



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

People Dogs and Parks Strategy – Off Leash Areas – Supplementary Report

Date:	November 20, 2007
To:	Parks and Environment Committee
From:	Brenda Librecz, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

At its meeting of July 4, 2007 the Parks and Environment Committee considered Item PE7.3 – People, Dogs and Parks Strategy – Off-Leash Areas. The committee requested that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation report back to the committee on the feasibility of user fees for dog owners who use off-leash areas with the exception of senior citizens; how off-leash areas can be established where no resident associations or other organized group exists in high-rise rental areas with a highly ethnic, mobile population; developing special “Park Days” for dog licensing; and addressing the backlog of pending applications for off-leash areas.

Additionally, City Council at its meeting of July 16, 17, 18 & 19, 2007 requested the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report back to the Parks and Environment Committee on the proposed budget for materials and resources with respect to the feasibility of including mechanized dog litter pick up equipment; and language appropriate materials specific to particular neighbourhoods to support the international pictogram signage.

The provision of off-leash areas for dogs within the parks system is a very contentious issue, and the Council approved People, Dogs and Parks Strategy attempts to balance the interests of dog owners and other park users. Responsible dog-owners and dog-walkers are the key to well-run off-leash areas that are integrated into the community. The successful implementation of the strategy is critical to the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division and the residents we serve, if we are to balance the needs of a wide variety of park users. However, in order to ensure that dog owners fully utilize off-leash areas and comply with all applicable by-laws, including obtaining a dog licence, maintaining

control and picking up after their dogs, staff are not recommending the imposition of user fees for these areas.

Staff will continue to expand their outreach efforts to work with neighbourhoods across the City to create opportunities for developing designated off-leash areas in City parks and open space areas. Particular attention will be focussed on liaising with diverse communities in high density residential areas, which may lack organized community groups or residents' associations but might welcome having these areas within their parks. The use of appropriate (e.g. pictogram signage) and the organization of special events – "Park Days" to promote dog licensing is also being recommended in this report.

The report also responds to the request on how staff will address the pending applications for designated off-leash areas across the City and targeted timelines for handling these requests. Finally, an analysis of the feasibility of using mechanized equipment for dog waste pick-up is presented. Staff are not recommending the acquisition of this type of equipment at this time and are recommending the current strategies outlined in the People, Dogs and Parks Strategy for dealing with dog waste (i.e., dog owners are responsible for picking up after their dogs, using the park green bins, where provided, etc.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that commencing in 2008, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Public Health Animal Services staff work with local community groups and dog owner associations to incorporate special "Park Days" for dog licensing as part of other community education activities related to responsible pet ownership.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report. An additional budget request to implement the "People, Dogs and Parks Strategy" has been included in the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division's 2008 Operating Budget submission.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of May 4, 2006, the Economic Development and Parks Committee, considered and amended the report dated April 19, 2006, from the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, entitled "Dogs in Parks Strategy," which was considered by City Council at its meeting of May 23, 2006.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/committees/edp/edp060604/it002.pdf>
<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/council/cc060523/edp3rpt/c1017.pdf>

Subsequently, at its meeting of July 4, 2007, the Parks and Environment Committee considered the report dated June 19, 2007 from the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation, entitled "People, Dogs and Parks Strategy – Off-Leash Areas," Item

PE7.3. The Committee recommended that City Council adopt the report recommendations and the Off-Leash Policy of the report as amended.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/pe/decisions/2007-07-04-pe07-dd.pdf>

City Council on July 16, 17, 18 and 19, 2007, adopted the report, item PE7.3 “People, Dogs and Parks Strategy – Off-Leash Policy,” in accordance with the report dated June 19, 2007 recommendations from the General Manager, Parks Forestry and Recreation, with amendment.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/cc/decisions/2007-07-16-cc11-dd.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

At its meeting of July 4, 2007, Parks and Environment Committee requested that the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation report back on the following:

- the feasibility of imposing user fees for dog owners who use off-leash City parks, with the exception of senior citizens;
- how off-leash areas can be established where no resident associations or other organized group exists in high-rise rental areas with highly ethnic, mobile population;
- developing special “Park Days” for dog licensing; and
- an update on how staff are addressing the backlog of pending applications for off-leash areas.

City Council at its meeting of July 16, 17, 18 & 19, 2007 further requested the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report back to the Parks and Environment Committee on the proposed budget for materials and resources with respect to the feasibility of including mechanized dog litter pick up equipment; and language appropriate materials specific to particular neighbourhoods to support the international pictogram signage.

COMMENTS

Feasibility for User Fees for Dog Owners who use Off-Leash City Parks –Excluding Seniors:

During the June, 2007 public consultation process several members of the public, who attended public meetings and/or responded to the on-line survey, expressed concerns with the imposition of user fees for the use of off-leash areas within the City park system. Dog owners felt that the payment of an annual license fee for dogs was sufficient and that an additional user fee for the use of these areas would be inequitable, given that most other park facilities are provided free of charge.

