

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, June 02, 2021

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: LOCAL OFF LEASH DOG AREA STRATEGY

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development
Michael Coroneos, Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, City Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To present the Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy report for Council's decision and approval of establishing seven (7) local off-leash dog areas, which will inform the off-leash dog implementation program over the next several years. The Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy prepared by consultant Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions provides a summary of the internal and external stakeholder consultation and community engagement activities undertaken and used by staff to identify and recommend implementation of local off-leash dog areas in all Wards.

Report Highlights

- Stakeholder and community engagement included two in-person workshops, four on-line surveys (1716 respondents, including 222 respondents interested in becoming off-leash stewards), 10 pop-up events, and interviews with 7 ratepayer groups.
- A two-tier criteria assessment was developed to begin the process in selecting recommended sites, with a total of 35 sites to be reviewed.
- Following the completion of Tier 1 criteria, a total of 8 proposed pilot sites were short listed and presented to the community for input through an Online Self-Directed Workshop.
- Participation in an Off-Leash Dog Area Stewardship Program was identified through public engagement, with 91 citizens indicating a commitment to participate as off-leash dog stewards.
- Following the completion of the Tier 2 criteria, a total of 7 recommended locations have been identified for local off-leash dog sites.
- Local off-leash dog areas are proposed to be fenced with separate enclosures for large and a small dogs ranging between 2500 to 3500 square metres in area.
- A Stewardship Program and Management Plan will be developed by staff to guide the planning, implementation and operations of off-leash dog areas.

Recommendations

1. That staff develop and report back to council at a future date on a Local Off-Leash Dog Area Stewardship Program and Management Plan, including associated policies, with specific roles and responsibilities between Stewards and the City;
2. That implementation of seven (7) local off-leash dog areas be approved at Chancellor District Park, Jean Augustine District Park, Mackenzie Glen District Park, Matthew District Park, Legion Park, Sugar Bush Heritage Park, and Vaughan Sports Village;
3. That the approved local off-leash dog sites be reviewed by staff over a two year period and evaluated for effectiveness and opportunities for improvements and that staff report back annually on all approved sites;
4. That two new capital projects be created for Park Construction and Animal Services Vehicles, with budgets of \$440,000 and \$256,000 respectively from within the approved 2021 capital budget, and that the CFO be authorized to make the necessary administrative adjustments;
5. That staff make the necessary changes to the existing Parks By-law 134-95 authorizing the establishment of the Dog Area sites within Chancellor District Park, Jean Augustine District Park, Mackenzie Glen District Park, Matthew District Park, Legion Park, Sugar Bush Heritage Park, and Vaughan Sports Village to allow for dogs to run off-leash within designated Off-Leash Dog Areas and to allow for enforcement of the Rules and Regulations; and
6. That the amendments to By-Law 134-95 be brought back to Council for approval to give effect to the recommendation.

Background

In 2016, consultant Amec Foster Wheeler was retained by the City to undertake a site selection process to address the need for a primary off-leash dog park west of Highway 400. This resulted in identifying four (4) possible sites for a primary off-leash dog park approximately 1 hectare in size. The study findings also recommended that the City consider undertaking local off-leash projects that engage dog owners and non-dog owners, select local parks to situate a fenced off-leash dog area, consider the existing criteria developed as part of the study for the local scale and conduct a two-year evaluation period to determine effectiveness and opportunities for improvement to local off-leash areas.

Following Council's adoptions of Item 2, Report 43 of Committee of the Whole on December 13, 2016 for a primary off-leash dog park site west of Hwy 400, staff received approximately 210 citizen inquiries over a two year period requesting local off-leash dog

areas within existing neighbourhood parks. Staff documented all inquiries and maintained a distribution list that would be used for future public and stakeholder engagement.

During the review and update of the 2018 Active Together Master Plan (ATMP), which includes recommendations related to the provision of off-leash dog parks, recommendation No. 50 identified the develop of a strategy for the establishment of smaller local dog-friendly spaces to serve areas of intensification and localized gap areas. The ATMP contemplated that these smaller local dog spaces would be in addition to the larger primary off-leash parks recommended for each quadrant of the City. In addition, survey results from the ATMP identify that many dog owners seek local recreation opportunities and additional dedicated off-leash dog areas in existing neighbourhoods throughout the City.

