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Information Item No.1
Halifax and West Community Council
April 21, 2015

TO: Chair and Members of Halifax and West Community Council
Original Signed

SUBMITTED BY: 
Brad Anguish, Director, Parks and Recreation

DATE: February 23, 2015

SUBJECT: Point Pleasant Park - Park Survey Solutions

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Motion passed at November 25, 2014 meeting of Halifax and West Community Council:

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Watts that Halifax and West Community Council request a staff report to identify possible solutions to the major concerns as identified in the 2012 Point Pleasant Park Survey including:

- 1. Improve compliance and increase awareness of existing park rules particularly with respect to dogs and bikes through the park through enhanced enforcement (e.g. increased officer patrols and signage to encourage compliance).**

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

HRM By-Law P-600 Respecting Municipal Parks
HRM By-Law A-300 Respecting Animals and Responsible Pet Ownership
Nova Scotia Protection of Private Property Act

BACKGROUND

On May 13, 2013 members of the Point Pleasant Park Advisory Committee (PPPAC) provided a presentation to Halifax and West Community Council entitled "What Point Pleasant Park Users Had to Say." This presentation provided the Community Council with information on how the park is used and outlined concerns provided by park users. While the majority of the responses were quite favourable towards the park and its management, two key areas of concern involved compliance with regulations related to off-leash dogs and use of bicycles in the park.

DISCUSSION

General Park Use

Staff reviewed the Point Pleasant Park survey in its entirety with the PPPAC and offers the following general comments for the benefit of Community Council;

- While no actual counts of park visits was conducted as part of the 2012 voluntary on-line survey, those who participated indicated that their frequency of visits had increased. Staff has seen an increase in use since the dramatic drop in park visits associated with Hurricane Juan.
- A subsequent staff review of event permits for the park shows an increase in the number and size of events in the park.
- An increase in park use is congruent with Council objectives as approved in the Point Pleasant Park Comprehensive Plan (approved 2009).
- Visitation continues to draw from Halifax's Peninsula (58%) with the remaining balance of users (38%) coming from nearby Dartmouth and Mainland Halifax.
- The majority (62%) of on-line survey respondents were female which is consistent with the 1999 user counts conducted within the park. This is significant as it is the opposite of the general North American trend in public parks.
- The majority (94%) of respondents felt safe in the park.
- The majority of park users used the park for walking (84%) and walking their dog (54%). Only a small group of respondents used the park for biking (6%).
- The survey conducted by the PPPAC indicates that there has been an increase in the number of off-leash and bicycling park users over 1999. The dog numbers do correlate with general Census Canada trends for pet ownership and staff observations for off-leash. Staff has observed an increase in bicycle use in the park during prohibited times.
- The 2012 survey findings are generally commensurate with staff's understanding of park use gained through the 1999 survey and 2005-2008 work on the Point Pleasant Comprehensive Plan.

Regulations

Bicycling and off-leash dog use of Point Pleasant Park have been long standing permitted uses at Point Pleasant Park. These occur alongside running, walking, outdoor theatre and the arts, community events, family gatherings and civic ceremonies. As with all public parks, when multiple activities occur in the same spaces, limitations and regulations are put in place to balance and foster co-existence for users. Regulations around these and other park activities within the Park have been adjusted over the years to tune them to evolving situations:

- During the 70's and 80's speed restrictions were put into place for bicycles and bike riding was prohibited on weekends when pedestrian crowds are significantly higher in the park.
- In the late 1990's off-leash dogs began to be permitted in designated areas only.
- Off-leash areas were adjusted again in 2009 to ensure dogs were on lead and under effective control at entrances where users and dogs are in higher concentrations and dogs were more likely to do their initial business and were excited to be going into the park.
- A general prohibition against dogs along Sailors Memorial Way after 10:00 a.m. was put in place in order that there is a significant area available to those who do not wish to encounter dogs at all (see Map 1).
- With the efforts by the Municipality to re-instate a natural forest since the destruction of Hurricane Juan, all off-path activities within the regenerating woodlands have been prohibited.

