

Report to Council



Date: March 15, 2016
File: 1840-10
To: City Manager
From: B. Davidson, Parks Planner, Infrastructure Planning
Subject: Dog Park Public Engagement Results

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the report from the Parks Planner dated March 15, 2016 with respect to the dog park public engagement results;

AND THAT Council direct staff to engage in public consultation with stakeholders and neighbourhood residents on four potential off-leash dog beaches and one potential off-leash dog park.

Purpose:

To present the results of dog park public engagement which includes a statistically valid survey and an online feedback form, and to identify five potential off-leash dog parks and beaches as a priority for consultation.

Background:

Each year the City receives feedback from residents and visitors regarding dogs in parks. These include requests for more facilities for dogs, and concerns with dogs in public parks, but the most common request is for more dog beaches.

Currently, the City has seven off-leash parks, two temporary off-leash parks and one off-leash beach for dogs. Kelowna dog owners report that the location of the existing Cedar Creek dog beach, at the south end of the City, is inconvenient for the majority of dog owners.

As identified in the draft 2030 Infrastructure Plan, development of Rowcliffe Community Park is anticipated to occur between 2017 and 2019. It is important to consider how to offset the temporary loss of this popular existing off-leash dog park during construction of the community park. In order to act as a counter balance, it may justify development of an additional off-leash park in advance of Rowcliffe Park improvements.

Statistically Valid Survey

On October 19, 2015, Council endorsed staff's proposal to undertake a public engagement process that included a statistically valid survey. NRG Research Group was selected to coordinate the survey, which was conducted between January 27 and February 4, 2016.

The statistically valid survey allowed for representative data both geographically and demographically by establishing age and postal code quotas. Three-hundred eighty-six surveys were completed and the overall survey results are accurate within +/-5%. The full summary of the statistically valid survey can be found in Attachment 1.

The City's goals of the statistically valid survey were to:

- Determine residents' levels of support for off-leash dog parks and/or dog beaches;
- Identify residents' tolerance levels for off-leash dog parks and/or dog beaches in their neighbourhoods;
- Identify priority locations for off-leash dog parks and dog beaches; and,
- Measure the size of dog owners as a user group of the parks system.

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of Kelowna households own at least one dog, with the highest percentage of dog owners living in the Central (43%) or Southwest/Mission (44%) areas of Kelowna. Of all the sports and recreational activities served by our parks system dog owners represent one of the largest user groups. However, approximately half (52%) of dog owners report that their dog(s) rarely or never visit an off-leash dog park for a variety of reasons.

With regards to the current inventory of off-leash dog parks and beaches: approximately half (52%) of Kelowna residents believe that there are enough existing off-leash dog parks; whereas 55% feel more off-leash dog beaches are required to sufficiently meet the needs of dog owners. It should be noted that more people voted in favour of additional off-leash dog beaches than those who own dogs, (44% in favour compared to 38% dog owners.)

The majority of Kelowna residents, (63%), do not believe it is reasonable to expect a dog park to be located within walking distance of home. However, 76% residents strongly support, or somewhat support, the creation of an off-leash dog park or beach in their neighbourhood. The top preferred locations for additional off-leash dog parks include:

- Mission (13%)
- Glenmore (10%)
- Rutland (9%)
- Downtown (8%)

The top preferred locations for additional off-leash dog beaches include:

- Downtown (17%)
- Mission (8%)
- North End /North Kelowna (6%)

There was support for increasing property taxes between \$4 and \$12 to help pay for dog parks (72%), however, it should be noted that not all residents are necessarily home owners and are therefore not responsible for paying property taxes. The majority (78%) of respondents were supportive of sponsorship or advertising options to help reduce impacts on taxpayers.

Online Feedback

To complement the statistically valid phone survey, an online feedback form was concurrently available on the City website for residents to complete between January 27 and February 15, 2016.

The goals of the online feedback form differed from the statistically valid survey, and the anticipated audience was expected to have a greater percentage of dog owners. Therefore, the questions posed in the online feedback form were also different; they focused mainly on preferred design parameters associated with dog parks.

The online feedback form was extensively advertised in the local media, on the City website, and was discussed in two radio interviews. The goals of the online feedback form were to:

- Identify community preferences for dog park amenities (e.g. surface material, size and infrastructure);
- Identify benefits and drawbacks of off-leash dog parks and beaches; and,
- Provide an opportunity for residents to provide feedback and /or suggestions

Of the 1,610 responses collected there were 1,245 completed forms. As anticipated, a higher proportion of dog owners (82%, or more than twice the city average) participated in the online feedback form as compared to the telephone survey. The summary of the online feedback form results can be found in Attachment 2.

It should be noted that there was an error listed for the minimum dog park size question (Question 6), this error has been described in detail in the Appendix of Attachment 2.

The majority of online respondents listed socialization and exercise for both dogs and people as the main benefit of dog parks. Safety (i.e., aggressive or uncontrolled dogs) was the primary concern or drawback identified. Very few respondents indicated the size of existing off-leash parks was a drawback.

Participants were asked what the minimum size of an urban off-leash dog park should be; the majority of responses indicated support for urban dog parks of 0.15ha in size (roughly the same size as the Stuart Park Ice Rink).

