

Attachment 2:

**Public and Stakeholder
Engagement Results (Survey,
Stakeholder Focus Groups,
and Commercial Dog Walker
Engagement)**

Online Survey Feedback Summary



thinc
design

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Project

Toronto's "People, Dogs and Parks – Off leash Policy" was adopted by Toronto City Council in 2007 and last revised in 2010. In October 2023, City Council directed the Parks, Forestry & Recreation division to review and update the City's approach to dogs off-leash areas (OLAs) in relation to the planning, locating, building, funding, and maintaining of off-leash areas, as well as the user experience including bylaw education and enforcement and communication and engagement with residents.

As part of this review, thinc design (Toronto-based landscape architecture and planning firm) was engaged to conduct a series of consultations to inform the City of Toronto's Dogs Off- Leash Areas review including with City Councillors, OLA users, the general public, and vested stakeholder groups. This consultation process began with interviews with Toronto City Councillors, followed by a series of three stakeholder engagement meetings. An Online Public Survey was to solicit input and feedback from OLA users as well as general park users in the City of Toronto to help inform the updated approach to off-leash areas. This report offers a summary of feedback provided through the Online Public Survey.

1.2 Background

At the time of this survey, Toronto has 79 off-leash areas, which includes more single-use (i.e., fenced) off-leash areas than any other large city in Canada. Toronto's off-leash areas vary in size, design, amenities, and condition. This is due both to older "legacy" designs as well as more recent improvements made to OLAs as staff applied lessons learned to each new off-leash area. Additionally, each off-leash area site has unique characteristics (e.g., abutting park/community uses, drainage, and slope) requiring a tailored approach to each location. This varied approach has allowed Toronto to develop some large off-leash areas which attract pet owners from across Toronto and beyond (e.g., High Park, Sherwood Park, and Cherry Beach) in addition to the many smaller neighbourhood OLAs serving densely populated areas of the city. The smallest off-leash area is 128 m² (Albert Campbell Square) while the largest is over 4.52 hectares (Riverdale Park West).

1.3 Survey Format and Communications

The Online Public Survey was made available on the City of Toronto's website from May 3-24th, 2024, and was advertised through a range of platforms, including: City of Toronto social media accounts; City Councillors' e-newsletters and social media accounts; invitations to "Friends of Parks" associations and Stakeholder Engagement Meeting attendees; posters at Community Centres; signs at OLAs and posters at park community boards; and, through the City's Improving Dogs Off-Leash Areas webpage.

The survey targeted residents from across the City of Toronto to ensure a balanced perspective that included the voices of OLA Users as well as residents that do not use OLAs but may participate in other activities in and around City parks. For ease of promotion and access for the public one survey was created with early questions branching the respondents into questions specific to OLA Users or specific to Non-OLA Users (i.e., General Park Users)¹, thus ensuring relevance and accuracy in capturing feedback from distinct stakeholder groups.

The survey consisted of a total of 64 questions, including 16 questions exclusive to General Park Users and 30 questions exclusive to OLA Users. Sixty-two of the survey questions were closed-ended questions, with predefined answer choices to select from, including multiple choice options, rating scales, or yes/no responses. Of these 62 questions, 19 provided an "other" option to allow respondents to provide an answer in their own words. There were also two open-ended questions (one for each group of survey respondents) that allowed survey respondents to provide any general suggestions for OLAs in Toronto.

The topics covered by this survey relate primarily to user experiences, preferred design features and provision approaches, maintenance needs, volunteer opportunities, and general challenges associated with Toronto's City parks and OLAs.

¹ Throughout this document, the term "OLA User" is used to denote survey respondents who either own a dog(s) or who do not own a dog(s) but have visited an OLA in the past six months, while the term "General Park Users" is used to denote survey respondents who have either never visited an OLA or who have not visited an OLA in the past six months.

2.0 Who We Heard From

2.1 Number and Geographic Location of Survey Respondents

A total of 8,408 responses to the survey were received, with 78% of respondents reaching the end of the survey. Consequently, the number of responses received varies for each question.

Responses were received from residents of every ward in the City. The distribution of survey responses is shown below (Figure 1).

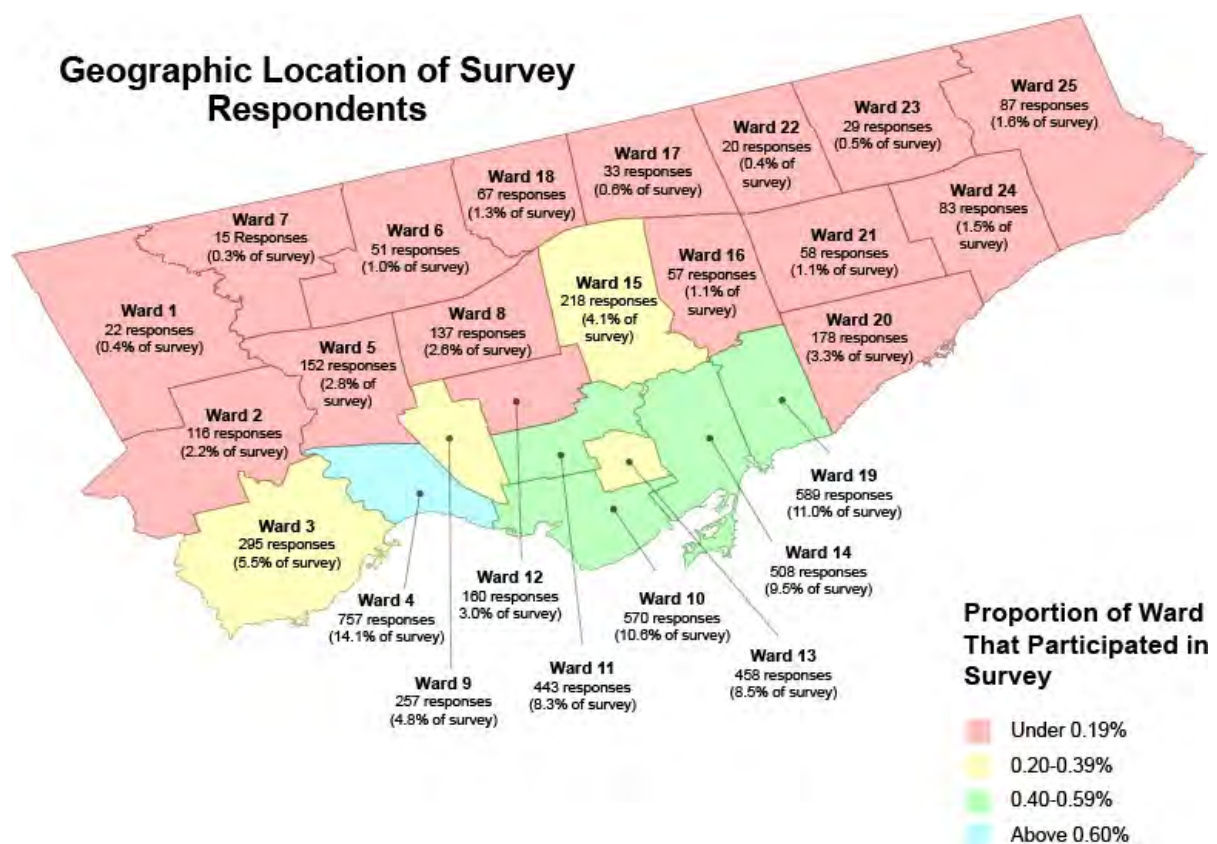


Figure 1: Geographic distribution of survey respondents by ward in the City of Toronto

2.2 Demographic Information

Age Distribution

The highest proportion of survey respondents were between the ages of 40-55 years old (36%), with 30-39 year-olds representing the second largest proportion of respondents (28%) (Figure 2). The lowest proportion of respondents were in the 75 years old or above age range.



Figure 2: Age distribution of survey respondents

Dog Caregiver Status

Eighty-one percent of survey respondents are dog owners, while two percent identified themselves as commercial dog walkers (Figures 3 and 5). Approximately nineteen percent of the dog owners responding to the survey had either never used an OLA in Toronto or had not used one in the past six months. Of those respondents who identified themselves as a dog owner or commercial dog walker, approximately three-quarters described the dog(s) they care for as medium/large (i.e., more than 12 inches tall at the shoulder and more than 20 pounds; Figure 4).

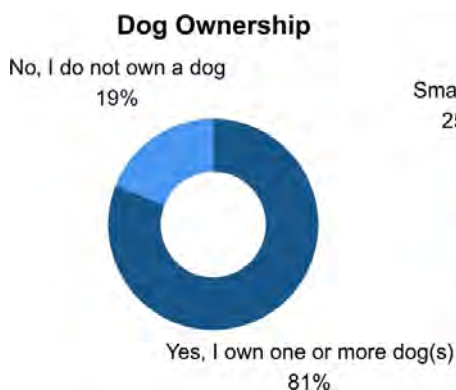


Figure 3: Rate of dog ownership amongst survey respondents

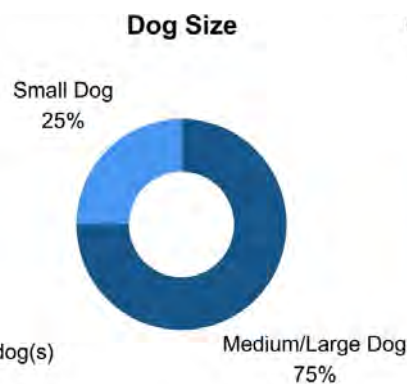


Figure 4: Rate of small vs. large dog ownership amongst survey respondents

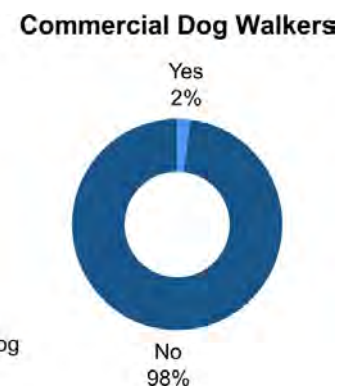


Figure 5: Proportion of commercial dog walkers amongst survey respondents

Gender and Sexual Orientation

Approximately two-thirds (67%) of survey respondents identified as a woman, while just shy of one-quarter (23%) identified as a man (Figure 6). Only two percent of respondents identified as either gender non-binary (including gender fluid, genderqueer, and androgynous) or provided an alternative response.

