

Civic wages war On man's best friend 03/30/2006

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Some people like dogs. Some people, such as Bob Holden, the president of the Juniper Park Civic Association, don't.

When some people think of dogs they envision a Norman Rockwell picture of happy children playing fetch with man's best friend. They see a faithful pal who comes running with tail wagging and ears flapping.

Not Bob. "Dogs can kill," he says, "they can maul and, at the least, they can intimidate - they should be kept on leashes."

President Bob and his association are adamantly opposed to creating a fenced-in dog run in Middle Village. They are equally opposed to a change in the city code that allows dog owners to let their dogs run off leash in some city parks between the hours of 9 p.m. and 9 a.m. And in fact Bob is considering taking the city to court to get the dogs back on their leashes.

Bob makes the Grinch look warm and fuzzy.

On the issue of the dog run, President Bob is flat out wrong. In urban environments where few people have large fenced-in yards, dog runs represent an excellent compromise between those who love dogs and those who would rather keep their distance. With any privilege comes responsibility. One of the conditions of using a dog run is that the dog owners cleanup Fido's waste. Most dog runs provide "poop bags" and a place to deposit the bags. Most dog runs are well maintained by pet owners who are grateful to have a place where their dogs can run. The runs are not unsanitary, nor are they dangerous.

Bob is equally wrong in his opposition to allowing dogs to run off-leash in parks in the early morning hours. His fears are unfounded. The change in policy has been in place for several years without causing significant problems. It goes without saying that people who own vicious dogs can never let their dogs run off-leash in a park, dog run or other public space. Likewise owners are expected to clean up after their pets whether they're on-leash or running free. If they don't should ticketed.

The city's parks belong to everyone. They should include space to sit quietly and reflect, space for children to play and a place for those who want to enjoy their pets.

Queens Ledger

Dog Pals Offer to Take Civic for a Walk

By Phil Guie **Dateline : Thursday, April 13, 2006**

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Two weeks after engaging in a shouting match with dog lovers, Juniper Park Civic Association President Bob Holden has not backed down from his stance of keeping canines out of public parks. Dog advocates, meanwhile, have stepped up their efforts to change his mind by offering to show him some of the city's better dog runs. Bob Marino, who serves as President of the New York Council of Dog Owner Groups, was unable to attend the March 23rd general membership meeting, during which Holden initially denied opponents the chance to address the public, and was the recipient of some harsh name-calling as a result. Marino sent a memo in his stead, urging Holden to postpone his lawsuit against Commissioner Adrian Benepe of the New York City Parks Department. The lawsuit accuses Benepe of failing to enforce an NYC health code by not enforcing leash laws in public parks at all times. Both parties spoke on the phone with each other several days afterward. According to Marino, it was during their conversation that Holden agreed to the tour. "When we originally spoke, he said he was willing to go with us," Marino said. "There was no specific time and place scheduled, but Bob Holden said 'I'd be interested in the showing.' We were hoping to show him Thompson Square in Manhattan and possibly one other." When reached by phone, however, Holden claimed no knowledge of any planned visit to a dog run. "Nobody called me. Nobody e-mailed me," he said. "This is the first I'm hearing about it." The Ledger called Holden back with the approximate date of the conversation, which was provided by Marino. The civic association president said that he recalled speaking to the dog advocate, but denied agreeing to any tour. "We spoke a week ago," he said. "Robert Marino asked me to reconsider the lawsuit. We also spoke about the condition of dog runs in Queens County. I said that 90 percent of them were horrendous, and he agreed. He said he would try to contact Commissioner Benepe about a compromise. That was the last I heard from him." Holden would not say whether he could be enticed to visit more public dog runs outside of his home borough, and said that Marino should call him personally if he wants to discuss any such activity. If Holden decides to push ahead with the lawsuit without first doing more research, it would be a rolled-up newspaper to the noses of dog lovers, who seemed to view the tour as their best bet to influence his decision. Marino, who works as a self-employed real estate consultant, sounded optimistic that Holden could still be convinced to go along. "If I was led to believe that Bob Holden could not be shown proof that good dog runs exist and that dog runs could be better, I would not be approaching him," he said. Then he spoke enthusiastically about the dog park in Thompson Square, which he said could be a model for the one-acre park that advocates would like to see in Juniper Park. "Let me tell you about Thompson Square Park, which Bob Holden has not seen," Marino said. "It's 18,000 square feet... It won an award for one of the best small urban dog parks in the nation, and received a \$10,000 gift as a result. It has a small dog area. It has chips that you can sprinkle

around to help clean it up. It has doggie bags. Benches have been brought in so people can sit and chat while monitoring their dogs. [It has been] incredibly successful."

