

Dana Wedeles

From: Dana Wedeles
Sent: Friday, March 04, 2016 8:44 AM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: FW: Planning Commission input

From: RADMRFD@aol.com [<mailto:RADMRFD@aol.com>]
Sent: Wednesday, February 03, 2016 5:45 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Re: Planning Commission input

Dana,

Thank you for the update. As you might expect, I am disappointed in this new element being introduced into the discussion, at this very late date. I deliberately cast my argument in terms that addressed what I honestly believe is a serious, ongoing, public safety concern. The City is facing an open liability.

I regret that there appears to have been little to no discussion about the Commissioner's concern. I think it could easily have been pointed out that it comes down to a matter of "uses"; what uses are intended to be supported by the park proper vs those intended to be supported by the dog park and the operating hours necessary to support those uses.

Not too long ago, the City spent over a million dollars on installing a professional-grade soccer field with ample hi-intensity lighting in Ben Brenman Park. That part of the park is regularly used, as intended, for soccer games after dark. The public rest rooms, across the street from the soccer field, in the same building as the community police station, are certainly available, and used, as intended for soccer players and fans. I do not recall a community outreach being conducted to ascertain interest in supporting these activities after dark; nor a movement to change all the park signs to include the phrase "... except during evenings when soccer activities are taking place." Before the soccer field was built, I recall many evenings taking my family to Ben Brenman Park to watch outdoor movies, sponsored by the Park Department, which were always shown after sunset (in fact, after full dark). Again, no sign modification seems to have been thought necessary.

The same discussion could be had regarding the baseball field in the main part of the park.

Last year, the City specifically authorized the conducting of an Ethiopian religious event in Ben Brenman Park - the focal point of which was an enormous bon fire. It was conducted well after sunset and was quite dramatic. Once again, no signage modification occurred.

Perhaps it was improper, but I noticed that more than a few residents genuinely enjoyed the exhilarating atmosphere of the park under a deep layer of snow and a full moon last week; using sleds, etc.

I could go on with further examples.

Today's sunrise in Alexandria was at 7:12. In December it was as early as 7:06. Sunset today is at 5:31. In December it occurred as early as 4:46. Of the large population of Alexandria dog owners (ie voters) who use this dog park, from Cameron Station and adjoining high density residential communities, a very high percentage have jobs and many commute to their place of employment around a highly congested metropolitan area. That means, walking your dog before going to work, and after returning home from a long day at work. Many, myself included, currently forego using the dog park in question for the safety concerns that I elaborated on in my letter to the Commission. If we intend the dog park to serve the use for which it was clearly intended, and for which it is proposed to expand, it must meet the needs of this community; which includes use before sunrise and after sunset.

As I stated in my opening, I am extremely disappointed that this matter has been left uncorrected for the several years that I have attempted to work with the City. These examples, and more, could easily have been discussed at the Commission meeting and resolved. I find this further delay both unacceptable and unnecessary. And certainly unresponsive to a serious citizen's concern, respectfully pursued - for a very long time.

Regards,

R F Duncan

Dana Wedeles

From: Katy Rother <mkrother@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 03, 2016 4:55 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Ben Brenman

Dana -

I understand there is a proposal to change the posted hours of the park and also to increase the size of the dog park and install lights. I think that is a wonderful plan and I fully support it. The posted hours to the park are clearly not an accurate reflection of the community's understanding of the park hours as it is utilized after dark by many people daily. It is also used by early morning joggers and dog walkers, which could be in violation of the posted hours depending on the time of year. During the shorter daylight hours of the fall and winter months, enforcement of the currently posted hours would make the park unusable for those of us who are commuting and working during the daylight hours.

The improvements to the dog park would also be a wonderful benefit to our community full of dog lovers. Again, my schedule makes the dog park unusable during the week most of the year. Lights in the dog park would be a welcome addition so that my (adopted) dog and my future foster dogs can have time to run and socialize with other dogs.

Thank you for this effort and for these valuable additions to our community.

