

COMMUNITY-INITIATED PROPOSALS FOR OFF-LEASH DOG PARKS

RECOMMENDATION

That the November 21, 2022, City Operations report CO01284rev, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work as we achieve our strategic goals.	Urban Places		
City Plan Values	ACCESS		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	A community of communities	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	15-minute districts
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy • Dogs in Open Spaces 10 Year Implementation Plan • <i>Breathe</i> - Edmonton's Green Network Strategy • Community Parks Framework Initiative 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CR_3374, Dogs in Open Spaces 10-year Strategy, March 21, 2016, Community Services Committee • CR_3559, Dogs in Open Spaces Pilot Program (Grand Trunk), September 6, 2016, City Council • CR_3560, Dogs in Open Spaces - Implementation Plan, September 6, 2017, Community and Public Services Committee • CR_6763, Dogs in Open Spaces Implementation Plan, April 10, 2019, Community and Public Services Committee • CR_7144, Off-Leash Dog Park - Recommendations, July 10, 2019, Community and Public Services Committee • CR_7145, Dog Park Options with Urban Development Institute, July 10, 2019, Community and Public Services Committee 		

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Previous Council/Committee Action

At the May 16/17, 2022, Community and Public Services meeting, the following motion passed:

That Administration provide a report to Committee outlining options and resource requirements for community-initiated proposals for off-leash dog parks with the potential to have the options integrated into City processes and strategy implementation.

Executive Summary

- The Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy incorporates smart planning, design, and management of Off Leash Areas (OLAs) that considers user experience, safety, and environmental sensitivities. The Strategy identifies where new OLAs in Edmonton are needed and establishes standard amenities required in all OLAs.
- New pop-up dog parks on parkland will be launched in 2023. Priority neighbourhoods have been identified and in Q4 2022 and Q1 2023 specific park locations will be selected. Limited engagement in early 2023 will assist in finalizing the pop-up locations with installation of sites starting in Q2 2023.
- Administration will examine opportunities to reduce and right-size capital costs for establishment and enhancement of off-leash areas through capital projects.
- Administration will continue the development of OLAs on community league licensed land through Community Group Led Construction and an evaluation and possible expansion of the existing Temporary Off-leash Program.
- There is a risk of continuing to establish off-leash areas without an increase for enforcement as dog related incidents and other confrontations can happen in off-leash areas that require enforcement response.

REPORT

Background

Maintaining healthy and vibrant open spaces is essential to achieving the strategic goals of ConnectEdmonton. Edmonton's network of parks, open spaces and natural areas support celebration, ecology and wellness and makes a quantifiable contribution to the long-term livability of the city. Off-leash areas (OLAs), are an ongoing interest in Edmonton, particularly the distribution and the possibility of community-led establishment and enhancement. OLAs can foster healthy activity, social well-being and may reduce off-leash activity in unsanctioned areas. However, considerations regarding other park-use priorities, noise, park user altercations, dog related incidents and dog waste must be considered. Comprehensive planning, design and management is critical to ensure the benefits of OLAs are achieved.

The Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy has guided the planning, design, and management of OLAs in Edmonton since 2016 and is aligned with ConnectEdmonton's guiding principles that ensure the City makes strategically consistent choices. The Strategy is also aligned with *Breathe*, which recommends prioritizing neighbourhoods currently underserved by OLAs. This includes

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acquisition and development of new or expanded parks, and emphasizes the importance of well-designed OLAs that include safety and environmental impacts.

A timeline of past work related to the Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy is outlined in Attachment 1 and the inventory of current OLAs is mapped in Attachment 2. This report presents potential new or adjusted ways to add off-leash areas, with feedback from community and reduced timelines and infrastructure costs.

New Methods to Establish Off-Leash Areas

In response to requests for community-led processes and stream-lined approaches for establishing OLAs, Administration will be implementing initiatives to support existing programs. Attachment 3 provides a comparison of options presented below.

- **Pop-up Dog Park Program:** Administration has developed a new program to establish City maintained temporary dog parks on parkland that will launch in Q2 2023. The intent is to establish the dog parks quickly in neighbourhoods that have a significant need for an OLA and use these sites to engage with residents prior to developing permanent OLAs. This program will take into account equitable opportunities for access to OLAs. Location criteria for pop-up dog parks are listed in Attachment 4 and consider location suggestions from Edmontonians and Councillors that have been tracked since 2018. Based on results of public feedback collected during a trial period, and a site evaluation, the site could potentially be made permanent with limited assets.

Administration has initiated a comprehensive review of the proposed neighbourhood locations for pop-up dog parks outlined in Attachment 5. The specific sites for the new pop-up dog parks will be confirmed by the end of Q1 2023 with installation commencing in early Q2 2023, weather permitting.

