



LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES
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Preservation, Restoration, Education and Recreation

DATE: February 3, 2020

MEMO TO: Jessica Vealitzek, Chair
Operations Committee

FROM: Michael Tully
Chief Operations Officer

REQUEST: Provide Policy Direction on whether the District should eliminate the long-standing prohibition on dogs in the recreational core area of Independence Grove.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION SUPPORTED: Public Access and Connections.

FINANCIAL DATA: If dogs are allowed in the recreational core area, there will be a cost to changing the signs, installing dog waste bag dispensers, and purchasing dog waste bags. There will also be increased labor costs for maintenance and Ranger Police staff.

BACKGROUND: Some residents that live near Independence Grove have requested that dogs be allowed on leash in the recreational core of Independence Grove (paved and gravel trails, picnic groves, North Bay Pavilion, native garden, Millennium Plaza). Executive Director Kovach and Chief Operations Officer Tully met with the requesting neighbors and explained why the rule had been established prior to the opening of Independence Grove in 2001, and why staff feels that rule has served the District well. While the meeting was cordial, the residents did not withdraw their request and asked that the matter be considered by the Operations Committee at a future meeting.

Allowing dogs in the recreational core of Independence Grove certainly would be welcomed by those dog owners that live closer to Independence Grove than to other nearby Forest Preserves, such as Old School and Lake Carina, where dogs are allowed. Dogs are allowed at Independence Grove, outside of the recreational core. They are allowed, on leash, on the Des Plaines River Trail, which traverses the entire preserve from Route 120 to Route 137. There are several neighborhood access points along River Road that connect to the Des Plaines River Trail. There is parking available just south of Route 137 at Adler Park in Libertyville. Dogs are also allowed off leash at the Independence Grove Dog Exercise Area located on Route 21. A permit is required to use the Dog Exercise Areas.

Dogs are welcomed, on leash, at almost all Forest Preserves. Notable exceptions are the Edward L. Ryerson Conservation Area, golf courses, and the equestrian trail area at Lakewood. When Independence Grove was being planned, staff recommended, and the Board agreed, to not allow dogs in the recreational core for a number of reasons:

- It was anticipated, and it has borne out, that visitation at this preserve would be much higher than any preserve in the District.
- There was a concern that dogs off leash, and unattended dog waste, could be at best an irritant, and at worst, a danger, to the large crowds of picnickers, hikers, cyclists and children using the preserve, as well as to attendees at large special events.
- This preserve was the only recreation area, outside of the golf courses, that would be selling and serving food outside. Mixing large crowds, food, and dogs was a concern.
- Not having dogs on site made the visitor center, Millennium Plaza, and native garden more attractive as venues for weddings, corporate meetings, and other special occasion rentals.
- The core recreational area is unlike any other preserve as it has acres of irrigated turf and a multitude of formalized landscaped areas. If only 10% of the cars visiting the preserve brought a dog, that could be over 200 dogs on nice summer day. The impact they could have on the turf and plantings was, and is, a concern.

Independence Grove has been fully opened, with this restriction in place, since 2001. In that time there have been some complaints about the rule, usually from visitors that did not know about it, brought a dog, and were politely turned away at the gatehouse. These complaints have lessened over the years as the rule is now widely known.

On the flipside, Independence Grove is known as an area in which a preserve user that does not particularly enjoy the company of dogs can visit without encountering any. When visitors do get in with dogs (we do not staff the gate house at all times) they are frequently reported by other preserve users. We have developed over the past nineteen years a constituency that is used to not seeing dogs. How welcoming they would be to having dogs now allowed is an unknown.

For the reasons stated above, staff does not recommend allowing dogs on leash in the recreation core of Independence Grove.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Executive Director, Director of Finance, Director of Revenue Facilities, Director of Operations and Infrastructure, Director of Public Safety, Director of Planning and Land Preservation, Corporate Counsel.