



Alejandra Bravo

CITY COUNCILLOR | CHAIR, ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY
WARD 9 • DAVENPORT | DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

June 4, 2024

RE: School Board Role in Citywide Approach to Dog Off-Leash Areas

Dear Chair and Members of the City-School Boards Advisory Committee,

In my community of Davenport, some neighbourhoods rely heavily on school board properties as the sole green spaces available for recreation. In recent years, concerns about off-leash and dangerous dogs on school properties have escalated. In many parts of the city, dog owners have no nearby green spaces other than school board properties. These conditions have led to conflicts between user groups and dangerous outcomes for some students.

In October 2023, City Council directed staff (IE6.8) to review and update the City's approach to planning, locating, funding, building and maintaining Dogs Off-Leash Areas. Earlier this year, the Toronto District School Board considered a report (01-24-4642) which responded to a request to assess the feasibility of a dog run pilot project on school property.

I believe it would be prudent for discussion and collaboration between the City of Toronto and Toronto school boards about the possibility of locating dog off-leash areas on school board properties to inform the City's development of a citywide approach to dog off-leash areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the City-School Boards Advisory Committee recommends to the Executive Committee that:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consult with the Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Conseil Scolaire Viamonde, and Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir on options for the off-leash dog areas on school properties, as part of the development of a Citywide Approach to Dog Off Leash Areas, and in light of the Toronto District School Board's January 2024 report entitled "Pilot Dog Run Update."

Sincerely,

Alejandra Bravo
City Councillor
Ward 9, Davenport

Appendix 1 – Agenda Item Summary - IE6.8 – Citywide Approach to Dog Off-Leash Areas

Appendix 2 – TDSB Report 01-24-4642 - Pilot Dog Run Update

Item - 2023.IE6.8

Tracking Status

- City Council adopted this item on October 11, 2023 with amendments.
- This item was considered by Infrastructure and Environment Committee on September 20, 2023 and was adopted with amendments. It will be considered by City Council on October 11, 2023.

City Council consideration on October 11, 2023

IE6.8 - Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas

Decision Type: ACTION

Status: Amended

Wards: All

City Council Decision

City Council on October 11 and 12, 2023, adopted the following:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to review and update the City's approach to planning, locating, funding, building and maintaining Dogs Off-Leash Areas based on recognized best practices and integrated with the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Facilities Master Plan which includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. international best practices for design, signage, rules, accessibility, shade, shelter, surface materials, fencing, and amenities;
 - b. process to proactively identify and fund new off-leash areas where most needed, reflective of population distribution and development, in balance with other park functions and uses;
 - c. process to identify and fund priority repairs and improvements, including design improvements, to existing off-leash areas, including a process for considering the introduction of fencing where appropriate to address safety concerns;
 - d. includes accommodations for all types and sizes of Dog Off-Leash Areas including those in urban settings with limited parkland available;
 - e. potential opportunities for volunteers to steward these areas and ambassador programs to promote responsible dog area use and promote responsible dog ownership; and
 - f. review of and updates to the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan and Dog Off-Leash Area Policy as needed.
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to include a comprehensive review of other jurisdictions' Off-Leash Area plans, strategies and approaches, and ambassador/stewardship programs, including but not limited to Vancouver, Surrey, Edmonton, Calgary, and Winnipeg, as part of the development of an evidence-based, best practice approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas for Toronto.

3. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report back with the recommended new approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas resulting from Part 1 above, including required funding to implement, to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee by the third quarter of 2024.
4. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation and the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing and Standards, to ensure the approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas includes by-law enforcement strategies to address the ongoing concerns of all park users.
5. City Council direct the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to include the findings and recommendations from the Toronto Dog Off-Leash Area Study, conducted by Thinc Design in 2019, in their report back to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee in the third quarter of 2024.