Sincerely,
Katy Rother
230 S. Jenkins Street

Dana Wedeles

From: Stephen Harris <stephar@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 01, 2016 12:02 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Cc: Bonnie Petry; Ali Ahmad
Subject: Ben Brenman Dog Park and Lights

Greetings Ms. Wedeles.

I live in the Wakefield-Tarleton neighborhood on the eastern side of Ben Brenman Park, off Duke Street. We bought this house in Alexandria almost 10 years ago because we fell in love with the area and neighborhood. Our neighborhood is composed of hard working people mostly civil servants, teachers, coaches etc.

Recently, it has come to our attention that there is a motion to change the rules associated with the dog park area in Ben Brenman park. Previously, signage indicated that the park was open and lit till 10 pm, a privilege that we took advantage of many a time. Seeing as this is the western boundary of my neighborhood, we would often walk our dogs in the cool summer evenings after sunset, as well as walk back through the neighborhood from one of our favorite Indian restaurants in the winter. It is a beautiful place to see the leaves change in the fall and is spectacular to walk through as the sunsets. It is a favorite outdoor recreational spot. We've even attended meetings with the police nearby that have gone till the sun starts to go down. My understanding is that there is a consideration to change the lighting and the times of the park to read as "sundown" rather than 10pm. I know that this example may be an extreme but, in the mid winter the sun sets even as early as 4:50pm (dec 21st). This change in signage would cut a full five hours of usable time from that park space, a park space which is supposed to be available to all residents and paid for by our taxes.

Additionally, my understand is that a resident or residents of Cameron Run may have asked for this change because they hope it will keep up an "undesirable element" out of their neighborhood. First, this park is for everyone and is not in "their neighborhood." Second, it disappoints me that the city would cow tow to the pressures of this neighborhood or certain individuals, especially those who continue to push for the gentrification of lower income areas. I've always enjoyed the diversity of our neighborhood; all socio-economic, racial, religious, and even sexual orientation are all welcome here. This latest proposal seems to go against the ethos of the city of Alexandria and frankly I'm concerned that city officials have forgotten our amazing and diverse history.

Lastly, my opinion would be that having the lights on longer would actually create a safer environment for the people who live near the park. If the people of Cameron Run are concerned about light pollution then I would suggest the city look at smarter lighting choices and the addition of trees to the park.

Unfortunately I will not be able to attend the meeting on March 3rd, but I wanted to make sure that as a tax paying - committed resident of Alexandria, my voice was heard.

I appreciate you taking the time to read my email and look forward to hearing from you if you have any questions or comments.

Stephen Harris and Erik Stemmy
46 S. Gordon St

Dana Wedeles

From: Heather Hammack <hkladue@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2016 1:54 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Ben Brenman Dog Park

Hello,

I am writing to let you know that I am in favor of Ben Brenman Park being open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. in all lighted areas of the Park. As a resident of the West End of Alexandria who also has a dog, I use the Ben Brenman dog park extremely frequently. Since both my husband and I work full-time, we can rarely go to the dog park after work except in the summer. Having lights for the dog park would benefit us and all West End resident dog owners greatly.

Thank you,
Heather Hammack
Usher Ave. resident

Dana Wedeles

From: Gillian O'Neill <gillianmabrey@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 6:07 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Ben Brenman Park and Safety Lights

Dear Ms. Wedeles,

I am unable to make the Thursday meeting due to work commitments, but I wanted to make known my support of the updated, corrected park hours sign and the installation of safety lights. I support the new posted signs and the dog park improvements.

Updating the sign language to say 6 AM until 10 PM extends the accessibility of the park, particularly for those of us in the Wakefield Tarleton neighborhood. The park is already open during those times for use of the sports fields, so we are not asking for special consideration. Those of us who have dogs to walk or who would like to go to the London Curry House restaurant just want to be able to use the park.

Best regards,

Gillian Mabrey O'Neill

Dana Wedeles

From: Daniel Gustav Anderson <danielgustavanderson@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 28, 2016 7:07 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Cc: PlanComm
Subject: Ben Brenman Park

Dear Planning Commission,

I am writing in regard to an upcoming Planning Commission meeting regarding the use of Ben Brenman Park and the dog parks in it. The issues involved in this matter extend beyond the simple matter at hand--whether or not lights should be installed in portions of the park, and the hours of use for the park extended after dark to 10pm--into questions of equity, access for all to public resources, and transparent process.