With regards to sexual orientation, approximately two-thirds (67%) of respondents identified as “heterosexual or straight,” while 14% identified as either bisexual, queer, gay, lesbian, or provided an alternative response (Figure 7).

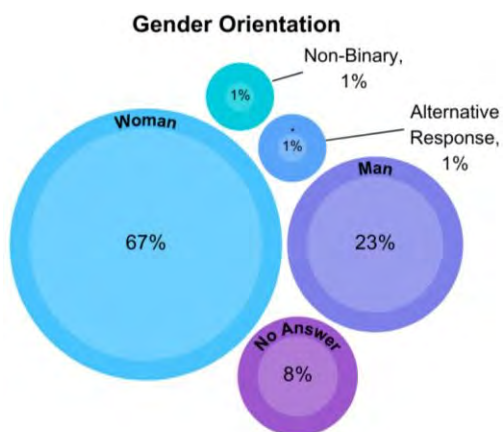


Figure 6: Gender orientation of survey respondents

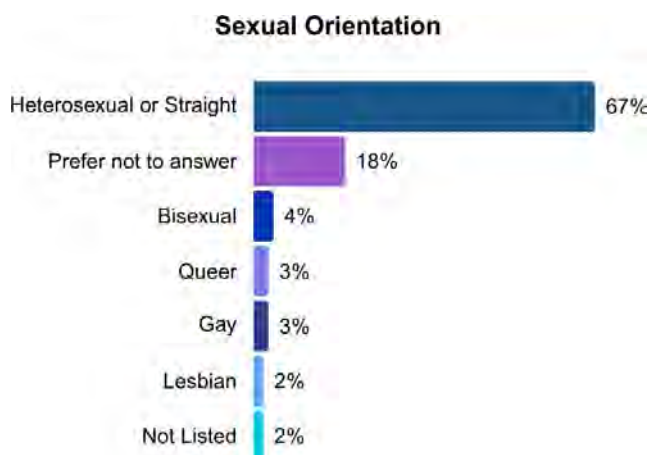


Figure 7: Sexual orientation of survey respondents

Racial Background and Indigenous Identity

The majority of respondents (63%) identified themselves as “White,” while the second highest proportion of respondents (6%) identified themselves as East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean; Figure 8). The lowest proportions of respondents identified themselves as First Nations (1%) and Black (1%). Similarly, only one percent of respondents identified as Indigenous to Canada (Figure 9).

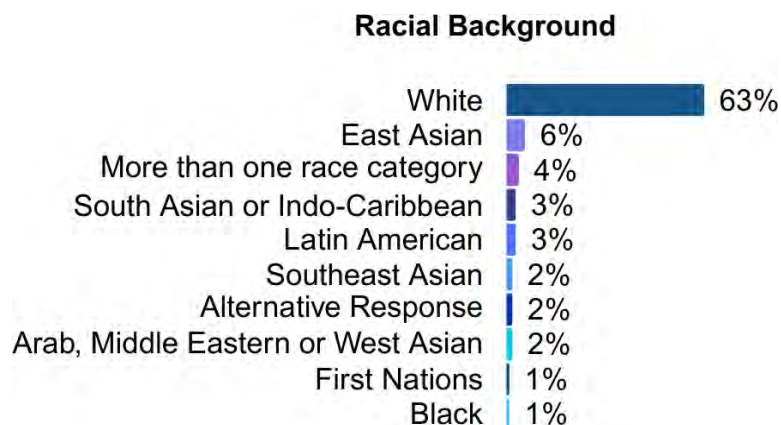


Figure 8: Racial background of survey respondents

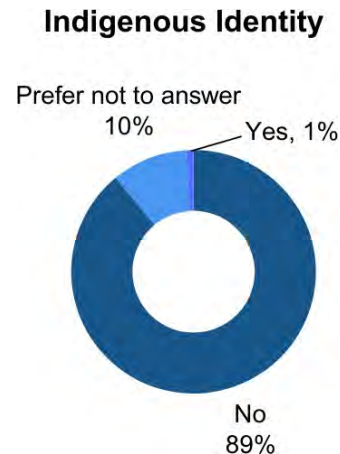


Figure 9: Indigenous identity of survey respondents

Preferred Language Spoken

The vast majority (97%) of respondents reported that their preferred language to speak is English, with only three percent identifying a language other than English as their preferred language (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Preferred language of survey respondents

Disability Status

Twelve percent of respondents identified as disabled, while over three-quarters (77%) did not identify as disabled, and 10% preferred not to answer the survey question about disability status (Figure 11).

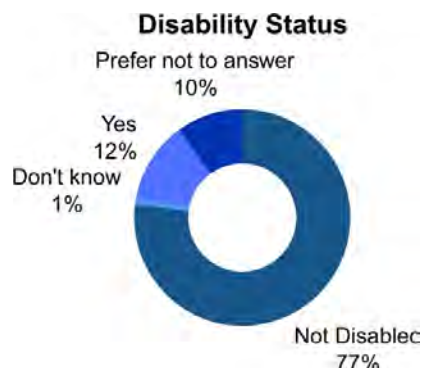


Figure 11: Disability status of survey respondents

Residency Status

The majority of respondents (60%) described themselves as homeowners, while 31% described themselves as renters (Figure 12). Two percent described their current housing situation as “permanently living with parent(s) or other family member(s),” while only one percent of respondents indicated that they are either unhoused, temporarily staying with others, or provided an alternative response.

Just shy of half of all respondents (48%) indicated that they have access to private outdoor spaces like a yard, while 13% said they have access to semi-private/shared outdoor space (Figure 13). By contrast, about one-third (35%) indicated that they only have access to public spaces like parks.

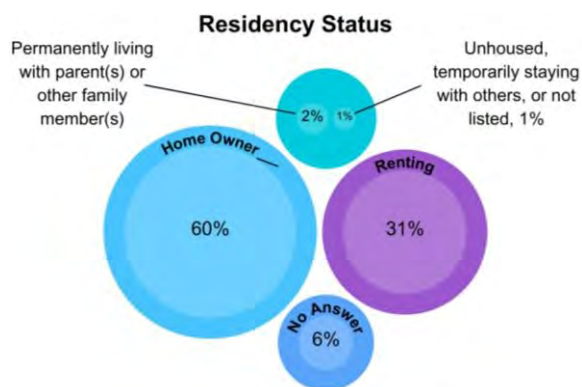


Figure 12: Residency status of survey respondents

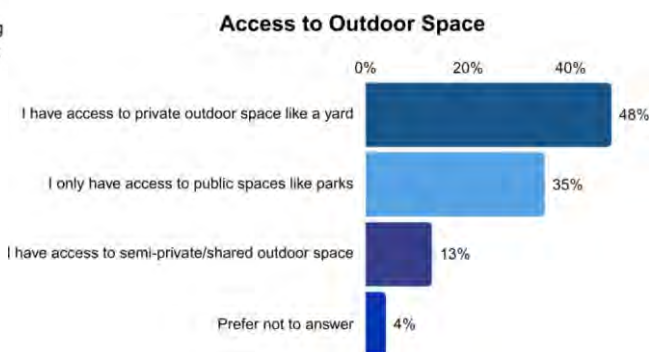


Figure 13: Survey respondents' access to outdoor space

2.3 Current Park Use and Satisfaction

Frequency of Use

When survey respondents were asked how often they visit parks and/or green spaces, approximately two-thirds (68%) said at least once a day (Figure 14). An additional 28% of respondents indicated that they visit parks at least once a week.

In comparison, when OLA Users were asked how often they visit OLAs, about one-third (36%) said they visited an OLA at least once a day (Figure 15). An additional nine percent indicated that they visit OLAs five or more times per week, and 21% said they visited one to four times per week. Thirty-one percent of OLA Users indicated that they use OLAs less than once a week.

Frequency of Park/Green Space Visits (All respondents)



Figure 14: Survey respondents' frequency of park/green space visits

Frequency of OLA Visits (OLA Users)

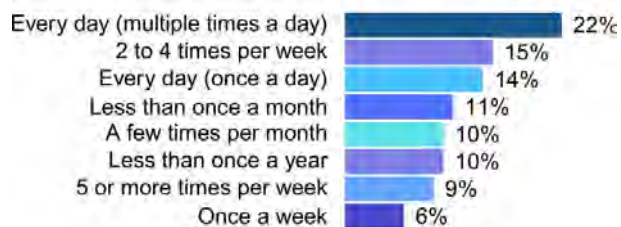


Figure 15: OLA Users' frequency of OLA visits

Location

The word clouds below illustrate the parks that are most visited by General Park Users (Figure 16) and the OLAs that are most visited by OLA Users (Figure 17). For both groups, the most visited park was High Park (11% of users from both groups said it was their most visited park or OLA), while Cherry Beach was the second most visited by OLA Users (5%) and Trinity Bellwoods was the second most visited by General Park Users (5%).



Figure 16: General Park Users' most visited parks



Figure 17: OLA Users' most visited OLAs

Reasons for Use and Satisfaction Level

OLA Users indicated that their top three reasons for visiting OLAs include giving their dog(s) exercise (38%), socializing their dog(s) (27%), and spending time outdoors/passively enjoying nature (15%; Figure 18). Of those who selected "other," the most common reasons for visiting OLAs were to provide training and enrichment for their dog(s) (including service dog training), and to enjoy off-leash freedom for their dog(s) that is not available in other areas (e.g., playing catch).



Figure 18: OLA Users' top reason for visiting OLAs

OLA Users reported high levels of overall satisfaction with their most visited OLA, with the majority (57%) indicating that they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their most used OLA (Figure 19). By contrast, only 17% reported that they were either somewhat unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with their most visited OLA.

