

**CITY OF ALBANY  
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT**

**Agenda date:** November 8, 2012

**TO:** Parks and Recreation Commission

**FROM:** Penelope Leach, Assistant City Manager/Community Services Director

**SUBJECT:** Section B, Memorial Park Ball Field

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**STAFF RECOMMEDATION**

That the Parks and Recreation Commission

- (1) recommend to Council via resolution to Municipal Code 10-4.2 hours when dogs are allowed in Section B that are consistent everyday of the week.(Alternatives are explained in the staff report.)
- (2) recommend language for a Good Neighbor sign to be posted in Section B (Draft language for the Good Neighbor sign is presented in the staff report.)
- (3) recommend to Council via resolution to Municipal Code 10-4.2 that no dogs are allowed on Section A at anytime.

**BACKGROUND**

At the May 10, 2012 Parks and Recreation (PR) Commission meeting residents requested and Commissioners agreed to discuss with the community the possibility of installing benches inside Section B at Memorial Park ball field for the purpose of providing a place to sit while owners allow their dogs to play and exercise. After the May 2012 PR Commission meeting, staff received additional information from residents living near the park regarding concerns pertaining to the condition and use of Section B. Given that the installation of benches may impact the use of the area, a broader discussion regarding current conditions and use of the area was warranted.

At the June 14, 2012, meeting, the Commission discussed with the community concerns regarding the large number of dogs using the park on a regular basis, parking, noise from dog owners and barking dogs, and the deterioration of the turf. Dog owners frequenting Section B also spoke of its popularity for use as a place to exercise and socialize dogs and requested that amenities for dogs be added to the area such as benches, a watering fountain for dogs, and a double gate at the entry on the corner of Carmel and Thousand Oaks. Given that the requests from some neighbors living near the park and the requests from dog owners regarding the use of the area were quite different, staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission agreed to form a Working Group to meet with the City's Dog ad Hoc Committee to brainstorm and discuss

possible solutions for the use and maintenance of Section B. The volunteer working group was comprised of dog owners desiring to develop a program for the area that would mitigate the concerns of the neighbors at the same time keep Section B open for dogs. The Dog ad Hoc Committee met with the Working Group on August 2, 2012 and August 23, 2012.

Recommendations from the group are attached (attachment 1) and were part of the September 2012 Commission packet.

After reading through the recommendations from the working group, at the September PR Commission meeting, the Commission asked staff to provide alternatives for Section B including how the area might be programmed for recreational classes/programs. A list of alternatives was presented to the Commission at the October 2012 meeting. Additional alternatives were added to the list at the October meeting. The list of alternatives and the general outcome of the discussion of each alternative is attached (attachment 2).

At the October meeting, staff was asked to further develop information supporting Alternatives Y and Z to be presented at the November 2012 meeting. Alternatives Y and Z describe changing the hours when dogs are allowed in Section B taking into consideration the recommendations from the Working Group. For example, as mentioned at the October meeting, the Good Neighbor sign and the addition of another garbage can in Section B were part of the suggestions offered from the Working Group. The additional garbage can was placed in Section B on Monday, October 15, 2012.

## **DISCUSSION**

Given the differences between those wanting Section B to remain available for dogs and the requests from nearby neighbors that no dogs, or very limited access for dogs, be allowed on the field, the Commission was diligent in ensuring that all requests and concerns were heard, discussed, and considered. This has been an emotional issue that has included the feeling that residents and park users' quality of life has been or could be negatively impacted. For the dog advocates, not having a place to create community with other dog owners while exercising and socializing their dogs, and for the nearby residents who feel the increase in noise and activities of the dogs and dog owners as well as the deterioration of the turf has decreased home values and made living near the park a burden. The number of park users who want the area to remain open for dogs far outnumber the residents who want the dog activity diminished or stopped all together; however, the concerns of the neighbors and their recommendations are as valid and valued as a part of the decision-making process as are the concerns and recommendations of the dog advocates. For this reason, and because no consensus has been reached, the process has taken time in an effort for all parties to have a voice and to have all parties recommendation's considered.

