

## DOG OFF-LEASH AREA ESTABLISHMENT

### Pop-up Dog Parks and Community Initiated Options

#### Recommendation

That the February 26, 2024, City Operations report CO02132, be received for information.

<b>Requested Action</b>	Information Only		
<b>ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle</b>	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
<b>CONNECTED</b> This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
<b>City Plan Values</b>	ACCESS		
<b>City Plan Big City Move(s)</b>	A community of communities	<b>Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities</b>	15-minute districts
<b>Corporate Business Plan</b>	Serving Edmontonians		
<b>Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy</li> <li>• Dogs in Open Spaces 10 Year Implementation Plan</li> <li>• Breathe - Edmonton's Green Network Strategy</li> <li>• Community Parks Framework Initiative</li> </ul>		
<b>Related Council Discussions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CR_3374, Dogs in Open Spaces 10-year Strategy, March 21, 2016, Community Services Committee</li> <li>• CR_3559, Dogs in Open Spaces Pilot Program (Grand Trunk), September 6, 2016, City Council</li> <li>• CR_3560, Dogs in Open Spaces - Implementation Plan, September 6, 2017, Community and Public Services Committee</li> <li>• CR_6763, Dogs in Open Spaces Implementation Plan, April 10, 2019, Community and Public Services Committee</li> <li>• CR_7144, Off-Leash Dog Park - Recommendations, July 10, 2019, Community and Public Services Committee</li> <li>• CR_7145, Dog Park Options with Urban Development Institute, July 10, 2019, Community and Public Services Committee</li> <li>• CO01284rev, Community-initiated Proposals for Off-Leash Dog Parks, January 16, 2023, Community and Public Services Committee</li> </ul>		

# **DOG OFF-LEASH AREA ESTABLISHMENT - Pop-up Dog Parks and Community Initiated Options**

## **Executive Summary**

- Planning, design and management of City off-leash areas is guided by the Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy in alignment with ConnectEdmonton and Breathe - Edmonton's Green Network Strategy. The City offers opportunities for community leagues or groups to establish or enhance off-leash areas.
- Pop-up Dog Parks was an unfunded pilot for 2023 to trial City-maintained temporary off-leash areas on underutilized parkland within neighbourhoods with less access to existing off-leash areas.
- Administration operated 19 Pop-up Dog Parks from May to October in neighbourhoods across Edmonton. Sites were chosen based on population, number of dog licenses and requests from Edmontonians, and did not conflict with areas used for programmed recreational activities.
- Administration's evaluation of the program at the end of the season found that Pop-up Dog Parks were well received; 60 per cent of Phase 2 survey respondents would like to have a Pop-up Dog Park in the same location, although results varied between locations.

## **REPORT**

Equitable access to parks and open spaces supports the ConnectEdmonton goal of a healthy city by providing opportunities for community connections to increase health and well-being.

Since their introduction in 1992, off-leash areas have helped decrease social isolation, provide recreational opportunities and contribute to creation of strong community bonds between dog owners, while also decreasing unsanctioned use of park space by off-leash dogs. Providing off-leash space is also one of many ways the City animates open space to promote vibrancy and improve safety. The Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy guides the planning, design and operation of off-leash areas in alignment with ConnectEdmonton, BREATHE principles, district planning and Community Parks Framework. The strategy recommends that neighbourhood-level off-leash areas be within a 15 minute or 1.25 kilometre walk or roll from residences. Attachment 1 shows the current neighbourhood access to off-leash areas, including ongoing sites and those in construction.

Administration introduced the new Pop-up Dog Parks program for 2023 to trial City-maintained temporary off-leash areas on parkland in neighbourhoods with an identified need for off-leash areas. Initial site selection was based on population, number of dog licenses and requests received since 2016. This report summarizes the evaluation of this program and presents options for next steps, as well as an update on other off-leash area establishment methods.

### **Pop-up Dog Parks Establishment**

The City operated 19 Pop-up Dog Parks from May to October 2023 in neighbourhoods across Edmonton. Each Pop-up Dog Park had etiquette and boundary signage, dog waste bag dispensers and garbage cans. Sixteen of the Pop-up Dog Parks were fully enclosed by temporary metal fencing with barrier-free entry gates due to adjacent neighbourhood amenities such as

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playgrounds, sports fields and environmentally sensitive areas, while three remained unfenced. All Pop-up Dog Parks were located on parkland not in use for other programmed recreational activities. The process used to select the locations is detailed in Attachment 2.

