

Seattle Board of Park Commissioners  
Meeting Minutes  
December 8, 2016

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**Board of Park Commissioners**

Present:

Tom Byers, Chair  
Dennis Cook  
Marlon Herrera  
Kelly McCaffrey

Excused:

Andréa Akita  
Marty Bluewater  
Evan Hundley  
William Lowe  
Barbara Wright, Vice Chair

**Seattle Parks and Recreation Staff**

Christopher Williams, Deputy Superintendent  
Paula Hoff, Strategic Advisor

The meeting is held at 100 Dexter Avenue North. Commissioner Byers calls the meeting to order at 6:30pm. He reviews the Agenda and the Commissioners introduce themselves.

There being no quorum, the Commissioners do not vote on the Consent Items.

**Study Session: People, Dogs, Parks Strategic Plan**

*Presented by Holly Miller and Christopher Williams, Seattle Parks and Recreation*

Deputy Superintendent Williams reviews the principles for the Off-Leash Area Plan:

- The Department does not support the unfenced areas for off-leash areas
- SPR cannot provide an off-leash area in every neighborhood in the City
- There will be a community process, through an ad hoc committee, to put off-leash areas in parks to ensure a high level of support.
- SPR does not have funds available to construct new off-leash areas but are open to considering new areas, on our property or other property.

Holly Miller introduces Jonathon Frose – Water Quality Specialist from Seattle Public Utilities and Dr. James Ha – PhD animal behaviorist from the University of Washington. Holly reviews the public involvement process for the off-leash plan.

She reiterates that licensed dogs are welcome on leash in all Seattle Parks, outside of beaches and children’s play areas.

Off-leash areas are an acceptable use of parks and help build communities.

The plan we put forth adheres to the plan of multiple uses within our Parks, do not want to exclude activities, but it is hard to divvy up Parks for everyone.

There are lots of demands for play areas, sports fields, and community centers.

This plan represents a prudent approach for off-leash areas, with an incremental approach for adding off-leash areas. Must look at them from a variety of perspectives and have a community voice. Keep a list of priority off-leash areas for when funding is available. Support the addition of OLAs in several ways: New park development, park redevelopment, and requests from the community.

All OLAs need to meet the design and safety standards of the Dept.

Unfenced Off Leash Areas – Continue to offer only fenced OLAs due to potential conflict. Many places that have tried them have had to back away from them for conflicting uses. SPR has very few enforcement officers. The plan is not recommending leash optional trails due to user conflicts, maintenance and environmental concerns.

Improving OLAs and the User Experience – long list of improvements based on input from crew chiefs, COLA and evaluations of each site. Will use new Park District funding to improve existing OLAs.

Require professional dog walkers to become licensed and get an animal behavior certification.

Planned modifications to the plan: (listed in “Proposed Modifications to the Draft Plan based on Public Input” section.

Question about 10 dogs per walker. Dr. Ha indicates there is no real data and he originally recommended 6. He is most comfortable with 6, but understands this is a political process and some people’s livelihood may depend on this.

What does certification process look like? Can they get training for up to 10? Everyday people are comfortable with 3. If someone has education and experience they may be able to manage more than 3.

Does the training relate to dog walker oversight and clean-up after the dogs? The Commissioners question whether any person could keep track of and pick up after 10 dogs. Dr. Ha explains that this is not part of the program and one reason he recommends only allowing 6 dogs.

What is the nature of the curriculum certification?

- Awareness of behavior and dog-to-dog communication.
- How humans interact with dogs and what effects interactions have on the dogs.
- Monitoring and observation of dog behavior.
- Understand symbols dogs are giving off, anticipate issues, and how to respond to them.
- Understand what the dogs are saying and how to react.

It helps the idea of managing a large number of dogs in an off leash area. From theories to practical side of things.

How do the recommendations in our plan relate to plans in other places in the Country? It puts Seattle on the cutting edge, in the lead. From the licensing to the physical design money puts Seattle in the forefront. Gives Seattle an opportunity to take a lead.

What is the water review like? Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) have reviewed Magnuson and Marymoor Park. There is no literature out there, but SPU did a lot of sampling and found:

- Lower bacteria are a result of the dogs chasing the birds away at Magnuson Park.
- Elevated ammonia is more indicative at Marymoor.
- Lots of shore and vegetation erosion with dogs in the beach area at Magnuson.
- Dogs were blocking migration at Marymoor and they had to adjust the usage during migration time.
- No problem with the bacteria from the dogs in Golden Gardens off leash area, but there is issues with the wood chip runoff. Many people leave their waste bags or throw them in the bushes and those cause more problems. It is a widespread problem in our urban creeks.
- High bacteria in Thornton Creek, not sure if it is from humans or animals.
- Those who don't clean up after their dogs create water quality problems and give others a bad rap.

Does water quality of the beach ever make dogs sick? Algae blooms can cause liver damage to dogs. Dogs should not drink lake water with Cyanobacteria.

If the City wanted to open a new off leash area on a beach, what would the process look like? We would have to address issues from the Shoreline code and go through the SEPA checklist and other review processes.

Are certain water areas better to use for off-leash dogs than others? Are water related use areas, like boat ramps, better? It is really a policy decision and the department would still need to go through the state regulatory review. The Adams St. Boat ramp will start this discussion.

Would a filtration system help at Golden Gardens? Yes, it could.

Audience Questions:

Budget question for off-leash areas: The Park District money was already approved before it was spent. SPR had a plan for how it would be spent, and SPR will potentially get new funding in the next Park District budget cycle. Off-leash areas compete with everything else in our park system. We need to work next time to make sure there is more money for off-leash areas.

Numbers of dogs and dog walkers: Most professional dog walkers take dogs that get along well together. The dogs stay with the walkers and they stay together.

The community have an opportunity to speak and say the following:

- Spell out clearly in a transparent plan every step of the way.
- Set out specific objectives and goals the department is trying to meet. Give us something specific. In X number of years, we would like to see X number of parks.
- Think in terms of how far behind SPR is in building and maintaining parks for the dog demand. More play areas for children, but the dog population keeps growing. There has never been money in the general fund.
- It is time for a line item for OLAs. The first money went to administrative fees to work on a plan.
- Use sales tax money from dog products for dog areas. There is probably about \$2 million coming to the City every year.
- Asks how the plan addresses the neighborhoods who have been asking for off-leash areas for years? The community see money allocated in the plan to initiate the process to plan for new parks. Many neighborhoods have been actively pursuing this, but no one is following through. Nothing in the plan addresses this.
- The plan calls for things in the existing areas that we don't really need.
- Explore the OLA fund that people contribute to when they get licenses.
- The plan is too vague.

Holly - This Plan is not a blue print. The proposals need to be generated from the community and not put upon them for Seattle Parks and Recreation. This is a process for how to review these proposals. Find sites where we find success in a community and build on it. Lead from success, not conflict.

Deputy Superintendent Williams will arm Jesús with the information on how much of the Park District funding has been spent. SPR hasn't spent it on staff time, but some was just used to repair the fence. We will report out on that next month.

Check discrepancy in COLA's tally on emails vs. SPR's.

Is the recommendation for fenced areas only? Three major reasons. Cities that have done this are reeling them back; SPR knows conflicts will occur and the City lacks enforcement. Unfenced areas are off the table. Hours are not respected and there are maintenance issues.

Let's make sure this is an open and transparent process that can continue to grow. Let's figure out how to educate the dog owners that are creating the problems.

**There being no other business, the meeting adjourns at 8:30 pm.**

APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Tom Byers, Chair  
Board of Park Commissioners