



TOWN OF PELHAM CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Pelham, Massachusetts

Summary Report on Dog Walking Forums

October 14, 2021

The Conservation Commission held two in person/Zoom forums on July 10 and 24, 2021 to allow residents to describe their views on dog walking on town lands and streets and also to discuss possible changes in town bylaw regulations and enforcement. An additional opportunity for individuals to comment on these topics was offered in the form of an online survey, advertised on the town website and Nextdoor.

A brief summary of the comments heard at the forums and online survey indicates that there are many residents who feel that off-leash dogs and their owners should be more strongly regulated than they are although a substantial minority of participants felt that the status quo was preferable. Included in the most common points were

- a spectrum of opinions from no leash requirements to leashing at all times was apparent
- a few locations within town (Buffam Falls Conservation Area, Meetinghouse Road, and Buffam Brook Community Forest) were cited as the most problematic areas
- increased levels of enforcement were suggested
- fines under the current bylaw are insufficient to provide deterrence for flouters of the bylaw
- a full time enforcement officer/animal warden to patrol town trails, provide education, and levy fines is warranted

By and large, many dog walkers seem to feel that the current system is working well. A typical view is that most dogs are friendly and do not cause problems. A number of individuals expressed the opposite view, however, many noting that a “friendly” dog that jumps up on them is not under control and that they or acquaintances have a fear of dogs such that any untethered dog is viewed by them as a threat. Some individuals expressed the opinion that dogs have the right to run freely while others said that domesticated animals in the woods disrupt the ecosystem and its inhabitants and that people on trails should not be put on defense by aggressive dogs.

There was a robust discussion of potential solutions to these opposing views. One often repeated possibility was to restrict the hours that off-leash dogs are permitted in conservation areas and on town roads. Another proposal was to have a designated dog play area in town where dogs could be off leash. The extreme positions were to have no restrictions on dog walking or to require dogs on leash at all times.

The Conservation Commission recommends a middle-of-the road compromise revision of the dog walking bylaw that should be put before Town Meeting for discussion and a vote. The bylaw revisions would

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1. specify that dogs on public ways (roads) in town must be leashed
2. change fines for bylaw violations to a warning ticket for the first violation, \$50 for the second, and \$100 for the third
3. add a second, part-time animal officer charged with patrolling conservation areas, providing education about town bylaws, and writing tickets for violations

The draft texts of two Warrant Articles to accomplish these changes were approved by the Conservation Commission at a public meeting on September 9, 2021. The draft articles that will be presented to the Select Board for inclusion on the 2021 Fall Town Meeting Warrant are:

To Amend the Pelham Dog Statute

Article _____. To see if the Town will vote to accept the recommendations of the Conservation Commission to amend Pelham Code 5.3 as follows:

- 1) Except that dogs must be leashed on all public ways in Pelham
- 2) To amend Schedule S-18, subsection “dogs of leash running at large” fines shall be; first offense a written warning, second offense a fine of \$50, third offense a fine of \$100 or take any action relative thereto.

Hiring of a part-time Animal Control Officer

Article _____. To see if the Town will vote to accept the recommendations of the Conservation Commission to appropriate from the Town funds to hire a part-time animal control officer, or take any other action relative thereto.

The Commission further decided on September 9 that the Buffam Falls Conservation Area (BFCA), which contains the most heavily used trail system in Pelham, will become a leash-only area. All dogs must be on leash within BFCA at all times. Signs that state this restriction and other information on dog control and mechanisms for reporting violations will be posted at BFCA trail entrances. Other select trail entrances in other areas in town will also have signage that describes the town dog-walking bylaw and information on reporting violations. The Commission will review the effectiveness of these changes over time and will make adjustments if they are deemed necessary.

The following three appendices include comments from participants at the two forums (Appendix A), worksheet comments from participants at the two forums (Appendix B), and comments from respondents to the online survey (Appendix C).

Appendix A

Conservation Commission Chair MacDonald asked the group at the July 10 forum for their comments. The following are paraphrased from those comments:

- It would be helpful to have specific times that required that dogs be on leash in conservation areas.
- Graphic signage about issues that have arisen on trails would be useful.
- Report of a rude owner who did not control their dog that was aggressive against the person's dog.
- Dogs not under control have been the problem.
- A report of specific experiences where the individual was menaced by dogs.
- One attendee remarked that a very small number of individuals can get their dogs under control. Most people can't get their dogs under voice control.
- One person noted that they try to get ahead of the game by shouting about leashing dogs when dogs are observed approaching.
- Early morning dog walking doesn't seem to be crowded at all. This individual noted that they enjoy being in the woods with their dog.
- One attendee noted that they have developed a fear of dogs, and having owner say that the dog is friendly does not help. Dogs must be kept under control.
- There was a comment that they hope to find a way to allow dog access while ensuring the safety of others walkers. The town needs a space for dogs to walk.
- There was a suggestion that the solution may be to deal with high use areas. More traffic leads to more interactions.
- One attendee noted that dogs off leash come onto their property while their cats are outside. An incident when a cat was chased up a tree was reported.
- Another individual reported that their dog was attacked on a trail and that the dog will not go back to that area. The two owners of the dog that did the attacking were identified by the license plate on the car parked at the trail head and they agreed to pay the veterinary bill for the injured dog. The dog walking community needs to hold dog owners accountable.
- An attendee who is a runner reported many positive interactions with dogs on trails along with a few negative ones. They suggested that staggered off-leash hours at different conservation areas could allow for both dog access as well as restricted access.
- One attendee noted that they now leash their dog when out walking in response to the discussion about dog walking incidents reported at Town Meeting. They noted that some dogs behave better off leash.
- Another individual said that the current system isn't working for many people in Pelham. They noted that they have had many experiences of being charged by off-leash dogs while walking in the Buffam Falls Conservation Area.
- Another comment was that being nipped or charged by dogs on the trail sucks the joy out of hiking.
- One attendee noted that off-leash dog walking on streets in town is problematic. They noted that half the time dogs are off leash.