As requested by the PR Commission at the October 2012 meeting, staff has provided more information and recommendations for a combination of Alternatives X and Y. There are at least four items that need to be considered as the Commission works through developing a course of action:

- (1) Enforcement: Times when dogs are allowed in the area needs to be clearly stated. All enforcement of the hours must be handled by the Albany Police Department (APD) as APD officers are the only City personnel with the authority to enforce the City's municipal codes. As stated at a previous meeting, the Working Group suggested self-monitoring, which is encouraged; however, should situations arise when self-monitoring is not remedying a situation, APD would need to be called.
- (2) Surface and Maintenance: Staff is recommending grass continue to be the surface in Section B. More information regarding surfaces is provided later in the staff report. With this option, the grass will require more yearly maintenance. Staff investigated renovating the grass and it will cost approximately \$2,000 each year to reseed and regenerate the grass. Additionally, Section B would need to be closed for approximately three months each year to give the grass time to regenerate. The fields in Albany are closed for approximately two months each year for annual maintenance and to rest the grass. The fields are typically closed from the last Monday in November to the first Monday in February. Staff anticipates that the grass in Section B, due to heavy dog traffic will likely need more time for renovation; therefore, with this option, Section B may need to be closed from approximately the last Monday in November to the first Monday in March. This timeframe is an approximation given that weather conditions vary each year as well as the condition of the grass when the renovation process begins each year.
- (3) Hours: Enforcement will be less impactful for officers if the hours are the same everyday and require the fewest number of closures and openings. For this reason, allowing dogs on Section B from 8:00am – 7:00pm, seven days a week is one alternative. Another alternative is to have sessions each day closing Section B during the middle of the day. The morning session could be 8am-11am and the afternoon evening session could be 3pm-7pm, seven days per week. Both options were discussed with the Police Chief and both of these options are acceptable with the 8:00am-7:00pm being preferred.
- (4) Good Neighbor Sign: Draft language (Pending final approvals, signs labeling Section A and Section B will be installed.) AMC = Albany Municipal Code
  1. Dogs are permitted in Section B from ??? to ???. (AMC 10-4.2b)
  2. Dogs must be under the control of their handler at all times. (AMC 10-4.2a)
  3. Handlers must clean-up after dog(s) under their control and deposit feces in the containers provided. (AMC 10-3.2)
  4. Handlers must fill any holes dug by dogs under their control with the mix provided.
  5. Handlers are responsible for any injuries caused by the dog(s) under their control.
  6. Users of the facility do so at their own risk.
  7. No personal belongings such as bowls, toys, and chairs may be left in the park. (AMC 8-4.7g)
  8. Dogs who become aggressive must be removed immediately.
  9. No continuous barking.
  10. No unneutered/unspayed dogs.
  11. No female dogs in heat are allowed

The items suggested for the Good Neighbor sign are a combination of suggestions from the working group and staff.

**Follow-up from questions to staff and the Commission  
regarding the maintenance of Section B**

Maintenance of Section B: Staff has been working with Albany Little League to update the contract between the City of Albany and Albany Little League for field maintenance services. One alternative being considered is to separate the maintenance agreement into Section A and Section B, listing specific responsibilities for City staff and contractors for each section. Staff will continue to work with Little League and the contractors to implement a plan that improves maintenance and does not increase costs to the City.

Irrigation system: As part of the discussion with the Working Group, the Group suggested changing the hours when Section B is watered. One suggestion was to water late at night so that grass would be less wet in the morning. The optimum time to start watering is early morning such as 3:30 AM or later. Watering in the late evening is not ideal since plants do not photosynthesize in the dark; therefore, water is wasted or water sits on the plants roots and may cause fungal problems. As for the request for volunteers from the working group to have a hose to access water to take care for the dry spots, a quick coupler (QC) was suggested. Quick couplers come in various sizes ½", ¾", 1"; and they all have specific quick coupler keys that turn the water on. There is an adapter that goes onto the key often with a hose bib (faucet) also attached. This enables one to screw on a hose. The parts are all brass and cost over one hundred dollars. The City is not in the practice of loaning them out. Moreover, given that the parts are made with brass they typically disappear if left or stored on the field.

Staff met with contractors regarding the irrigation system, the condition of the grass, and the changes that need to be made to improve the condition of the grass. The report from the contractor is as follows:

The attachment (attachment 3) is what we found and areas that are either not getting water or getting reduced water are shown as hatched lines. There is a minor area near the entrance. There is another minor area near the middle double gate and there is an area that is larger which is being covered by only one rather than two sprinklers. We can adjust the head so the entry gets watered but I'm not sure you want that. We can also adjust the water near the double gate but that would throw water on the practice pitching mound but I'm not sure you want that either. Finally, we did adjust the one head so an area gets double covered but single coverage isn't a serious issue as there are many areas of many fields that only get single coverage.

So looking at the above, whatever concerns have been raised about the areas within B not

getting watered are minor at best. There is nothing going on with the watering pattern or functional operation of the heads that is causing any major problems.