Administration selected the final locations using input from internal City stakeholders, utility companies and 6,561 public responses to the Phase 1 survey, which was advertised via postcards distributed to approximately 142,000 residences in neighbourhoods being considered for the installation of a Pop-up Dog Park. Attachment 3 maps the neighbourhood access to off-leash areas including the Pop-up Dog Park locations.

### **Pop-up Dog Parks Evaluation**

Administration evaluated Pop-up Dog Parks based on public input and technical considerations within the framework of existing City policies and strategies. Public input about individual locations and the program was gathered from 2,842 responses to the Phase 2 survey available online and paper surveys at each Pop-up Dog Park, 100 in-person feedback sessions at all locations, 18 inquiries from members of Council and 160 direct email and 311 notifications from interested residents.

Overall, the program was well received; 60 per cent of survey respondents would like to have a Pop-up Dog Park in the same location, 14 percent would like to have the amenity in a different location, 20 per cent would not like to have the amenity in their neighbourhood and six per cent would not like to have any Pop-up Dog Parks within Edmonton. Technical considerations included future planned land use, usage monitoring data, field and desktop site evaluations and feedback from internal stakeholders on the impact of Pop-up Dog Parks on current and future operations.

Administration identified opportunities to improve the program:

- Transition select Pop-up Dog Parks to ongoing off-leash areas with required infrastructure (such as permanent fencing, signage, dog waste bag dispensers, garbage cans) when there is park user and local resident support, and no barriers to establishment such as future planned land use.
- Expand temporary or seasonal Pop-up Dog Parks to provide year-round off-leash area opportunities in neighbourhoods not currently served by ongoing off-leash areas.
- Update site selection criteria to include winter planning and design principles and align with upcoming implementation of Breathe - Edmonton's Green Network Strategy.
- Increase communication and site programming opportunities through community-led information channels such as community league newsletters, social media groups and meetings.

Individual site evaluation results by ward (Attachment 4) shows that nine Pop-up Dog Parks are feasible to transition into ongoing off-leash areas with standard amenities (signage, dog bag dispensers, garbage cans). Eight of the locations would require permanent fencing due to incompatible adjacent neighbourhood amenities like playgrounds and sports fields, while one location could remain unfenced. Attachment 5 shows the neighbourhood access to off-leash areas if these nine locations are converted to ongoing off-leash areas.

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### Ongoing Off-Leash Area Establishment

Ongoing off-leash areas are established or enhanced through City-led, community-led or developer-led projects built in alignment with the Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy.

- **City-led:** City-funded projects are designed, built, maintained and operated by Administration as part of a larger park or neighbourhood renewal projects. Recent examples include:
  - Pleasantview Dog Park opened in late 2023 with temporary infrastructure as part of Building Great Neighbourhoods. Pleasantview renewal will be completed in 2024.
  - Future projects include the addition of a fenced off-leash area within Warehouse Park and as part of Building Great Neighbourhoods Ottewell.
- **Developer-led:** Projects are funded and built by developers as part of new neighbourhoods. Inventory is transferred to the City to be operated and maintained by Administration. A recent example includes:
  - The Orchards Dog Park opened in 2023, with the transfer to the City planned for 2024.
- **Community-led:** Community groups may be able to fund and establish temporary or ongoing off-leash areas.
  - The Community League Temporary Dog Park program is entering its seventh year and provides the opportunity for Community League to designate their fully enclosed spaces within their license area as off-leash areas. Eight community leagues participated in 2023 and two of them received multi-year permits for year-round use of off-leash areas.
  - Community Group Led Construction is a method for community groups to fund, construct, operate and maintain infrastructure within licensed areas. The City added off-leash areas as an option in January 2023. No project proposals have been submitted.

