

Petitioner Deputation: Piney Lakes Fenced Dog Play Park, 7 December 2021

Introduction

Good evening, Mr Mayor and Councillors. Thank you for the opportunity to address you.

My name is Neil Fox, Lead Petitioner on the proposed Piney Lakes Fenced Dog Play Park, and with me is Rita Swain. We are both long-time residents of Winthrop, frequent users of Piney Lakes, and represent a large number of concerned users of Piney Lakes who are signatories to the petition submitted to Council on 12 October 2021.

Structure of Presentation

- Acknowledging the limited amount of time available to convey our concerns and comments on the City officers report before you, I will be addressing the following matters:
 - Consultation processes
 - Metropolitan Region Scheme and Bush Forever
 - Site selection criteria
 - Other fenced dog parks
 - Options going forward

Consultation Processes

- By way of background and observation, in the report to Council in August 2019, it was stated that Piney Lakes would not be the City's recommended location (for a fenced dog park) due to the area having insufficient parking and the effect on other park users such as picnickers, walkers and cyclists. The report currently before Council does not explain what has changed at Piney Lakes to now make it suitable.
- On 10 September 2021 details of the project were posted on the City's website, stating that the location of Piney Lakes was chosen in 2020 when the City engaged with the community to find support for a fenced dog park.
- During the week ending 17 September 2021 a sign was installed at Piney Lakes announcing the arrival of the fenced dog park.
- September – October 2021: submissions and correspondence from Piney Lakes users were sent to the City expressing concerns about the proposed fenced dog park.
- Signatures for a petition were collected between Friday 8 and Monday 11 October. 128 signatures (117 City residents and 11 non-residents) were obtained from an estimated 145 users (88%). The majority of users knew very little or nothing at all about the proposed fenced dog play park, few users knew that the City had done high level consultation on the idea of constructing a fenced dog park somewhere in the City of Melville, and very few knew that the consultation process had identified Piney Lakes as a suitable location. It was also clear that there was no user consultation regarding the selected site within Piney Lakes, and that the vast majority of users were opposed to it. Many people believed that the \$160,000.00 budget was excessive and a waste of money, and that features such as the 1.8M fence in particular was over the top and would be a blight on the landscape.
- The petition was lodged on 12 October and accepted by Council that evening.
- In response to Council's acknowledgment of the petition, on 14 October a community survey was posted on the City's website. This provided the opportunity to comment on

the draft Concept Plan so that feedback received could be used to assist preparing a report for Council's consideration. The survey was open until 29 October. The survey had limitations and imposed a small word limit for submissions, undermining the ability to obtain meaningful community input.

- A meeting was held on site with Kim Giddens MLA on 15 October, attended by about 20 community members, none of whom indicated support for the fenced dog park. Kim advised that she would be meeting the City CEO the following week, and thereafter would be providing feedback. We are still waiting to hear what transpired.
- A meeting with ward Councillors Katy Mair and Margaret Sandford, and City officers, was held on 8 November at Piney Lakes to discuss the project and consider the site for the fenced dog park selected by the officers. Officers shared the 'Engagement Snapshot' of the October survey: 107 submissions were received with 50% supporting the draft concept, while 45% did not support it. The survey was intrinsically flawed because it focused on the site already identified by the City without considering other options. This was acknowledged, and the officers agreed to include other options in the report to Council.
- Considering the community response to both the petition (88% opposed) and the City's survey (50% support, and 45% opposed), it is apparent that the project does not enjoy a high level of support.

Metropolitan Region Scheme and Bush Forever

- The City's report makes no mention of the Metropolitan Region Scheme (MRS) and the Bush Forever status of Piney Lakes. Piney Lakes is a Parks and Recreation Reserve under the MRS and a registered Bush Forever site.
- It is my understanding that under the MRS, in a Bush Forever Site, development without the approval of the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) is allowed where there is no clearing of bush, provided there is a management plan approved by the WAPC. Is there a management plan that provides guidance for any additional infrastructure, such as integrating a fenced dog park into the Piney Lakes Reserve?