Following council's approval in principle of the ATMP, funding for a Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy was identified in the 2019 Capital Budget Plan for Council review and consideration. On January 29, 2019 capital budget PK-6639-19 was approved by Council as part of the 2019 Budget process.

In September 2019, consultant Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions (Wood) was retained by the City to undertake a study to inform development of an implementation plan for local off-leash dog areas. Understanding the City's goal to identify local off-leash dog areas across the City, Wood developed and undertook a study process that:

1. Considers available information from the City;
2. Conducts a review of municipal best practices;
3. Undertakes community and stakeholder consultation including workshops, surveys and an online self-directed workshop (in place of a public open house);
4. Provides recommendations on site selection criteria, evaluation conditions and assessment scoring;
5. Identifies priority areas and list of potential sites;
6. Identifies a short-list of recommended potential sites across the City, a minimum of one per ward; and
7. Develops level of service standards and implementation plan.

Previous Reports/Authority

Second Off-Leash Dog Park in Vaughan

https://www.vaughan.ca/council/minutes_agendas/AgendaItems/CW0902_14_50.pdf

Off-Leash Dog Park Site Selection West of HWY 400 Ward 1, 2, and 3.

https://www.vaughan.ca/council/minutes_agendas/Extracts/43cw1206_16ex_2.pdf

2018 Active Together Master Plan Review and Update

https://www.vaughan.ca/projects/community/active_together/Pages/default.aspx

Analysis and Options

A variety of site selection criteria and evaluation factors were used to help determine a list of suitable sites for local off-leash dog areas

Building upon existing site assessment criteria for primary off-leash dog parks, information collected from off-leash dog areas in Southern Ontario, stakeholder feedback and community consultation process, the study team considered the following site selection criteria to identify potential sites:

Tier 1 Criteria

Governance

- Established by-laws, policies and regulations, which aid in establishing enforceable parameters
- Need for education and outreach
- Potential for stewardship
- Safety and security
- Results of community input

Accessibility:

- Parking at the location
- Service area catchment
- Proximity to sidewalks and trails

Location:

- Availability and ownership of properties
- Proximity to residential areas
- Proximity to areas where children play
- Proximity to outdoor sports fields or courts
- Proximity to areas that are environmentally sensitive or designated

Design

- Available area ranging between 0.25 to 0.5 ha (0.6 to 1.2 acres)
- Site characteristics (such as drainage, grading, vegetation, microclimate)

Tier 2 Criteria

- Results of the Online Self-Directed Workshop;
- Availability of a minimum of three identified Off-Leash Dog Area Stewards;
- Stakeholder and community input;
- Layout and availability of amenities including fencing;
- Cost (acquisition, construction, operation and maintenance, enforcement, governance);
- Potential for external funding;

The evaluation process is divided into a two-tier process. Through the first tier process sites are evaluated to determine if the site meet the minimum needs for consideration as a local off-leash dog area.

Step 1: Site Selection Criteria – Tier 1: general criteria that must be met for a site to be considered as a potential off-leash dog area to move on to tier 2 process. Potential locations must score a minimum of 75%. To ensure equitable distribution of locations across the City all identified locations were grouped by Community area.

Step 2: Site Selection Criteria - Tier 2: criteria to evaluate the relative quality of suitable sites and provide ranking. Develop preliminary layout plans and cost estimates for the recommended local off-leash dog areas. Step 2 includes public engagement from community areas and matching a minimum of three stewards with recommended local off-leash areas.

Eight (8) proposed sites were reviewed and considered for local off-leash dog areas.

A total of 76 locations were identified by residents through public consultation (survey, workshops, City events) for further assessment and consideration for future local off-leash dog areas.

Using the available information, including existing park and open space asset management data, City staff and the Consultant determined that 35 sites could be reviewed through the Tier 1 criteria.

Following the Tier 1 criteria screening, eight (8) sites achieved a score of 75% or greater. These eight (8) sites moved forward as proposed local off-leash dog areas for consideration and review by the community through an Online Self-Directed Workshop.

