

**Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Parks and Recreation
Planning & Environment Committee Meeting
Held at the Vancouver Park Board Office on
Thursday, January 7, 2010**

ATTENDEES:

Park Board Commissioners

Sarah Blyth, Chair
Aaron Jasper
Ian Robertson
Stuart Mackinnon

Park Board Staff

Piet Rutgers	Director, Planning & Operations
Liane McKenna	Director, Vancouver East District
Ron Caswell	Manager of Golf and Park Operations
Hart Nijjar	Recorder

Delegations:

1. Elizabeth Wilkinson – Vancouver Children’s Safety Association
2. Eleanor Hadley
3. Jack Taylor
4. Toni Schang
5. Gary Wedeking
6. Bobbie Merilees
7. Lynne Kent
8. Megan Carvell Davis
9. Jonathan Parker
10. Terrin Griffiths
11. Steven Ryback
12. Peter Guo

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm, with the following agenda:

1. Approval of the Minutes of the meeting on December 10, 2009
2. Dog Off-Leash Areas

1. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Planning & Environment Committee held on Thursday, December 10th, 2009 were adopted as circulated.

2. Dog Off-Leash Areas

Staff presented information on potential changes to off-leash hours at Fraser River Park as a follow-up to the November 2, 2009 Board Meeting. Fraser River Park is a popular off-leash destination that currently allows for dogs to be off-leash from 6 am to 10 am and from 5 pm to 10 pm year round in both the east and west portions of the park. The east side of the park is a 'multi-use area' with picnic tables and restrooms, while the west side of the park has smaller grass spaces, a sandy beach area, and natural riparian areas. The two portions of the park are divided by a pathway.

A petition was received in 2009 asking the Park Board to consider extending off-leash hours to allow all day access. A consultation process was undertaken to determine public opinion regarding potential changes to off-leash hours. In total, 112 responses were received with 88 respondents favouring changes and 24 respondents opposing them. Taking into consideration feedback received from the consultation process, Staff recommended that the park be designated as off-leash all day from October 1 to April 30, and from 6 am to 10 am and 5 pm to 10 pm from May 1 to September 30. However, due to feedback received at the November 2, 2009 Board Meeting, the Board asked Staff to examine alternatives to having the park off-leash during the suggested hours.

Staff consequently met on-site with proponents of the petition and representatives from Animal Control to discuss alternatives. Potential alternatives included treating the east and west portions of the park as separate areas with separate hours, and applying seasonal hours to certain parts of the park. Taking these two options into consideration in conjunction with input gathered from stakeholders, Staff recommended that Fraser River Park West be designated as off-leash all day, year round, while Fraser River Park East be designated as off-leash all day from October 1 to April 30 and off-leash from 6 am to 10 am only from May 1 to September 30. The proposed hours will allow for year round off-leash access while accounting for picnic users and special events in the park during warm weather months.

The Committee thanked staff for their presentation.

Discussion:

A Committee member enquired as to how extensive signage will be regarding off-leash hours and areas. Staff noted that signage is a key component for the successful operation of Fraser River Park as an off-leash park. Information signs will be posted at the two parking lots in the park, where the east and west portions of the park meet, and at pedestrian entrances to the park.

The Committee asked for clarification on who was involved in the consultation process. Staff consulted with three representatives who are regular park attendees and proponents responsible for the petition. Other stakeholders were also consulted over the phone and informed of potential changes via email. Generally, other park users were not outright

opposed to changes to off-leash hours, demonstrating a willingness to compromise to achieve a mixed-use park.

The Committee expressed concern regarding the ecology of the riparian area on the west side of the park, and what impact off-leash dogs may have on it. Staff noted that an ecological assessment of the area has not been conducted so it is unclear what impact dogs have, however, it is uncommon for dogs to spend large amounts of time in that area.

The following delegations requested to speak to the Committee:

- Elizabeth Wilkinson – Vancouver Children’s Safety Association
- Eleanor Hadley
- Jack Taylor
- Toni Schang
- Gary Wedeking
- Bobbie Merilees
- Lynne Kent
- Megan Carvell Davis
- Jonathan Parker
- Tarin Griffiths
- Steven Ryeback
- Peter Guo

The following is a summary of the comments provided by the foregoing delegations:

- There is concern over lack of compliance with current off-leash hours
- Aggressive dogs pose a risk to other park users
- There is a lack of respect for non dog owners
- Mixed-use parks do not work and discourage other user groups from using parks
- Other parks in Vancouver already have all day off-leash hours
- Dog owners and dog walking companies should be charged a fee to use the park like other user groups
- There should be a limit on the number of dogs who may use parks at any one time and all dogs should be licensed
- Dog-owners should be allowed access to parks near their homes
- There is a need for fenced-off dog off-leash areas to clarify boundaries
- David Gray Park in Burnaby is an example of successful mixed-use fenced park
- Volunteers are willing to help build a fence to divide off-leash areas from other portions of the park
- There should be designated dog parks to decrease interference with other park users
- Well behaved dogs and the general public get along well
- Off-leash hours should not be the same in winter and summer as shorter hours of daylight in the winter months make it difficult for dog-owners to comply with the current off-leash hours
- Majority of people who use Fraser River Park are dog owners
- Dog owners are given priority over regular park users
- Signage regarding off-leash areas and hours is not clear

- A broader off-leash strategy needs to be implemented
- Fraser River Park is a successful mixed-use park
- Survey results were largely in favour of new hours
- Many parks are on-leash only and there needs to be some flexibility from other park users for more off-leash spaces
- An ecological evaluation of Fraser River Park needs to be conducted
- Support Staff's recommendation, as longer hours will accommodate different working schedules and allow dog owners to follow the rules
- Use natural boundaries to delineate differences between on-leash and off-leash areas
- Parks should be assessed on a case by case basis to determine appropriate off-leash hours
- There needs to be a balance between dog-owners and other citizens
- A three point off-leash strategy should be implemented, consisting of communication of current rules; consideration of fencing; and re-consideration of beach designation as off-leash

The Committee expressed mixed opinions on the necessity of a fence to signify off-leash areas. The construction of a partial fence to divide dog off-leash areas from the rest of the park would cost \$10,000, and although it is a good option to aid in reducing conflicts with other park users, it may not be necessary. If signage is clear enough and placed in appropriate areas, it combined with the natural division between the east and west portions of the park, may be enough to distinguish between on-leash and off-leash areas.

The Committee expressed concern over proposed hours on the east side of the park, which is also used by picnickers and for special events. Although the Committee supported Staff's recommendation for the west side of the park to be off-leash all year, it recommended that the east side not be designated as off-leash during certain hours due to potential conflicts with other user groups. Staggered hours have not proven to be successful in the past, and as such should not be implemented in the east side of the park.

The Committee also discussed the need to improve the current off-leash enforcement strategy. One of the main concerns citizens have regarding off-leash dog parks is the lack of enforcement during on-leash hours. The Committee asked staff to provide information on the success of enforcement strategies in other municipalities.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Piet Rutgers, Director,
Planning & Operations

Commissioner Sarah Blyth,
Chair