

City unleashes fines against dog walkers

For letting pets run free along Stony Run

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Hugh Holman usually walks his three Dalmatians, Zoe, Axel and Lu Lu, at a park near Stony Run Creek in Roland Park several times a day.

He takes the dogs there so they can run, play and get their exercise, said Franciene Graillot, Holman's wife.

"These are Dalmatians and, especially the young one (Zoe), need to run," she said.

However, two weeks ago the routine of letting the dogs run near the creek was interrupted when the couple received notice of a \$450 fine they owed the Baltimore City Health Department.

An animal control officer cited Holman \$100 for each dog off its leash, \$100 for not having a permit for multiple animals and \$50 because Zoe's rabies vaccination expired.

The officer told Holman they were ordered to patrol the area for people letting dogs off the leash after a resident wrote a letter to Mayor Sheila Dixon complaining about dogs running free.

Robert Anderson, director of the health department's Animal Control division, said Stony Run Park was not targeted for special consideration. There was a complaint about dogs being allowed to run at large in the park. Dogs were chasing joggers.

"We respond to these types of requests several dozen times a year," he said.

But Graillot said the fines are excessive and the city's leash laws are antiquated.

"It feels like you're being punished for being a good owner," she said.

Graillot said she and Holman feel they've tried to do everything right. They've registered all of their dogs with the city and they have never had an incident with their dogs, who they said are in no way aggressive.

Graillot said that LuLu is 13 and Axel is 14, and that Axel suffers from spinal problems.

She also said that going after dog owners who are just trying to make sure their animals are happy and healthy should be secondary to actively seeking out people who are abusing animals.

"Why aren't they out there finding the Michael Vicks (a former NFL player convicted of dog fighting) of Baltimore?" Graillot asked.

She said she understands that dogs need to be controlled by their owners, but said they also need exercise.

The only off-leash dog park in the city is in Canton, and that is not convenient for people who own dogs in Roland Park that need to be exercised several times a day, Graillot said.

Anderson said people who want to walk their dogs off the leash should form a group and work with the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks to establish a dog park within a reasonable distance.

The leash laws are written to protect both the citizen and the dog, Anderson said.

In the Holman-Graillot case, if a raccoon had bitten the unvaccinated dog and escaped, the dog would be euthanized or quarantined for six months. If the dog bit a jogger, it could have been brought in front of the Vicious Dog Hearing Board, deemed vicious and immediately euthanized.

"The message is love your dog, license your dog and leash your dog," he said.

After receiving the citations, Holman and Graillot said they called to learn what needed to be done to get

the permit.

They said they were unaware they needed a special permit for multiple animals.

The health department had to inspect and photograph their house and post a large sign in their front yard announcing that they were applying for the permit.

Several neighbors who saw the sign -- which told neighbors who oppose the permit to write to the Animal Control Board -- asked Holman and Grailot if they needed letters of support.

Grailot said she understands why the department wanted to inspect their home, but she said the efforts were misplaced.

Grailot and Holman are appealing the citations, but a date for the appeal hearing has not been set.

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