

The logo features a stylized graphic of a building or skyline to the left of the text. The word "TORONTO" is in a large, bold, sans-serif font, and "STAFF REPORT" is in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font to its right. A horizontal line is positioned below the text.

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

April 19, 2006

To: Economic Development and Parks Committee

From: Brenda Librecz, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Subject: Dogs in Parks Strategy Report
All Wards

Purpose:

To recommend adoption of the proposed new Dogs in Parks Strategy, including protocols for leash free zones, professional dog walker limits, a communication and education plan.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

In an effort to cover increased maintenance and repair costs of the City's parks as a result of increased wear and tear caused by the increase in "professional" dog walkers in parks, this report recommends implementing a permit process and annual fee of \$100.00 payable by each "professional" dog walker for use of the parks. The anticipated annual revenue is \$120,000.00. The revenue will fund the costs of program administration, offset the current maintenance costs and provide for new signage for the leash free zones.

The permit process is targeted for implementation beginning in January, 2007. The projected revenue and maintenance costs will be included in the 2007 budget submission. The actual revenue and costs will be reviewed one year after implementation to determine their accuracy and the results of the assessment will be reported in the 2008 budget process.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial impact statement.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- (1) the Dogs in Parks Strategy, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report, be adopted;
- (2) the projected revenue and maintenance costs be included in the 2007 Parks, Forestry and Recreation budget submission;
- (3) Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in consultation with the City Solicitor, report back with specific amendments to *Chapter 608 of the Municipal Code* in accordance with the proposals set out in Appendix 1 of this report;
- (4) Until such time as *Chapter 608* is amended so that permitted dog walkers may have up to six dogs under their control at one time in a park as set out in Appendix 1, that the interim limit on the number of dogs under the control of a permitted dog walker at any time in a park be set at six;
- (5) *Chapter 441, Fees* be amended to include a fee of \$100.00 per annum for a permit to use the City's parks while having the control of more than three and up to six dogs at any one time;
- (6) Parks, Forestry and Recreation be authorized to finalize and implement the Communication and Education Plan as outlined in Appendix 1; and
- (7) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting of July 20, 21, 22, 2004, City Council adopted "Our Common Grounds" the Strategic Plan for the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division which includes a recommendation that the Division develop a Dogs in Parks Strategy.

Concurrently with work beginning on the Strategy, Parks By-law Enforcement began enforcing *Municipal Code Chapter 608*, the harmonized parks by-law. *Section 34 C of Chapter 608* limits the number of dogs being walked by any one person to three. This limit resulted in complaints from professional dog walkers that it was limiting their ability to earn a livelihood. City Council provided an interim solution to the issue by adopting a motion at its meeting of June 14, 15, 16, 2005, that set the limit at five dogs and essentially directed By-law Enforcement Officers not to issue tickets or summonses to walkers unless they have more than five dogs in their control. The motion also directed the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in consultation with the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards to report on amendments to *Chapter 608* that would establish a regulatory and licensing process for professional dog walkers, as well as set an appropriate limit on the number of dogs permitted to be walked.

Subsequently, at its meeting of January 16, 2006, the Economic Development and Parks Committee referred a communication dated November 10, 2005, to the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the General Manager of Toronto Water requesting that they report on the feasibility and implications of establishing dog leash free zones either in close proximity to, or directly upon water reservoir areas.

This report, in conjunction with the Strategy attached as Appendix 1 addresses the issue of regulating and licensing dog walkers in parks only. It also provides information and recommendations on procedures, guidelines and plans for leash free zones, signage and a communication and education plan for implementation of the Strategy.

Notice of the proposed permit fee to have control of more than three and up to six dogs in a City park will be given as required by *Section 14 of Ontario Regulation 244/02*.

Comments:

Striking a balanced relationship between dog and non-dog owners is an issue that requires attention in all major municipalities world-wide. Extensive research was undertaken on the different approaches employed by different municipalities with respect to their establishment and operation of leash free zones. A number of professional dog-walkers and leash free zone members were also consulted. Staff also involved representatives from the Animal Services Unit of Public Health and the Toronto Police Marine Unit.

