

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, November 12, 2024

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: OFF-LEASH DOG AREA PROGRAM UPDATE NOVEMBER 2024

FROM:

Vince Musacchio, Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development
Gus Michaels, Deputy City Manager, Community Services
Shanon Kalra-Ramjoo, Acting Deputy City Manager, Public Works

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide an update on the City's off-leash dog area program and to seek Council approval for implementation of the Ward 5 local off-leash dog area at Pierre Elliott Trudeau Park.

Report Highlights

- In 2021 the City completed a Local Off-leash Dog Area Strategy to guide the provision of off-leash dog areas as a new level of service.
- Over the past several years, the City has made significant strides towards meeting community desire for dedicated off-leash dog areas with a total of nine (9) off-leash dog areas approved city-wide, including six (6) sites that are open and operational, and three (3) additional sites under construction or planned for development.
- Implementation of the local off-leash dog program has been successful, with positive feedback received from the community and continuing requests to establish more off-leash areas.
- Planning, development, and implementation of new off-leash dog areas and improvements follow Standard Level of Service provisions for both Primary and Local off-leash locations.

Report Highlights continued

- Additional off-leash areas beyond what is already Council-approved requires thorough community engagement, cost considerations (operating and capital), and is subject to approved funding and resources.
- Based on community engagement and site selection reviews completed in Ward 5, staff recommend implementing the approved local off-leash dog area for this ward at Pierre Elliott Trudeau Park.

Recommendations

1. That the local off-leash dog area approved for Ward 5 be developed at Pierre Elliot Trudeau Park located at 60 Promenade Circle, Thornhill.

Background

In 2021 the City completed a Local Off-leash Dog Area Strategy to guide the provision of off-leash dog areas as a new level of service within communities city-wide.

Through the local off-leash study process, the City reviewed a number of potential off-leash locations and narrowed them down based on site-specific features, ensuring a city-wide distribution and best-matched site criteria in response to what residents said was important to them.

Key recommendations identified development of one (1) new Primary off-leash dog park at Major Mackenzie Drive and Hwy 27 and six (6) Local off-leash locations. A new Primary off-leash dog park at Mackenzie Valley Park is currently under construction and scheduled to open in Q4 2024. All but one of the six Council-approved Local off-leash locations have been developed and are operational. The remaining location, identified for Ward 5 to serve the Thornhill Community, required additional consideration and community consultation with a recommended location identified in this report.

Furthermore, the study identified improvements to be made at the Primary off-leash dog area at Concord Thornhill Regional Park (which are currently in-progress), as well as the creation of a new Primary off-leash dog area at the North Maple Regional Park to be included in the planning of future phases of park development.

Implementation of additional off-leash areas beyond what is already Council-approved requires thorough community engagement, cost considerations (operating and capital), and is subject to approved funding and resources.

The 2021 Strategy identified sites for development of additional local off-leash locations in Blocks 11, 12 and 18 using the established site selection criteria. A local off-leash

area has been identified in Block 18 within the future Martin Tavares Park (currently under construction and planned for completion in 2026) and an off-leash area in Block 11 as part of future Phase 2 development of Crimson Forest Common. The proposed local off-leash location in Block 12 at Clearview Park was not supported by the community and is no longer included in the City’s park development plans.

Finally, the study also recommended that the local off-leash dog areas be reviewed by staff over a two-year period and evaluated for effectiveness and opportunities for improvements and that staff report back on all approved sites.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Local Off Leash Dog Area Strategy](#), Item 3, Report No. 31 of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session), June 2, 2021

[CL0622-21 C40 \(PDF\)](#)

[Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy Project Updates | City of Vaughan.](#)

Analysis and Options

Over the past several years, the City has made significant strides towards meeting community desire for dedicated off-leash dog areas across the City

The City’s parkland inventory now includes a total of nine (9) approved off-leash dog areas city-wide, including six (6) sites that are open and operational and three (3) additional sites under construction or planned for development as detailed below:

	Location	Address	Ward	Type	Status
1.	Mackenzie Glen District Park	220 Cranston Park Ave.	1	Local	Open
2.	Legion Park	70 Legion Court Rd.	2	Local	Open
3.	Mackenzie Valley Park	5851 Major Mackenzie Dr.	2	Primary	Under construction (completion in Q4 2024)
4.	Giovanni Caboto Park	75 Matthew Dr.	3	Local	Open
5.	Matthew Park	1 Villa Royale Ave.	3	Local	Open
6.	Sugarbush Heritage Park	91 Thornhill Woods Dr.	4	Local	Open
7.	Martin Tavares Park	130 Martin Tavares Way	4	Local	Under construction (completion in Q4 2026)

8.	Ward 5 Location TBD ¹	60 Promenade Circle	5	Local	Planned (for construction 2025)
9.	Concord Thornhill Regional Park	299 Racco Pkwy.	5	Primary	Open (improvements in progress)

Note: 1. Recommended for implementation at Pierre Elliott Trudeau Park, Thornhill

In addition to the above sites, two (2) off-leash dog areas have been identified for future development in the coming years including a primary off-leash dog park at North Maple Regional Park (Ward 1), and a local off-leash dog area at Crimson Forest Common (Ward 4).

Responsibility for the off-leash dog area program is shared across several departments including By-Law and Compliance, Licensing and Permit Services; Parks, Forestry, and Horticulture Operations; and Parks Infrastructure Planning and Development.

By-Law and Compliance, Licensing and Permit Services

- Responsible for Enforcement of off-leash dog areas including:
 - Animal Control By-law (pet licensing, bite investigation)
 - Off-leash Zone Provisions:
 - (a) no Dog under the age of four months is permitted;
 - (b) no Dog shall be left unattended;
 - (c) Owners or Custodians of Dogs must carry a Leash for each Dog at all times;
 - (d) no person shall have more than three (3) Dogs per visit;
 - (e) no person shall bring any Biting or Menacing Dog or Pit bull;
 - (f) Dogs shall be spayed or neutered.

Parks, Forestry & Horticulture Operations

- Responsible for routine maintenance of off-leash dog areas including:
 - Grass mowing and restoration;
 - Fence and gate repairs;
 - Garbage collection; and
 - Snow clearing (parking)
 - Engineered wood fiber installment and top up

Parks Infrastructure Planning & Development

- Responsible for the overall planning, design, and development of new off-leash dog areas and major capital improvements, including:

- Off-Leash Planning Strategy
- Site selection process
- Community consultation on future sites
- Capital project development and budget

Implementation of the local off-leash dog program over the past several years has been successful, with positive feedback received from the community and continuing requests to establish more off-leash areas.

Positive feedback received by staff include comments from residents that the off-leash areas provide good opportunities for dogs to exercise and socialize together. They also provide a hub of activity for neighbours to meet and engage with each other. Repeated comments received by staff continue to be requests for the City to establish more off-leash areas at the local level. While staff agree that overall, the program can be considered a success, off-leash areas require regular oversight, enforcement, education, maintenance, and repairs. Consideration of additional sites will require a review of staff resources as well as operating and capital funding requirements.

Some areas for improvement and further consideration include site surfacing (worn grass, mud, potholes from dogs digging), noise and lighting impacts to adjacent residential properties, and requests for more amenities such as shade shelters, water access (drinking and cleaning), waste bags, and parking.

Enforcement Overview and Statistics

- 2023:
 - Contraventions - 34
 - Bites - 5
 - Charges Laid – 13
- 2024 (data to October 28, 2024):
 - Contraventions – 28
 - Bites – 6
 - Charges Laid – 5

Planning, development, and implementation of new off-leash dog areas and improvements follow Standard Level of Service provisions for both Primary and Local off-leash locations.

Primary off-leash dog areas are larger in size (up to 1 hectare in size). Due to their size, they are typically located in destination parks such as District, and Regional Parks, and

are expected to serve a larger number of residents compared to a local off-leash dog area. For this reason, they are likely to be a drive-to facility in addition to walking or biking and require parking and lighting to support their use.

Local off-leash dog areas are planned at the community level situated in neighbourhoods and are therefore typically smaller in size (up to 0.25 hectares in size). They are expected to serve the residents who live in the neighbourhood and are more easily accessed by foot.

