

Subject: Why the proposed People, Dogs and Parks refinements must still be rejected

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Dear Carol, Councillors, Mayor Miller and concerned citizens

Thank you Carol for this response and the extended conversation in regards to the revised changes to the People, Dogs and Parks strategy. While I appreciate the time and effort you and other City staff have put into these changes, I will still be urging the voting public to demand their councillors reject this committee report when it appears before them in the coming days. The proposed refinements do not reflect what is best for the park systems or the citizens of Toronto and have yet to receive any direct public input or consultation.

While I thank you for the procedural by-law lesson on the City clerk, the underlying issue does not lie at the feet of clerk but in the failure of your department to properly consult with the public before making the proposed refinements. If you had consulted even just the dog-owners associations prior to sending the staff report to the committee, the notification period that the clerk was obligated to follow, while short, would have sufficed. Dog-owners associations were established to facilitate ongoing communication between dog owners and City staff, a role that seems to have been ignored during this process and apparently one that has no official place in the revised policy.

Secondly, if the policy governed solely staff conduct and staff facilities, it would be totally acceptable and appropriate to generate revisions solely based on staff experience. However the parks system, including off-leash areas, are not the private playgrounds of City staff and as such, to consider only their experience and their requested revisions is totally unacceptable. How is it possible to report back on the effectiveness of the policy unless you consult the end user, including dog-owners and other park users?

Finally, your comments with regard to the High Park off-leash area, while still very cryptic, are welcomed and I will be sure to provide them to dog-owners along with my recommendation for the revised changes. Unfortunately the proposed "refinements" to the People, Dogs and Parks strategy make it far too easy for future City staff to cancel or eliminate an off-leash area like High Park without evidence or an appeals process. Furthermore the justification for eliminating the appeals process (ie. that the "ultimate conclusion reflects unanimous Divisional decision") smack of a "our word is final" attitude that doesn't reflect the culture of accountability and accessibility that was promised to the citizens of Toronto.

During the coming days, I will be meeting with local dog-owners and concerned citizens to provide, as you requested, a list of the failings and flaws of the proposed refinements. However as you readily admitted, this will have little effect on the current report due in front of City council in the coming days. I can only hope that City councillors listens the voice of concerned citizens and send the report in its entirety back to your department for further revisions and public consultation. I hope to be given the chance to work on fixing these refinements with you and other City staff.

John Cleary

Co-chair High Park K9 Committee