

To Leash or Not to Leash

By Søren D. Simonsen

Of the many controversial issues that have come before the city council recently, almost none has elicited greater response or more differing opinions than allowing pets virtually unrestricted “off-leash” use of the Parley’s Historic Nature Park—commonly referred to by its more popular name “The Gulch.” A walk in the park on any given day shows clear evidence of why such a place was needed. At almost any hour, on almost any day—inclement weather not excepting—the park is full of nature lovers, walkers, hikers, and joggers of every size, shape, age and ability—and their pets.

Because of the many conflicts that we have had and continue to have with pets off their leashes in all corners of the city, creating this and other off-leash parks has been critical to meeting the needs of one of our largest single user groups of our outdoor spaces. The off-leash area of Parley’s Park is more than double the area of all other off-leash dog parks in the city combined.

The majority of support from the council allowed for creating this sizeable off-leash park last summer, followed shortly afterward by the funding for a much smaller off-leash penned area in Pioneer Park now under construction. These actions will undoubtedly lead us, as a community, to establish other off-leash areas to serve this growing group of park users. The intensive use of all of our dog parks presents many challenges in addressing environmental concerns of our more sensitive natural areas, and in general maintenance and upkeep of all of these parks.

Another of the actions of the council last summer was to substantially increase funding for additional enforcement of our pet ordinances, including laws about where and when pets can be off leash. With the exception of designated areas in parks and private yards, pets must always be on their leashes. Dog owners beware!

Enforcement of leash laws, along with many other animal services, is provided under contract with Salt Lake County Animal Services. Recent comments to the council from pet owners who have been issued citations for not following this ordinance suggest that the additional enforcement is in full swing. It may be reasonable to assume that as designated off leash continue to expand, so will enforcement for illegal off-leash activity.

If you have additional questions about animal laws and enforcement services, please visit the Salt Lake County Animal Services web site (www.slcoanimalservices.org), or call 801-269-7499.

If you have ideas of how to improve our pet laws and services, or to expand our dog parks in Salt Lake City, please feel free to email me (soren.simonsen@slcgov.com) or call the city council office (801-535-7600) to share your thoughts.

If you'd like to sign up to receive our weekly District 7 email newsletter, with regular updates on city council activity, including dog parks, pet ordinances, other useful information, please visit the council web site (www.slcgov.com/council/D7).