact off-leash dogs have on Heather Park and the adjacent neighbourhood.

While staff acknowledge the December 19, 2000 submission by the Douglas Park Community Association (Appendix 2) we believe the recommendations in this report respond in some way to the Association’s issues as well as to the issues from the people within the community who have expressed an equal concern to not having access to Heather Park.

Queen Elizabeth Park

On Wednesday, December 6, 2000, staff held a public meeting to discuss a proposal to establish a dog off-leash location within Queen Elizabeth Park. (Appendix 3 - Proposed Dog Off-Leash Location). The proposed site is a grassed slope that has a large open area suitable for exercising dogs and would have minimal impact on adjacent residents.

The December 6th meeting was advertised in the December 3rd Vancouver Courier and 300 mail drops were delivered to local homes on December 2nd. Twelve people attended the December 6th meeting and no one spoke against the dog off-leash proposal. After the public meeting staff received only one phone call from a person living adjacent to the proposed location who did not support the proposal.

There appears to be an acceptance to using this part of Queen Elizabeth Park for off-leash dogs.

Hillcrest Park

In 1999 Hillcrest Park was reconstructed. The new sand-based sports fields opened to the general public during the summer of 2000 and since then the number of off-leash dogs in this park has grown. In order to protect this investment, staff are recommending that dogs be restricted from using these fields. At Hillcrest Park people with on-leash dogs will be encouraged to use the perimeter pathway and those wanting off-leash privileges will be asked to use the area recommended for designation in Queen Elizabeth Park.

The Board has previously recognized the problems associated with dogs on playfields. In May of last year the Park Board designated the sports fields at Balaclava Park as a site where dogs were not permitted on sports fields. Given the success of the Balaclava Park experience, the same course of action is recommended for Hillcrest Park.

SUMMARY

The success of the Dog Off-Leash Program will continue to depend on all park users sharing existing park land and acting in a responsible fashion. While the recommendations in this report will not satisfy everyone, they do provide a course of action to improve our present situation.

Prepared by:

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