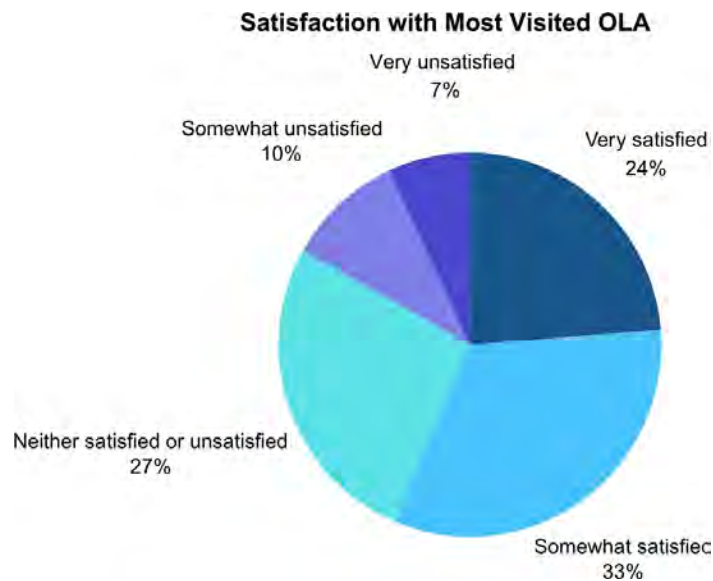


Figure 19: OLA Users' overall satisfaction with most visited OLA

General Park Users indicated that their most important park uses are enjoying nature (21%), getting exercise (20%), spending time with family, friends, and neighbours (14%), using playgrounds and other spaces for young children (11%), and exploring green spaces and biodiversity (10%). Of those respondents who selected "other", the most frequent responses included birdwatching, environmental stewardship activities, commuting, or other animal-related uses (e.g., bringing a cat to the park).

3.0 What We Heard

3.1 Overview

The feedback received through the Online Public Survey provided a wide range of perspectives from both OLA Users and General Park Users, all of which are integral to the City's review of off-leash areas. Consequently, the summary below comprises a diversity of opinions, including many contradictory views.

Feedback has been organized below under the following headings: Provision Process & Approach, Design Elements, OLA Management, and Volunteer Involvement in OLAs.

3.2 Provision Process & Approach

Management of Shared Spaces

Existing OLAs are generally located within City park boundaries, which causes challenges in balancing access to park spaces between General Park Users and OLA Users. As part of the Online Public Survey, General Park Users and OLA Users were asked to provide feedback to support the achievement of this balance.

As a starting point, General Park Users were asked if they think the City is currently doing a good job of balancing park space for people and dogs in their neighbourhood. The majority indicated that they either disagree or strongly disagree that the City is currently doing a good job, while slightly less than one-quarter agreed or strongly agreed that the City is currently doing a good job. Additionally, approximately half of General Park Users either disagreed or strongly disagreed with adding more OLAs to their neighbourhood, while about one-third either agreed or strongly agreed with adding more OLAs to their neighbourhood (Figure 28). This indicates that General Park Users think that less focus should be placed on creating spaces for dogs in the City parks.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that there should be more dogs off-leash areas in your neighbourhood?

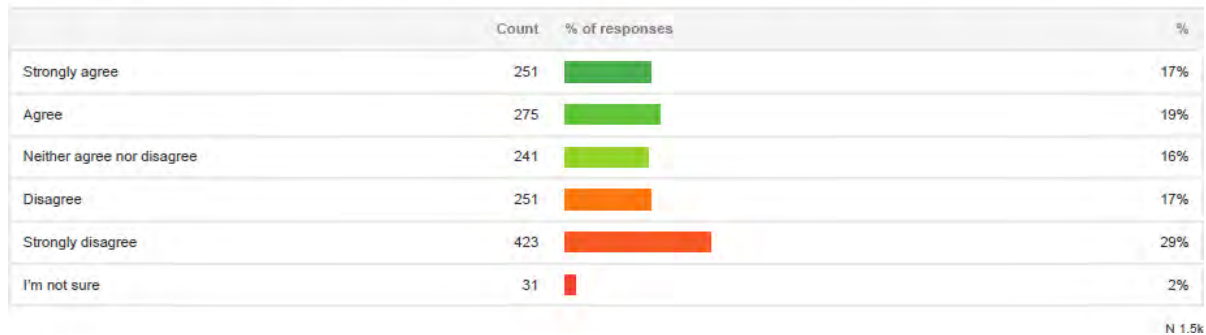


Figure 28: General Park Users interest in adding new OLAs to their neighbourhood

When asked about limiting the hours of operation of OLAs to help balance park use for everyone, about one-fifth of General Park Users indicated that they think there should be a limit, while 38% felt that the decision of whether to limit hours should depend on the specific park in question and 33% did not think there should be a limit.

Of those who feel there should be a limit, the highest proportion of respondents indicated that they think OLAs should be open between 7am-9am and 7pm-10pm, while the second highest proportion said the limit should depend on the specific OLA, and the third highest proportion said OLAs should be open between 7am-10pm (Figure 29). From those respondents who selected “other,” responses revolved around the themes of avoiding designating hours that overlap with General Park Users’ highest rate of use to minimize conflicts and enhancing enforcement measures to ensure compliance with designated off-leash hours.

When do you think an off-leash area (OLA) should be open?

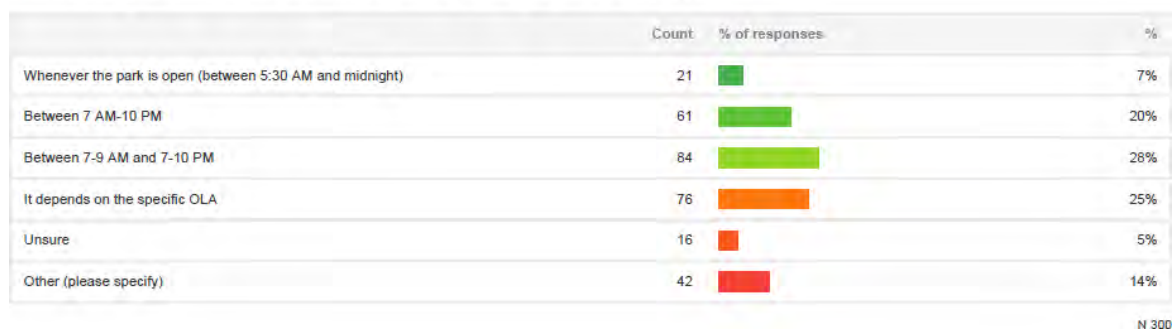


Figure 29: General Park Users preference for OLA hours

In relation to this, OLA Users indicated that the majority of their OLA visits occur between 3pm-6pm (50%), between 6pm-9pm (49%), and between 9am-12pm (44%), while the least popular times were between 12am-6am (3%) and 9pm-12am (12%).

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate which alternative means of providing spaces for OLAs they would support. Of those choices provided, both General Park Users and OLA Users agreed that the top two options they would support are repurposing underutilized hard surfaces as permanent OLAs (53% and 54% support, respectively; Figure 30 and Figure 31) and seasonal use of outdoor sports fields when not otherwise in use (36% and 78% support, respectively). Year-round time-of-use restrictions on spaces in parks was the least supported option of those provided (11% and 43% support, respectively).

As demand for use of limited parkland grows, the City continues to look at various opportunities to provide space for off-leash areas in different ways. Which of the following options would you support? Select all that apply.

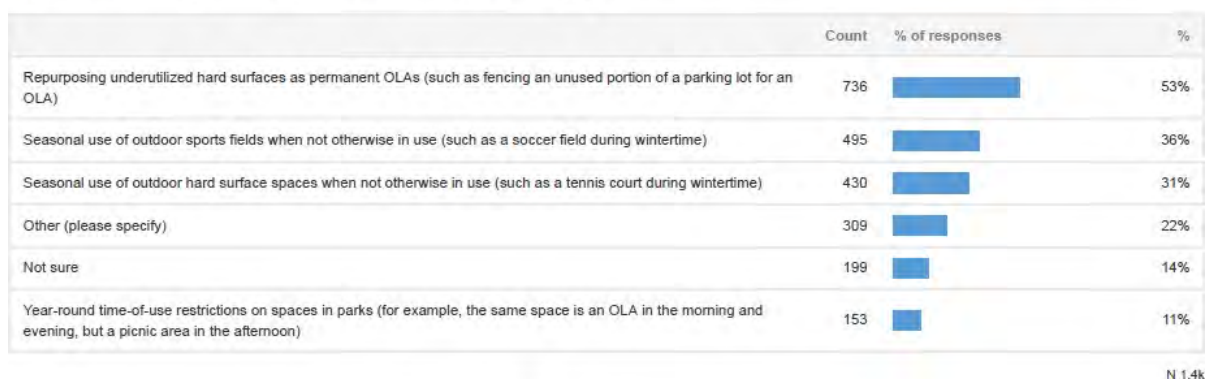


Figure 30: General Park Users' preference for alternative OLA provision

As demand for use of limited parkland grows, the City continues to look at various opportunities to provide space for off-leash areas in different ways. Which of the following options would you support? Select all that apply.

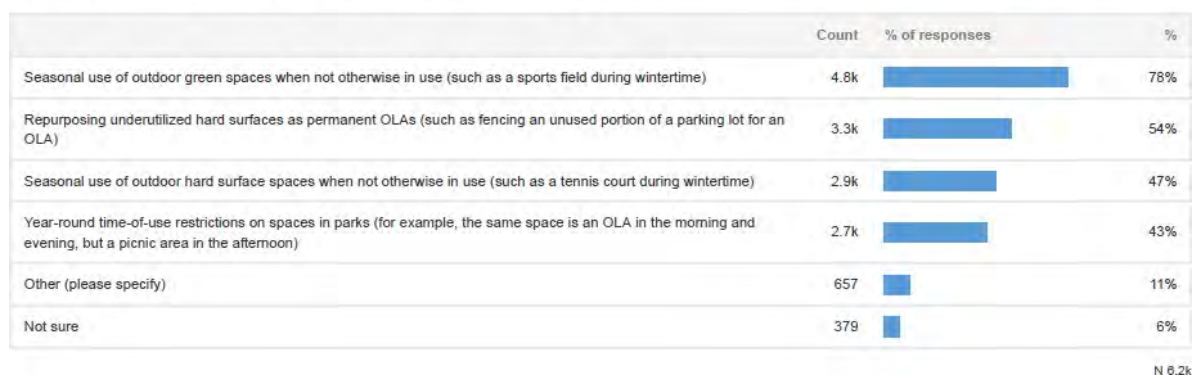


Figure 31: OLA Users' preference for alternative OLA provision

Of those General Park Users who selected “other,” recurring responses included sanitary concerns about dog waste in shared park spaces (i.e., spaces that would be subject to time-of-use restrictions or sports fields that would not get cleaned properly between uses), limited trust that dog owners will respect time-of-use restrictions, and an interest in exploring other areas such as hydro corridors or industrial areas.

