

**BAINBRIDGE ISLAND METROPOLITAN PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT
PUBLIC HEARING: PROPOSED FOUR OPTIONS OFF LEASH DOG AREAS**

APRIL 3, 2014

STRAWBERRY HILL CENTER

CALL TO ORDER: A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order at 6:03 pm by Chair Kinney.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Lee Cross, Ken DeWitt, Jay Kinney, Kirk Robinson, and Tom Swolgaard.

INTRODUCTION: Chair Kinney welcomed everyone and said the priority for this evening is to take public comments on four proposed off leash dog areas. Once these have been given, comments on other matters pertaining to dogs will be taken if time permits. No decisions will be made tonight. He offered some background information, saying dogs in parks is a contentious issue that the Board has been looking at for years. The Park District has received a number of complaints about off leash dogs biting people, other dogs, and horses. Disturbance of wildlife is also an issue. The Board would like to accommodate the need for dogs to be off leash in a manner that is consistent with public safety and the rights of other citizens to use the parks. He said some criticism has been received over nothing being done, but it is not as easy as it seems. He mentioned various efforts the Park District has made in recent years to address this issue including an attempt to open a dog park at the City's Vincent Road site. The four options being presented this evening are sites that the Park District could get up and operating this year.

STAFF PRESENTATION PROPOSED OFF LEASH DOG SITES: Senior Planner Perry Barrett provided an overview of the four proposed sites. 1) Battle Point Park North: 1.5 acres of mixed canopy and open space near the main trail; 2) Battle Point Park South: 1.25 acres on high ground with open terrain off the main trail and convenient access to the Forest to Sky Trail; and 2.9 acres if this area is expanded to include a seasonal pond that would be fenced off and closed when wet; 3) Strawberry Hill Park: 2.35 forested acres with little undergrowth west of the play area and Strawberry Hill Center; 4) Madison Avenue Tot Lot: a walk-in pocket park of less than a quarter acre off Madison Avenue that would serve primarily small dogs

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Martha Turnbull, island resident, favors rotational off leash 24 hour periods for trails in parks. She thinks there might be some use of the proposed off leash sites but finds them small and inadequate. The two proposed areas for BPP are muddy and not acceptable. The Madison site would be used most since it is in town and dry. She understands rotational hours may be hard to administer but said dog owners will help with this. She has always voted in support of park levies, but feels marginalized by the Park District's lack of interest in providing off leash access to the trail systems. She will no longer vote for park levies if she doesn't get something out of it.

Doug Hatfield, island resident, loves the idea of having more dog parks. There's not the option of having something huge here so you do the next best thing. His dog loves the mud. Let dogs be dogs. Keep it simple. Move forward and make it happen.

Marilynn Gottlieb, island resident, said she doesn't like the Battle Point Park sites. The site at SHP is best and the Madison site is good for small dogs. She doesn't think dog parks will eliminate the problem of off leash dogs in parks.

Monica Aufrecht, island resident, spoke in support of dog parks as best for the island, however if poorly designed they will make an aggressive dog worse. She provided the board with some criteria from the Association of Professional Dog Trainers on what makes a successful dog park. The sites at SHP and north BPP meet the criteria. The south BPP site does not since there are few areas where dogs can hide from other dogs if targeted. This could be modified by planting trees. The Madison site is too small to meet the minimum criteria of one acre and is not a good option since it is so close to a toddler's play area.

Doug Lasniewski, island resident, walked all the sites. He commented on how wet the north BPP site is saying the grass will not last if used for a dog park unless the site is available only in the summer.

Kathy Blossom, island resident, is disappointed the Board cannot find a solution to the problem saying dogs are an important part of human life. It is incumbent that board members set aside their personal biases. They are the beneficiary of property made possible through the public's support for the open space bond and are responsible for stewardship of this land. She found a comment once made by Commissioner Robinson to be tasteless and arrogant when he suggested that anyone donating land for a dog park could have it named after their dog. She said her family has donated land. She asked the Board to find a way to give people what they need to enrich their lives.

Bill Glasser, island resident, walked all the sites with his wife. The north BPP site is wet and would require drainage work. The SHP site is heavily forested and would require deforestation. The enhanced south BPP could be a good option if it was extended west for additional acreage and the seasonal pond was seen as a feature of the dog park.

Robyn Teske, island resident, said the Madison site might be all right for small dogs, and that she likes the SHP site since it is forested and good for older dogs that are less interested in playing with other dogs and just like to snoop around and wander slowly around the forest.

