

## Memo to Long Range Planning Subcommittee

May 19, 2023

FR: Ann Freiwald

Subject: Dog Free Status in City of Madison Parks

In 2019 the Board of Park Commissioners and Common Council made changes to the Madison General Ordinance 8.19, to allow leashed dogs in more parks. The longstanding ordinance originally prohibited dogs in any public park, on any Madison school ground, or City space, such as a building occupied by the City. The ordinance, created in 1973, was revised several times. The 2019 review and subsequent change were prompted by the increase in the number of Madison residents and the increase in the number of dog owners in the city. There has also been an increase in population density in some areas of the city due to multi-family developments, particularly multi-family developments which allow dogs.

The 2018-2023 Park and Open Space Plan stated that dog walking was one of the top 10 recreational activities.

During 2019, the Long Range Planning subcommittee (LRP) discussed a change in Parks' policy and City Ordinance to allow leashed dogs in most neighborhood, mini and community parks. During that time, the LRP held a robust public input process, hearing a great deal of support for this change as well as some concerns. In February 2020, the Board of Park Commissioners (BPC) passed a resolution creating Sec. 8.195 and amending Sections 8.19, 23.32 and 1.08 of the Madison General Ordinances to create dog recreation areas and to reorganize and recreate a unified ordinance relating to dogs on City property and dog recreation areas.

In early 2020, Parks staff implemented the new policy and as part of the process, approximately 30 neighborhood and mini parks were designated as "dog free", prohibited dogs in these parks. We received feedback almost immediately that folks wished to change the status from dog free parks to dog friendly (rarely the other way around). In Nov of 2021, in an effort to respond to folks and in an attempt to maintain a good geographical balance, Parks changed selected parks to dog friendly and others to dog free. Most notably, neighbors of the newly designated dog free park were dissatisfied. This response in late 2022, led to a discussion at both the BPC and the LRP regarding the need for dog free parks. Discussions included how to best maintain and select dog free parks and how to continue addressing the on-going change requests. The LRP discussed the issue in January and May of 2023 and the subcommittee believes the need for the dog free parks is not sufficient to continue with the effort involved in selecting the parks and enforcing this status. Rangers have also provided input and feedback and are in favor of removing the dog free status in these select parks. Therefore, the LRP recommends that Parks remove this status from all currently designated dog free parks. Note this does not require a change to the policy or to the City ordinance, as the ordinance already provides a complete list of areas where dogs will remain prohibited such as beaches, shelters, conservation parks, and athletic fields. The LRP believes these areas provide sufficient space for park users to recreate without the presence of dogs. The process would be as follows:

- Ann Freiwald and Ann Shea will develop a project web page
- Ann Freiwald will write an alder notification (in the form of an email)



- Shea will deploy a series of social media posts to inform the public and invite them to comment via a special email
- The Board of Park Commissioners will consider this issue at their July 12, 2023 meeting
- Assuming this change is adopted;
  - Change will go into effect on August 1, 2023
  - Shea will continue to share info via social media posts
  - The rangers will update the park rules signs in the effected parks and remove all remaining dog free park signage.

Public information will focus on:

- Places that are dog free in the park system
- Reminding dog owners to be responsible dog owners (licensed, permitted and leashed dogs and picking up the inevitable).