Of those OLA Users who selected “other,” the most common responses included: safety concerns related to the suitability of hard surfaces for dogs; an interest in repurposing underutilized spaces like hydro fields, parking lots, or the underside of the Gardiner Expressway for OLAs; comments about the need for year-round OLA spaces; and interest in collaborating with schools, businesses, and other private landowners to create more shared spaces for OLAs.

Geographic Considerations

When asked what features are most important to them when selecting an OLA, approximately half of OLA Users indicated that geographic proximity to home ranked among the most important factors in their decision after cleanliness/maintenance, fencing, and surface material. Similarly, when asked if they would prefer more, smaller OLAs that are closer to residents or fewer but larger OLAs, just over half indicated that they would prefer more, smaller OLAs that are closer to residents, while less than one-third said they would prefer fewer, but larger OLAs. Additionally, just over two-thirds of OLA Users indicated that they use the OLA closest to them most often, followed by 25% who said they use a farther OLA because it's larger in size. Only 20% of respondents indicated that they will most often travel to a farther OLA because it is better maintained or has better features.

With regards to transportation, in a select all that apply question, OLA Users indicated that their most used method of transportation to their local community OLA was to walk, jog, or run (76%), followed by driving a personal vehicle (43%). The highest proportion of OLA Users indicated they are willing to travel up to 10 minutes to a local community OLA (37%), followed by 28% who responded that they would travel up to 15 minutes (Figure 32). Only 21% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to travel more than 15 minutes to a local community OLA.

How far are you willing to travel to a local community OLA?

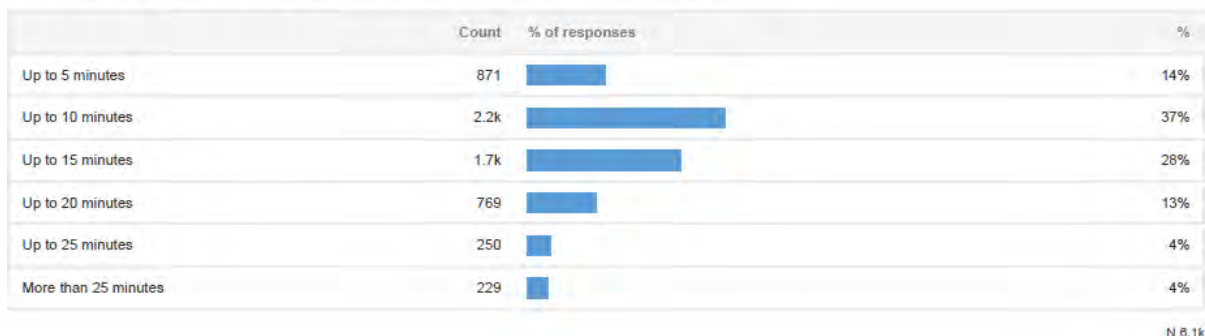


Figure 32: Distance OLA Users are willing to travel to a local community OLA

OLA Users also responded that their most used method of transportation to larger “destination-style” OLAs was driving a personal vehicle (69%), followed by walking, jogging or running (30%). The highest proportion of OLA Users indicated they are willing to travel up to 20 minutes to a “destination-style” OLA (25%), followed by 24% who responded that they would travel up to 15 minutes (Figure 33). Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that they would be willing to travel more than 25 minutes to a “destination-style” OLA.

How far are you willing to travel to larger, “destination-style” OLAs?

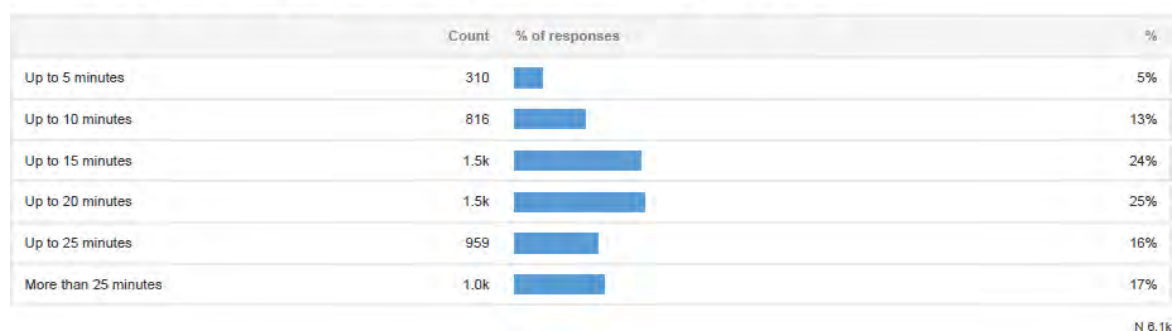


Figure 33: Distance OLA Users are willing to travel to a “destination-style” OLA

Of those dog owners who have never been to an OLA or have not used an OLA in the past six months, the most frequently reported reason for not visiting was that the nearest OLA is too far away.

These responses indicate that geographic proximity of OLAs to residents/walkability of OLAs is a high priority for OLA Users, and that they are unwilling to travel long distances to use an OLA. The survey also indicates that OLA Users are reasonably satisfied with how close their most used OLA is to their home, as respondents indicated the third highest level of satisfaction with geographic proximity to home after size and accessibility.

Population Density and Distribution

With regards to distribution of OLAs, survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they think the City should prioritize building new OLAs, prioritize improving existing OLAs, or balance building new OLAs with improving existing OLAs. While a majority of OLA Users (57%) think the City should balance building new OLAs with improving existing OLAs, only 33% of General Park Users agreed. Similarly, while the largest proportion of General Park Users (36%) would prioritize improving existing OLAs over building new OLAs, OLA Users would prioritize building new OLAs (22%) over improving existing OLAs (18%).

These results indicate that General Park Users are generally less supportive of building new OLAs, while OLA Users would prefer if the City could strike a balance between adding new OLAs while still providing improvements to those OLAs that already exist.

Of those respondents who selected an option that prioritizes building new OLAs, approximately 60% of both General Park Users and OLA Users said the City should prioritize building new OLAs in neighbourhoods without an OLA, where there is a high population density and/or number of licensed dogs (Figures 34 and 35). Approximately one-quarter of General Park Users and one-third of OLA Users indicated that they think the City should prioritize building new OLAs in neighbourhoods where existing OLAs are too crowded, while less than one-quarter of all respondents selected neighbourhoods without an OLA, regardless of population density and/or number of licensed dogs.

Where should the City prioritize building new Off-Leash Areas (OLAs)? Select all that apply.



Figure 34: General Park Users' preference for new OLA locations

Where should the City prioritize building new Off-Leash Areas (OLAs)? Select all that apply.

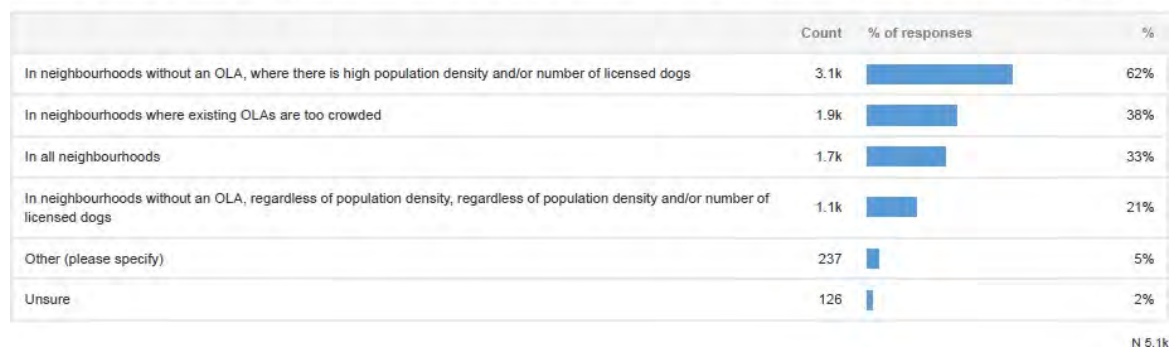


Figure 35: OLA Users' preference for new OLA locations

Of those OLA Users who selected “other,” the most common responses included: areas of density where residents lack private yards; areas where there are many off-leash dogs in on-leash areas; areas where there are high rates of reporting about dangerous dogs; areas where there is appropriate underutilized green space (e.g., hydro fields, trails, etc.); away from environmentally sensitive areas; and away from residential areas to minimize noise complaints.

General Park Users who selected “other” made several recommendations for where new OLAs should be located, including: areas where there are large numbers of off-leash dogs; areas where OLAs are not being used properly (e.g., Sorauren Park); away from areas where kids and families play (e.g., playgrounds, schools, etc.); and in areas with important ecosystems that need to be protected (e.g., away from ravines)

These responses indicate that there is a strong interest in relying on data about population density, number of licensed dogs, and intensity of OLA use to guide where new OLAs should be built rather than simply building them in neighbourhoods that do not already have one.

3.3 Design Elements

OLA Users were asked to respond to a number of questions that related to the particular design elements that contribute to the overall experience of off-leash areas. The primary elements in question include fencing/entrances, lighting, shade, size, surfacing, and water. Other elements that were addressed are discussed below under the title “Other Amenities.”

Of these primary design elements, OLA Users indicated that fencing, surfacing, and shade were the most important features to consider when choosing an OLA (Figure 20). Drinking fountains were also noted as one of the most important features of an OLA by close to half of respondents, while the size of OLA, lighting, accessibility, seating, play supporting structures (e.g., large rocks or logs), and community information boards were mentioned as one of the most important features of an OLA by less than one-quarter of OLA Users.

Of those who selected “other,” the most common responses included: safety and security of the OLA (e.g., high fences, secure gates, surveillance/by-law enforcement, and well-behaved dogs/owners); separate areas for large and small dogs; adequate size to allow dogs to run and play without feeling crowded; availability of amenities like bathrooms; sense of community among users; and access to natural features (e.g., water, beaches, forests, etc.).