Marcia Millican, island resident, spoke first as a Park District employee who has safety concerns over the location of the dog site at SHP. She is responsible for young children and is concerned about the close proximity of the dog area to the playground as well as the area where she walks with the children to the playground so they do not need to go through the parking lot. She asked if the access gate could be moved farther north. She also expressed safety concerns over potential conflicts between children and off leash dogs when people park and do not leash their dogs on the way to the dog area. As a private citizen, she has concerns about the south BPP site thinking it will encourage more off leash dogs on the Forest to Sky Trail.

Gary Tripp, island resident, spoke in favor of shared use plans that would designate half the day for off leash dogs and half the day for on leash dogs. People who don't want to be around off leash dogs could visit the parks when dogs are on leash. There is still only one off leash dog area on the island. It is a mud hole, not easily accessed and a failure because nobody likes to go there. All that a shared use plan requires is a sign. If it doesn't work, take the sign down. It could happen tomorrow. He knows dogs behind fences and on leash are more aggressive than dogs that run free. He asked the board to try a shared use plan at Fort Ward Park, The Grand Forest, Battle Point Park, and Pritchard Park.

Sharon Eshan, who recently moved back to the island, asked what criteria was used to arrive at these four sites. She gave the Board a report she found online that outlines guidelines for successful off leash dog parks. It is based on a study of 17 dog parks, has a wealth of information, and emphasizes community involvement. Commissioner Kinney said this is the fourth public hearing regarding this issue. Executive Director Lande said two different dog committees evaluated the parks for possible dog park locations and each have come back with the same recommended parks. It was noted that much of the District's parkland came with conservation easements or are wildlife preserves that do not permit this type of use. Commissioner Robinson mentioned Park District efforts to work with COBI on making City owned property at Vincent Road available to the public for a large dog park. This site was significant in that it is a large area that could be converted into a dog park without displacing current uses in the island's parks. The Vincent Road efforts were tabled recently when after submitting the permit application to the City, the District was informed of a number of unanticipated costs related to studies, engineering, etc. These costs would have exhausted a good portion of the funds the District had available for this project. In an effort to get a dog park operating this year, the Board opted to look again at the District's parks for off leash dog areas since the funds could go further and there would be no permitting delays. A woman in the audience asked whether a collaborative effort in the community could

work to raise the needed funds to bring the Vincent Road dog park into fruition. Executive Director Terry Lande said if people wanted to do this, he would be happy to work with them.

Becca Hanson, island resident and DAWG committee member, said in 2010 the Park District put together a committee known as the Dog Area Working Group Committee (DAWG) that developed criteria to determine which parks offered the most opportunity for dog parks. She said the challenge is that putting up a fenced dog area doesn't get rid of aggression. If a dog is not trained, an aggressive dog outside a dog park will be the same aggressive dog inside a dog park. She said DAWG came up with a number of solutions of which fenced dog areas were one. Other solutions include timed use and shared use of the island's trails especially for those dogs who have been accredited through canine good citizens training. She said we must learn how to live together with our dogs and not ruin other people's experience. Through partnership with our dogs and each other we can make this island the best place to own and walk our dogs. If funds are short, she agreed with Gary Tripp in his view that shared use should be tried; it would be a cheap solution. To provide background information about herself, she said has lived here since 1983 and has had six dogs during this time. She had to put two of them down because they killed another dog. She said she knows the good and the bad. She was adamant in saying she does not agree with people who say you cannot count on dogs to do what you want them to do. It's a matter of training, education and working with your dogs. This has to be a cooperative process. Part of the responsibility lies with the Park District because we pay money to use these parks; part of it lies with the City. She said DAWG stopped with the identification of parks that could be looked at for possible sites, and there has not been a collaborative process where people could work with the Park District since then. There have been public meetings (hearings) which are for taking comments and are not for collaboration. She said DAWG was a huge effort of collaboration; people spent hours on this and were never thanked. She said she has documents from this committee outlining the various options. Each park presented tonight has possibilities but they need design, not just a fence. She hopes the Park District hears everyone here. This is not about the District doing its thing and others raising the money. We have to come together and DAWG was an extraordinary way of doing this.

Ken Teske, island resident, said dogs in a dog park are not really unleashed dogs; they are leashed by a fence. The Madison site is good for small dogs but without parking it could be used only by people within walking distance. His experience with dog parks is that they tend to be self-policing by the dog owners who will not tolerate aggressive dogs or owners who don't pick up their dog's waste. He recommended a separate entrance/exit to better control the flow of dogs in and out of the fenced area. What is done with dog parks should not affect what is done with unleashed dogs in other areas. A few bad dogs should not penalize the good ones who do not cause problems.

