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Parks Department Poops Out On Marine Pk Dog Run

By Gary Buiso 08/17/2006

In the end, Spot won't be getting a dog run in Marine Park.

The city's Department of Parks and Recreation has withdrawn its support for the controversial canine enclosure, which was once planned for Burnett Street and Avenue X or at Florence and Gerritsen Avenues.



Pooches and their pals gather in Marine Park. Photo By Ted Levin

Phil Abramson, a Parks spokesperson, said the city is following the will of the community, namely the Marine Park Civic Association and Community Board 18, which both rescinded their support for the dog run.

"We usually go by the community board's advice and consent—in terms of dog runs, we are usually guided by their decisions," Abramson said.

Dog runs—protected expanses that offer dogs a chance to socialize with their kind, unencumbered by leashes—require "active community support," Abramson said.

According to a Parks Department rule, if a dog run is set aside, area dog owners would have been forced to keep their animals leashed at all times in all other areas of the 800-acre park.

In June, Greg Borruso, president of the Marine Park Civic Association, told the community board that the consequences of the dog run's arrival—namely, rescinding off-leash courtesy hours—would be too much to bear. Better to leave the status quo, he reasoned.

"We are now against the placement of the dog run," he said at the time.

The city will now continue its off-leash courtesy from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m. This unofficial policy is now the subject of a lawsuit filed against the Parks Department by the Juniper Park Civic Association, a Queens group that argues the policy endangers humans and beasts alike. Both sides will return to court on Aug. 29.

The possibility of the off-leash courtesy being rescinded compelled Marine Park dog owners to action. Almost 400 local residents/dog owners petitioned to keep the off-leash courtesy intact.

Rissa Peckar, a Marine Park resident and dog owner, was among those who feel strongly about continuing the off-leash courtesy hours.

“We were never against the dog run,” Peckar said. “But when it’s one or the other, we have to fight for what has been there for 30 years, and is hurting no one.”

“It’s just unfortunate for them. It’s just so silly” that both constituencies couldn’t be accommodated, she added.

State Senator Martin Golden vigorously supported the dog run. His spokesperson, John Quaglione said the dog run’s demise was “a disappointment for the community that initially brought the idea...to our attention.”

“It was a request that came from the neighbors,” he added.

One of those neighbors was Phyllis Addalli, a Gerritsen Beach resident and owner of Hunter, a German Shorthaired Pointer.

Addalli, who organized the petition to bring the dog run to the neighborhood, will now be forced to continue to take her dog to the closest dog run—in Bay Ridge.

She said allowing the off-leash courtesy is misguided. “You can never tell if the dog is going to run after a squirrel or flying paper...it’s also very dangerous for people.”

Abramson said that even when dogs are off their leashes, it is the owner’s responsibility to control the animal “at all times.”

Abramson said “a court” would have to decide who would be liable if a person suffers a bite in a city park during the off-leash courtesy hours.

Addalli said it makes no sense that in a park as vast as Marine Park, the city couldn’t find a way for both the dog run and the off-leash courtesy to co-exist. “Why can’t we both be happy?” she asked.

Asked why the community couldn’t enjoy both the dog run and the courtesy hours, Abramson had this to say: “Dog runs are areas where dogs are able to run without a leash. Off-leash hours were implemented to benefit those that do not have a dog run. If there is a dog run, then the space is already established.”

Addalli remains incredulous.

“To me, it’s very important that dogs are allowed to socialize and run free...With all that property and land, they can’t give a little piece of land to a dog run?” she wondered.

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