

Pets & Public Lands Forum

January 19, 2016

The Land Management & Acquisition Committee (LMAC) and the Parks and Community Programs Advisory Committee (PACPAC) held a public forum to solicit ideas and suggestions regarding policies concerning pets on public lands (conservation land and parks). Twenty-nine interested citizens participated, with 27 staying the entire meeting. The assumptions made going into the meeting were these:

1. People need places in town to walk their dogs. Walking dogs is good for both dogs and their owners.
2. All park and public land trail users should feel safe when out on our trails.
3. Uncontrolled dogs can have a negative impact on people, other dogs, & wildlife.

Part I of the meeting focused on what specific issues the two committees were concerned about and why they felt it necessary to hold such a meeting. Several participants were outspoken in their view that, in their experience, there really are no problems concerning pets (dogs) in our public spaces. After further discussion and elaboration, most people came to accept the idea that there are occasional issues that might be classified in the following way:

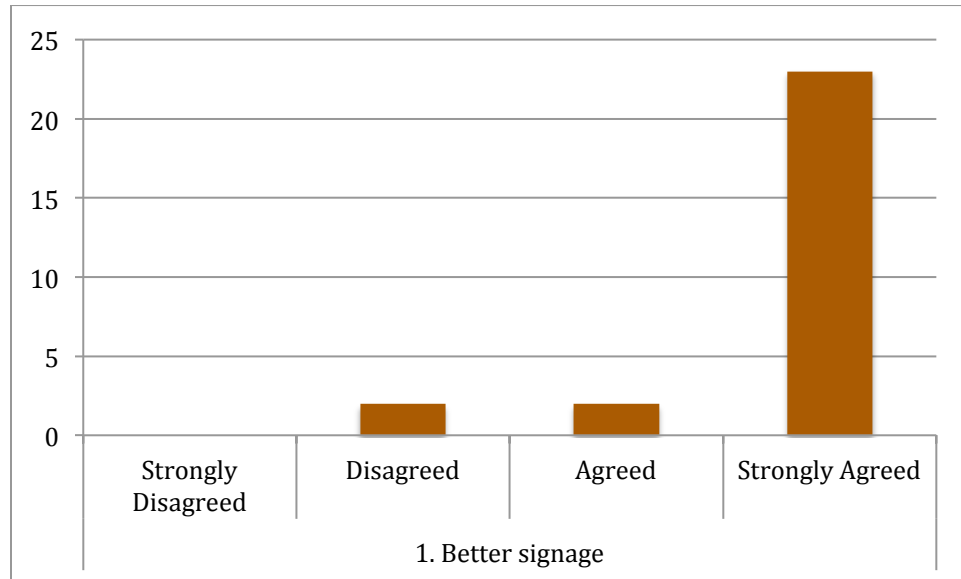
1. Sanitation: Too many dog owners do not pick up after their pets, or pick up after them and then leave the plastic bag of dog waste along the trail, in the woods, or at the trailhead.
2. Safety: People have been chased, jumped on, intimidated, and even bitten by unleashed dogs. This keeps some people, especially with people with children who are afraid of dogs, from using our trails and parks.
3. Wildlife: A major function of our open space properties is to serve as wildlife refuges, places humans visit but have minimal impact on the natural systems at work. Uncontrolled dogs can have a negative impact on wildlife in these areas.

Part II of the meeting had people working in small groups to identify possible solutions to these three problems. Each group compiled a list of suggestions that a majority of the group could agree to. These suggestions were then compiled in a composite list, and then each participant indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each specific recommendation.