David Ward, island resident who owns two dogs and a City Council member, said he is here to comment as a private citizen and is not carrying the wishes or desires of the City Council. He said he and Council Member Sarah Blossom spent two years meeting with Park Commissioners Robinson and Kinney to talk about solutions to this issue. He said they came up with a list of ten to eleven sites and the only one tonight that is familiar to him is Battle Point Park. The rest fell off the table for some reason. He feels strongly that after going through all the potential uses of the parks, the District had these four finger nail clippings left over and that is what is being offered tonight as dog parks. He said they are just little fenced in prison areas. He wants to see hourly allocations in parks so dogs can run without being fenced into a small area. He said his personal opinion is that he doesn't think dog owners are being particularly well served by the Park District, at this point. He'd like to see a higher level of cooperation to find solutions similar to what Becca Hanson has offered, which he believes are falling on deaf ears. He wants to work together and use other communities as examples of what might be possible.

Susan Stanton, new island resident, would like areas for small dogs designated within the larger dog parks. She thinks the Madison site would be good for small dogs but not large dogs. She likes the SHP site saying it is the least muddy. When she hears about the possibility of off leash trails, she knows that this is not something her dogs could use.

John Kuenninc, island resident, acknowledged the need for open spaces so dogs can run, but also would like to see some contained areas in dog parks that can be used for training purposes. If an area is too big, his dog will take off. He also emphasized the importance of having good drainage in whatever site is chosen, saying if the site doesn't drain well, it won't be used.

Larry Sivitz, island resident, said dogs are bred for specific purposes. Certain dogs will break command and run off if prey crosses their path. He doesn't believe fences are prisons; they create manageable areas where dogs can freely run. Not all dogs are the same and while many would like to let their dogs run free, not all dogs will cooperate. His priorities for dog parks include: areas that are not marshy; usability and proximity to parking area; vertical channels for easy management of dogs while they are exercising, many dog parks distributed throughout the island that can be accessed easily on a daily basis versus one large destination park.

Mary Lou Teske, island resident, says she takes her dog to Pritchard Park because he is under voice control and loves the water. She likes the SHP site the way it is and would not like to see it overdeveloped.

Mary Lou Vibrans, island resident, said it is her understanding from tonight and from a board meeting last month that the idea is to get a dog park up and running quickly. Once this initial step is taken, additional efforts will be made to move forward with other areas such as the Vincent Road site. Chair Kinney agreed. He does not think opening dog areas in any of the sites proposed tonight will solve the problem or be a final solution. This issue is something the Board will be working on for years to see what works and what does not work. It will take time to find a balance that addresses both the concerns of non-dog patrons with those of dog owners who want to recreate in the parks. Mary Lou Vibrans asked if once a few of tonight's proposed sites are up and running, could citizens can come together to help raise funds for a dog park at the Vincent Road site and work with the Park District and City to bring this about. Executive Director Terry Lande answered with a "yes" saying that while the Vincent Road site is owned by the City, the City Manager has told him he would be happy to work with the Park District and bring this project back to the table. He reiterated that the reason the Park District wants to move forward with something right now is because the permitting process for the Vincent Road site could take eight to twelve months and the District does not have the funds to pay for the additional permit related costs. Terry Lande responded to questions from the audience about the unanticipated costs involved, saying while the permit itself cost approximately \$4500, the costs to meet the permitting requirements would cost significantly more and is estimated at an additional \$15,000 to \$20,000. Examples of the permitting requirements include: engineering, transportation and fecal matter studies, storm water drainage, retention ponds, and a change of use permit.

Dana Campeau, new island resident, noted that in addition to exercising dogs, socializing is also an important factor to consider when addressing the needs of dogs. She kept her comments brief since Becca Hanson and David Ward had earlier expressed her concerns with their comments.

Beth Katz, island resident, said in California there are no separate dog parks. Every park is available for off leash dogs during designated hours. She proposed the following times for parks to be designated off leash on the island, saying these times worked well in Chicago where she once lived: 5am to 10 am, and 5pm to 10 pm. She said these times work well for dog owners and are during a time when families generally are not using the parks.

Chair Kinney said everyone who signed up has now spoken and opened the floor to anyone else who wanted to comment.

Barry Malone, a non-dog owner and trail runner, said he fully supports the creation of dog parks. However to address the user conflict between those who want their dogs off leash on trails and those who do not want to encounter off leash dogs when using the trails, the District must create off leash areas that dog owners will actually want to use. The dog areas presented tonight will not solve this. He said he is tired of being chased by dogs when he is running through the Grand Forest. A shared use trail will not work in that it will exclude him from using the park. He said a reality check is needed. It is in the nature of the animal to chase someone who is running. He asked the Board to consider larger spaces for an off leash dog park so it will reduce pressure on other areas. He also emphasized the importance of enforcing existing leash regulations since many of the island's parks are already by de facto off leash parks.

