



**October 23, 2019**

To the members of the Toronto City Council Executive Committee,

The Toronto Dog Park Community was founded to help make dog parks - and our city - better. We worked hard to establish a constructive relationship with Parks, Forestry and Recreation, hoping to inspire them to create a citywide strategy or master plan for off-leash areas that reflected international best practices. The experience has been surprisingly difficult and disappointing.

Over the past three years, we have met with Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City Planning, Waterfront Toronto, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, City consultants and multiple Councillors. While everyone recognized the limitations of Toronto's off-leash policies, no one has taken ownership or action. So, today, I must be clear.

**The Facilities Master Plan, Implementation Strategy and 2010 People, Dogs and Parks Policy are insufficient to the point of negligence** when compared to the strategies and master plans for off-leash areas developed by municipalities such as Vancouver. If this is left unchanged, significant ongoing problems will continue, affecting all residents of Toronto, including school children and people without dogs.

We urge the Executive Committee and Toronto City Council to direct Parks, Forestry and Recreation to conduct a formal international review of municipal off-leash area policies, practices and plans, report back, and initiate the creation of a new, separate master plan or strategy for off-leash areas that is on par with international best practices. Since the Facilities Master Plan is a living document and Toronto's residents deserve an off-leash strategy that reflects best practices, we feel that this request is reasonable.

If the Facilities Master Plan Implementation Strategy is left unchanged, the following problems will continue to occur.

- Toronto will continue to NOT plan off-leash area locations, as a matter of policy
- Entire wards will continue to remain without off-leash areas
- High-density developments will keep being built without off-leash areas, leading to conflict
- People will continue resorting to schoolyards for off-leash activity
- Toronto's standards for off-leash areas will continue to conflict with best practices
- Design decisions will continue to be made based on theoretical risks, not evidence
- The criteria for off-leash areas will remain vague and subject to interpretation
- Toronto will remain the only municipality that intentionally builds dog parks without trees
- New off-leash areas will continue to be barren gravel pens – not parks
- PFR will continue to resist proven materials such as wood chips and synthetic turf for dogs
- PFR will continue to resist accessible design solutions
- Dogs and people will continue to be injured and ignored

While the Implementation Strategy does suggest that Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City Planning and the development community should work together, a suggestion is not a plan, nor will it result in the change required to keep pace with our growing city. Further, the new Pet Friendly Guidelines are optional, and not a replacement for actual parks.

As you know, Parks, Forestry and Recreation is currently conducting a citywide study of off-leash areas to inform potential improvements. While improving our existing off-leash areas is absolutely necessary, it is not enough. We need to improve the system that led to the state of our off-leash areas, and build new off-leash areas to achieve equitable distribution. There is no budget for new off-leash areas in the Implementation Strategy.

As you undoubtedly know, off-leash areas are regrettably contentious in Toronto. They don't have to be. From unhappy dog park users to people upset about irresponsible dog owners, solutions to all of our challenges can be found within the pages of other municipalities' strategies and plans.

We imagine that the Implementation Strategy will move forward. We don't expect to put everything else on hold. But please do not allow Toronto's off-leash area-related problems to continue. We are simply asking for due diligence.

On a more positive note, we are here to help in any way possible. As much as people may be frustrated, this energy comes from a very good place. You will not find a more active, passionate and engaged group of park users.

Unfortunately, it seems that we are now considered troublemakers, but consider what we're fighting for. We're fighting for trees, accessibility, safe conditions and smart planning. Those are things worth fighting for – and things that we should not have to fight for at all. We hope you agree.

In the following pages, you will find:

- Links to municipal strategies and plans for off-leash areas
- Articles about Toronto's off-leash areas
- Results of our online survey with over 1,000 responses
- More information about our group

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Code". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.

Eric Code  
Founder and Chair  
Toronto Dog Park Community

## **Municipal strategies and master plans for off-leash areas**

### **Vancouver (184 pages total)**

Strategy: <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/people-parks-dogs-strategy-report.pdf>

Appendix: <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/people-parks-dogs-strategy-appendix.pdf>

Implementation Guide: <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/people-parks-dogs-strategy-implementation-guide.pdf>

Site: <https://vancouver.ca/parks-recreation-culture/people-parks-dogs-strategy.aspx>

**\*Cautions against pea gravel and recommends more paw-friendly alternatives.**

### **Surrey (219 pages)**

[https://www.surrey.ca/files/Dog\\_Off-Leash\\_Master\\_Plan\\_2012.pdf](https://www.surrey.ca/files/Dog_Off-Leash_Master_Plan_2012.pdf)