Recommendations and the Level of Support Each Received

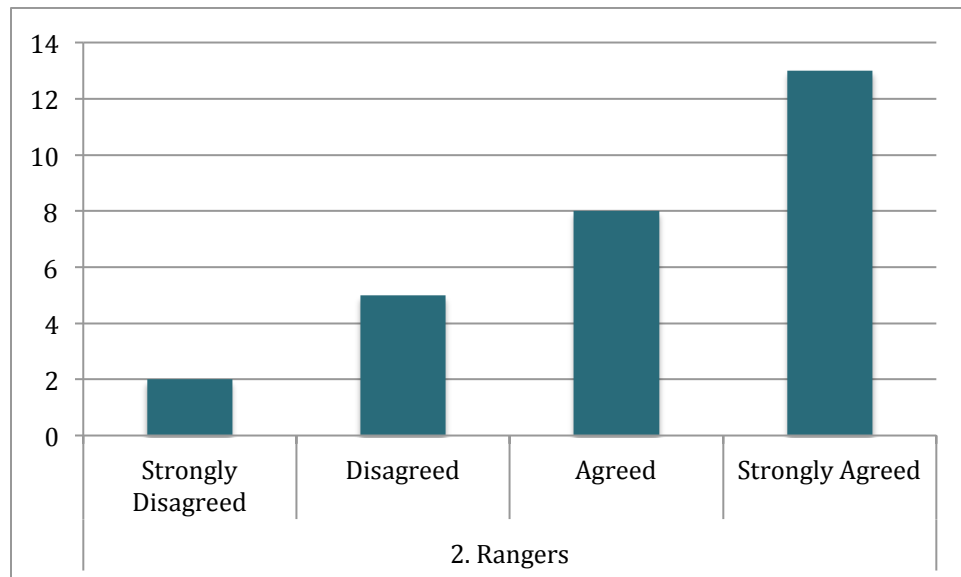
1. Better signage at trailheads and kiosks about the rules governing pets on each property.

Twenty-five of 27 people agreed (2) or strongly agreed (23) that this was a good idea. Only two disagreed.



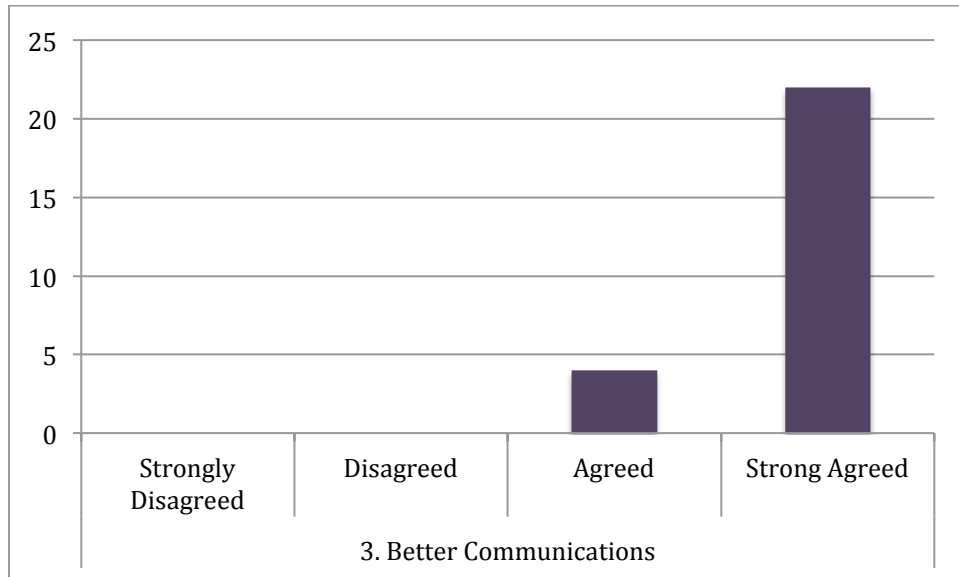
2. Hire or recruit volunteers to serve as Rangers, empowered to enforce town pet ordinances.

Twenty-one of 28 people responding agreed (8) or strongly agreed (13) with this suggestion. Seven people disagreed (5) or strongly disagreed (2).



