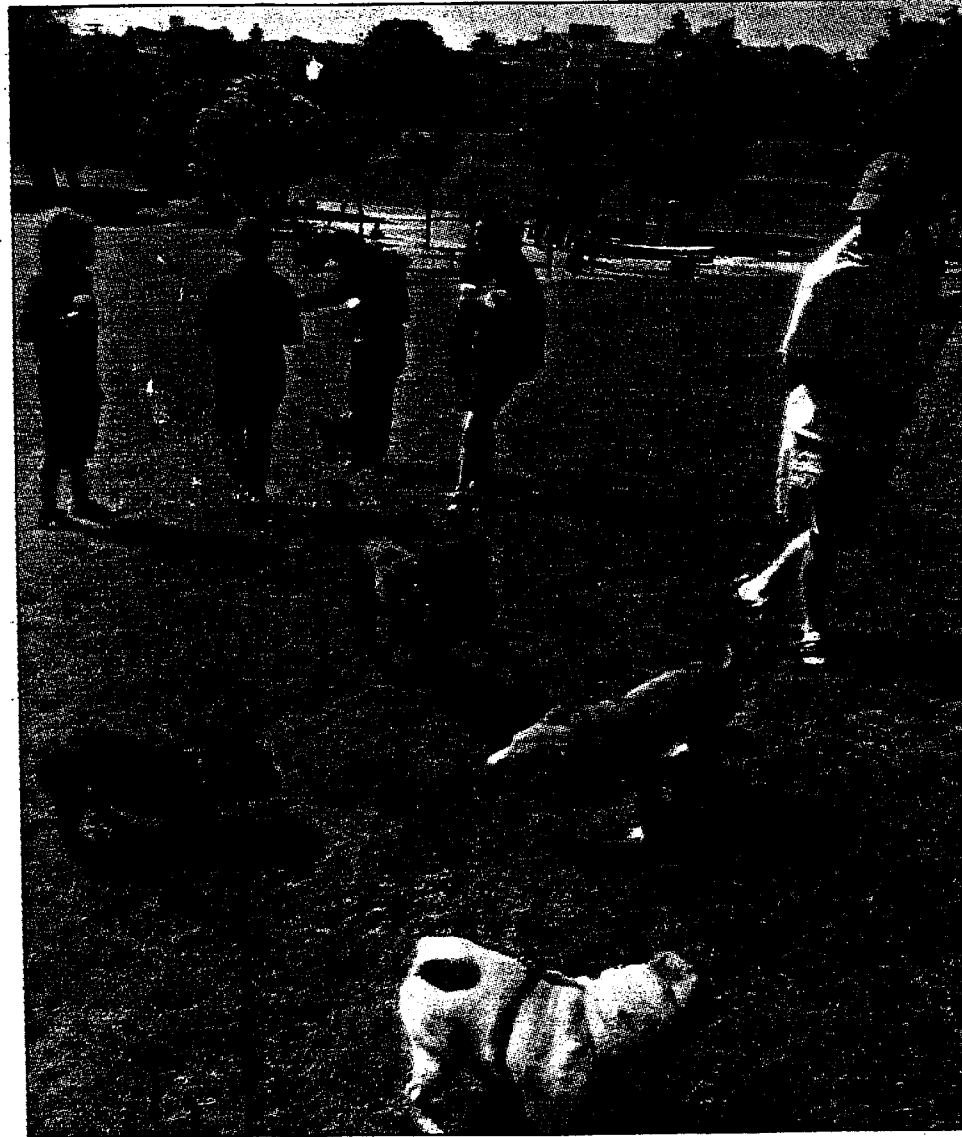


ATTACHMENT L: ARTICLE FROM *SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE*

Canine crackdown

Unleashed dogs in parks limited to fenced runs



BRANT WARD / *The Chronicle*

Todd Quackenbush, right, keeps his pup Naomi on a leash while other pooches run free at Dolores Park. A new regulation would make law-breakers of these unleashed dogs' owners.

By Heather Knight
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CHRONICLE STAFF WRITERS

Hundreds of dog walkers woke up to the sobering reality Thursday morning that their days of letting Fido run freely in certain parks are numbered.

Try as they might, they couldn't dissuade San Francisco officials Wednesday night from enacting strict new policies that will create designated off-leash areas in parks throughout the city.

Following a contentious hearing that ran five hours, the San Francisco Recreation and Park Commission unanimously approved limiting unleashed dogs to fenced-in dog runs at small parks throughout the city.

