

Board of Health/Recreation Commission Joint Meeting Minutes 0016 OCT 19 PM 2:24  
September 27, 2016

The September 27, 2016 Recreation Commission Meeting was called to order by David Kane, Chair at 7:02pm.

Those present from the Board of Health were David B. Alper, D.P.M., Chair; Donna S. David, R.N., M.N., Vice Chair; Julie C. Lemay, M.P.H., Member; Angela Braun, R.S., Director; and John Maguranis, Animal Control Officer.

Those present from the Recreation Commission and Department of Public Works/Recreation Division were David Kane, Chair; Anthony Ferrante, Co-Chair; Kathryn Jones, Secretary; Anne Helgen, Member; Mary Bradley, Member; June Howell, Recreation Program Supervisor; Frank Sartori, Parks and Recreation Division Manager, and Jay Marcotte, Director of Public Works.

Several members of the public were also present.

Introductions of those present took place.

Mr. Kane gave a brief introduction of the Recreation Department's Off Leash Dog Program and commented that it is a very popular, good program and that perhaps it is time to look at making some improvements due to recent concerns.

Dr. Alper presented a history of how the Off Leash Program began years ago as the "Goosebusters" Program. With the assistance of the Animal Control Officer, John Maguranis, the Program was greatly improved by providing education, great oversight, and a dog evaluation program for applicants to the Program. Dr. Alper mentioned that the Program began with one field at the High School with a handful of dogs and expanded to several parks with a dramatic increase in participants. Complaints regarding the Program have increased and recently the Health Department has received a couple of dog bites reports involving dogs permitted through the Program.

Dr. Alper spoke of the Program being not only about control of the dogs, but of control of the owners and that the Board of Health, as the approving authority, is here in collaboration with the Recreation Department to revisit the Program and offer suggestions, adding that the parks should accommodate dog owners and non-dog owners alike.

Specific mention was made by Dr. Alper of the great turn out at the July 11, 2016 Board of Health meeting when testimony was heard by many residents who provided constructive suggestions to improve the Program. The suggestions formed the basis of the recommendations in the letter, dated July 26, 2016, from the Board of Health to the Recreation Commission. Dr. Alper mentioned that the majority of the public present were not in favor of a "dog park" and that the Board of Health no longer considered a fenced in dog park as an option for the Program.

Kathryn Jones asked how many dogs are permitted in the Program and how many dogs are turned down during assessments.

June Howell answered "120 permits".

John Maguranis said that a small number of dogs are turned away. John gave an overview of the assessment process. Dogs are assessed following a written protocol; the applicants are evaluated in small groups. Dog owners are drilled on rules and responsibilities of the Program during the process. John spoke highly of the Program, which he states is a positive program for both dog owners and non-dog

owners; it creates better dog citizens, and results in less complaints and happier dogs; it is a community program. When problems arise, it is due to people not following the rules; the Program is very successful.

June added that when a member of the public asks for a permit the regulations are handed out; they are aware of the rules.

Mr. Kane mentioned that John cannot be everywhere - enforcement is a challenge.

John Maguranis responded that much emphasis is placed on the dog owners' self-monitoring the fields for issues, violations, and non-permitted dog owners.

Donna David commented on the importance of camaraderie between members of the Program; monitoring each other, picking up after each other and reaching out to new permit holders.

Mr. Kane made reference to the letter of recommendations from the Board dated July 26, 2016 and discussion ensued starting with item one on the list of recommendations.