The People, Dogs and Parks Strategy outlines the numerous public benefits of these areas, such as: increased physical and mental health associated with people exercising and socializing, better socialized and healthier dogs within the community, promotion of

responsible pet ownership and licensing, and improved security in parks by the presence of dog walkers during evening and night-time hours.

The intent of the Strategy was to find common ground among all park users, to develop optimal local solutions to balance the needs of all users and prevent conflicts, where possible. The Strategy was not intended as a vehicle for revenue generation, nor does the Division have the resources to administer and enforce either an entry fee or a membership fee system. Consequently, staff are recommending that the off-leash areas remain free of charge.

Last July, when Council adopted the staff report recommending the establishment of a Commercial Dog Walkers Permit Policy, it also adopted the recommendation to direct the revenues generated from the permit fees to the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division's operating budget to cover the administration costs of the permit system, as well as to recover some of the costs associated with the hiring of additional Parks By-law enforcement staff to monitor these areas and enforce the policy and by-laws, as needed. A new funding request for ten additional By-law Enforcement Officers with Special Constable status has been included in the 2008 Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget.

Establishing Off-Leash Areas without Resident Associations:

The People, Dogs and Parks Strategy includes the development of a communication plan to support its implementation by promoting public education and awareness through the distribution of print material, web postings, news articles and media relations. Park Supervisors and Enforcement Officers provide a key link to communities during their daily course of business. In high-density areas that are characterized by rental apartment buildings and diverse populations, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will be able to identify parks that are being used by dog owners and their pets. These staff will engage with local communities and agencies, as well as with the local Councillors to discuss opportunities and community needs for the provision of off-leash areas.

Special "Park Days" for Dog Licensing:

A community information event will be held in the spring of 2008 to support the implementation of the policy and provide an on-site opportunity for Pet Licensing to promote the benefits of licensing and responsible pet ownership. Additional Park Days can be incorporated into community events occurring in parks with off-leash areas. Many residential communities are currently active in neighbourhood park activities and can provide the link in their websites to host the "Park Day" in partnership with Parks, Forestry and Recreation and Toronto Public Health Animal Services. Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff will work with their local communities to host these types of annual events, commencing in 2008.

Considering the Backlog of Pending Applications for Off-Leash Areas:

Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff have compiled the waiting list for new off-leash areas within parks. Following completion of the assessment of existing off leash sites to determine which sites will be grand parented, the staff implementation team will work with applicants to review the current list of 12 applications for new off-leash areas. These reviews should be completed by the end of the year.

Feasibility of Utilizing Mechanized Dog Litter-Picking Equipment:

Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division currently has MadVac Units within its fleet inventory. These units are used most successfully on hard, dry surfaces, have a thick exterior vinyl bag and interior disposable filter cloth bag. The units are not effective under wet conditions as liquids seep out of both bags. The filter cloth bags are disposed of in the litter stream. In addition to the practical problems associated with the use of this equipment, its use in picking up and disposing of dog-waste in the litter stream would be contrary to the Division's waste diversion goals. Therefore, staff are not recommending implementation of this option.

We recommend that Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff continue to encourage the public to divert dog-waste from the litter stream by means of existing pilot programs, such as providing and encouraging the use of green bins in certain parks, carry in / carry out programs and requesting that dog walkers and owners take their dog waste home and dispose of it in their home green bins (where feasible).

Staff are also continuing to educate the public on Parks By-law requirements concerning dog etiquette and responsible pet ownership in both on and off-leash areas.

Language Appropriate Materials Supporting International Pictogram Signage:

Staff have developed a comprehensive signage package that will be utilized consistently across the Parks system and posted on the Parks, Forestry and Recreation website. Resource materials, brochures and specific location signage can be translated to reflect the predominant language of the local neighbourhoods served.

International pictograms that are colour coded will be used. Signs indicating areas where dogs must be kept leashed will be depicted in red, while signs indicating areas where dogs may be kept off leash will be depicted in yellow. No Dogs Allowed signs will be indicated by a dog on-leash with a red circle and slash through it. These colour coded pictograms will also be used on Park Identification signage and off-leash area signage. See Attachment 1.

Staff will be reporting back in one year's time on the effectiveness of the People, Dogs and Parks Strategy – Off-Leash Policy, evaluating the provisions of the policy and procedures for application and monitoring and any recommendations for improvement.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

Brenda Librecz
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – People Dogs and Parks Strategy – Off Leash Areas and General Park
Signage

Attachment 1 – People Dogs and Parks Strategy – Off Leash Areas and General Park Signage



Date _____	Scale <u>not to scale</u>		
Contact Person <u>Carol Cormier</u>	Address <u>Various Parks</u>	<u>Dogs off Leash Area</u>	
Designer _____	Docket No. _____	Project Title _____	Approval Date _____ Customer Signature _____



Description & Specifications		
	Material:	Due Date:
Proposed Park Identification sign with new incorporated "Dogs off Leash Area Symbol"		Department:
		Account Number:
	Quantity:	