- **Community Group Led Construction of permanent off-leash areas by community groups:** The Community Group Led Construction process is a well established method for community groups to fund, construct, operate and maintain infrastructure within licenced areas. Community groups may advance OLAs on league licensed land, whether within existing limits or expanded licensed areas. Over the past two years, in response to the Community Projects in Neighbourhood Parks Process Audit that was conducted by the Office of the City Auditor and presented to Audit Committee on August 30, 2018, many improvements have been made to this process. The community may require additional resources to support expanding licensed areas.

Current Off-leash Area Establishment & Enhancement Processes

Establishing or enhancing OLAs through City-led or developer-led projects provides oversight to ensure that OLAs are equitable, sustainable, safe, and built in alignment with the Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy. Every OLA requires standard amenities, including waste bins, waste bag dispensers, signage and clear physical boundaries. The City currently prioritizes new, or enhancing existing OLAs by the following methods:

- **City-led Capital Projects:** City-funded projects that are designed, built, maintained, and operated by Administration. Projects can either be standalone or part of a larger park or

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neighbourhood renewal project. In both instances, public and stakeholder engagement is used to inform design. Where capital open space and neighbourhood renewal projects are being advanced, opportunities for alignment with Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy are considered. Administration will continue to examine standard amenity needs, levels of services (size and quality), and distribution to ensure capital projects are delivered in the most cost effective manner to meet the specific needs of the community.

- **Developer Projects:** Funded by developers or through the City's Shared Park Development Program, projects are built by developers as part of new neighbourhoods. Once the inventory is transferred to the City, administration operates and maintains the asset.

Community Leagues are able to establish temporary off-leash areas as follows:

- **Temporary off-leash area pilot program:** Groups apply to designate their fully enclosed areas (tennis courts, rinks, etc) under-utilized, fully enclosed amenities on league licensed-land can be designated as temporary dog parks. In 2022, nine community leagues participated in the pilot which is being evaluated to determine effectiveness and potential for continuation, expansion, and reduction of barriers to participation in an ongoing program.

Policy and Strategy Updates

The Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy (2016) and Implementation Plan (2017) have shifted to increase opportunities for OLAs and align with new or updated strategic documents approved by City Council including:

- The City Plan:
 - In 2018, 315 of 399 neighbourhoods (79 per cent) were within a 20-minute walking distance of an OLA, as outlined in the strategy.
 - For the 2019-2022 budget cycle, Administration's target was that 333 of 402 neighbourhoods (83 per cent) are within a 20-minute walking distance of an OLA by the end of 2022. This target was met based on new OLAs already built or planned for construction this year.
 - The target distribution of neighbourhood level OLAs has been adjusted from 20 minutes/1.67km down to 15 minutes/1.25km to align with The City Plan's 15 minute community concept.
 - Adding up to 30 pop-up dog parks, combined with the three permanent OLAs already scheduled to open in 2023, will result in up to 85 per cent of neighbourhoods with access to an OLA within a 15-minute walking distance to an OLA.
- City Policy C602 - Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy
 - All projects related to off-leash areas will include accessibility as a key consideration.
- Parkland Bylaw 2202
 - As part of an amalgamated bylaw review focused on activities and behaviours in public spaces, opportunities related to dogs in parks and open spaces will be examined.

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Next Steps

The City led pop-up dog parks will launch in Q2 2023 through a phased approach and will target placement of these temporary amenities in neighbourhoods prioritized for establishment of new OLAs (Attachment 4). This program will take into account equitable opportunity for access to OLAs using the City Plan District approach of a 15 minute community and consider location suggestions from residents and City Council.

Additionally, Administration will:

- examine opportunities to reduce capital costs for establishment and enhancement of OLAs through integration with other park and neighbourhood planning projects; and
- continue to move forward with the City-led, developer-led and community-led establishment of OLAs.

The community league led temporary off-leash area pilot program is undergoing evaluation and results will be communicated to Council in early 2023. All approaches will include engagement opportunities for Edmontonians.

Financial Implications

The new Pop-up Dog Park Program costs include one seasonal full time equivalent, public engagement support and program supplies estimated at \$120,000. Pop-up Dog Park standard amenities have been estimated to be \$500 to \$4,500, for a six month period, if a site requires temporary rented fencing. Maintenance of these spaces for six months, excluding bylaw enforcement, is estimated to be \$500 to \$1,500 per site. A target of installing up to 30 temporary pop-up dog parks averaging six months duration in 2023, is estimated to cost a total of \$150,000 to \$300,000. Administration will review existing budgets and find efficiency and integration opportunities to launch the program for 2023.

Based on results of public feedback collected during the six month trial period, and a site evaluation, the site may be made permanent with standard amenities in off-leash areas. If significant site enhancements are required, a capital profile to make a pop-up site permanent would be presented to Council, along with operating impacts of capital.

