



A Howlin' Good Time

River Park Off-leash News

February



2011

UPCOMING STUFF

NEXT PARK CLEAN-UP March—TBA

Let's hope for a Chinook to melt away some snow so we can concentrate on dog feces. Since this will be weather-dependent, there will be little advance notification.

CLASSIFIEDS

JOB OPENING

Inner Hound is looking for a flexible part time person to help cover holidays, some hours during the week and occasional weekends. Apply at:

Inner Hound
2036 34 Ave SW
403-217-9950
www.innerhound.ca

GLOBAL PET FOODS GRAND OPENING

In celebration of their Grand Opening, here's a great offer: Get a free personalized engraved metal ID tag by presenting a copy of the Howling Good Time newsletter to Global Pet Foods staff on or before March 31, 2011.

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

Candice Lee

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River Park, Sandy Beach, Britannia Slope Update

The City of Calgary hosted two public meetings for the park areas in January. These "introductory sessions" included a presentation on the park planning process to date and an overview of proposed public input opportunities in the months ahead.

An external facilitator emphasized it was the start of a new process with the goal of presenting a plan to council by summer 2011. They hope that public input will help to mold direction and determine cost. They want decisions finalized so that the plan can go to council in time for budget consideration in November. Here's the schedule:

Jan 19 & 27, 2011	Info sessions
Feb 12, 2011	Workshop
March 1-12, 2011	Online discussion forum #1
March 19, 2011	World Café (workshop)
April 2011	Online discussion #2
Early May 2011	Release of proposed plan online for comments
Late May 2011	Report back on proposed plan
June 29, 2011	Plan presented at Standing Policy Committee on Community and Protective Services

Overall attendance was low at the January info sessions and February workshop.

I helped to lead the off-leash interest group on February 12. So much time was spent educating people about past things and the off-leash plan for Calgary rather than concentrating on current issues and solutions for River Park, Sandy Beach and the Britannia Slope. Although City staff said we could meet for as long as we wanted, they forced us to wrap up more than an hour before the advertised end of the session.

So far, The City's approach to dealing with competing interest groups' concerns is bringing us together to hear each other's concerns, opinions and suggestions. Their

process is much like what a handful of us as stakeholder representatives tried to work through in 2007 and 2008 in meetings that were closed to the public. Dog-related interests were not valued and my comments were often not included in minutes.

The City has stated we're starting over. As mentioned, dog owner representation at 2011 meetings has been disappointingly low. Dog owners appear to have lost interest or faith. People said they weren't concerned because I would represent their opinion; others have said The City already has an agenda. Please don't give up.

Remember I am one person representing one opinion. Have your say. From what I know, dog owners' first concern is preserving off-leash access. After that, we seem to be onside with competing interest groups. Everyone wants a clean park that receives its share of maintenance.

For future feedback opportunities, let's focus and say the same thing:

- Scrap initial results from the slanted surveys that form the basis of the process.
- Slow the process and do it right this time. The timeline is too tight.
- Concentrate on more maintenance such as watering and grass cutting.
- Forget about building facilities and amenities. New facilities require significant capital for creation and for ongoing upkeep. With overuse stated as one of the main concerns in the park, development would attract more users.
- Focus on education for all user groups. Although it should be obvious, post rules for use and behaviour. This is practiced in multi-use spaces in other cities.
- Create some bylaw officer presence.
- Re-instate volunteer programs to off-set The City's resources.

Please get involved in the process if you care about the future of the park. Visit The City's website (www.calgary.ca) for more information.

Making the Most of a MESSY SITUATION

Just after a Chinook that lasted a few days, some of us have found more dog droppings than acceptable in the park. If you're picking up and I'm picking up, why is this happening?

Every year, the same trend occurs. Christmas and New Years (actually any holiday) brings more visitors to the park. People socializing with friends and not watching their dogs is the biggest contributing factor. Those of us who pick up extra on a regular basis can tell you the park is dirtiest after the weekend or a statutory holiday.

With winter's snow cover, there's no excuse. The next easiest contrasting colours to see other than black and white is brown on white.

