

Dog Policy and Communications Committee Report

August 19, 2013

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Committee's Purpose and Group Members

The Montpelier Parks Commission established the Dog Policy and Communication committee. The committee was charged to “review the Canine Code of Conduct and all written suggestions offered, and propose any changes to the Canine Code of Conduct or park policies.” (Parks Commission Minutes February 2013). The mission of the group was clarified by the Parks Commission during the committee process to be broad and other dog policy related discussions and recommendations were within the committee's scope. (Parks Commission Minutes July 2013).

Committee members included: Geoff Beyer, Jim Eikenberry, Wendy Harrell, Ben Huffman, Lynn McNamara, Dave Pelletier, Susan Ritz, Cara Robecheck and Larry Sherwin.

The Committee recognizes the importance of support from the local dog owner community. The participation and buy-in from people who walk dogs in Hubbard Park is critical to the success of these suggestions. A group of dog owners (the Friends of Dogs of Hubbard Park) has offered feedback and suggestions to the group (Appendix A).

Process

The committee met on the following dates 05/30/13, 06/13/13, 06/24/13 07/8/13 07/22/13, 08/5/13 and 08/19/13 in City Hall or Police Department meeting rooms. Meetings were open to the public and members of the public were present, and participated in discussions, at every meeting.

Meeting agendas, minutes, and resources used were all posted at the following website:

<http://www.montpelier-vt.org/page/604/.html>

Recommendations

Canine Code of Conduct

The Committee recommends that the Canine Code of Conduct be amended to contain the following concepts. We acknowledge that this wording is not final and may be adjusted.

Hubbard Park welcomes dogs. To keep the park friendly and accessible for all, please observe the following code of conduct.

1. In accordance with the Montpelier Dog Control Ordinance,* closely supervise your dog by voice control or leash. Keep your dog in sight at all times.
2. Don't assume others want to interact with your dog.
3. Don't allow your dog to approach people or other dogs without mutual agreement.
4. Carry a leash for every dog you're walking and be prepared to use it.
5. Dogs must have a current rabies vaccination.
6. Dog owners must pick up after their dogs. Receptacles and bags are available.

The asterisk will refer to the Montpelier Dog Control Ordinance footnoted at the bottom of the sign. The committee recommends either the ordinance number or an abbreviated ordinance that may be added to the sign when and if the city has updated the language in the ordinance.

- The Code signs could state the following at the bottom: "Refer any incidents to Parks Department or Police Department using the incident reporting form found at (link) or in the Kiosk by the New Shelter.", bulletin boards or Park office. It could also have links to the complete city ordinance and to the Park website.

North Branch Park

The committee recommends that a similar Code of Conduct be posted at North Branch Park, but that the Code there reflect the fact that dogs are not allowed off leash in that park. The signs should explain why dogs are not allowed off leash in that park.

Signage

We feel that it is important to install signs soon, preferably before winter, to maintain progress and momentum on this issue and improve the park experience for all visitors. Signs should be placed in conjunction with the new waste receptacles.

- Maps, and general format of the signs should be consistent throughout the park. They should be sturdy, weatherproof, resistant to vandalism and allow for flexibility.
- The signs should refer to the city website where all the rules and controlling ordinances would be available for review to make it easy for park users to educate themselves on the rules of park usage. A QR code could even be provided to link directly to the website.
- Signage should be more official than just a posted piece of paper.
- Signs with an excerpt of the City’s Dog Control Ordinance might be added underneath the Code of Conduct signs in the future, however as we also recommend clarification of the ordinance later in this report, ordinance signs should not be created immediately.
- Signs and wording could have an inviting, light hearted appeal—perhaps a cartoon or a background color or graphic, no more than a page perhaps with links for more information.
- Placing signs near the five waste management stations may increase visibility for both.

Suggested Code of Conduct sign locations **should** include:

1. All park entrances (Winter St. and Hubbard Park Dr.)
2. Meadow/Boulders open field area (currently a popular location for dogs and dog owners in Hubbard park)
3. New Shelter/near caretaker’s gate
4. Tower
5. Bottom of the sledding hill
6. The entrances to North Branch Park (with the adapted North Branch Code, not the Hubbard Park Code)

Communication Strategies

The committee recommends the following methods for sharing the final Code of Conduct with the community:

- Writing articles for The Bridge and the Times Argus
- Redesigning the Parks website to highlight any approved changes
- Efforts should be made to reach out to dog park and other websites to correct any misinformation about use of Hubbard Park.