Community Group Led Construction requires guidance from Administration for projects but is contingent on the ability of the community group to fundraise all project costs, including operation and maintenance.

Administration has completed strategy and prioritization work on where to build new OLAs through capital projects. When the Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy and Implementation Plan were first approved in 2016 and 2017 respectively, Council directed Administration to bring forward a capital profile to fund new and enhance existing OLAs. From 2019 to 2022, some capital funding was approved to enhance existing OLAs, but no funding was approved to build new amenities. An unfunded capital profile for the 2023-2026 budget cycle has been included within the proposed capital budget. This profile is focused on building 11 new permanent neighbourhood off-leash areas, two new district off-leash areas, and enhancements to 23 existing off-leash areas. A separate unfunded capital profile focused on upgrading Callingwood off-leash area is also included in the proposed capital budget. This profile would fund the build phase for this project as

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strategy, design and public engagement have already been completed. To date, Administration has prioritized adding new OLAs as part of existing, funded neighbourhood and park renewal processes or in collaboration with developers.

Although six new OLAs have been installed since 2016, no operating or capital budget has been provided for enforcement and response. An unfunded Animal Welfare service package for the 2023-2026 budget cycle has also been included in the proposed operating budget for additional Animal Control Peace Officer positions that would increase enforcement capacity to meet the needs of existing OLAs. There is currently no growth request for enforcement to meet the development of new OLAs. The estimated annual operating costs of these resources is approximately \$540,000 for personnel, equipment and training, with a capital cost of \$140,000 for the Animal Control Officer vehicle. Continued establishment of OLAs without new funding for enforcement will continue to strain resources.

Legal Implications

Pursuant to Section 17(2)(d) of the Parkland Bylaw 2022, a dog is permitted to be unleashed on Parkland so long as the dog is in an OLA. "Off Leash Area" is defined in the Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw 13145 as "an area designed by the City Manager where a Dog or Nuisance Dog is permitted but is not required to be held by a leash." In accordance with Section 47(d) of the Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw, the City Manager has the authority to establish Off Leash Areas.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Although there are Edmontonians desiring additional OLAs in their community, through public engagement for capital park projects, and projects submitted through the existing Community Group-led Construction process, residents and community groups can identify and prioritize the desire for different amenities in open spaces, such as play structures, disc golf, and alternative recreation activities. These considerations need to be evaluated when space is limited.

Significant public engagement with internal and external stakeholders played a prominent role in shaping the Dogs In Open Spaces Strategy and supporting plans. Past public engagement did not specifically ask about support for community groups to fund, build and manage OLAs. Responses to open-ended questions included suggestions to leverage outdoor rinks as OLAs seasonally.

Prior to installation of pop-up dog parks, residents living nearby the locations selected will be engaged. The engagement will be limited based on the desire to advance pop-up dog parks within a short period of time. The placement of OLAs can be polarizing. Although the City often hears requests for more OLAs, based on experience with the number of inquiries that Administration currently receives on existing OLAs, we anticipate that installing pop-ups quickly will potentially lead to a high volume of inquiries and complaints from residents and park users that may not be in support. It is important to note that without comprehensive engagement, design and planning for OLAs, there may be conflicts that arise once a dog park is installed that Administration will not be able to predict.

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GBA+

GBA+ was applied to review the Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy and management of current OLAs. Concerns and recommendations from park users and City Council regarding operation and maintenance of OLAs since 2016 were considered.

Ensuring physical accessibility in all OLAs is important to ensure access for users with disabilities, families and people of all ages. Accessibility and barriers to accessibility has been added as a key public engagement point of discussion for all projects to establish or enhance OLAs. Online resources (descriptions, maps, etc.) are in the process of being updated with accessibility factors such as terrain, snow clearing and photos of potential physical barriers in all seasons. Paved trails and lighting will be considered in the design and placement of new permanent OLAs.

Administration may consider adding these amenities to the standard amenities list for OLAs, noting that this would increase the cost to build new OLAs. Increasing minimum requirements for amenities could also create a barrier for community groups to fund and build OLAs.

Equitable opportunity for access to OLAs to all neighbourhoods is considered so that Edmontonians living in neighbourhoods with less financial, infrastructure and volunteer resources have access to these amenities. This consideration has been added as part of prioritization criteria in the establishment or enhancement of OLAs and will continue as the number of OLAs and programs to establish/enhance these amenities increases.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy Timeline
2. City of Edmonton Dog Off-leash Area Access
3. Comparison of Processes for Development or Enhancement of Off-leash Areas
4. Location Criteria for Establishment of Off-Leash Areas
5. City of Edmonton Dog Off-leash Area Access - Addition of Proposed Pop-up Dog Park Neighbourhoods