METROPOLITAN BOARD OF PARKS AND RECREATION

DOG MANAGEMENT ON PARK PROPERTY
POSITION PAPER

amended
September 6, 2005

Mission Statement

"It is the mission of the Metropolitan Board of Parks and Recreation to provide every citizen of Nashville and Davidson County with an equal opportunity for safe recreational and cultural activities within a network of parks and greenways that preserves and protects the region's natural resources."

Introduction

Increasingly across the nation dog parks are recognized as one of the many amenities that helps improve a community. A dog park is not just about dogs, it's about people and helping them to build positive, cohesive relationships in their neighborhoods. In short, dog parks are one of the many benefits of successful, innovative cities across the nation. Current national trends have revealed an interest and demand for recreational opportunities for dog owners and their pets on municipal park property. A recent Gallup poll stated that 42% of households in the United States have dogs and according to the National Recreation and Parks Association there are an estimated 2,000 existing dog parks in the United States. The Metropolitan Board of Parks and Recreation has established goals and adopted recommendations to accommodate this popular interest within the framework of the Board's Mission Statement.

The position of the Metropolitan Board of Parks and Recreation is that all Metro Parks will be "dog friendly" subject to Park Board rules, regulations, and policies. It is the responsibility of dog owners and custodians of dogs to ensure that they are in compliance with these conditions when they visit and enjoy Metro Parks and Greenways with their pets.

The use of Metro Park property and facilities by dog owners, custodians of dogs, and their pets will be subject to the Department's "core service" conditions that promote safety and quality of recreational experiences for all residents who share the park resources.

To promote responsible pet ownership practices, compliance with policies, and quality recreational experiences, the Director has established a Dog Management Team with representatives from the planning, public information, natural resource management, and law enforcement sections. The Dog Management Team has formed a partnership with representatives from the Nashville Humane Association, the Tennessee Veterinarian Medical Association, Metro Public Health Department / Metro Animal Services, and Metro Water Services.

Primary goals of dog management on park property are:

- **strict compliance with the leash law**
- **increase removal of dog waste**
- **increase the number of off leash areas**

Opposing views, counter claims, and consequences

This position paper recognizes the existence of opposing views and counter claims. For example some residents may believe that their unrestrained dogs pose no threat or nuisance to other park visitors throughout the Metro Park system. However, Park Police and other staff report that unrestrained dogs have become one of the most frequent sources of complaints on park property. The seriousness of these complaints range from dog bites to humans, dog fights that include injuries and veterinarian bills, altercations between park visitors, and negative impacts to the quality of recreational experiences for runners, walkers, bicyclers, and others. Leash free dog experiences should be allowed only in designated, properly designed park areas.

Some residents believe that responsibility for cleaning up after their dogs on park property is an unnecessary and intrusive expectation. However, clean up obviously helps keep park areas more enjoyable and hygienic, while failure to do so passes maintenance responsibility on the others and leaves a mess that park visitors may step in. Furthermore, the Metro Public Health Department and Metro Water Services report that uncollected dog waste, especially in concentrated areas, is a risk to public health, safety, and water quality. The Metropolitan Code of Laws (8.04.180) states that: “A dog owner shall clean up and remove any excrement left by his/her dog(s) on any public or private property. . .”

Some residents propose that unleashed dog areas be designated in their neighborhood parks prior to the establishment of regionally distributed facilities in the Metro Park system. However, review of this practice reveals the potential for the unintended consequence of neighborhood parks being overwhelmed by dog owners and their pets from a wider population than is appropriate for this classification of municipal parks.

In order to accommodate the interest and demand for recreational opportunities for dog owners and their pets in a successful, safe, and comprehensive manner, the following recommendations will be implemented.

Recommendations:

1) **Conduct an ongoing educational campaign and marketing initiative with the following goals:**

   - **Strict compliance with the leash law and promotion of dog owner/custodian control of their pets**

   - **Increased collection and removal of dog waste**

   The educational campaign will include a kick-off event, print media, electronic media, and digital/website information. The motivators for the campaign will include public safety, public health, a cleaner environment, quality of recreational experiences, and enforcement. It is the position of the Metro Board of Parks and Recreation that education, increased awareness, and voluntary compliance are the most effective and desirable methods of achieving these goals.

2) **Implement and further develop the recommendations of the 2002 *Parks & Greenways Master Plan***

The Parks & Greenways Master Plan recommended the development of two pilot dog parks in Davidson County – the Shelby Dog Park, which opened in June 2004 and the Warner Dog Park, which opened in June 2005.

