



Robert J. DeRubeis
Commissioner

Off-Leash Area Working Group

Friday, May 4, 2012

9:30 a.m., Room 202

Meeting Minutes

Attending: Commissioner DeRubeis, Lee McIntyre, Amy Koel, Ted Kuklinski Carol Stapleton, Carol Schein

Also Attending: Arthur Magni, P & R Commission Chairman, Ralph Rinalli, NYS, Chris Hill, NYS

- **Discussion with NYS/NGS regarding the Weeks Park & Forte Park off-leash area proposal.**

- ✓ Commissioner DeRubeis reviewed the history and process the Off-Leash Area Working Group (OLAWG).
- ✓ Mr. Rinalli stated since the last meeting there has been a lot of discussion within Newton Youth & Girls Soccer (NYS/NGS) organization about the off-leash areas. NYS/NGS are in favor of fenced off-leash areas and are willing to work with OLAWG to create off-leash areas but they cannot accept shared use of athletic fields with dogs.
- ✓ Mr. McIntyre stated he is a citizen representative for 700 dog owners. The open off-leash areas are working well, the users are responsible. OLAWG is charged with finding areas that are win-win for all. Eight hundred off-leash medallions were sold last year. There are people with off-leash dogs already using Weeks Park and Forte Park. The off-leash areas are typically neighborhood parks. OLAWG has reviewed the available green space in Newton, there is no "low hanging fruit" available.
- ✓ Commissioner DeRubeis commented there are locations that are under the jurisdiction of other City or State agencies and if NYS/NGS could assist in contacting these agencies that would be helpful. An example is the strip of land by the Newton Centre Fire Station that is owned by the MWRA and is an underutilized green space that would make a great fenced off-leash area.
- ✓ Mr. McIntyre stated the group does not want a fight but is NYS/NGS saying they cannot accept dogs on soccer fields anywhere? Anytime? This does not sound like a compromise.
- ✓ Mr. Rinalli stated NYS/NGS does not share the same view of sharing. Grass athletic fields are an ecosystem and must be allowed to rest. And do not believe it is necessary to share the fields and does not believe there is no low hanging fruit.
- ✓ Ms. Kolston, resident, stated she is a dog owner and uses Weeks Park in the morning with other dog owners. This group is a community and helps to keep the area clean. In the morning the group cleans the fields including the trash left behind by soccer groups. The field is better for multiuse.
- ✓ Mr. Hill stated NYS has abandoned the fields at Newton Centre because of the off-leash area and asked why the fenced little league fields are not an option. Commissioner DeRubeis stated there is an ordinance that prohibits dogs on these fields. The baseball fields are smaller areas.
- ✓ Mr. Rinalli asked if the following locations have been considered: Bowen-T-Ville, Braceland or Nahanton Park.
- ✓ Commissioner DeRubeis responded that Braceland has already been approved. OLAWG has agreed to keep off-leash dogs away from elementary schools. There was strong opposition at Nahanton Park related to protecting wildlife and an Audubon Study was just completed and they do not recommend off-leash dogs in Nahanton Park. The group has also looked at Norumbega Park which is a heavily used unofficial off-leash area but the group has received objections from the Conservation Commission.
- ✓ Mr. McIntyre stated every area that is considered meets opposition from interest groups.

- ✓ NYS/NGS and the OLAWG members agreed to work together but Mr. Rinalli will only move forward if Weeks Park & Forte Park is taken off the table.
 - ✓ Commissioner DeRubeis and Chairman Magni agreed to take these two areas off the table and have both groups work together to find other locations.
- **Next meeting**
 - ✓ The next meeting is Friday, May 11, 2012 at 9:30 am, Room 202, in City Hall.
 - ✓ On the agenda: continued discussion with the soccer leagues

Respectfully Submitted

Robin McLaughlin, Secretary