

The Springfield Park Regulation Challenge

by Graham McCoy

I (Graham McCoy) am a dealer for White's Metal Detectors in Chatham, Illinois, I began receiving text messages from several friends and purchasers who share this wonderful pastime informing me that as of 2018, all public parks in Springfield "for the most part" were no longer allowing metal detecting. I could sense the anger in the messages and was told that some were declaring that they would detect the parks anyway. I felt that since I am a local dealer, I should get involved, so I asked everyone to cool their heels while I worked through this problem. My first recommendation to those concerned about this situation is to get your local dealer involved if you have one.

While giving this park development some thought, I recalled that some years back I had sold a metal detector to the last Executive Director of the Springfield Park District. He was also a former Board member. I searched my records for his phone number and gave him a call to inform him of the Park Board's recent decision on metal detecting. He advised me to call the current Executive Director at the facilities office and arrange to be put on the agenda for the next Park Board meeting and also to mention that "I (the referrer) was a good friend of his." When I placed the call to the latest Executive Director, he said he would be glad to place me on the agenda but would also be happy to sit down and talk to me first. We scheduled a meeting for the following week which gave me a few days to prepare for my approach which ultimately consisted of three parts.

First, I searched my photo files and pulled out and printed copies of nine pictures to take with me. The first photo, taken years ago, features a huge pile of the trash that I had removed from parks and yards as I detected them and includes a good deal of aluminum can slaw and broken glass. The remaining eight photos are of lost items being returned to their owners. These items include rings, other jewelry of value and a WWII Coast Guard dog tag worn on D-Day while ferrying troops across the English Channel and retrieving bodies on the return trips. An article on this dog tag return was featured in the Journal-Register.

Second, I gathered up the latest White's Metal Detector brochure to take with me to illustrate the capabilities of the newest detector technology.

Third, I prepared my own sample of a permit to illustrate how a permit might be drawn up that would include rules such as the size of digging tools allowed and the necessity of leaving an area the same as found with little or no trace of disturbance.

Now having identified these talking points subjects, I was prepared for my meeting. Additionally, I felt it was important to go alone and to be polite and respectful. The following was my approach.

I began with explaining that I was there because I had recently been notified about the new regulations being imposed on metal detectors in the rewritten Park District General Use Ordinance effective January 1, 2018. Sec. 4.20 Metal Detectors: No person shall operate any devise which is designed for the detection off metal objects on or below District property unless authorized by executive detector. The fine imposed is to be \$100. I asked if the Park Board's decision was the result of complaints. The response was "no." In fact, they had not received any complaints. Rather, the Park District had not updated their General Use Ordinance since 1982-83 and while doing so, they found the State Law governing "JULIE - Call Before You Dig" would present a legal problem for the issuance of permits to those of us who dig for targets. They took the JULIE regulation to mean digging anywhere. I then asked, "What about gardening?" From this question, I think he understood that there needs to be a common sense approach her.

At this time, I pulled out the White's brochure and showed the Director how the technology has advanced to point out the exact location of a target and that most targets are only 1" - 3" or at most, possibly 5" deep. Then I pulled out the photo of all the trash I have taken out of the parks. He appeared surprised to see this much trash. I told him this pile contained not only broken glass and shreds of aluminum cans, but also 2 1/2" deck screws found in and removed from playgrounds. I also told him that most detectorists remove the trash they find in the parks and take it with them when they leave.

Now, the discussion moved to permitting. The executive director asked if a \$50 permit fee would be appropriate, and I responded that a large fee wouldn't fly. I told him that the largest permit fee I have ever had to pay was \$1.00, but perhaps a \$10 - \$20 fee might be acceptable.

The next thing he asked was what we did with items of value that we find since those items belong to somebody. I answered him, "Yes, that's true, but then, what if they are never found"? I then pulled out the eight photos of me returning items to their rightful owners, and he made a remark on the order of, "Oh, this is what I like to see." It probably didn't hurt that he recognized two of the individuals in the pictures. I then told him that I am a regular reader of the White's Metal Detector Forum and most often when a ring is found, the last comment made is "Now to find the owner."

Our meeting lasted for the better part of an hour, after which he told me that at the next board meeting, they would consider my comments and suggestions and come up with a permit. When I asked, he agreed to send me a copy first. The next morning, I received his call wanting to email me a preliminary copy of the permit form and asking me to look it over but not to share it with anyone. I was told there were probably some changes we would not like and others that we would. After looking over the permit form, I called him requesting one clarification and offering one comment. I believe the Park Board will approve this form, and it will be one that our fellow detectorists can live with.

Final outcome for metal detecting in Springfield Parks driven by Graham. They made no change to sec 4.20 METAL DETECTORS in the book of regulations which required approval from the executive director. They added a clause to stating "This permit is the vehicle for granting said authorization" the permit fee is \$15.00.

I have been metal detecting for twenty-three years. I was previously employed by Continental Can Company, Container Systems Division where I was trained in sales and marketing and held the position of Regional Sales Manager for my last eight years. My advice for others who may be faced with this permit problem is to approach it in a calm, respectful manner. Put on a good face for this hobby. Try to get the best qualified person to represent you and let him or her go in alone. This will prevent others from stepping on your "Sales" pitch.

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