

Tails Wagging Over New Dog-Friendly Law

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Ginny Munger Kahn, president of LI-DOG and member of the Huntington Greenways Trails Committee, with her two golden retrievers Gus, left, and Amber. *Photo Courtesy of Ginny Munger Kahn*

By Janee Law

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The Huntington Town Board has approved legislation that increases the number of public parks that permit dog owners to walk their canine companions, and a local organization is wagging its tail over it.

Huntington-based Long Island Dog Owners Group has been advocating for dog owners and their pets for nearly 20 years, including this summer when members pushed for the now-approved legislation penned by Supervisor Frank Petrone and approved unanimously Aug. 15.

Requested by the Greenway Trails Committee, the law brings town code in line with Suffolk's, which currently allows for licensed dogs to be walked on trails in county-owned parks with a leash no longer than 6 feet.

"People don't just want to walk their dogs around their neighborhood on the street, they want to be able to walk their dog in a beautiful park," Ginny Munger Kahn, LI-DOG president and member of the Greenways Trails Committee, said. "We are so grateful to the Town of Huntington for making this happen for opening up access to almost all the town's parks to on-leash dog walking. It's really wonderful."

The uniform regulation allows dogs in town-owned active or passive parks, which there are more than 100. However, Heckscher Park and the Betty Allen Nature Preserve will continue to not permit dogs.

Kahn, who has been with LI-DOG since 2002, said the organization also advocated for access to Heckscher Park, since the park is the most common request from Huntington dog owners.

"Our main focus now in Huntington is to make sure that the new policy that's been put into effect is successful and then hopefully once we know that it is successful we can talk to the town again about Heckscher Park," Kahn, of Huntington, said.

The organization will ensure the success of the law by communicating with supporters on the importance of keeping their dogs on leash in parks, cleaning up after their dogs and making sure they abide by the restrictions, which include keeping dogs out of playgrounds, off ball fields, out of picnic areas and off beaches.

The organization was founded in 1998 by a group of Huntington dog owners, initially known as Huntington Dog Owners Group. Their goal was to find a safe location where they could exercise and socialize their dogs.

The group was incorporated in 2004, changing its name to Long Island Dog Owners Group, and then became a nonprofit in 2006.

Kahn said the group has grown and communicates to nearly 3,000 people a month through its email list, Facebook group, or meetup group.

Since its inception, the group has assisted in dogs being allowed in 10 areas on Long Island.

In June 2007, the organization worked with Suffolk Legislator Steve Stern (D-Dix Hills) and former Legislator Jon Cooper to help pass a bill that directed the parks commissioner to recommend the creation of at least five new areas for dogs.

“We call it the five new dog parks bill,” said Kahn, who added that one of the parks was West Hills Big Dog Run in Huntington.

Their mission remains to increase access to public parks and beaches for Long Island dog owners and their dogs.

“We started out focusing on off-leash areas but, in more recent years, our supporters have increasingly asked us to work on getting on-leash access to parks because there are many parks on Long Island where you cannot walk your dog, even on a leash, and this is really unusual,” Kahn said. “We’re trying to change that here on Long Island because walking your dog on a leash in a park is one of life’s greatest pleasures.”