

# **Off-Leash Dog Task Force Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, September 21, 2006**

Present: Ald. Susan Albright (Chair), Ald. Mitchell Fischman, John O'Connell, Fran Rice, Norman Richardson, Richard Tucker and Amy Kohl

Also present: Ald. Jay Harney

City staff present: Marie Lawlor (Assistant City Solicitor)

## **Draft Ordinance**

Ms. Lawlor provided the task force with a revised draft ordinance for the establishment of dog parks. Ald. Albright met with Ms. Lawlor after the previous meeting to update her on the requested changes to the previous draft ordinance. The City Solicitor has reviewed the new draft ordinance and made suggestions on how to streamline the draft ordinance. The biggest change is that no specific municipal agency that may have land under consideration for use as a dog park is referred to in the ordinance. They are all under the umbrella of municipal custodial agencies. It states that - in areas officially designated as off-leash areas by a municipal agency with care, custody and control of public land – that language care, custody and control of public land is used elsewhere in the city's ordinances. It means that if the land under consideration happens to be Parks and Recreation land under consideration they must go to Parks and Recreation Commission and if it is Conservation Commission land they must go to the Conservation Commission, as was intended. If there were other land subject to another municipal agency's control, they would need to that municipality. Each municipal agency would be in charge of adopting rules and regulations for their land. However, the composition of the Advisory Committee has not been changed, as it works as it is. It advises each municipal agency with care custody and control. Ald. Fischman was concerned because the Board will need to become involved if the land is in the control of a city department and not a commission. It was Ald. Albright's objective to keep the Aldermen out of the picture of approval and Ald. Fischman still feels that it is a worthy objective. He asked if by broadening the language it keeps the Aldermen out of the picture. Ms. Lawlor responded that she believes it does because the decision making power is in the hands of the department head. Ms. Lawlor will recheck but the Board can delegate the responsibility to the department head. Mr. Tucker suggested having someone look at the territorial map of the City and identify, which lands are under which department.

Ms. Lawlor directed the task force's attention to the section regarding dogs and Little League fields. The draft language states that no person with a dog shall allow the dog leashed or unleashed to enter a park designated as a Little League field. There was discussion on whether to include all athletic fields such as soccer fields. Ald. Fischman pointed out that it may be unnecessary to call out Little League fields, as it is up to the designees whether an area should be used as an off-leash dog site. Ms. Lawlor responded that the difference is the language also bans leashed dogs on Little League fields. Ms. Lawlor stated that the task force could consider applying the language to all athletic fields. Mr. Richardson asked the task force is calling Little League fields specifically. The Parks and Recreation Commission can determine whether to allow dogs on or off leash on the Little League or athletic fields. The task force was in agreement

with removing the Little League language from the draft ordinance. Mr. Rice would like an opportunity to get some input from the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation. Ald. Baker suggested inviting a representative from the Parks and Recreation Department and Planning Department to the next meeting or sending a copy of the draft ordinance. The Chair will invite the representatives to the meeting.

Ms. Lawlor asked the task force if there should be an age limitation on the person in control of the dog. Some cities and towns do not allow children to bring dogs to dog parks. Ald. Albright suggested a guideline that the advisory committee considers the age of a person. Ms. Lawlor stated that it was possible. Task force members volunteered to research other communities' regulations to determine whether it was a good idea to put that type of restriction in place. The task force felt it was unnecessary to include the restriction in the ordinance. Ms. Lawlor also tightened up the language referring to cleaning up after the dog. Her concern was that requiring immediate disposal of the plastic bag into a garbage container could leave a dog unattended. Therefore, she added "as soon as possible" to the language.

The task force asked Ms. Lawlor to add language to ban any dog that bites or injures a person or any animal at dog parks. The task force continued discussion of the composition of the Dog Off-Leash Advisory Committee. There was discussion regarding including an aldermanic appointment to the advisory committee. The task force was unsure whether they wanted to proceed in that direction.

The discussion turned to how to notify neighbors to possible dog parks that the park by their home is being proposed as a dog park. The advisory committee will require staff to handle notification. Ald. Baker suggested that the task force look at how other Boards and Commissions handle notification of meetings. There is a variety of ways that people can be notified and Ms. Lawlor agreed to research the notification process. Ms. Lawlor also advised the task force that there should be language addressing how many times the advisory committee should evaluate the dogs off-leash program. The task force felt that twice a year was sufficient. Ald. Baker suggested that the portion of the ordinance addressing the sunset provision be amended to state that the unless the Dogs Off-Leash Advisory Committee recommends extending the dog park program it will expire in two years.

## **Outline Report**

Amy Koel took each of the pieces of the report submitted by various members of the task force and incorporated them into one report. There are still holes in the report and it is missing some of the portions. Ms. Koel is willing to continue working on the outline but she would like further input from the task force members. The task force will review the draft outline and forward comments to Ms. Koel.