



MEMORANDUM

Phone: 452-5258

Date: December 21, 2012

To: Parks & Community Services Board

From: Glenn Kost, Planning & Development Manager

Subject: Priority Use of the Robinswood Tennis Center Off-Leash Corral

At your October 9 meeting, Cherie Carchano raised objections to a recent change in use to the Robinswood off-leash corral behind the tennis center, stating that the change prevented her from using this facility that she and her miniature horse had been using for over 40 years. You asked us to look into the situation and report back.

We have completed our study and have implemented a change to accommodate Ms. Carchano and her horse that also provides more certainty to the off-leash community. A copy of that report is attached, along with a series of emails received. All emailers were notified of our actions and provided a copy of the report.

Attachments



MEMORANDUM

To: Shelley McVein, Deputy Director
Patrick Foran, Director

From: Glenn Kost, Planning & Development Manager

Date: December 20, 2012

Re: Robinswood Off-Leash Area Change in Use

Issue

At the October 9 Park Board meeting, Ms. Cherie Carchano objected to a recent change in the corral behind the tennis center at Robinswood Park, eliminating the priority use for horses. She explained that she and her miniature horses have been using this facility for 40 years, and that horses had been granted priority use of the arena for many years. However, when the horse priority sign was removed, the corral changed to a “dogs only” facility. Ms. Carchano asked why the usage was changed, and if there had been any advanced notice prior to removing the sign. Speaking later in the meeting, Mr. James Goodnow expressed a similar concern, hoping that a solution could be found that allowed both horses and dogs to utilize the facility. The Park Board asked the staff to investigate the situation and report back. The “Horses Have Priority” sign was restored pending the outcome of this report. Since the October Park Board meeting, several comments have been received on this issue (see attached).

Early History of the Robinswood Park Corrals (1973 – mid-2000’s)

The majority of Robinswood Park was acquired by the City in 1970. The corral south of the Tennis Center was constructed in 1972/3 as a horse corral in response to the presence of area equestrian facilities and nearby horse ownership. Use of this facility was infrequent, but diminished greatly as nearby equestrian facilities closed and area horse ownership declined. The City constructed the corral near 148th Ave NE in 1991, also as a horse corral, in order to conduct equestrian programs, which occurred only for one season.

As off-leash dog facilities gained popularity in the 90’s, the use of both corrals transitioned into off-leash dog areas. Recognizing this shift in use, signage was installed at the Tennis Center corral in the mid-90’s identifying it as an off-leash facility, and a “*Horses Have Priority*” sign was placed nearby that recognized its historical purpose. Use here remained minimal throughout the 1990’s and early 2000’s, and uses co-existed without incident.

During this time, the use of the 148th Avenue off-leash corral increased. Modest improvements were made to accommodate dogs, and eventually signage was installed in the late-90’s to formalize a second off-leash area. The 148th Street facility quickly became more popular than the Tennis Center facility due to its high visibility and nearby parking, and it remains so today.

Recent Use & Off-Leash Planning (mid-2000's – present)

As the use of off-leash dog facilities continued to grow throughout the region, so has the use of both Robinswood corrals. Recently, users have distinguished these facilities unofficially as the “large/active dog area” at 148th and the “small/passive dog area” behind the Tennis Center.

For several years, reservations were accepted to allow for the exclusive use of the Tennis Center corral for a fee, and it was reserved mainly for dog obedience classes and “meet-ups” of similar dog breeds. The increasing popularity of this corral created a significant number of conflicts between “drop-ins” and “reserved users,” because most reserved use is incompatible with general drop-ins. For example, dog obedience classes are difficult to conduct while nearby dogs are not under voice control. Similarly, dogs and horses are incompatible, creating safety concerns for both animal and owner. As a result, the reservation system was discontinued in 2010, restoring it to a drop-in only facility, but retaining the horse priority. The 148th Street facility has always been a drop-in-only facility.

