

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Parks & Recreation Committee of Council
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Monday, June 7, 2021 at 6:45 P.M.**

The Chairman, Councilman-at-Large Craig Witherspoon, called the meeting to order.

Committee Members Present:

Chairman, Councilman-at-Large Craig Witherspoon
Ward 3 Councilman Tony Moore, Ward 4 Councilman Scott Radcliffe

Others in Attendance:

Clerk of Council Barb Brooks; Ward 1 Councilman Bob Butkowski; Councilwoman-at-Large Tammy Holtzmeier; Mayor Bryan Jensen; Planning/Economic Development Coordinator Pam Fechter; Kevin Martin, Morning Journal; Reporter-Chronicle; Resident Pat Jankowski, Resident Mary Berges; Ward 2 Councilman Dennis McBride; Council President Brian Fischer; Recreation Coordinator Clare Harasimchuk; Law Director John Gasior; Safety Director Duane Streater; Service Director Mike Farmer; Resident Lucy Greaney

Discussion of Proposed Dog Park at Veterans Memorial Park

Mr. Witherspoon stated that Avon Lake has what he considers to be a great dog park. He went and took pictures of it and had those to show everyone tonight. He then pointed out on the pictures the signs that are up with the rules and regulations for the park, the stone ground surface, the fencing, etc. Mr. Witherspoon said he did a measurement and the park is approximately 160 ft. x 100 ft. There is a double entrance which is important so that when someone opens the gate, the dogs do not get out. There are some toys for the dogs and some equipment such as slides and something like a teeter totter that the dogs can jump on. He had a chance to talk to Avon Lake Councilman Marty O'Donnell and he said there have been no problems. The people generally police themselves if there is an unruly dog, etc. which was a concern that Mr. Witherspoon had. Mr. O'Donnell told Mr. Witherspoon that shade is one of the most important things for a dog park. Water is also very important and owners need a place to sit so benches are necessary. Avon Lake is planning on expanding their dog park and including a shelter to provide cover if a storm comes up. There is another fenced in area in their park which may be for smaller dogs. Mr. Witherspoon talked to a couple of people who were there with their dogs and they said the Avon Lake dog park gets used a lot; there are not that many dog parks around. Mr. Witherspoon said that he did not know of any others in Lorain County.

Mayor Jensen noted that what we are here for tonight is to get a recommendation from the Committee to move this forward. Recreation Coordinator Clare Harasmichuk is going to show you some things we have talked about and things that she has gotten some information on. He said that former Ward 3 Councilwoman Mary Berges was in the audience and she was part of the Parks & Recreation Committee when we did the surveys asking residents what they wanted to see in Avon. A dog park was one of those things and people still ask him as Mayor when we are going to get a dog park. So he would like Council to see what Ms. Harasmichuk has put together and if they feel so inclined to give a recommendation. We will have to come back with budgets and everything that is going to be needed. We want to have a contest for residents to give their ideas for the park, then come back together and show you what the plan is and then Council can formally vote on whether they want to put a certain amount of money in the budget for next year to move that forward.

Ms. Harasimchuk displayed an overview of the area for the proposed dog park and pointed out its location, which is just north of the first baseball field as you come off the main road. It measures 340 ft. x 190 ft. Ms. Harasimchuk has done some research to get an idea of what is necessary for a dog park, and as Mr. Witherspoon said, shade and water are very important. This area shown can take advantage of not just using the actual dog park but will lead to the trails. Mayor Jensen added that there will be a walking trail through the woods and there will be parking up there.

Ms. Harasimchuk stated that Avon Lake has a very nice dog park with many activities. So our idea is to get Avon residents involved for their ideas on what our dog park should include and hopefully we can have something in the budget for next year to move forward.

Mr. Radcliffe said that he thought the contest is a great way to get the community involved in helping us. He thought that the location will be great and being able to connect up two trails and being able to walk through there will be wonderful. He suggested reaching out to the schools with the contest and seeing if they might do a "welcome back to school" thing with asking for designs for the dog park to tie this in with the kids. He felt this will be a great asset for the community.