Leash Free Zones

There are currently 32 officially recognized off leash zones within the nearly 1,500 City of Toronto parks, their locations are attached as Appendix 2. The majority are in the former Toronto, with three located in Etobicoke-York and one in North York. The current leash free zones have been established in large parks of sufficient size to permit closing off a portion of the park without impacting the use of the rest of the park. They have also been established in small parkettes where the leash free zone occupies all or part of the park for set periods of time. The key to the success of these leash free zones has been the involvement of a responsible, formalized group consisting of community members, both dog and non-dog owners with support from Parks staff, Ward Councillors, Parks Bylaw Enforcement Unit and Animal Services.

Given the many different sizes of parks and uses occurring within them, the staff team agreed that the number, location, physical environment and hours of operation of leash free zones need to be driven and decided by the community who use the park. A recommendation to establish a certain number of leash free zones per capita on a city-wide basis may appear to be feasible; however, it may result in the establishment of leash free zones in communities that do not need them or in parks that cannot accommodate them.

With respect to the issue of establishing leash free zones on Toronto Water reservoirs, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff have consulted with staff from Toronto Water. Given Toronto Water's support for the passive recreational use of the sodded horizontal surfaces on top of its reservoirs, public parks have been permitted on reservoir properties. The passive uses supported by Water are compatible with the mandate of Parks, Forestry and Recreation. In the interest of ensuring the enjoyment by the public, both Divisions agree that the establishment of leash free zones does not conflict with their objective uses for this space and will consider portions of water reservoir properties as suitable places for leash free zones provided the physical improvements necessary to establish the area do not compromise Toronto Water's mandate of providing a safe water supply in any way. Each leash free zone proposal will be reviewed on an individual basis. Parks will maintain full responsibility for leash free zones established on Toronto Water properties, including all capital and operating costs.

Accordingly, the Strategy sets out a process to establish a leash free zone and places the key responsibilities on the Ward Councillor, local residents, as well as the Parks Supervisor and Manager to decide amongst themselves what the best solution for their community is. This approach respects the diversity of needs city-wide and puts in place a process that commits all involved parties to work together to establish and sustain the leash free zone over the long term.

Dog Walker Limits

The trend towards busier lifestyles has resulted in a growing number of people and organizations who walk dogs for their livelihood, or "professionally". It is estimated there are over 1,200 "professional" dog walkers using City parks on a daily basis to earn a living. Staff and the public have reported seeing the dog walkers with as many as ten to twelve dogs under their control at one time. As a result, *Chapter 608*, the harmonized Parks by-law limits the number of dogs any one person can have in their control at any one time to three. This number coincides with *Municipal Code Chapter 349 –Animals* which limits the number of dogs in one dwelling to three.

It became apparent during the spring of 2005, as by-law enforcement began, that this limit would impact the professional dog walkers and their livelihood. Recognizing the issue as one requiring further debate, a motion was put forward and adopted by City Council at its meeting of June 14, 15, 16, 2005 that raised the limit of dogs under one persons' control to five until such time as a further report on the matter was considered.

The Strategy Team consulted extensively with both individual and organized dog walkers in an effort to strike a balance between permitting the walkers to maintain their livelihood, while limiting the number of dogs under their control to a manageable number. After considerable investigation and consultation, the Team concluded that the limit of dogs walked by a professional should be set at six. This will be conditional on the walkers paying a permit fee to use the parks and offset the existing cost of maintenance in the leash free zones. The permit fee of \$100.00 will fund the cost of administrating the permit process, which will include the issuance of a "permit" in the form of an identification card to be carried by the dog walker. It is estimated that the administrative costs, including printing the cards will be \$5.00 per card, \$6,000.00 in total. It is estimated that Parks currently spends approximately \$3,000.00 annually to maintain an average-sized leash free zone of 2,500 square metres. Applying this cost to the 32

current leash free zones generates costs of \$96,000.00 to repair turf and maintain fencing and signage, which comes from the existing budget. The remaining \$18,000.00 of projected revenue will be spent on damage done by dogs in other areas of the parks and new signage. The dog walkers consulted during the preparation of the report advised that the \$100.00 permit fee was acceptable.