Incident Reporting Form

The Committee recommends that the Park Commission adopt an incident reporting form as one way to receive park incident information. (See Appendix B for an example format). The form will quantify the park incidents as well as to allow park staff, citizen’s panel and/or police to take follow-up action

when needed.

The Incident Report form, when finalized, should be available to park visitors to pick up at park bulletin boards/kiosks and the park office. The form should also be posted on the Parks Department website where it could be completed and submitted online. Emails, phone calls, in-person discussions, written letters and other means of communication will still be available for incident reporting.

The committee also recommends that the Parks Commission or a citizen's committee appointed by the Parks Commission review incident reports and take direction from the Parks Director to follow up on reported incidents and resolve incidents in a timely manner. The citizen's committee may also offer education and outreach to park visitors.

The form should include the following fields:

- Date, location, type, and details of the incident – type includes a dog-related incident; driver-related incident; illegal activity; biking/skiing/sledding-related incident; or “other”.
- Contact information of reporting party – this might also include small print that states ‘no action may be taken on a complaint without contact information’.
- Contact info for witnesses (if applicable).
- The form should state that it will be a public record whether a name is required or not.
- The form should include a statement that the goal of the form is to provide information to parks staff about patterns and frequency of issues that arise in the park. The goal is not necessarily to police the park.

Recommended Next Steps:

Suggestions for City Dog Control Ordinance

The committee recommends that the Parks Commission ask City Council to improve the clarity of the dog control ordinance. The current verbiage is out of date and open to various interpretations. The ordinance should be updated to reflect current standards and language in an effort to reduce confusion among the community.

Proposals for designated areas of Dog or Leash Restrictions

The committee recommends that the Parks Commission establish a process to investigate potential designated uses based on clear definitions of allowed or not allowed use. These designations could be done in all city parks or for the entire city.

The committee agreed that identifying the range of designated use types and locations for designated uses was beyond the scope of the committee. The committee recommends to the Parks Commission that they investigate designated use types and work with professional planning staff to host meetings or charettes at which members of the public may interact, discuss designated uses, and make specific recommendations on locations of designated uses on maps. This inclusive community process should designate specific trails/locations (for on-leash, off-leash etc.) including areas and trails that might restrict dogs and/or off-leash dogs.

Proposal for an additional fenced in Dog Park in Montpelier

The Committee recommends that the Parks Commission promote the idea of a fenced in off leash dog park to the City Council. There are a few potential areas that could be fenced in and designated as dog parks on existing City Parks or Recreation land. A fenced in dog park would become an additional option for dog owners who want to socialize their dogs and could relieve some of the pressure on Hubbard Park.

Appendix A

Suggestions from the Friends of Dogs of Hubbard Park

Alternative language suggestions for Code of Conduct:

Welcome to Hubbard Park

Dogs are always welcome and may be off-leash

Dog owners must pick up after their dogs. Bags and receptacles are provided.

City Ordinance requires dogs be under voice control or leashed.

Always keep your dog in sight

Carry a leash for each dog you walk

Don't assume others want to interact, leash your dog if requested

Dogs must have a valid rabies vaccination

Enjoy your visit. Come back soon!

Appendix B

Montpelier Parks Incident Report Form

Please provide as much of the following information as you can.

This information will be used to educate and improve the park experiences for all.

Date of Incident: ____/____/____ Time: _____AM/PM

Specific Location: _____

The incident being reported involved: dog(s) not under clear control of their owner unsafe driving
 alcohol or drug use threatening or inappropriate behavior
 irresponsible biker/skier/sledder other (please describe below).

Reporting party

Name: _____

Email Address: _____ Phone#: _____

Address: _____ Town _____ Zip _____

Information about individual(s) causing the problem

Name and contact information and/or description of individual (if relevant, also include description of individual, dog, car and license plate, etc.)

Describe what happened: _____

Witnesses: Names and contact details for others who witnessed the incident:

Please return completed forms to Parks Director, 39 Main St, City Hall, Montpelier, VT 05602.

They will also be shared with the Montpelier Police Department.

In case of emergency, please call 911.