

**MINUTES OF THE
PUBLIC HEARING
OF THE
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
SKOKIE PARK DISTRICT
DOGS IN PARKS
MARCH 19, 2019
6:00 P.M.**

ATTENDANCE AT MEETING

Board Members Present:

President Susan Aberman
Vice President Michael Reid
Commissioner Michael W. Alter
Commissioner Khemarey Khoeun
Commissioner Maureen Yanes

Others Present:

Executive Director/Secretary John V. Ohrlund
Superintendent of Business Services William G. Schmidt
Superintendent of Recreation and Facilities Michelle Tuft
Superintendent of Parks Mike Rea
Executive Administrative Assistant Ann Perez

CALL TO ORDER

President Aberman called the regular meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners to order at 6:00 p.m., followed by the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Khoeun arrived at 6:10 p.m.

PUBLIC INPUT ON DOGS IN PARKS

Vice President Reid said the meeting is being held to solicit public input on a proposal to allow dogs on leashes in parks. No action will be taken at the hearing or at the regular Board meeting tonight. Emails have been received from the public and excerpts will be read into the record at the conclusion of the public comments. Vice President Reid invited the citizens to come forward and express their opinions. There will be a three minute limit on each citizen comment.

Scott Holtz said this is the third month he has attended a meeting to request that dogs on leashes be allowed in parks. He said 14 out of 15 communities have gone through this process to allow dogs on leashes in parks.

Marc Jacott moved to Skokie in 2016 and has a young child. They have a family dog and it has been a disappointment not being able to bring his dog to the parks. Mr. Jacott believes the policy is outdated and most dog owners are responsible. He has seen dogs running at Oakton Park at night and since people are doing this anyway, why not allow it with some regulations.

Lynn Payer would have liked to be able to bring her dog to the park. She said a dog is part of your family. She attended a meeting about 15 years ago regarding dogs in parks and never followed up. She would like to know what the opposition is. Residents should be able to enjoy their dogs.

Kenneth Mantel said he understands public health and safety concerns, but there have been no incidents of dog attacks. Mr. Mantel went to Facebook, social media, next door neighbors and took a survey and 76% of those surveyed support dogs being allowed in parks.

Pearl Cohen is not a dog lover and she does not want dogs in restaurants or places she shops. She cannot walk on her lawn because of dog poop. She finds it difficult to walk on public sidewalks and she would like to walk in the parks, so please no dogs in parks.

Ilonka Ulrich feels we are a dog friendly nation. As a Village Trustee she does not receive complaints about dog poop not being picked up or dogs barking. Those who don't pick up the poop should be fined.

Karoline Uhler said when she moved to Skokie she was surprised by the no paw print on the sidewalks in the parks. They moved here because they love the diversity of the community. If dogs are allowed Ms. Uhler would like basketball and tennis courts open to dogs after hours as it is a safe area to run. Pooch Park is unusable after a heavy rain.

Judy Mendel believes for the most part dog owners are responsible for picking up dog poop. Allowing dogs in parks is a way to meet your neighbors. She walks her dog in Sculpture Park and does not see much dog poop there. She feels Skokie is a very welcoming community. She would like to see Skokie welcomes everyone including dogs. Ms. Mendel asked if the Board could comment on how they individually feel. Vice President Reid said the Board will decide after listening to the comments and make an informed decision. There will be some rules considered and discussed. Vice President Reid said it took another local park district five months to revise their policy on dogs in parks.

Executive Director Ohrlund, in response to a question said a public hearing was held in 2002 and there was a significant number of people who did not want dogs in the parks.

Paul Kozlowski has four children and no dogs. He and his wife enjoy that their children can go to the parks and not have to be concerned about dog poop. The challenge to him is that when dog poop is being cleaned up, it is never really all cleaned up. On movie nights it would be problematic to have dog poop in the parks. He feels there needs to be some compromise.

Michael Delanois is in favor of dogs in parks on leashes. He has addressed the Board in the past. He would like to carry this a step further by having a centrally located dog park.

Ross Bennett discussed the need for dog obedience training. He would like to be able to walk his dog in the park. He said dog walkers are aware of things going on in the neighborhood when walking their dogs. It's good for the community. He thinks there should be some rules concerning playground areas. There needs to be more than one dog park for a city the size of Skokie.

