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Leash-free policy lacks teeth: Critics

Dog owners must form associations, but new zones won't be fenced

July 05, 2007

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CITY HALL BUREAU

Dog owners who want an off-leash area in their neighbourhood will have to form an association and negotiate terms with city officials under a new policy recommended by the city's parks committee.

But critics said the policy fails because it doesn't require all leash-free areas to be fenced.

Three dozen citizens addressed the committee on the new policy, and no consensus emerged between dog owners and those who want more protection from dogs.

Dog owners and walkers said that the city has more than 1,400 parks, but only 32 legal off-leash areas.

"My dogs are my children," said Anca Pascalau, arguing there should be an off-leash area within a 10-minute walk of every residential area in the city.

David Mills, who said his 5-year-old is scared to go to the park because of dogs, disagreed. Children are people with rights while dogs are property, he said. "Those who acquire pets must not assume there will be a place to take dogs off leash because they pay taxes." He wanted all off-leash areas fully fenced.

The proposed policy got a rough ride from Michael O'Sullivan, chair and chief executive officer of the Humane Society of Canada, who said his attempts to provide advice to the city had been rebuffed.

He argued that compulsory spaying or neutering of dogs, and compulsory training for owners, should be keystones of city policy. They're not included in the proposal.

The committee agreed to a suggestion from one dog owners group that females in heat and unneutered adult male dogs should not be allowed in leash-free zones. It also recommended nearly doubling the number of dog bylaw enforcement officers to 21 from 11.