Marino attributed the park's success to the involvement of the community - something he said is not so common in Queens. "The problem with Queens is that it's a community with many private homes, and many people tend to be private with their own lives," he said. "It's easier when you go to the park [to have your behavior policed]." He pointed to Forest Park, which is adjacent to Woodhaven and Kew Gardens, as an example of what can happen when a community does come together. "The community organized around Forest Park," he said. "They had 600 members who, alongside the Parks Department, were working together to improve dog parks for everyone." Having seen his fair share of dog runs in parks, Marino did not dispute Holden's comment that the run he saw was "a fence with dirt." He said that sub-par dog runs do exist, and used Flushing Meadows Park as an example. "The Parks Department did not create an adequate dog park there. They created a dog run, but not a dog park. There were a lot of neighborhood dogs, and Parks [Department] felt it was better to put up a fence than to have nothing. And they were right. But originally, in Flushing, they did not have an organization working to better the park." Organized citizens, he argued, could keep in check those owners who fail to pick up their dogs' feces, who threaten to turn beautiful parklands into public pet toilets. "The dog owners realize that... there are dog owners who don't follow the rules, and they would like to remind them that respect is a two-way street," Marino said. He offered up the Juniper Park Dog Association, whose membership consists of between 40 and 50 dog owners, as an example of a local community group that effectively polices its own. As of press time, Marino said that the New York Council of Dog Owner Groups, or NYC Dog, hopes to continue working with the civic association and Queens Parks Commissioner Dorothy Lewandowski to develop a reasonably-sized dog run in Juniper Park. In the meantime, they can probably rule out the support of Council Member Dennis Gallagher, whose office recently sent a letter to Lewandowski reminding the Parks Department that Community Board 5, private citizens, and the Queens Civic Congress have voted against a Juniper Park dog run, and have voted to enforce leash laws at all times in public parks. Gallagher also expressed disappointment that the Parks Department has made no effort to obtain a small area of land at 57th Ave and 80th St., which he said would make an ideal location for two dog runs, from the state. "I will gladly advocate for City Council funding for the development [at that location]," he stated. "The location would not interfere with any other usage as it would in Juniper Valley Park and is a mere few blocks away from the park itself." Marino, however, argued that any prospective site must satisfy the particular expectations of both dog owners and non-owners. "What sites meet the criteria to handle the proper number of dogs that use the park?" said Marino. "We have to make sure this is not something that creates noise for neighbors or creates disturbances for someone nearby. We would prefer somewhere in the middle of [Juniper] Park, so that it's easy to get to for everyone, and far enough away from people's homes. [But] we're not going to say, 'This or nothing.' That would not be fair." And of course, there is the matter of that lawsuit. Along with his argument that dogs off the leash in Juniper Park would be a menace, Holden has also accused Parks Commissioner Benepe of trying to pull an end-run around residents by not bringing the issue before the community board in the first place. "Everyone is saying that the civic association doesn't want a dog run, but we have nothing to do with dog runs," he said. "If a group wants a dog run, it goes through the community board. Any city agency should go through the community board, and that's not what's going on

here. Our stance is that we just want Benepe to enforce the [leash] law."



Sit, Robert, sit

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There he goes again. Robert Holden, the petulant president of the Juniper Park Civic Association has turned up the heat in his crusade against the city's dogs and their owners. We can only hope that his bark is worse than his bite.

We commented in last week's issue on Holden's campaign to prevent the creation of a dog run in Juniper Park and his threat to sue the Department of Health for allowing dogs to run off leash in city parks from 9 p.m. until 9 a.m. Clearly, Mr. Holden has too much time on his hands.

Then Mr. Holden invited Mayor Bloomberg to a meeting of the civic association where he presented him with a plaque honoring him for his help in blocking the Cross Harbor Tunnel Project. After Hizzoner left, Holden reiterated his opposition to the dog runs and the relaxing of the leash law. He said he is now ready to go forward with the lawsuit and, he says, he has the signatures of all 100 members of the Civic Congress.