Site Selection Criteria

- The City's report contains a listing of the criteria used to consider locations in an attempt to lessen any impacts on residents and current users of parks / reserves.
- Worthy of inclusion would have been:
 - retention of large existing open spaces and not fragmenting them particularly when alternative site options are available;
 - visual impact and amenity;
 - retention of areas of high landscape quality; and
 - environmental attributes.
- In the Council report it is recognised that concerns have been raised by the community about the loss of amenity should a fenced dog park be established at the proposed location, but the report then goes on to overlook this by recommending the site proposed.
- Feedback during the petition process is clear – the vast number of current users are drawn to the park because of the big open and uninterrupted green spaces it offers to both people and dogs.
- The proposed site is within an existing off-lead dog exercise area that is well utilised by people and dogs. The existing off-lead area represents a significant community benefit, but the report recognises value in withdrawing this benefit by establishing an additional

off-lead area within an existing off-lead area. This is illogical when there are existing on-lead areas that are under-utilised and that would be more suitable for a fenced dog park.

- As already mentioned, in the report to Council in August 2019, it was stated that Piney Lakes 'would not be the City's recommended location due to the area having insufficient parking and the effect on other park users such as picnickers, walkers and cyclists'. What has changed at Piney Lakes to now make it suitable?

Other Fenced Dog Parks

- The report states the main focus of the review of existing dog exercise areas constructed by other Local Governments was to gain a better understanding on size requirements and fencing specifications. Six fenced dog parks were examined ranging in size from 2,070m² to 5,100m², with an average of 3,895m².
- Based on an examination of aerial photography, it is clear that the locational and site attributes of Piney Lakes cannot be compared with the six fenced dog parks. Unlike Piney Lakes, which has extensive parklands where dogs are able to exercise and play in a relatively unrestricted way, the others are for the most part constrained by space and surrounding infrastructure such as housing, industry, and road networks. In situations like this, it makes good sense to establish a fenced dog park and provide opportunities for off-leash exercise where it would otherwise not have been possible.
- It is noted that the fence height of the six fenced dog parks ranges from 1.2m to 1.8m, with four of them having fences of 1.8m. A height of 1.8m at Piney Lakes will have a significant impact on visual quality, and should not be required given that owners must be in full control of their dogs at all times, even in a fenced enclosure.
- Piney Lakes is a unique park with beautiful open green spaces that are used and enjoyed by many for a variety of activities. There is no proven need to introduce such a significant change to this greatly appreciated natural environment by establishing an enclosed 5,500m² facility bounded by a 1.8m fence. Instead of this providing the community with a much-needed asset, the establishment of such a facility will in effect take away from the community a highly valued area of public open space and introduce a blight on the landscape.

Options Going Forward

- The City gives the clear impression in its report that it wants to respond to the community's wishes. If the project is to proceed, it is requested that the establishment of a fenced dog park on the proposed site not be pursued and that an alternative option identified in the City's report be chosen.
- To enable Council to make a well-informed decision, it is recommended that an overall management plan be prepared if this does not already exist. This will enable proper consideration to be given to the park as a whole, and other potential requirements such as parking and low impact activities, and the selection of a site for a fenced dog park.
- Alternative option 1 is the least preferred option on the basis of its size, which is not much smaller than the officer's proposed plan for what seems to be an excessively large fenced dog park.
- Alternative option 2 has the advantage of occupying the smallest land area, will not interrupt the open green space as much, and presumably would cost the least. It also allows for flexibility in that if the fenced dog park proves to be a success, then it could possibly be expanded at a later date.

- Alternative option 3 is very similar to the average size of the six fenced dog parks examined by officers, and has the advantage of being clearly separated from the existing off-lead area. While it will result in a land use change in this part of the park, it could be the catalyst to activate under-utilised areas in other parts of the park. It should be noted that the positioning of this option could be amended to be set further back to better utilise the available land. This would also provide space for future car park expansion were this to be required.
- At this stage alternative option 3 is preferred as it does not impact the well-established and fully utilised off-lead exercise area.
- It should be mentioned that a further option was put forward by many of the signatories to the aforementioned petition. It is an underutilized area opposite Corpus Christie College alongside Murdoch Drive stretching towards Somerville Boulevard. That option was put to Councillors Katy Mair and Margaret Sandford and City officers at the Piney Lakes meeting on 8 November. However, City officers thought the option was too close to residences. That said, it seems such a waste of open space that could surely be enhanced or activated and put to public use.
- Regarding fence height, it is suggested that consideration be given to 1.2m throughout the dog park.

Conclusion

In light of the findings of the City and Petition consultation processes, MRS and Bush Forever considerations, comparison with other fenced dog parks, and outstanding environmental and landscape characteristics, it is recommended that Council makes a decision within the context of an overall management plan and opts for a reduced size facility on another site within Piney Lakes taking cognizance of the community preference.