

MBSJRA Presentation to Orakei Local Board on Waiatarua Reserve Enhancement Plan

Thursday 19 September 2019

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We are happy for Waiatarua Reserve to be an off-leash dog area, and believe there is more than enough green space there for everyone that wants to use it. But with backyards shrinking, obesity statistics rising, and physical and mental health worsening, we need to find ways to increase the amount of time our children spend outside and ensure they grow to value our environment. We are here today to request a small a small area of the Reserve be set aside for outdoor recreation and play where dogs must be on-leash.

We believe the reserve is too valuable a green space to be solely dedicated to our four-legged friends. We want the 84% of households who don't own dogs to be able to enjoy the reserve too.

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The reserve is one of over 2,500 spaces in Auckland and 39 in Orakei Ward listed as off-leash dog walking areas, which is defined as: "a place shared with other users, where dogs may be off a leash but must still be under control at all times." Waiatarua Reserve is not a "designated dog exercise area".

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In Auckland 21% of the population is under 15 years old. Our discussions with residents with children show that other than the small playground, the reserve is not well used by this group due to the presence of dogs, and examples of dogs intimidating children, puncturing balls, grabbing sticks, biting bike wheels and interfering with play are numerous. The small playground area is not large enough for anything other than playing on the provided play equipment, but its popularity demonstrates that people want to get outside with their children in Waiatarua Reserve.

We want our residents to be able to go to the Reserve to meet other families to socialise or picnic sitting on the ground, kick a ball around, play some backyard cricket, explore the natural play areas the reserves offers – climbing trees, playing with sticks, being curious about insects, birdlife, habitats and the

seasonal changes. We want young children to be able to safely explore and for older children to be able to go there independently with their friends and have a good time out of the house and away from screens.

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The area needed could be just a small part of the 16ha of open meadows in the reserve. We've included Meadowbank School's senior field as a size comparison here.

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The flat area at the eastern end of the park off Grand Drive is the prime location for such a recreation area. As shown by this flood zone map, the area is not flood prone and observations show that the area is impressively dry even after heavy rain. Pushing out the fenced area at the current playground into the large, flat, adjacent open space could also be an option.

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Our ultimate aim would be having the whole reserve as a space that families and dogs can enjoy. This could be achieved through dog owners simply following the rules, which is unfortunately not happening at present. Our aim is for Waiaatarua Reserve to be an area that 100% of our households can enjoy, not just the 16% that own dogs.

I'll end with this quote from Our Auckland's September edition: "The future is a heavy burden but it does rely on our young people caring for the planet. And you can only care if you've actually spent time in nature, valuing nature."

Please consider setting aside an area of the reserve so our residents to make the most of having such a fantastic natural area right on our doorstep.

Other information perhaps useful for questions

"Now more than ever, the planet needs environmental heroes to lead the way to a sustainable future." – Our Auckland September edition.

The Enviroschools programme aims to install kaitiakitanga or guardianship of the land. The planned enviro centre shows that the OLB recognises the reserve's importance as a teaching space.

“There’s growing recognition that teaching children values such as kaitiakitanga by getting them involved in planting days, clean ups and nature walks is just as important as direct conservation action.” – Our Auckland September edition.

“The future is a heavy burden but it does rely on our young people caring for the planet. And you can only care if you’ve actually spent time in nature, valuing nature.” – Our Auckland September edition.

Obesity is a huge problem in New Zealand and we are the 3rd fattest country in the world. The NZ Health Survey 2017/18 found that 67% of adults and 32% of children were overweight or obese.

Public consultation on the plan in July and August included a questionnaire. While there was a specific question on a dog agility course thus ensuring that facilities for dogs were front of mind, there was no specific question on improving the playground so it is a useable recreation space. As a result a dog agility course was front of mind when answering questions.

In Auckland the number of households with registered dogs is 16%, which means that 84% of households do not own dogs.

According to 2013 census 19% of the usually resident population of Meadbank and St John is aged under 15, and that figure is even bigger at nearly 21% for all of Auckland. Why are dogs allocated 16ha and children perhaps ¼ ha?

The park is big enough to provide a space that people can go without being surrounded by dogs, somewhere that young people and families can go in the reserve where they don’t have to keep a watch out for dog activities. Somewhere where they can enjoy activities that are not compatible with off leash dogs e.g. picnics, ball games, very young children doing whatever they like.