After extensive study of citizen need, the commission was advised that it would be in everyone's best interest to add lights to portions of the park and allow citizens to use the park after dark. This is important to citizens in my neighborhood, Wakefield-Tarleton, where most of us work during the day and use the park to walk ourselves and our dogs in the evening. Brenman Park serves Wakefield-Tarleton and Cameron Station. There is a sense that some of our neighbors in Cameron Station, which is considerably more affluent and less diverse than Wakefield-Tarleton, would prefer not to have us share the park with them, and that this is impacting the work of the planning commission.

There is last-minute resistance on the commission to extending the hours of the park and lighting the dog park areas. There is a strong perception that the commission is being used to privatize Ben Brenman Park to the use of Cameron Station residents only, to the exclusion of the people of color and less affluent residents of Wakefield-Tarleton. This is underscored in the peculiar and undemocratic decision on the part of the commission to hold their March 3 2016 meeting to determine this matter not in a publicly-accessible place, but in a meeting room at Cameron Station.

I am asking you to consider ways in which access to our parks and other public places may be made equally available to all citizens, without favoring some over others.

To the immediate point, I urge the commission to light the dog parks, and to extend the hours of use for Ben Brenman Park to 10pm.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Daniel Anderson
41 S Hudson St.

Alexandria, VA 22304

Dana Wedeles

From: Mary Nardelli <mnardelli60@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 9:16 AM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: BEN BRENNAN PARK/DOG PARK SAFETY LIGHTS

I SUPPORT THE NEW POSTED SIGNS & THE DOG PARK IMPROVEMENTS!. This area is Dog Friendly and we all love our dogs and want to walk safely at night - especially in Sprint and Summer.

Mary Nardelli
102 S. Jordan Street
Alexandria, VA 22304
703-461-8976

Dana Wedeles

From: Stacy E. Costello <sec@sacklaw.com>
Sent: Saturday, February 27, 2016 1:28 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Brendan Park dog park hours

As a Cameron Station owner, I am opposed to extending the hours and to adding lights to the dog park. I am not able to attend the meeting but wanted to send my comments. Bright lights and barking dogs are not wanted for the evening. No thank you.

Sincerely,
Stacy Costello of 246 Murtha Street, Alexandria Va.22304.

Sent via the Samsung GALAXY S® 5, an AT&T 4G LTE smartphone

Dana Wedeles

From: wgoff1950@aol.com
Sent: Tuesday, March 01, 2016 6:31 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: dog lights

We have schools and others building in the city that are falling apart and you wants to spend money on lights for dogs? The city sure has gone to the dogs! Increase their taxes not mine.

wgoff1950@aol.com

Dana Wedeles

From: Sara Deshong <sararose0409@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, February 29, 2016 6:49 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Dog park lights

Hi Dana,

Please move ahead with dog park lights in Ben Brennman park, another thing we would love to have is water for the dogs, a fountain like in Del Ray.

Many Thanks,

Sara Deshong and Petulia (pup)

Dana Wedeles

From: Mimi <WGoff1950@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 01, 2016 11:18 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Dog park

Can u tell me how much the dog lights are going to cost? And when are you going to tell us your going to charge to use the park? 🐕

Sent from my iPhone

Dana Wedeles

From: angela brown <angelabrown907@hotmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 9:10 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Dog Park

I support the new posted signs and the dog park improvements. Thanks

Sent from my T-Mobile 4G LTE Device

Dana Wedeles

From: Dorothy Strunk <dorothystrunk@aol.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 3:13 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Cc: ali.ahmad@gmail.com
Subject: Dog Park

I am writing to let you know of my support for lights at the Ben Brenman Dog Park. I use the dog park several times a week and it would be very nice to have longer hours to use the park.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dorothy Strunk
30 South Hudson Street

Dana Wedeles

From: Asa Orrin-Brown <asaorribrown@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 03, 2016 8:51 AM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Lights and hours at Ben Brenman Dog Park

Dana,

I will not be able to attend the meeting tonight, but wanted to write in support of the plan to add lights and to extend the hours of Ben Brenman Dog Park. I live in the neighborhood, and am often out with my dog after dark -- especially in the winter time. Currently we stay away from that area at night completely, not just because of the posted hours but because of the people who seem to be buying and selling drugs. I sincerely think the lights and extended hours would help clean up the area and get rid of the problem individuals. If there are more members of the community using the area, we will be better able to report suspicious activity to the police, and I suspect that in a very short time the dealers will at least relocate to another area -- hopefully outside of the City of Alexandria.

