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# Dog owners protest \$1,000 no-leash fines

By Brent Jones | [brent.jones@baltsun.com](mailto:brent.jones@baltsun.com)  
10:40 PM EDT, April 16, 2009

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About 100 dog owners gathered Thursday night at Riverside Park Pavilion in [Federal Hill](#) to protest the \$1,000 fines for owners who allow their animals outside without a leash.

Animal control officers began issuing the costly citations this month. The amount is 10 times the previous fine for first-time offenders.

City Councilman Edward L. Reisinger held an open forum where he and Councilman [William H. Cole IV](#) listened to dozens of dog owners, who called the new fines "excessive" while arguing for off-leash early-morning hours in city parks.

The City Council approved the increased fines last year as part of a larger measure to raise fines for a variety of animal control violations. Reisinger said the original bill was to protect dogs from abuse and that the leash law was part of that bill. He told the crowd that he is co-sponsoring legislation to be introduced Monday to revamp the law and lower the fine to \$250 for first-time offenders.

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Ian Ruiz, who owns a 45-pound terrier mix and runs it without a leash early in the morning, said Federal Hill dog owners do a good job of policing themselves. "It's a cat-and-mouse game. We had been able to get away with it. But we have a really good off-leash community here," Ruiz said.

Dog owners can appeal fines in Environmental Court.

"My office got quite a few number of e-mails and phone calls stipulating that the fine was too high, and I can understand that," Reisinger said. "The answer isn't large fines. The answer is that the city needs to have more dog parks."

Since March, the city has cracked down on dogs without leashes, staging several raids, including in [Mount Vernon](#) and Federal Hill.

Beth Krasucki, who lives on Covington Street a block from Riverside Park, said she was given a citation April 5 after a friend walked her dog without a leash in the park.

"It was like a sting operation," Krasucki said. "We plan on fighting this completely. I mean, \$1,000? ... And there had been no information going around to even alert us of this."

Several dog owners argued that they should be able to run their dogs during off-peak hours in designated areas. Cole said that could be a solution the City Council

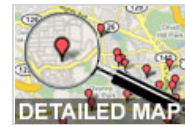
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