

City of Westminster Mayor and City Council
Westminster City Hall
4800 W 92nd Ave
Westminster, CO 80031

Bethany Yaffe, PE, ENV SP
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RE: Westminster Hills Open Space Use Determination

To the City of Westminster Mayor and City Council:

I am a concerned resident, a licensed professional environmental engineer, a certified sustainability professional, a participant in the Westminster Hills Open Space Community Advisory Team (WHOS CAT).

I am asking you to lead by example, to follow City Code and your own guiding principles, to educate the public and make the difficult decision to protect this heritage open space property by significantly decreasing the size of the off-leash dog park.

I am a dog owner of two large, energetic dogs. I used to be a frequent visitor to the off-leash portion of the Westminster Hills Open Space, and no longer go due to the congestion, visible degradation to the land, and a dog who is now reactive after being attacked (not at the dog park). I loved running with my non-reactive off-leash dog in this space, **but I love preserving the land more than my own enjoyment and convenience.**

"Ignorance, arrogance, narrowness of mind, incomplete knowledge, and counterfeit knowledge are of concern to us because they are dangerous; they cause destruction. When united with great power, they cause great destruction... Now, reasonably enough, we are asking, if it is even thinkable, that the destruction can be stopped." -Wendell Berry, *The Way of Ignorance*

It has been made clear to me during the WHOS CAT process that the destruction of the Westminster Hills Open Space can be stopped if a dedicated group of leaders have the fortitude to intervene.

I want to make clear that the Westy Dog Park Guardians, with their emotionally evocative and inflammatory language, incorrect information, and fear-inducing message of "Save the Dog Park!" will garner significant public support, but their suggestions fall painfully short of restoring, protecting, and "saving" this land. Jefferson County had to close an off-leash dog park area due to similar degradation of the land, and it is ultimate hubris, expecting that the experience of surrounding open space managers is not applicable and ignore the experts that work for the City, to expect land impacted by off-leash dogs will be restored with anything less. While I can enumerate the reasons why with peer reviewed journals, textbooks, and years of experience, I will instead summarize:

- Off-leash dogs are the biggest negative impact on the land. This is undisputable.
- The recommendations put forth by the Westy Dog Park Guardians do not address the biggest negative impact, off-leash dogs.

- The land cannot not be restored and will continue to degrade if the plans suggested by the Westy Dog Park Guardians are the only steps taken.
- The off-leash area must be decreased to restore the land.
- By requiring on-leash dogs in the majority of the space, you are opening the space to more mixed use, and safer use for the public.

It is the Mayor's and City Council's duty to protect this land, dictated by the following:

- *City Code: 13-5-3 (B)* Additional activities that may be allowed on certain open space property, or portions thereof, after the City Manager determines such **activities will not have a detrimental effect** on the natural qualities for which the open space was originally acquired.
- *City of Westminster Strategic Plan Guiding Principles:*
 - o Sustainability and Resilience: Act and operate in an environmentally responsible manner and lead by modeling best practices and incorporating sustainability in every aspect of our work.
 - o Prevention and Proactivity: Solve problems at their source and focus the City's policies and community education and addressing root causes, leading to a better quality of life and greater prosperity for all in our community.

In summary, the only way to continue to allow the public to have safe access to the site and successfully restore the land is to make the majority of the area required on-leash.

This land was purchased and established as an open space. It is clear that the current use of this space (off-leash dog park) has a significant detrimental effect on the natural qualities of this open space property.

The land is continuously exposed to a negative impact (off-leash dogs), and in order to ensure long-term viability and health of the land, use of this space must be changed.

Without going to the root cause of this land degradation, without making hard decisions today, you are deferring the cost to future generations who will have to manage this site, increasing fiscal cost and the scope of restoration due to years of degradation.

You have been told that taking any limit action on this space is against public opinion. However, while I know deciding to decrease the space accessible to off-leash dogs in this area will anger a portion of the public, many will understand and be able to enjoy this space more fully.

It has been communicated to us during the WHOS CAT that the burden of the final decision rests with you. I am asking you, those who have chosen and have been chosen to lead the community, to educate residents and visitors, and make the decision to follow your own code and guiding principles and decrease the size of the dog park.

Sincerely,



Bethany Yaffe, PE, ENV SP
WHOS CAT Member