Location	Ward	Community	Tier 1 Score
Vaughan Sports Village District Park	Ward 1	Maple Community	98%
Mackenzie Glen District Park	Ward 1	Maple Community	90%
Matthew District Park	Ward 3	Woodbridge Community	88%
Nort Johnston District Park	Ward 2	Woodbridge Community	77%
Chancellor District Park	Ward 3	Woodbridge Community	77%
Clearview Park	Ward 4	Carrville Community	77%
Jean Augustine District Park	Ward 5	Thornhill Community	77%
Sugar Bush Heritage Park	Ward 4	Carrville Community	76%

Eight (8) shortlisted sites were presented to the public for feedback

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic regulation (including social distancing measures, closure of non-essential services, restricted gatherings, restricted access to City Hall and other municipal venues), the community open house planned for March 24, 2020 was rescheduled and developed as an Online Self-Directed Workshop. The Online Self-Directed Workshop included an introductory video presentation, survey and supporting background documentation which offered citizens an opportunity to provide their input on the eight (8) shortlisted local off-leash dog areas.

The workshop materials were posted to the City's website from July 23, 2020 to August 31, 2020. The City advertised the online workshop through City social media channels, social media advertisement (August 14 to 28), local newspapers (Vaughan Citizen and Thornhill Liberal) during the week of August 10, 2020, digital signboards, Councilor e-letter and email distribution. In addition, for all identified sites, over 5,000 mailouts were sent to addresses within approximately 250 meters of proposed locations, including all registered ratepayer associations. The mailouts included an invitation to participate in the Online Self-Directed Workshop. A total of 20 public notification signs were also installed during the month of August at the eight (8) proposed sites to inform and direct local residents to the Online Self-Directed Workshop. A notice was posted for public viewing at the Vaughan Animal Shelter and the existing primary off-leash dog area located at Concord Thornhill Regional Park.

The Online Self-Directed Workshop received positive responses, with 699 citizens participating in the survey component of the workshop, recording an 87% completion rate. In addition, each month the City received a breakdown of the most visited pages on the Vaughan.ca website. For the month of August, the Off-Leash Dog Area project webpage was the 20th most visited page on the site. The high number of visits to an individual project page is uncommon and speaks to the amount of public interest in the Study, including the quality of the workshop materials. Over the course of the survey staff received over 100 phone calls and emails from Citizens providing additional feedback and seeking clarification on this study.

Following the closure of the Online Self-Directed Workshop and based on the feedback received, one of the questions of the survey requested citizens to provide their contact information should they have an interest in becoming an off-leash dog area steward. A total of 222 citizens indicated an interest in becoming off-leash dog stewards. A follow up survey questionnaire was later sent to the 222 citizens interested in becoming off-leash stewards on October 5, 2020, with a deadline by October 19, 2020 to reconfirm their interest, offer additional information on their possible community partnership, and request confirmation on their preferred location to volunteer their time as an off-leash dog stewards.

Location	Ward	Community	Number of Confirmed stewards
Vaughan Sports Village District Park	Ward 1	Maple Community	13
Mackenzie Glen District Park	Ward 1	Maple Community	16
Nort Johnston District Park	Ward 2	Woodbridge Community	15
Chancellor District Park	Ward 3	Woodbridge Community	8
Matthew District Park	Ward 3	Woodbridge Community	13
Sugar Bush Heritage Park	Ward 4	Carrville Community	13
Clearview Park	Ward 4	Carrville Community	2
Jean Augustine District Park	Ward 5	Thornhill Community	11
Total			91

In order to receive additional feedback, staff also met virtually with seven (7) ratepayer associations and approximately 19 representatives during the month of September and October that have a proposed local off-leash dog area identified within the association's geographic boundaries.

During these discussions with the ratepayer representatives, alternative sites had been suggested to replace the North Johnston District Park site, with one possibility being Legion Park, located south of Hwy 7 and west of Islington Ave.

Seven (7) Recommended Local Off-Leash Locations

Following the review and input received through public consultation, the proposed eight (8) sites were further shortlisted to seven (7) sites. The locations recommended for local off-leash dog areas include (refer to Attachment No. 2 for location plan and notes below).

