



- **OPTION 1: Do nothing except rewrite the existing Open Space Regulations to make them more concise to improve any confusion for enforcement agents.**

The wording of the regulations in Section 14 of the existing Parks and Open Space Regulations are unclear and could be updated to be more succinct and straightforward for the Police Department and Animal Control Officers. Option 1 would be to rewrite the existing regulations to simplify the existing enforcement while leaving the current intent of the regulations the same as they currently exist, with the exception of limiting off-leash dogs from three dogs per person to two dogs per person.

The committee also discussed new, more prominent signage on Open Spaces about dog leashing policies. In general, public input favored keeping unleashed dog regulations as is on Fairfield's Open Spaces, particularly at Lake Mohegan Open Space, which has the largest volume of unleashed dogs.

- **OPTION 2: Explore the construction of a separate fenced in Dog Park on an existing open space property. Update the regulations to require dogs to be on leash in all existing Town owned open space properties.**

This option explored the purpose of creating a separate isolated dog park area within the Town that would be fenced in and would have the singular purpose of allowing off leashed dogs a place to congregate. Research on other neighboring towns' dog parks was reviewed as well as issues and enforcement in more restricted areas for dogs. If a dog park was constructed, the Conservation Commission could change the regulations to institute a leash law on all Town owned open space parcels. It is unclear exactly what Town Department would have oversight and the responsibility to manage a designated off-leash dog park. Once jurisdiction over a future dog park was determined, further research on Option 2 would need to be conducted including selection of a dog park location on town-owned property or open space, rules, regulations and enforcement. In general, during the committee's deliberation, public commentary was not favorable toward the idea of a town dog park.

- **OPTION 3: Designate the upper portion of the Cascades as a non-leash area while requiring dogs to be on-leash around lower Lake Mohegan.**

A proposal from a local resident was submitted and was discussed regarding the segregation of the Lake Mohegan Open Space property into separate on-leash and off-leash areas. The proposal had several reiterations in the plan including having the western half of the lake off leash while the eastern half of the lake would be on-leash. Another option would be separating the Cascades out as an off leash area while leaving the southern half of the lake on-leash. Option 3 did not address off-leash dogs on other Town owned open space properties and therefore is not a comprehensive solution. Furthermore, the difficulty of enforcement was considered and did not appear to simplify the existing enforcement burden.

- **OPTION 4: Designate specific open space areas as leashed and other areas as unleashed.**

Option 4 was discussed and would identify certain open space areas as unleashed while other areas would be leashed only. The committee also reviewed and discussed other options like specific times and days of the week for off-leash dogs only on open spaces, which has been implemented at other towns/cities' off-leash spaces. (i.e. 5-9 am and 6-9 pm off-leash dogs



permitted.) Seasonal restrictions was also discussed and limits to off-leash access as needed could also be incorporated based on the need for open space habitat restoration or replenishment.

- **OPTION 5: Develop a new “Off-Leash” Permit Program in Fairfield:**

This option would require all dogs’ owners to obtain an “off-leash” permit from the Conservation Department prior to walking their dog(s) off-leash at designated open space parcels in the Town. Leashed dogs would still be allowed on all open space parcels without the benefit of obtaining a permit. This option would help to streamline enforcement for the Animal Control officer since only dogs that were properly licensed and had rabies shots. The permit also requires owners’ written agreement that their dog responds to voice commands while off-leash and that they will abide to all the Town’s rules and regulations for off-leashed dogs. Those in agreement would be issued an annual “off-leash” permit – one for each dog with a visible collar worn during off-leash visits. Several different reiterations of “off-leash” permit programs throughout the nation were researched and discussed by the sub-committee. An “off-leash” permit requirement also would be easy to enforce: either people have their permit with them or they don’t. An “off-leash” permit program will also be revenue generating and could help the town off-set increased Animal Control enforcement throughout the year, which is essential for the success of any off-leash dog policy.

### **SUBCOMMITTEE FINAL RECOMMENDATION:**

Based on a review of the above listed options, the subcommittee recommended by of vote of 4 to 1 moving forward with Option 5 and the development of an off-leash permit program that would apply to 4 of the Town’s current open space parcels including; Hoyden’s Hill, Lake Mohegan, Brett Woods, and South Pine Creek. Dog owners would be allowed to walk their dogs’ off-leash once they successfully obtained an off-leash dog permit from the Town’s Conservation Department. All other Town owned open space parcels would require owners to keep their dogs on leashes at all times.

As part of the proceedings, a draft framework for the development of an off-leash permit program was developed to be effective July1 and the annual permit process would be coordinated with the town’s dog licensing program. Details and enforcement of the new Off-Leash Permit Policy would need to be vetted with Police and Animal Control staff in advance. Also, an effective public communication plan and new signage on these 4 Open Spaces would also need to be implemented. It is presented as part of this recommendation in draft form.

**If the full Conservation Commission should decide to move forward with the implementation of the subcommittee’s recommendation, it is required to hold a properly noticed Public Hearing prior to adopting any changes to the Fairfield Open Space Rules and Regulations.**

Also, while not voted on by the subcommittee, the Conservation Director believes that it is warranted at this time to move forward with an extensive update to the existing Lake Mohegan Open Space Area Multiple Use Management Plan. The Lake Mohegan Open Space Area Multiple Use Management Plan was originally completed in 1990 and does not accurately reflect the current conditions and uses at the site. An update of the management plan will allow the Conservation Commission to better execute its charge of the management of the open space property by providing a more accurate and timely representation of the current conditions of the property.