When asked, more specifically, about their levels of satisfaction with various elements of their most visited OLA, OLA Users expressed the highest levels of satisfaction with the size, accessibility, and fencing of their most visited OLAs, and the lowest levels of satisfaction with the availability of seating, amount of shade/shelter, and surface materials of their most visited OLA (Figure 21).

Considering these responses, it is unsurprising that respondents’ highest priorities for improvements to design elements of their most visited OLA include improvements to OLA surface material, shade, and addition of a drinking water source, while their lowest priorities for improvements with regards to design elements include improvements to accessibility, more lights, more vegetation, and the addition of an area for small dogs only.

Of those who selected “other,” the most common responses included: fixing water sources or making water sources accessible year-round; repairing gates; improving safety (e.g., repairing fences, removing dangerous materials like broken glass or needles); expanding the size of the OLA; improving accessibility of OLAs by creating more parking; addressing drainage issues; and improving signage, education, and enforcement of rules and regulations.

The following sections provide a more in-depth description of the specific feedback received in relation to the OLA design elements discussed above.

What features are most important to you when choosing an OLA? Rate each category from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important).

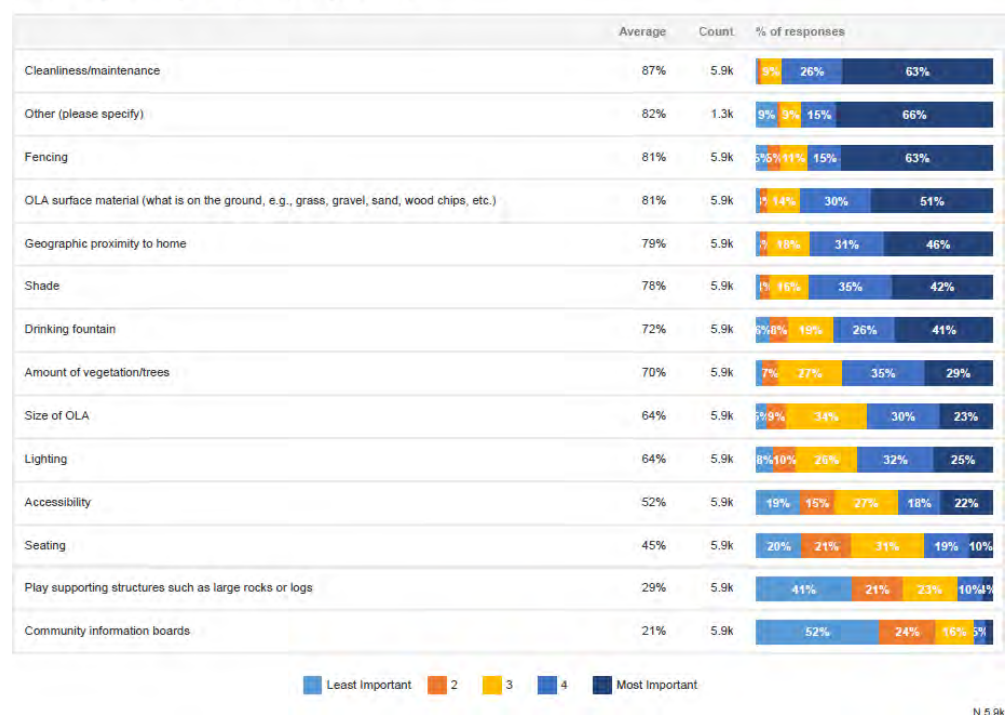


Figure 20: Most important features when choosing an OLA (OLA Users)

How satisfied are you with the OLA you visit most often? Rate each category from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied).

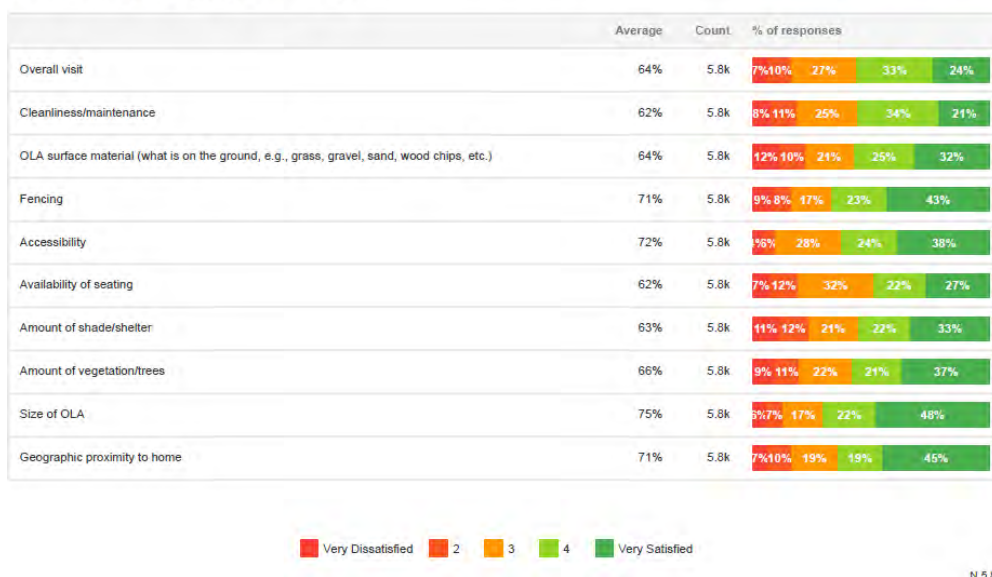


Figure 21: Satisfaction with most used OLA (OLA Users)

Accessibility

When asked what features are most important to consider when selecting an OLA, less than one-quarter indicated that accessibility is one of the most important factors for them, while about one-fifth indicated that it is somewhat important to them. Similarly, OLA Users indicated the second highest level of satisfaction with the accessibility of their most visited OLA with relation to other design elements. Lastly, improvements to accessibility was the lowest ranked option for how OLA Users' most visited OLA could be improved with relation to design elements.

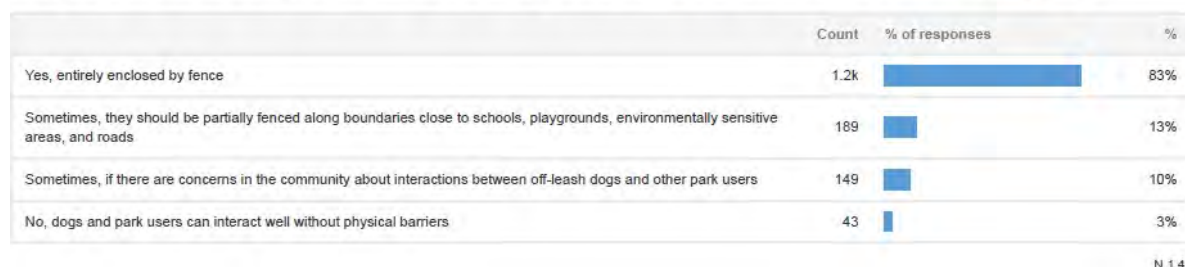
These results indicate that improvements to accessibility are not a personal priority for the majority of OLA Users; however, it is unclear whether this indicates that OLA Users' most used OLAs are already AODA accessible, or if accessibility factors have less of an impact on these respondents.

Fencing/Entrances

Over three-quarters of General Park Users indicated that they think every OLA in a park should be entirely enclosed by a fence, while only 3% indicated that dogs and park users can interact well without physical barriers (Figure 22). The remaining 14% of respondents indicated that they think OLAs should be partially fenced along boundaries close to schools, playgrounds, environmentally sensitive areas, and roads and/or fenced if there are concerns in the community about interactions between off-leash dogs and other park users.

Although OLA Users were not asked about their preference for fenced, unfenced, or partially fenced OLAs, nearly two-thirds indicated that they consider fencing to be one of the most important factors when selecting an OLA. Given these responses, it is clear that fencing should be considered a high priority design element for the City's review.

Do you think that every off-leash area in a park should be fenced? Select all that apply.



N 1.4k

Figure 22: General Park Users' OLA fencing preference

Lighting

When asked which features are the most important to consider when choosing an OLA, only one-quarter of OLA Users selected lighting, while approximately one-third said that it is somewhat important. Nearly half of OLA Users placed lighting in the categories of “least important”, “somewhat important”, or “neutral.”

This indicates that, while lighting may be a desirable feature for many OLA Users, it is not considered a high priority in relation to other design features.

Shade

Shade was noted by close to half of OLA Users as one of the most important factors in their OLA selection, with just over one-third reporting that it is somewhat important. Additionally, when asked how their most visited OLA could be improved, OLA Users indicated that shade was their second highest priority with regards to design features (tied with addition of a drinking water source).

Consequently, shade should be considered a priority design element for the City’s review.

Size

The size of OLA was mentioned by less than one-quarter of OLA Users as one of the most important factors in their OLA selection, while approximately one-third said that it was somewhat important. Additionally, when asked if they would prefer more smaller OLAs that are closer to residents or fewer but larger OLAs, just over half of OLA Users indicated that they would prefer more smaller OLAs that are closer to residents, while approximately one-third reported that they would prefer fewer but larger OLAs (Figure 23). Finally, of those dog owners who have never been to an OLA or have not used an OLA in the past six months, only one-quarter of respondents noted nearby OLAs being too crowded (25%) as a reason for not visiting.

