

The Civic Scene: Civics agree to back Juniper in dog lawsuit

By Bob Harris 04/06/2006

The Juniper Park Civic Association, Middle Village, came to the March meeting of the Queens Civic Congress to present its long-standing concern over the fairly recent New York City Department of Parks & Recreation rule which permits owners to let their dogs run free between 9 p.m. and 9 a.m. in public parks. Juniper Park Civic President Bob Holden brought a "Dog Owner's Guide" issued by Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe listing 15 citywide and park rules concerning dogs.

One of his rules is the Courtesy Off-leash Hours, which is of concern to Holden and the civic. However, Holden quoted 161.05 of the City Health Code which states that dogs are not permitted to be loose in a public place, must be on a six-foot leash and the owners must clean up after their pets. An article in a July 2, 1962 issue of Newsday and in the March/April issue of the Juniper Berry, the civic's quite large newsletter, discussed the issue. The civic is so unhappy with the answers it has received from the Parks Department that it has decided to sue over the issue of the unenforced leash law.

Juniper Park Civic is concerned because children going to and from school and adults going to work or running for recreation are often in Juniper Valley Park prior to 9 a.m. There is concern that unleashed dogs can defecate when and where they want to.

Owners are often many yards away from unleashed dogs and sometimes stand and talk to other dog owners whose dogs form packs which run and play together. Since little children play on the grass and since there are Little League and Peewee League fields, there is the possibility that dogs will relieve themselves where the children and even adults play without the dog owners picking up the feces.

The Juniper Berry has a full page story by Lorraine Sciulli about the unenforced leash law. It states that the insurance industry has identified several breeds of dogs that have a strong propensity to attack. Anything from a leaf falling to a child or exerciser running can set off an attack.

Dogs in a pack tend to attack more quickly. Dogs which tend to attack are usually male and the breeds include the husky, Akita, German shepherd, pit bull, Rottweiler and the chow. The Juniper Berry article states that these very breeds are loose in the mornings in Juniper Valley Park.

Parks has answered the Juniper Park Civic by saying that they would enforce the leash law in Juniper Valley Park if the civic would accept a dog run. The civic complains that the park is too small for a dog run, plus the area proposed is a historic place which volunteers have spend years making beautiful. Juniper Valley Park activists have visited dog runs in other parks and Holden

says that they are not impressed by them.

There is a dog run on the western edge of Cunningham Park along 193rd Street near Aberdeen Road. There have been no complaints about this dog run that I know about. Holden says that it has just bare dirt and no sawdust. He believes that the big trees there may be damaged if dogs urinate on them constantly.

I do walk by it now and then and see dogs and owners. There is a can just outside the enclosure for waste. I really have never looked closely at the condition of the dog run, although when my 4-year-old grandson goes to the playground to the north of it, he sometimes stops playing to watch the dogs on the other side of the common fence located there.

One future problem might be the proposal, with no input from the community, to repair the deserted stone park building on the eastern edge of the dog run. They plan to repair the old closed toilets and add a children's toilet. There will be a room for a park office. I don't know how a dog run will fit into these plans which were presented to the Friends of Cunningham Park.

Oh, when the Cunningham Park Dog Run was proposed about a dozen years ago by a group of dog owners with a man from 186th Street who trained dogs, they agreed to take care of the dog run. After a while they just stopped being involved and it is now up to the individual dog owners to clean up the area. Since no one ever complained, things are just continuing as they have been for years.

The Queens Civic Congress, an umbrella group of about 100 civic associations, agreed to support the court activities of the Juniper Park Civic. We must all be alert to activities concerning our parks. "They" have just decided to relocate two parks in the Bronx to build a new Yankee Stadium and took 2.5 acres of Kissena Park adjacent to New York Hospital so cars can be parked there for a few years while a new hospital wing is built. Parks should be inviolate!