Compliance

Generally, compliance with regulations in parks are re-enforced through:

- 1) Education/awareness - creating an environment of self-regulation through signage and public information.
- 2) Presence/correction - encourage adherence through presence of authorities who provide presence to deter those who might otherwise be lax in adherence to the rules and who correct inappropriate or uninformed behaviour through face to face interaction with users.
- 3) Enforcement - penalize those who repeatedly or grossly disregard the regulations through writing of summary offense tickets (fines) and protection of property orders (prohibition from using the park).

In Point Pleasant Park, the delivery of park regulation and compliance has been evolving.

- Prior to 2002 the primary means was through numerous park signs and a dedicated Point Pleasant Park Patrol who was a visible presence dealing with park users and was able to write tickets and orders.
- In 2002, Park Patrol was tasked with patrol of other parks to extend the program to other major parks and temporary problem areas.
- In 2007, at the request of the public, the significant accumulation of park signs was reduced by eliminating unnecessary signs and creating a new system of simple regulatory signage located at entrances and specific information locations within the park (see Attachment 1 Figure 1).
- In 2007, the www.pointpleasantpark.ca web site began to be used as a communication tool for the operation of the park with web pages dedicated to the park regulations event and activities. Prior to this point the web site was used for public information around the park restoration post Hurricane Juan. Reductions in public inquiries around events regulations and park restoration were noted by staff as a result (see Attachment 1 Figure 4).
- In 2007, Park Patrol was subsumed into right-of-way parking enforcement with a shared park patrol component.
- In 2007, park response duties for off-leash dogs were transferred completely to Animal Control who carry out one to two patrols in the park per week and respond on a “call for service” basis over the region.
- In 2011, the Park Patrol function was eliminated. Currently, there is no consistent presence in the park related to impacting off-leash or bicycle regulations. Other major calls and issues are addressed by Police on a call for service bases. Between the two, presence is stepped up when consistent compliance issues arise through a “blitz” of the area. Interviews with staff indicate that the tactic of “blitzing” temporarily achieves the desired effect, however, the impact of these “blitzes” fade with time as persons seem to revert to previous patterns of behaviour.

Analysis

Through the public survey, complaints to the area councillor and the PPPAC, and general staff observation, adherence to the park regulations by off-leash and bicycle users has decreased. The survey and comments from the public indicate that non-adherence to the regulations is having an impact on users of the park.

The survey also indicates there is a high level of awareness around the regulations (90% for off-leash and 75% for bicycling) and that 90% of users have read the regulatory signage. Therefore, of the three elements of compliance (education, monitoring and enforcement), the education/awareness component has high uptake among users. Therefore, the reduction in monitoring and enforcement account for issues of non-compliance. This is congruent with observed impact when monitoring and enforcement are increased owing to a “blitz” and congruent with the general lowering of patrol presence over the last eight years.

Between the period of 2007-2014, there have been 20 calls related to Animal Control and 1209 calls related to Police matters. The majority of the police calls were motor vehicle related and include the period of time involving stunting and driver behaviour issues in the Point Pleasant parking lot and along

Young Avenue. Calls have been increasing since 2011. Park and enforcement staff also concur that many park incidents often do not result in a call for service because either complainants see it as a low priority or feel that the incident is incapable of being followed up as no means is available to identify the dog, owner or cyclist or the incident occurs quickly and the offender is gone.

There are documented cases of major and minor injury caused by dogs (on and off-leash) and bicycles in Point Pleasant Park as well as other parks. However, the majority of incidents brought to staff's attention involve:

- Direct unwanted encounters or physical contact with dogs and cyclists where the complainant has been startled or not felt safe.
- Observed behaviours where cyclists and dog owners are showing a disregard for other users and adherence to the rules which could cause an incident or accident.
- Behaviour which affects other people's enjoyment of the park such as people not picking up after their pets, staying to the assigned areas or times and respecting the rights of others.
- Complaints from cyclists and dog owners of people seemingly "reacting irrationally" to the presence of dogs and bicycles where they are permitted.