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Zoom participants at the July 10 forum posted comments in the Zoom chat window. These included:

- 1) entrance to Buffam Falls by the community garden (Knocked down by large jumping dog off leash, owner non-responsive) and 2) on the (path) trail further into Buffam Falls, mid-way between the garden entrance and the bridge off of N. Valley Rd (2 medium sized jumping dogs whose owners were quite away behind them calling out "they're friendly") and third dog ran up also jumping on me.
- 1) at the first barricade on North Valley Rd, entrance to the logging road (pit bull-like dog jumped up against my chest and as I turned around it continued to jump up against my back; owner was having difficulty getting the dog off and back on leash) and 2) on the Buffam Falls trail just before the Buffam Brook joins the Amethyst Brook, owners continued to reassure me that the medium size dog jumping on me was "friendly". Owner never leashed it even after it jumped me. In both instances I went into a mild shock state where I could not gather my wits to express my dismay or ask for names and phone numbers of the humans. In that state, with the big dog knocking me down, I felt intimidated by the glaring human. I think of how it would be my responsibility to report the humans, and it feels like a mild version of having to confront any aggressor.
- I am always at my garden plot at the entrance to Buffam Falls. I guess I need to define good/bad experience. I have had 40/50 pound dogs run at me on the Falls trail I have been frightened to the point of my only recourse was to freeze in place That's bad. I yelled at the owner to leash her dog and all I got was "she's friendly". I didn't get bitten or jumped on so that's good
- Buffam, Cadwell, Pemberton, Harkness
- I have taken a straw poll of the dog walkers at Buffam Garden. Most are from Amherst some leash, some don't
- Not all dog owners are honest about how responsive their dogs are to voice command. Families with small children should feel safe and no one should be harassed or jumped on by an unleashed dog.
- 18 years of walking most of the public trails in Pelham, including Buffam Falls, of course. Daily to twice daily walks. Over the years had 4 dogs (50-60 pounds each) Met many people, many dogs; no bad dog experiences myself, but I like dogs and am not afraid of normal ones. Had many, many experiences of people interested in my dogs, and of friendly dog/dog interactions and occasional tense dog/dog interactions but nothing dramatic. Have also encountered people afraid of dogs. My dogs come back when I call and I've never had a known complaint about one of them.
- One point to emphasize: the dog-related complaints are virtually all already in violation of the existing leash law. I would much prefer to find a remedy to address violators than to hold all dog owners and dogs to a highly restrictive standard.
- I have had good and bad experiences with other dog owners. As a dog owner myself it is always disappointing. I feel most are responsible like myself. They are trained to stop and come to me as a human approaches. As dog owners we discuss those we come upon that are not good at controlling their dogs and it seems to be repeat offenders and outsiders.
- Would I be correct in saying this is a liability issue? If A strict leash law is in effect, the town cannot be held liable?

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- From the Town of Billerica Water Department Water Quality Report 1/1/2020 - 12/31/2020. "[Dog Waste] It's full of harmful bacteria and excess nutrients which can cause significant health issues including Giardiasis, Salmonellosis, Campylobacteriosis, and Toxocariasis. Dog waste left in our yards, forest areas, and parks can have many adverse effects on the environment. During a rainstorm, these pollutants can be washed into local rivers and ponds"
- When the inevitable law suit against the town (we have a litigious society) arises my taxes will have to pay for the lawyers and any judgement. If we are looking down the road at public trails used by college students and out of towners I am confident that we will see legal problems from a dog incident when one hurts a hiker. The only option that seems feasible to me is to have a designated area where it is clearly posted that this specific area allows dogs off leash, and clearly posted at this location that the town is not liable for any injuries (use this trail at your own risk).
- Maybe walkers should carry pepper spray, similar to mail carriers. I wonder what the reaction from the dog owners would be?
- Should we include the Town of Amherst Water Dept? Off leash dogs are always in the watershed lands

At the July 24 forum Chair MacDonald provided participants with a worksheet to guide their thoughts on dog walking in town, allowed a period of time for individuals to write down their thoughts, and then broke the assembly into three groups that honed their collective thoughts. The three groups then reported out their suggestions as given below.

Group 1:

- no dog should be under voice control only
- restrict areas where dogs can be off leash (will cause walkers to migrate)
- apply different times for off-leash walking
- simple, clear, well spelled out
- enforcement is a huge issue
- what are the consequences if there is an infraction – education piece, could increase dog registration to help with enforcement

Group 2:

- only control what we have jurisdiction over
- remove voice control from the bylaw
- more clearly publicize the rules, and include how to file a complaint -- signage
- fines should be increased
- if caught fourth time, lose dog license

Group 3:

- the dog walking bylaw revision needs to be very clear with a reporting protocol included
- education about the bylaw should occur

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- creating a dog park in town might help reduce conflicts between dog owners and walkers
- the Pelham bylaw should align with those in Amherst, Shutesbury and other adjacent towns

In separate written comments, one resident noted that they had had several bad interactions with dogs on town trails. They noted that saying that individuals who said that they “never had a bad experience (with dogs on trails)” was like saying that “racism does not exist because I have never experienced it”. Another resident commented that they had experienced issues on all trails off of Meetinghouse, North Valley and Amherst Roads. They suggested that town streets should be included in the dog walking bylaw.

A summary of the individual worksheet comments along with the guiding questions is given in Appendix B.

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Appendix B

The following are individual comments from the worksheet used at the July 24 forum. The guiding statements on the form are shown in italics.

Modifications to the existing dog leash Bylaw and public lands. Which areas in town need changes to regulations?

- A. Buffam Falls may need restrictions. “Under voice control” -- a dog officer would be able to see this.

- B. All areas of conservation land; On all roads for sure;
A clear statement that dog license is at stake.
Remove wording “under voice control” from the current law.

- C. Existing law could cover existing complaints – needs to be clearly publicized and complaint process, too. High traffic areas should get leash-only laws. To protect.

- D. Dog leash law should be clearer & publicized.
Needs to be enforced more closely in public lands.
Change “or under voice control”. It’s a leash law. Dogs should be on-leash on roads.
This should apply to conservation land, town owned land, the land we have control over.
Dog waste – increase fines.

- E. No dogs on public lands (or none without a leash)
If dogs need exercise, fence your property and let them run there & throw balls for them to chase until they are tired.

- F. Town controlled jurisdictions;
remove “voice control” from bylaw
Bylaw and method of complaining should be more clearly publicized

- G. Remove voice control
land controlled by town

- H. No change needed

- I. (No comment)

- J. How does one turn in a complaint?
Changing the law won’t change the behavior of some owners.
Dog park? – It works in Northampton!
Northfield & neighboring towns have some leash laws.

