

Celebrate your love of dogs at Paws in the Park

By Brock Weir

Sheppard's Bush is going to the dogs next Saturday, May 14, as the Town of Aurora launches Paws in the Park, a new celebration of our best furry friends.

Paws in the Park is an opportunity not only for your pampered pooch to strut their stuff down the runway in a pet fashion show, but also connect with local pet services and stores, as well as sound off on the future needs of the Town's canine community and the people who love them.

While the event is a fun chance to show off your dog, it is also a chance for the Town to engage with local pet owners on future needs and bylaws, as well as act as a refresher on laws already on the books.

"It celebrates the dog and gives us an opportunity to catch up and begin with an educational program for dogs and animal owners," says Bylaw Officer Mandie Crawford. "The demographics of the Town is changing. We have a lot of newcomers to Aurora in the newer subdivisions, and people who have been here for a while. As the Town changes and we have more people using the trails, and more dog walkers using the trails, what happens is there is a lack of communication between the two of them. We are just trying to get everyone together to give them some education and allow them to connect with each other."

Although Ms. Crawford has only been with the Town for a year as Manager of the Bylaw Department, she says they have had "ongoing" concerns not just from dog owners but the public at large around people leashing their animals. Their first step in tackling this issue is education rather than being "heavy handed" with enforcement.

"Our first step [with this event] is bringing together a lot of the dog owners where they can have a forum to express some of their needs and learn some of the local bylaws," says Ms. Crawford. "Some might not even know where the dog park is, for example. They can also get into contact with some of the other service providers in the area like dog walkers, doggie day cares and pet photographers.

"A lot of people commute to work and they are concerned about their animal being alone in the house all day. This will bring them into contact with a lot of dog walking groups, vets and things like that, and get out and socialize with fellow dog owners. Dog owners have a tendency to be able to connect very easily. I have met more people at off leash dog parks than anywhere else. You just start talking about your dog and it seems to be a natural connection."

Sheppard's Bush, however, is not a leash-free park and if you plan on coming out with your canine and letting your dog do a turn on the catwalk, leashes are required so the event remains a welcome one for big bruisers like Great Danes or the most jittery Chihuahua.

But, if you think Aurora needs an additional leash free dog park in addition to the one already near the top of Industrial Parkway North at St. John's Sideroad, this will be your chance to say so. Some dog owners, says Ms. Crawford, have already said there is a need for a second park space.

"As more families come into Aurora, there will be more dogs," she says. "It is a growing canine community, as well as a growing people community. We want to be proactive with our education as opposed to being the big, bad dog catcher, because we're not. We want to make sure everybody in this community can be comfortable and still have the ability to have happy animals. It starts with education. We don't want to go out and do a pile of enforcement without educating people saying this is why we do this. If they want another dog park we're not going to know unless we're out there amongst them and not chasing them."

Paws in the Park will take place Saturday, May 14, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Sheppard's Bush (Enter at Industrial Parkway South and Cousins Drive). The Pet Fashion Show begins at 2 p.m. Best Dressed will have the chance for one of three prizes of 90 days of full

access to the Aurora Family Leisure Complex, as well as goodie bags from participating services and vendors.