Extended hours and lights in the park would also be very useful for the dog owners in the community. In the half year we have had a dog, since adopting from the Alexandria shelter, we have met around one-hundred neighbors who regularly use Ben Brenman Dog Park. In the winter time, it is very hard for most of us to get there before dark. Work, commuting time, and other commitments (for me fixing dinner and getting my son to bed on time for school) often make it impossible to get out with our dogs until 8:00 or 9:00. Extending the parks hours until 10:00 would be very helpful, and make an already great community resource even more valuable.

Thank you for your help in this matter and service to the community.

Best regards,
Asa

Dana Wedeles

From: Bonnie Petry <bonnie.petry@outlook.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 23, 2016 2:41 PM
To: PlanComm
Cc: Judy Coleman; jennifer.atkins@cloudigylaw.com; wakefield-tarleton@yahoogroups.com
Subject: Regarding Dog Park Lights and the Preservation of the Existing Resident Access to Ben Brenman Park

Dear Members of the Planning Commission:

I write to you today to express my strong support for the installation of solar-powered, timed lights at the Ben Brenman Dog Park and some concern that the measure was not approved at the last Planning Commission meeting.

I support the installation of lights on two levels.

First off, I am a dog owner who lives in the Wakefield Tarleton neighborhood that adjoins Ben Brenman Park's Eastern boundary of Holmes Run. Ben Brenman Park is a short four to five minute walk from my house and I walk my dog in that park almost every day of the week. Those of us with active breed dogs really depend on that dog park to provide our dogs with badly needed exercise and socialization. These lights would allow us to give our urban canine companions badly needed exercise in the winter months when it is dark by the time we return home from work. I believe strongly that these lights would greatly improve safety for local residents. It is my understanding that the Alexandria Police Department has expressed support for this measure and believes it to be a safety enhancement for the community. It is worth noting that this project is included as a high-priority item in the city's plan for Ben Brenman Park.

Secondly, I support the installation of lights at the Ben Brenman Dog Park because this project is the result of a thorough and transparent park planning process in which RPCA staff reached out to residents through online surveys and community meetings in a receptive, honest, and transparent manner. The result was a plan for Ben Brenman Park that reflects the input we provided and the high priority we placed on this request. When I saw the plan for Ben Brenman Park, I was greatly heartened to see that residents' request for dog park lights was taken seriously by the city and was even characterized as a high priority investment, as indicated by the feedback provided to the city.

But just as city processes were beginning to look like they were starting to align with what residents believe to be important and desirable, I learned that the Planning Commission chose to defer the consideration of this planned and researched "easy fix" project. To be clear, this project enjoyed both city staff and citizen support, with only supportive letters submitted.

If this permit application was deferred in an effort to ultimately derail or stop a commonsense city project that would benefit residents and let them know that the city is listening to them, then *I am quite concerned*.

Lastly, I am disheartened to learn that a discussion of whether to allow lights at the Ben Brenman Dog Park has now widened into a referendum on park access by all users, not just those with a dog.

I would hope that that the entrance of “park operating hours” into the discussion is not an attempt to ban residents from walking their dogs in the park at 6:30pm in January, or jogging around the Ben Brenman Pond at 9:00pm on an August night when its cool enough to exercise. To be clear, it would be an enforcement nightmare to allow residents to use the lighted sports fields until 10:00pm but try to sort out and ban other residents not using the sports fields “at dark.”

In conclusion, this project, which enjoys the strong support of city residents and city staff, needs to be approved in respect of the fair process that was conducted and residents’ access to Ben Brenman Park until 10:00pm needs to be maintained.