Responding to numerous requests for additional off-leash facilities in Bellevue, the staff completed a study in 2009 that identified the need for additional off-leash facilities Citywide. That study recommended expanding both corrals at Robinswood as off-leash facilities. The Robinswood Park Off-Leash Expansion Plan was developed and adopted by City Council in 2011 as part of the Airfield Park Master Plan. One of the plan features is to create a separate corral adjacent to the Tennis Center corral to accommodate reserved use concurrent with drop-in use.

Current Situation & Initial Action

In recent months, the staff has received complaints from off-leash Tennis Center corral users that they had been asked to leave the corral in favor of a single horse and owner, creating a situation where one horse and owner enjoyed priority over a large number of dogs and owners. These conflicts have only occurred late on Saturday mornings, which is a very popular off-leash period and the only time Ms. Carchano walks her miniature pony.

The staff looked at the current uses and trends at this facility and off-leash areas in general. As reflected throughout the historical footnotes above, off-leash use is on the rise throughout the area, with similar patterns experienced at both Robinswood corrals. Equestrian uses in Bellevue, except for small pockets such as Bridle Trails, are historical relicts. Nearby equestrian facilities have closed and horse-ownership that prompted the construction of the tennis center corral no longer exists. Long-time park staff whose responsibilities include Robinswood Park report never having seen a horse at either Robinswood facility. The staff concluded that continuing to allow horses the priority use of an increasingly popular off-leash area in Bellevue no longer made sense. The sign was therefore removed, with the intent that the corral be a drop-in only facility that allowed horses, but without special privileges. The sign was later restored pending the outcome of this report. No public notice was provided when the signs were originally installed, or when they were removed.

Options

Removing the horse priority sign eliminates horses altogether from Robinswood because both off-leash rules signs state “*for dogs only.*” Our intent was not to eliminate horses, but to create a drop-in facility that allowed horses, but granted no special privileges. This does not accommodate Ms. Carchano’s horse because horses and dogs are incompatible, so if dogs already occupied the corral, or arrived while she was there, conflicts would persist.

Many options were discussed with Ms. Carchano to accommodate her horse, while also trying to recognize the corral’s increasing popularity as an off-leash area. She indicated that she typically uses this facility less than one hour/week on Saturdays from 11am - noon:

- A. Horses retain priority use at all times (No change). This accommodates Ms. Carchano, but does not solve existing conflicts or respond to the use trends.
- B. Limit horse priority to 1-hr/week during non-peak off-leash use. An early weekend morning (say 9 or 9:30am) or a weekday time period was suggested because off-leash use is low, conflicts would be minimized, and signage would alert users. She explained that only late weekend mornings work because of her schedule and her horse's feeding schedule.
- C. Limit horse priority to 1-hr/week on Saturdays 11am-noon. This accommodates Ms. Carchano, honors her historical use and alerts dog-owners of the restricted time, but displaces the existing off-leash users. However, the nearby 148th Street facility is still available if this is the only convenient time for dog owners.
- D. Use Bridle Trails State Park. With 28 miles of horse trails and fenced corrals dedicated to the equestrian community, this nearby 462-acre state park seems like a logical option. However, Ms. Carchano explained that the State Park corrals contain a thick sand surface unsuitable for her miniature horse.
- E. Use Kelsey Creek Farm. Annamarie Solomonson, Manager at Kelsey Creek, spoke with Ms. Carchano about her needs and concerns, and about utilizing Kelsey Creek Farm's facilities. This option is not recommended because of the potential to introduce disease into the farm.
- F. Expand the Tennis Center corral. The adopted long-range plan expands this facility and creates a separate reservable space concurrent with Airfield Park phase 1 development. However, accelerating those plans would require \$100-200,000 in unbudgeted funds.
- G. Divide the corral into two spaces. Prior to implementing the long-range expansion plans, a temporary fence could be constructed to divide the existing corral into two equal spaces at a cost of less than \$3,000. It would continue to be used as a single space most of time, but gates would allow for reserved use. The smaller spaces would accommodate most existing uses, as this has generally become the small/passive dog corral. Reservations could be reintroduced for half the space, with the remainder available at all times for drop-in use.