### **Edmonton (27 pages)**

<https://www.edmonton.ca/documents/PDF/DogsInOpenSpacesImplementationPlan.pdf>

### **Calgary (25 pages)**

Plan: <https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Parks/Documents/Locations/Off-Leash-Areas/off-leash-management-plan.pdf?noredirect=1>

Off leash Ambassador Program (VIDEO) – we should be doing this

<https://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/ABS/Pages/Volunteering/Off-leash.aspx>

### **Winnipeg (225 pages)**

<https://winnipeg.ca/ppd/PublicEngagement/OffLeashAreas/documents/Off-Leash-Dog-Areas-Master-Plan.pdf>

### **Seattle (194 pages)**

<https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/ParksAndRecreation/PoliciesPlanning/PeopleDogsandParksPlan-August2017.pdf>

### **Denver (46 pages)**

<https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/denver-parks-and-recreation/planning/park-facility-projects/dog-park-master-plan-update.html>

### **South Australia (48 pages)**

<http://gooddogsa.com/media/W1siZiIsIjIwMTUvMDMvMDMvOWM2bGhqZG8yZi19VbmXlYXNoZWREb2dQYXJrcy5wZGYiXV0/UnleashedDogParks.pdf>

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### **Toronto**

2010 People, Dogs and Parks Policy **(6 pages)**

<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/8dd0-dogs-off-leash-policy-2010.pdf>

Facilities Master Plan **(2 pages for off-leash areas)**

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-107775.pdf>

Implementation Strategy **(3 pages for off-leash areas)**

[https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-138699.pdf#xd\\_co\\_f=N2EwMzZiYjAtNGI4MC00OGU4LWI5NjctYmXlYXNoZWREb2dQYXJrcy5wZGYiXV0/UnleashedDogParks.pdf](https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-138699.pdf#xd_co_f=N2EwMzZiYjAtNGI4MC00OGU4LWI5NjctYmXlYXNoZWREb2dQYXJrcy5wZGYiXV0/UnleashedDogParks.pdf)

## Articles about Toronto's off-leash areas

### Pea gravel in off-leash park injures pup's paws (VIDEO)

<https://www.msn.com/en-ca/sports/more-sports/pea-gravel-in-off-leash-park-injures-pups-paws/vp-AAF905r>



### Corktown residents want city to make more pet-friendly spaces (VIDEO)

<https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/corktown-residents-create-poster-campaign-with-pets-want-city-to-make-more-dog-friendly-spaces-1.2955732>

### Liberty Village families and pet owners face off over scarce park space

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/liberty-village-dog-population-1.4656442>

### Off-Leash dog park in Liberty Village hits snag as condo board voices concerns

<https://www.toronto.com/news-story/5816653-off-leash-dog-park-in-liberty-village-hits-snag-as-condo-board-voices-concerns/>

### CityPlace residents clash over lack of pet-friendly spaces

<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2019/04/03/cityplace-residents-clash-dog-friendly-spaces/>

### Off-leash area at Marie Curtis Park has gone to the dogs

[https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the\\_fixer/2017/11/18/off-leash-area-at-marie-curtis-park-has-gone-to-the-dogs-the-fixer.html](https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the_fixer/2017/11/18/off-leash-area-at-marie-curtis-park-has-gone-to-the-dogs-the-fixer.html)

### Dog walkers frustrated with \$135K dog park shelter 'marred by problems'

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/cedarvale-park-dog-park-shelter-dog-owner-specifications-1.4792177>

**Dogs and people are panting for a drink at Sir Winston Churchill Park**

[https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the\\_fixer/2012/05/26/the\\_fixer\\_dogs\\_and\\_people\\_are\\_panting\\_for\\_a\\_drink\\_at\\_sir\\_winston\\_churchill\\_park.html](https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the_fixer/2012/05/26/the_fixer_dogs_and_people_are_panting_for_a_drink_at_sir_winston_churchill_park.html)

**Dog run at EarlsCourt Park is a muddy bog in wet weather**

[https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the\\_fixer/2016/02/08/dog-run-at-earlsCourt-park-is-a-muddy-bog-in-wet-weather-the-fixer.html](https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the_fixer/2016/02/08/dog-run-at-earlsCourt-park-is-a-muddy-bog-in-wet-weather-the-fixer.html)

**Broken gate latch dogs off-leash area**

[https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the\\_fixer/2011/03/25/the\\_fixer\\_broken\\_gate\\_latch\\_dogs\\_offleash\\_area.html](https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the_fixer/2011/03/25/the_fixer_broken_gate_latch_dogs_offleash_area.html)

**Muddy entrance to Balmy Beach off-leash area falls through the cracks**

[https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the\\_fixer/2017/10/26/muddy-entrance-to-off-leash-area-falls-through-the-cracks-the-fixer.html](https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the_fixer/2017/10/26/muddy-entrance-to-off-leash-area-falls-through-the-cracks-the-fixer.html)

