

You may not know, but recently the Mass Turnpike has announced that it is going to remove the gate on the Little Park on Richmond Street (by the Tunnel and across from 108 Richmond) in order to discourage dogs from being there. It is my understanding that this decision was made based upon pressure from just a couple abutters, and without soliciting the input of the neighborhood as a whole.

I'd like for you to consider whether or not doing this is the best thing for the neighborhood, and how this might impact other North End parks, ball fields, and tot lots. Note that this is the only gated public area in the North End that isn't a tot lot or ball field. There are at least 75 - 100 dog visits per day in this park, but in spite of this, it is one of the cleanest parks in the neighborhood due to the diligence of the dog owners who use it.

For those who aren't familiar with the history of the park, it has not been maintained for about 20 years. Many years ago, the Richmond Street side and the North Street side were one park, with no dividing fence. The Richmond side had old and unsafe sees-saws, swings, and so forth. About twelve years ago, Head Start got the Mass Pike to separate the two sides and put in the North Street tot lot. Shortly thereafter, the unsafe playground equipment was removed as part of a Boston Shines project.

I believe that this action will have the following negative impacts on the neighborhood:

First, dog owners whose dogs cannot be off the leash without an enclosed area will tend to go to other enclosed areas in the neighborhood. This would include tot lots, especially the North Street tot lot, and the Langone Little League field.

To support this, a few years ago, the gate was removed for about a week. Dog owners began to take their dogs to the tot lot side of the park on North Street, especially at night, because it is gated. Although this gate is currently locked for brick repairs, once the bricks are fixed, I suggest that this will happen again.

Second, many owners whose dogs are good off leash, have told me that they would be afraid to let their dogs run free in the Little Park once the gate is removed, since it is so close to Richmond Street. These owners are probably going to take their dogs to Columbus Park, the two Greenway Parks on Cross Street, Puopolo Park, the Gassy, or the Prado, among other parks. There are already many complaints about off-leash dogs in these areas.

Third, over the last few years, the many dog owners and others who have used this park have worked on a regular basis to keep the park clean. They have planted flowers and raked. The frequent visits of dogs and their owners have discouraged the homeless, alcoholics, and drug users from hanging out, especially at night, in this dark and out-of-the-way park—formerly, a longstanding problem.

Finally, there is no real purpose to be served by removing the gate. Making this into a small pocket park for people is hardly necessary when the two, new Greenway parks and Columbus/Waterfront Park are one or two blocks away.

The park is in very rough shape now. Neither the Mass Pike, which owns the land, nor the City has done any real maintenance to this park for 20 years. As a result, it has lost almost all its topsoil and what little is left, is rock hard.

No one objects to sprucing up this park with planters and new benches. However, it would take extensive renovations, including replacing the top soil, to make this an “enjoyable park.” That would be very expensive due to the many concrete blocks and large tree roots under the dirt. Spending that amount of money is unlikely in the current fiscal climate, especially when the Mass Pike is not only deeply in debt, but is slated to disappear by the end of this year.

This park is owned by Mass Pike not the City. Why can't the Pike make it into an official dog park like the MWRA recently did in Southie? Because it is owned by the Pike, it is not subject to the city leash law (as far as we have been able to determine, there is no state leash law), and it doesn't have to comply with the recently enacted, but cumbersome, City Dog Park Ordinance, which only applies to City parks. Additionally, the city allows off leash hours in the Boston Common. We put up with over a decade of the Big Dig. The Pike, it seems to me, might want some good publicity for a change.

In talking to people who work at the Mass Pike, we have been told that the only thing the Mass Pike will respond to is a strong showing of neighborhood sentiment by means of a large number of e-mails (or letters) regarding this matter. A paper trail is necessary. Do NOT just telephone, because your opinion will likely not be accounted for if phoned in.

I discussed this matter last week with Mass Pike Board member Mary Connaughton. We met at the little park and there were several dogs playing at the time. She was appalled that the Pike was going to remove the gate without going through a community process, and she thought that using the Little Park as an off-leash dog park was a great idea. She wrote about this in her Boston Herald Blog. You can see it at http://www.bostonherald.com/blogs/news/toll_talk/?p=191.

I urge you to contact both the Mass Pike and City Hall about this. It is also important to the City as taking away the gate will negatively impact City parks, ballfields, and tot lots.

E-mail your comments to Mass Pike Executive Director Jeffrey B. Mullan at Jeffrey.Mullan@MassPike.com and to Nicole Leo, Liaison to the Mayor, at nicole.leo@cityofboston.gov.

You might also cc Aaron Michlewitz, our new State Rep, at Rep.AaronMichlewitz@hou.state.ma.us and perhaps our City Councilor Salvatore LaMattina at salvatore.lamattina@cityofboston.gov.

You could also call John Romano, Mass Pike community liaison, at 617-248-2822.

I discussed this matter today with a Mass Pike Board member who, although not familiar with this park, agreed to meet with me later this week at the park. I will let you know if anything comes of this.

In the meantime, if anyone knows “someone,” I urge you to contact them.

If you have questions or want to discuss this, call me at 617-227-7987.

Regards,

Fredda Hollander

NOTE: PLEASE ALSO EITHER CC YOUR LETTER OR JUST E-MAIL
savethegate@hotmail.com SO THAT WE CAN SEND YOU UPDATES ON THE LITTLE
PARK.