



A Howlin' Good Time

River Park Off-leash News

January



2011

UPCOMING STUFF

NEW YEAR'S DAY GATHERING

Saturday, January 1
11:00am - 12:30pm

Dogs and people are welcome to enjoy the 4th annual River Park New Year's Day get-together.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Wednesday, January 19
6 - 8pm

North Glenmore Park
Community Association
2231 Longridge Dr SW
OR

Thursday, January 27
6 - 8pm
South Calgary Community
Association
3130 16 St SW

NEXT PARK CLEAN-UP

January—TBA

We'll watch for a Chinook to melt away some of the snow and concentrate on dog feces.



Since it will be weather dependent, there will be little advance notification.

Please feel free to share this newsletter with friends. If at any time you no longer wish to receive communication, just let me know.

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River Park/Sandy Beach & Britannia Slope Public Consultation

Mark your calendars to attend the next phase of public consultation for the management and design development plan for River Park, Sandy Beach and Britannia Slopes. This is one of few opportunities to make your views known.

Do your homework and visit The City of Calgary website (www.calgary.ca) for more information.

Check the **Upcoming Events** section of this newsletter for details such as date, time, place.

Happy New Year to All!

Bring in the New Year with friends and our dogs. Stop by the water fountain at the **Park within a Park** (Cat's memorial) on New Year's day between 11:00 and 12:30pm. Enjoy some hot apple cider, socialize and grab a tasty bone for your dog.



A Brief Summary of Park Development Proposals

Planning to attend one or both of the public consultations in January? Undoubtedly, details of the 17 documents that make up the Management and Design Development plan for River Park, Sandy Beach and Britannia Slopes will be a bit fuzzy.

Here's a bit of history and some comments from fellow dog owners.

Since 2006, there have been several meetings of stakeholder representatives. At first there was no representation by people with dog-related interests. Although there are now three people supporting various dog interests, they are not equally represented. While competing interest groups are quite vocal about reducing dog use in the park, all stakeholder representatives agree that the park needs more maintenance. Most stakeholders felt the park was overused. Many people, including dog people, felt protecting the environment was important.

Provisions in the official 1956 agreement:

- The park is multi-use
- The park shall be for rest and relaxation in a natural setting (grass, trees and shrubs at appropriate locations; railings, steps footbridges etc where required—no ornamental flower beds/manicured lawns)

- City responsible for maintenance/upkeep
- No vehicular traffic
- Development of a system of foot paths and bicycle paths connecting informal play areas, picnic and lounging areas, lookouts, etc
- System of wide paths for horse riding
- No commercial concessions, no billboards or advertising

The design principles are as follows:

- Protect and respect the river.
- Keep everyone safe.
- Make preservation and restoration of sensitive natural areas a priority.
- Strike balance among diverse uses/users.
- Create space for shared & solitary moments.
- Inspire visitors to become stewards.
- Make the park a better neighbour.
- Establish a strong identity—green and sustainable, modern and memorable.

The plan was based on feedback obtained from stakeholder meetings and surveys conducted in the park. There were a few surveys conducted. Some were specific to River Park, Sandy Beach and the Britannia Slope, while others were about city-wide off-leash use. Dog people were confused and were not certain as to which survey they completed. Many people had concerns with

A Brief Summary of Park Development Proposals *continued*

the surveys:

- The first survey was unannounced; respondents were targeted.
- Questions were leading.
- Online survey links did not work.
- When stakeholders gathered for an update, we learned 95% of respondents were dog owners; the planning team stated the deadline for feedback would be extended by two weeks to specifically gain non-dog owner feedback; the end result—non-dog owner feedback increased from 5% to 29%.
- A non-dog owner stakeholder asked about the purpose of the survey. The head of the planning team said it was *“to determine who the user of the park is and how to better the user’s experience”*. However, the statement posted on The City’s website later read as follows: *“To obtain insights into how the park is currently used and to explore options for alternative uses.”*
- The top 5 concerns for the park were environmental. With 71% dog owner use, it’s odd that no dog-related concerns were top of the list.

