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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 13, 2018

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES SPENGLER, DIRECTOR; DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION,
PARKS & CULTURAL ACTIVITIES &
KARL MORITZ, DIRECTOR; DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING

ISSUE: On December 6, 2018 the Planning Commission recommended approval of DSUP # 2018-0007 for development of the property located at 1200 N. Fayette Street known as Braddock Gateway Phase III with an amendment to Condition #6a. of the Staff Recommendations. The motion passed 6-0 and Commissioner Lyle was absent. Condition #6 outlines the program and features to be provided by the developer in the design of the City-owned park parcel located north of the development site.

The Planning Commission amended Condition #6a. to include requirements for improvements that facilitate use of this parcel for off-leash dog use with gated fencing to surround the park. Staff opposed the use of this site for a dog park because the park area does not meet the minimum size requirement for off-leash dog parks as outlined in the City's Dog Parks Master Plan. Planning Commissioners expressed the belief that there is a need in this neighborhood for a dog park, that smaller dog parks can be successful, and expressed the hope that the planned update to the Dog Parks Master Plan would allow for smaller, more "urban" dog parks.

The primary issues raised with fencing this parcel for an off-leash dog park concern public safety, maintenance, and community outreach. Each issue is described in further detail within the Discussion provided below.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends City Council consider the following revisions to the Planning Commission's amended language for Condition #6 (The Planning Commission's language is ~~underlined and stricken~~. Staff's proposed amendments are underlined):

6. **CONDITION AMENDED BY CITY COUNCIL:** In coordination with Staff and the community, design and construct a public park on the City-owned property zoned Public Open Space (POS) located north of the site to the satisfaction of the Directors of RP&CA, P&Z, and T&ES.
 - a. The design of the park shall be consistent with the pocket park exhibit dated October 19, 2018 and shall, at a minimum, include: enhanced landscaping,

slope stabilization, removal of invasive plants, 2 City standard park benches, an accessible trail, natural play elements, ~~improvements to secure the area for off-leash dog usage with gated fencing~~ and concrete pad for trash and recycling to be coordinated with T&ES and RP&CA.

- b. The park improvements shall be processed as an independent Grading Plan, prepared in accordance with the Grading Plan Checklist: [https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/tes/info/Grading%20Plan%20Checklist%202019%20Update%20Final%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/tes/info/Grading%20Plan%20Checklist%202019%20Update%20Final%20(1).pdf)
- c. This site shall not require additional background study or archaeological investigation.
- d. All park improvements shall be bonded and maintained for a minimum of 3 years.
- e. Construction of the park shall be completed prior to issuance of the first certificate of occupancy for Building 3A or Building 3B, whichever comes last. ***
- f. Provide percolation tests to ensure sufficient subgrade drainage related to proposed planting locations. Test pits shall be a minimum of 2 feet in diameter and 2 feet deep from the bottom of the planting hole. Percolation test locations and rates shall be to the satisfaction of the Director of RP&CA, but the minimum acceptable rate shall be 2 inches per hour using potable water. Percolation tests shall be certified by a soil scientist / registered geotechnical engineer. Underdrains shall be provided if percolation tests are determined unacceptable due to existing soil conditions.

-OR-

- g. If it is determined, prior to construction of the park, by the forthcoming update to the City's Dog Park Master Plan that this site is suitable for off-leash dog use, the applicant shall provide a minimum monetary contribution of \$65,000 to RP&CA towards construction of an off-leash dog park pursuant to the design standards recommended by the updated Dog Parks Master Plan. The contribution shall be made prior to issuance of the first certificate of occupancy for Building 3A or Building 3B, whichever comes last.
- h. If such determination is made as outlined in Condition 6g., the applicant shall grade and stabilize the park property to the satisfaction of the Directors of T&ES, RP&CA, and P&Z prior to issuance of the first certificate of occupancy for Building 3B. (P&Z) (RP&CA) (T&ES) (Archaeology)

BACKGROUND: The parcel in question is located north of the Braddock Gateway Phase III development site and measures slightly more than one quarter of an acre in size, or approximately 13,000 square feet. The original request for developer improvements to this parcel for an off-leash dog park was raised by some members of the community, notably those who serve on the Braddock Implementation Advisory Group (BIAG) and Braddock Metro Citizen's

Coalition (BMCC). Upon evaluation of this request, Staff determined that the parcel does not meet the minimum size required by the City's Dog Parks Master Plan for an off-leash dog park. This minimum requirement is one-half acre or 21,780 square feet. As a result, Staff worked with the applicant to develop a concept for a pocket park on this site with passive uses and an informal play area for children.

DISCUSSION: Issues with the Planning Commission's recommendation to provide a fence and gate around this park for use as an off-leash dog park are summarized in the following points:

- **Safety:** The intent of the design guidelines set forth in the Dog Parks Master Plan is to facilitate a fun, safe environment for dogs and their owners within new City-owned dog parks. An undersized, fenced dog park increases aggression in dogs, especially in parks where both large and small dogs are allowed. Additionally, the Planning Commission discussion on December 6 included promotion of integrating children's play areas with dog play areas at this park. Staff does not recommend such integration of uses on this parcel due to its limited size leading to increased potential for conflict between children and dogs.
- **Maintenance:** The pocket park, as designed, is not suitable for the amount of wear anticipated with an off-leash dog park. The park design includes natural turf grass surfacing and a 3:1 slope stabilized with plant material. The City's standard for new off-leash dog parks includes synthetic grass or crushed stone surfacing, irrigation to flush-out deposits, and other resilient design elements that require minimal maintenance. Although the applicant agreed to provide 3 years of park maintenance, the recommendation to add a fence around the park as it is currently designed for off-leash dog use will require long-term, continued maintenance by the City which is currently not accounted for in the City's budget.
- **Community Outreach:** The Department of Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities (RPCA) facilitated an extensive community outreach process leading up to the adoption of the Dog Parks Master Plan. This process resulted in identified improvements for existing City-owned dog parks and identification of areas for new City-owned dog parks. At the time of the Plan's adoption, the area in question was not identified by the community as a site for a new dog park. Therefore, a standard community outreach process to facilitate input from all community members must be followed, including endorsement by the Park and Recreation Commission, if a dog park is to be implemented on this site.

To conclude, Staff recommends reevaluating this site for use as an off-leash dog park as part of the Dog Parks Master Plan update scheduled for upcoming FY2020 which will conclude prior to construction of the park. This process will ensure safety and design standards are consistent with current industry standards and applied consistently throughout all new City-owned dog parks. This update will also include a standard community outreach process and endorsement by the Park and Recreation Commission.

FISCAL IMPACT: The cost to maintain an unleashed dog park in perpetuity on this site per the Planning Commission's recommendation cannot be determined since the design is inconsistent with current City standards. Per the Staff-proposed condition language (above), a \$65,000 developer contribution will be used to implement an off-leash dog park on this site if it is determined that the site qualifies for such use in the update of the Dog Parks Master Plan. It is anticipated that additional funding is needed beyond \$65,000 to implement an off-leash dog park on this site. The source(s) of the remaining funds will be determined with the Dog Parks Master Plan update.

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