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- K. (No comment)
- L. No one (in the group) thinks.. all dogs loose all the time..
Some thought dogs need to be on leash all the time – (remove the “voice control” exception)
Some favored stratified / defined areas of town rules
Some favored schedules town-wide.
Current leash law stands but we need enforcement (i.e. voice control OK)
Simplicity to what’s in place

Modifications to the existing dog leash policy on Pelham lands. What regulations need changes: signage, enforcement, other?

- A. I want to see a program of responsible dog ownership. I will support (financially) enforcement & training.
- B. Signage with pictures. Should state consequences. Walker/owner is responsible. Cameras in high volume complaint area.
- C. Signs are useful to frame expectations.
- D. Signage – pictures & words, big – posted at access points.
- E. Create a dog park. No change needed (with respect to regulations) keep dogs on leash by law as it is. Idea of particular times in some places for off leash takes away some people’s rights to feel safe walking at that time -- How is that just or fair?
- F. Signage with pictures at access points & fines.
- G. Enforcement needs \$\$ and time. How can police/animal officer schedules be altered? Voice command.
- H. Possible time constrictions.
- I. Just concerned that unleashed dogs run towards, startle and frighten horses which (as prey?) animals will halt and run. Who will be liable if the rider is injured?
- J. Doesn’t have an effect on many owners.
No dogs on public lands – unenforceable. But “on-leash” is enforceable. Some dogs are ok in walking situations, some aren’t.
- K. (no response)

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L. Education. Enforcement – not been answered. Animal control full time, taxes go up.

Proposed enforcement actions, citation structure, and penalties.

- A. Violations of the current policies need to be followed up on. I support a dog officer enforcing the existing leash law.
- B. Warning, \$\$ animal control officer (Nancy Long) afterward
Fine up \$5, 10, 15 (waste). License revoked. online report by conservation commission?
Cadwell Forest – Umass Police. Random fines increased. Post where there is a problem.
Dog ban from town if nuisance. Orient Springs – no public access without (??????)
- C. No comment
- D. Clear signage at conservation areas.
Random enforcement, high posted fine at Public access point.
if select board appropriates \$ - hire someone for Animal Control
- E. Education is key. Inform population of laws.
Report immediately to police (dispatch)
When license is issued, law is provided – get other towns to do the same.
- F. Raise fines
lack of resources for control – new officer for random enforcement. Mostly days, part/time.
dog license revoked
- G. Increased fines; animal officer?
- H. No more than existing.
- I. No comment
- J. Get people to enforce the bylaws on their own; police don't have the resources to proactively enforce the bylaw. But: report the incident immediately for response (dispatch).
Out of towners: come from towns with more stringent bylaws.
- K. Signage, Police lines, police officer request.
- L. Consistent across areas to prevent the problem from simply migrating to another conservation area.

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Conservation Education – especially people who want to have their dog off leash.
Happy to support program.

Current bylaw:

Site & immediate response to voice control & does not trespass on private
property

leash control

removal of dog waste

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Appendix C

The following are verbatim responses to the two statements shown in italics at the top of the table. As of 8:00 am on September 12, 2021 a total of 52 responses had been submitted. Of those, 45 respondents said they were Pelham residents, five said they were Amherst residents, and two said they were from other Hampshire County towns. Twenty-nine[of the respondents said that they almost always walked with a dog when they walked on trails or roads and 18 said that they never walked with a dog.

<i>Let us know of incidents, positive or negative, involving dog walking in Pelham on public lands or roads.</i>	<i>Pelham is considering various options for dog walking on public lands. Please give us your thoughts on the matter.</i>
<p>mostly very positive. I walk with a very active and extremely friendly young dog, always on a leash, and we enjoy encountering other people and dogs in the woods. But once recently in the woods by our house my horse was startled by an off-leash dog. I couldn't stay on and fell into the brush and badly bruised my leg and hamstring. Not good!</p>	<p>you don't mention several areas we use- Baxter Road, the New England Trail, Dunlap Creek and the old yellow blazed trail along the Brook which parallels North Valley Road and Rohmer Woods. I would be fine with designated hours for people to have dogs off leash- I would just be sure not to ride my horse during those times. And I would really like to see signage indicating our rules- especially in the informal parking area by the Jersey barriers on North Valley! A lot of people from outside of pelham come up here.</p>
<p>Some off leash dogs, usually at Buffam, not under voice control run at my on leash dog. Otherwise mostly positive experiences!</p>	<p>I understand people wanting to walk their dogs off leash but if that dog can't be controlled, they should have to be leashed. Ultimately feels to me like dogs should be leashed for everyone's safety! Although I understand that's a bummer for some with really good dogs. As usual, a few ruin it for the many. Thanks for your attention to this issue!</p>
<p>I have never had any negative experiences, only positive. Everyone is always friendly and respectful of me and my dogs, and vice versa. Most people I meet with dogs have them off leash as well and they interact in a friendly manner, usually briefly, before continuing on our respective walks.</p>	<p>I strongly disagree with any type of mandatory leash law on public lands for numerous reasons. 1) I rarely encounter others on my daily walks. Having to leash them an entire walk on the off chance I'll come across someone seems ludicrous. 2) most dogs, mine included, are more comfortable meeting and interacting off leash. 3) part of why I live here instead of somewhere else is the vast space for myself and my dogs to enjoy. They love exploring the woods, having the freedom to pop off trail to sniff, hop in a pond, chase a turkey into flight, etc. Having that ability on a daily basis keeps them calmer and happier. I always have leashes with me if for any reason I need to use them, which I have on the extremely rare occasion. I do feel it's safer to have them leashed on roads as I've noticed not everyone in the area follows the speed limit.</p>
<p>I've only come across one instance in my 15 years here where a dog was under voice control. It's too little too late when riding my horse if a dog is way ahead of the owner and rushes at the horse.</p>	<p>I think all dogs should be on leash. However, One of our dogs is old and crippled and can barely get around so in that instance it seems foolish to put her on a leash I usually feel like I'm at a funeral</p>

