

12 June 2008

Dear Off-Leash Dog Park Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in participating in the Newton Dogs Off-Leash Pilot Program. This program was created by a revision (Sec. 3-30; [http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/Legal/Ordinance/Chapter\\_3\\_web\\_version\\_Revisions\\_12-21.pdf](http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/Legal/Ordinance/Chapter_3_web_version_Revisions_12-21.pdf)) to the city ordinance concerning dog control, approved by the Newton Board of Alderman earlier this year. As you probably are aware, this ordinance established the Newton Dogs Off-Leash Advisory Committee and assigned it responsibilities that include: developing and recommending site selection criteria, monitoring the pilot program and providing regular status reports to the custodial agencies and the Board of Alderman. In addition, the Advisory Committee has a central role in the public review and approval process for proposed individual off-leash sites.

In this letter, we provide an overview of the process for establishing an off-leash site and offer some guidelines/suggestions that we hope will expedite the process and the chances of getting your proposed site approved.

The Advisory Committee members recognize the potential value that a well executed off-leash dog program can provide to all open space stakeholders in Newton. As a new pilot program, this will be a learning opportunity for everyone involved in the process. We are delighted to have the opportunity to work with you and assist in this process.

### **Steps for Applications**

The following is an overview of the various steps necessary to get a site approved for off-leash dog use.

1. **Complete and submit your application to the advisory committee.** This step involves describing your proposal in sufficient detail so that an informed decision regarding its merits and potential adverse impacts can be made. The information provided also will be used to establish baseline conditions (e.g., usage patterns, ongoing conflicts) at the proposed site. The application is available online at the City of Newton's website, Planning and Development Department, Boards and Committees. Please submit 10 copies of the finished application to the Planning and Development Department, attention Mike Kruse.
2. **Meet with the advisory committee to discuss your proposal.** The Advisory Committee will hold meetings to discuss submitted proposals on an as-needed basis. This meeting will be an opportunity for you to receive constructive feedback. We will try to identify any potential

problems with the proposal and/or any additional information that might be needed by the Committee or the custodial agencies. The Advisory Committee may also suggest modifications of the proposal to facilitate the approval process. We will work with you to develop a viable proposal.

3. **Meet with the applicable custodial agency to present your proposal.** You will present your proposal to the custodial agency that has jurisdiction over the area you are proposing for an off-leash site. In most cases this will be either the Newton Parks and Recreation Commission or the Conservation Commission. Both commissions meet monthly except during the summer (Parks and Recreation does not meet in July or August and Conservation does not meet in August). When you are ready to present your proposal, please check the city website for the schedule and contact information of the appropriate Commission and give notification (at least 2-weeks in advance of the meeting) requesting a time on the agenda for the next regularly scheduled meeting.

At the meeting, you will have an opportunity to present your proposal (plan on about 5-10 minutes) after which commission members will ask any questions they deem necessary to better understand the proposal. Any concerns that commission members might have also will be raised at this time. It is anticipated that successful proposals will be continued to a second meeting with the appropriate commission so that all abutters can be duly notified about the proposal and have an opportunity to voice any concerns they may have. The interval between the two meetings also provides you with an opportunity to collect additional information and/or revise your proposal to address concerns raised by the commission at the initial meeting.

At the completion of the meeting, the commission will approve, approve with special conditions, or disapprove of your proposal. In the event that your proposal is disapproved, your options would include revising your proposal and requesting a new hearing or you may want to consider developing a proposal for another area.

4. **Status meeting with the Advisory Committee.** In addition to any updates that may be requested by the approving commission, you may be requested to meet with the Advisory Committee in approximately six months following project approval. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss what is and isn't working at the off-leash site. Committee members will make suggestions and work with you to resolve potential conflicts that have been identified.

## General Guidelines for Applications

The following guidelines/suggestions are offered for consideration during preparation of your proposal as well as for the public meetings with the custodial agency. It is important to bear in mind throughout the process that some people have a natural antipathy towards dogs in general and off-leash dogs in particular. Your proposal will have a much greater likelihood of getting approved if you demonstrate an awareness of the concerns harbored by the various stakeholders and explain how those concerns would be addressed. What you propose needs to be seen by all interested parties as a win-win situation such that dog owners, the neighborhood, and the land all are perceived to benefit.

1. **Address potential stakeholder concerns.** If necessary, spend the time to find out what people are concerned about and tailor your proposal to address the identified concerns. For instance, the custodial agencies will likely have a number of concerns related to their role as land stewards including damage to sensitive areas. Abutters may be sensitive to early morning noise or parking congestion and other park users might be intimidated by the presence of a group of off-leash dogs. How will you publicize the off-leash hours so that owners and non-owners can plan their on-site activities? Although the issue of dog fecal matter is not specific to an off-leash site, this is a big concern for those responsible for overseeing multiuse activities. Your proposal should explain how any dog-related impacts would be mitigated at the site and how stakeholder concerns would be addressed. All parks in Newton are multi-use and will continue to be. Any successful proposal must reflect this and be sensitive to other users of the area.
2. **Effective organization.** It is critical that your proposal identify the individual(s) who will oversee the proper functioning of the off-leash site and will serve as a point of contact for the custodial agency. The proposal should also indicate how group members will be kept informed in the event that issues arise. Does the group have a plan to ensure that the potential stakeholder concerns, above, are addressed?

Thank you,

Amy Koel, Chair: [akoel@rcn.com](mailto:akoel@rcn.com)

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