

Council Votes to Allow Dogs in Parts of Parks

Pets will be allowed on paved surfaces only.

By Laura Sullivan

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The Norcross City Council voted 4-to-1 in favor of updating the city ordinance that bans dogs from parks. They've decided to allow pets on the paved areas—and agreed to revisit the issue in six months.

Advocates of having pets in the city greenspaces are calling it a step in the right direction.

“In an effort to reach a compromise, what I’m proposing is dogs in the paved parts only,” said Councilmember Charlie Riehm, who brought the motion before the Council. All Councilmembers voted in favor except Ross Kaul.

Councilmember Andrew Hixson offered his own motion before the vote, which would allow dogs in all areas of the parks, but it was not seconded by any other councilmember, so it was stopped in its tracks.

“I would like to commend Council,” said Gordon Tomlinson, who runs a downtown business and has been vocal about lifting the ban. “I think it would benefit Norcross in general,” he said, mentioning that many people bring dogs into the city for festivals and activities—and this would keep them coming.

Riehm mentioned in his memo that he had heard from several citizens about the issue, with some saying that the ordinance does not “fit the city’s image for ‘live, work, play’” and that it might discourage younger people from moving to the area.

The debate over allowing pets in city parks has been divisive. On July 11 the City Council voted to uphold the ordinance on dogs in parks, spurring a slew of responses from the media and from citizens.

Riehm argues that waste will be more evident on the sidewalk than in the grass—an advantage for citizens trying to self-police the situation. Connie Weathers, chair of Sustainable Norcross, questioned in the safety of allowing dogs only on the impervious surfaces in a public comment, however.

“It used to be recommended that you ‘curb’ your dog,” she said, referring to the practice of letting dogs go on the sidewalk. But, she says, it has since been determined that the waste causes issues with stormwater, flowing more directly into streams.

An issue echoed by officials and citizens is that the system would need to be relatively self-policing.

“Citizens would need to be alert about who’s not abiding,” said Tomlinson in his comment. The issue of enforcement is still a question mark. Some say the ordinance is unenforceable, in any case.

Another piece of the puzzle seems to be the receptacles for dog walkers—residents want more of them and more convenient locations, as one Sunset Hills resident pointed out in the public comments and as Riehm noted in his memo.

The Council agreed to bring this issue up with the staff, but mentioned that it isn't really possible to work into an ordinance.