Summary

It is a safe assumption that the vast majority of people using the Park abide by rules. Point Pleasant Park is a successful facility provided by the Municipality with a large public uptake. What has shifted in Point Pleasant Park is the increase in the percentage of people walking their dogs as a segment of overall use and the absence of face to face public education, monitoring and enforcement for bicycles and dogs. Without a level of deterrence, some law abiding citizens tend to drift into bad practices. This occurs in many areas of society, the most common example being roadway speeds. In a location as well used as Point Pleasant Park, this behaviour shift shows up as heightened awareness among users. Halifax needs to re-establish the norms around bicycling and off-leash dogs in Point Pleasant Park by creating a physical presence to monitor and correct behaviour and enforce the existing regulations. This statement is backed up by the number of Summary Offense Tickets (SOTs) and Protection of Property tickets which were issued when a full Park Patrol function existed in the park (six SOTs over five years) and the positive but temporary results that increased presence during a "blitz" creates. The challenge is how to accomplish this effectively without undue cost to the tax payer or strain on resources. These might be achieved through:

- additional patrols using existing Animal Control resources
- creation of a volunteer component to monitor and deliver on-site education
- creating a new patrol function with other needed municipal park duties and wide patrol area
- use of existing municipal staff within the park
- some combination of the above

There also appears to be an opportunity to build on the Municipality's success around regulation awareness by delivering public messaging through park signage and public information:

- recognizing and respecting the rights of others within the park
- etiquette for people using the park (including general park users, cyclists and dog owners)
- education around dog behaviour for dog owners and non-dog owners

Halifax uses this approach to a degree (Attachment 1-Figure 2), however, some cities have made it a primary component of their compliance programs.

As part of the 15/16 budget process, Parks and Recreation staff will be proposing to initiate a parks patrol pilot program in Point Pleasant Park and other major municipal parks. Staff will assemble the pilot program using a combination of the low/no-cost methods outlined above. The information and analysis provided through the user survey and analysis will be used to shape the pilot program. Additionally, the Off-leash Park Service Review, currently underway at the request of Council, will be creating a framework

for off-leash improvements which will also propose to positively impact Point Pleasant Park in the areas of compliance and education.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this time. Any increases in service which would require increased operating or capital funding would be subject to Regional Council approval.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Point Pleasant Park Advisory Committee (PPPAC) is made up of HRM appointed citizens-at-large and was established to advise and assist Halifax and West Community Council in planning and management of Point Pleasant Park.

The Point Pleasant Park user survey was conducted in August 2012 which provided the PPPAC and Municipal staff valuable information on how people use the park and also drew attention to a growing number of concerns from Park users. It follows a previous Point Pleasant Park User Survey in 1999 carried out by the PPPAC and other Municipal consultations related to Hurricane Juan in 2006 and off-leash dog area consultations on 2007.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Examples of current compliance communication tools

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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Attachment 1 – Examples of current compliance communication tools



Figure 1 Typical Park Signage

<p>Know Before You Go</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By-law A-300 (the Animal By-law) applies to this park. • Your dog must be licensed by HRM before using our parks. • Children walking dogs must be under the supervision of a responsible adult. • You must have continuous and effective control of your dog. • Owners are obligated to pick up and properly dispose of their dog's waste. • Dogs must be leashed in areas indicated. • Dogs are prohibited on Sailors Memorial Way (Shore Road), and where indicated, from 10 a.m. to closing. • Dogs MUST be leashed in all parking lots and on Cambridge Road from the Upper Parking Lot to Ogilvie Road. • Owners will be asked to remove aggressive or excessively noisy dogs. • Respect your urban forest: please keep your dog on pathways and trails when in the woods. 	<p>The Well-Prepared Dog Owner</p> <p>Is Point Pleasant the right park for you and your dog? Are you familiar with your obligations under By-law A-300 (the Animal By-law)?</p> <p>You and your pet will be sharing the park with adults and children, park workers, walkers, cyclists, runners, picnickers, artists, birders, urban wildlife, and the occasional Shakespearean actor.</p> <p>Both owner and pet are expected to be well-behaved and courteous members of the dog walking community.</p> <p>There are areas where your dog is not allowed-- but there are many kilometres of trails for you and your pet to explore and enjoy!</p> <p>Leash? Bags? Water? Bowl? Ready!</p> <p>Questions, concerns, incident report, compliments? Please contact the HRM Call Centre: 490-4000.</p> <p>For more information: www.halifax.ca/police/animalservices www.pointpleasantpark.ca</p>
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Point Pleasant Park