Location	Ward	Community
Vaughan Sports Village District Park	Ward 1	Maple Community
Mackenzie Glen District Park	Ward 1	Maple Community
Legion Park <small>(see note 2)</small>	Ward 2	Woodbridge Community
Chancellor District Park	Ward 3	Woodbridge Community
Matthew District Park	Ward 3	Woodbridge Community
Sugar Bush Heritage Park	Ward 4	Carrville Community
Jean Augustine District Park	Ward 5	Thornhill Community

Notes:

- 1- Clearview Park in Ward 4 at the Carrville Community was dropped from the list due to the low interest from local residents and lack of stewards.
- 2- The Nort Johnston District Park option was substituted with Legion Park following additional consultation and validation with the community.
- 3- At the time of evaluating suitable sites, locations identified at Kleinburg/Nashville did not meet the Tier 1 criteria, however it should be noted that locations at planned parks in the Kleinburg/Nashville area may be considered in the future.

Local Off-Leash Dog Stewardship Program and Management Plan

Interested residents will be invited to collaborate with the City to develop a comprehensive Local Off-Leash Dog Area Stewardship Program. Through the Stewardship Program, the intent is for stewards to work with the City to:

- foster a positive social environment for dogs and people
- educate others on local off-leash dog area regulations and etiquette
- communicate any safety concerns to the City
- share feedback about operations and maintenance
- collaborate with the City on studies and sharing input (the good, the not so good and opportunities for improvement and enhancement)

For a location to be developed a minimum of three (3) local off-leash dog area stewards per location shall be registered with the City through the Stewardship Program. The Stewardship Program and an associated Management Plan will be developed by staff, finalized in collaboration with the stewards and brought back to a future council meeting. The Stewardship Program will build on the processes developed to administer the Adult Volunteer Program in place by Vaughan Animal Services to assist at the animal shelter.

The Off-leash area Management Plan will be the City's administrative document, outlining principles and procedures for the planning, management and operation of off-leash dog areas. The intent is that this document will enable the City to effectively manage these facilities while taking into consideration the interest of a variety of park users. The Off-leash Dog Management Plan will guide the City to provide consistency in the service level / management of sites, facility enhancements, education/ enforcement, community participation and future communication.

Once an off-leash dog area is identified in a neighbourhood or district park, fencing, access gates, signage and trash receptacles will be installed and to make the off-leash dog area safe for dog owners and their pets.

The degree of use and success of the site will be monitored over a 2 year period. Staff will report back to council and proceed to finalize standards for the local off-leash dog area within those communities throughout the City.

Recommendation for Concord Thornhill Regional Park (CTRP) Primary Off leash Area

Through the public engagement process and based on comments received from user groups and a general review of the CTRP primary off leash dog area, the following improvements are recommended and will be considered in the capital budget. Capital improvements to occur in the short term include the supply and installation of a shade structure, pedestrian access, lighting and other associated site works.

Primary Off-Leash Dog Area West of Hwy 400

Through the public engagement process many user groups inquired about the status of the new primary off-leash dog area West of Hwy 400. Staff are reviewing the available options to advance one of the four short listed primary off-leash dog areas identified through the 2016 study. Currently staff are considering an option to advance a site located at the southeast corner of Major Mackenzie Drive and Highway 27. This site is currently being used as a temporary works yard by York Region and will be made available to the City by the end of the year. Further discussions are required with York Region staff regarding driveway access and TRCA staff regarding development in a regulated and flood plain area.

Operations, Maintenance and Enforcement

The success of the program will be based on suitable maintenance of the off-leash areas and enforcement of the Parks and Animal Control By-law. These sites are expected to be used throughout the year and require on-going maintenance such as garbage removal, gate repairs, fencing repairs, mowing, etc.

Enforcement of the seven (7) local off-leash sites will be required to continue as per existing standards. By law officers will respond to urgent and/or recurrent issues. In addition, a part-time Animal Services Clerk will be required to manage the Off-leash Stewardship Program.

Financial Impact

The capital cost to implement two (2) sites and add the identified improvements to the primary off-leash dog area located in Concord Thornhill Regional Park is estimated to be \$440,000 in 2021. The capital cost to purchase two (2) Animal Services vehicles in 2021 to support sites being implemented in 2021 and 2022 is \$256,000. The funding for these capital costs in 2021 will be supported from within the existing approved 2021 capital budget.

The operating costs to support parks opening in 2021, prorated to approximately 4 months (based on estimated September 2021 openings), is estimated to be \$7,000 for park maintenance and \$73,000 for animal services enforcement and stewardship program administration. This includes one full-time Animal Services Officer and one part-time Animal Services Clerk. Operating costs for 2021 will be temporarily supported within existing approved department budgets and labour gapping until additional funding, if required, is requested through the annual budget process.