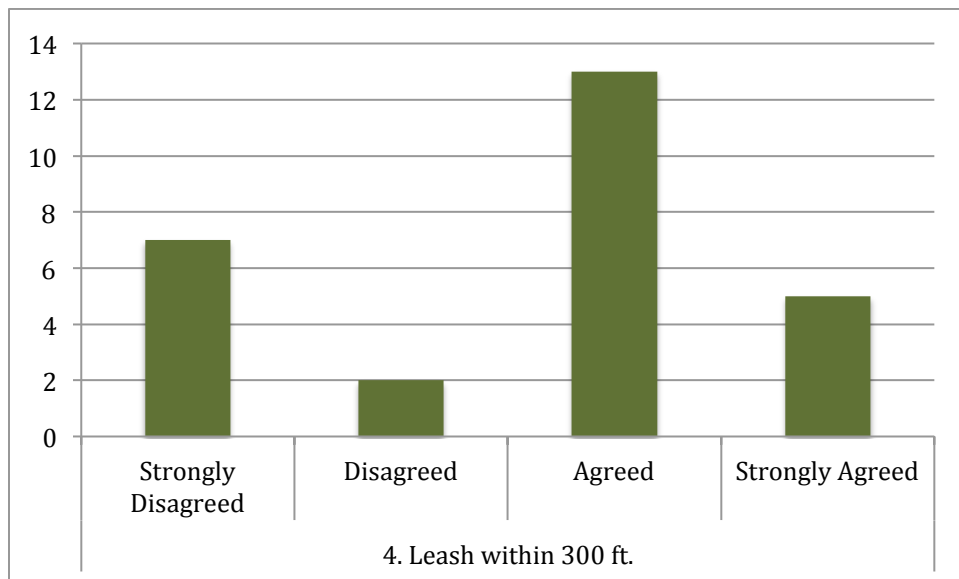
3. Improve communications with all town residents regarding town pets on public lands ordinances.

There was unanimous agreement regarding this suggestion.



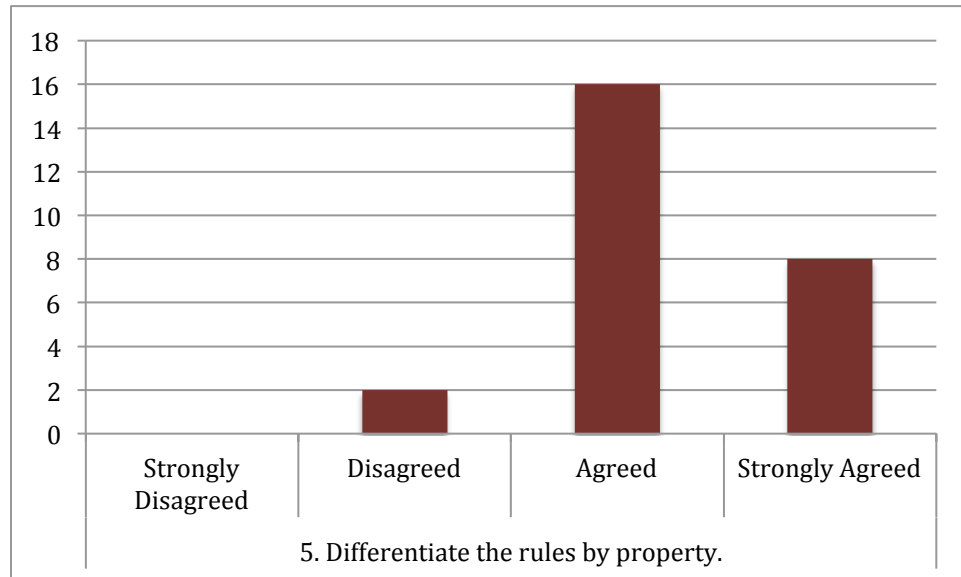
4. Require pets to be leashed within 300 ft. of a trailhead.

Opinion on this recommendation was split, although a majority agreed (18); nine disagreed.



