MVCCA Environment and Recreation Committee Resolution on the Interim use of Westgrove Park as an Off Leash Dog Area

1.   Whereas, the former Westgrove Sewage Treatment Plant was reduced to a pumping station (still active) and the 22-acre property was transferred to the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) in 2001 and is now known as Westgrove Park;

2.   Whereas, Westgrove Park includes a stream, buffered by a designated Resource Protection Area (RPA), that drains to the Potomac River through Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve, a unique ecosystem and the largest temperate freshwater tidal marsh in the National Park Service system;

3.   Whereas, development of a master plan for Westgrove Park was initiated in 2005 but was suspended indefinitely due to lack of community consensus on future use(s);

4.   Whereas, dog owners have been using Westgrove Park as a *de facto* off-leash dog area for about five years, but animal control officers recently began enforcing the leash law and ticketing owners of unleashed dogs;

5.   Whereas, the Pumphouse Association for Canine Kindness (PACK) has asked FCPA to designate a portion of the Westgrove Park for interim use as an OLDA (http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/OLDA_development.htm), with no additional improvements, until such time as the county obtains citizen approval and identifies funds for alternative use(s);

6.   Whereas, the FCPA Executive Committee did not support PACK's proposed interim use, because (a) it did not meet FCPA guidance for operating an OLDA (http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/OLDA_development.htm), and because (b) it did not satisfy the preference that such uses be master-planned, and because (c) on-site access and parking do not meet public use standards;

7.   Whereas, the only off-leash dog park in Mount Vernon district is at Grist Mill Park, located 11 miles away on heavily-travelled roads, and the closest dog park is Founders Park, located 3.5 miles away in the City of Alexandria;

8.   Whereas, Section 41.1-2-4 of the Fairfax Code permits an "off-leash or dog exercise area" (OLDA) to be designated on FCPA land by resolution of the FCPA, and policy 103-1-3 of the FCPA policy manual allows the authorization of this use on an interim basis;

9.   Whereas, PACK has demonstrated the need and desire for an OLDA in this area including with a petition with over 500 supporters, a need that was also rated as one of the greatest unmet needs by FCPA itself in an assessment conducted in 2004 using standard metrics;

10.   Whereas, Supervisor Hyland has publicly supported the OLDA and has asked the Mount Vernon representative to the Park Authority Board to support interim use for an OLDA at Westgrove Park, and has asked FCPA to begin master planning Westgrove Park;

A.   Therefore, be it resolved that the MVCCA affirms Supervisor Hyland's request that the Park Authority initiate the public master planning of Westgrove Park as soon as possible;

B.   Be it further resolved that MVCCA recommends that FCPA grant interim use of a portion of Westgrove Park as an OLDA, subject to the following conditions:

a. FCPA shall present a specific proposal for consideration and seek the views of neighborhood groups, the Belle View Elementary School, and Martha Washington Library;

b. There shall be a designated "dog owners' sponsoring organization" with responsibility for monitoring the use of the interim OLDA in accordance with FCPA guidance;

c. The interim OLDA shall be located within the already-disturbed area of mowed grass enclosed by an oval asphalt driveway (i.e., the site of the former sewage treatment plant);

d. The specific design of the OLDA is to be negotiated by FCPA staff and the dog owners' sponsoring organization;

e. Leash restrictions will be enforced outside of the designated OLDA and the RPA and natural areas should be demarcated as no-dog areas;

C.   Be it finally resolved, the FCPA should conduct a formal inventory of the natural resources of Westgrove Park in order to inform final decisions about appropriate and compatible use(s) for a final park plan.