

Board of Health / Select Board
Joint Meeting Minutes
January 8, 2024

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BELMONT, MA**

DATE: March 20, 2024
TIME: 10:15 AM

Ms. Allen called the Board of Health to order at 7:38pm.

Discussion of Off Leash Program with the Select Board.

- Mr. Epstein explained that off-leash dogs have attracted a lot of attention recently, and the Recreation Commission and BOH worked to create a policy for the dogs.
- Mr. Fitts outlined the challenges that caused this issue to come to light, explaining that there has been feedback about dogs in the parks over the years. Recently a resident was bitten, which caused the Recreation Commission to take a deep look at the issue.
- Mr. Fitts then presented on the issue (click [HERE](#) to see the slides) which included the bylaw (§ 60-200. Pets and other animals) that states: C. Except as the Board of Health may otherwise permit, no dogs, except those dogs that serve as service animals as defined by regulations issued pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act, 28 CFR 35.104, will be allowed in the following areas of the Town: all cemetery land, all public-school playgrounds and athletic fields and all Recreation Department playgrounds and athletic fields. Nor may any dog be allowed inside food establishments, retail businesses or public buildings.
- He then reviewed the history of the off-leash program, and the process used to review and improve the program. Mr. Fitts spoke about athletic events being interrupted by off-leash dogs and how off-leash dogs are licensed. He also explained that there is a lack of awareness about the program and how the working group has tried to address this.
- Mr. Fitts presented the updated “Paws in the Park” program including information on registration, fees, training, available parks, and other program components. He also compared the previous program with the new one and spoke about the difficulty enforcing these types of programs. He explained that the Recreation Commission voted unanimously in favor of the “Paws in the Park” trial program at their December meeting.
- There was a discussion of the Board of Health’s involvement with the issue and how to reconcile the demands of different park users. Mr. Epstein explained that he believes there is not enough information about the trial program for the Board to vote on, and outlined some of the missing information.
- There was a discussion of the program and challenges of the issue as well as how to proceed. Mr. Chin proposed that the property stakeholders work together to create rules for the Paws in the Park Program to propose to the Board of Health for review and approval. Ms. Garvin recommended that rules & regulations be in place before there is a vote. There was a discussion of how to proceed. Mr. Epstein proposed that representatives from the Schools, Select Board/Town Administration, Recreation Department, and Board of Health meet to discuss this issue with the goal of having a proposal within 6 weeks. Ms. Allen asked if there were other specific considerations the Select Board would like the group of representatives to look at. Recommendations included potential funding sources to create fenced areas and where to place this type of facility, better signage, better outreach, and extending the timeline of the trial

period. Mr. Epstein spoke about the large number of emails received from the public on this topic and opened public comment.

- Joanne Adducci expressed her support for the off-leash program and she spoke about the residents of Winn Brook being unaware of the working groups and activities around this issue and her concerns about a new policy. She offered to join the working group.
- Michael McNamara suggested that a group of dog owners participate in setting rules and then self-police which would be an effective way to ensure enforcement.
- Ira Morgenstern outlined what the working group has already done and spoke about the problems with fenced in dog areas as well as the goals and benefits of dog areas.
- Nancy Reppucci expressed support for a fenced-in area and recommended discussions before taking action. She also shared her concerns about dogs jumping on her. She asked that liability also be considered.
- Jung Yueh explained that he is a soccer coach and expressed concern for residents whose dogs are not permitted and who do not follow the rules, especially out-of-town dog owners. There was a brief discussion of next steps.
- Ms. Allen moved to adjourn the Board of Health. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The Board of Health adjourned at 8:21pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Adrienne Allen, M.D., M.P.H., Chair