In April 2010, The City posted 17 documents for review. Here are the titles of the documents:

- Context
- Proposed Design Development Plan
- Current Uses
- Soils
- Habitat Types
- Slopes
- Existing Maintenance
- Circulation
- Parking Capacity
- Issues and Opportunities
- Off Leash Dog Area
- Proposed Restoration Areas
- Proposed Management Zones
- Design Principles
- Parking and Traffic Review
- Open House Presentation
- Public Survey Results

Here are some proposals that affect off-leash access:

- Extending parking spaces on either side of the trail at the south end of the park—increase spaces from 20 to 40 (reduces off-leash space and encourages more use from further away).
- Proposed parking off 50 Ave, by the Emily Follensbee Centre is already slated for use by the Glenmore Athletic

Park redevelopment plan.

- River Park would become on-leash from 38 Ave to 42 Ave (reduction of 1/3 of current off-leash space).
- Off-leash space reduced by 50% in Sandy Beach.
- Moving the off-leash water area in Sandy Beach to be closer to the parking lot.
- Fencing the Sandy Beach bike trail to reduce conflicts between cyclists and dogs.
- Restoring informal trails throughout River Park and Sandy Beach (some would be temporarily fenced; others are located in the area that becomes on-leash).
- East side of trail would become manicured (watering and mowing?).
- Increasing parking where possible.
- Promotion of an existing off-leash area near the dam as an alternative to River Park (problematic because access is limited, parking is non-existent and hill is very steep).

Although the plan is not finalized, some proposed changes became reality during 2009 and 2010 without stakeholder consultation or notification:

- Parking was increased in Sandy Beach from 79 spaces to 165 stalls.
- The stairs to Sandy Beach, the steep hill at the south end, the winding path parallel to the road to Sandy Beach became on-leash.
- Paving the parking lot and road at the south end

With cuts to The City’s budget, various stakeholder groups question the need for development in the park. The 1956 park agreement notes it should remain natural. With overuse being one of the main concerns in the park, development has the potential to attract more users. Most of us prefer regular maintenance, not new facilities that require significant capital and ongoing upkeep. Proposed facilities include:

- Elaborate washrooms (most oppose them because they don’t fit in well with the natural landscape). Why do we need them when the survey results state 51% walk to the park and 41% drive? The survey results also show 44% live less than 1km away and 35% live over 1km but less than 5km.
- A feature pond at the north end that could host weddings, but they don’t

propose more parking to accommodate the wedding party and guests.

- A boat launch in Sandy Beach (most oppose it because of disrespectful and problematic use).

Many dog owners are unaware that Sandy Beach, the River Park escarpment, the Britannia Slope and a small area by the Emily Follensbee Centre used to be off-leash. Elimination was unannounced as is often the case with off-leash areas. While many of dog owners understand and support some of the reductions, we are concerned about the way change is implemented.

Note the two maps on The City’s website that indicate context and current uses. The maps clearly show the amount of off-leash space compared to opportunities for other recreational groups and activities. The context map shows three golf courses within a mile of the park. The maps do not indicate the other types of recreational use within a mile of the area that include community centres, tennis courts, swimming pools, tot lots, soccer fields, baseball diamonds, skating rinks, the curling rink, cycling track, running track rowing club and museums. While off-leash spaces are shared use, competing interest groups have ample recreational opportunities within a mile of the park as well as designated space in Sandy Beach where dogs must be on-leash or are simply not allowed.

Dog owners have been voluntarily caring for the park since the 1980s. For the most part, their use is self-managed and respectful. Health advocates promote dog walking for its physical and mental benefits. Since dog walking is a year-round community-building activity regardless of weather that people willingly choose to do every day, it makes sense to provide opportunities, not reduce them. It’s also logical to have these spaces within walking distance rather than located in areas that require owners to drive.

Visit the City’s website and learn more about the management and design plans. Attend one or both of the public forums in January and have your say!