Mr. Butkowski stated that he has had dogs over the years and has been to many different dog parks and a lot of the things Mr. Witherspoon touched on are important features of a dog park, especially the shade. The proposed location at the Kurtz property at Veterans Park provides mature trees for shade; the other important things are the water and the benches. The only question that he had was the size of this layout. It is about the size of a football field and having dogs run free on that size field, it would be hard to see where they are so maybe the size could be reduced a little bit. He said he likes the size of Avon Lake's park at 100 ft. x 160 ft. or even 200 ft. He would just be afraid of letting his dog go in a park of this large size that is proposed. You want to be able to let your dog go but still be able to see them easily in case something does happen. And he also liked what Avon Lake did with that small section; having a cordoned off area for the smaller dogs to be in that dog park and not be around some of the larger dogs or maybe more aggressive dogs.

Mr. Moore said that he was not opposed to the size of the proposed dog park but maybe we could put compartments inside of that size where there would be a section for climbing and other activities, a section for running, etc. Ms. Harasimchuck agreed that having different compartments is a good idea, especially a space for the smaller dogs.

Mr. Moore asked about liability for the City. What happens if a child is bitten by a dog? He asked Ms. Harasimchuck if she could tell him a little bit about that from other parks. Ms. Harasimchuk responded that she has not looked into that quite yet.

Mr. Witherspoon stated that liability was a concern of his also; liability is always a concern as a City. Councilman O'Donnell said, though, there have been no problems with that at all in Avon Lake. They have a list of 15 rules and each individual is responsible for their dog and for the dog's interacting with other dogs. He said there were no problems with the dog park as far as liability with the City because of the 15 rules that they have. Ms. Harasimchuk stated that we have to have those regulations. Dogs have to be vaccinated, be registered with the County, there will be self-policing, etc.

Mayor Jensen clarified the reason for choosing the size of the dog park that they did is because that is probably the biggest footprint we can have. He does not know if anybody realizes this but we have a lot of people who run their dogs in the grass area of our baseball fields even though we have signs up that

say “no dogs in the baseball fields.” And there are little prizes that they leave for us that our workers have to clean up. So our thought was that in maybe one section of the dog park there will be an area just for letting a dog run, so we wanted to give a footprint that was as big as we could. He is sure that there are going to have to be rules on how many dogs can run in certain areas but again, we just want to give an alternative for letting a dog run. We discussed three different surfaces – grass, turf, or stone in certain areas, but it is going to have to come back to Council to approve whatever comes forward.

Mr. Witherspoon stated that one of the things that he did not even think about is that the senior citizens really appreciate a dog park because in the wintertime they can take the dog to the park if it is not too bad and let the dog go rather than having to walk the dog on the icy sidewalks.

Mr. McBride stated that our parks are not fully ADA compliant right now. We still have stone pathways, we have parking lots that are still stone – and we are talking about a dog park? He knows that people are clamoring for a dog park and he will agree to go along with what the majority of Council wants but personally he feels that we should not spend a dime on this. And let’s assume the costs. Is this going to be half a million dollars with the fences, water, parking, etc.? If we do this, he wants to see signs posted that if somebody lets their dog go into one of those baseball fields, there is a \$1,000 fine. It is just rude and inconsiderate. There was a time when it was difficult for his son to access the playground equipment in our parks if he was using his walker or his wheelchair because of the mulch and we still have mulch in our parks along the playground equipment. If we are 10 years down the road and everything is taken care of in the parks, then great, go for the dog park but we have a lot of capital project needs in this town right now: sidewalks, open ditches, improvements at intersections, etc.

Mr. Witherspoon said that this is just the first step. We do not know what this is going to cost, or what it is going to look like but what has to happen now is for the Parks and Recreation Committee to make a recommendation to move forward with it to look at cost and size, etc. If it gets to a point where we decide we do not want to do it, then that is a separate thing. We are not spending a lot of money right at this point; we are only going to spend a little bit to research a few things.

Mayor Jensen stated that the parks are funded in a different way and also with some of the recycling grant money. Ms. Brooks has been good to file the applications we need to get in every year for the grants and we receive approximately \$30,000 each year. That could go toward benching for the dog park and even some recycled material for turfing. But going back to Mr. McBride’s statement in terms of our parks, this Administration is always willing to look at changing some of the playground surfaces, etc. that have not come into question before. For instance, we have had people saying they cannot get their child around on Every Child’s Playground. He thought that the mulch that we use is ADA compliant but if Council wants to push forward for us to look at some other materials we certainly will do that. We are trying to help as many children as possible. And in regard to the dog park, as you talk to seniors, you realize how important their dogs are to them now that their children are grown. So we are looking for direction of whether we want to move forward with the dog park. It will probably be just like our playgrounds in terms of being a staged or stepped program. His hope is to get it fenced in, get some surface materials down, and then add stages each year, just as we do in our playgrounds. We will spend as much as Council allows us to spend but we want direction as we move forward into next year so we know what Council wants to see moving forward. And if they do not want to see it, that helps us focus on other areas.

