

August 19, 2016

To Concord's city council,

Concord has a dog poop problem.

It is not just an irritation, an inconvenience or... ahem... a pet peeve. It is all of those things. AND it is a hazardous waste, as declared by the EPA in 1991. It works its way into the ground and into the ground water. What dog owners fail to scoop up today, we all drink tomorrow. In addition, other pets out for a walk are attracted to the waste and they risk picking up bacteria and parasites from other dogs' poop.

I have tried without success to solve this problem for my own lawn. I have spread doggie keep-away powder on my lawn and learned that it is expensive and ineffective. I have placed a small sign on my lawn, but I am convinced that many of the dogs in my neighborhood cannot read. I have called the police when I witnessed the event and could describe the perpetrators. One time the police took my report. Another time the police told me they didn't have time for this sort of thing, leaving me to wonder -- who better to enforce the law than law enforcement?

Concord does have an ordinance (1880) prohibiting dog owners from allowing their dogs to poop on someone else's property at all, even if they do pick it up. The law allows dogs to poop in public places as long as dog owners scoop the poop immediately.

I learned this from Blossom Hill Cemetery, where they have a dog poop problem. Failing to clean up after a dog in a cemetery goes beyond inconsiderate. That is actively disrespectful. It also leaves a mess for city workers to clean at taxpayer expense.

Blossom Hill hands out a card printed with the ordinance. On the bottom, it says, "please cooperate."

"Please cooperate" is the closest we get to enforcement of the law.

The number of times Concord enforced the law last year was ... zero. The number of dollars collected in fines was zero.

It is a bad idea to have a law that goes unenforced. It weakens society's respect for the law in general. In this case, the lack of enforcement means the bad behavior continues. Dog poop scofflaws know they can get away with it.

We have to enforce the law.

How? Science!

When dogs poop and dog owners choose to be irresponsible, they leave behind evidence of the crime. In fact, leaving behind the evidence IS the crime. 21st century DNA technology can use the evidence to identify the culprit.

Imagine a system like the one used by several condominium complexes now, but apply it to the entire city. Dog owners could be required to swab the cheeks of their pets in order to place their animals on a

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DNA registry. That could happen when they get a dog license from the city, it could happen at the vet's office when a dog gets an annual rabies shot, and it could happen at pet stores or animal shelters when a dog gets adopted. These already require a fee—the cost of DNA testing can be built into those fees. In this scenario, every licensed dog in Concord is part of a DNA database. Owners who fail to get licenses and swab for their dogs should pay a stiff fine.

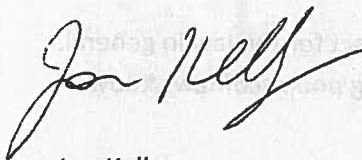
Then, when a dog leaves evidence, any citizen can report it to the police. (Concord has no animal control officer – those duties have been relegated to police officers.) The police officer can take a marble sized sample and send it to the DNA registry which can then identify the culprit and his owner. Then the city can issue a fine. I suggest 300 dollars. If the fines total more than the cost of the program, perhaps the extra money could be dedicated to the city dog park off Branch Turnpike. Even more important than the revenue from fines is the decreased cost of maintaining parks and sidewalks and keeping our ground water clean.

This solution will promote a clean and walkable Concord, and it will bring other benefits as well. Responsible dog owners will no longer be falsely accused, or tarred with the same brush as the scofflaws. Dog owners will be less likely to have their own animals stick their noses in another dog's business and bring home diseases.

This is not something we have to imagine. It is something we can implement now. The DNA technology exists and private companies want to make this work for cities.

How much does it cost? One private company can enter a dog into the national DNA registry for a one-time fee of \$40. That lasts the lifetime of the dog. Then testing a specimen costs \$75 -- a small price to pay to collect a \$300 fine and start eliminating this problem.

Human nature responds to penalties and rewards. How about a small reward for the people who call in reports of dog poop when those reports result in a 300 dollar fine? Even ten dollars is a meaningful reward. That way everyone has the opportunity to be part of the solution. And next time you find something stinky on your shoe, you can tell yourself you might have stepped into a little treasure.



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