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	<p>March when she comes along. Our other one is strong, friendly active and young and she is always on a leash.</p>
	<p>Would support leashes at Buffam and Caldwell and voice control in other areas</p>
<p>It's been some years since I've walked once or twice a day, but I have small dogs (8 and 15 pounds) and one reason I STOPPED walking is because my dogs were attacked by a loose dog (since deceased) and one of my dogs was bitten by one (different dog, on a much too long leash!) and a neighbor's small dog was killed by a loose dog (same one now deceased). Now in my 70's, the prospect of my dog being attacked is daunting, to say the least! Most on my street leash their dogs and are considerate. But it only takes one...</p>	<p>You can see from my previous note that I've had a few unpleasant experiences both with loose dogs and leashed dogs. Unfortunately, so much is up to the owner. And I'm ambivalent. Over my many decades of dog ownership I've had dogs I felt were reliably under voice control (and one almost got killed in a freak "exception"! and others I wouldn't trust off my property without a leash. It's a rare dog -- and a very consistently trained one - -who is 99% reliable off leash -- as many have discovered when they've spent days hunting for their "reliable" dog who dashed off after a deer (or got chased off by something) or made a trip to the emergency vet with a dog full of quills who "always comes when I call him." Every dog deserves somewhere to run "loose". And my feeling is that folks who get dogs should make sure they have somewhere -- their own property, a dog park, a friend's fenced yard -- where their dog can do that in a safely enclosed area large enough so they "feel" loose. We could use a good dog park! But letting them run loose elsewhere is, in my opinion, irresponsible and dangerous -- for the dog and for others. I do NOT want to meet a loose dog -- on my road, on a trail, if I'm alone, if I'm with a dog, if I'm on a bike, if I'm on a horse (as I was alot years ago). So I think all dogs not on their own property should be on leash. And even on their own property, they should be under supervision -- not just loose -- and under control so they do not dash OFF the property after someone walking by. Again, it's such a matter of responsible ownership. Every dog owner/walker should ask themselves some very practical questions: (1) What would I do if my loose dog and i spotted a bear or a coyote not far away -- and my protective dog runs toward the bear barking. Would I run after my dog? Abandon my dog and go in the opposite direction? Stand there shouting? (2) Who's at fault if my dog sees something (another dog, a person, a cat, a skunk) on the other side of the road and runs across...and gets hit? I lost a "totally reliable" young German Shepherd that way - -when I took my eyes off her on my own property...just for a minute! There are lots of scenarios that would be so different with no leash vs leash. We should think about them! (At least the neighbor's dog who, years ago, bit mine while both were on leash only got in one bite that didn't turn out to be</p>

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	lethal!) Yes, leashes restrain...but they also protect. (Sorry this is so long!)
Buffum Falls is a favorite. If there are no people in the water, I let the dogs swim at the falls.	It is important to have off-leash opportunities
There is a very occasional incident with a less than perfectly responsible dog owner	If we cannot enforce the regs we have now, why would we even consider adding more? I feel strongly that it is up to the community of dog owners to police themselves. It is the only reasonable solution. Also I wonder if this venue along with the Conservation Committee meetings are the best and only way to conduct a survey. Every dog in Pelham and Amherst is registered and a data base should be available
In the 35 years I've walked the trails in Pelham and Amherst I have never had a negative encounter with a dog(but have with non-dog owners). Problems arise when dog owners do not know their dogs.	I think the simplest solution is to keep the leash law as it is, and not mandate leashed dogs. Dog owners need to know their dogs. Dog owners are consistently being marginalized and there are fewer places to let dogs be dogs. Everyone who uses public forests should be made aware that everyone has a right to use them. Runners and cyclists have to be educated that they need to announce themselves when coming up behind dogs. Education of canine behavior for everyone who uses the woods is necessary.
Many positive experiences, one of the pleasures of hiking in the woods is the interactions, & conversations meeting people and their dogs. I have never encountered a threatening dog in the Pelham woods in over 30 years of living here. Though I enjoy seeing others on the trails, most of the time (99%+ of the time) I do not see anyone else in the woods on trails. The ability to go out my backdoor and run in the woods together with our dogs is a primary joy of living here.	I think that the current regulations for dogs are appropriate and more than sufficient for the trails and conservation lands. The anxieties of a small number of people who seem mostly to be concerned with interactions on roads (not trails) should not guide policy and regulation. This issue raises a much more important long term issue regarding the use of the conservation lands and the trails. Many of these trails have been in place and in use for a long time (decades if not centuries). The declaration of the 'town trails' and the town making official publicly posted and publicized trails (with signage, access and so forth) has brought much higher use in some areas. As someone who loves these woods and uses them frequently I welcome that and have deep concern that we've already crossed into a time when we need to budget, plan for maintenance and ensure that it is done, think about uses and priorities, and be prepared to sacrifice some uses for others. Taking up issues one at a time (like dog leashing) is not in the best interests of the town, the land or the wildlife that depend on it. How can we ensure that the Conservation Commission is able to do this?
No negative incidents in Pelham come to mind.	I've been walking my dog for 4+ years and the only incidents I've had were at Amethyst Brook. Dog owners/walkers here are generally educated in proper etiquette and any new regulations will only serve to drive residents away or force all the

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	<p>dogs into one area, which will increase negative incidents tenfold. Look at how many negative dog incidents are reported at Amethyst Brook on a weekly basis. We stopped walking there. Having a designated dog walking area will cause more dog owners to let their dogs run freely without proper supervision because they perceive that place to be "free for dogs" which will lead to more negative incidents-they will just be in a more concentrated area.</p> <p>All negative dog incidents are generally a result of someone ignoring a current regularation, which is a struggle to enforce as is. How does adding new ones change anything?</p> <p>Pelham has a large plethora of trails and all of them are dog friendly. We could reduce the amount of negative incidents by educating the public on the wide variety of trails across Pelham, Shutsberry, Amherst and Belchertown and encouraging everyone to spread out.</p> <p>Lastly, when this issue was brought up in town meeting it was widely/strongly contested by approximately 2/3rds of the people present. So much so that the petition was withdrawn. People choose to live here because it's not regulated the way Amherst is. Keep Pelham the way it is, and educate the residents on the wide variety of trails. There are many more than the ones listed above.</p>
<p>More people and trash on trails in Buffam falls during covid. It seems to have slowed down this summer.</p>	<p>I don't want my tax \$\$ going toward a full time dog officer to monitor the trails. Those of us who are regulars pretty much monitor what's going on</p>
<p>Cadwell Forest. No incidents in 25 years. Owners have been really good.</p>	<p>Cadwell forest should NOT be restricted to leash only. I live adjacent to the land and walk out my back door and am there. I can see restrictions for North Valley where there has been problems but Cadwell is good the way it is. A blanket leash law for the entire town does not make sense at all.</p>
<p>In ten years I have never had a bad experience except with a town employee</p>	<p>I think it is fine as it is - there seem to be people who have stirred things up, creating problems where none exist. The idea to hire someone to patrol the woods is ridiculous.</p> <p>Use of my tax dollars for such a position is even more so. We live in a rural area so we can enjoy the outdoors with our animals. If something is done it should be like Amethyst where dogs must be leashed after 10 a.m. That works well and there are many more walkers there. When I walk at Buffam I seldom see more than one or two other dog walkers.</p>
<p>My land abuts Amherst watershed land and conservation land. I walk my two dogs on trails in the woods behind my house at least twice a day almost</p>	<p>You haven't explained the "various options" you are considering. But why does the town have to do anything, really? According to reports I've</p>

