



Date: July 19, 2012

**TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board**  
**FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation**  
**SUBJECT: Dog Off-Leash Area Guidelines and Next Steps**

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## RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT the Board approve the Dog Off-Leash Area Guidelines as listed in Appendix A.*
- B. THAT the Board direct staff to report back in the Fall with next steps.*

## POLICY

At the November 24, 1997 Park Board Meeting the Board creates the dog off-leash program, consisting of four pilot off-leash sites.

At the September 28, 1998 Park Board meeting the Board approves the expansion of the dog off-leash program and selection criteria.

At the May 12, 2003 Park Board meeting the Board approved funding for a public opinion survey on the dog off-leash program.

At the May 3, 2004 Park Board meeting the Board approved funding for a Responsible Dog Ownership Program to be carried out in conjunction with the City and SPCA.

On July 7, 2011 Park Board endorsed draft principles for the Park Boards current 35 dog off-leash areas and directed staff to seek public input on the draft principles.

## BACKGROUND

In response to the growing demand for dog off-leash areas, in 1997 the Park Board approved a pilot program consisting of four trial dog off-leash areas. After reviewing the pilot in 1998, the Park Board added 25 new sites to its list of dog off-leash locations. The sites were selected to provide distribution across the city and minimize impacts on wildlife and sports groups activities.

A number of off-leash areas were subsequently added to respond to increased demand for off-leash areas, or removed to respond to issues such as dogs digging holes on sports fields and owners not picking up after their dogs. Park Board subsequently approved funding for an opinion survey and a responsible dog ownership program to be carried out in partnership with the City and the SPCA.

Today dogs are allowed on-leash in all Vancouver parks, and the Park Board has currently designated 35 off-leash areas, 5 of which are fenced.

## **DISCUSSION**

Many Vancouverites value the opportunity to take dogs to parks for exercise and socialization, a healthy activity for both dogs and dog owners. Dog owners are also some of the city's most frequent park users, often using parks at off-peak hours and providing valuable 'eyes' in our parks. As many dog-owners particularly value the opportunity to exercise dogs off-leash, Vancouver, like many other North American cities, provides designated 'off-leash areas'.

The Vancouver Park Board is currently exploring ways of improving the off-leash area network. Off-leash areas that are not physically contained can cause other park users to feel threatened and result in conflicts with playgrounds, sports fields, bike lanes, adjacent land uses and roadways. There have also been comments that current off-leash area locations and hours are not satisfying demand for off-leash activity across the city.

### Draft Guidelines

In spring of 2011 Park Board staff developed a set of draft principles to provide basic direction for improving the off-leash area system. The draft principles (listed below) were endorsed by the Board in July 2011 and staff was directed to seek public input.

### Draft Principles:

1. Off-leash areas are an important part of our park system.
2. Off-leash areas need to work for all park users.
3. Physical separation can create off-leash areas that work for all.
4. Good design will create places that work for people and dogs.
5. Off-leash areas need to be carefully placed within parks.
6. Off-leash areas need to be strategically located across the city.
7. There is a meaningful role for education and enforcement.
8. Off-leash areas part of standard park planning processes.

In Spring of 2012 staff developed draft guidelines for off-leash areas (listed below), drawing on the principles, public feedback, experience from Vancouver and precedents from other cities:

Draft Guidelines:

**Location:** Dog off-leash areas should be conveniently located across the city, providing for both neighbourhood and destination use. Off-leash areas should be carefully located within parks, considering other park uses and environmentally sensitive areas.

**Rules:** Dog off-leash areas should be available all day for off-leash use. The Park Board and Animal Control should continue to work together to decrease conflicts.

**Communication:** Websites and signage concerning dog off-leash area locations, boundaries and rules should be clear and easy to understand.

**Design:** Dog off-leash areas should be attractive to dogs and dog owners, and constructed with durable, dog-friendly materials.

**Fencing:** Dog off-leash areas should be separated from other park areas with fencing or natural barriers, using materials appropriate for each park.

#### Public Consultation on Draft Guidelines

The guidelines were posted on an online forum which enabled the public to vote 'agree' or 'disagree' and comment on each guideline for 1 month (June 5<sup>th</sup> to July 4<sup>th</sup>). Comments were visible to all users, allowing for discussion between participants. Comments were also welcomed through e-mail or by letter to the Park Board. The online forum was advertised through a Park Board media advisory, social media and the Park Board website homepage, public consultation page and dog off-leash area page. The online forum was also discussed in one radio interview and seven newspaper articles.

