

Greetings:

I'm hoping that you can please provide a copy of the following letter (written to the editor of the Ann Arbor Observer) to the Parks Advisory Commission. I'm hopeful that our laws can be changed to reflect how people actually use our park system. Thank you.

My letter to the editor follows:

The Observer's recent article illustrates why I don't plan to own dogs in Ann Arbor after my current dogs pass away. I've had dogs for nearly all of my 56 years on the planet and they have enhanced my life immeasurably. However, the local laws regarding on-leash dogs need to be modified to resolve the perpetual conflict among local park users. The existing laws are simply unrealistic regarding the nature of the human-dog relationship and they take all of the joy out of dog ownership (and the joy out of being a dog, too, I suspect).

A well-behaved dog is a tired dog. A dog in the prime of life simply cannot be tired out on the end of a leash. I've abandoned walking my reliable, friendly dogs off-leash in my neighborhood parks because I'm weary of arguing with strangers. Now, because they aren't being exercised properly, they've taken to barking with their excess energy (another problem that could be ameliorated with inclusive dog-friendly recreation policies).

We should tell the Humane Society to stop the Love Train because our community can't absorb any more dogs effectively. Asking dog owners to burn fossil fuels in the time of the climate crisis to drive to the outskirts of town to walk in circles on a landfill is not a solution. Nor is laboriously taking our pets to another "small fenced area" where humans and dogs are equally bored and marginalized. Dog owners and their dogs are some of the highest frequency users of our fantastic neighborhood parks. Those humans with high-energy dogs are out every day of the year regardless of the weather.

We can and should do better. All Ann Arbor parks need to have posted off-leash hours (I suggest early morning and right after a typical workday). We could consider whether Bird Hills Park could have "off-leash days" (perhaps Monday, Wednesday and Friday, reserving Tuesday, Thursday and the weekends for on-leash visitors). Trash cans for waste disposal should also be prominently located at all park entrances.

Those citizens who can't endure the chance encounter with an off-leash dog greeting an on-leash dog can simply choose an alternate walking route during those predictable times and locations. This isn't rocket science. It's a legitimate shared use for all park users and it can improve everyone's quality of life (dogs included). Given that outdoor socializing is one of the safest means of being together at this isolated point in time, I suggest this easy solution be implemented as soon as possible.

Respectfully,

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