

Fairfax Extra
Taking Offense at Realtor's Us ...
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Taking Offense at Realtor's

Use of Flag for Advertising

Kenneth Bredemeier's article about roadside advertising ["Signs, Signs, Everywhere a Sign," Fairfax Extra, July 5] caught my eye because on the Fourth of July, this litter invaded my personal property. When I went outside to pick up my newspaper, I found a real estate sign posted in my front yard and saw its clones in every front yard up and down my block.

The sign, mounted on a wooden stick 30 inches tall and one-fourth of an inch in diameter, is a 12-by-18-inch plastic American flag, with a 4 1/4-by-5 1/2-inch cardboard advertisement that includes a business card attached to the stick. The advertisement is for a Great Falls Realtor. Her crass abuse of the American flag to carry this commercial advertisement makes it doubly offensive, on a patriotic holiday no less.

Bredemeier quotes the Virginia code forbidding such signs on public property but also writes that "Fairfax City officials recently reminded residents that yard sale, real estate and election signs may only be put up on private property." That sentence needs an addition: "with the property owner's permission."

The law in the City of Falls Church forbids such postings on public property and also requires businesses to have the property owner's permission before posting signs on private property.

Coldwell Banker and the Realtor failed to ask my permission, which I would not have given. After removing the sign and reporting the violation to the police, I wrote a letter telling Coldwell Banker never to post any advertisement or leave anything else at my home again. I told the Realtor to put my name, address and phone number on Coldwell Banker's "do not contact" list and to stay off my property.

I hope that other Falls Church citizens will let this company know that we don't appreciate and won't tolerate having our yards turned into advertisements.

Yard sale signs don't bother me, for two reasons. They represent a form of community recycling that I'd like to encourage. Most people who hold yard sales have the courtesy to post only a few temporary signs and to take them down promptly after the sale ends. I would like to see a specific exception in the law for yard sale signs.

I would like to see more enforcement against politicians and commercial ventures such as Herbalife and real estate agents, who aggressively trash neighborhoods with hundreds of signs that are replaced as soon as citizens remove them.

Lelia Loban Lee

Falls Church

Dog Parks Help to Build

Stronger Communities

As a Northern Virginia resident, I have gone to many dog parks here and around the state and found some of the comments by residents near the proposed Annandale park atrocious ["Pet Peeve," Fairfax Extra, June 14]. Most noted were the comments of James S. Dryden Jr., who said dog parks would attract rats, contaminate his property, encourage people using the parks to relieve themselves on his property or give pedophiles free reign over the neighborhood to hurt children.

Not once while at a park have I witnessed any of these situations. Many of the people I've met at the park have rescued their dogs from shelters or the pound, keeping local governments from having to pay for upkeep or euthanizing of these dogs. They do not allow barking, and I have even seen people asked to leave because they have not followed the rules, which including picking up after their dog.

In response to Dryden's comments about rodents infesting the parks, I have seen more rats downtown crawling around the city that houses our nation's monuments than I have at local dog parks. Besides, there is probably a greater chance of luring rats to picnic areas where people leave their trash and food containers and do not pick up after themselves.

I am appalled that Dryden thinks that dog owners are uncivilized enough to [urinate] in his back yard. I certainly have never seen that. Quite frankly, I don't see what these behaviors have to do with owning a pet. We're dog owners, not cavemen. We pick up after our dogs, we control the barking, we look after the area and we report suspicious behavior.

If Dryden is concerned about children being lured into the woods, then he should want people around to ensure that it doesn't

If Dryden is concerned about children being lured into the woods, then he should want people around to ensure that it doesn't happen.

If anything, I have witnessed the strong community that dogs parks have brought to the D.C. metro area. In a city where people don't often even look others in the eye and say hello or talk to their own neighbors, these parks have reestablished the community that we are too busy to build today. People from the dog park I regularly visit have built lasting bonds.

Several parkgoers visited an 84-year-old dog park member in a rehabilitation home after she had hip surgery; they offered support to an attendee that has cancer, and they provide friendship to many retirees who spend time at the park with their dog companions to escape loneliness.

If owning a dog is such a bad thing, as Dryden portends, they why has owning a dog and more, having these dog parks, had such a positive impact on our local communities?

Michelle L. Hankins

Falls Church

Water Near Parks

Goes to the Dogs

Our town house borders the area of the proposed Mason District park. There are many public health problems with dog parks in a densely populated area, including the introduction of pathogens to the community and the runoff of water.

In 1998, a study on the Four Mile Run watershed by the Northern Virginia Planning District Commission found that a dog population of 11,400 contributed an estimated 5,000 pounds of solid waste every day and was identified as a major contributor of bacteria to that stream.

The proposed site of the dog park in Mason District Park is directly uphill from a storm drain, which would allow soil contaminated by dog feces to run into the nearest stream. Even with 75 percent compliance with "pooper scooper" laws, this is still a significant addition of coliform bacteria to the environment. The highest compliance of these "pooper scooper" laws was 69 percent, according to one study.

The bacteria in dog feces are significant. A single gram of dog feces could contain 23 million fecal coliform bacteria. Other studies show that dogs can also be significant hosts for salmonella and fecal strep bacteria and can transmit an infection characterized by watery diarrhea, abdominal pains and fever. Dogs can be asymptomatic. One mode of transmission is improper disposal of dog feces.

These bacteria not only enter the environment through the water supply. The proposed dog park is uphill from the Pinecrest Heights community and other adjacent homes. Simple water runoff downhill to the town house community will make those areas susceptible to bacterial contamination. The easy transmission of these potentially dangerous infectious agents is worrisome in a densely populated area such as ours.

Finally, the risk of dog bites should not be dismissed as unlikely. Dog attacks result in 10 to 20 deaths annually, mostly in children.

The State Farm Fire and Casualty Co. reported paying nearly \$80 million in dog bite-related claims in 1997. In 1998, a study in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that nationally, dog bites occur at a rate of 12.9 per 10,000 people. This represents 914 dog bite injuries requiring emergency room visits per day. The highest incidence was found in boys ages 5 to 9.

Donald W. James

Lynne M. Murphy

Annandale

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