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<p>every day of the year unless I'm too sick or it's too dangerous. It is the joy of my life and I believe of theirs, too. My husband and I chose to move to this beautiful town specifically so we could be close to the natural world and share it with our dogs, and this is what has kept me going since his ashes were scattered in the cemetery seven years ago.</p> <p>On walks my golden doodles are under voice control. They also wear training collars and I carry remote controllers to summon them back if they are straying or barking. In all my years walking with these dogs, and the previous one, I've had no encounter more unpleasant than the momentary startle at coming upon someone else unexpectedly--especially someone with a dog--setting off a general barkfest that is quickly calmed down.</p> <p>I don't know what you mean by "positive incidents." That's a peculiar question. Who is going to describe running into someone friendly and how sweet it was that their dogs got along? I can't help but suspect that the purpose of this question is to elicit negative incidents.</p>	<p>heard from friends who attended one of these hearings and from the Amherst Bulletin story, there has not been any uptick in problems involving bad dog behavior on public lands in Pelham recently. Has a single person been bitten on public land by an unleashed dog? This sounds like an "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" situation to me. Apparently there are a few grumbling citizens who want to see all dogs on leashes. But in every town, aren't there are always going to be grumbling citizens? Must every squeaky wheel be greased?</p> <p>Pelham has an extraordinarily high tax rate for a tiny town that offers so little in the way of services. I certainly hope town officials are not going to spend any of our precious tax money trying to enforce unnecessary leash laws. I love living here and I value this place for its beauty and its bucolic splendor. Let's keep it that way, please?</p>
<p>We have not had any problems. The trail walking is mostly at Well Away Farm and we rarely even see other people. Our dog is generally off leash but we put her on leash if we see other people unless they also have a dog off leash.</p>	<p>It seems that Pelham already has an appropriate law but it is not enforced. I think that improving enforcement, particularly in areas where problems are reported should be the first step. I attended the first meeting and seemed most of the problems were at Buffam Falls and Meetinghouse Rd areas.</p>
<p>I've had no problems with our dog, which is under voice control and loves people.</p>	<p>It appears that there is one area that becomes relatively congested with walkers, both with and without dogs. Some split time assignment there may be appropriate, but the remainder of the Town should be left without further regulation.</p>
<p>I have only had positive experiences with people walking their dogs in Pelham, whether on leash or under voice control. My dog is a bolter and can be reactive, so I keep him on a leash. Whenever I've encountered an off-leash dog, its owner has always checked with me to make sure their dog can approach. If my dog seems tense, sometimes I'll ask that they leash their dog, and they've always complied.</p>	<p>Please keep the law as it is. We cannot legislate our way to a 100% safe society, and that's not a society I would want to live in, anyway. Dogs that are properly and reliably trained should be allowed to roam in the vicinity of their owner under voice control.</p>
<p>Most folks and dogs are fine. There is an older woman with a white dog that are awful. She has told me her dog will attack my dog and it bit my partner while out jogging.</p>	<p>I don't think a leash mandate is needed or enforceable. We can't really stop people who are behaving badly, so I can't imagine how the town would respond to people with a well behaved dog off leash. I assume a leash law makes us all either into either scolds or scofflaws, neither of which seems like much fun or good for liking your neighbors much.</p>
<p>When I walked off-property with any one of our dogs, they were ALWAYS on a leash, which put them at a disadvantage. We experienced numerous incidents with off-leash dogs: dog fights and trips to the vet, and I was</p>	<p>When I walked off-property with any of our dogs, they were ALWAYS on a leash. I allowed off-leash only on our own property. I stopped walking town trails with my dogs because of incidents and</p>

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<p>knocked down on two occasions. I finally gave up and confined our dogs to our own property.</p>	<p>accidents. It was always a problem, even though dog owners would claim: she's friendly!" or "our dog is gentle." I hope Pelham will require all dogs to be leashed when off owner's property.</p>
<p>I have twice had dogs run at me and bark this summer. It was very unpleasant.</p>	<p>I think that dogs should be leashed on public lands where there are many hikers, like Buffam Brook. In Amherst, at Amethyst Brook Conservation Area, dogs are allowed off leash. Anyone who wants to walk their dog off leash can go there. Thank you for doing this survey.</p>
<p>No problems on Arnold Rd. The owners tend to know where their dogs are and the dogs come when called. I'm not a dog person, but haven't been bothered.</p>	<p>I think the way things are is good. We have great open spaces that should be utilized and are utilized. I've never had a problem with dogs on trails or on the road. Those who own larger or more aggressive dogs tend to keep them on their own property or on a leash. There are other laws regarding owner responsibility of pets and livestock, MGL Chapter 140, Section 155.</p>
<p>Have had many bad experiences with dogs off leash. When I said something most common response is they won't hurt you. I do not know that. I have had dogs rush me barking with no one in site.</p>	<p>Fine if they are leashed. For the safety of people and the dogs.</p>
<p>I have experienced several incidents of dogs off leash who jump on me or get in the way so it's difficult to pass them. In all cases the dogs are not under voice control. In fact, most dog owners don't see this as a problem and say their dog is just being friendly. I am grateful that I have not been bitten.</p>	<p>I believe that one or two areas under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission should require that dogs be leashed at all times. The remaining areas may continue with the current by-law.</p>
<p>Have only had a few negative interactions with dogs - mainly on the Robert Frost Trail, and to a lesser extent, the area around the reservoirs. All instances were with unleashed dogs who were well out of view from their owner. I'm allergic to dogs so I don't appreciate being pounced on but there hasn't been anything too egregious.</p>	<p>I have a lot of thoughts on this issue and would be happy to discuss them in another venue if desired.</p> <p>I worked 17 years for the only Mass Audubon sanctuary in the state that allowed dogs so I have a lot of experience! We worked regularly with members, the local conservation commission, neighbors, animal control, dog walkers, to find a solution for everyone. We did a lot of listening to people's concerns. But ultimately we had to stress the impact of off-leash dog walking, and all the drama that surrounds it, with the health of our ponds, vernal pools, forest and wildlife.</p> <p>I could go on for pages with successes and failures of things we tried. What it basically boils down to is that if you try to enact a specific rule on when, where and how dog walking can take place, it needs to be somewhat enforced, especially at the beginning. We found there was little chance of succeeding otherwise. Without it you just end up with angrier folks than you had before. We partnered with our animal control officer, as a staff we volunteered to patrol the property, we provided educational moments, all in an attempt to make dog walking work. There were areas that were off-</p>

