

Off Leash Parks Strategy Archive-FAQ Web Page-2007

HRM Parks and the Dog By-law

In municipally owned parks, HRM can specify entire parks, or areas of parks, where dogs are prohibited. The Municipality can also designate areas of parks where dog owners are permitted to have their dogs leashed, or off leash. Since 1998, only Point Pleasant Park and Seaview Park have received off leash area designations. HRM has also designated sport fields as off leash areas for limited off-season use (November 1 to May 1, from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m). HRM's Dog By-law (D-100) requires that owners have continuous and effective control of their dogs in leashed, as well as off leash areas of municipal parks.

Frequently Asked Questions

How many dogs are there in HRM?

A 2001 Ipsos-Reid study of Canadian pet ownership estimates that dogs are part of 46 percent of households in Atlantic Canada and that the average number of dogs per household is 1.4. The 2001 census lists 144,435 households in HRM. Based on these estimates, our city would have a population of 93,017 dogs. While this is not likely, even a conservative estimate of a 50 percent margin of error would produce a total dog population of over 46,500 dogs in HRM. A more accurate assessment would be possible if more dog owners licensed their dogs but less than 5,000 registration tags were issued in 2006. Regardless of the actual number of dogs in the municipality, it is clear that more than the current two off leash parks areas are needed.

Who approves off leash areas in city parks?

In 1998, during deliberations of the HRM Dog By-law, Regional Council concluded that the need and requirements for off leash areas would be evaluated on a regional basis but off leash parks would be locally designated by Community Councils after consultation with staff and citizens. In July, 2004 Regional Council approved the HRM Off Leash Dog Park Internal Guidelines. The guidelines provided some initial standards for staff to assist and inform decisions by Community Councils prior to the designation of additional off leash areas in municipal parks. Since then, staff and Community Councils have used the guidelines to consider a number of off leash park area proposals. Thus far, all of the proposals have been found to be unsuitable due to environmental, public safety, and/or budgetary concerns.

Why do we need an off leash strategy for city parks?

Presently, many dog owners want additional leash free areas designated while other park users have expressed concerns that they pose a risk to public safety and the enjoyment of individual, or family-based, recreational pursuits. In HRM, public opinion appears to be divided on the merits of creating additional off leash park areas. A compromise needs to be found to ensure that the recreational needs of all park users have been considered before more off leash park areas are created.

Lessons learned

There are lessons to be learned from other municipalities across Canada and the United States that have attempted to resolve similar situations. HRM has reviewed programs in cities such as Chicago, Toronto, Ottawa, St. Catharines, Vancouver, and Markham to identify their successes and ongoing challenges. The HRM Off Leash Parks Strategy builds on the lessons learned from other cities and towns. Not one strategy has been perfect but the willingness to seek out public participation, learn from mistakes, and adapt to change have been hallmarks of every approach.