Based on the proven popularity and success of these new facilities, Metro Parks is committed to providing additional leash-free sites throughout Davidson County per the following development guidelines. These guidelines have been developed based on our experience with the Shelby and Warner projects, advice from Dog Management Team and Partners, and research into off-leash facilities nationwide.

a. Develop a system of leash-free facilities throughout the county that offers a range of experiences.

Metro Parks' off-leash system should provide a variety of experiences that respond to a range of needs. A conventional, fenced dog park, as at Shelby, will be the backbone of our system but, additionally, sites should be developed that offer separate areas for small dogs, hiking opportunities in large natural areas, access to a waterbody, and other well-documented needs.

b. Develop regional facilities first

- Providing a leash-free area in each of the major quadrants of the city ensures that all citizens of the county have equal access to this type of recreation.

- Regional parks are usually better-suited than neighborhood parks to incorporating leash-free areas

    * It's easier to find "under-utilized" space
    * Conflicting uses are easier to keep geographically separated
    * Existing parking may be adequate, and can often be shared with other park uses
    * Surrounding roads are more likely to be classified as Collectors or Arterials, and have the capacity to handle the additional traffic

- Experience indicates that a neighborhood park is usually a poor candidate for a dog park.

  Developing a neighborhood dog park without first having a regional system would attract users from throughout the county, placing too much stress on the park, parking lots, local streets, and surrounding residences.

  Generally, only a fenced, exclusive-use dog park is appropriate in a neighborhood park, since other uses and public streets (traffic) are close-by. But due to the intensive, multiple, and shared uses in a neighborhood park, it is generally better for Metro Parks to maximize shared uses and minimize exclusive uses.

  It may be appropriate to consider the development of neighborhood dog parks after a regional leash-free system is in place. At such time, a neighborhood dog park would primarily attract neighborhood residents.

c. Develop leash-free areas in phases

- As a new type of park facility/use; leash-free areas should be developed as need, funding, and opportunity indicates.

- As the highest priority leash-free areas come on-line, use should be monitored to determine if countywide needs have been met in terms of geographic distribution and variety of experience, and if additional leash-free areas are needed.

- A leash-free area is going to be more successful if there is an existing base of known users to promote responsible use of, and to build community around, each facility.

- Where the opportunity presents itself, it may be appropriate to consider incorporating leash-free areas into large park development projects at a minimal cost.

d. Leash-free facility locations

Implementation of the following recommendations would result in a regional leash-free system that offers a variety of experiences.

- **Shelby Park** (Downtown/East) Opened June 2004

- **Warner Park** (Southwestern Nashville) Opened June 2005

- **Centennial Park** (Midtown)
  Expected opening by the end of 2005.
  Sites on and around First Amendment Hill are being evaluated for feasibility.

- **"Twelve South Park"** (Midtown/West)
  This is an undeveloped property east of Granny White Pike, South of Gale Lane, and owned by TDOT. Presently, Metro is negotiating with TDOT to be given control of the property

- **<u>"Twelve South Park"</u>** *(*Midtown/West)

  There is intense demand for a dog park in this high-density area of the city. Sevier Park has long been a defacto dog park, with some resulting conflicts. As outlined in the general discussion of neighborhood parks, Sevier Park is poorly suited to the development of a formal dog park. "Twelve South Park" is within a block of Sevier Park and is much better suited to dog park development.

  It is "new" parkland, with few existing user groups competing for space.

  It would reduce dog traffic in Sevier Park and accompanying conflicts, although the park should continue to welcome leashed dogs per general park regulations.

  The *Parks & Greenways Master Plan* recommends that additional neighborhood/community park acreage be acquired in Subarea 10.

  Planning should occur in coordination with surrounding neighborhood groups.

- **<u>Bell's Bend Natural Area</u>** (Western Davidson County)

  800-acre natural area with extensive trail system to be developed in phases. Construction should be completed by the end of 2005.

- **<u>Stones River Greenway Percy Priest Dam Trailhead OR Two Rivers Lake</u>** (Hermitage, Donelson)

  Both sites are being evaluated to serve this area. The open area at the foot of the Percy Priest Dam is currently being developed as a large-scale trailhead for the Stones River Greenway. The open acreage is suitable for a dog park, the use is compatible with the greenway, and no additional parking would be required.