The concept of a part-time dog park part-time playing field is not an option. You will have to choose one. The reason for this is that if you walk area B you will notice lots of level changes. It's not flat. It's not flat because of dog activity taking the soil below grade and thick thatched grass areas adjacent to dirt areas, also a result of dog activity. For safety, playing fields need to be flat. In order for this to happen, there needs to be a consistent grass coverage across the field or alternatively no grass coverage. It takes several years for planted grass to develop a thickness. A newly planted area adjacent to an established area will be lower. We are able to achieve this flatness over time on playing fields, despite established areas, because we level the difference with fine screened top dressing. This top dressing biodegrades over time so as the new grass gets thicker, the top dressing gets thinner. This takes months. In severe areas, we actually use a special mix which isn't very hospitable to rapid grass growth (12 months to cover rather than 12 weeks) but is very stable and doesn't degrade.

However, the confined area of the dog park means that even if it gets planted once a year and it gets full coverage, it won't take long for the dogs to destroy the newly planted areas. Because of this, the grass will never get established, never develop a root system strong enough to withstand the dog punishment and hold the soil in place. If a field that had a three year root system destroyed in a year of dog activity, a field that has a three month root system will likely be gone in three to six months.

We can certainly start the experiment late November and see what transpires but I'm not very optimistic that anyone is going to be happy with what they are looking at six months after the city spends \$2000 to fix things.

City staff is recommending, for the time being, that grass remain the surface in Section B and that the irrigation system be modified so that the need for keeping a hose for volunteers is not needed. Staff is considering re-configuring the irrigation system so that there is head-to-head coverage and an exact precipitation rate is applied consistently. The cost of modifying the irrigation system is approximately \$1,000.

Other surfaces have been explored such as artificial grass made specifically for dog parks (K9 Grass), mulch, wood chips, decomposed granite, and sand. Each of these surfaces is used in dog parks and each has pros and cons. Moreover, aesthetics need to be strongly considered when considering changing the surface. Staff does not have expertise in all surfaces used in dog parks; however, the information gathered thus far includes the following. Should the PR Commission or Council wish to pursue a surface other than grass, staff will provide additional information.

Artificial Turf: With artificial turf there are no air benefits, no soil improvement, and although Albany is relatively cool year-round, artificial turf does get hotter than turf. There are as many

articles stating that artificial grass is not a health risk as there are that state artificial turf is a health risk. This option would cost approximately \$5-\$15 per square foot, or a total of \$75,000 to \$225,000 to cover all of Section B. Section B is approximately 15,000 square feet. The life of artificial turf is approximately 10-15 years. After the life of the turf, the turf needs to be replaced and the old turf would need to be disposed of which would be an additional cost.

Mulch vs Wood Chips: Bark mulches usually come from evergreen trees, including fir, pine, redwood and spruce. Bark mulch is often used as an ornamental mulch due to its attractiveness, low-cost and density. The heavier bark chunks do not blow away as easily. Finer bark granules and shredded bark breakdown more quickly than bark chunks so are often worked into soil beds to provide aeration instead of being used as a mulch. Mulch would be dusty, most of the year. The irrigation system could water the area to hold the dust down; however, with mulch there can be fungal problems which may not be the healthiest choice for the dogs.

With wood chips, the main concern is odor and aesthetics. Those living near the park have already expressed concerns about the added fence, batting cage, and deteriorating turf. Wood chips are not expensive, usually free, but would require maintenance and replacement. Wood chips come from a variety of trees, including both hardwood and softwood varieties. Most wood chips for landscape use come from removed trees that have been run through a chipper. Wood chips weather more quickly than bark and do not remain attractive as long. Wood chips also decompose more quickly than bark.

Bark mulch is preferable over wood chips if cost is not an issue, since bark must be purchased and wood chips are usually available for free or at a low cost. The cost of mulch would be approximately \$24,000; \$12,000 for the mulch and another \$12,000 for site prep and installation.

Sand and granite are also used in dogs parks. Sand is not a feasible option due to hygiene concerns, cost, and replacement. Decomposed granite creates a dusty environment and is costly to install.

### Next Steps

The City Council has agreed to agendaize Section B on December 3, 2012. Recommendations concerning changes in City policy, ordinances, and resolutions are approved by Council. Commissions/Committees/Working Groups/Task Forces are advisory groups. Council is also responsible for approving all contract changes. Changing the irrigation system and modifying maintenance practices that do not significantly impact budget or staffing are handled by City staff.

Pending recommendations from the PR Commission and pending changes approved by Council, staff will implement changes during the time period that the field is closed for maintenance.