Permits will be issued through the CLASS system already used by Parks, Forestry and Recreation. Prior to rolling out the permit process, it will be necessary to create the permit system on CLASS and print the identification cards. Once the permit process is in place, it will be necessary to amend *Chapter 608* to require that a permit is necessary in order to have control of between three and six dogs in a City park. Legal Services advises that this amendment to *Chapter 608* cannot occur until such time as the permit system is in place to allow the dog walkers to comply with the requirement. In this regard, a recommendation has been included in this report seeking authority to report back to Committee, in consultation with Legal Services, on any amendments to *Chapter 608* necessary to implement City Council's final decisions on this issue. Setting up the permit system will begin once City Council approves the process which would begin in January, 2007. Until such time as *Chapter 608* is amended, it will be necessary to raise the interim limit on the number of dogs under the control of one person to six, from the current level of five set by the motion adopted by City Council at its meeting of June 14, 15, 16, 2005.

The Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards has been consulted and concurs with this approach to issuing permits to professional dog walkers. The projected revenue and maintenance costs will be included in the 2007 budget submission. The actual revenue and costs will be reviewed one year after implementation to determine their accuracy and the results of the assessment will be reported in the 2008 budget process.

It should be noted that the increase in the dog walking limit will only apply to dog walkers with a permit, and anyone else will still be required to comply with existing bylaws which sets a maximum of three dogs in the care and control of an individual in a City park.

Signage

There are currently a number of different sign types and messages in use throughout Toronto parks providing information about leashed and leash free zones and requesting dog owners to stoop and scoop. Parks, Forestry and Recreation have developed new consistent signage that will replace the current signage so that all members of the public will receive the same information.

Dog Restrictions on Beaches

Chapter 608 restricts dogs from going onto beaches at any time, unless in a leash free zone. The Blue Flag designation that has now been applied to five Toronto beaches requires the posting of signage that clearly states that dogs are not allowed on the beaches, except in designated areas, at any time, including the months that are off-season for swimming and other beach uses. This restriction places an additional burden on the two existing leash free zones located along the Eastern Beaches.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Toronto Water Division have recently been jointly appointed with developing an Integrated Beach Management Strategy, such plan to include the Blue Flag Program. The Dog Strategy Team considered a number of solutions that permits the Blue Flag Program to be sustained while also providing dogs controlled access to the waterfront. The Team concluded that retaining the two existing areas makes sense at this time; however, consideration should be given to including the development of a more detailed plan as part of the Integrated Beach Management Strategy. This will permit the impact of dogs on water quality and beach use to be considered at the same time as all other beach and waterfront related issues.

Until such time as the Integrated Beach Management Strategy is approved, Parks and Toronto Water will continue to work together to ensure that the leash free zones located on beachfronts meet the needs of dog owners without affecting the Blue Flag designations for the beaches.

Communication and Education Plan

Once the Strategy has been adopted, it will be necessary to inform the public about the changes that will be occurring, as well as providing them with a forum for feedback and sites where ongoing information changes can be communicated. Until the content of the Strategy itself is endorsed, it is not possible to specify the actual content of the communication plan; however, the methods, tools and communication plan components are set out in the Strategy and should be endorsed as part of the Strategy.

City-wide Dogs in Parks Team

To ensure that the Strategy remains current to all interested parties subsequent to the Strategy being approved, a permanent City-wide Dogs in Parks Team is proposed for establishment to serve as a forum in which to share views and raise concerns or concepts. The team will oversee implementation and monitoring of dog-related issues, be part of the conflict resolution process outlined in the attached document, and take a leadership role in ensuring the success of the Strategy.

Conclusions:

The Dogs in Parks Strategy strives to achieve a balance between the needs of dog-owners who seek places to let their pets run leash free and those who wish to enjoy the parks without fear or interruption from dogs. The Strategy addresses key issues such as leash free zones and the number of dogs under the control of both permitted dog walkers and pet owners. It recommends a communication and education plan for informing the public of the changes and puts in place a Team capable of sustaining and keeping the Strategy current.

