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Pilot program OK'd to allow dog walking in city parks

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LAKESWOOD — After months of discussion and debate, residents will be allowed to put their dogs on a leash and take them to Lakewood and Kauffman parks. City Council voted 3-2 in favor of legislation to allow dogs on standard 6-foot leash into the two parks beginning April 9.

The controversial one-year pilot program has been in the works since last spring when Ward 2 Councilman Tom Bullock introduced the idea of allowing dogs in all of the parks. Since then, there have been numerous community meetings about the issue and many arguments on both sides.

The new ordinance includes extensive restrictions that prohibit dogs from certain areas of the parks such as playgrounds and

the access ramp to the lake at Lakewood Park. Dogs are also banned from the parks during large events like the Fourth of July and concerts.

“What we’re proposing in my view is a middle ground and it’s something that we’ve worked on very hard over the course of a year with a lot of citizen engagement,” Bullock said. “So we’re going into this experiment with our eyes open about potential problems and ways to address what I’m sure will be the occasional irresponsible user rather than the frequent one.”

Councilwoman at large Mary Louise Madigan and Ward 3 Councilman Michael Summers, who both voted against the ordinance, addressed several potential problems such as the cost of implementation and enforcement, dog waste, safety and general enjoyment of

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the parks.

“Even with all of the efforts put in, this has still been a rather disjointed and haphazard presentation of what essentially is an ordinance and could have actually just been a policy decision,” Madigan said. “There are a number of things I’m not clear on. This just isn’t an issue that I think we should be spending our very limited resources on. There are many more deserving issues.”

Summers pointed out that residents have the option of walking along Lakewood’s 120 miles of sidewalks and expressed concern about enforcement of the restrictions, as well as support for the ordinance.

“I believe effective enforcement and funding of this ordinance rests in a volunteer citizen group,” he said. “I’ve seen little evidence that this is a very large group and I believe that this group, while sincere in their beliefs and intentions, has challenges to maintain the enforceability and funding over the long-term.”

The group advocating dogs in Lakewood’s parks, known as the Citizens Committee to Allow Leashed Dogs in Lakewood Parks, argues that they have done the necessary research and planning for startup money and supplies, including promissory notes from businesses willing to donate funds.

“I was amazed and baffled that this has not been changed sooner,” said Kat Berger, owner of The Furry Nation pet store. “It’s advantageous to us not only for business but as a community.”