**High Park fencing is a sharp-edged menace**

[https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the\\_fixer/2015/06/17/high-park-fencing-is-a-sharp-edged-menace-the-fixer.html](https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/the_fixer/2015/06/17/high-park-fencing-is-a-sharp-edged-menace-the-fixer.html)

**Toronto dog owners challenge city's 'unacceptable' changes to dog park**

<https://www.toronto.com/news-story/9266242-toronto-dog-owners-challenge-city-s-unacceptable-changes-to-dog-park/>

**In Toronto, depressing dog parks are a matter of policy**

<https://www.toronto.com/opinion-story/9094695-in-toronto-depressing-dog-parks-are-a-matter-of-policy/>

**Accessibility concerns in Greenwood Park (VIDEO)**

<http://toronto.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=855473>

**New pea gravel surface at Greenwood Dog Park drawing mixed reviews**

<https://www.insidetoronto.com/news-story/7018257-new-pea-gravel-surface-at-greenwood-dog-park-drawing-mixed-reviews/>

**Newly renovated dog park in Toronto's east end proving unpopular**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/3580396/greenwood-dog-park/>

**Pooches, owners turn up noses at newly renovated Leslieville dog park**

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/pooches-owners-turn-up-noses-at-newly-renovated-leslieville-dog-park-1.3886273>

**North York dog owners upset with pea gravel surface at off-leash park**

<https://www.toronto.com/news-story/8298564-north-york-dog-owners-upset-with-pea-gravel-surface-at-off-leash-park/>

**Visually impaired Leslieville dog owner plans to fight off-leash fine**

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/02/07/visually-impaired-leslieville-dog-owner-plans-to-fight-off-leash-fine.html>

**Toronto lawyer helps visually impaired woman fight off-leash dog fine**

<https://www.toronto.com/news-story/8124890-toronto-lawyer-helps-visually-impaired-woman-fight-off-leash-dog-fine/>

**Visually impaired woman in Toronto flouts law to show Greenwood Dog Park is inaccessible**

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2019/04/17/visually-impaired-woman-in-toronto-flouts-law-to-show-greenwood-dog-park-is-inaccessible.html>

**Hopefully, city gets Greenwood Dog Park right this time**

<https://www.toronto.com/opinion-story/8135267-hopefully-city-gets-greenwood-dog-park-right-this-time/>

**Pea gravel causing problems for pooches, owners at Greenwood dog park**

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/city-councillor-wants-changes-to-greenwood-dog-park-1.4959269>

**Raymore Park Dog Zone official opening**

<https://www.westonweb.ca/tag/raymore-park/>

**Pea gravel an issue for Leslieville dog owner**

<https://raymorepark.wordpress.com/2018/02/07/pea-gravel-an-issue-for-leslieville-dog-owner/>

**Paws for concern: is pea gravel injuring dogs in off-leash areas?**

<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2019/07/31/paws-for-concern-is-pea-gravel-injuring-dogs-in-off-leash-areas/>

**'It cuts their paws:' Councillor wants to resurface Leslieville dog park after complaints**

<https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/it-cuts-their-paws-councillor-wants-to-resurface-leslieville-dog-park-after-complaints-1.4382938>

**Toronto Dog Park Community Survey Results**

Top line only

1,000+ responses

- **88%** are unhappy or extremely unhappy with pea gravel, of those who identified their main dog parks as pea gravel
- **93%** feel that dog parks are important to their quality of life
- **72%** rated pea gravel as poor or unacceptable
- **Trees** are the most critical factor to making dog parks appealing (**87%** important or extremely important)
- **91%** would comply with off-leash bylaws if their dog parks were more appealing

**Read the full report here:** <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j93NHhkxpIIFq-3h9CNKmJEXkPLzpVPD/view>

## **About the Toronto Dog Park Community**

The Toronto Dog Park Community is a grassroots organization with 1,700 members across the city. We advocate for off-leash strategies and improvements that optimize park experiences for people with and without dogs. Our group grew out of a community effort to defend Humber Bay West Dog Park, which was in danger of losing half its land. Information from other municipalities' off-leash strategies and master plans was used to defend the dog park, since Toronto does not have an off-leash strategy of its own. The Toronto Dog Park Community's primary goal is to inspire the City of Toronto to develop a comprehensive, evidence-based off-leash strategy or master plan that reflects the best practices of cities across North America and around the world. This would solve our existing challenges, which are significant and avoidable, leading to better parks, increased bylaw compliance, fewer conflicts and a more liveable, enjoyable city for everyone.