Recommendation

OPTION C. Limiting horses to a specific 1-hour period each week accommodates Ms. Carchano, recognizes her historical use of the facility, and allows the larger off-leash community to enjoy the unrestricted use of this facility at all other times. This option simply requires a change to the existing sign that would now read: "*Horses Have Priority Saturdays from 11am – noon.*" We will proceed with this option.

Emails regarding Dogs and Horses at Robinswood

From:

Sent: Friday, October 12, 2012 1:45 PM

To: Harvey, Nancy

Subject: Re: response to your oral communications at park board

Hi Nancy,

Thank you for your response.

My frustration is that it doesn't appear that the request to take down the "horses have priority" sign had to go through so many hoops or take so much time (and completely without notice) but in order to get information that led to that decision is more troublesome. Also, the current use of the horse arena is now in an ambiguous state. When I ask the people at the City if horses can still use the arena on a first come first serve basis they say yes but the signage that is currently at the horse arena states Dogs Only... keeping in mind that the dog only sign has been there along side the Horses Have Priority" for years. When we have been at the arena first, the dog owners have tried to make us leave they have taken on a bully mentality in front of the 7 year old child riding the horse.

Is there anyone that I can speak with to get some answers sooner rather than latter in order to try and mitigate the dog owner/horse rider war that has now begun?

Cordially,

Cherie Carchano

From: Jane Bobbit

Sent: Sunday, November 04, 2012 2:58 PM

To: Parksweb

Subject: Robinswood dog park

Just a note to support changing the policy of priority for horses at the Robinswood dog park. This issue is the cause of much conflict that is not getting any better. The people with dogs were once again forced to leave so one person with a horse could use the corral. This person says she has used this corral for 50 years! (although no one has seen her there for at least the past five years). And it may be true that she used it as a child and young adult. However, Bellevue is certainly not the rural place it was then. It has become much more urban, and people with horses now use the horse-friendly and lovely corrals in Bridal Trails. There has a been a demographic shift. I think the parks policies should reflect this shift.

Also her insistence on using the corral at a time a fairly large established group of dog owners have been meeting for the past five years, cannot help but cause conflict. There is no reason one person should have priority over anyone else. There has never been another horse seen in the area in recent times. We all value our time and enjoy downtime with our pets, we want this conflict to end.

Please give consideration to this plea.
Jane Bobbitt

From: Natalie Weinstein
Sent: Sunday, November 04, 2012 7:16 PM
To: Parksweb
Subject: Horses

NO PRIORITY for horses at the small dog corral at Robinswood Park.
Natalie Weinstein

From: Sandy Klein
Sent: Tuesday, November 06, 2012 1:06 PM
To: Parksweb
Subject: Off leash dog park

Hi! I have a year old puppy and last spring when I learned about the off leash dog park at Robinswood Park I was so excited. How luck to have one just for small dogs. It's the only one in Bellevue. I go there almost every day around 11am. I was surprised to learn that horses have priority over dogs at this park, especially when Bridle Trails is available to horses. On Saturday, when a lot of working people have the opportunity to take their small dogs to this off leash park, there has been a problem with one lady who brings her horse sometime between 11 and 12, when the small dogs get together. Anywhere between 10-15 dogs have to leave for this one horse. Several of us have asked her if she could come at another time, but my understanding is her schedule revolves around the horse's feeding schedule.

It was great when you had new signs made giving dogs priority, but now that has change again. Please make this Off Lease dog park area so dogs have priority.

I understand there is some kind of meeting on the 19th to discuss this issue. Is this open to the public? If so, I would appreciate getting more information on the time and location so I can have some small dog owners come to have a say. Thanks!

