



OPEN SPACE CONSERVANCY TRUST BOARD REGULAR MEETING MINUTES MAY 19, 2016

Call To Order:

Chair Poor called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm in the Council Chambers at City Hall.

Roll Call:

Chair Poor, Vice Chair Weiker, Secretary Lanzinger, Council Liaison Sanderson, Trustee Christy and Trustee Westberg were present. Trustee Newman was absent.

Staff Present:

Bruce Fletcher, Parks and Recreation Director
Paul West, Park Operations Superintendent
Alaine Sommargren, Natural Resource Manager
Kim Frappier, Natural Resources Specialist

Minutes:

It was moved by Secretary Lanzinger, seconded by Council Liaison Sanderson, to:

Approve the minutes of March 17, 2016.

Motion passed 6-0.

Public Appearances – Pioneer Park leash policy forum:

Chair Poor welcomed the group of citizens in attendance and reviewed the code of conduct to be followed during the meeting. The following Mercer Island residents provided testimony regarding the proposed change to the leash policy in the NW Quadrant.

Daniel Glasser, 7416 West Mercer Way

Spoke in support of the community of dog owners that utilize the NW Quadrant of Pioneer Park. He asked the OSCT board to avoid a policy change that would penalize one group of park users over another. He stated the best way forward is to focus on education. He recommended the formation of a working group made up of park users and neighbors to address ongoing issues.

Tom Alexander, 9103 SE 50th St.

Tom stated that he has not had a problem with dogs in the park and that a majority of park users are dog walkers, particularly during the harsh winter months. Tom noted the multiple uses of the park, including mountain bikers, and called for tolerance all around by the many park visitors. Tom added that dogs socialize better off leash than on leash.

Tom Loeser, 8822 SE 39th St.

Mr. Loeser reported that he and his extended family own dogs and utilize the park regularly. He noted that he has never seen an out of control dog in Pioneer Park. He stated that ball throwing is a problem, which would be better used at the Luther Burbank off-leash area. Tom made an analogy of Pioneer Park to the public highways and the risks associated in sharing any type of public amenity. He noted that we shouldn't close a public space because a minority of users break the rules. He also stated that private property owners should not expect personal access to a public space and doesn't want to see a policy change.

Marie Bender, 7890 81st Place SE

She stated that the alternative quadrants suggested for off leash dog walkers are inadequate due to lack of parking, steep grades, close proximity to streams, and poor upkeep of some of the trails. She stated education needs to improve such as having signs along the paths versus on the perimeter of the park. She stated that seasonal or hourly restrictions would disenfranchise the dog owners. She stated the trail use guidelines and the brochure are unclear.

Jennifer Longo, 8455 W. Mercer Way

She has never witnessed or experienced problems with the off leash dogs. She stated that she doesn't see the impacts of the dogs to the ecosystem, admitting that her information is anecdotal. She stated that her dogs on leash are more scared than if they were off leash. She added that dogs cannot walk where horses are also ridden.

Victoria Stickney, 5802 W. Mercer Way

She is the owner of a paralyzed dog who uses a cart. She spoke of her personal experience as an owner of a dog with special needs. She thinks that the current rules are reasonable, that there is not dog poop problem in the park, does not feel threatened by other dogs at the park and does not want to see changes to the leash policy.

Barry Briggs, 7901 Northbrook Lane

Spoke in favor of keeping Pioneer Park off-leash. He referenced the literature review included in the packet, but does not support the science outlined in the paper. He spoke at length of the importance of giving dogs space to run free through the forest. He stated that it would be a form of cruelty to take this away from them.

Mark Spranger, 7050 82nd Avenue SE

Mark is a 30-year resident of Mercer Island and lives two blocks from the park. He spoke of his history utilizing the parks in the City. He noted that dog-owners are the largest user group in the park and that bad incidents are rare. He believes dog owners are good at self-policing. He requests that the board does not ban off-leash dogs in the NW Quadrant.

