

Date: October 18, 2007



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Work of the Dog Strategy Task Force - Update

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board approve an extension of the timeline for the Dog Strategy Task Force to provide their report to the Board.

BACKGROUND

In response to continuing and often adversarial public debate on the issue of dogs in the urban environment, particularly parks and open space, the Board approved the creation of a citizen-based Dog Strategy Task Force in May 2006. The six members and one alternate were appointed in September 2006. They brought a range of interests and expertise to the Task Force including business, children and families, community relations, environment, parks and leisure and animal/pet behaviour. One of the members of the Task Force was not able to continue and the alternate took over the role. The Task Force was supported by staff and a budget of \$40,000.

The group met between late September 2006 and mid June 2007 and broke for the summer intending to meet again in late August. Given the intervening labour disruption the next meeting of the group is being organized for late October or early November.

DISCUSSION

The Task Force has moved forward on a number of the items within its Terms of Reference (see Attachment) including:

- Interviews with key representatives of City and Park Board involved with police, dog licensing, Animal Control, Cemetery and parks maintenance.
- Review of background information on the existing off-leash program, survey data on how the public sees the program and the extent of licensing and enforcement around the City.
- Hosting 3 public forums in December 2006 at facilities in the downtown and the west and east sides of the City to hear directly from the public on the issues around dogs in the city.
- Research on how other BC, other Canadian, U.S. and European cities have approached the management of dog issues.

and they have begun the development of draft recommendations for further comment by the public.

Soon after the public forums in December it became apparent that the Task Force had difficulty in agreeing on what was heard and then finding common ground to allow them to move forward toward a draft strategy.

A facilitator was brought in to assist the group. They developed a vision, described current realities and discussed what would be required to close the gap. However, differing views amongst the Task Force members have not allowed for consensus in all areas. The key areas where recommendations have yet to be finalized include:

- how many off-leash sites should be provided and should they be provided in new communities
- criteria for the selection of an off-leash site
- which areas or parks should be dog-free
- if and to what extent off-leash areas should be modified and how should these modifications be funded
- how off-leash areas can be managed by stewardship groups

In addition several other tasks assigned by the Board have yet to be tackled because of the focus on developing the strategy and its recommendations:

- review the results of the public process for Stanley, Devonian Harbour and Creekside Parks and provide recommendations
- review the proposal to extend the off-leash hours at Portside Park to all day and provide a recommendation

Timetable Changes

When the Board originally established the Task Force it had an expectation that a final report would be available by April 2007. The Task Force subsequently reviewed its workload and discussed as recently as June 2007 that a final report would likely be delivered by October/November 2007.

In view of the time since the Task Force last met, staff estimates that the final report could be expected in April/May 2008. The Task Force members have individually encouraged an earlier date, ranging from the end of December 2007 to February 2008. The next meeting of the group will include a discussion of a revised timetable. While the Task Force has further work to complete, an extension for the submission of the final report should be considered by the Board.

Outstanding Concerns

Much like the public at large, the Task Force members reflect various opinions on the question of how balancing the needs and interests of non-dog owning residents and dog-owning residents can best be achieved. Several areas of compromise and consensus have been found but other difficult areas remain. A consensus in all areas may not be possible.

The Task Force has now been involved with this work for over a year and this time may be extended for a potential additional six months. Continuing ability to commit volunteer time and potential burnout of the Task Force members is of concern to staff.

SUMMARY

The Task Force has completed a number of the items in the Terms of Reference and will be meeting again in the near future to determine its next tasks and a revised schedule. An extension of the timetable for the development of the Dog Strategy report is being recommended.

Prepared by:

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