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Port officials tell dog owners who want city to let pets run free on beach they favor establishing special park instead

A group of Port Washington residents told the Common Council Tuesday they would like the city to designate hours when they could let their dogs run unleashed on the north beach.

But several aldermen said they believe a dog park may be the better answer.

“I think having dogs off leash is a bad idea,” said Ald. Tom Hudson, who has two dogs and described himself as a dog lover.

“I think it would be great for us to look into the possibility of a dog park. If somebody wants to take the lead and work with Park and Rec to establish a dog park somewhere, it would be wonderful.”

Even with designated hours for dogs to be allowed off leash, Hudson said, “There’s always going to be someone out there who doesn’t want to be bothered by dogs.”

A group of about 10 dog owners attended Tuesday’s meeting, but only one spoke.

“We believe giving our pets sufficient exercise is a prime responsibility of a dog owner,” said Anne Davis, 920 Crestview Dr.

“We believe letting our dogs off leash on the beach to chase a stick in the water and swim is not the same thing as letting dogs run rampant. We walk at times and in places we’re unlikely to encounter others.”

If the city were to establish hours when dogs could run unleashed on the beach, Davis said, that doesn’t mean other people couldn’t use the beach at the same time.

Out of courtesy, she said, the pet owners would continue to leash their dogs when others are present.

“We are not asking for the abolition of the leash law,” Davis said.

Nor are they asking the city to stop enforcement of the pooper-scooper law, said Davis.

“We wholeheartedly agree this has become a problem,” she said.

In recognition of the fact that a few negligent pet owners can cause problems for all owners, Davis said, her group has frequently picked up after dogs that aren’t their own.

Since the police department began strictly enforcing the city’s pet laws last month, she added, the bike path has been cleaned.

Police Chief Richard Thomas said his department has issued 15 warning to pet owners violating the city's various pet ordinances during the past month, many for allowing a dog to roam off leash.

"We feel pretty good about where we're at," Thomas said. "The response we've received from the community has been wonderful. I'm very pleased and happy.

"Now we're ready to take it to the next level."

The department will now issue tickets and fines to pet owners who violate the city ordinances, Thomas said.

"We want to preserve our reputation as a pet-friendly community," he said, "but we have to be responsible, too."

But the dog owners, many of whom have received warnings from police for allowing their pets off leash, find it frustrating that even if no one else is on the beach, they cannot allow their dogs to swim and run freely, Davis said.

The group plans to approach the Park and Recreation Board next week to see if it is willing to consider designating hours when dogs could be unleashed on the beach, she told aldermen.

Several aldermen said they would prefer the group put its efforts into establishing a dog park in the city.

Ald. Mike Ehrlich said he has been approached by several constituents willing to work on establishing a dog park in the city.

"I like the idea," he said.

John Sigwart, 230 Theis St., told aldermen the former landfill site off Grant Street might be a good place for a dog park.

"It's ideal," he said. "The city owns it. It's isolated."