

The Long Islander

'Canine-loving' Change Mulled By Board

July 13, 2017

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Long Islander News photo/Janee Law
Michael Kaplow speaks Tuesday with his service dog. Lola, by his side.

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Huntington resident Michael Kaplow took to the podium at Huntington Town Hall on Tuesday with his service dog, Lola, by his side.

As Lola smiled and lay next to him, the president of the Siberian Husky Club of Greater New York urged the town board to move forward with a proposal to increase the number of parks around town that permit dog owners to walk their leashed canine companions.

“From our experience... we have observed that the vast majority of both the dogs and their human companions are well behaved and responsible. Are there exceptions? Most certainly there are... but the town has already seen the success of dogs in test parks, and the new code provisions will enhance that success for everyone,” Kaplow said. “Lola and I encourage the extant board to pass this canine-loving legacy legislation.”

Kaplow was one of eight speakers at Tuesday’s hearing, which mostly yielded support.

The proposal, requested by the town’s Greenway Trails Committee, seeks to bring town code in line with that of Suffolk’s, which currently allows for licensed dogs to be walked on trails in county-owned parks with a leash no longer more than 6 feet.

Huntington contains 10 parks that are co-owned by the town and county, and in those parks county code applies. Five other town-owned parks — Dix Hills Park, Phragmites Park, Jerome Ambro Preserve trail segment, Sunshine Acres Park, and Frazer Drive Park -- currently allow owners to walk their dogs on an up to 4-foot leash.

If uniform regulations are developed, dogs will be allowed in the other town-owned active or passive parks, of which there are more than 100.

There will be some exceptions, including at both Heckscher Park and the Betty Allen Nature Preserve, which will continue to not permit dogs. If approved, dogs would also be barred from town beaches — not including parking lots and walk areas — picnic areas; camps and programmed educational use areas; and developed recreation areas, such as playgrounds, ball fields and courts.

Huntington Supervisor Frank Petrone, sponsor of the resolution, said if the proposal is approved, parks will be monitored to see if dog owners are cleaning up after their pet, if they are using the right receptacles and if their dogs are on leashes.

“It has to be done the right way and it has to be done with the right restrictions in place,” Petrone said. “There’s nothing worse than a rowdy dog and an owner that’s not considerate of everybody else, so that’s what we want to isolate.”

Petrone added that if the policy change is successful, town officials will consider expanding the policy to more areas in the future.

While developing its recommendation, the Greenway Trails Committee collaborated with the Long Island Dogs Owners Group, a nonprofit dedicated to increasing access to public parkland for local dog owners and their dogs.

Ginny Munger Kahn, president of the Long Island Dog Owners Group, said adopting uniform standards would allow more people to enjoy Huntington's parks, which would make parks safer and support the town's goal of being dog-friendly.

"Walking your dog in a beautiful park is one of life's great pleasures," she said. "We're very excited at the prospect of being able to walk our leashed dogs in almost all town parks."

The town board could vote on the proposal as soon as Aug. 15, 2 p.m., during the board's next meeting at Huntington Town Hall.