



Date: June 1, 2001

**TO: Board Members - Parks and Recreation**  
**FROM: General Manager - Parks and Recreation**  
**SUBJECT: Dog Off-Leash Program**

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

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| <p><b>A. THAT THE Board withdraw the dog off-leash privileges at Heather Park</b></p> <p><b>B. THAT THE Board approve dog off-leash hours (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.) at Shaughnessy Crescent Park on a 1-year trial basis.</b></p> |
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## **BACKGROUND**

In September, 2000, the Park Board received a request from the Douglas Park Community Association to review the dog off-leash program at Heather Park.

They were concerned initially about Heather Park having been chosen as a dog off-leash site without their input and after an extensive community process had developed plans for improvements to the park. These plans were put on hold. Further concerns arose when dog off-leash use showed wear on newly renovated turf and conflicts between neighbours increased.

On October 30, 2000, a public meeting was held to listen to what the local community residents wanted regarding dog off-leash opportunities.

On January 17, 2001 the Park Board held a special meeting to discuss the issue of off-leash dogs in the Douglas Park area. As a result of hearing many different opinions on what should be done, the Board asked that the General Manager approve the creation of a task force comprised of all stakeholders of Heather and Douglas Park in order to identify an off-leash area in that neighbourhood.

During the months of January and February of this year an organizing committee met to plan a workshop that would ensure the opportunity to involve as many stakeholders as possible in deciding how to best deal with the dog management issues in the Douglas Park area. Members of the committee included: Ann Bailey, Dave Walsh, Tracey Penner, Jean Scribner and Gord Plottel from the community; Dianne Ledingham and Christopher Richardson from the Park Board Commissioners office; Nancy Reynolds, Gord Lindal, Liane McKenna and Bill Manning from staff and Doug Soo who was hired to help facilitate the process. On March 12, 2001 a workshop was held to discuss the topic of dogs off leash within the Douglas Park area. (Appendix A is a summary of that workshop).

## DISCUSSION

Fifty six people attended the March 12<sup>th</sup> workshop. The agenda included:

1. Introductory Remarks
2. Framework for Discussion
3. Summary of Issues
4. Context and Background to Off-Leash Program in the Local Community.
5. Key Issues from the Local Point of View
6. Off-Leash Opportunities & Viable Options
7. Additional Comments
8. What Next?

The workshop ran from 6:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. The first half hour was designed as a public open house to allow participants to familiarize themselves with display information. Items one through five on the agenda ran from approximately 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. The remainder of the workshop focused on agenda items five and six.

While the evening did not produce a clear agreement on specific resolutions, general consensus was developed on several key issues.

- There are capacity limits on all parks with respect to their use regardless of the type of activity.
- Not every use can be accommodated by every park.
- The dog off-leash program is highly popular and meets a need for dog owners and their pets, but the program is inadequately supported in terms of sufficient green space and amenities to meet the demands of the program.
- Implementation of the off-leash program needs to respect and integrate previous and existing community processes.

At the end of the evening it became apparent that there was not enough time to develop a list of viable options so the group agreed to having staff develop the options for further community feedback.

In developing the options for community feedback staff used the information gained from the March 12<sup>th</sup> workshop and focused on opportunities that would spread the off-leash use to lighten the volume and impact while giving consideration to separating the off-leash use from other users to reduce potential conflict.

With respect to the options involving Douglas and Braemar Parks the Douglas Park Community Association expressed concern that the Dog Off-Leash program not impact current programs at either site. The feedback received from the community at large supports the position of the Community Association.

Appendix B outlines the options for public consideration and Appendix C summarizes the feedback results.

The feedback received suggests that Heather, Douglas and Braemar Parks be restricted to on-leash dogs. To satisfy people wanting local dog off-leash areas, staff suggest using the area behind Nat Bailey Stadium, the Queen Elizabeth Park location off 37<sup>th</sup> Ave. and the 37<sup>th</sup> Ave and Oak location.

The feedback received from the Douglas Park Community Association supports the recommendation to remove Heather Park from the dog off-leash program. Reasons for requesting the removal are due to the pre-existing plans to develop Heather Park, which the Community Association would like to see completed.

In an effort to provide another site adjacent to but not officially included within the boundaries of the Douglas Park neighbourhood, staff proposed adding a new dog off-leash location at Shaughnessy Park Crescent. On May 7, 2001 the residents living around the Shaughnessy Park Crescent received a notice asking for their comments on this proposal. From the 43 notices sent out staff have received feedback from 7 people who are not in favour of the proposal. All of these Residents were also invited to a meeting on May 24 to share their opinions. Attendance at the May 24 meeting was limited to 3 people and the concerns expressed can be summarized as follows: increased use – people coming from other areas to use the park, and the impact of the dog off-leash program on the park and existing users.

In response to the concerns raised by residents, staff recommend reducing the original proposal of all-day dog off-leash hours (i.e. 7 a.m.-10 p.m.) to restricted hours from 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. for a one-year trial.

Staff believe the reduced hours and one-year trial will help to address potential noise and use conflict related issues.

## **SUMMARY**

After an extensive process to involve residents in considering alternatives for off-leash dogs in the Douglas Park neighbourhood, it was determined that a daytime opportunity at Shaughnessy Park plus the continuation of use at Queen Elizabeth, Oak & 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Nat Bailey Stadium Park would provide the required sites. Use of Heather, Douglas and Braemar Parks were considered by the majority of the public to be problematic because of their limited size, the extent of existing playfields, childrens' play areas and other recreational uses on these sites.

The success of the city-wide Dog Off-Leash Program will continue to depend on all park users sharing existing park land and acting in a responsible fashion. While the recommendations in this report will not satisfy everyone, they do provide a course of action to improve our existing program.

Prepared by:

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