With all due respect, we doubt that. Show us the signatures, Mr. Holden.

But if 100 community leaders did sign this resolution, then 100 civic leaders were wrong. The dog runs and the easing of the leash are a good compromise between those who love dogs and those who don't.

No matter what, this isn't an issue for the courts. Since this is a democracy, let the people decide. Why not put the issues of the dog runs and the amended leash law up for a vote in the November election. We're guessing the anti-dog contingent will find themselves a small, albeit noisy, minority.



The Civic Scene: Civics agree to back Juniper in dog lawsuit

By Bob Harris 04/06/2006

The Juniper Park Civic Association, Middle Village, came to the March meeting of the Queens Civic Congress to present its long-standing concern over the fairly recent New York City Department of Parks & Recreation rule which permits owners to let their dogs run free between 9 p.m. and 9 a.m. in public parks. Juniper Park Civic President Bob Holden brought a "Dog Owner's Guide" issued by Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe listing 15 citywide and park rules concerning dogs.

One of his rules is the Courtesy Off-leash Hours, which is of concern to Holden and the civic. However, Holden quoted 161.05 of the City Health Code which states that dogs are not permitted to be loose in a public place, must be on a six-foot leash and the owners must clean up after their pets. An article in a July 2, 1962 issue of Newsday and in the March/April issue of the Juniper Berry, the civic's quite large newsletter, discussed the issue. The civic is so unhappy with the answers it has received from the Parks Department that it has decided to sue over the issue of the unenforced leash law.

Juniper Park Civic is concerned because children going to and from school and adults going to work or running for recreation are often in Juniper Valley Park prior to 9 a.m. There is concern that unleashed dogs can defecate when and where they want to.

Owners are often many yards away from unleashed dogs and sometimes stand and talk to other dog owners whose dogs form packs which run and play together. Since little children play on the grass and since there are Little League and Peewee League fields, there is the possibility that dogs will relieve themselves where the children and even adults play without the dog owners picking up the feces.

The Juniper Berry has a full page story by Lorraine Sciulli about the unenforced leash law. It states that the insurance industry has identified several breeds of dogs that have a strong propensity to attack. Anything from a leaf falling to a child or exerciser

running can set off an attack.

Dogs in a pack tend to attack more quickly. Dogs which tend to attack are usually male and the breeds include the husky, Akita, German shepherd, pit bull, Rottweiler and the chow. The Juniper Berry article states that these very breeds are loose in the mornings in Juniper Valley Park.

Parks has answered the Juniper Park Civic by saying that they would enforce the leash law in Juniper Valley Park if the civic would accept a dog run. The civic complains that the park is too small for a dog run, plus the area proposed is a historic place which volunteers have spend years making beautiful. Juniper Valley Park activists have visited dog runs in other parks and Holden says that they are not impressed by them.

There is a dog run on the western edge of Cunningham Park along 193rd Street near Aberdeen Road. There have been no complaints about this dog run that I know about. Holden says that it has just bare dirt and no sawdust. He believes that the big trees there may be damaged if dogs urinate on them constantly.

I do walk by it now and then and see dogs and owners. There is a can just outside the enclosure for waste. I really have never looked closely at the condition of the dog run, although when my 4-year-old grandson goes to the playground to the north of it, he sometimes stops playing to watch the dogs on the other side of the common fence located there.

One future problem might be the proposal, with no input from the community, to repair the deserted stone park building on the eastern edge of the dog run. They plan to repair the old closed toilets and add a children's toilet. There will be a room for a park office. I don't know how a dog run will fit into these plans which were presented to the Friends of Cunningham Park.

Oh, when the Cunningham Park Dog Run was proposed about a dozen years ago by a group of dog owners with a man from 186th Street who trained dogs, they agreed to take care of the dog run. After a while they just stopped being involved and it is now up to the individual dog owners to clean up the area. Since no one ever complained, things are just continuing as they have been for years.

The Queens Civic Congress, an umbrella group of about 100 civic associations, agreed to support the court activities of the Juniper Park Civic. We must all be alert to activities concerning our parks. "They" have just decided to relocate two parks in the Bronx to build a new Yankee Stadium and took 2.5 acres of Kissena Park adjacent to New York Hospital so cars can be parked there for a few years while a new hospital wing is built.