The Strategy empowers communities and Councillors, with support from Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff to decide for themselves where leash free zones should exist, how they operate and what measures are needed to sustain them and provides the information necessary to make informed decisions. The Strategy is based on the philosophy that the residents and Councillor

for a community know the community they live in and are best suited to make decisions about how dog and non-dog-owners interact in their parks.

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List of Attachments:

Appendix 1 - Dogs in Parks Strategy
Appendix 2 – Current Leash Free Zones

Dogs in Parks Strategy

Goal:

To create a mutually beneficial park experience for users of Toronto's parks, green spaces and waterfront areas.

Guiding Principles:

- 1) respect for and between all users
- 2) community based decision-making
- 3) Protection of our assets and environmentally sensitive areas

Strategy Components

- Leash free zones
- Dog walker limits
- Signage
- Dog restrictions on beaches
- Communication and education plan
- By-law enforcement
- City-wide Dogs in Parks Team

Leash Free Zones

The following process is recommended for the establishment and long-term stability of leash free zones in City of Toronto parks.

Step 1 - Initial proposal request

- Residents who are interested in establishing a leash free zone and Leash Free Zone Team in a park should submit a brief outline of the proposal to the area Parks Supervisor and their Ward Councillor.

Step 2 - Research of the proposal

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in consultation with Toronto Water (as required), will review the submitted proposal and assess the site(s) against the guidelines and criteria set out below. If the proposal does not meet the guidelines set out below, the Supervisor will advise the local Councillor and the proponents of the reasons the location is unsuitable. Where the proposed site is deemed suitable, the following actions will occur.

Step 3 - Community input

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Ward Councillor will coordinate a public meeting with the Leash Free Zone Team, other representatives of the community such as Advisory Councils, sports groups, area schools, etc. to discuss the proposal and refine details of the proposal, including, but not limited to:
 - size and location of area

- hours of operation, winter and summer
- physical improvements necessary for establishment of the area
- signage
- commitment and structure of Leash Free Zone Team
- communication to residents of area establishment and schedule

Step 4 - Implementation

- Prior to opening the pilot leash free zone, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in consultation with Toronto Water (as required), will ensure the site is physically suitable, arrange for and install signage which would clearly indicate leashed and leash free zones, hours of leash free times, stoop and scoop regulations and set fines. Appropriate waste and recycling containers will also be installed.

Step 5 - Review of Pilot Program

- During the pilot period, the Leash Free Zone Team will track issues as they arise and contact the Park's Supervisor or Ward Councillor in an effort to resolve these issues as soon as possible.
- After six months, the chair of the Leash Free Zone Team will organize a public meeting to review the pilot program in cooperation with Parks, Forestry and Recreation, the local Councillor, Toronto Water (as required) and other users. The meeting will determine if further action is required to improve the leash free zone or if sufficient concerns exist to consider its removal.
- Pending the decisions at the meeting, any recommended changes will be implemented for the following year and the permanent status of the area will be determined.

Step 6 – Annual Review

- An annual meeting will be held to review and resolve any issues that have evolved during the prior year.

Dispute Resolution

When an issue arises that is irresolvable by a Leash Free Zone team, the following Dispute Resolution process shall be used.

Step 1 – involves the Leash Free Zone Team, Parks staff and Ward Councillors' staff

Step 2 – involves the Toronto Dogs in Parks team and representatives from Step 1

Step 3 – involves a report by Parks staff for direction to the relevant Community Council

Leash Free Zone Team Guidelines

Prior to considering a proposal for an off leash area in a park, the proponent of the leash free zone must assemble a Leash Free Zone Team with a minimum of six members, including community members who do not own a dog and other representative park users. This group will be responsible for submitting the proposal, meeting with Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Ward Councillor and be prepared to undertake the following in support of the leash free zone:

- Meet not less than 4 times annually to discuss evolving issues

- Oversee the area, educate users and non-users, identify irresponsible and in-appropriate use of area
- Establish a use schedule that includes the presence of Team members at high-use times to monitor activity and assist in resolving problems
- Organize park clean ups of leash free zone and in adjacent parkland a minimum of 4 times a year.
- Consult with Parks By-law and Animal Services for by-law enforcement when necessary.
- Consult with the Ward Councillor, Parks staff and other park users to discuss issues relating to the area.
- Support the educational initiatives of the Toronto Dogs in Parks Team.