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	<p>limits, especially during specific nesting bird seasons. It was vital that people understood they could see a staff member at any given time on the property. Initially it was great - until those who believed they shouldn't have to have their dog on a lease figured out areas where they were less likely to be seen or they would just walk with the leash in their hand and quickly click it on when they saw one of us.</p> <p>I retired from Mass Audubon a few years ago to move to Pelham, but from I understand, my sanctuary has since given up on trying to make dog walking work and now it is not permissible. I have mixed feelings as there were a lot of mindful walkers who always kept their dogs on leash ,and followed the rules. But ultimately it was the right call for the health of the nature we were trying to protect.</p> <p>I realize Pelham is in a slightly different situation but I'd be happy to provide any assistance if desired. Good luck!</p>
<p align="center">None negative</p>	<p>No strong opinions. I'm a "dog person", even though I don't currently have one, and I've encountered dogs occasionally on my hikes. Some are better behaved than others, but I've never felt threatened or frightened by any encounter. It would be unfortunate to overly restrict off-leash dog-walking, so I hope that in writing regulations some leeway to train dogs off leash is permitted.</p>
<p align="center">Out of control dogs on Buffam Falls land</p>	<p>Leash your dog(s). Pick up behind them and take droppings away with you, i.e. don't tie poop bags to tree branches and walk away.</p>
<p>Many times while walking or horse riding in the woods in Pelham I have had dogs run up to me..sometimes barking, sometimes not. At times there is not an owner in sight .</p> <p>Many times when there is an owner around, the dog does not respond to voice commands to return to its owner. Other times I am told from afar " it's OK- he is friendly".</p> <p>Since Town Meeting Pelham dog owners seem to be more willing to leash their dog if they see others that will cross their trail. When this happens I thank them.</p> <p>I believe the larger problem lies with people from Amherst and other places that come to Pelham to let their dogs run.</p>	<p>It is hard for me to agree to dogs being off leash at all because of the propensity of dogs to chase wildlife.</p> <p>However, I understand the need for dogs to get exercise. I feel 7:00am-9:30am. And 4pm-6:30pm should be times when dogs can be off leash. This gives folks a chance to walk their dogs before and after work.</p> <p>The other BIG problem is the fact that people leave their plastic bags of dog feces on the trails in the woods or at the trail heads. I don't care if the bags say they are biodegradable or not. They hang around for weeks or months !</p>
<p>None dramatic; frequent slightly negative experiences (e.g., encountering a barking, unleashed dog and not knowing if it'll be okay, or seeing dogs swimming in the reservoir)</p>	<p>I hope that whatever rules are put in place for Buffam Brook extend to all areas an easy walk from there. I'm concerned that otherwise, those who currently walk unleashed in Buffam Brook will just move one circle out from there, and spread the problem to trails that aren't now overused.</p>

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	<p>I wish that we could come up with an innovative approach, since this is a perennial problem that so many towns have failed to conquer, and there's no point in repeating ineffective tactics. E.g., What if we could have some kind of a neighbor-to-neighbor reward system, with deserving dogs/owners earning the right to off-leash walking? Or the equivalent of a learner's permit and driving test (and, where needed, license suspensions)? Or...?</p>
<p>I walk four times a week in Pelham woods. I would say 1 out of 5 dogs are on a leash and under voice control - mostly they run up to me barking and the owner says "Oh, she's very friendly". But never calls the dog back to them unless I ask them to. When a dog is leashed I always thank the owner for leashing their dog.</p>	<p>I strongly support very specific times for dogs in Pelham to be allowed off leash. I know they DO need to run free daily. I think two times a day for off leash that respects full time working hours for owners. Perhaps off leash times: 8:00-10:00a.m. and 5:00-6:30 p.m. I am not a dog owner & never have been & hope this town can come to a compromise.</p>
<p>I walk on trails in Pelham with my two you kids on a regular basis. Most encounters with dogs are benign. That said I'd say at least once every few months on average an unleashed dog or dogs will come bounding down a trail and the owner has no control. The dog(s) often jump on or around my kids. Frightening them while the owner says "don't worry my dogs are friendly." These experiences make it hard to enjoy our towns beautiful forests. And I think it's unfortunate than a minority of public lands users make the experience unpleasant for a large share of folks.</p>	<p>There is no reason why Pelham can't have a mandatory leash law for all dogs after 10am like other towns nearby. That would make the forests more accessible to all. Thanks for soliciting input.</p>
<p>Pelham has a lot of watershed properties and I have witnessed residents allowing their dogs to swim in the reservoir that were posted . I'm pretty sure their is state law addressing domestic animals on the watershed. I'm sure Amherst will have something to say about use of their lands.</p>	<p>I'm not sure how you can control things that occur on lands owned by Amherst and UMass.</p>
<p>I've never had a negative incident with someone else's dog. Most of the dogs I've run into have been quite well-behaved, generally not all that interested in me.</p>	<p>While I am not a dog owner and my child is afraid of dogs, I do *not* support requiring dogs to be on leashes on these trails. It's very rare that I run into ANYONE on the trails that I walk, so the risk of an incident is beyond minimal. (I'm usually in the Cadwell Memorial Forest or Dunlop Brook areas, which are not very heavily frequented; I can't speak as much for Buffam.) Moreover, people whose dogs are not under voice command are the least likely to adhere to a leash law, so we would really just be restricting those people whose dogs are already well-behaved. I'm also unclear about how such a leash law would be enforced. If I saw someone violating it, I assume that I would be responsible for getting their information or taking a picture--both of which would feel very uncomfortable and possibly lead to conflict.</p>