Background Information (Committee)

(September 6, 2023) Letter from Councillor Chris Moise on a Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ie/bgrd/backgroundfile-239111.pdf>

Communications (Committee)

(September 14, 2023) E-mail from Adam Rodgers (IE.Supp)

(September 17, 2023) E-mail from Dharshika Watson (IE.Supp)

(September 18, 2023) E-mail from Hanna Uehre (IE.Supp)

(September 18, 2023) Letter from Janet Young, Convenor, on behalf of Friends of Sherwood Park (IE.Supp)

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ie/comm/communicationfile-172247.pdf>

(September 18, 2023) E-mail from Bernard Sanders (IE.Supp)

(September 19, 2023) E-mail from Alison Gadsby (IE.Supp)

(September 19, 2023) E-mail from Meg Nissen Clare (IE.Supp)

(September 20, 2023) Letter from Eric Code, Founder and Chair, Toronto Dog Park Community (IE.Supp)

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ie/comm/communicationfile-172279.pdf>

(September 19, 2023) E-mail from Sheryl Johnson (IE.Supp)

(September 20, 2023) E-mail from Nadine Morton (IE.Supp)

(September 19, 2023) Letter from Tracy Loconte, Founder, Paws for Parks on behalf of Members of Paws for Parks (IE.Supp)

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ie/comm/communicationfile-172286.pdf>

(September 20, 2023) E-mail from Emma Bongers (IE.New)

(September 20, 2023) Letter from Lenka Holubec (IE.New)

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ie/comm/communicationfile-172288.pdf>

Communications (City Council)

(September 22, 2023) E-mail from Mario Iannuzzi (CC.Main)

(September 25, 2023) E-mail from Thomas Doumalin (CC.Main)

(September 27, 2023) E-mail from Susan Aaron (CC.Main)

(October 4, 2023) Letter from Daniel Elliot (CC.Supp)

(October 8, 2023) E-mail from Dolly Kao (CC.Supp)

(October 9, 2023) E-mail from Lisa Mackenzie (CC.Supp)

(October 9, 2023) E-mail from Maggi Burt (CC.Supp)

Motions (City Council)

1 - Motion to Amend Item moved by Councillor Brad Bradford (Carried)

That City Council amend Infrastructure and Environment Committee Recommendation 1.c. by adding the words "including a process for considering the introduction of fencing where appropriate to address safety concerns" so that it now reads as follows:

1.c. Process to identify and fund priority repairs and improvements to existing off-leash areas, including a process for considering the introduction of fencing where appropriate to address safety concerns.

2 - Motion to Amend Item moved by Councillor Paula Fletcher (Carried)

That City Council amend Infrastructure and Environment Committee Recommendation 1.c. by adding the words "including design improvements" so that it now reads as follows:

1.c. Process to identify and fund priority repairs and improvements, including design improvements, to existing off-leash areas.

*Motion to Adopt Item as Amended (**Carried**)*

Infrastructure and Environment Committee consideration on September 20, 2023

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Pilot Dog Run Update

To: Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee

Date: 18 January, 2024

Report No.: 01-24-4642

Strategic Directions

- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be received.

Context

At the October 30, 2019 meeting of the Board, the Board of Trustees had the following written notice of motion:

- (a) That the Director present a report on the feasibility of a pilot dog run project at schools including:
- (i) criterion for the establishment of such dog runs (school and community input);
 - (ii) the potential costs for the local community, including consultation, installation, supplies (e.g., waste bins) and maintenance, of fenced in enclosures to accommodate the dog runs, so that interested local communities can plan accordingly;
 - (iii) the development of appropriate signage;
 - (iv) an evaluation criterion to determine the effectiveness of the pilot project;
 - (v) the addition of appropriate clauses to the Board's policy regarding dogs/pets to allow local schools to accommodate dog runs.

Background

There have been various requests from the public to use school grounds for dogs, as generally, school grounds are convenient to access within a residential neighbourhood. When these requests have come forward, staff respond to inquiries with direction that TDSB does not allow this type of use. Operational needs arising from the pandemic delayed the advancement of work on the Dog Run Pilot motion, which the Board approved in October 2019. Staff recently became aware of a City of Toronto report that is in development, which will review and recommend a new Citywide comprehensive approach to Dog Off-Leash areas. The City's report is anticipated to be completed by the third quarter of 2024.

