



Robert J. DeRubeis
Commissioner

Off-Leash Area Working Group

Friday, January 31, 2014

City Hall, Room 202

Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Commissioner DeRubeis, Susan Albright, Amy Koel, Carol Stapleton, Lee McIntyre, Officer Ralph Torres, Stephanie Lapham, and invited guests from the Bowen School PTO (Jessica Brooks, Jed Sugarman, Greg L., Sylvia and Keith; and Harry. Notes by Carol Schein.

The Commissioner opened the meeting. He stated that Off-Leash Area Specialist Jason Roberts is back out there and things are quiet; no issues. He mentioned the possibility of this position being turned into a full-time Park Ranger position. Financial tracking could be difficult, but not un-doable. Jason would need to be paid out of both the Revolving Account and the Operating Budget depending on tasks performed and where. Jason's proposed citation powers had been put on hold by the aldermen.

Carol Schein mentioned she spoke with Steve Sallan, the Stanton Foundation project coordinator. She asked whether the fact that Newton already had off-leash areas precluded the City from being considered by his foundation. He said no. She emailed him the Cabot OLA plan and specs and he said he would have his reviewers take a look.

The Bowen School PTO representatives came to the table. The Commissioner explained the history of OLAWG and the Parks and Recreation Commission public process as related to creating new off-leash areas. The process works best when abutters and stakeholders come to the table early, prior to public meetings. Some from OLAWG had already met with soccer, Little League and Bowen's principal. The Commissioner introduced Stephanie Lapham, Parks and Recreation, and thanked her for her work on playgrounds. He also thanked the PTO for coming, explaining how hard it would be to get anything done without the help of all the PTOs.

The Commissioner focused on the aerial photo and pointed to the proposed sites 1, 2 and 3 that had been considered. Alternative 1 (closest to Langley Path) had been eliminated; 2 and 3 were preferred (located closer to the middle of the park and at the far back retaining wall, respectively). The PTO rep explained that they had hired, Joanne Hiromura, Landscape Architect, to develop a master plan for the school playground (lower field). They had then been encouraged by others to enlarge the scope to create a vision/master plan for the entire area – both the school playground and the upper field together. Due to the installation of the modulars plus the poorly draining playfield, the school (now the largest elementary school in the City) has a much greater use for the upper field than ever before.

The group agreed to work collaboratively on a master plan. The Commissioner asked that the off-leash area be incorporated into the overall master plan. There is no specific timeline for getting this area up and running. The PTO explained that their plan, at the very least, was to get a new play structure up this coming spring. The PTO was concerned with the costs related to the design and construction.

The PTO reps explained parents/teachers were concerned with having to deal with off-leash dogs and children – a conflict of uses on the field. Officer Torres stated he's had no issues on school grounds. Lee explained the recreational value of Off-Leash Areas for dogs but more importantly for their owners. It was explained that all areas have rules and regulations; all area rules and regs are enforced by the ola-specialist; behavior on the part of dog owners improves at legal areas and that hours can always be adjusted so as not conflict with school or afterschool use. The PTO is holding a meeting next Wednesday, 8pm, for the parents to explain the proposed project and Parks and Recreation and OLAWG is invited. Clear communication – the message to the community—will be critical.