Given the City has limited parkland, would you prefer:

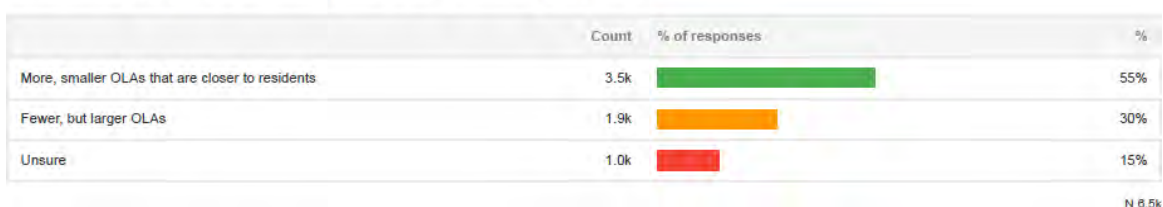


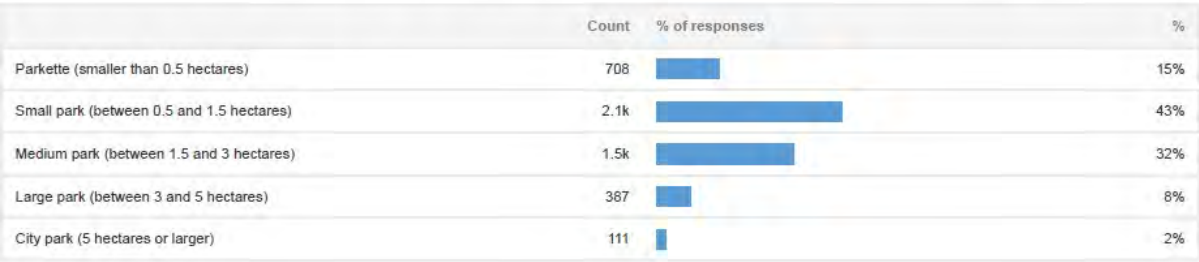
Figure 23: OLA Users' preferred use of limited parkland

This suggests that, while size may be a desirable feature for many OLA Users, it is not considered a high priority in relation to other design features.

With regards to establishing a minimum park size for accommodating OLAs, over half of OLA Users and nearly two-thirds of General Park Users agreed that there should be a minimum size. However, while the highest proportion of OLA Users indicated that a small park (between 0.5-1.5 hectares) should be the minimum size (43%), the highest proportion of General Park Users indicated that a medium park (between 1.5 and 3 hectares) should be the minimum size (39%; Figures 24 and 25). Approximately one-third of General Park Users indicated that the minimum size should be 3 or more hectares, while only 10% of OLA Users agreed.

In general, OLA Users appear to think that OLAs should be able to be accommodated in relatively small-sized parks, while General Park Users appear to think that OLAs should only be accommodated in larger parks.

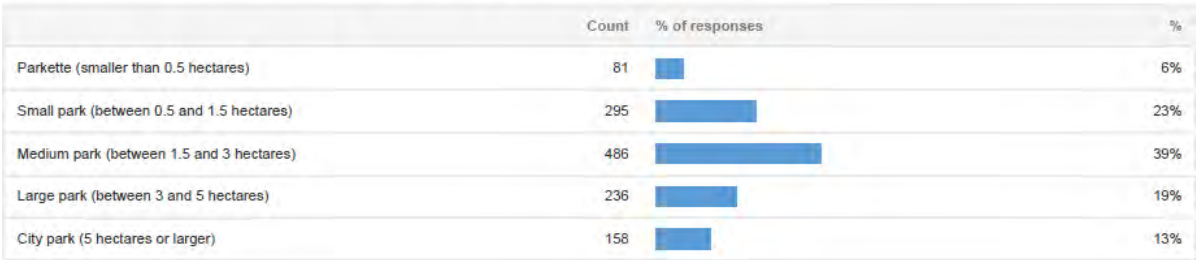
What do you think the minimum size of a park should be before it is suitable for an OLA? To help with visualization, an American football field is a little over half a hectare and professional baseball fields are around a hectare in size.



N 4.8k

Figure 24: Preferred minimum park size to accommodate an OLA (General Park Users)

What do you think the minimum size of a park should be before it is suitable for an OLA? To help with visualization, an American football field is a little over half a hectare and a professional baseball field is around a hectare in size.



N 1.3k

Figure 25: Preferred minimum park size to accommodate an OLA (OLA Users)

Surfacing

Approximately half of OLA Users consider surfacing to be one of the most important factors to consider when selecting an OLA, while about one-third would consider it somewhat important. Additionally, OLA Users' highest priority for design feature improvements to OLAs was improvements to OLA surface material. These results indicate that surfacing should be considered a very high priority design element for the City's review.

In your experience, what surface material works best for an OLA? Rate your top 3 in order, with 1 being the best.

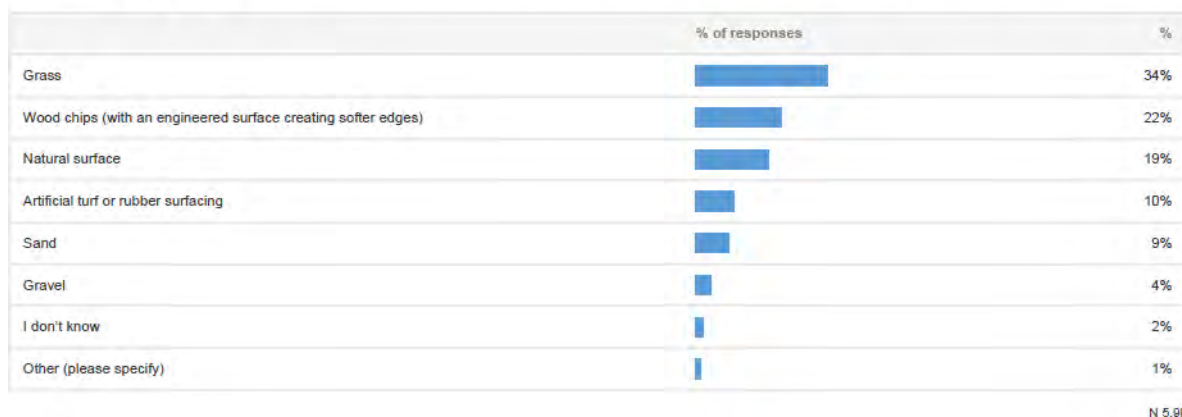


Figure 26: OLA Users' preferred surface material for OLAs

With this in mind, it is worth noting that OLA Users ranked grass as the surface material that works best for an OLA (34%), while engineered wood chips (22%) and natural surfacing (19%) were the second and third most favoured. Gravel (4%), sand (9%), and artificial turf or rubber surfacing (10%) were the least favoured surfaces, on average (Figure 26).

Of those who selected "other," the most common responses related to: selecting a surface that has good hygiene and odour control (e.g., concerns about gravel, sand, and wood chips being unsanitary); a desire for natural and soft surfaces (e.g., grass, mixed natural terrain to encourage exploration, and natural forest floors); the importance of surfaces that drain properly to prevent mud and standing water (e.g., some support for gravel or wood chips where regularly maintained); importance of accessible surfaces (e.g., not gravel); desire for surfaces that minimize environmental impact and support natural vegetation growth; and desire for surfaces that are cost-effective and require minimal maintenance.

Given that the three most favoured surface materials received relatively similar levels of support, it will be important for the City to examine their suitability for OLAs of different sizes and intensities of use.

Water

Drinking fountains were noted by 41% of OLA Users as one of the most important factors in their OLA selection, while approximately one-quarter said it was somewhat important. Additionally, OLA Users indicated that the addition of a drinking water source was their second highest priority for design feature improvements to their most used OLAs (tied with shade).

These results indicate that drinking fountains should be considered a priority design element for the City's review.

It is important to note that other design features related to water (e.g., splash pads, wading pools, decorative fountains, etc.) were not explored through this survey and, as such, further review of these features may be required.

Other Amenities

Other amenities not listed above which were explored through this survey include small dog areas, pet relief areas, amount of vegetation/trees, and play supporting structures.

When asked about small dog areas (a specific area in an OLA for dogs 20 pounds or less), approximately half of OLA Users with small dogs (12 inches tall or less at the shoulder and 20 pounds or less) responded that they would exclusively use a small dog area if their most visited OLA had one. Thirty-nine percent indicated that they would use a small dog area "sometimes, but not always," while only 12% indicated they would not use a small dog area. Additionally, approximately one-quarter of dog owners who had either never been to an OLA or had not been to an OLA in the past six months noted their dog being too small to feel safe in the nearby OLA as a reason for not visiting.

These results appear to indicate that small dog areas would be well used by individuals who care for small dogs. While it is important to note that only one-quarter of dog owners/dog walkers who responded to this survey indicated that they care for small dogs, this is still a relatively large sample size (1,400 respondents) which demonstrates clear support on the part of small dog owners for small dog areas.

With regards to pet relief areas (small spaces in buildings where pets can relieve themselves), approximately equal proportions of OLA Users responded that they were either very likely or somewhat likely (43%) or very unlikely or somewhat unlikely (39%) to use a pet relief area if there was a pet relief area in addition to the current off-leash areas in their neighbourhood (Figure 27). Half of respondents also indicated that they would not be willing to travel further to get to an off-leash area if their neighbourhood had a pet relief area that was convenient for them to regularly use, while only one-quarter of respondents said they would be willing to travel further.

If your neighbourhood had a pet relief area in addition to the current off-leash areas in the neighbourhood, how likely would you be to use it?

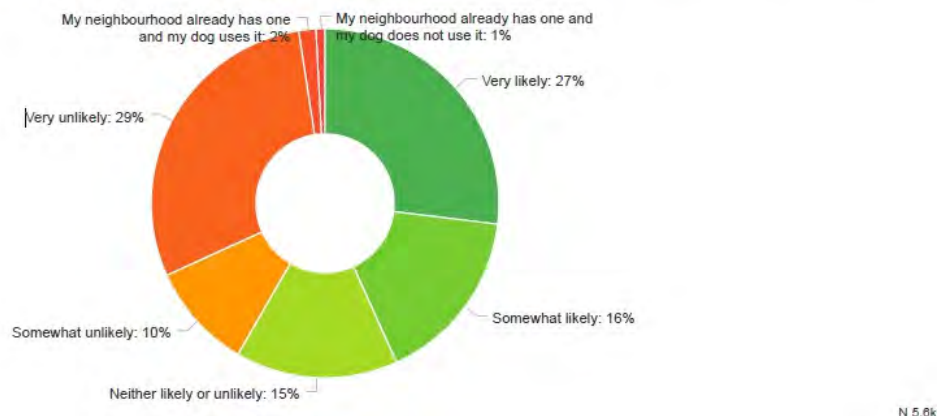


Figure 27: OLA Users' likelihood of using a pet relief area

These results suggest that the development of additional pet relief areas are unlikely to have a significant impact on OLA use; however, it may be beneficial to further examine the potential impact of adding pet relief areas to neighbourhoods that do not have an existing OLA.