Sandy Klein 5865 155th Ave SE Bellevue,WA 98006 425-643-6523

From: wendy kaehler
Sent: Sunday, November 11, 2012 7:57 PM
To: Parksweb
Subject: dogs and horses at Robinswood

To whom it may concern,

I am writing about the small corral at Robinswood Park behind the tennis courts. I would like to advocate that horses not be given priority since dogs are using the facility far more and it is frustrating to have multiple dog owners have to evacuate the area for one horse.

Thank you for your consideration.
-Wendy Kaehler
16711 SE 30th ST
Bellevue, WA 98008

From: Dan Tripp
Sent: Thursday, November 15, 2012 4:44 PM
To: Parksweb
Subject: Robinswood Corral

Hello,

Last week when I took my dog to the Robinswood corral, a woman who was there with her dog gave me your email address and said you were soliciting input about the policy giving horses priority at the corral. Here are my thoughts.

I take my dog to the Robinswood corral every couple weeks, more often in the summer. I don't live near the park, so I have to drive. I've found the Robinswood corral to be the best local place to take my dog because: 1) it's fully enclosed, 2) my dog is medium-sized and the other dogs tend to be medium or small as well, and 3) the grass surface is generally in good condition so my dog gets less dirty than in other parks. There's a group of owners of small dogs who meet at the park around 11:00 each day and I try to go then so my dog will have playmates. This summer there were several times when there was a woman giving pony rides or lessons to a girl, and the dogs had to leave because of the policy giving horses priority. The pony arrived around 11:00 on Saturdays and left around 30 minutes later. Last Saturday, November 10, I took my dog to Robinswood. In case the pony was at the corral at 11:00, I arrived later, around 11:40. When I arrived I counted 18 dogs in the corral. A woman informed

me that they were expecting the horse at 12:00, so the dogs would have to leave by then. As noon approached most of the owners took their dogs and left, although a few more arrived as well. At around 12:15 the pony, woman, and girl arrived so the remaining dogs left the corral. I asked the woman how long she expected to stay. She answered around 20 minutes, so I decided to walk my dog around the park and return to the corral after the horse left. A short time later as I was walking my dog I saw the horse and riders leave the corral. Perhaps it was due to the cool weather, but the pony riding lasted less than 10 minutes. For this, over 20 dogs and their owners left the corral and went home.

I recognize that the corral provides a safe and convenient place for horse riding and lessons. However, it's a real problem for dog owners that horses have priority at all times, so you never know when you might have to leave the corral. I know of at least four groups of dog owners that organize regular dog get-togethers at the corral through meetup.com. These meetups are usually scheduled for mid-day on weekends and can attract 30 to 40 dogs. These groups can no longer reserve the corral and are subject to being evicted without advance notice if a horse happens to show up at the same time. Dog owners are becoming frustrated with the policy.

My suggestion is to maintain the horse priority policy, but only for certain hours. I suggest horses have priority until 10:00 or 11:00 in the morning, and not after. That way a dog group can come to the corral at 11:00, say, and know they will not have to leave because a horse arrives.

Thanks for considering this input. I hope you will update the usage policy to recognize the large number of dog owners who take advantage of the excellent facility at Robinswood.

Regards,

Dan Tripp

From: Kost, Glenn
Sent: Friday, December 21, 2012 10:30 AM
To: janebobbit1@-----; natanya45@-----; sdandyaklein@-----;
wakaehler@-----; dan@-----
Subject: Robinswood off-leash corral

You had recently contacted us expressing frustration with the situation at the Robinswood Park off-leash coral behind the tennis center. Specifically, you questioned whether a very limited number of horses should continue to enjoy the priority use of this facility at all times over an increasing number of dogs. We have looked into the situation, and agree that a change is needed. Starting in early January, horses will only have the priority use of this facility one-hour each week, from 11am to noon on Saturdays. This recognizes the historical use of the facility by horses, but provides certainty to the off-leash community to enjoy the unrestricted use of the facility all remaining times. A new sign will be installed to reflect this change. We apologize for the inconvenience, and hope this helps to alleviate some of the recent conflicts and confusion.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Glenn Kost
Planning & Development Manager
Parks & Community Services
425-452-5258