- **<u>Stones River Greenway Percy Priest Dam Trailhead OR Two Rivers Lake</u>** (Hermitage, Donelson)

  Furthermore, a dog park would offer an additional destination that would enhance the greenway. The property is owned by the US Army Corps of Engineers and the use would require their approval.

  Two Rivers Lake provides irrigation water for the golf course. This site would offer a water experience for dogs and would activate an otherwise underutilized area of the park. It is also accessible from the Stones River Greenway.

e. Planning & design considerations

- Generally accepted national standards should be the basis for the planning and design of all leash-free areas, applied and adapted as necessary to address site-specific opportunities, constraints and objectives. Outlined below are fundamental issues to take into consideration.

- Within Metro's system of leash-free areas, the following opportunities should exist:

  Hiking opportunities (Warner Parks, Bells Bend)

  Access to a water body (Bells Bend, Two Rivers Lake)

  Separate fenced areas for small and large dogs

- Characteristics of a conventional dog park:

  It is fenced

  It is an exclusive use

  It may not be appropriate where there are nearby streets or conflicting park uses

  It can accommodate dogs not under voice control and effectively contains all dogs

  When separate areas for small and large dogs are provided, there should be no common fences

- Characteristics of a leash-free area, such as a hiking trail loop:

  It can be multi-use -- shared with compatible, non-dog related users as long as they are made aware that they will be encountering unleashed dogs

  It requires a large acreage

  It is often unfenced, so dogs must be under voice control

- Characteristics of a leash-free area, such as a hiking trail loop:

  If unfenced, it must be located away from public roads or other active park uses

  Because it is multi-use, development costs may be minimized and wrapped into a larger project

- A specific site may lend itself to a facility that incorporates some of the functions or design elements of both a fenced dog park and an open, leash-free area.

- No regional facility should be less than two acres in size.

- All leash-free areas should incorporate the following features:

  Dog waste bag dispensers

  Trash receptacles

  Regulatory signage

  Shade opportunities

  Fresh drinking water

  Benches

  Incorporating other features such as play equipment, should be evaluated by the Dog Management Team members and advisors.

3) Continue to develop and install signage in appropriate locations to educate park visitors about compliance with the leash law and responsible pet ownership on park property**.**

4) Continue to increase the number of dog waste bag dispensers in appropriate locations throughout the Metro Park system, and require dog owners/custodians of dogs to clean up after their pets on park property.

Metro Water Services has estimated that 31,000,000 pounds of dog waste are generated in Davidson County each year. Dog feces may carry parasites, bacteria, germs, pathogens, and viruses that are harmful to humans. Uncollected dog waste left on the ground can find it's way into creeks and streams and ultimately into the Cumberland River, negatively impacting water quality. Clean up after your dog also keeps park areas attractive and hygienic, while failure to do so leaves a mess for someone else to step in or deal with. To assist with this important responsibility, Parks Maintenance Staff have installed approximately 50 dog waste bag dispensers in multiple locations throughout the park system.

It is the position of the Metro Board of Parks and Recreation that dog owners / custodians of dogs will be required by Park Board policy to pick up after their pets on park property. Furthermore, in the interest of public health and a cleaner environment, it is recommended and encouraged that dog waste be picked up on all public and private property.

5) Continue to review, determine, and list park areas and facilities where dogs should be prohibited for public health, safety, and other appropriate reasons.

Two obvious examples where dogs will be prohibited include playgrounds and pool facilities, where barefoot children and others are especially vulnerable to exposure to harmful parasites, bacteria, germs, pathogens, and viruses commonly found in dog waste.

6) Continue to enforce Park Board rules, regulations, and policies related to dog management, compliance with the leash law, and responsible pet ownership on Metro Park property.

Education, increased awareness, and voluntary compliance are the most effective and desirable methods for achieving success. Enforcement is a tool that will be used when necessary and appropriate.

7) Proposals from residents, neighborhood organizations, and others

Proposals from residents, neighborhood organizations, and others about additional dog parks and leash-free areas should be submitted to the Park Board for consideration.

Conclusion

The Metropolitan Board of Parks and Recreation recognizes the need and importance of strict compliance with the leash law, increased removal of dog waste, and increased recreational opportunities for dog owners and their pets in the Metro Park system.

To successfully accommodate this demand within the framework of the Mission Statement, in a safe and comprehensive manner, with the avoidance of unintended consequences, the Park Board adopts the recommendations of this position paper and instructs staff to proceed with implementation.