A man in the audience (could not hear his name) said Pritchard Park works great. The place is clean because people pick up after themselves. People don't walk there with their dogs in the afternoon when families are there. This morning fourteen dogs were there and everyone got a long fine. He supports designated times in parks for off leash dogs.

Ian Colletti, island resident, asked if there is some sort of public medium outlining this process where people can congregate online. Is there someplace where the problem is clearly articulated, criteria is laid out, the objective and constraints are identified, and concerns can be made visible? He said he is a solutions consultant who would be willing to donate his expertise in this area.

Gary Smith, island resident, said he has a Facebook site people can go to at bidogparks.com that covers issues related to dog parks. While it is not an official site, it reflects most everything that has gone on related to this issue in the past fifteen months since he's been on the island.

Another man in the audience (could not hear his name) agreed with Ian Colletti on the need to clarify what the goal is. He likes the idea of 5 to 10 for designated hours at someplace like Pritchard Park and prefers mixed use.

Executive Director commented on the National Memorial at Pritchard Park, saying no dogs are allowed there at all. Commissioner Swolgaard informed the audience that while Pritchard Park is jointly owned by the Park District and the City, it is managed by the City of Bainbridge Island.

Robert Dashiell, island resident, noted there is a lot of interest in having a dog park at the Vincent Road site. He said the City has excess funds from storm water management fees that are available for storm water use and suggested pressure be put on the City to fully fund these aspects of the project.

Barb Trafton, island resident and part-time Park District employee, said she served as the former co-chair for the Pritchard Park Design Advisory Committee. After a taking fair amount of public input, the committee did recommend a possible dog area or off leash hours for Pritchard Park. She did note however that this issue has become the park's primary focus, and that the park is in need of other attention as well.

Bill Glasser, urged the Board to at the very least try out off leash hours in parks to see if it works.

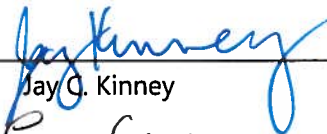
Chair Kinney said the Park District has heard from a lot of people not here tonight who are afraid of dogs or have been bitten by off leash dogs. This is a concern to the Board. Commissioner Robinson echoed Chair Kinney's comments noting the many written comments the Board has received that counter what people have been saying tonight. He mentioned that much of what the Park District is today has come about through the efforts of volunteers who have seen a need and worked with the Park District to get something done. The Eagledale dog park was initiated and created through a group of volunteers that organized under the name of BIOLA (Bainbridge Island Off Leash Area). He encouraged the people here tonight to get organized and help the Park District with the fundraising and work needed to bring about what they want. Executive Director Lande said there are lots of possible solutions and many are mutually exclusive of each other. There are liability issues the District must consider. He said the Board wants a good

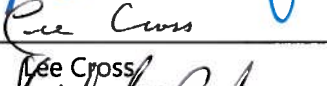
solution. The Commissioners serve as the stewards of park land, and sometimes decisions need to be made that people won't like. He said he has visited hundreds of dog parks and is more than happy to talk with people about this issue. Chair Kinney said there are many people who are afraid to go to parks because they fear being bitten by an off leash dog. Timed use excludes citizens from the parks during these times. Dogs can be in all parks anytime provided they are on leash. The Board encouraged everyone to get organized and to work with the Park District in a manner similar to Little League when it collaborated with the Park District to renovate a ball field at Strawberry Hill Park. It was noted by some in the audience that dog walkers are different than sports leagues and don't tend to know each other. Squeaky Wheels was mentioned as a group that brought bicyclists together to address issues related to bicycling; dog owners are similar to bicyclists in that both bicycling and dog walking is done more as individuals than in a group. Commissioner Cross suggested contacting PAWs as a possible means through which to get organized. She said the Park District has been working on these issues for a long time, and there is no perfect solution. The four sites discussed tonight is an attempt to get something going.

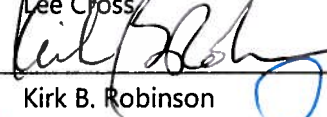
NEXT STEPS: Chair Kinney said the last day for written comments is April 10. The Board will discuss where to go from here on tonight's proposed locations at the April 17 or May 1 board meetings at which time the Board will decide how to proceed with these four sites. A committee will be formed to work with staff on the design of any approved dog area. The Park District's goal is to have something open six to eight weeks after the Board has made a decision. He reiterated that this will not be a final solution, but a starting point that will lead to additional opportunities in the future.

MEETING ADJOURNED at 8:05 pm.


Elizabeth R. Shepherd
Terry M. Lande
BAINBRIDGE ISLAND METROPOLITAN
PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT

BY: 
Jay C. Kinney

BY: 
Lee Cross

BY: 
Kirk B. Robinson

BY: 
John Thomas Swolgaard

ATTEST: 
Kenneth R. DeWitt