

Off Leash Task Force Minutes Thursday, February 16 2006

Present: Albright, Koel, Tucker, Palumbo, Rice, O'Connell, Richardson, Lawlor

Fran Rice from the Recreation Commission had agreed to send sites to the group between meetings. At the start of this meeting, he announced that he was unable to designate any sites as possible for off-leash dogs.

Attorney Lawlor reported on the history of the usage of dog licensing fees. She reported that in the relatively recent past there was a change in the law and that fees now collected (\$22,500) are not segregated but rather go into the general fund. Question was again raised whether or not fees could be raised and earmarked for a special purpose. It was pointed out that the dog officers would have a hard time finding time to give more citations. Question was raised whether a volunteer group might donate funds for an off-leash dog pilot. Ann Dorfman replied that it would depend on how much people felt part of the process.

The agenda then turned to a discussion of a model for off-leash dogs in Newton. It was recognized that while the AKC booklet recommended fencing, it was unlikely that there would be sufficient funds in Newton for this.

Norm Richardson suggested the approach of finding a few successful models and importing them to Newton. His concept centered around two questions, can we make the situation better than it is today and can we change behavior. He suggested focus on certain problem areas - those mentioned were Norumbega Park, Cabot Woods and Cold Springs Park. Question was raised whether or not a pilot program in a few areas would require a change in the ordinance. Attorney Lawlor felt that the ordinance would have to be amended to accommodate such a program.

Concern was raised whether designating pilot areas would increase use by dog walkers. Would more dog walkers from outside Newton come to these parks? Reference again was made to the possible use of citizen groups to work with the police.

It was agreed that members of the task force would do some field research to see what was happening at parks in Newton right now. Dick Tucker volunteered to look at Houghton Gardens, Amy Koel - Burr Park, Albright - Cabot Woods, Richardson - Norumbega, Polumbo and Tucker - Old Cold Springs Park. Questions to be asked would be: what is not working? Where are you from? What are the neighborhood issues? Is there a community group involved with the park?

At the next meeting, a possible draft ordinance would be presented for discussion.

The key to Norm's suggestion was the creation of a grass-roots group that could work

with the landowner to make the situation better than it is today. Criteria for success would be established and all could work together to accomplish this goal.

A discussion followed on criteria for success of such a program including observance or time limitations (if appropriate), cleanliness of the area, and lack of complaints of any sort - i.e. from neighbors or reports of aggressive dogs. Question was raised whether selecting only a few sites for a pilot would cause overuse of the area. Comment was made that the idea would not be to siphon of current off-leash use from other areas but rather to focus on current use in the pilot areas to see whether people could be more responsible and to whether the pilot parks could be improved for all users.