



MCPB Agenda Item # 17

M E M O R A N D U M

June 20, 2000

TO: Montgomery County Planning Board

VIA: Donald K. Cochran, Director
Montgomery Parks

FROM: Terry H. Brooks, Special Projects Coordinator
Office of the Director of Parks

SUBJECT: Proposed Dog Exercise Area Policy / Program & Sites

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approval of the proposed policy and program (highlighted in bold in this memorandum), which would allow for the development of off-leash dog exercise areas within the Montgomery County Park System.

Background:

Over the course of the past 6 - 7 years the Department has received many requests from dog owners asking the Commission to consider developing off-leash exercise areas within the Parks System. According statistics obtained from the American Veterinary Medical Association: approximately 31.6 percent of the households in the United States own at least one dog; there are approximately 53 million dogs in the United States; and there are approximately 758,000 dogs in the State of Maryland.

Montgomery County has approximately 25,000 licensed dogs. Dog owners are known to be one of the most frequent users of the Parks System, often visiting our parks at least twice a day.

The Montgomery County Code requires all dogs to be licensed and under the command of their owners at all times (either on a leash or voice command). Commission Park regulations require all dogs to be on a leash at all times while on park property.

Pursuant a request from the Director of Parks, the Montgomery County Planning Board, and the Montgomery County Council, staff formed a special task force to investigate and develop a program that would allow for the creation of off-leash exercise areas for dogs within the Commission's Park System. The Prince Georges County Planning Board is also considering a similar initiative and is currently conducting a site search and analysis study to establish dog exercise area facilities within their park system.

Because the creation of dog exercise areas is a totally new use of public parkland, the staff taskforce assembled represents a broad spectrum of interests and perspectives affecting this new initiative. Staff from the Director of Parks Office, Community Based Planning, County-Wide Planning, Northern and Southern Operations Regions, Natural Resources, Park Police, Park Development (CIP) and the General Counsel's Office have all been involved with this effort.

Over the course of the past ten months staff has been investigating the development and operations of similar facilities across the country as well as those around the Washington Metropolitan Area.

The results of this study effort is contained in the attached special report titled:

“Dog Exercise Areas In Montgomery County Parks: A Proposal For Locations, Funding, And Operating Criteria”.

This report contains the background, proposed program structure, funding strategies, CIP funding program and projected operating budget needs, site selection criteria, basic facility element or design standards, facility rules and regulations, and general dog owner group requirements supporting this new initiative. (See Attachment A).

Public Outreach-

In August 2001 staff produced an edition of “The Park Show” TV Cable program to introduce the Department's formal launching of this study effort by the Commission. In September, staff produced a draft report, which was distributed and placed on the Commission's web site for comments and suggestions. Staff received well over 200 e-mails commenting on this proposal (See Attachment B)

During the period between October – December, staff met with the Recreation Advisory Committees across the County. In February 2002 staff conducted a countywide forum with the public in order to receive comments on the proposed

program. Over 200 people attended this meeting. A summary of the comments received during the meeting is contained in *Appendix A* of the report.

As a result of this meeting and additional public comment, Evans Parkway Local Park, and Aberdeen Local Park were removed from the candidate site list and staff looked at regional and recreational parks in order to provide greater service delivery to more dog owners. The adjusted sites referenced in this report reflect some of the public comments and suggestions.

Current Planning Board Policy-

In November 2001 the Planning Board took a policy position supporting the concept of allowing dog exercise areas within the parks system when it adopted the FY 03 – 08 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Specifically, the Board approved \$ 20,000 in Facility Planning: Non-local PDF 958776 for facility planning for non-local park sites. The PDF states that in FY 02 the Department will “facility plan for a dog park at a site to be determined during studies to be concluded in FY 02.”

The Planning Board also approved funding in the Minor New Construction; Local PDF 998799 in FY 03 to be distributed between planning, design, and construction of dog parks along with other minor new construction projects like the conversion of unused tennis courts to roller hockey rinks – sites to be determined. This PDF allocates \$ 97,000 as a general fund source to be used for both dog exercise areas and roller hockey facilities.

Proposed Planning Board Policy-

Staff is recommending that the Planning Board adopt the following language highlighted in bold:

Policy:

The Planning Board approves the development of off-leash areas for dog exercise areas in the Montgomery County Parks System subject to the management, site selection, and budget guidelines defined in the Dog Exercise Area Program.

