

Denzil Minnan-Wong

November 9, 2012

Chair and Members
Parks and Environment Committee
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Re: Request for Report on Off-Leash Hours in Toronto Parks

Dear Councillor Kelly and Members of the Parks and Environment Committee,

As a group, dog owners in the City of Toronto are some of the most frequent users of City parks, utilizing parks in all four seasons, in all types of weather, every day of the year. Dog owners in Toronto have two options if they hope to exercise their dogs. They can either take their dog for a walk on leash or to one of Toronto's fifty-four designated off-leash areas. For a number of dog owners, going to an off-leash area is not a daily occurrence as they are out of walking distance and must be accessed by car. For this reason, one frequently finds dog owners congregating in their local park with their dogs off leash, despite it being prohibited under Chapter 608 of the Toronto Municipal Code.

Recognizing that it is not feasible to open a designated off-leash area in every neighbourhood of the city, I propose that the City investigate the implementation of off-leash hours, an approach that has been successful in New York City. Off-leash hours allow dog owners to walk their dogs off leash in select City parks from the time the park opens until 9am, and then from 9pm until the park closes. In New York, off-leash hours served to significantly decrease the frequency of dog owners walking their dogs off leash during the day when the parks are being used for other activities, while at the same time meeting the demand for more recognized off-leash opportunities in the City.

The benefits of off leash exercise for dogs are numerous and help contribute to well rounded, socialized, and obedient dogs. Dogs who are walked off leash on a regular basis have been shown to be more social towards other people and dogs, less aggressive, bark less, tend to have far less neurotic behavior, and bite less than dogs who get no off leash exercise. Since the implementation of off-leash hours in New York City, dog bites have been reduced from over 10 739 in 1993 to 3 956 in 2005, of which only 88 took place in the City's parks. The City of Toronto should be promoting safe and healthy off leash exercise for dogs by meeting the current demand that exists for more off leash opportunities.

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RECOMMENDATION:

1. The Parks and Environment Committee request the General Manager, Parks, Forestry, and Recreation, in consultation with the Municipal Licensing and Standards, Animal Services division, investigate the feasibility of enacting off-leash hours in the City of Toronto and report back to the Parks and Environment Committee no later than its June 24, 2013 meeting.

Sincerely,

Denzil Minnan-Wong
Councillor, Don Valley East
Ward 34

cc. Councillor Michelle Berardinetti
cc. Councillor Raymond Cho
cc. Councillor Mary- Margaret McMahon
cc. Councillor Ron Moeser
cc. Councillor James Pasternak