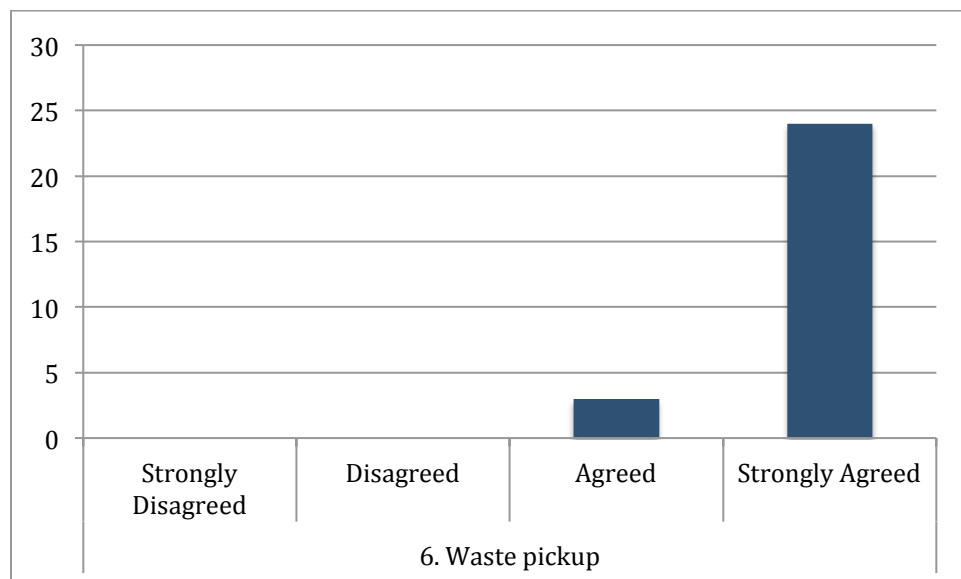
5. Differentiate the rules according to specific properties or even within specific properties. Some properties might be off-limits to pets; others allow no leashes; and still others require leashes at all times, etc. Within properties, some specific trails might be off limits to pets; others open to them.

Twenty-four of 26 respondents agreed (16) or strongly agreed (8) with this recommendation. It was noted the “the devil’s in the details.”



6. Implement a “Poop Paws” system that dispensed plastic bags and had a receptacle for depositing them at major trailheads. Have the town or volunteers collect the waste.

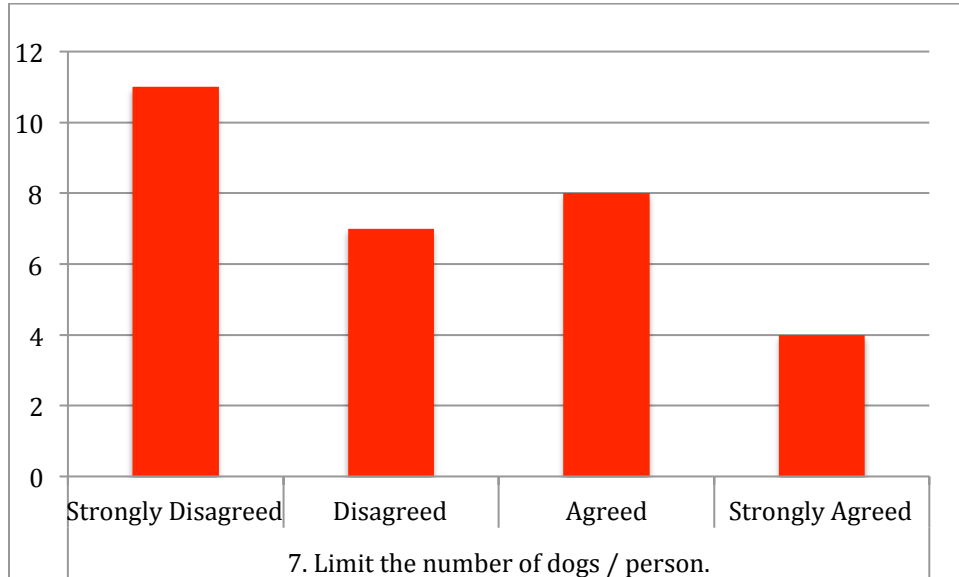
There was unanimous agreement about this suggestion, with all 27 respondents agreeing (3) or strongly agreeing that it was a good idea.



7. Limit the number of dogs that can be walked by one person.

Opinion on this recommendation was split, with a majority strongly disagreeing (11) or disagreeing (7). Eight people agreed and 4 strongly agreed.

These numbers suggest that perhaps two people may have voted twice on this item, since the total votes (30) exceeds the number of participants.



In addition, nearly twenty emails with comments and suggestions about pet regulations were received from Falmouth citizens. LMAC and PACPAC will now review the various suggestions from both the meeting and emails and develop a proposed list of pet regulations to present to the Council. The Council may or may not choose to address this issue. Interested parties should attend LMAC or PACPAC meetings, or read the minutes of those meetings to keep apprised of future activities.