Dog Exercise Area Program:

1. All dog exercise areas will require a Dog Owners Group (DOG) which must agree to enter into a standard partnership agreement with the Commission to assist in monitoring, maintaining, and managing each facility. The DOG shall also assist the Commission in informing and reminding the general public user to abide by the facility use rules and regulations.

- 2. Standard dog exercise areas shall be constructed in accordance with the facility development guidelines contained in the Dog Exercise Area Program.**
- 3. Oversight of each dog exercise area will be the joint responsibility of the sponsoring organization DOG, the users, park management and the Maryland-National Capital Park Police.**
- 4. Basic facility funding for all dog exercise areas shall be supported by the CIP. Any additional facility development features beyond those identified in the facility development guidelines can be supported through private donations made through the Montgomery Parks Foundation. Other acceptable sponsoring groups shall also include: retail partners, local community groups, and private corporate donors.**
- 5. Each dog exercise area shall have sufficient funds to maintain the facility prior to construction.**
- 6. The standard rules and regulations contained in the Dog Exercise Area report for the operation of the facility will be posted at each site.**
- 7. The exact location and development feasibility of all sites selected for dog exercise areas shall be decided using the Commission's standard facility planning process prior to development. Both the staff and the public may propose site locations if they comply with the standard site location criteria. Special attention relative to site development feasibility will be given to each site pursuant to the Commission's environmental guidelines for development.**
- 8. Minor adjustments to the Dog Exercise Area Program may be made by the Director as appropriate.**
- 9. The development of all dog exercise areas and the agreements with all Dog Owner Groups (DOG) must be approved by the Planning Board.**

Site Selection-

One of the most critical components of the dog exercise area program is the selection of appropriate sites. Staff has taken a great deal of time to develop site selection criteria in support of the program. Staff has identified 9 possible sites requiring further analysis and study, which could serve as possible candidates. The sites identified in the report have been identified for illustrative purposes only. Each site will require the support of a DOG and a facility planning effort in order to become a reality.

These sites were identified through a combination of site selection guidelines, staff or public recommendations, population served and/or residential density, and geographic location within the County.

The nine (9) sites are listed in alphabetical order. (A map of each site has been provided in Attachment A):

1. Black Hill Regional Park, Boyds;
2. Cabin John Regional Park, Rockville;
3. Centerway Local Park, Gaithersburg;
4. Martin Luther King, Jr. Recreational Park, White Oak;
5. Northwest Branch Regional Park, Aspen Hill;
6. Olney Manor Recreational Park, Olney;
7. Ridge Road Recreational Park, Germantown;
8. Waters Landing Local Park, Germantown; and
9. Wheaton Regional Park, Wheaton

The Dog Exercise Area Process-

Staff anticipates several local dog owners organizing themselves to form a DOG. Each group would be required to meet the minimum standard for forming a group (i.e. a group of at least 20 dog owners with licensed dogs willing to abide by the standard agreement with the Commission).

The staff would work with the DOG and conduct a facility plan and preliminary design for the proposed facility subject to the site selection and facility development guidelines. The staff would then proceed to present the proposed facility, along with the DOG to the Planning Board for both site and construction approval. Each DOG would be encouraged to work with their local communities in the development of their proposal for a dog exercise facility.

Dog Owner Group Requirements & Responsibilities-

Each dog owner group (DOG) would be required to:

1. Have a membership of at least 20 dog owners willing to abide by the standard DOG agreement. A roster of all members shall be provided to the Commission and updated annually;
2. All dogs must be licensed and photographed for identification and data collection purposes;
3. There must be at least 3 individuals serving as the key leaders of the DOG. Each of these individuals shall agree to complete special Park Police training in conflict resolution and park regulation enforcement protocols and serve as the liaison between the DOG, Park Manager and Park Police in the management and operations of the facility;
4. All DOG members shall commit themselves to encouraging all patrons of the facility to abide by the posted rules and regulations;
5. All DOG members will agree to work with the park manager in order to address operational problems and/or improve the operations of the facility.

Next Steps-

If the Planning Board approves the staff recommendations, staff will proceed to:

- Work with the Legal Department to develop a standard DOG agreement;
- Assign staff to work with DOG's that apply for a facility; and
- Construct the facility subject to Planning Board approval.
- Staff may develop an umbrella County-Wide DOG with representatives for each site after several sites have been developed in order to create balanced and informed operational decisions.