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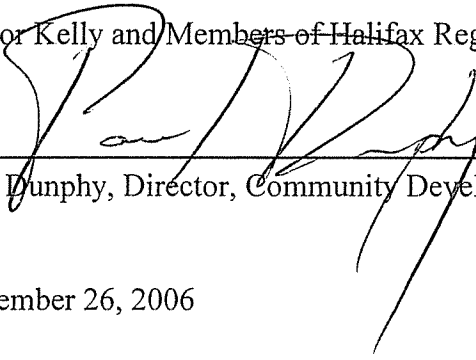


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Halifax Regional Council
October 3, 2006

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:



Paul Dunphy, Director, Community Development

DATE: September 26, 2006

SUBJECT: Draft Planning Principles for Dog-related Uses in HRM Parks

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Halifax Regional Council, at the request of Councillor Younger, passed a motion on November 9, 2004, requesting staff to develop a master plan for off-leash dog areas within HRM.

On January 31, 2006, Regional Council approved Councillor Younger's motion to request a staff report regarding progress on the creation of designated off-leash dog areas in HRM parks. An information report was sent and this constitutes a further update to that request.

On May 16, 2006 Councillor Sue Uteck brought forth a petition to designate an off leash area within Thomas playing field.

BACKGROUND

By-law D-100 (Respecting the Registration and Regulation of Dogs) was passed by Regional Council on June 30, 1998. The by-law contained provisions for the designation of off-leash areas within municipal parks. Regional Council agreed that the need for off-leash areas would be evaluated on a regional basis but locally designated by Community Councils after consultation with staff and citizens. Following by-law passage, areas of Point Pleasant Park and Seaview Park, as well as sports fields (between November 1 and May 1) were designated for off-leash activities. Since then, Community Councils have considered several off-leash park area proposals but have determined the locations to be unsuitable due to public safety and/or budgetary concerns. Current requests have also been received by some Community Councils and decisions are pending. Public opinion appears to be divided in this matter. Many dog owners want designated leash-free areas while other park users have expressed concerns that leash-free activities pose a risk to public safety and their enjoyment of individual, or family-based, recreational pursuits.

DISCUSSION

In response to this issue staff has developed a set of planning principles for dog-related uses in HRM parks (see Appendix 'A'). The adoption of the proposed principles will rely upon partnerships among HRM, dog owners, and the general public, working towards the goal of fostering responsible, and respectful use of HRM park properties. Public consultation is an essential component of this initiative. In order to ensure that the principles are acceptable to all stakeholders, HRM staff will be conducting a series of focus group sessions where the planning principles will be presented for public feedback and more detailed discussion. An initial stakeholder consultation will be held in early October. Representatives of HRM Community Councils will be invited to take part. Additional focus groups will be scheduled with the participation of Community Councils to ensure full stakeholder participation.

The result will be a program for the creation and funding of off leash areas for consideration by Regional Council early in the new year.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial commitments required on the part of HRM regarding this report. Any incidental costs would be covered under normal operating budget.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES

This report is provided for information purposes. The report contains no recommendations for Regional Council's consideration.

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A - Planning Principles for Dog-related Uses in HRM Parks

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by:

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APPENDIX A**Draft Planning Principles for Dog-related Uses in HRM Parks**

The foundation for the planning of dog-related uses in HRM parks is based on nine principles used to protect the health and beauty of our parks while balancing park user needs and affordability of dog related programming.

The principles are:

Balance

Dog-related uses in our parks should be sensitively balanced with other park uses for the benefit of all citizens. Proposed dog-related uses in HRM parks should be in balance with all aspects of the individual park in order to maintain ecological health, natural beauty, and an overall enjoyable visit for all park users.

Environmental Sustainability

A healthy park environment is a primary value in the HRM parks system. Dog-related use should be integrated into a park's ecosystem with sensitive consideration for flora, fauna, soils, and hydrology. It should be integrated into our parks with sensitive consideration to cultural resources that link us to our local, regional, and national history. Dog-related uses should be integrated in ways that consider the wide variety of social environments in our parks.

Accessibility

Planning for dog-related use in our parks should embrace barrier-free or universal design principles. Universal design seeks to create products and environments that are useful and useable by everyone. Universal design does not segregate or stigmatize any group of users and attempts to provide the same means of use for all; identical where possible, equivalent when not. While dog-related activities in HRM parks should be accessible to all, conflicting uses may necessitate that not all parks may be accessible to all users at all times.

Clean

Dog-related uses should include the best possible means of controlling environmental contamination by dog waste.

Diverse

Dog-related activity should include a diversity of experiences within the HRM park system.

Usability

Design, use, management, and operation of areas or facilities for dog-related activities should enhance safety and minimize risks caused by:

- threats to personal safety from other users;
- environmental contamination;
- conflicting uses.

Affordability

Dog-related programming should be undertaken in ways that provide for efficient use of limited government and private sector resources. Where possible, social, environmental, and economic objectives should be integrated with each other in order to achieve them as effectively as possible; for example:

- projects might be more affordable if partners co-ordinate activities and share resources;
- projects could be designed to yield multiple benefits;
- a healthy, clean, usable environment is more valued amongst park users.

Attractive

Integration of dog-related uses and the planning and design of dog parks should protect and enhance the beauty of our park landscapes, and create distinctive and memorable experiences for visitors.

Connectedness & Context

Whether through casual recreation or programmed activities, parks in HRM are special places of social connection and community. The integration of dog-related programming in HRM parks should reflect the various degrees to which we accept dogs into our lives. Dog-related use in our parks should be integrated in a way that strengthens community connections and fosters courteous, respectful, & civic-minded behaviour amongst all park users. It should promote an understanding of our community's interconnections and an appreciation of the social and natural environment of our parks.