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<p>Two days ago my wife, while walking along Amethyst Brook encountered a woman with two dogs off their leashes. One dog, owned, by a friend of the woman (and not accompanying the dog walker) rushed at my wife in a threatening manner and remained near in a threat posture. The second dog, owned by the woman, ran up, sniffed my wife and ran back to its owner. The woman said she was walking her friends dog - one that had been owned by her friend for only two days. Apparently she was trying to introduce her friends dog to trail walking. My wife advised the dog walker of the town bylaw on dog walking and continue on her walk.</p>	<p>The bylaw brought by petition to Town Meeting is a good document if the notation about "private land where dogs are permitted" is removed. This could be interpreted that in some way the private landowner could be made partly responsible for a dog attack. Existing state law already explicitly protects landowners from responsibility in the event that person enters their unposted land without permission and causes or suffers harm of some kind. The statement in the draft seems to establish another unneeded and confusing class of landowner.</p>
<p>walking in Pemberton forest a dog ran up and jumped he was friendly but startled me and I fell.</p>	<p align="center">limit off the leash dogs to Cadwell forest</p>
<p>I personally have not had an issue when encountering dogs. I don't have one right now and only walk friends dogs, always on leash. I tend to go when and where there are fewer people and therefore dogs.</p>	<p>I attended the first meeting held by the Cons Com. I think that one attendee said something important which was that Pelham already has leash laws, the incidents cited at that meeting all broke those laws, but there is an issue of enforcement of any law. Personally, whatever happens with the law, more needs to be done regarding what people think is acceptable dog behavior. That is the gray area. For example, a dog running up to some people is a frightening experience. It does no good to say that "don't worry, the dog is friendly". It is not to that person. Describe what acceptable behavior is in greater detail, like "dogs allowed to run towards another person is not acceptable behavior" as an example. Hard to do but I see so many people "walking their dog" on a leash and it looks as if they are being dragged around by the dog. The dog is not leash trained and who wants to walk theirs on a leash, given that? Just some thoughts....</p>
	<p align="center">I am open to having dogs on leashes. Both to respect other walkers, and to protect the environment.</p>
<p>Some years ago, a neighbor's dog attacked my leashed dog by leaping from his yard onto the road. I've witnessed increased amounts of dog poop on Arnold Road and bags and trash on trails. Also, dogs and horses are sometimes walked through my backyard because trails from Butter Hill Sanctuary are not adequately marked and by the time people get to my yard they've gone through two other properties. My neighbors are welcome if I know them and have been responsive when I let them know ducks are nesting or trillium is blooming. I object to non-neighbors and non-residents wandering through because of poor signage however. The latter seem to be coming from Belchertown via the power lines but not always.</p>	<p>Keep the leash law as it is recognizing that very few people understand what "voice control" really is. How many dogs are we actually talking about? Do the majority of residents own and walk dogs on public lands? Having dogs on a leash is safer for the dogs, wildlife, and humans. Dog walkers should be required to have a leash available even if folks want to take the chance of unleashing their dogs when it seems no one else is around. In that case, enforcement and education are the best options and a strong law can be enforced when something egregious happens even if no animal control officer is immediately available. A control officer would be a good idea--mostly to randomly patrol problem areas to give information, warnings and tickets without being too heavy handed.</p>

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<p>I am now afraid of dogs because of an incident with my husband and the fact there are lots of dogs without a leash on trails.</p>	<p>If dogs are allowed to walk on public lands they should only be on a leash. Their owners should "clean up" after them. If the dog owners want to have their dogs "run free" let them go to dog parks.</p>
<p>Most people I encounter are also walking dogs off leash. I know this is a huge issue with those frightened of canines. I feel for them but wish there was less hysteria involved. I always have a leash and often hook my dog up if I see non dog walkers. Most dog walkers have friendly critters.</p>	<p align="center">Off leash okay if under voice command.</p>
<p>I won't walk alone on trails in Pelham because I am afraid of dogs and have been told Pelham is a place with a lot of off-leash dogs. My husband and I own a house on Gulf Rd that we rent out- we live in Shutesbury. I had an incident in the woods of Shutesbury recently where the dog owner claimed the dog was under voice control but it was not. I was extremely upset and asked her how she would feel coming across my five foot long snake in the woods. Chloe is a Royal python, a species known for being shy and harmless to people but still I understand people are deathly afraid of snakes and I would never cause someone to meet her unexpectedly. I would appreciate the same respect from dog owners. My posting of this essay got over a hundred comments on Nextdoor and if I get a chance, I will rewrite it as a letter to the editor to encourage Pelham to tighten up the leash law. https://medium.com/belly-dancing-bibliophile/dont-tell-me-your-dog-won-t-hurt-me-e299f01f4e0e?sk=97e76ea7fde294e541f5a922fb15c55b</p>	<p>I read in the Montague Reporter that there were only "minor" incidents with unleashed dogs. Please understand that meeting an off-leash dog in the woods at best causes people like me discomfort and embarrassment (I am trying to get over my fear but my body response is beyond my control and dogs sometimes react to fear with aggression) and at worst, a terrifying confrontation as happened when I met a snarling pit bull in the woods of Leverett with no person in sight. Thanks for this survey!</p>
<p align="center">Not sure where Amytheyst Brook are crosses into Pelham, but I see many off-leash dogs and people navigating their various needs there (e.g. "My dog's not friendly," People respond by putting their dog on leash as soon as possible.</p>	<p>I understand the demand for leash laws, but I hope neighbors will consider the fact that many domesticated dogs need exercise off-leash to maintain their mental and physical health. For some dogs, a fenced-yard or dog park cannot provide the space to run freely. And, as the saying goes, a well-exercised dog is an obedient dog. Dogs can be well-trained, but like humans, they are sometimes not obedient and make poor decisions. Conservation areas are wild areas where we accept the possibility of seeing snakes and bears or contracting poison ivy and Lyme Disease. Can we not accept the possibility of an occasional occurrence of a misbehaving dog? There are plenty of parks and yards where people can go and where dogs must be leashed. Like many families, we have adopted a rescue animal who needs far more exercise than we anticipated. He is far, far more likely to become aggressive without appropriate exercise than he is when running freely on a trail. I hope Pelham can come to a middle-ground on this issue.</p>
<p>No negative or positive incidents so far. Just a handful of neutral interactions with other people with dogs, some on leash some off leash.</p>	<p>I'd have to know more about the various options and the experiences of other people. From my</p>

