

PRESERVE PIONEER PARK



A resident committee to keep Pioneer Park
Clean, Green and Serene

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My name is Sheldon Polonsky, and I live at 10461 Grand Oaks Lane. I am a practicing pediatrician, and I wanted to discuss concerns about the health effects of a dog park on the stream which runs through Pioneer Park. I appreciate the fact that the Dog Park Committee has addressed this issue in their report, but I believe they underestimate its importance.

I have copies of two articles I am passing out that I hope members of the City Council and Parks and Recreation Committee will take time to read in the near future. One is by Brian Bohl, stream specialist for the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District, entitled "Invasion of Unwelcome Feces" and the second is a USA Today article entitled "Dog Waste Poses Threat to Water". I think a quote from the first article sums up the theme for both of them: "Pet waste is not only a visual problem, but also presents a water quality problem for nearby streams, lakes, and rivers...contact with contaminated water could result in serious long-term illness, particularly for children..." The articles go on to discuss some of the diseases found in dog feces including E. coli, Salmonella, Giardia, and roundworm and do not support the report's contention that the contribution of dog waste to water pollution is minor and of low risk to humans. These are not hypothetical illnesses, but infections I have seen in my practice with effects ranging from trivial to life-threatening.

Do I pretend to know exactly what the increased risk to the creek and our children would be from the dog park? No. But I don't believe that the committee knows, either, and I think many of their assumptions are overly optimistic. I would like to think that the trees and extra foliage around the park would help filter contamination to the creek, but having seen the creek and the park after even a moderate rainfall I doubt that any amount of extra plants will really reduce run-off from the park. As they themselves have pointed out, an attractive feature of the park is its excellent drainage—well, guess where all that drainage goes? The creek! I would like to think that 100% of the dog owners who used the park would always pick up after their dogs, instead of the 41% who don't according to the USA Today article. I would like to think that pooper scooping bags would be well stocked at all times in the park, although their frequent lack of availability in the park now does not give me a lot of hope. I would also like to think that every dog stool would be firm and well-formed and leave no residue on the ground when it is picked up—although other dog-owners like myself can attest to how likely that would be.

I truly appreciate the committee's diligence in demonstrating how they are going to have regular water testing, but they left an important piece out of the equation—what are they going to do if the water does become unsuitable? Remediation for such problems can easily run into the hundreds of the thousands of dollars, and who is going to pay for that? And by remediation, I don't just mean a sign by the creek that says "Wade at your own risk".

In conclusion, I would like to point out that one of my eight year old son's favorite summertime activities is playing along the creek looking for rocks and fossils, as I know it is for many neighborhood children. Whatever the increased risk, I can say as a parent and a physician that if there is a dog park at Pioneer Park, the creek will be off limits to him. And I suspect that many of you would feel the same way for your children. So much for the dog park not affecting any of the current features or recreational activities in the park.

Thank you for your time and attention to this very serious concern.