Date _____	Scale <u>not to scale</u>	Dogs off Leash Area _____	Approval Date _____	Customer Signature _____
Contact Person <u>Carol Cormier</u>	Address <u>Various Parks</u>	Project Title _____		
Designer _____	Docket No. _____			



Description & Specifications		
	Material:	Due Date:
Standard Park Identification with "No Dogs Allowed" icon		Department:
		Account Number:
	Quantity:	

Date _____	Scale <u>not to scale</u>	Dogs off Leash Area _____	Approval Date _____	Customer Signature _____
Contact Person <u>Carol Cormier</u>	Address <u>Various Parks</u>	Project Title _____		
Designer _____	Docket No. _____			



Municipal Code
Chapter #608



High Park Off Leash Area

In order to ensure that all users of High Park have an enjoyable visit, you as a dog owner/walker must abide by the Toronto Municipal Code and Off Leash Area Code of Conduct:

Keep your dog on a leash in all areas marked in red circles.
 Allow your dog off leash only in the areas marked with yellow circles.

While off leash, keep your dog on the woodchipped trail inside the fenced areas and on the paved portion of Spring Road - not the environmentally sensitive areas to either side.

Pick up after your dog(s) and carry the dog(s) litter or waste home to the Green Bin or use the litter receptacle.


Dog(s) must be under voice or signal control and in sight at all times. If your dog does not respond immediately retrieve your dog and leash it.

Remember dogs and owners/walkers do not have exclusive use of the off-leash areas. Demonstrate your consideration by not allowing your dog to approach other users in the unleashed area.


Violation of By-laws are punishable by fines.

Description & Specifications		
	Material:	Due Date:
Typical "Dogs off Leash Area Signs" 18" x 24"		Department:
		Account Number:
	Quantity:	

Date _____	Scale <u>not to scale</u>	_____		_____	_____
Contact Person <u>Carol Cormier</u>	Address <u>Various Parks</u>	<u>Dogs off Leash Area</u>		_____	_____
Designer _____	Docket No. _____	Project Title _____		Approval Date _____	Customer Signature _____



**Municipal Code
Chapter #608**



Eastern Beaches Off Leash Area

In order to ensure that all users of the Eastern Beaches Area have an enjoyable visit, you as a dog owner/walker must abide by the Toronto Municipal Code and Off Leash Area Code of Conduct:


Keep your dog on a leash in all areas marked in **red circles**.
 Allow your dog off leash only in the areas marked with **yellow circles**.


Pick up after your dog(s) and carry the dog(s) litter or waste home to the Green Bin or use the **litter receptacle**.

Dog(s) must be under voice or signal control and in sight at all times. If your dog does not respond immediately retrieve your dog and leash it.

Remember dogs and owners/walkers do not have exclusive use of the off-leash areas. Demonstrate your consideration by not allowing your dog to approach other users in the unleashed area.

Violation of By-laws are punishable by fines.


Off Leash Area


Leashed Area

Description & Specifications

	Material:	Due Date:
Typical "Dogs off Leash Area Signs" 18" x 24"		Department:
		Account Number:
	Quantity:	



Date _____	Scale _____ not to scale			
Contact Person _____ Carol Cormier	Address _____ Various Parks	Dogs off Leash Area	Approval Date	Customer Signature
Designer _____	Docket No. _____	Project Title		

Municipal Code
Chapter 608

Code of Conduct for Off Leash Area

Comply with all signs and boundaries and carry a leash at all times.

All dogs must have a valid municipal license.

Dogs must remain in off leash area so as not to trample or endanger plant material and other park resources.

Dogs excluded from off leash areas include dogs identified under the Dog Owners Liability Act:

1. Pit Bulls;
2. Female dogs in heat;
3. Uncastrated male dogs;
4. Or any dog that has been issued a muzzle order by the Medical Officer of Health

Discourage your dog(s) from chasing wildlife.

Pick up after your dog(s) and carry the dog(s) litter or waste home to the Green Bin or use the litter receptacle.

Dog(s) must be under voice or signal control and in sight at all times. If your dog does not respond immediately retrieve your dog and leash it.

Leash your dog(s) immediately if aggressive behavior is demonstrated.

Respect other park users.

Dogs that dig holes must have their owners fill them in immediately. Holes create safety hazards for other users especially after dark.

Always carry a bag, a spare and one to share.

Violation of By-Laws are punishable by fines.

Description & Specifications		
	Material:	Due Date:
Typical "Dogs off Leash Area Signs" 18" x 24"		Department:
		Account Number:
	Quantity:	



Date _____	Scale _____ not to scale _____	Dogs off Leash Area _____	Approval Date _____	Customer Signature _____
Contact Person <u>Carol Cormier</u>	Address <u>Various Parks</u>	Project Title _____		
Designer _____	Docket No. _____			



Dogs must
be leashed



Dogs off Leash



No dogs allowed

Description & Specifications		
	Material:	Due Date:
Typical place & icons used to identify different areas.		Department:
		Account Number:
	Quantity:	