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	own experience alone, there is no need to do anything different.
Have had aggressive off-leash dogs bark and growl at me. The owners always say the dog is "friendly". It unfortunately does not appear that way to me.	Please keep the on-leash law in effect and post more signs accordingly.
	<p>Dogs contribute much to humans' health, both mental and physical. Dogs need off leash time for their own mental and physical health. Many people do not own land to meet this need. Should all those folks be deprived of the scientifically-supported benefits of owning a dog?</p> <p>Towns should not prohibit this activity without providing some kind of alternative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Specify on and off leash hours that allow for working people access --designate an area as the off leash area, with signage directing people to on-leash areas elsewhere if they prefer to walk under those conditions <p>-build a dog park, those these can have issues as well, spreading disease and overcrowding, for example.</p>
<p>Positive: my dogs are free but under voice command and I have never had an incident with walkers or other dogs walkers: I walk in the conservation areas: Pelham conservation land (north valley) and off meeting house road (other side of Buffon falls) when I see a person who request dog to be put on leash - I do so immediately .</p> <p>Walkers become more aggressive than a quiet dog:</p> <p>At times the walker becomes a bit rude even when my dog is quietly waiting for them to pass .</p> <p>I understand fears but not all owners or dogs are aggressive where as many of the walkers immediately go into a reflexive fear mode.</p>	<p>- Dogs should continue to be allowed to be off leash if under voice command and walking in areas that are not heavily used.</p> <p>Strict hours and leash law only at buffam falls. I do not believe that tighter laws at buffam will force dog owners to go deeper into Pelham.</p> <p>We need to start somewhere and most of the issues are at buffam. So let's start restriction of hours at buffam and then evaluate.</p>
<p>since the May Town meeting, I have made a point of being conscious if I ever meet somebody on the trail. And I just don't cross paths with anybody. And I walk at very different times of the day, depending on all kinds of personal circumstances.</p>	<p>Consider that on the many many miles of trails, rarely do two people come across each other. In other words interactions are rare. If you need to make stricter rules Concentrate on Buffam Falls. It seems to be the most used trail. Assign hours of the day, early AM and later PM, for dog walkers not to have to use a leash. respect that fact that there are some people in Pelham who have office hours and still want to be able to walk their dogs off leash. On all trails, place some signs with graphic languages: "Because of out of control dogs: A Pelham resident had to go to he emergency room, a Pelham citizen had to take their dog to the emergency vet clinic, a Pelham resident's 2 year old daughter was ambushed by a</p>

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	<p>dog. The father still has PTSD from the event. Don't let your dog add to these statistics".</p>
<p>I've been walking with different dogs on Pelham trails for 20 years. On the majority of our walks we've not seen anyone. The majority of our encounters are other people with dogs. Over the 20 years I have had very few encounters which were not friendly. I've had a lot of good times with other dog owners in the woods. It's one of the main things I like about living in Pelham.</p>	<p>I have always loved walking my dogs off leash so that they can run and sniff without me having to navigate around trees. It is one of the country things I like most about Pelham.</p> <p>I see very few people on the walks I take round the reservoirs off Meetinghouse Road. I have had very few unpleasant encounters with other dogs or dog owners but lots of pleasant ones.</p> <p>Please don't put in a general leash law applying to all areas when many trails in Pelham have very low traffic.</p> <p>At Town Meeting, the problems that were aired I think could have been dealt with if people had known how to complain using the existing dog law. I think that changing the dog leash law in all areas is not needed.</p> <p>With the increased usage of Buffam Falls trails in the pandemic, I would support requiring leashing and add signage at gates for this area and the Community Forest.</p> <p>Although some people may now say that they want more dog officer hours spent on trails, I don't think they will want to vote to pay for it at Town Meeting, I certainly won't.</p> <p>When considering mandatory leashing, please remember that many dogs are made more territorial and anxious when they are on-leash. Non dog owners often do not know this.</p> <p>Please keep the existing exceptions "dogs in the act of training, working or hunting are excepted"</p> <p>It would be nice if there was also an exemption for dogs that have a recognized dog training certificate such as the AKC Canine Good Citizen. It would give dog owners an incentive to get their dogs trained properly.</p> <p>I would be happy to help with drafting or publicizing if it would be helpful.</p>
<p>I have not had incidents with dogs in 40 years of walking in the Cadwell frequently.</p>	<p>The current rule of dogs being under the control of their owner seems adequate.</p>
<p>Walking with a dog in woodland is one of the great pleasures of living in Pelham. We have never had a bad experience encountering a dog on trails in Pelham and we have spent years walking in the town's woods.</p>	<p>While we understand the problems of off-leash dogs in heavily used public lands, we think any town legislation should accommodate both walkers who fear dogs and the many among us who do our best to be good citizens and keep our dogs under control. Perhaps some hours in the</p>

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	<p>middle of the day when dogs are less commonly walked should be reserved for on leash walking while early and late in the day off leash dogs should be allowed. We have never had problems ourselves with off leash dogs, though during our puppy's training he was not always dependably responsive to voice commands.</p>
<p>multiple near tragic events with off leash dogs. 2 years ago, our dog was severely injured from 2 dogs off leash.</p>	<p>I believe all dogs need to be on a leash 100% of the time in public lands. "Under voice control " is failure as a law, and we need to stop the fear, intimidation and injury due to off leash dogs. This is a public safety issue, a dog safety issue and a wildlife/environmental issue.</p>
<p>Most dog owners and their dogs are friendly and well behaved.</p>	<p>Current status seems OK to me.</p>