

Dogs on City of Toronto Swimming Beaches

**Presentation to Parks &
Environment Committee**

October 15, 2009

Parks, Forestry & Recreation/Toronto Public Health

Swimming Beaches

- Toronto's 11 swimming beaches are a key feature of the city's waterfront and they contribute significantly to the quality of life for all Torontonians



Dogs on City of Toronto Swimming Beaches

- Joint report from PF&R and Toronto Public Health recommends changes to the Municipal Code regarding how and when residents can access City Beaches with their dogs
- Recommended approach offers balanced solution for both residents with dogs wishing to enjoy Toronto's beaches and those without



Swimming Beaches in Toronto

- Lifeguarded, beach water quality monitored, maintenance levels high

Blue Flag:

- Hanlan's Point
- Gibraltar Point
- Centre Island
- Ward's Island
- Cherry
- Woodbine
- Kew-Balmy

Non-Blue Flag:

- Marie Curtis East
- Sunnyside
- Bluffer's
- Rouge



Beach Water Quality, Public
Health and Dogs:
It's not just the dogs....

But the dogs are important

Public Health Aspect

- Level of microbiological contamination in beach water correlates with adverse health conditions including:
 - Gastrointestinal illness
 - Skin infections
 - Ear, nose and throat infections
- Recent research also suggests that microbial contamination of beach sand may also play a role in human illness

Major Sources of Microbial Contamination at Toronto Beaches

- Combined Sewer Overflows
- Surface run off
- Wild birds
- Domestic Pets

Beach Water Quality Approach

- Improve water quality (and lower health risks) by addressing all major sources of microbial contamination
 - Combined Sewer Overflows & Surface run off
 - Eastern and Western Beaches Tunnels
 - Wild birds
 - Population control; landscaping; feeding by-laws; border collies; beach grooming
 - Domestic Pets
 - Limiting access to beach in bathing season; encouraging responsible pet ownership; by-laws for leashing and waste clean up;

Toronto Public Health Recommendations

- Access of dogs to beaches only outside of swimming season
- Adequate number of garbage bins for disposal of dog feces
- Signs to alert about health hazards and encourage responsible pet ownership
- Clean and groom beaches before swim season

Current Regulations – Municipal Code Chapter 608, Parks

- Prohibits dogs at all times from the City's seven designated Blue Flag Beaches
- Permits dogs on-leash to use the City's four non-Blue Flag swimming beaches throughout the year