Definition and Requirements

For the purpose of this report, a *dog run* would be defined as a designated portion of TDSB property which is fenced in and provides an off-leash area where pet owners can bring their dogs to run around. This area would be a dedicated for this purpose and not available for other uses by students or the community. The City of Toronto website for [Dogs Off-Leash Areas](#) provides the following definition: "*Dogs off-leash areas are a place where your dogs can run around, meet new friends and enjoy the outdoors. As a pet owner, it is your responsibility to keep these areas safe for everyone.*" The website further explains the following rules which could become the minimum standard for a pilot dog run:

- *Be a good buddy and interact with your dog, keeping them within sight at all times.*
- *Off-leash doesn't mean unattended.*
- *Our furry friends ask that you keep the human noise to a minimum and walk, not run.*
- *Take the time to fill in any holes dug by your dog.*
- *Don't forget to scoop your dog's poop and dispose of it in the appropriate waste bin.*
- *Dogs must:*
 - *have a visible municipal licence tag*
 - *be vaccinated*
 - *not chase wildlife*
 - *not trample or endanger plants*
 - *Dangerous animals including any dog that has been issued a muzzle order are not allowed.*

City by-law officers do patrol city parks and issue fines or notifications to dog owners who let their dogs off leash – although as indicated in city reports, there are not enough bylaw officers to always undertake this work and at every location.

Important Considerations

School Operation and Safety

In many parts of the city, school grounds are considered as neighborhood green spaces and playgrounds. Most school grounds are easily accessible as gates unlocked and there are no access restrictions to enter the school grounds. Dogs on school properties have been an ongoing challenge for many years despite the “no dogs permitted” signage. There have been examples of dog owners taking their dogs off leash or even leaving their dogs unattended in a school yard, or within the kindergarten or childcare enclosures. There have been incidents of off-leash dogs chasing as well as biting students, members of the public and staff. Dog feces and disposal bags are frequently left on the school grounds impacting the student use and enjoyment of outdoor activities. Another challenge is when the school grounds are immediately adjacent to a city park or a public pathway, without fencing in place to separate the two properties. There is a risk that off-leash dogs could come onto the school portion of the site, when the students are playing outside.

Signage is posted near the entrances, such as gates or openings in the school ground fencing (refer to Appendix A for a copy of the signage) that clearly indicates TDSB school grounds are private property and dogs are not permitted on school board property. Section 6.10 in PR523, [Access to School Premises](#) prohibits canines on TDSB properties at any time (except service animals).

Another concern is with kindergarten and childcare play areas that are usually fully enclosed with fencing to create a defined play environment for the younger children, separate from the school grounds used by the older children. These play enclosures often have a combination of natural (mulch and grass) surfacing as well as some asphalt pathways. Unfortunately, there are examples where dog owners have also used these kindergarten or childcare enclosures as a secure dog area. Caretaking staff check these play enclosures every morning along with other areas of the school grounds to remove and dispose of debris and other objects, including dog feces. Some schools and childcares have adopted the practice of securing the gates at the end of the day, in the “open” position as a deterrent so the area is no longer fully enclosed by fencing.

Current Costs and Enforcement

TDSB currently incurs costs to address and respond to dogs on school property. One cost is the increased caretaking time and resources needed to remove feces from school grounds and to clean floors/areas in when feces is tracked into the school/classroom(s). Another cost is the use of the TDSB Security staff who are routinely dispatched to schools after the Operations Call Centre receives calls from the

community about dogs on school properties (after school hours). In 2022 – 23, there were 91 calls regarding off-leash dogs on TDSB properties. Given that it may take time for a mobile security team to arrive at the school, there may not be a chance for the Security guard to speak with the dog-owner. In most cases however, when Security advises the dog-owner that they cannot be on TDSB property – the dog-owner leaves the site without an issue.

The City of Toronto's Municipal Licensing & Standards (MLS) provides bylaw administration and enforcement services, including targeted strategies to address graffiti, noise, business inspections, park regulations and animal services issues. The City of Toronto has limited resources to consistently support enforcement of City Bylaws regarding off-leash dogs in City parks. The pandemic did see an increase in the number of dogs in the City and has put pressure on City parks as well as TDSB properties. In the past, the MLS Office, indicated they did not have the resources to monitor TDSB properties however recently, the City has indicated that they would consider sending Bylaw officers to TDSB properties, but this would require an agreement between the City and TDSB detailing the hours, schedule, coverage, and whether Bylaw officers can issue tickets on TDSB property. Staff are following up and will provide an update if this is a workable option for both the city and TDSB.

Future Dog Run Areas in the City

On October 11, 2023, Toronto City Council adopted the Infrastructure and Environment Committee's recommendations *IE6.8 Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas* (Appendices B and C). The report is due back in the third quarter of 2024.