Regarding dog park infrastructure, drinking fountains for people and dogs has the highest priority. Parking and separate areas for small dogs followed. The overwhelming preference for dog park surfacing appears to be turf grass followed by wood chips, however, it should be noted that from a maintenance perspective turf grass is best suited to areas of lower intensity use.

Both the survey and online feedback form results will be posted on kelowna.ca/parks under Dog Park Public Engagement following this report.

Summary

The results of the telephone survey as well as the online feedback will be helpful in longer term planning decisions for dog parks with regards to size, location, amenities, and funding strategies. In the short term, the results suggest that:

- Dog owners represent one of the largest user groups of our parks system;
- General public opinion is split on the need for another dog park, whereas the majority of residents support another dog beach. The opinion of dog owners was shared similarly; and,
- The most popular location for an off-leash dog beach was the Downtown, followed by the Mission area, and the North End/North Kelowna.

Next Steps

Staff recommend proceeding with Phase 2 of the public engagement process as endorsed by Council in October, 2015. This process may include meetings with surrounding potential park or beach neighbours and stakeholders, and inviting public feedback online.

Several locations that could be explored based on the community feedback have been identified.

Potential off-leash dog beaches:

Downtown

- The “mini” beach near the Sails Plaza for a dog “cooling off” opportunity, (see Attachment 3). This small beach is isolated from the popular swimming areas in City Park and is conveniently located for dog walkers in the downtown. Early morning use by dog owners may also serve to deter overnight camping on this beach, which has been an issue in the past.
- Lake Avenue Beach Access foreshore, adjacent to the mouth of Mill Creek. Water quality here fluctuates greatly and is not suitable for public swimming. Increased activity by dog owners may help to discourage undesirable activity often associated with this beach access.

South Pandosy / KLO

- Cedar Avenue Beach Access (future South Pandosy Waterfront Park) is centrally located, has fluctuating water quality and the City owns multiple properties on both sides of this beach access. Creating an off-leash dog beach at this access will require a minimal investment for fencing and signage.

North End / North Kelowna

- Dewdney 1 Beach Access foreshore together with 1844 Dewdney Road at McKinley Landing. This beach consists of pebbles and cobbles. The dog off-leash area will have to be delineated and separated from the existing dock and swimming area. Currently parking is very limited at this location, however future plans include additional parking as part of a larger community park development in partnership with the developer.

- Knox Mountain Park (hooked property across Poplar Point Drive, opposite the disc golf course). The water quality at this location is low.

Potential off-leash dog parks:

Glenmore

- Glenmore Recreation Park (consistent future phases shown on the GRP Master Plan);
- Clement Avenue rail corridor between Gordon Drive and Spall Road parallel to the existing Rails with Trails pathway, (this could provide an off-leash trail);
- Part of Knox Mountain Park East (Grainger Road Property)

South Pandosy / KLO

- Munson Pond Park - the western field area, (not including the riparian area and the recently constructed pond perimeter trail);

Staff recommend engaging the Downtown Kelowna Association (DKA) with regards to receiving input on the proposed "Sails" off-leash dog mini-beach, as well as meeting with the neighbours and stakeholders in the vicinity of the Lake Avenue Beach Access, Cedar Avenue Beach Access, Knox Mountain Park (Poplar Point Drive) and Munson Pond Park. Preliminary discussions with the neighbours of Lake Avenue suggest that they are in favour of this idea.

Significant advances in responsible dog ownership have been made in the past decade. However, the large volume of correspondence staff receives on this matter, both from dog owners and non-owners, suggests there is still room for further improvement (i.e., picking up after dogs, controlling aggressive dogs off-leash, both within off-leash parks and at large, etc.). Staff recommend methods to foster improved dog ownership responsibility be considered with any messaging related to changes to the off-leash dog park and dog beach network.

Following these stakeholder meetings, staff will prepare a budget submission for off-leash dog parks and beaches for consideration by Council in the 2017 annual capital budget; will report to Council with proposed changes to dog park designations in the Parks and Public Spaces bylaw; and will prepare a dog park strategy outlining priority sites for development as well as site selection and design criteria.

Internal Circulation:

Divisional Director, Infrastructure
 Divisional Director, Civic Operations
 Parks Services Manager
 Parks Community Relations Coordinator
 Communications Department Manager
 Communications Coordinator
 Infrastructure Planning Department Manager
 Parks and Buildings Planning Manager

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Legal/Statutory Authority:
 Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

Existing Policy:

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

Personnel Implications:

External Agency/Public Comments: Communications Comments:

Submitted by:

B. Davidson, Parks Planner, Infrastructure Planning

Approved for inclusion:



A. Newcombe, Divisional Director, Infrastructure

Encl.: Attachment 1; Summary of Statistically Valid Survey Results

Attachment 2: Summary of Online Feedback

Attachment 3: Location Map for proposed new dog facilities

cc: Divisional Director, Infrastructure
Divisional Director, Civic Operations
Parks Services Manager
Parks Community Relations Coordinator
Communications Department Manager
Communications Coordinator
Infrastructure Planning Department Manager
Parks and Buildings Planning Manager