Between June 5<sup>th</sup> and July 4<sup>th</sup>, there were 286 participants on the online forum, 40 e-mails and 3 letters. The percentages of agree votes from the online forum are listed below to give an indication of support (See Appendix B for a full list of results):

- Communication Guideline (98% agree)
- Location Guideline (95% agree)
- Rules Guideline (94% agree)
- Design Guideline (92% agree)
- Fencing Guideline (62% agree)

A total of 542 comments were received through the online forum, including 216 comments on 'Other Ideas'. All comments received through the forum, e-mail and mail have been made available to the Board. Many thoughtful and constructive comments were submitted and will also be considered in upcoming work on identifying specific projects and improvements.

The following is a brief summary of comments received surrounding Fencing, the least supported Guideline:

- Support for fencing where it can decrease conflicts with other park users such as children and cyclists;
- Support for fencing where it can increase dog safety, especially next to roadways;
- Support for fencing of some off-leash areas where needed, but not all off-leash areas;
- Concern that creating enclosed spaces can increase dog aggression, especially between larger and smaller dogs;
- Concern that fencing will result in smaller off-leash areas.

These comments are reflected in the following proposed amendment to the Fencing guideline, and these and all other comments will be considered in the future creation of location, fencing and design criteria.

Amended Draft Guidelines:

It is recommended that the Board approve the guidelines (listed in Appendix A), including an amended Fencing guideline in response to public input:

***Fencing:*** Fencing or natural barriers should be used to reduce conflict, prioritising high conflict areas and ensuring appropriate fencing/separation for each park.

Next Steps:

It is recommended that the Board direct staff to report back in the Fall with next steps, including a public consultation strategy for identifying priority projects and improvements to the off-leash area network.

**SUMMARY**

The Vancouver Park Board currently designates 35 off-leash areas, 5 of which are fenced. In July 2011 the Board endorsed Principles for improving the off-leash area network and directed staff to seek public feedback. Staff then developed Draft Guidelines for off-leash areas, which were posted on an online forum from June 5<sup>th</sup> to July 4<sup>th</sup>. There were high levels of support for the guidelines with the exception of the Fencing guideline, and it is therefore recommended that the Board approve the guidelines along with the proposed amendment to the Fencing Guideline. It is also recommended that the Board direct staff to report back in the Fall with next steps, including a public consultation strategy for identifying priority projects and improvements to the off-leash area network.

Prepared by: Parks  
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KI/ <img alt="Vancouver logo"/> KI

## APPENDIX A

### DOG OFF-LEASH AREA GUIDELINES

***Location:*** Dog off-leash areas should be conveniently located across the city, providing for both neighbourhood and destination use. Off-leash areas should be carefully located within parks, considering other park uses and environmentally sensitive areas.

***Rules:*** Dog off-leash areas should be available all day for off-leash use. The Park Board and Animal Control should continue to work together to decrease conflicts.

***Communication:*** Websites and signage concerning dog off-leash area locations, boundaries and rules should be clear and easy to understand.

***Design:*** Dog off-leash areas should be attractive to dogs and dog owners, and constructed with durable, dog-friendly materials.

***Fencing (recommended amendment):*** Fencing or natural barriers should be used to reduce conflict, prioritising high conflict areas and ensuring appropriate fencing/separation for each park.

## APPENDIX B

### FORUM RESULTS

#### Participants

Feedback for the draft guidelines was collected between June 5<sup>th</sup> and July 4<sup>th</sup>. There were 286 participants on the online forum, and the Park Board received 40 e-mails and 3 letters.

#### Online Forum Votes

##### ***Communication Guideline:***

- **233** 'agree' votes; **4** 'disagree' votes; **98%** 'agree' votes
- **21** comments on this guideline

##### ***Location Guideline:***

- **242** 'agree' votes; **13** 'disagree' votes; **95%** 'agree' votes
- **117** comments on the web forum

##### ***Rules Guideline:***

- **233** 'agree' votes; **15** 'disagree' votes ; **94%** 'agree' votes
- **53** comments

##### ***Design Guideline:***

- **217** 'agree' votes; **20** 'disagree' votes; **92%** 'agree' votes
- **36** comments

##### ***Fencing Guideline:***

- **146** 'agree' votes; **91** 'disagree' votes; **62%** 'agree' votes
- **99** comments

##### ***Other Ideas:***

- **44** 'agree' votes; **1** 'disagree' votes; **98%** 'agree' votes
- **216** comments

#### Comments

All comments received through the forum, e-mail and mail have been made available to the Board. Many thoughtful and constructive comments were submitted and will also be considered in upcoming work on identifying specific projects and improvements, and creating location, fencing and design criteria.