Mrs. Holtzmeier stated that the point is taken on ADA accessibility and she supports having multiple surfaces within our parks to allow getting around easier. She added that she also supports the dog park for Avon and moving ahead with it. She said that she has a dog that travels with their family and they

have gone to many dog parks around Ohio and the country and the communities that she observed that did it well for the use of their residents were the ones who put in place a system to make the parks for their residents only. Mrs. Holtzmeier said that she saw a great example in Tiffin where, to release the liability from the City, they created a separate non-profit to run the dog park through a volunteer Board of Directors and had fundraisers. If you are running the park just for the residents, what they have is a registration system with a key fob, so the dog is registered and you know the breed, the type, the owner, and that the dog is up to date on its shots. As part of that registration, there is a small fee for access which goes for the care and upkeep of the dog park itself. Mrs. Holtzmeier said that she has heard with dog parks that complaints generally fall on deaf ears, so you want to have a system where complaints can be addressed. You want to have good insurance in place and you want to have a plan to limit to your residents all the folks that can come so that the park is not overrun. Other than that, it is nice to see that we are discussing this; it is something that has been on the board for awhile. Mrs. Holtzmeier noted that Lucy Greaney, a resident, was in the audience tonight, and Ms. Greaney was responsible a few years ago for submitting this discussion to Council and she and her daughter had an excellent presentation about what that might look like for the City. She asked Ms. Greaney if she wanted to speak tonight.

Lucy Greaney, 3511 Long Road, stated that most of the issues about the dog park have been addressed tonight. One thing that she wanted to mention was that when she went to the dog park in Lakewood in recent years, she noted that people without dogs came to the park just to sit and watch the dogs play and got so much joy out of it. She also described taking her dogs to Avon Lake and how eager they would be when they sensed they were going to the dog park. It really is a good thing. She added that 45 minutes in a dog park is equal to about a 2-mile walk; the dog spends all its energy. She said that she is excited about this and she hopes that most of Council is sold on the idea of at least investigating it.

Mr. Witherspoon thanked Ms. Greaney and asked if there were any other comments from Council or the audience.

Mr. Moore said that he likes the idea of a dog park but he would like to add on to a small piece of what Mr. McBride said. We have been waiting and waiting for activity on the property on Riegelsberger and if this dog park gets done before that gets done, he will be a little disappointed because the Metro Parks has been dragging their feet with the Parks and Recreation and he would like to see that really looked at as well and get that done. How many years has that been now? Four?And we are talking about a dog park and so that is something to think about.

Mr. McBride stated that he was assuming that we are moving forward with this and if we are, he would like to see a couple conditions: we should install cameras near the baseball fields and there should be a fine of at least \$500 if someone cannot pick up after their dog on City property.

Mayor Jensen said that we will have cameras there and electricity there; that would be vital to the going forward there. We do have cameras throughout the park now but that would be specific toward the dog park. He said that Mr. Gasior could briefly speak in terms of the liability that the City might have with the dog park.

Mr. Gasior stated that he has not looked into the liability yet. He generally would think that there would be no liability; it would be an assumption of the risk. We are not providing any concepts of safety – it is an open area, fenced in for your dog to run and it is at your own risk. He could see perhaps if people rely on the fact that it is fenced in and then the fencing is somehow destroyed and a dog gets out, he could see maybe a possibility there but as long as we maintain the park and keep the fence in place, dogs are

there to run and they are at their own risk. He would like to take a look at the rules and see what Avon Lake did but it is probably similar to any playground. We usually do not have any risk when we are involved with recreational activities. Everybody takes their own risks.

Mr. Witherspoon said that we do have the rules from Avon Lake and we also have their ordinances for this and he asked the Clerk to send those to Mr. Gasior.

Mr. Witherspoon called for a vote from the Parks and Recreation Committee to move forward with looking into a dog park, and the vote was: Mr. Moore, "yes"; Mr. Radcliffe, "yes"; Mr. Witherspoon, "yes".

The meeting was adjourned by Mr. Witherspoon at 7:25 P.M.

Transcribed by Gail Hayden, Assistant Clerk of Council