Sincerely,

Yvonne “Bonnie” Petry

Vice President of the Wakefield Tarleton Civic Association

Dana Wedeles

From: Ali Ahmad <ali.ahmad@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 4:01 PM
To: Dana Wedeles
Subject: Support for Corrected Hours Posting and Dog Park Lights & Expansion in Ben Brenman Park

Ms. Wedeles:

The elected board of the Wakefield Tarleton Civic Association has voted by electronic ballot to support fixing the posted hours of the park and the installation of the dog park lights. The full membership has not had a chance to vote at a meeting on this issue, as the announcement of this special public meeting fell after our last Association meeting and our next Association meeting is not for two weeks.

The rest of the language in this communication is mine personally. I am writing to express my strong support for the new posted hours in Ben Brenman Park and my continued support for the expansion of the dog park and the installation of lights to extend the safe use of the dog park.

I moved to my home in Alexandria for its access to parks. My house backs up to Tarleton Park and I use it at least once everyday during my morning dog walk. My dog uses it two more times each day, with the aid of a professional dog walker. I am using the park every weekend throughout the day.

But in the evening during the week, my wife and I like to walk along with our dog after dinner. During the Fall and Winter, we get home from work far too late to use Tarleton Park or the Holmes Run Trail. In the Summer, we often wait till it's dark so as to enjoy the cooler evening air.

We have used Ben Brenman Park in the evening hours since we moved into our house 6 years ago. Not even on the coldest night have we been the only people using the park. The park is the perfect well-lit, safe area to walk for some many West End residents. We use it for recreational walking with our dog, with our foster dogs, and also to access the London Curry House for the occasional dinner out. A lot of people do this. There is no doubt that the current situation, in practice, is that the park is open till 10 p.m. in the lighted areas.

While we are aware the posted signs say that the park closes at dark except for permitted use, it makes little to no sense to say that a loud cheering sports team playing a little league baseball or softball game under their very bright lights is allowed to use the park until 10 p.m. while precluding me from walking my dog.

In fact, I would argue that the park does not go dark- certainly not before 10 p.m. Ben Brenman Park is very, very well-lit.

I live very close to the footbridge from the Holmes Run Trail to Ben Brenman Park. I live with the light pollution caused by the lights being on in Ben Brenman Park until 10 p.m. I live with the noise from the permitted use of baseball/softball games on the diamond closest to the footbridge. I live with these costs because I enjoy the immense benefit of living near a park.

The current posted hours also present the opportunity for uneven enforcement of park closure. A beautiful well-lit, and well utilized park does not look dark to any resident of Alexandria. It would be a tragedy for anyone to

think they were being barred from the park because of the color of their skin or because they come from lower-income housing.

On the specific subject of the dog park lights: the addition of seven lights to enhance the public safety and utility of the park.

This is vital for Public Safety. Dog park users are currently left with insufficient light in the early morning and evenings, especially in the fall and winter. This will make dog owners safer. This is a well used dog park, and the addition of lights and expansion proposed are a real benefit to the surrounding neighborhoods.

The staff report discussed at length concerns about the light pollution and I believe they are unfounded. I live in a "semi-detached home in the adjacent neighborhood [Wakefield-Tarleton]" and my house is likely the one or one of the ones located approximately 700 feet away. Ben Brenman park lights already produce light pollution until 10 p.m. every night. The marginal increase of these lights would easily be outweighed by the marginal benefit it provides to me and my neighbors as dog owners. However, the staff report repeatedly notes the use of full cut-off lighting and user-activated lighting. I also concur that the trees will provide additional buffer.

Taken into account, this is a no-brainer from the perspective of individuals looking for a great amenity in a public park. I am happy to answer additional questions about the benefit this would bring to my life and the lives of my neighbors.

--

Ali Ahmad
703.895.9899

*"I'm a slow walker, but I never walk back."
Abraham Lincoln*

Dana Wedeles

From: Ali Ahmad <ali.ahmad@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 4:01 PM
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Ali Ahmad
703.895.9899

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Abraham Lincoln*