

December 8, 2021

City of Madison Parks Division  
City-County Building, Room 104  
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd  
Madison, WI 53703

Board of Park Commissioners  
City-County Building, Room 104  
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear park administrators,

Three city parks — [Haen Family](#), [Kingston-Onyx](#), and [Quarry Grove](#) — were recently designated 'dog free' as part of a [set of changes recommended](#) by Madison Parks Division staff and approved at a Board of Park Commissioners [meeting](#) on November 3, 2021. These parks became 'dog free' despite receiving no requests from residents for this change and without eliciting input from the potentially impacted communities. As a result, the policy changes have effectively limited access and reasonable use of these three parks for many people.

Because of the lack of community outreach and subsequent input, and the general lack of transparency regarding this process, we, the undersigned Madison residents, request that:

1. The recent set of designation changes adopted in November 2021 — particularly those that established new limitations on park use — should be re-examined expeditiously;
2. The City of Madison Parks Division provide a written outline of the process and methodology used for allocating and adjusting dog use designations for parks;
3. This draft process be made publicly available and circulated widely through mayor, alder, and city division communication channels; and
4. A public comment period be set aside to receive feedback from Madison residents.

We specifically recommend that this process:

- Identify how resident input regarding park designations and dog policies will be solicited;
- Describe how Parks staff will use public input to inform future change recommendations and how competing interests and concerns will be weighed and resolved;
- Explains the rationale for providing dog-free parks and the 1-mile distribution goal.

We are submitting this request after reviewing [related documentation](#), viewing the [recording](#) of the November Commissioner's meeting (36:45-58:00 min.), and inquiring by email with Parks staff. We feel the following issues should be addressed when developing a formal policy.

## **Lack of Transparency / Need for Input**

While it may be prudent to annually review dog-related policies and specific park designations, this was not communicated to the public either when park access to dogs was [expanded](#) in April 2020, or possibly at any time before the recent review. Without knowledge of potential changes, residents had little opportunity to contribute to the recommended changes prior to adoption.

An online form for submitting designation change requests was made available in May 2021, however it does not appear that the Parks Division communicated the availability of this form to city alders, neighborhood associations, city division listservs, dog owners licensed with the city, or any other groups. It is also not clear if any other type of feedback — such as affirming satisfaction with a park's current designation or providing general input about dog policies — should be submitted through this form or through any other means.

During the Commissioners' meeting, Parks staff referenced the fact that so few change requests were submitted as evidence that people were likely pleased with the new dog policies and its administration. That conclusion is reached even while acknowledging that people satisfied with current rules were probably not likely to use the change request form. Conversely, we contend that there could be any number of reasons why so few changes requests were submitted, such as lack of knowledge about the form and lack of understanding that resident feedback would be used to inform future policy and designation changes.

## **Need for Dog-Free Spaces**

Park staff have indicated their desire to have a 'dog free' designated park within 1 mile of most city residents. This was said to be particularly important in areas that have a dog park or a large park which allows dogs. The logic, presumably, is that some residents prefer not to be in close proximity to dogs and that they benefit from having readily available parks that will reliably not have dogs. Parks staff said that small parks with amenities and also those that do not provide key walking connections between neighborhoods were particularly suited for the dog free status.

We would like to know how Parks staff is estimating the overall need for dog free public spaces and what rationale it is using for setting the mark of having a dog-free park within approximately one mile of most residents. As more public input is received regarding park designations, it may prove difficult to simultaneously accommodate designation change requests and continue to provide an even distribution of these spaces. Additionally, measuring one mile with straight line distances — as it appears is the approach in the map of [recommended changes](#) — is not truly an accurate measure of accessibility for each individual park.

## **Consistency of Designation Status**

The three parks that received dog free designations this fall, were recommended for this change because other nearby parks would now allow dogs. Essentially, the dog free status was pushed from one park to another in their respective neighborhoods. If change requests remain the

primary method of community input, what is to keep this from happening every review cycle? Constantly moving the location of dog free parks will be confusing for people wanting to use these spaces and will make it less likely that dog owners will adhere to policies if they are constantly changing. A sound methodology for assessing need for these spaces and allocating them throughout the city would greatly diminish the need for annual revisions.

Thank you for considering these requests and outstanding issues with the dog designation process for administering changes.

Respectfully,

Robert Beets  
Secretary, Rolling Meadows Neighborhood  
Association

Becca Beets  
Rolling Meadows resident

Brent Denton  
Oakbridge Neighborhood resident

Janell Denton  
Oakbridge Neighborhood resident

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