The Standard Level of Service provisions for both Primary and Local off-leash areas are as follows:

Standard Level of Service	
Primary off-leash dog areas	Local off-leash dog areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.5 m high perimeter fencing • natural turf surfacing with engineered wood fibre for part of the area • separate enclosures and entrances for small dogs (less than 11 kg/24 lbs) and large dogs (more than 11 kg/24 lbs) • a minimum of two double gate entries • site furnishing (seating, trash, recycling and dog waste bins incl. possible in-ground units) • code of conduct and educational signage • entry and leaving area signs • parking area • pathway and entrance lighting • notice board or kiosk • shade structure • shade tree planting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.5 m high perimeter fencing • natural turf surfacing with engineered wood fibre for part of the area • separate enclosures and entrances for small dogs (less than 11 kg/24 lbs) and large dogs (more than 11 kg/24 lbs) • a minimum of two double gate entries • site furnishing (seating, trash, recycling and dog waste bins) • code of conduct and educational signage

Note: Waste Bag dispensers were once offered but have since been removed due to unexpectedly high utilization by users.

Enhanced Level of Service:

It is recommended that items associated with higher capital and maintenance costs may be considered through sponsorship or donations from an affiliated organization or through special funding or grants and/or through the city's budget process as required:

- Water Fountain
- Lighting at local off leash dog areas
- Additional shade structures
- Artificial turf and rubber surfacing

Decorative fencing: Standard chain-link fencing may be upgraded to decorative fencing (e.g. Omega fencing) within context specific locations such as heritage conservation district areas.

An inground garbage container system will be piloted at Mackenzie Valey Park with a Third Party pickup and disposal program. The program will be assessed for cost and operational efficiencies and user feedback to consider for potential scale up to other off-leash dog areas where feasible and supported by associated funding.

Although desirability for agility equipment was identified through the community consultation process, this equipment should only be used in a proper training environment, and not by amateurs for play. Staff have concerns that unsupervised use will lead to the risk of injury when equipment is improperly used.

Based on community engagement and site selection reviews completed in Ward 5, staff recommend implementing the approved local off-leash dog area at Pierre Elliott Trudeau Park.

Extensive consultation was conducted since 2022 to identify a location west of Bathurst Street for implementation of the Council-approved local off-leash dog area for Ward 5. Three locations were selected for public input located at York Hill District Park (330 York Hill Blvd.), Winding Lane Park (580 York Hill Blvd.) and Gallanough Park (21 Springfield Way). A community survey conducted in 2022 received 1115 respondents recorded, the majority of which residing within Ward 5. The survey results demonstrated a slight favour for the York Hill District Park location among the three proposed locations, however, staff detailed review of the recommended location, configuration, design and details of the proposed York Hill site concluded that further sites in Ward 5 be assessed for their feasibility including alternative locations in Thornhill. Through this additional analysis, staff are recommending Pierre Eliot Trudeau Park to service the Thornhill community.

Financial Impact

Funding to implement the approved Local off-leash dog area at Pierre Elliott Trudeau Park is included in the 2025 Budget submission.

Operational Impact

When viewing the off-leash dog area program from an operational lens, the largest impact is the wear and tear of the sod leaving muddy surfacing. This is both the most common concern vocalized by residents through Service Vaughan and as well as outlined in the dog park section of the park inspection. To remedy constant sod replacement, engineered wood fibre (safety surfacing used in playgrounds) has been added at the entryway of some locations and is recommended to be used at all new off-leash areas moving forward. Parks Operations continues to perform bi-weekly cutting and trimming, frequent garbage collection (4-7 days a week depending on the park), and fence repairs as needed.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

None

Conclusion

With the significant development of the off-leash dog area program over the past several years, City staff continue to learn more about the routine operation and management of these facilities. Overall feedback received has been positive, with the roll out of additional locations subject to Council approval and meeting site selection criteria and available funding for both capital, operations, and management. Following the completion of additional site reviews and community engagement, staff recommend developing the approved Local off-leash dog area in Ward 5 at Pierre Elliott Trudeau Park.

For more information, please contact:

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Attachments

1. Off-leash Dog Area Location Plan

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