

# Report to Council



**Date:** October 14, 2015  
**File:** 1840-10  
**To:** City Manager  
**From:** Terry Barton, Urban Planning Manager  
Ian Wilson, Park Services Manager  
**Subject:** Off-leash Dog Areas - Park Planning

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## **Recommendation:**

THAT Council receive for information the September 12, 2015 report regarding future off-leash dog areas from the Urban Planning Manager and the Park Services Manager.

AND THAT Council instruct staff to develop a community engagement strategy to help determine local preferences for dogs in parks and public places.

## **Purpose:**

To receive Council's direction on a proposed public engagement process for future off-leash dog areas.

## **Background:**

There are currently nine off-leash dog areas in the City, comprising 13.7 hectares of parkland. This includes one off-leash dog beach at Cedar Creek Park and two temporary locations at Rowcliffe Park and Rutland Recreation Park.

The number of off-leash areas per capita in Kelowna is currently 7.5 areas per 100,000 residents, which is excellent compared to communities in the United States: a 2014 survey of the 100 largest American cities<sup>1</sup> found that Portland, Oregon had the highest per capita off-leash dog areas at 5.3 per 100,000 residents. Similar comprehensive statistics do not exist for Canadian cities however Kelowna fares moderately well compared to other Canadian locations such as Prince George (4.2 parks per 100,000), Vancouver (6 parks per 100,000), and Kamloops (19.8 dog parks per 100,000 residents).

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<sup>1</sup> 2014 City Park Facts. The Trust for Public Land, <https://www.tpl.org/2014-city-park-facts>

There are many social and health benefits that both on- and off-leash dog parks can provide to the community. However, dogs also present challenges and potential conflicts in public spaces. In 2011, the City developed the following planning principles when considering the creation of any new off-leash areas:

1. Health / Safety: Dogs should not be permitted in proximity to children's playgrounds, sport fields and human swimming areas. Interior Health has previously expressed concerns about mixing dogs and human swimmers (Attachment 1). Kelowna's beaches are critical to tourism and the local economy.
2. Environmental / Wildlife Impact: Dogs negatively impact wildlife and wildlife habitat, and dog parks should not be located in environmentally sensitive areas.
3. Neighbourhood consultation: Dog park locations and potential impacts on adjacent neighbourhoods must be carefully considered and neighbours consulted. A new dog park and surrounding neighbourhood must be able to accommodate additional traffic, parking needs and noise generated by park visitors.
4. Park Size: The minimum size (best management practice) for off-leash dog areas is sited at 0.4 ha (1 acre) by the American Kennel Club. This is the approximate size of the Mission Recreation Park Off-leash area.
5. Park Location: Dog parks should be located in areas that are convenient and accessible. The size and distribution of dog parks should take into account population density within the urban core of the City. The park should also be accessible from the City's sidewalk / trail network.
6. Fencing, gates and buffers: The use of fencing and/or appropriate buffers is required to prevent conflicts with other users or wildlife and to protect dogs from vehicle traffic. Ideally, small dogs should also be separated from larger dogs.
7. Infrastructure: Dog parks should be developed with the appropriate supporting infrastructure, e.g. parking, washrooms, fences, signage, shade, site furniture, and drinking fountains for people and dogs. If possible, lighting should be provided to allow evening usage.
8. Construction Materials: Turf areas are very difficult to maintain in heavy-traffic dog parks. Other surface materials should be considered to minimize operational costs, such as gravel, decomposed granite or wood chips.

### **Public Feedback**

The 2012 Kelowna Citizen Survey found that the majority of citizens support the creation of fenced spaces for dogs, within existing parks. Nearly three-quarters support dog parks in existing city parks, with more than four-in-ten saying they 'strongly support' dog parks. While dog owners are more likely than non-dog owners to support dog parks, the majority of respondents in both of these segments were in general support.

Each year the City receives feedback from residents and visitors regarding dogs in parks. Some request more facilities for dogs, while others express concerns with dogs in public parks. The most popular request is for more dog beaches. While staff have found that there

tends to be general community support for dogs in parks, local neighbourhoods have raised significant concerns when a proposal has come forward for a specific location. Past City efforts have failed at Sutherland Bay, Kinsmen Park and Powerline Park.

This past summer, two petitions were submitted to the City requesting off-leash dog beach access at Sutherland Bay. One petition was on-line with approximately 800 digital "signatures"; the second petition was in paper format with approximately 200 signatures. A number of participants on both petitions did not appear to be local residents. The City also received three formal letters from residents who did not support a new dog park in Sutherland Bay. Sutherland Bay was not acceptable to local residents in the late 1990's. Some current challenges facing the site include lack of parking (and competition for parking from boat launch users) as well as an on-going City foreshore protection project along Poplar Point drive.

#### **Proposed Public Engagement Process:**

Staff recommend a public engagement process that will help answer immediate questions about acceptable locations for new dog parks, and also provide important feedback that will inform park planners in the years to come regarding access for dogs in public places. Ideally staff would like to develop an overall "Dogs and Parks Strategy" similar to what has been done in Nanaimo and Surrey.

Staff propose to design and implement an appropriate community engagement process together with the Communications department. Staff propose that the first step include a City-wide statistically valid survey to gather public feedback about dog access to parks and community priorities. Staff would then report back to Council on the results of the survey before proceeding to the next step, which would include engaging individual neighbourhoods on potential locations (such as Sutherland Bay).

In order to utilize existing budgets, staff recommend beginning this public engagement process in January 2016 and reporting back to Council with preliminary findings by March, 2016.

#### **Internal Circulation:**

Divisional Director, Communications & Information Services  
Divisional Director, Corporate & Protective Services  
Manager, Bylaw Services

#### **External Agency/Public Comments:**

Regional District Dog Control staff were invited to comment on this report. RDCO staff indicated that they would participate as part of the public process.

#### **Financial/Budgetary Considerations**

Staff estimate that the initial public engagement process would cost a minimum of \$7,500. These costs can be covered under existing budgets early in 2016.

Different options and locations will carry significantly different capital and operating costs. These will be outlined in a future report to Council for consideration should that become the preferred direction. The addition of new dog areas may also need to be supported with additional resources to the RDCO Dog Control Program and/or the City's Bylaw & Enforcement Division.

**Considerations not applicable to this report:**

Legal/Statutory Authority  
Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements  
Existing Policy  
Personnel Implications  
Communications Comments  
Alternate Recommendation

Submitted by:

Terry Barton, Urban Planning Manager  
Ian Wilson, Park Services Manager

**Approved for inclusion:**



A. Newcombe, Director of Infrastructure

Attachment 1: MHO Health Guidance Statement - Dogs in Parks

Attachment 2: Designated Dog Off-Leash Parks

cc: Divisional Director, Communications & Information Services  
Divisional Director, Corporate & Protective Services  
Manager, Bylaw Services