Leash Free Zone Physical Criteria

In an effort to ensure that the physical establishment of the area meets the objectives for active recreation for the dogs while not compromising the use of the remainder of the park for other uses, the following criteria must be taken into account when a leash free zone is being considered for establishment.

- They should not encroach on environmentally sensitive areas such as ravines or wetlands.
- Children's playgrounds, horticulture displays and features such as ball diamonds, skateboard bowls and tennis courts must be avoided.
- Leash free zones on reservoir properties should not encumber the free and clear access by Toronto Water staff and their vehicles to reservoir facilities and underground works.

Dog Walkers Limit

The following measures are to be applied to allow those who walk dogs as a means of earning a livelihood to continue to do so but only in a manner which provides other park users with a level of comfort that the number of dogs being walked is controllable and the walkers have a permit from the City.

- Section 34 of Chapter 608 of the Municipal Code will be amended to allow six dogs to be walked under the control of a dog walker permitted by Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division. All other members of the public will be limited to having 3 dogs under their control.
- Prior to submitting a report recommending an amendment to Chapter 608, Parks, Forestry and Recreation will establish a Dog Walker Permit System on the CLASS System currently used by the Division to track and handle payments for registration.
- Subsequent to the establishment of the Dog Walker Permit System and beginning in January, 2007, all dog walkers who want to walk more than three dogs and up to and including six dogs at any one time will be required to obtain a permit through the Dog Walker Permit System, the requirements of which are as follows:
 - an annual \$100.00 fee
 - valid home address and phone number
 - personal and business name, if applicable
 - identification of the park primarily used in their dog walking business

- On completion of the permit application process, the dog walker will receive by mail a permit in the form of a plasticized identification card that must be displayed any time the dog walker is walking more than 3 dogs in a city park.

Signage

- To assist all parks, green space and waterfront users, clear and consistent language and graphics will be present on all signage.
- The signage for Leash Free Zones will be part of the Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division's new signage initiative.
- Signage samples will be included on the website and in the communication strategy to increase public awareness.
- The signs will reflect both site specific and generic information as applicable.

Dog Restrictions on Beaches

The Dog Strategy Team considered a number of solutions that permits the Blue Flag Program to be sustained while also providing dogs controlled access to the waterfront. The Team concluded that retaining the two existing areas makes sense at this time, however, consideration should be given to including the development of a more detailed plan as part of the Integrated Beach Management Strategy. This will permit the impact of dogs on water quality and beach use to be considered at the same time as all other beach and waterfront related issues.

Until such time as the Integrated Beach Management Strategy is approved, Parks and Toronto Water will continue to work together to ensure that the leash free zones located on beachfronts meet the needs of dog owners without affecting the Blue Flag designations for the beaches.

Communication and Public Education Plan

The Communication and Public Education Plan will be finalized once Council has adopted the Strategy. The Plan will inform the public, staff and Council of the changes to Chapter 608, the establishment of the Dog Walker Permit System, the protocol for leash free zones and the harmonized signage. It will also include messaging relating to the relationships between dogs and people and information on the impacts of pet ownership and interaction with non dog-owners.

- 1) Appropriate messaging will be disseminated via media releases and events, seminars, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation web-site and Fun Guide, industry publications and print media.
- 2) The following issues will be addressed by the Plan:
 - Leash-free Process, including locations
 - Dog Walker Permit System, including fees
 - Dogs and beaches and the Blue Flag Program
 - Harmonized signage
 - Implementation of by-law enforcement
 - Responsible pet ownership

- The positive impact of pets and human health
- The benefits of complying with Chapter 608 and supporting Leash Free Zone Teams
- The physical impact dogs have on parks and open space
- Information and courses on child and dog safety, dog health and vaccinations, pet licensing, basic obedience will be developed and offered by the city.

