

Subject: High Park and the proposed revisions to the People, Dogs and Park policy

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Organisation: High Park K9 Committee, HPCAC

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Dear Councillors, Mayor Miller and City staff

High Park, which is often described as the jewel of the park system, is home to one of the largest and most vibrant off-leash areas. Dog-owners are active in our local community council, participate in local stewardship efforts and have been attempting to work with Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff to build a better and more sustainable off-leash area in High Park.

In reviewing the proposal that will go before the Parks and Environment committee on Wednesday, we were struck by a number of things:

One, the limited time given to the public to consider the proposed changes. Many of these changes will have significant impact on the citizens of Toronto, both dog-owners and non-dog owners, yet very little time has been given to the public to provide input before the Parks and Environment committee meets. These changes have far reaching implication for not only High Park but many other parks within the City of Toronto.

Two, the lack of consultation with off-leash groups in regards to these proposed changes. Despite being one of the largest and most organized off-leash groups within the City of Toronto, the High Park K9 Committee has never been consulted on these proposed changes. Furthermore while our group has been actively involved in an ongoing review process with the City as noted in the document, the City has failed to call a meeting in almost one year. Dog-owners and groups such as ours, have daily hands-on experience with off-leash areas. Please take advantage of the experience of dog-owners by consulting with them before, not after, you make changes.

Three, the lack of foresight in regards to the proposed environmental component of the policy. For example, provisions to exclude areas "undergone tree/shrub/wildflower planting or where plans exist for such planting to occur", would not only effectively eliminate the High Park off-leash but also prevent the rehabilitation of off-leash areas. Off-leash areas are one of the very few recreational facilities in which these types of planting can occur side by side with recreational activity. While you cannot plant a tree, shrub or wildflower inside a ball diamond or soccer field, most dog-owners would welcome any such plantings within an off-leash.

Carrying these proposed changes to their logical conclusion, we can only foresee the closure of the High Park off-leash area in the near future. While these proposed changes may seem beneficial in the short-term, in the long-term it will hasten the decline of many of Toronto parks, including High Park, and contribute to the image of a City that no longer listens to its citizens.

On behalf of both High Park and the dog-owners that enjoy its natural beauty, we are asking you to temporarily shelf the proposed changes and return the staff report to the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation until such time that they have, not only properly consulted with the public in regards to these changes, but also considered their long-term environmental implications.

Sincerely

John Cleary and Tammy Reid

Co-chairs High Park K9 Committee