

Date: May 18, 2006



**TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board**  
**FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation**  
**SUBJECT: Dog Strategy Task Force - Terms of Reference**

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

*That the Park Board approve:*

- 1. The Terms of Reference for the Dog Strategy Task Force attached as Appendix 1;*
- 2. Funding of \$40,000 for the work of the Task Force, including \$30,000 reallocated from a previous approval for the Dog Off-Leash Program and \$10,000 from the 2006-2008 Capital Plan for planning studies.*

## BACKGROUND

Dogs have been part of Vancouver's urban environment since the City's founding in 1886. For most of Vancouver's history, the regulatory framework for accommodating dogs has been relatively simple: owners are required to obtain licenses for their dogs, and dogs, when on public land, must be leashed. Dogs are forbidden from specified public lands for the safety of other residents and/or the preservation of valuable landscapes, for example school grounds, bathing beaches, children's playgrounds, formal gardens, and sport fields.

In 1997, the Park Board began to permit the creation of specified areas within certain parks where dogs are not required to be leashed – these areas are referred to as “dog off-leash areas” and, as of May 2006, a total of 31 dog off-leash areas exist within Vancouver's 221 parks. Thirteen of the dog off-leash areas are full-time (usually from 6 am to 10 pm), and eighteen are part-time (usually from 5 am to 10 am and 5 pm to 10 pm). One of the dog off-leash areas is fenced (in Stanley Park), and plans have been approved to fence off the existing dog off-leash area in Nelson Park.

There is ongoing pressure being applied by dog owners to provide additional public areas where dogs are permitted to be off-leash. There is also pressure by non-dog-owning residents to ensure that public safety is maintained and that their enjoyment of the public lands (i.e. sidewalks, pathways, parks, school grounds, and cemeteries) is not unduly disrupted by off-leash dogs.

A significant component of the public debate in recent years has been adversarial and not productive in terms of seeking solutions that are acceptable by all residents.

On March 20, 2006, the Vancouver Park Board approved the following motion:

“WHEREAS the Park Board strives to create a balanced compromise between restraint and freedom for dogs and has worked to create a happy leisure experience for all;

WHEREAS dogs in an urban environment necessitate specific practices, rules and regulations so that we can all share public spaces;

WHEREAS it is estimated that less than one-third of dogs in Vancouver are licensed; and

WHEREAS the density and character of Vancouver's neighbourhoods have changed significantly;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Vancouver Park Board request staff to develop terms of reference and structure for a dog strategy task force, and report back on the membership and involvement with the Vancouver School Board, City Council, Commissioners, Park Board staff, and members of the public to fairly represent all views.”

In response to this motion staff made presentations to two meetings of the Board’s Planning Committee. On April 18, 2006, staff discussed three options for the structure and membership of the Dog Strategy Task Force (the Task Force) and the Committee gave positive feedback on a committee of citizens with expertise in key areas important to the discussion of dog issues in the community. At the meeting of May 16, 2006 staff provided additional details of the objectives, role and outcomes required of the Task Force. Several members of the public addressed the Planning Committee and provided feedback. Staff have reviewed the proposed Terms of Reference attached as Appendix 1, and adjusted the statements where the ideas had not been previously included.

The Board also, in considering a report at its meeting on May 15, 2006 on expanding hours at two parks and a proposal for three new off-leash locations, referred these proposals to the Task Force for their consideration. This referral was for expanded hours at Crab Park at Portside and new locations at Stanley Park, Devonian Harbour and Creekside Parks.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Dog Strategy Task Force is to be a six member panel charged with the role of hearing from the community about dogs in the urban environment and presenting the Park Board with recommendations for a strategy to balance the needs of all park users.

The Terms of Reference for this group and a more complete description of their work, the structure of the Task Force and their process and products are identified in the Dog Strategy Task Force Terms of Reference attached as Appendix 1.

### **Administration**

Park Board staff will seek out potential Task Force members by advertising in local newspapers and on the Park Board's website. Selection criteria will include but not limited to:

- the applicant's experience with public policy issues, research and public discussions;
- the applicant's understanding of key issues related to dogs in urban environments;
- the applicant living or working in the city of Vancouver;
- the applicant being 18 years or older; and
- the applicant's time commitment based on the expected amount of work and the anticipated time line.

The Task Force will be supported administratively by the Vancouver Park Board, either directly by staff and/or the hiring of one or several consultants.

Staff from the Park Board's Planning and Operations Division and its three districts will be available to support the Task Force, and contact will be made with Animal Control, Permits and Licenses, Engineering Services, Legal Services, Mountain View Cemetery, and the Vancouver School Board.

### **Budget**

A budget of about \$40,000 has been established, which will pay for costs associated with consultants, administration, research, advertising, public meetings, refreshments, meals and travel.

In April 2004, the Park Board approved an allocation of \$83,000 for enhancements to the dog off-leash program. This included public education and consultation. Approximately \$30,000 remains from this amount, and these funds will be reallocated to the Task Force's work. The remaining \$10,000 will be allocated from the 2006-2008 Capital Plan planning studies account.

### **Timeline**

The Task Force is proposed to be installed in June 2006 and will complete their work by the end of April 2007. The specifics of the timeline for this work are included in Appendix 1.

## **SUMMARY**

On March 20, 2006 the Board adopted a motion to create a Dog Strategy Task Force. This report describes the type of individuals required, their roles and the expectations of this group in their consideration of the issues related to dogs in the urban environment. It also recommends a timeline and budget for their work.

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