Dog Access and Leashing Guide 2010

Figure 2 Leashing Guide

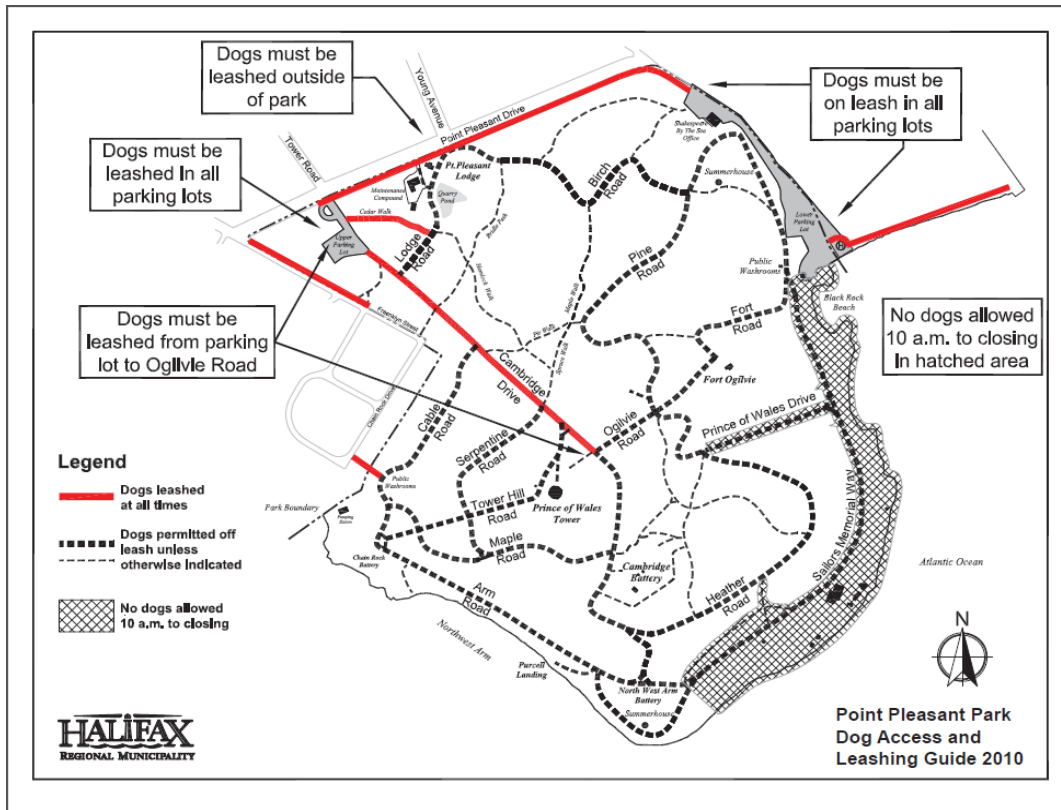


Figure 3 Dog Off-Leash Areas Map

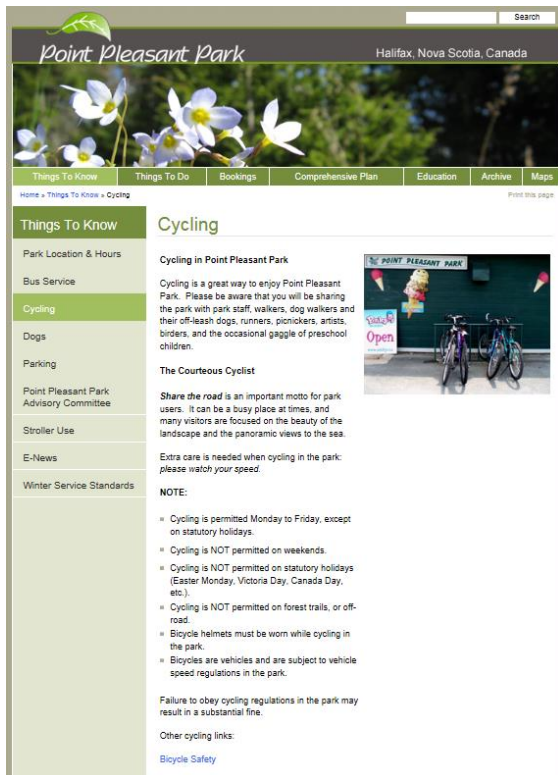


Figure 4 Point Pleasant Web Site