### Budget/Financial Implications

Administration delivered Pop-up Dog Parks as an unbudgeted pilot in 2023. However, ongoing funding is required if the program were to continue. To meet the same service levels seen in 2023, which would include up to 20 pop-up dog parks open from May through October, Administration would require an annual base budget increase of \$147,300 for site operation, plus an additional \$125,000 in one-time funding for 2024. Funding requirements to increase the number of sites up to 40, or to include year-round availability are outlined in Attachment 6. However, it should be noted that as a result of OP12 work completed in 2023, this service would be considered non-core. There are also pressures within the current operating budget and any additional growth projects would need to be managed with fiscal restraint.

Administration has examined opportunities to reduce capital costs for establishment and enhancement of off-leash areas. Public engagement results and site evaluations demonstrate that nine pop-up dog parks are feasible to transition into ongoing off-leash areas at an annual operating cost of \$20,351, and one-time capital cost of \$642,000 for construction.

An Animal Welfare service package was funded for the 2023-2026 budget cycle to increase enforcement capacity to meet the needs of the 60 ongoing off-leash areas through proactive patrols. There is currently no growth funding for enforcement to meet the development of new off-leash areas, including Pop-up Dog Parks. The estimated annual operating cost for

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enforcement is \$269,600 for personnel, equipment and training, plus \$37,000 in one time funding for 2024 with a capital cost of \$132,000 for the Animal Control Officer vehicle<sup>1</sup>.

### **Legal Implications**

“Off Leash Area” is defined in the Animal Licensing and Control Bylaw 13145 as “an area designated 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**

Administration conducted public engagement on Pop-up Dog Parks in two phases. Phase 1 included an online survey on proposed locations and responses were considered when selecting the final locations. Postcards with the survey link were mailed to 142,000 residences in 37 neighbourhoods considered for the addition of a Pop-up Dog Park, temporary signs were placed in all proposed Pop-up Dog Park locations and posts with information about how to participate in the survey were shared through City social media channels. The Phase 1 survey received 6,561 responses (Attachment 7).

Phase 2 public engagement took place while Pop-up Dog Parks were in operation to capture feedback on the lived experience of park users, local residents and other interested residents. Administration conducted a Phase 2 survey, available online or on paper at all Pop-up Dog Parks, and 100 in-person feedback sessions. Administration also included input from 311 notifications, direct emails and Councillor inquiries. The Phase 2 survey received 2,872 responses (Attachment 8). Administration based the final evaluation of each Pop-up Dog Park location on this public feedback, as well as technical and operational considerations.

### **GBA+**

Pop-up Dog Parks may impact communities and parkland users in different ways. They provide off-leash area users with more equitable opportunities for outdoor activity and community connection by improving access within their own neighbourhoods. These locations encourage active transportation through walking, rolling and cycling within neighbourhoods. Additionally, they may benefit parkland users who are afraid or uncomfortable around dogs, because Pop-up Dog Parks provide more designated fenced areas for off-leash dogs to be contained. At the same time, the presence of a Pop-up Dog Park may reduce the availability of parkland for other recreational and social activities.

Individuals and families experiencing low income are more likely to lack access to private outdoor space. Because of this, the positive and negative impacts to users and non-users of Pop-up Dog Parks may be more acutely felt in areas where there is a higher proportion of low income people, and where access to private outdoor space or public parkland is already limited. Administration

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<sup>1</sup> CO01284rev Community-initiated Proposals for Off-leash Dog Parks, Community and Public Services Committee, January 16, 2023

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considered this as part of location selection and evaluation, and in some cases relocated Pop-up Dog Parks mid-season to ensure parkspace access was maintained for the general population.

Ensuring physical accessibility in all off-leash areas is important to provide access for Edmontonians with disabilities, families and people of all ages. Accessibility and barriers to accessibility has been a key factor in site selection and a public engagement point of discussion for Pop-up Dog Parks.

### **Attachments**

1. Current and Future Dog Off-Leash Area Neighbourhood Access
2. Pop-up Dog Park Establishment Process and Timeline
3. Current and Future Dog Off-Leash Area 15 Minute Walking Access
4. Pop-up Dog Park Individual Site Evaluation Results
5. Current, Future and Proposed Dog Off-Leash Area Neighbourhood Access
6. Financial Considerations
7. What We Heard Phase 1
8. What We Heard Phase 2