

# TOWN OF ARLINGTON

Joseph Connelly  
Director of Recreation



## PARK COMMISSIONERS

Leslie Mayer  
Shirley Canniff  
Donald Vitters  
Jim Robillard  
Jen Rothenberg

## Recreation Department

### M E M O

TO: Arlington Board of Selectmen

FROM: Joseph Connelly, Director of Recreation  
Leslie Mayer, Park & Recreation Commission Chair

DATE: March 21, 2012

SUBJECT: Article 24 PRC Comment

#### **Introduction**

At their February 14<sup>th</sup> and March 13<sup>th</sup> meetings, the Park and Recreation Commission reviewed and discussed the proposal for limited off-leash hours in the evenings put forward by ten register voters, known as Article 24. The Commission feels that it could support this article provided the language in the bylaw allows for additional restrictions and exclusions to be placed on the evening hours proposed. That was the approach taken with morning off-leash hours, where the activity is allowed on "*lands under control of the Park and Recreation Commission except: A. those lands directly contiguous to school properties; B. within 15 feet of playground equipment; C. by specific exclusion of the Park and Recreation Commission.*"

#### **Assumptions**

With this as a starting point, it is anticipated that all playgrounds; all school department properties (including, but not limited to, W.A. Peirce Field); all conservation properties (including, but not limited to, Mt. Gilboa); all Town and community gardens (including Town Hall gardens, Magnolia & Robbins Farm gardens); all enclosed youth baseball fields and tennis courts; and several other Park & Recreation parks and fields would continue to have *no* morning or evening off-leash hours.

#### **Plan for Evening Hours**

It would be the intent of the Commission to then look at properties where morning off-leash activity is currently allowed and to further restrict evening off-leash hours in a manner consistent with the principles that were applied to restrict morning off-leash hours. In its attempt to balance a variety of public needs and uses, the Commission believes that it is necessary to evaluate each property for its current uses at the time of day proposed and its appropriateness for introducing evening off-leash hours. The Commission would look at the potential for environmental damage, public health or safety risks, conflict with other permitted uses or other known issues with the way a property is used by other park users.

In looking at these locations, proximity to playing fields, during spring, summer and fall months, and proximity to playgrounds would be considered. It is expected that there would be limitations related to seasonal use and specific location exclusions. The exact limitations and restrictions would be implemented by the Commission after an open, transparent, public process. It is very important to the Commission that any plan proposed receive extensive public input and comment.

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### **Impact of Fenced OLRA**

This spring the Town will finish construction of its first fenced off-leash recreation area (OLRA) at Thorndike Field. The Thorndike OLRA is an exciting new recreational amenity for the Town made possible by the generous funding support of the Stanton Foundation. Located in East Arlington, off the bike path, it is expected to be a destination park that will serve the needs of many, but not all, in the community.

While the exact hours of operation of the OLRA have yet to be formally voted, evening hours will be available. The Commission has made the commitment that when an OLRA is built off-leash hours will be removed from surrounding properties. The Commission has already voted that off-leash hours will be eliminated from the rest of Thorndike Field and at Magnolia Park/Field, when the Thorndike OLRA is operational. It is hoped that in the future additional fenced OLRA's will be built in other areas of town. However, this is a long-term solution due to the many competing capital priorities for parks, playgrounds and playing fields.

### **Conclusion**

The Commission recognizes that, while evening off-leash hours present certain challenges, it is a need that has been raised repeatedly by members of the community. At the one year public review of the off-leash dog bylaw, it was a major focus of the discussion. The Commission believes that if Article 24 is passed by Town Meeting then implementation is very workable.