That means at least 50 parks that are under 10 acres in size will be parceled into dog areas and non-dog areas if the community requests that it be. The dog areas may be bordered by chain link fences, hedges or other clear boundaries.

Another 100-plus parks that are too small or have too many other uses to have dog pens will be leash-only zones.

The rules go into effect immediately, although there will be a 90-day education period and soft-enforcement policy.

The commission's 6-0 vote culminated nearly four years of at-times acrimonious debate over how much freedom dogs and their guardians should have in city parks.

Frustrated dog owners are already talking about appealing to the Board of Supervisors to sus-

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Unleashed dogs in parks limited to fenced areas

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pend the decision.

"If the board won't take it up, I suppose a legal challenge might be possible," said Laura Cavaluzzo, spokeswoman for SFDog, the San Francisco Dog Owners Group, which has been fighting the proposals since they were introduced. "The next thing would be that each community would have a say in how their parks would be used. We'll end up fighting (leash requirements) on a park-by-park basis."

Cavaluzzo said dog walkers felt frustrated because they far outnumber the opposition at the various hearings. They believe dogs and other park users have co-existed peacefully in parks where dogs were allowed to run off-leash.

"The mix is happening," Cavaluzzo said. "It's successful and it's almost virtually without incident. What (Rec & Park is) doing is taking multi-use space and turning it into single-use space."

The new regulations create an advisory committee to deal with infractions of the new rules.

Recreation and Park spokesperson Becky Ballinger said she wanted dog walkers to understand that the small dog pens that so many dog walkers fear won't be created at many of the parks that are already known as off-leash parks.

There are 31 parks in the city between 10 acres and 35 acres that will have large off-leash areas designated and on-leash areas as well. Those parks include Dolores, Alamo Square, Bernal Hill and Alta Plaza. Parks bigger than 35 acres, like Golden Gate, Bayview, Stern Grove, Glen Canyon and McClaren, will have even larger areas designated as off-leash, Ballinger said.

"We're going to be renovating almost every park in the city," Ballinger said. "As people are talking about renovating their park, they'll need to help us figure out how to create dog areas as well."

Like most policies involving pooches, this one drew people out in packs Wednesday night. The commission usually meets in a small lodge in Golden Gate Park, which seats 60 members of the public. But after the commission received 2,700 letters in response to its plans, it opted to hold its meeting at City Hall.

Nearly 1,000 people filled the chambers and an additional overflow auditorium downstairs which was equipped with a large screen broadcasting the meeting. They appeared to be about 3-to-1 in favor of looser regulations for dogs.

People cheered and boo'ed so vociferously after each speaker, the commission's president, John Murray, had to repeatedly warn them to quiet down.

Murray said dog-owners and their beloved pets had pretty much had the run of the city's parks for so long that it was time to establish regulations.

"In effect, we've had no rules for 10 years on how our dogs live in our parks," he said. "Now is the time to make the changes that are most important."

After the meeting, most audience members left unhappy — with some muttering expletives.

Patrick and Lee Noakes were two of hundreds with postcards safety pinned to their shirts with pictures of dogs and the words "We need a better solution for off-leash dog recreation!" The couple takes their two dogs, Tessa and Zack, to their neighborhood park in the Sunset twice a day. They described disabled people, seniors, toddlers and dog owners all getting along just fine.

"We're a family," Patrick Noakes said. "This will ruin because it will push the dog people into one area. We'll stop going there and so will other people."

But parents of small children were pleased with the decision. Marybeth Wallace serves on the board of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, which has issued report cards on parks around the city for six years.

"We need dog space, and we need people space — they need to be separate," said the Noe Valley resident, who attended the meeting. "Not every child and adult feels comfortable with dogs. There's too little green space in all San Francisco to give it all to the dogs."

Environmentalists largely supported the stricter policy because it keeps dogs off sensitive areas such as those that are home to threatened and endangered species including red-tailed hawk, red-legged frogs, and western pond turtles.

Sidney Kass, a member of the California Native Plant Society, said he "was frightened into coming" to the meeting when he heard of the strength of the dog owner contingent.

"Dogs scare away the birds and the little animals," said the Glen Park resident. "They might eat the eggs of the birds."

"This is a good compromise," he added. "We were terrified that the dogs were going to take it all."

Dog walkers in Dolores Park Thursday morning said they were frustrated with the regulation but would probably abide by them.

"Everyone gets along in Dolores Park, dogs and people," said David Spero, a political activist who was walking his dog Chiq. "It's a shame that in a city named after St. Francis, the patron saint of animals, that we have to criminalize dogs and dog walkers."

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