Robert Arbor, 4651 Forest Avenue

Robert is a 20-year resident of Mercer Island and regular visitor of Pioneer Park as both a dog owner and runner. He thinks the park is actually underutilized, but the largest user group are the dog owners. He has witnessed a couple of dog fights, but has never been approached or jumped on by a dog while in the park. He noted the importance of off leash dog areas both for the benefit of the dogs and their owners. He would like to see less government regulation over the park and believes the citizens can resolve issue at the park as a community.

Bob Stoney, 7920 E. Mercer Way

Bob is a regular visitor to Pioneer Park's NW quadrant and has witnessed both responsible and irresponsible dog owners while at the park. The irresponsible dog owners only represent one to two percent of the dog owner group. He submitted an email with specific suggestions the board. He suggests more self-policing, better signage and public education.

Jill Robinson, 3436 76th Place SE

Spoke in favor of keeping the NW Quadrant off-leash. She has lived on the island for three years. She stated that the park keeps Mercer Island a healthy community because in addition to exercising her dog, she gets exercise. She noted concern over restricting the off-leash hours as this could negatively affect those with school aged children. She noted that some of the biggest complaints are coming from neighbors who live adjacent to the park who see the park as an extension of their backyard. A solution could be to put up a fence or barrier to keep dogs out of those yards.

Lorraine Willoughby, 4024 W. Mercer Way

Lorraine has lived on the Island for 42 years. She noted that six of the private property owners adjacent to the park have private footpaths to their backyards. She thinks the home owners have ruined vegetation walking back and forth through the paths. She noted that the Luther Burbank off-leash area isn't big enough to service all the dog owners in the city and that she has been knocked down many times while at

that park.

Leonard McKay, 18 Meadow Lane

He spoke in support of all the comments made by previous citizens.

Bill Ganes, 8651 SE 63rd Street

Bill lives adjacent to Pioneer Park, close to a trail. He does not have a personal path from his yard to the park. He noted that planting that has been done in the area. He spoke in support of the current dog leash policy. He agrees that there needs to be more policing of those irresponsible dog owners who allow their dogs to run out of control.

Kevin Peck, 6825 84th Avenue SE

Kevin lives three blocks from the NW Quadrant for the past 17 years. He and his wife have not witnessed any dogs who have harassed or harmed visitors to the park. He spoke in support of keeping the policies as they currently stand. He suggested that private property owners need to put up fences to block dogs from going in their yards and believes that the park is there to serve all citizens of Mercer Island.

Lynn Tuttle, 7430 E. Mercer Way

Lynn has lived on Mercer Island for 16 years. She spoke in favor of keeping the leash policy as it stands currently. She stated that private property owners adjacent to the park do not represent the hundreds of visitors that come from all over the city. The park is there to serve the entire community and not just a small minority.

Brian Gierke, 8501 SE 71st Street

Brian spoke in favor of the current leash policy. He has lived on the island for 10 years. He believes the dog owner community is capable of self-policing and holding each other accountable. He thinks now that this issue has been raised, the dog owner community will come together to address people's concerns.

Maren Gilliland, 6810 96th Avenue SE

She spoke in support of keeping the current leash policy. As someone who suffers from arthritis, she values being able to walk with her dog off leash through Pioneer Park. The trails are better for her than walking on cement.

Anne Woodley, 7920 E. Mercer Way

She spoke in support of the current dog leash policy. She stated that the dog owner community provides a myriad of volunteer services in the NW Quadrant including general safety, trash and dog poop clean up. She sees the community as a walking advocacy committee for the park and recommended that the community could establish a volunteer "Safety Paw" group and work together to address problems at the park.

Art Michel, 8426 SE 83rd Street

Mr. Michel has lived on island since 1980 and utilizes the NW Quadrant regularly. He spoke in support of the dog owners on the island. He referenced the summary report created by Marie Bender. He discussed general dog behavior and the needs of dogs in the community. Mr. Michel described how leashes can sometimes be a liability in themselves because dogs sometimes trip people by wrapping their leashes up in their legs.