Amount of vegetation/trees was noted by less than one-third of respondents as one of the most important factors in their OLA selection and was only the ninth most frequently mentioned way their most visited OLA could be improved. OLA Users also indicated a relatively high level of satisfaction with the amount of vegetation/trees in comparison to other design elements (fourth highest level of satisfaction of seven design elements evaluated). This indicates that while vegetation/trees may be a desirable feature for many OLA Users, it is not considered a high priority in relation to other design features.

With regards to play supporting structures, 42% of OLA Users said they were amongst the least important factors contributing to their selection of an OLA; however, it was the third most frequently mentioned way their most visited OLA could be improved (tied with improvements to waste disposal and improvements to fencing). This indicates that play supporting structures may not be a high priority for new OLAs but may offer a strong opportunity for improvement in existing OLAs, where feasible.

3.4 OLA Management

Communication

When asked how the City can best communicate with dog owners and OLA users, the top three methods selected by OLA Users were social media, email/newsletter to licensed dog owners, and dedicated mobile app. According to OLA users, the least effective way to communicate with dog owners and OLA users is through volunteers.

Of those who selected “other,” the most common responses included: using direct engagement (e.g., through by-law enforcement officers/city representatives who visit dog parks, attend local meetings, etc.); through traditional media like television, radio, newspapers and transit shelter ads; through signage; and through educational campaigns at vet clinics, pet stores, shelters, and local festivals.

Enforcement

There are many factors associated with OLAs that require some level of enforcement, including dog behaviour, human behaviour, and dog licensing. In order to gauge the type and level of enforcement that is required for OLAs, General Park Users and OLA Users were asked to provide feedback on their own experiences.

General Park Users indicated that their top four concerns about the impacts of OLAs in their neighbourhood were people that don't pick up after their dogs, safety of children, personal safety of themselves and others, and impacts on the environment (Figure 36). Additionally, approximately three-quarters of General Park Users indicated that they feel there are a significant number of off-leash dogs outside of off-leash areas. By contrast, the least concerning impacts included hours of operation, dust and dirt in the air from dog activity, and noise.

If you live or work near an off-leash area (OLA), do you have any concerns about the impacts of OLAs in your neighbourhood? Select all that apply.

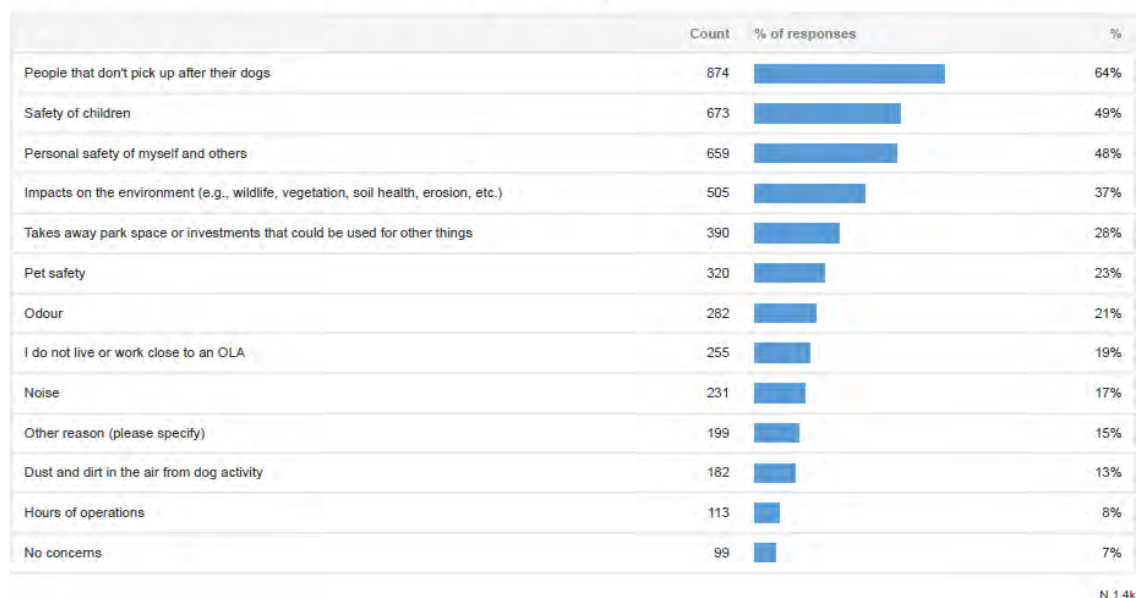


Figure 36: General Park Users' top concerns about OLA impacts

Of those who selected “other,” the most frequently mentioned concern included the encroachment of off-leash dogs into non-OLA areas. Many respondents reported instances of dog owners allowing their pets off-leash in areas outside of designated OLAs, which creates conflicts and safety hazards for other park users.

These results indicate that General Park Users are most concerned about the behaviour of dogs/owners and less impacted by factors associated with OLA design.

With regards to safety, half of all General Park Users indicated that they feel either somewhat unsafe or very unsafe using parks where OLAs are present (Figure 37). By comparison, 40% of General Park Users said they either feel somewhat safe or very safe using parks where OLAs are present². Additionally, of those dog owners who have never been to an OLA or have not used an OLA in the past six months, the second most frequently reported reason for not visiting was that the respondent's dog is bullied/harassed by other dogs in nearby OLAs.

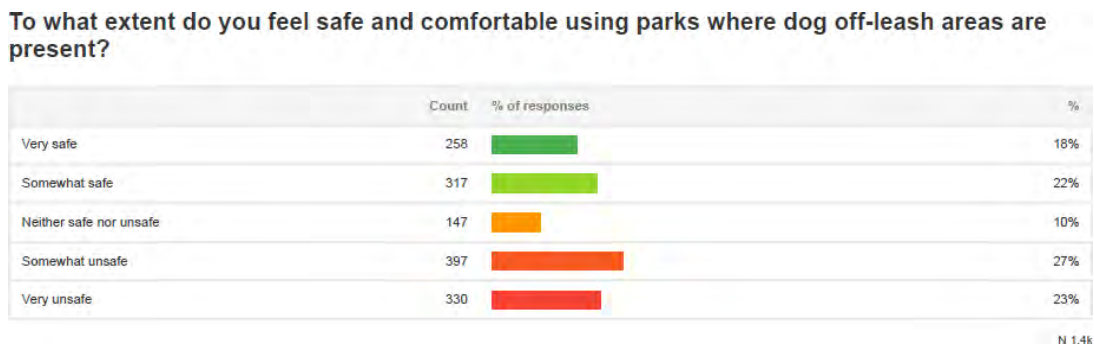


Figure 37: General Park Users feelings of safety and comfort in parks with OLAs

These results make it clear that there are notable concerns for both General Park Users and dog owners who do not use OLAs with regards to feeling safe around and within OLAs.

Finally, with regards to licensing, approximately three-quarters of dog owners responding to the survey claimed to have licensed/registered their dog(s) with the City of Toronto.

Maintenance

A majority of OLA Users indicated that they would consider cleanliness/maintenance to be the most important features they consider when selecting an OLA. They also indicated the lowest levels of satisfaction with the cleanliness/maintenance of their most used OLAs (tied with availability of seating). Given these two pieces of feedback, it is unsurprising that “better maintenance” was the second highest ranked way that OLA Users’ most visited OLA could be improved.

It is clear from these results that maintenance levels are a high priority area for OLA Users that the City should review.

² This result may require further examination to determine whether General Park Users feel unsafe in parks with fully fenced OLAs, or whether this response is more related to OLAs that are either unofficial, unfenced or partially fenced.

3.5 Volunteer Involvement in OLAs

Volunteer Opportunities

Approximately equal proportions of OLA Users indicated they would be somewhat likely or very likely to participate in a volunteer/ambassador program for OLAs (38%) as those who indicated they would be somewhat unlikely or very unlikely to participate (39%; Figure 38).

If the City were to implement a volunteer/ambassador program for OLAs, how likely would you be to participate?

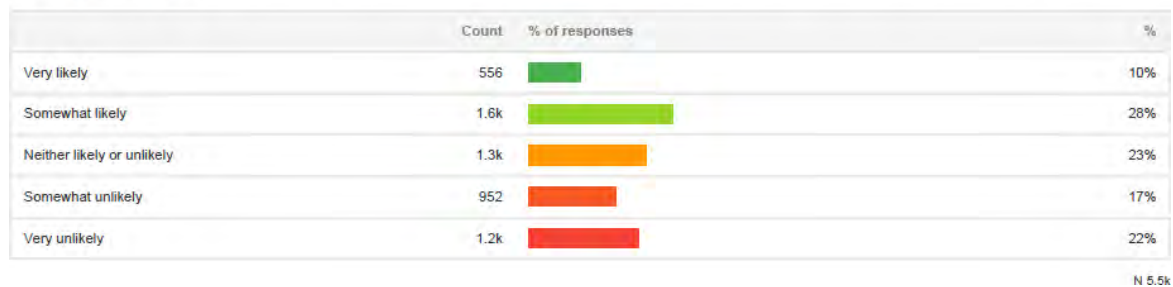


Figure 38: OLA Users' interest in participating in a volunteer/ambassador program

Of those OLA Users who responded that they would be somewhat likely or very likely to participate in a volunteer/ambassador program for OLAs, only one-fifth indicated they would be willing to volunteer over 4 hours per month, while the highest proportions of respondents indicated a willingness to volunteer for either 2-4 hours per month (41%) or 0-2 hours per month (39%; Figure 39).

How many hours per month would you be willing to dedicate to volunteering at OLAs in your community?