By-law Enforcement

By-law enforcement has been identified as a key component of successfully managing dogs in park. Currently both the Parks By-law Enforcement Unit and Public Health Division - Animal Services staff enforce the provisions of Municipal Code Chapter 608 Parks and Chapter 349 - Animals. The units recognize that joint support and enforcement will maximise the area covered and the message that is delivered to violators. The Units have committed to:

- Liaise with Leash Free Zone Teams
- Work to create a coordinated data base of site issues and violations to ensure that information gathered is consistent and shared
- Take a leadership role with education and awareness initiatives
- Ensure that there is consistent enforcement protocols (education, warning, and enforcement) practiced throughout the City of Toronto.

City-wide Dogs in Parks Team

This team will be established on a permanent basis to oversee the implementation of the new strategy and to continue to monitor and make improvements over time to ensure success.

The Team will consist of representation from:

- Leash Free Zone Teams (both non-dog and dog owners)
- Permitted Dog Walkers
- Staff from Animal Services, Parks Bylaw Enforcement, Toronto Police Services – Marine Unit and Parks
- Other interested parties such as environmentalists, cyclists and veterinarians

Team Roles and Responsibilities:

- Support the implementation of the Dogs in Parks Strategy across Toronto.
- Provide support to new Leash Free Zone Teams.
- Ensure ongoing monitoring evaluation and adjustments to sites, issues and strategy.
- Assist with dispute resolutions
- Build partnerships to support and enhance responsible dog ownership.

Current Leash Free Zones

Allan Gardens (west end)
160 Gerrard Street East, Gerrard & Jarvis Street

Bickford Park
400 Grace Street at Harbord Street

Burk Ravine (beside Sunnybrook Park)
Below the Sunnybrook Hospital, on the west side of the West Don River.

Cassels Avenue Playground
69 Cassels Avenues at Brookside Avenue

Cawthra Square
519 Church Street at Wellesley Street East

Cedarvale Ravine
1611 Bathurst Street at Lonsdale Road

Clarke Beach Park (at the foot of Cherry Street)

David Crombie Park
131 to 171 The Esplanade at Lower Sherbourne Street

Don Russell Memorial Park
Birmingham Street at Faustina Drive

Don Valley Brickworks
550 Bayview Avenue

Eastern Beaches (Winter – South of Snow Fencing)
RC Harris plant west to Lakeshore Blvd. and Coxwell Avenue – avoid BLUE FLAG SIGNAGE AREAS

Greenwood Park
150 Greenwood Avenue at Dundas Street East

Hideaway Park
23 Audley Avenue

High Park (designated area)
1873 Bloor Street West at Parkside Drive

Hillcrest Park
950 Davenport Road at Christie

Jean Sibelius Park
50 Kendal Avenue (Bloor & Bathurst area)

Kew Gardens

2075 Queen Street East at Lee Avenue
At the foot of Lee Avenue, on the beach delineated by fencing.

Monarch Park

115 Hanson Street at CNR tracks

Nordheimer Ravine

326 Spadina Road at St. Clair Avenue

Norwood Park

16 Norwood Road, Woodbine & Gerrard Street

Oakcrest Park

30 Oakcrest Avenue at Woodbine Avenue

Park Drive Reservation Lands

200 Park Drive at Mt. Pleasant Road

Ramsden Park

215 Avenue Road (Avenue Road & Davenport area)

Rennie Park

140 Ellis Avenue

Riverdale Park West

375 Sumach Street at Carlton Street
Lower playing fields, southeast of Riverdale Farm

Sherwood Park

1200 Mt. Pleasant Road at Sherwood Avenue

South Stanley Park

845 King Street West at Adelaide

Trinity Bellwoods Park

790 Queen Street West at Shaw Street

Vermont Square

819 Palmerston Avenue (Bathurst & Dupont area)

Wildwood Crescent Playground

110 Wildwood Crescent (Gerrard & Woodbine area)

Withrow Park

725 Logan Avenue at Danforth Avenue

Woburn Park

Northwest section of the park. This area is fenced off. Woburn Park is located just east of Bathurst off of Cranbrooke Drive.