

Worksession

Agenda Item #	4
Meeting Date	February 8, 2010
Prepared By	Barbara B. Matthews City Manager
Approved By	

Discussion Item	Discussion of Off-Leash Dog Areas
Background	<p>Numerous City residents have expressed strong interest in establishing an area where dogs are permitted to run off leash and socialize with other dogs.</p> <p>In considering a petition submitted by residents regarding Spring Park, staff consulted with the Local Government Insurance Trust (LGIT), the insurance trust to which the City belongs. LGIT's advice to the City follows:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"An unfenced dog park, where dogs are permitted to run unleashed poses risks to the dog owner, other people (including children) and other unleashed dogs. The unfenced [park] will cause the City a greater loss exposure where it might be liable for any or all claims for injuries, damages and/or losses to any person or animal (including, but not limited to disability and death) or property, which may arise out of, result from or be associated with the use of or presence at the dog park. Therefore, LGIT's recommends that all dog parks be fenced and that all participants sign a hold harmless and indemnity agreement...."</p> <p>Given the liability concerns expressed by LGIT and the possible conflicts with other park users (human and canine), the City Manager does not recommend that dogs be permitted off leash except in fenced areas.</p> <p>Recognizing residents' interest to have an area where dogs are permitted to run off leash and socialize with other dogs, one option would be for the City to commit its own operating funds to creating a fenced dog park in one of the City-owned parks. The Council would need to balance any such expenditure against other community priorities.</p> <p>Alternatively, with the Council's concurrence, City staff could approach the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to request establishment of a fenced dog park.</p> <p>Staff has reviewed a number of sites that the Council may wish to consider if it chooses to pursue either of these options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prince George's triangle (City-owned property on Prince George's Avenue near New Hampshire Avenue) • Opal Daniels Park (owned by M-NCPPC) • Green space at the intersection of Maple Avenue and Sligo Creek Parkway (owned by M-NCPPC)

	Staff has prepared a memo to provide background information on other area dog parks (attached).
Policy	The City Council determines amenities to be provided to residents and establishes financial priorities for the City.
Fiscal Impact	The majority of the cost of establishing a dog park would be for fencing of the area. A general estimate for a five-foot high, decorative black aluminum fence would be in the range of \$40-45 per linear foot.
Attachments	Memo
Recommendation	
Special Consideration	

Memo

To: Barbara B. Matthews, City Manager
From: Jessie Carpenter, City Clerk
Date: February 5, 2010
Re: Area Dog Parks

The information below is based on a general review of local dog park policies.

City of Rockville (1.35 acres)

- Park restricted to residents of Rockville.
- Users must have their dogs licensed through City of Rockville.
- Users must sign a “Dog Park Rules Compliance and Release Form” (and complete it again when renewing dog license).
- No user fee
- Park is locked – users are given the combination.
- Separate areas for small dogs
- Active user group meets periodically, plans events.

City of Gaithersburg (approx. 1.5 acres)

- Gaithersburg residents may use the park by obtaining the City of Gaithersburg dog license.
- Non-residents may use the park for a \$60 annual fee.
- Park is not locked but actively monitored by Gaithersburg Animal Control.
- Park divided into two areas, one gravel and one grass (no separate area for small dogs)
- No user group

City of Greenbelt

- Greenbelt residents only.
- Users must have Prince George’s County dog license.

- Users apply (one time for the life of the dog) and sign release form. Dogs receive a tag showing that they are able to use the park.
- \$5.00 one-time fee.
- Park is not locked – monitored by users.

District of Columbia

- Program established in 2007 to consider establishing dog parks upon application by a dog park group that agrees to take responsibility for the park once constructed
- Flexible “urban” program allows for design of small parks (5,000 square feet and up, or smaller in certain circumstances such as triangles).
- Users must have DC dog license or proof of rabies vaccination if non-resident.
- Users apply for registration tag annually (no fee for registration).

Montgomery County Department of Parks

- Montgomery County Department of Parks currently has four operating dog parks: Wheaton Regional Park (Wheaton), Cabin John Regional Park (Bethesda), Black Hill Regional Park (Boyd's), and Ridge Road Recreational Park (Germantown).
- The dog park at Wheaton Regional Park is approximately ½ acre in size but expansion has been recommended.
- Parks are free. Dogs must be licensed and have current rabies tags.
- Montgomery County M-NCPPC adopted dog park policy amendments in 2007. The policy suggests that the minimum size of future dog parks should be three acres in size; however, new, smaller, urban-scaled dog parks may be developed in down-county areas with less open space opportunities.

Dog Park Rules

Rules and policies vary by jurisdiction. Montgomery County Parks' rules are noted below. Many of the policies are similar to those in other jurisdictions.

- Dogs must be display current license and rabies vaccination tags.
- Dogs must be over 4 months old.
- Dog-handlers must leash their dogs when outside the dog exercise area and must be in possession of a leash at all times when inside the park.
- Dog handlers must be in control of and in visual contact with their dogs at all times.
- Parents must be in control of their children. No pet handlers under age 13 (or other specified age).
- No more than 3 dogs per handler.

- Dog handlers must immediately remove their dogs' feces and repair any holes created by their dogs.
- No smoking or eating by dog handlers (except for dog treats).
- No aggressive dog behavior.
- No female dogs in heat.
- Hours of the dog exercise area are the same as the hours for the remainder of the park.
- Dog owners are liable for any injuries or damage caused by their dogs.
- Users of the dog exercise area do so at their own risk.