The Committee recommendations are to have City staff review and update the City's approach to planning, locating, funding, building, and maintaining Dogs Off-leash areas based on recognized best practices and integrated with the Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) Facilities Master Plan which includes but is not limited to:

- a. International best practices for design, signage, rules, accessibility, shade, shelter, surface materials, fencing and amenities.
- b. Process to proactively identify and fund new off-leash areas where most needed, reflective of population distribution and development, in balance with other park functions and uses.
- c. Process to identify and fund priority repairs and improvements to existing off-leash areas.
- d. Includes accommodations for all types and sizes of Dog Off-Leash Areas including those in urban settings with limited parkland available.

- e. Potential opportunities for volunteers to steward these areas and ambassador programs to promote responsible dog area use and promote responsible dog ownership; and
- f. Review of and updates to the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan and Dog Off-Leash Area Policy as needed.

Considering the work that City staff are undertaking with regards to developing design standards, as well as operational and maintenance procedures for the establishment of a city-wide dog run park installations, this report recommends deferring any decision regarding the implementation of a dog-run pilot at a school until the city completes its research and presents its recommendations.

There may be opportunities for the TDSB and the City to work together to develop strategies to establish future dog runs. Consideration should be given to locate dog runs on City properties as the TDSB's mandate is to support students and their use of school grounds. Although a dog run park on school property may be seen as a way to allow both uses (students and dogs), simultaneously or separately, on school property – there are liability concerns, as well as funding limitations with regards to the TDSB building and maintaining dog run areas on school property.

Those concerns include the following:

- Potential liability to the Board, with increased risk of incidents related to dogs interacting with students, staff and/or community members, as well as other dogs, on TDSB property.
- Funding to cover the cost of installation of a dog run. Currently, the only funding available is the School Renewal Allocation (SRA) however this funding is limited (\$47 M/annually) and allocated to a variety of programs and projects including playgrounds, fields or baseball diamonds.
- Funding is also limited with regards to addressing the operational and renewal needs to maintain dog runs on school property – these costs could include repairs/replacement of fencing, gates, surface and below-grade repairs, and lighting.
- Additional TDSB security guards may be required to support schools, to address any issues that arise during the school day.
- Site size is another consideration as many schools located in high density areas, typically have smaller school properties, and as such have, limited capacity to partition a section of the school grounds to create a separate dog run area without impacting student and community use of the site.

TDSB would benefit from the research and recommendations that will be provided in the City's report with regards to the design and implementation of dog run areas, to better understand the costs and resources needed to support implementation of dog runs on TDSB property.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

It is recommended that the selection and implementation of a Dog Run pilot project at a school be deferred until Toronto City Council, Infrastructure and Environment Committee receives and approves the City staff report regarding "Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas."

The City of Toronto Master Plan report is tracking to completion in the summer of 2024. TDSB staff in collaboration with the Toronto Lands Corporation (TLC) will approach the City's Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff to provide input on the development of the City's report and to communicate the challenges with dog runs on school properties. A subsequent report will be provided to the Board following the release of the City's report in the Fall of 2024, regarding possible opportunities for the City and TDSB to support the strategy together.

Staff will continue to monitor the number of complaints received from schools and the community, and where possible, subject to available resources, have Security staff attend a school to reinforce that no dogs are permitted on school property. Staff will also continue discussion with City's Municipal Bylaw Enforcement division to request support for monitoring school properties.

Communications Considerations

Continue to monitor and respond to school and community concerns regarding dog-owners accessing school properties. Continue to provide "no dogs permitted" signage (Appendix A) to schools and ensure that there is signage as well as information available on the Board's web site providing information of the TDSB Call Centre, to place a complaint. Further updates regarding the City's report and possible strategies for TDSB and the City to work collaboratively on dog-run strategies, will be provided to the Board in the fall of 2025.

In consultation with the City's MLS Office, provide communication to schools to share with the school communities, that neighbours/residents may also contact 311 to lodge a complaint as well as calling the TDSB's Call Centre.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

P011, [Community Use of Board Facilities](#)

P101, [Enterprise Risk Management](#)

P092, [Student Health Support Policy](#)

P048, [Occupational Health & Safety](#)

PR523, [Access to School Board Premises](#)

PR604, [Use of Service Animals by the General Public](#)

Appendices

- Appendix A: “No Dogs” on School Property Sign
- Appendix B: City of Toronto: The Infrastructure and Environment Committee Recommendation
- Appendix C: (September 6, 2023) Letter from Councillor Chris Moise on a Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas

From

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