1. *Identification of dogs* - Mr. Kane said that this is something that the Commission has been interested in adding to the Program. Yellow, round, metal tags labeled "2017" ordered by the Health Department were shared with the group. Everyone present agreed that the tags are a good idea and will assist in determining if a loose dog is part of the Program.
2. *Hours of operation*- Mr. Ferrante brought up the issue that working people may only be able to take advantage of the Program at night, especially after the time change; the dusk to dawn hours would not be fair. The Commission is going to think about exclusion hours and not allowing dog on the fields during sporting events.
3. *Signage*- June said that it has been a few years since the signs were updated. The Department of Public Works will look into adding/replacing the signs based on Health Department recommendations listed on the July 26, 2016 letter to the Commission and review their placement at each field.
4. *Eliminating the Winn Brook Park as an off leash location* - Dr. Alper stated that we need more of a balance: a park should be available for people who are afraid of or do not like dogs; not everyone will be 100% happy but everyone deserves an opportunity to enjoy the parks. Also, Dr. Alper stated that off leash dogs should be banned from the soccer fields during second soccer time. Several people present said that eliminating the Winn Brook Park would not be fair to permit holders living nearby Winn Brook. Mr. Ferrante stated that he recalls only one dog incident at Winn Brook Park, and could we restrict one end of the park for off leash dogs. June brought up the fact that no dogs are allowed at Payson Park. All agreed that Payson Park should be identified as the dog free park and advertised as such.

John Maguranis added his thoughts. He agreed that signage is lacking and should be improved. John stated that he has been monitoring this Program for fifteen years and he has only had a handful of problems; minuscule; we are trying to fix something that is not broken. "Dogs get socialized, dogs are not barking in windows, and it would be a big mistake to get rid of this Program." All present agreed that signage is a good idea. Emphasis was placed on keeping hours simple so that it is easy to remember and is not confusing and reference should be made to the website for more information. Dr. Alper reiterated that fact that these ideas were all recommendations from the public who made comments during the Board of Health Hearing in July.

5. *Educational Opportunities*- John Maguranis spoke favorably in regard to Zen Dogs training that was provided by the Recreation Department. June added that the turnout was not good - only 12 people. Zen Dogs can hold classes for "Meet and Greet" and park etiquette. One Commission member offered the suggestion that Belmont Media could film the training for greater outreach. The Recreation Department staff will explore opportunities for expanding dog programs.

6. *Provide a new Off Leash Program Brochure* - June said she could work on this in the future.
7. *Off-leash Committee Liaison Group* - John Maguranis stated "self-monitoring" by dog owners is an important part of the program and he always emphasizes this when he is out on patrol and during dog assessments.

Mr. Ferrante added some thoughts to the discussion: people need to display common sense, for example, if your dog reacts to balls, don't have it off leash during a soccer game. We need clearer rules; we are taking a program that is good and making it better. June Howell said that she will send out a request to permit holders for suggestions and incorporate them into new guidelines.

There was mention of fencing tot lots. John Maguranis added that it should not be necessary because there are setbacks from tot lots, no dogs should be near them.

One resident spoke of the need of a database to track off leash offenses.

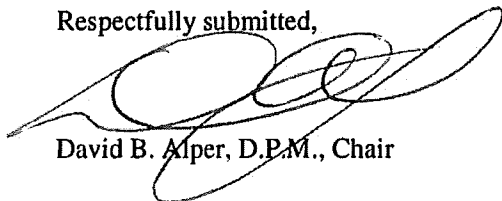
The Recreation Commission agreed to review everything discussed regarding the Off Leash Program and get back to the Board of Health with new items added to their current policies and new signage at the parks reflecting such.

The second item on the agenda - The use of personal flotation devices (PFDs) at the Underwood Pool was discussed. Board of Health member Julie Lemay presented a brief overview on the topic, explained the history of Christian's Law, and the basis of the American Red Cross and MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) recommendation that young children and weak swimmers should wear coast guard approved personal flotation devices when they are around water, even a municipal pool. Ms. Lemay mentioned that she also spoke to the Director of Community Sanitation at the Department of Public Health who concurred that approved PDFs should not be banned.

Mr. Kane agreed that this change has to be looked at - this is a personal choice of the parents. June Howell explained the background regarding the reasoning for not allowing PDFs by the Aquatics Director: interfering with learning to swim, false sense of security, conflicts with those who want to use non-approved devices. The Commission will review policies and will not mandate the use of PDFs but will allow them on supervised children if the PDF in use is approved by the Aquatics Director - this will be the only exception and they can only be utilized in the wading pool at the Underwood Facility.

The Board of Health/ Recreation Commission Joint Meeting adjourned at 8:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,



David B. Alper, D.P.M., Chair