

The Hoboken Dog Association (HDA) is an all-volunteer non-profit 501(c)(3) community organization founded in 2000. The over 170 HDA volunteers represent local dog owners, veterinary clinics, and other pet-care providers. HDA promotes responsible dog ownership and is committed to assisting local officials in improving the quality of life for Hoboken's (the "City's") dog population.

Hoboken dog owners are uniquely conscientious in training their pets to the benefit of the community. Many of Hoboken's dog population have been trained for certification in the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen Program; a program recognizing dogs who demonstrate good manners. Others have successfully completed the training necessary to become licensed Therapy Dogs. Therapy Dogs and their owners perform a valuable public service by volunteering in programs designed to comfort hospital patients and others struggling with stress and anxiety. Hoboken's responsible dog owners are eager to work with the City to create a more pet-friendly Hoboken.

HDA appreciates the enthusiasm of Mayor Dawn Zimmer, Director Jennifer Wenson-Maier of the Hoboken Department of Environmental Services, and Councilman Peter Cunningham for providing HDA with an opportunity to address the concerns of local dog owners. HDA respectfully submits the following comments for consideration.

Dogs on Grass in Public Parks

Major cities throughout the United States, including New York, Boston and Chicago permit dogs on grass in public parks, with few exceptions. New York and other cities also allow off-leash privileges during off-peak hours. Sadly, with the exception of those residing in the proximity of the Hudson County maintained Columbus Park, local dogs are not afforded the right to enjoy the soft, natural comfort of grass. Rather than enjoying a lounge in the grass, or Hoboken's "Movies Under the Stars" program with their dogs, Hoboken residents must choose between leaving their dogs behind or all together foregoing these activities.

While HDA is not seeking off-leash privileges outside the dog runs, we recommend reconsideration of the unduly restrictive prohibition against dogs on grass in City parks. Those opposed to allowing dogs access to public parks argue that exposure to dog urination will destroy the composition of the grass. However, judging from the quality of grass in Columbus Park, potential damaging effects may be prevented with regular maintenance. In addition, dogs are a known deterrence to geese, whose droppings are a health hazard.

Others argue that dogs should be restricted from grass because owners are not being held accountable for waste left behind. Admittedly, a small population of dog owners is giving responsible dog owners a bad name by not following the rules. However, rather than imposing unfair restrictions on all dog owners, the City should post more signs, step up enforcement actions and impose significant fines on those who fail to clean up after their dogs. Further, HDA will help educate dog owners about their responsibilities.

Additional measures can be made to encourage clean up. Following the example of other municipalities, such as Chandler, Arizona, the City can encourage clean up by posting waste receptacle stations, where residents can recycle used grocery bags for use in collecting dog waste (See Appendix I: Image of waste receptacle station). These stations are much needed in areas located further away from the center of Hoboken.

Dog Runs

Dog runs provide grounds for much needed exercise and should be considered for inclusion in all parks under design. Well-exercised dogs are more adjusted to community living. Dog owners also benefit from the socialization aspect of visiting these runs. Seasoned pet owners are happy to share dog health and wellness tips while sharing the park space with new dog owners. Expecting parents can visit to solicit advice from others who have successfully welcomed a child into a home with an existing pet. Also, for single dog owners, the dog runs foster a sense of community and a nice place to meet other like-minded individuals.

Hoboken's existing dog runs need improvement. Fences surrounding the perimeters of the parks are too low. Large dogs have taken to jumping over fences, while much smaller dogs have escaped through gaps formed in weaker sections of the fencing. The current park benches also pose a threat. Dogs have been injured from running into concrete bench frames, and getting legs caught between the wooden slats of the seats. Worn seats also pose a threat for splinters to dogs and humans alike.

The chief concern to HDA members is, without a doubt, the current surface used in the runs. Left unmanaged, the gravel becomes sparse in vulnerable areas resulting in puddles and patches of mud. Even when replenished, residual dirt clings to a dog's coat leaving it grimy even after brushing. During dry spells and high periods of activity, clouds of dust immerse the air leading many to cough and fear potential health risks.

A suitable alternative to the gravel surface is debatable. Advocates of grass maintain that perennial rye grass has a high resistance to urine and can withstand a heavy flow of traffic. Soft variations of artificial turf are also gaining popularity. A credible example of a dog park successfully using artificial turf is Jackass Acres K-9 Korral, in New River, Arizona. The park, which was named the "the best dog park" in 2010 by Fancy Dog Magazine, uses turf recycled from football stadiums. The park is also credited as being the country's first green dog park, with its method for composting waste, and solar-powered lights and dog washing station.

Finding the best surface for Hoboken's dog runs may be best left to the experts. A task force can be assembled from local veterinarians, trainers and landscapers to determine the most suitable surface and maintenance practices for each dog run.

Funding and Community Outreach

HDA recognizes that upgrading the City's dog runs will be costly. However, the cost can be mitigated by supporting the initiative with money collected from dog licensing fees, and fines associated with failure to comply with dog clean up regulations. Dog owners may be more willing to license their dogs, even at higher dollar amounts, with confidence in knowing the money will be used to benefit their pets. HDA will also help by organizing fundraising initiatives.

Landscape businesses, fence supply contractors, and companies catering to the needs of pets, may be willing to shoulder remaining costs associated with park development and maintenance in exchange for advertising. Additionally, members of the public may wish to donate agility equipment, benches and other park features as a means of memorializing lost pets.

Matching funds and grants can be sought from large companies employing Hoboken residents. Many of these companies encourage employees to engage in community development projects, and may be willing to organize park clean up events here in Hoboken.

HDA Commitment

HDA is committed to providing assistance in helping Hoboken become a more pet-friendly place to live. We look forward to forming a stronger relationship with City Officials in improving the quality of life for dogs in our growing community.

Appendix I: Dog Waste Receptacle Station



A Park Maintenance staff member builds and installs a Dog Waste Station at Quail Haven Park.