Lynette Michel, 8426 SE 83rd Street

She spoke in support of increasing education in the community regarding dog behavior and expectations in the NW Quadrant, over just self-policing.

Stephanie St. Mary, 8221 SE 67th Street

She has lived on the island about 36 years. She spoke in support of the current dog leash policy. She referenced the social aspects of owning a dog and the mutual respect between dog owners. She spoke in support of increased education and other suggestions proposed by the community. She said that the off-island visitors at Luther Burbank do not take care of their dogs.

Liz Friedman, 9031 SE 50th Street

She described the dog community at Pioneer Park as her safety net while she is walking her dog by

herself. She said the people that utilize the park look out for each other and the park itself. She wants to see education expanded. She said that neighbors need to communicate with each other to solve problems – about how to be a good neighbor whether at home or in the parks.

Lee Goldman, 4328 92nd Avenue SE

Mr. Goldman was born and raised on Mercer Island. He is a current board member of COLA (Citizens for Off-Leash Areas) based in Seattle. His organization is currently working with the City of Seattle to expand off-leash areas for dogs, but the main problem is the lack of space available. He said the national trend especially on the West Coast is for mixed use areas. Mercer Island is one of the few cities that has mixed use areas. He spoke of his experience owning a rescue dog and the challenges he faces when his dog is on-leash or visiting off-leash open areas versus smaller, forested trails. His dog is less likely to get scared and get in a fight with another dog when at a site like the NW Quadrant. He noted that we need to consider the larger implications of a policy change that could affect the larger community.

Helen Owens, 4842 E. Mercer Way

She spoke in support of the current dog leash policy and that her dog is her personal trainer.

Regular Business:

(I) Trustee recognition – Chair Poor

Chair Poor recognized the service of the two outgoing trustees, Aric Weiker and Tina Lanzinger. Secretary Lanzinger, having served on the OSCT Board for 10 years, was presented with a resolution from the City Council honoring her many years of service.

The resolution was moved by Trustee Westberg and seconded by Trustee Christy. Secretary Lanzinger spoke about her positive experience serving on the board, working with Parks and Recreation, and the importance of the work done by the OSCT board.

(II) Dog leash policy report – Paul West

Paul referenced the staff report provided to the board. He noted that this includes all the comments provided by the community. The staff report also includes a first cut of solutions broken down into Tier 1 (those more easily implemented) and Tier 2 (those more challenging and expensive to implement) options. He noted that some discussion is needed to clarifying the exact problems. The staff report outlines impacts on staff, on the native plant community and wildlife, and on the community. The board will be tasked with defining the problem definition and next steps.

Trust Board Discussion:

Chair Poor summarized the process that lead to the original recommendation to move to an on-leash policy in the NW Quadrant and the public forum held today. She noted that the majority of concerns about dogs were raised by private property owners in contrast to what was heard tonight.

Vice-chair Weiker noted the importance of developing a long-term view with a solid standing policy that won't flip flop over the years. He recommended that the issue of multi-user impacts (from dogs, horses, mountain bikes) be added to the board's agenda annually. The data should be collected and analyzed regularly. There should be an ongoing process of engaging community groups.

Trustee Westberg outlined the problem statement as 1) trespass on private property and 2) behavioral issues with dogs and their owners. He noted that the issues of impacts to resources and safety to staff members is still unclear. He noted the importance of collecting data to clarify this. He was compelled by the dog owner community to come together and solve the problem of the behavioral issues as well as Parks and Recreation.

Secretary Lanzinger noted the challenge between user and conservatory aspects of park management. She stated that we won't have anything to save if we don't have users and advocates, but that we don't want the park to be like Luther Burbank Park. She noted the

importance of understanding people's perspective and fears who do not feel comfortable with dogs or horses. She noted the importance of supporting the dog owner community. She recommended the formation of a working community group of park users.