Thanks to Fraser K, Colleen H, Linda S, Tracy L, Bobby & Metaxia G, and Candice L who used shovels and pails to pick up feces on January 22, February 5 and 13. We agreed that people using the park during the holiday season, coupled with a week of cold, blustery weather was really hard on the park. We also acknowledge there's a handful of early morning / late evening owners who have no intention of picking up and the professional dog walkers who have too many dogs in their care.

What can dog owners do to maintain a clean park?

- Keep your dog within sight at all times
- Walk backwards to watch your dog if necessary (great exercise too)
- Alert owners about missed droppings
- Pick up whatever you find on a walk

If you're a professional dog walker, consider these ideas:

- When piling out of the vehicle, limit the amount of dogs off lead at the beginning
- Walk with another person so that there are more than one set of eyes and hands minding the dogs
- Walk fewer dogs

All of us are concerned about people who don't pick up their dog's deposits. The majority of River Park dog owners are responsible when it comes to scooping and placing their dog's poop in the garbage receptacle.

Missed opportunities usually involve a lack of attentiveness and yes, at times, unwillingness to pick up.

In many cases, simply calling out to the dog owner and pointing out a missed deposit is sufficient and the mention is often gratefully received. Sometimes it's uncomfortable approaching a fellow dog owner. The person may be in a hurry or seems unapproachable or they may be amongst a group of people chatting and you don't want to interrupt.

In other instances, people mentioned they were embarrassed by the approach of a well-intentioned dog owner. When someone called out, "Need a bag?", the other dog owner felt accused before they were given the benefit of the doubt.

Do you have a non-confrontational way of approaching another dog owner? If so, let me know and I'll publish suggestions in the next newsletter.

For now, here's a handful of non-confrontational ways to approach someone and address the situation. In a non-accusing tone, try saying:

"Excuse me, but your dog just had a poop while you weren't looking."

"Just as you turned away from your dog, it had a poop over there."

"You've just missed your dog dropping a deposit by the _____ (place)."

"Do you own the _____ (type of dog)? It just defecated over there."

If they tell you to go away (or worse) and you want to pursue it further, you can try to explain that all efforts to keep the park clean help to retain our off-leash access. Or you can mention that the highest complaints in the park are about left over feces. If you don't feel comfortable pursuing the conversation, see if you can get their license plate number and you can report them to The City of Calgary Bylaw Services.

There's no absolute right or wrong way to approaching this matter. All we can do is try. And if you do approach someone (successfully or not), thanks for your effort to keep River Park clean and maintain our off-leash access.

A Fond Farewell

Scott said a final goodbye to his loyal sidekick on January 22.



Caymen was a 16-year-old Siberian Husky who enjoyed many years of walking at River Park with her two 'furry siblings'. Scott wrote, "She was a great dog... Caymen had a good life and I miss her."



Jackie also had sad news to share: "We said goodbye to **Astrid** on Saturday, Feb. 5 after a courageous battle with lymphoma. She was a real trooper and fought until the very

end. Astrid, a.k.a. Asty, Stinks and finally Sweetie was a real character as almost everyone who has been going to River Park for the last 10 years knows! She was very independent and loved to go on her own adventures looking for rabbits down the cliff at the park. (Thank you to everyone who helped me find her when she would lose herself on a scent). Astrid really surprised me in her final few months - she became very loyal and would stay with me - even on our adventures at Sandy Beach. Astrid was such an incredible communicator - she would hit a dish with her paw when she wanted a drink of water at the park. If she wasn't thirsty - she would ignore the dish when I put it down on the ground. Every evening when Astrid was hungry she would lay by the pantry where her food was kept and stay there until she was fed and if she was still hungry she would go back and lay there again until we gave her more food! She would also lay beside her treat ball every night and whine until we filled it up for her. If it got stuck under something and she couldn't reach it (and boy would she try her best to get it) she would lay beside where it was stuck until we got it for her. She was a very determined girl! Even at 10 years old she kept us busy - she always seemed to need something to do and I am so glad that she did. She really expressed who she was. We miss her dearly. We love you Asty."

~ Jackie, Ryan, baby Lennon, Beagle sister Karma, and big brother Malamute Hoshie

