



Post-Juan park restrictions anger dog owners

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Since the closure of Point Pleasant Park, one of only two off-leash parks in the HRM, dog owners have no choice but to let their dogs off illegally.

By: Jennifer Nichols
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Joan Sinden used to walk her dogs in Point Pleasant Park. When Hurricane Juan destroyed the park in late September, she had to find a new place to take them. The Halifax resident says she soon realized that would be harder than she expected.

Before the hurricane, there were only two parks in the Halifax Regional Municipality where dog owners could let their dogs off of their leashes. Now, with Point Pleasant Park closed indefinitely, Seaview Park is the only one that remains.

Sinden says Seaview is a different kind of park than Point Pleasant, and she doesn't like bringing her dogs there.

"My dogs go there and play with other dogs instead of chasing squirrels and sniffing trees," she says. "They have had to completely re-learn how to relate to other dogs."

Sinden says since the storm, she and many other dog owners have had to let their dogs off at closed and on-leash parks.

"Dogs need to get exercise, so it's got to be done," she says.

She adds she has four large dogs, making it difficult to keep them on their leashes.

Sinden says she thinks the city could designate more areas as off-leash, so dog owners wouldn't have to sneak around.

"There are a lot of places that aren't as devastated as Point Pleasant was," she says.



Joan Sinden used to take her dog, Charlie, to Point Pleasant Park. Now that the park is closed, the number of places she can let his run without a leash are limited.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

No easy solution

Parks in the Halifax Regional Municipality

- Point Pleasant Park
- Waterfront
- Northwest Arm Shoreline
- Great Neighbourhood Parks

John O'Brien, Corporate communications officer for Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), says the city plans to do something about the issue, but it won't be able to soon. In the meantime, he says people can still use sports and playing fields between the hours of 6 and 10 a.m..

"In order for the hours to be extended, there has to be a change in the bylaw," he says. "So it would have to go to council and there would be a public hearing. It is quite time-consuming."

- The Halifax Commons
- Kearney Lake
- Seaview Park
- Sir Sandford Fleming (the Dingle) Park
- Shubie
- Bissett Road/Cole Harbour Heritage Park
- Salt Marsh Trail
- Spectacle Lake Park
- Oakfield Park - Fall River
- York Redoubt National Historic Site
- Crystal Crescent Beach
- Long Lake Provincial Park
- Clam Harbour Beach
- Hemlock Ravine
- Jack's Lake Trails

O'Brien says he understands that it is a problem, but the city has had other priorities since the hurricane.

"There are six hundred parks in the HRM," he says. "Twelve hundred properties were destroyed in the hurricane and so far we've only assessed 800."

In addition, O'Brien says park crews were unavailable during the five weeks after the hurricane because they were helping with the cleanup of other areas of the city.

He says that for now, all parks in the HRM are closed and people can be fined for trespassing and letting their dogs off their leashes.

"Of course there have been complaints," he says. "People are obviously used to walking their dogs and letting them go in Point Pleasant Park. But the reason the parks are closed is because they are unsafe."

Speaking up

Dog owners aren't the only people who think the issue should be looked into.

Graham Steele, MLA for Halifax Fairview, says the fact that Long Lake Park, which is in his jurisdiction, is not an off-leash park is a big problem.

"It's become an interesting issue because people care a lot," he says. "I've gotten more phone calls about this issue than any other in the last few weeks."

Steele says the Provincial Department of Natural Resources began enforcing the on-leash law in early September. He says before then, people let their dogs off all the time and there was never a problem. He says people should have at least been given notice.

"My objection is not so much on-leash/off-leash," he says. "It's that they suddenly changed their minds about enforcing it."

Steele says now that there is only one off-leash park in the HRM, he thinks the department, along with the city, should designate other areas as off-leash.

"Walking a dog without a leash is pretty low on the list of crimes people can commit," he says. "It is a legitimate use that should be encouraged."

Sinden says the city needs more "dog-friendly" people in power.

"In other places in North America dog-friendly areas are growing," she says. "More parks for dogs are opening up."

She adds that dog-owners can have a voice as well.



Before Hurricane Juan, Point Pleasant Park was one of only two parks dog owners could let their dogs run without a leash.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

"Maybe that's what the city needs, more politically active dog-owners," she says. "Hopefully dog owners' voices won't be ignored. I shouldn't be forced to chain my dog in the backyard. I want my dogs to have a good life."

Websites related to this topic:

- [Charlie Loves Halifax](#): Joan Sinden's Website
 - Halifax Regional Municipality: [Department of Parks and Recreation](#)
 - [Graham Steele, MLA for Halifax Fairview](#)
 - [Hurricane Juan Photos: Acts of Violation](#)
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