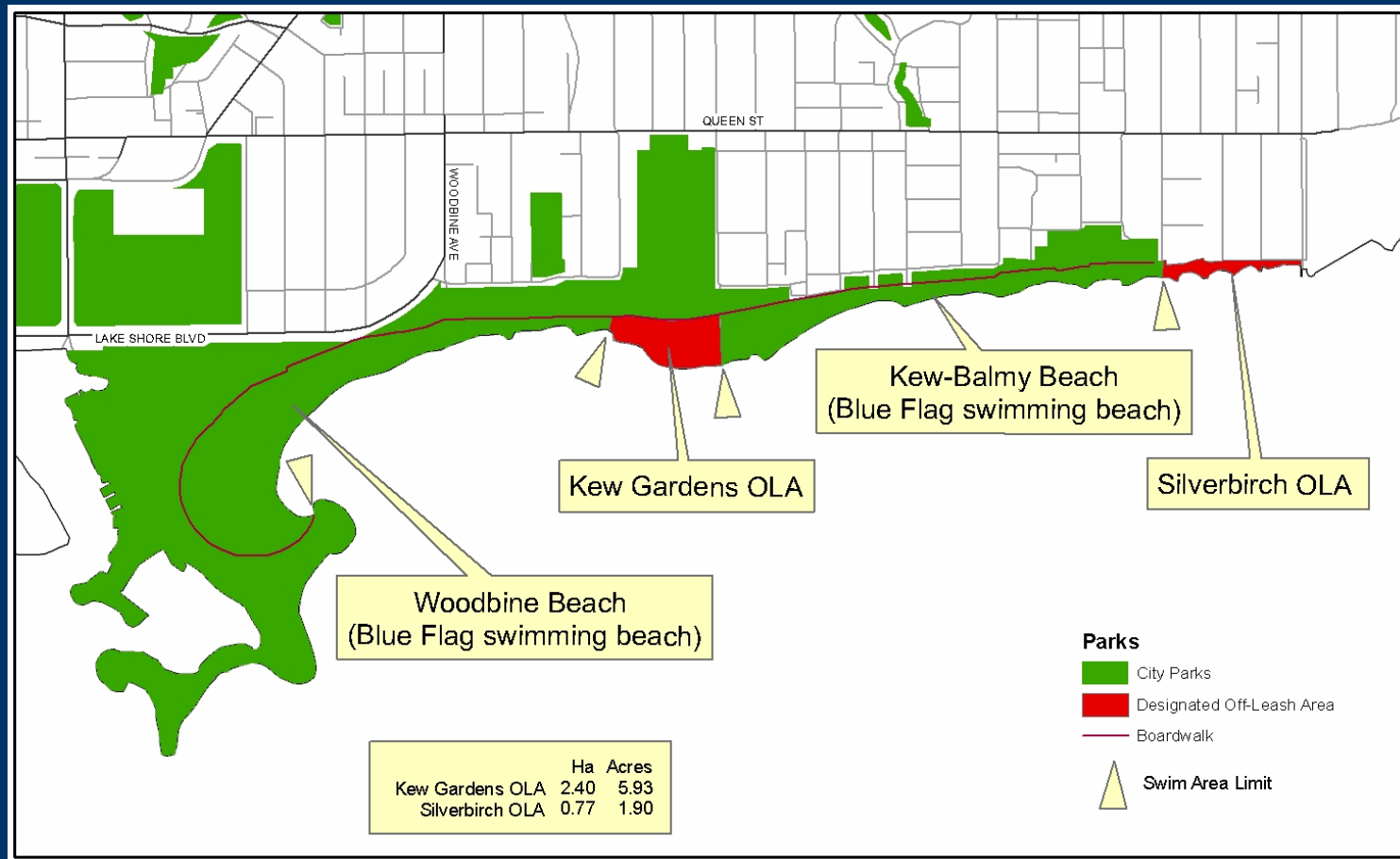
Blue Flag Program

- International certification program for quality beaches
- Blue Flag criteria does not “ban” dogs on beaches, but regulations controlling dogs and other domestic animals must be strictly enforced



Impact of Blue Flag Status

- Request to address the impacts of “Blue Flag” status on dogs, on and off-leash, on Blue Flag designated beaches, and specifically Kew Balmy Beach



Proposed Changes

- Provide seasonal access for dogs on-leash at all 11 of the City's swimming beaches and prohibit access at other times with the exception of working dogs that provide a service to the City



Current and Proposed Conditions

Blue Flag Swimming Beaches

CURRENT

- No dogs allowed anytime

PROPOSED

- Dogs now allowed on-leash during winter (Nov. 1 - Mar. 31)