The advancement of five (5) additional local off-leash dog areas and one primary off-leash dog area west of Hwy 400 will be considered during the 2022 and 2023 annual budget processes.

Between 2021 and 2023, total capital costs for the implementation of this initiative are estimated to be \$1.7 million. By 2023, annual operating costs are estimated to be \$0.5 million, including 2 full-time and 3 part-time positions in Animal Services.

Capital costs for the implementation of this strategy will be funded from the Community Services Development Charges Reserve while operating costs will be funded by Taxation.

For further cost details, please see the Financial Table below.

Financial Table

Year	#	Location	Ward	Estimated Capital Cost		Estimated Operating Cost (annualized)	
				Park Construction ¹	Animal Services Vehicles ²	Park Maintenance ³	Animal Services Enforcement ⁴
2021	1	Mackenzie Glen District Park	1	\$55,000	\$128,000	\$12,000	\$175,000 1 F/T ASO 1 P/T ASC
	2	Matthew District Park	3	\$55,000		\$7,000	
	3	Concord/Thornhill Regional Park	5	\$330,000		\$0	
2022	4	Primary Off-Leash Dog Park West of Hwy 400	2	\$580,000	\$128,000	\$23,000	\$185,000 1 F/T ASO 1 P/T ASO
	5	Sugar Bush Heritage Park	4	\$55,000		\$7,000	
	6	Jean Augustine District Park	5	\$55,000		\$7,000	
2023	7	Vaughan Sports Village District	1	\$55,000	\$128,000	\$7,000	\$65,000 1 P/T ASO
	8	Legion's Park	2	\$55,000		\$7,000	
	9	Chancellor District Park	3	\$55,000		\$7,000	
TOTAL COST⁶				\$1,295,000	\$384,000	\$77,000	\$425,000
				\$1,679,000		\$502,000	
2021 Budget Required				2021	2021 & 2022	4 months in 2021	
				\$440,000	\$256,000	\$7,000	\$73,000
				\$696,000		\$80,000	

Notes

1) Park Construction

- a. Park Construction of \$55,000 includes fencing, double gate entrances, signage, pathways, garbage receptacles, pathways and seating
- b. Concord/Thornhill Regional Park construction of \$330,000 includes universal and accessible pedestrian access, site furnishing, shade structure, lighting and associated landscape works
- c. Primary Off-Leash Dog Park West of 400 construction of \$580,000 includes site grading, servicing, parking lot, fencing, double gate entrances, signage, pathways, garbage receptacles, seating

2) Animal Services Vehicles

- a. Includes 3 purpose-built vehicles, \$128,000 each
- b. Due to lead times required, 2 vehicles would be purchased in 2021 to support parks opening in 2021 and 2022, and the third vehicle would be purchased in 2022 to support parks opening in 2023

3) Park Maintenance

- a. Park Maintenance of \$7,000 includes casual labour, service contracts, and materials & supplies
- b. Mackenzie Glen District Park maintenance of \$12,000 includes an additional \$5,000 for the parking lot winter maintenance contract
- c. Concord/Thornhill Regional Park maintenance requires \$0 additional budget as the existing budget provides sufficient year-round service

4) Animal Services Enforcement

- a. Enforcement costs include labour, benefits, and related continuous and one-time costs
- b. ASO: Animal Services Officer, full-time and part-time
ASC: Animal Service Clerk, part-time to manage the Stewardship Program

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Not Applicable

Conclusion.

A thorough public consultation process was undertaken to assess potential locations for Local Off-Leash Dog Areas within neighbourhoods across the City. Through the evaluation and public engagement process, the Tier 1 and Tier 2 criteria identified seven (7) suitable sites that are recommended to move forward to implementation following the establishment of Off-Leash Dog Stewards through a Stewardship Program and Management Plan to assist the city in monitoring of the local off-leash dog sites.

For more information, please contact: Jamie Bronsema, Director, Parks Infrastructure Planning and Development, ext. 8858 or Gus Michaels, Director, By law and Compliance Licensing and Permit Services, ext. 8735

Attachments

1. Off-Leash Dog Area Location Plan

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