Trustee Sanderson spoke about the passionate community that came together. The actions of a few should not negatively affect the multitude of park users. The issue of the private property owners should be addressed. He noted that the first tier suggestions made by the Parks and Recreation Department is a good first step.

Trustee Christy noted that more oversight and citizen policing has been done by park users since we've started these conversations and more people are aware of the complaints and occasional issues. She agreed that continuing the conversation with the community is the best way to solve the issues.

Chair Poor noted that Pioneer Park is technically not a biological preserve – which is one end of the spectrum. We need to find a balance between a public multi-use open space (such as Luther Burbank) and a biological preserve.

Trustee Westberg agreed that it is not a biological preserve but it's not Luther Burbank Park either. He referenced the ordinance that created the Trust that discussed the details of managing a trust property. The language of the ordinance states that "uses should not impair the ecological, scenic, aesthetic, and natural attributes." This is a very high standard. He stated that looking long-term, as the Island becomes more urbanized, the popularity of the park expands, and the numbers of users increase – we will see damage to the attributes of the site. He noted that self-policing may not be sufficient over time, but this is a good place to start.

Trustee Lanzinger noted the importance of the Trust board including some analysis into the annual work plan to monitor the sensitivity of the site. She suggested that the board start early in the year with a lot of visibility, education, and reach out to user groups. She noted that the user groups are a good resource of information - as a focus group and for work parties.

Chair Poor summarized that the Board supports the Tier 1 recommendations made by Natural Resources Staff and that there is support for a community working group.

Trustees discussed and agreed that it will be important to build a working relationship with the community and various ideas for how to launch that effort. Trustee Lanzinger noted that starting with some general educational and outreach to help everyone understand the existing city-wide dog leash ordinance. She suggested that it may be helpful to start by inviting Anna Ormsby out to the park to speak about the City's leash law.

Vice-chair Weiker noted that he envisions a group of leaders from the community that would come together once per year to review data regularly regarding various impacts such as dogs, horses, mountain biking, natural resources as well as public feedback. He noted the importance of getting in front of the issues and not be reactive.

Paul noted that the staff will come back in the July meeting with more detailed information on the First Tier recommendations.

(III) Trail Work Plan – Alaine Sommargren

Alaine presented information on 2016 projects for the Trails Work Plan. She noted that there are no large projects scheduled for the NW Quadrant. In the NE Quadrant, staff need to work on a couple of areas that require drainage improvements (e.g. water bars). The biggest project is in the SE Quadrant on the Fox Trail. The trail is going through the wrong location and continues to have drainage problems. The Trails Specialist has suggested a reroute to improve drainage, decommission the existing trail and replant that area next fall. The Natural Resources staff will notify the public before and during the trail work.

(IV) Tree Work – Alaine Sommargren

Alaine reported that the department will be doing a round of tree removal work. This includes six trees in the NW Quadrant: three big leaf maples, one Douglas-fir, and two red alders that were dead or failing. These will be removed before they become more of a safety hazard. More information is outlined in the packet provided by staff.

(V) Quadrant Reports – Trustees

Chair Poor asked about graffiti reported in the area at the Overlook. Alaine noted that the Trails Specialist removed the graffiti. Chair Poor added that there has been good adherence to the dog leash policy in the park. Trustee Christy noted that one of the Boy Scout signs was crushed by a tree that came down in the NW Quadrant. Staff are working on ordering a replacement.

Trustee Christy noted that the barred owls are active in the SE Quadrant - calling to each other. She said that the Letterboxing has been going well and the Boy Scout trail signs are excellent. The Boy Scouts have been using the signs for orienteering.

(VI) Next Meeting – Chair

The next meeting is scheduled for July 21, 2016

Adjournment: 8:03 pm

Geraldine Poor, Chair

Attest:

Kim Frappier, Scribe