Non-Blue Flag Swimming Beaches

CURRENT

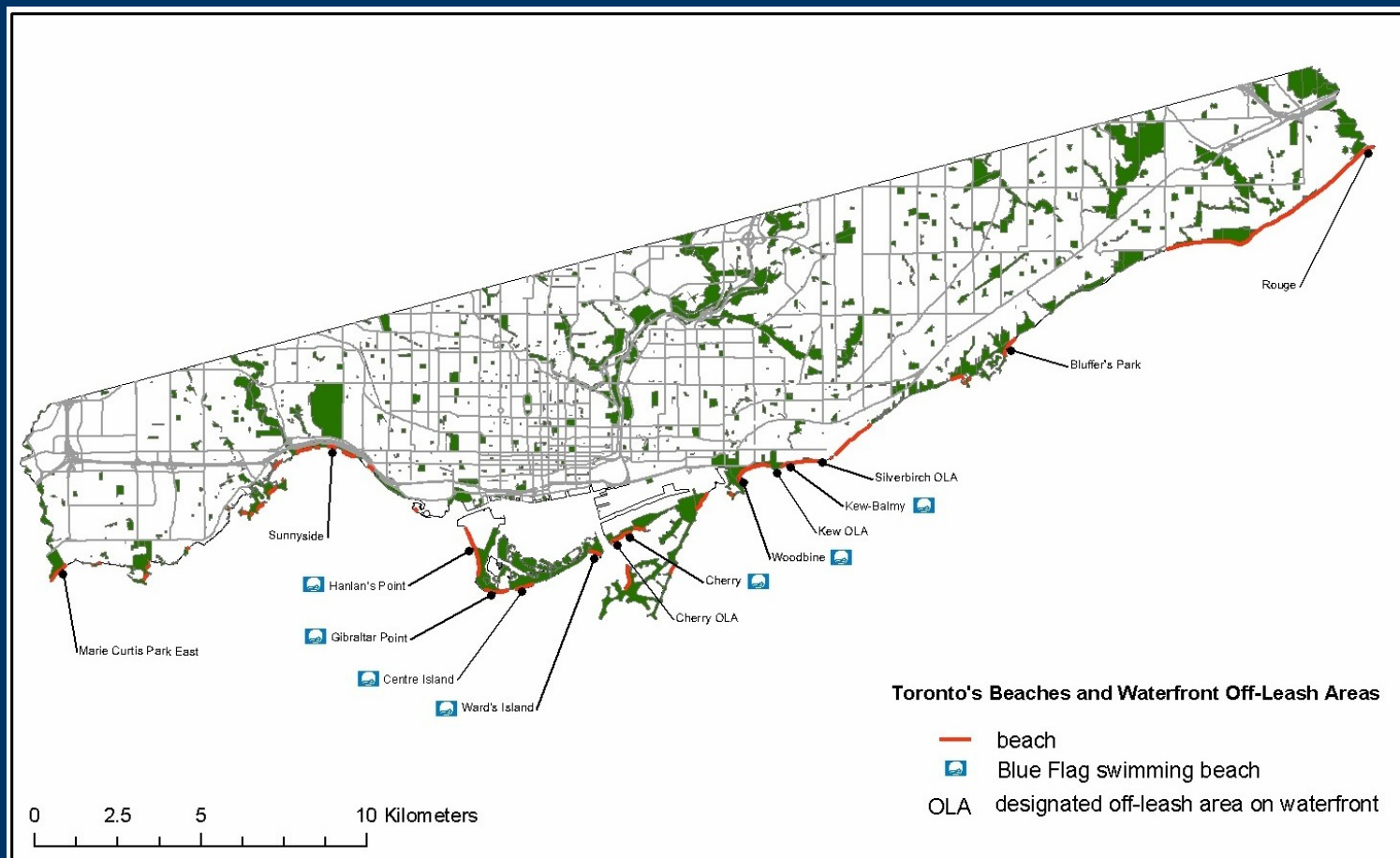
- Dogs allowed on-leash year-round

PROPOSED

- Dogs only allowed on-leash during winter (Nov. 1 - Mar. 31)

Toronto Beaches and Waterfront

- Residents with dogs have significant access to City beaches
- Of the 24.4 km of public beach (sand and cobble), 5.5 km. is supervised swimming beach (Blue Flag + non Blue Flag) and 18.9 km is unsupervised beach which includes 1.1 km/18.7 acres of permanently designated off-leash areas



Other Cities

- Approach is in line with the practices in other large North American waterfront cities
- Similar approach in New York City which provides seasonal access on-leash at most, but not all sites
- Los Angeles and Chicago are more restrictive and provide one or two off-leash sites only



Orchard Beach, NYC

Recommended Approach

- Dogs on-leash would be allowed on the City's seven Blue Flag beaches seasonally (November 1 to March 31), whereas they are now prohibited at all times
- Dogs would continue to be welcome on-leash at the City's other four swimming beaches (those that have not yet attained Blue Flag status) from November 1 to March 31, but, upon approval, would be prohibited during the spring and summer (April 1 to October 31)
- Residents with dogs could continue to access 18.9 km of unsupervised beaches – those not designated for swimming – throughout the year
- Residents with dogs would continue to have access to three permanently designated off-leash areas along the waterfront - Cherry Beach (10.9 ac) Kew Gardens (5.9 ac), Silverbirch (2.0 ac).

Conclusion

- Balanced approach – meets needs of all beach users while generally improving dog access
- Consistent approach – one set of rules for all swimming beaches
- Protects public health, assures clean, safe beaches during bathing season
- Aligns with Blue Flag program and beach management practices elsewhere
- Helps achieve Council's objective of flying Blue Flags at all swimming beaches