

Presentation to Mayor and Council May 12/2008

Your Worship and City Councillors:

My name is Joan Dufour. I am a resident of Steveston and the spokesperson for the Disability Dog Initiative developed by Richmond Responsible Dog Owners Group. I am also a disabled person and have a large assistance dog. I am mobile with the use of canes, crutches and a large outdoor scooter. My dog is trained to go with me everywhere I wish him to go, including accompanying me when I'm using my scooter.

I thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening. I wish to speak about Item 3 at the bottom of Page 3 of the Staff Report, and relevant content in the Dogs In Parks Task Force Report. My statement will take less than 5 minutes.

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Disabled people and even able bodied dog owners find it difficult, and at times impossible, to be responsible dog owners AND comply with the Leash Bylaws 7138,7932 plus Schedule A, and 7321 referring to tickets and fines (which incidentally is missing from the Task Force Report).

The combination of factors that create this situation, some of which are reflected in the Dogs in Parks Task force report, are:

1. There are NO off-leash parks in West Richmond, where the majority of dogs are.
2. Dogs must always be on-leash EXCEPT in an off-leash park (\$100 fine).
3. The seven existing off-leash parks are far away, not very accessible, multiple use and often crowded. There are NO dedicated dog parks in Richmond. There is not one off-leash area in Richmond that I can get to with my scooter. Therefore I have to use the local trails and parks, none of which are off-leash. This means that for me, I'm very limited where I can go to exercise and socialize with my assistance dog. Because I don't wish to be fined, my dog must be leashed to me while I'm on my scooter, which creates a number of dangerous situations.
4. Leash length is restricted to 3 meters but it is impossible for most people to adequately exercise a dog on a leash of that length. Retractable leashes or "lunge lines", which are used by many to help give their dog more space, are almost all longer than 3 meters, which makes them illegal. (\$100 fine).
5. Owners are required by law to exercise their dogs regularly (\$200 fine) but aren't really able to do so outside an "off-leash" Park unless they wish to risk a ticket for either a leash that is too long or having no leash at all.
6. The unfortunate absence of any effective enforcement to curtail dangerous behaviour in off-leash or on-leash areas makes it potentially dangerous for every one, but especially vulnerable people - particularly children, the disabled and elderly. Dangerous dog restriction and dogs running at large provisions do not seem to be enforced (\$500 fine).
7. There are NO exemptions in the bylaw for disabled owners with obedience trained dogs to help alleviate this "Catch 22" situation, even though DisabilityDog has made several submissions to the City regarding the resolution of this problem over the past three years.

8. The DOGS IN PARKS Task Force also rejected the recommendations of DisabilityDog. "Recognition of Exemplary Behaviour" is of no use to us because, while it sounds nice, the meaning is unclear, and it doesn't solve the legal problem.
9. The Dogs in Parks Task Force refers to closure of the West Dyke to dogs. I live on the dyke and exercise my dog on the dyke - one of the very few places I can go with my scooter and not risk being run over by a car. I don't have the choice of going to the off-leash parks as I cannot take my scooter to the parks and I'm not mobile enough to exercise my dog on foot. Closing the dyke would be devastating to me.
10. DisabilityDog believes these are human rights issues, not just a frivolous pet issue. Personally, I've experienced only too well what happens when the "leash law" meets reality. It can be extremely dangerous to be attached by a leash to your dog when your dog is attacked by another dog or the leash is hit by a bicycle. I've got permanent injuries as a result of these experiences and my dog required extra retraining to get over the fear he developed as a result of these experiences. It is part of his job to go with me on my scooter and having a fearful, reactive dog is of no help to me at all.

In conclusion, I ask for your support in the form of an instruction to your staff to include an exemption for disabled owners and certified Good Canine Citizens in their proposed changes. Thank you for listening.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Dufour
Spokesperson, Disability Dog