Benjamin Schueler said he is in favor of dogs on leashes in parks. The sociability and positive impact on the community have been discussed. Since the Village of Skokie Ordinance allows for leashed dogs in public spaces the park district should match and update their ordinance. He would like to see a general decision made first and then the implementation follow.

A question was asked about writing a citation if someone is not following rules. Executive Director Ohrlund responded that the park monitors do not have the authority to write a citation. Only the Skokie Police or Village of Skokie Health Department write citations.

Judith Rice has a dog and walks the dog twice a day. When moving to Skokie she was disappointed that dogs were not allowed in the parks. She is not satisfied with the dog park as it is in an industrial area and when it rains it is unusable.

Minal Desai said she understands both sides. She suggested a compromise of allowing dogs to walk at certain times of the day.

Steven Rosenbloom walks his dog and knows where every trash can is located in the parks. He doesn't like unleashed dogs approaching him or poop left behind. He said if there is a way to fine people who do not follow regulations he is in favor of it.

Sheila Meyer has lived in the community for a long time when people walked their dogs and did not pick up the poop. She now strongly believes that our lives have become isolated. Dogs are extremely satisfying to our souls and a great way to meet people. Restricting dogs in the parks does not stop people from bringing their dogs to the park. Those people exist whether you have a law against it or not. It is important to say that Skokie is a community that wants citizens to interact with other people in the community. Skokie should find a way to be more inclusive.

Kim Bayma said Seattle is dog friendly and it is an attraction tool for businesses. She thinks if Skokie were dog friendly it would attract more businesses. A lot of millennials have pets and this may attract them to Skokie. Kim suggested a large park be divided into an area for a smaller dog park.

Irene Bennett feels education is very important. She volunteers at local shelters and recently had a grand dog. When people adopt a dog they should learn the ABC's of how to care for the dog. Walking a dog on a leash, picking up after the dog, and teaching the dog basic commands are part of responsible dog ownership. Dog and owner etiquette are needed. Be a good dog neighbor and pick up after another dog if needed. Skokie is a welcoming community and we need to keep that face to stay strong on the Northshore.

Trina Janes is a dog owner. She sees advertising on the yellow line that says Skokie is a hip urban community. Hip urban communities welcome dogs. Her father lives in a nursing home that accommodates dogs. Her mother has a therapy dog that she takes to the library and hospital and walks through Evanston parks. If we want our policies to match our advertising, let's welcome the four leggers.

A resident suggested to promote dogs on leash in parks on social media.

Executive Director Ohrlund read comments received via email and Facebook. There were 35 in favor of dogs on leash, 8 opposed and 2 in between.

Superintendent Tuft said a few people mentioned the muddiness of Pooch Park and wanted to inform them that there are plans to install synthetic turf in a portion of Pooch Park in the next fiscal year. It will be installed west of the sidewalk and shelter.

Executive Director Ohrlund said some areas where dogs would likely not be permitted would be:

- School parks
- Playgrounds
- Pools
- Emily Oak Nature Center
- Kawaga Garden
- Golf Course

Many issues would have to be considered before an ordinance could be drafted and finalized.

A resident suggested to start ticketing for violations. She said this could be a revenue source for the District. Superintendent Rea said enforcement is an issue and notifications of violations are not timely. The park monitor can call the police with a situation if needed.

Commissioner Khouen said we are trying to find a compromise or middle ground on allowing dogs on leash in parks.

Vice President Reid said the Board wants to be as informed as possible to make the best possible decision. One attendee asked if residents could be involved in the process. The Board agreed.

Vice President Reid said staff will collect information, consider hours, areas not allowed and provide input for a possible revised ordinance. Executive Director Ohrlund said residents should check the website for information. Vice President Reid said the Board will try to get this done expeditiously.

Scott Holtz suggested taking advantage of open green spaces instead of creating a dog park downtown.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Alter moved to adjourn the public hearing. Commissioner Yanes seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted aye. Motion carried. The public hearing adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Susan Aberman
President

John V. Ohrlund
Secretary