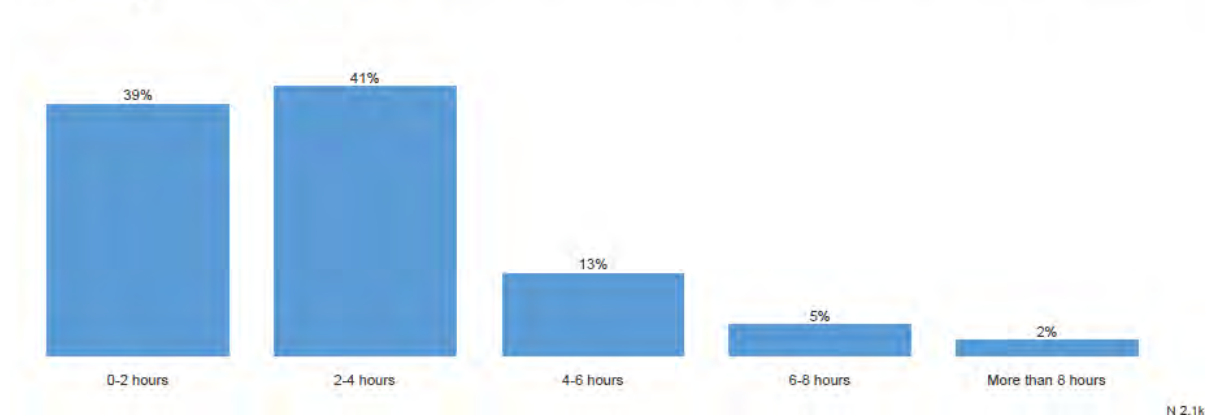


Figure 39: Number of hours per month OLA Users would be willing to volunteer

When asked what ways they would be willing to support their local OLA, of these same respondents, nearly two-thirds of OLA Users indicated a willingness to report issues at their OLA to the City, while about half would be willing to participate in OLA clean up days, and about a quarter indicated a willingness to donate towards improvements at specific OLAs.

Of those who selected “other,” the most common responses included: willingness to participate in maintenance tasks such as cleanup, planting, weeding, and releveling surfacing; willingness to participate in community meetings, action committees, and educational initiatives; and unwillingness to contribute financially to OLAs.

Additionally, these OLA Users indicated that the top three roles they would be willing to do were joining a citywide advisory group that meets periodically to discuss OLA matters and provide feedback to the City, acting as a liaison with the City and resource hub for OLA users, and organizing community clean up days in the OLA.

These results indicate that OLA Users are somewhat willing to participate in volunteer activities related to OLAs; however the general preference would be for lower commitment volunteer opportunities (i.e., tasks that take four hours or less per month) as well as administrative tasks conducted in association with the City (as opposed to contributing to education efforts or making/facilitating financial contributions).

Attachment A: Complete Online Public Survey Results

Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas Review

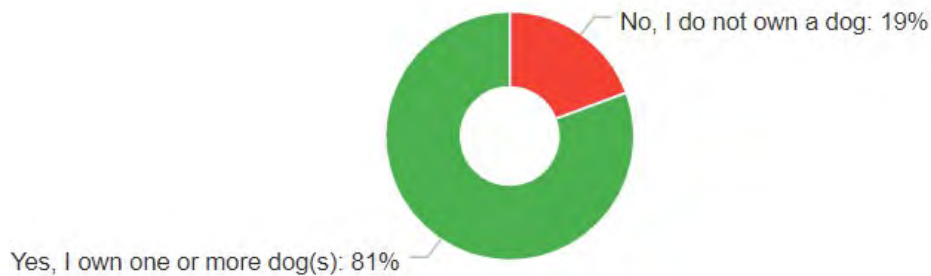
Introductory Questions – All Respondents

On average, how often do you visit parks or green spaces in your community?

	Count	% of responses	%
Every day (multiple times a day)	4.0k	<div><div></div></div>	48%
Every day (once a day)	1.7k	<div><div></div></div>	20%
5 or more times per week	966	<div><div></div></div>	11%
2 to 4 times per week	1.1k	<div><div></div></div>	13%
Once a week	299	<div><div></div></div>	4%
A few times per month	214	<div><div></div></div>	3%
Less than once a month	86	<div><div></div></div>	1%
Less than once a season	101	<div><div></div></div>	1%

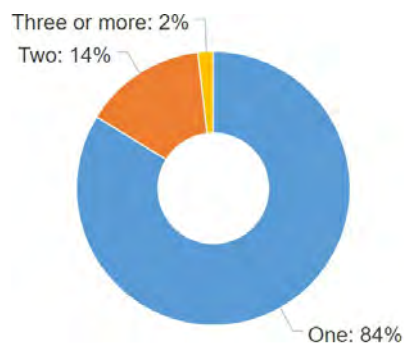
N 8.4k

Do you currently own any dogs?



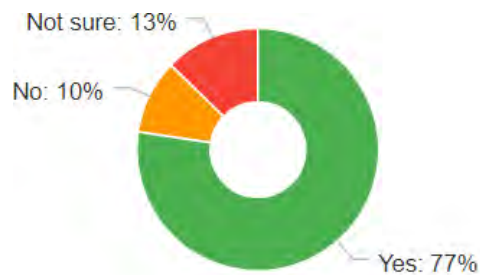
N 8.4k

How many dogs do you own?



N 6.6k

Is/are your dog(s) licensed/registered with the City of Toronto?



N 6.6k

Have you used a City of Toronto designated dogs off-leash area (OLA)? Select the statement below that best describes you.

	Count	% of responses	%
I have used an OLA in Toronto in the past six months	5.6k	<div><div></div></div>	68%
I have used an OLA in Toronto, but not in the past six months	1.4k	<div><div></div></div>	17%
I have never used an OLA in Toronto	1.2k	<div><div></div></div>	15%

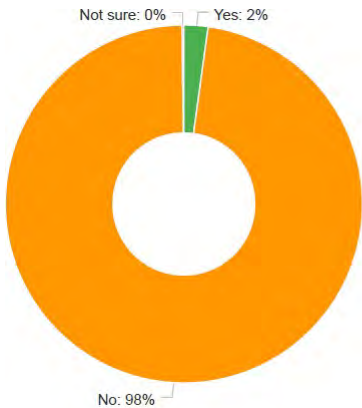
N 8.2k

Why haven't you used an OLA or used an OLA recently? Select all that apply.

	Count	% of responses	%
The nearest OLA is too far away for me	478	<div><div></div></div>	38%
My dog is bullied/harassed by other dogs in nearby OLA(s)	397	<div><div></div></div>	31%
Nearby OLAs are too crowded	324	<div><div></div></div>	25%
My dog is too small and I do not feel safe with it in nearby OLA(s)	299	<div><div></div></div>	24%
I prefer to keep my dog on a leash, and not use OLAs	287	<div><div></div></div>	23%
My dog's temperament is not well suited to OLAs	282	<div><div></div></div>	22%
Nearby OLAs are not well maintained	261	<div><div></div></div>	21%
Other (please specify)	255	<div><div></div></div>	20%
Nearby OLAs do not have enough shade	239	<div><div></div></div>	19%
Nearby OLAs are too small	238	<div><div></div></div>	19%
Nearby OLAs have a surface my dog(s) does not like	205	<div><div></div></div>	16%
I don't need an OLA, my dog gets enough exercise and socialization elsewhere	156	<div><div></div></div>	12%
Nearby OLAs are not physically accessible	35	<div><div></div></div>	3%

N 1.3k

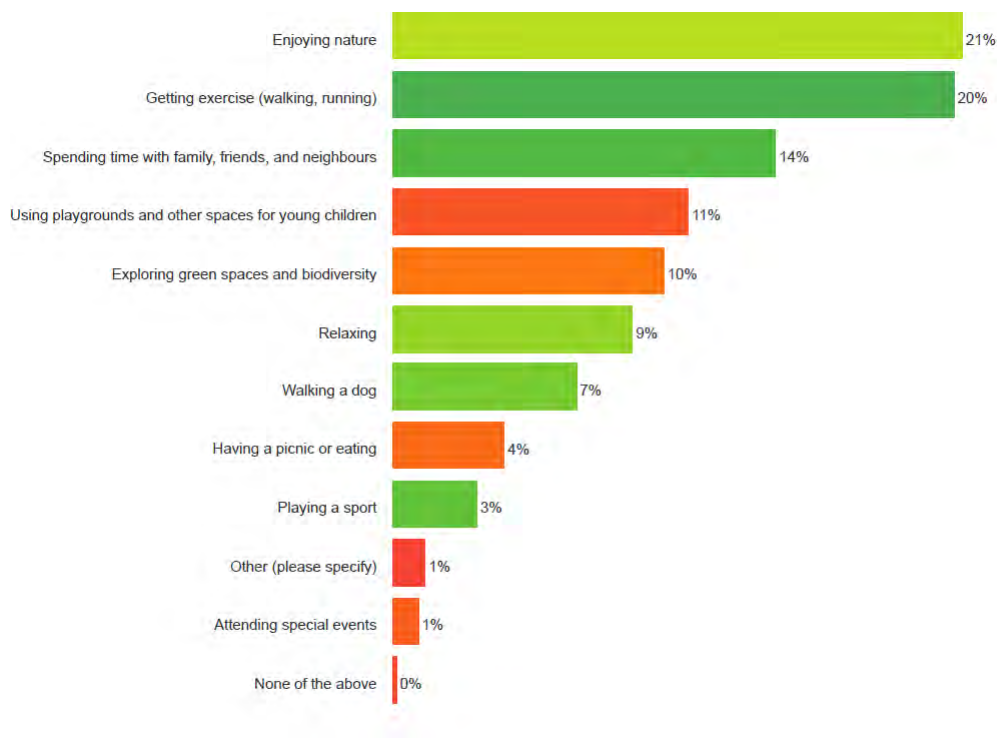
A commercial dog walker is a person who walks or has control of four to six dogs in a public space. Are you a commercial dog walker?



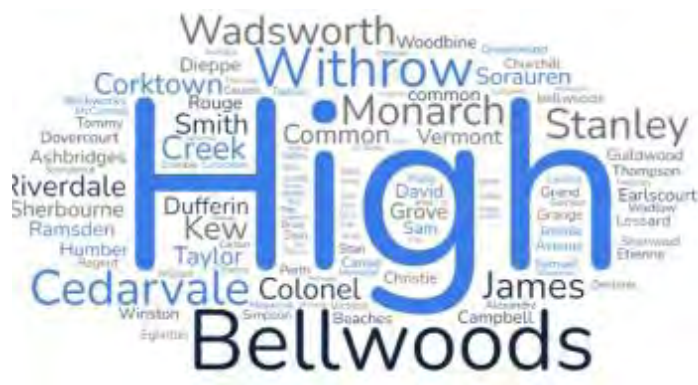
N 8.1k

Questions Specific to Non-Off-Leash Area Users

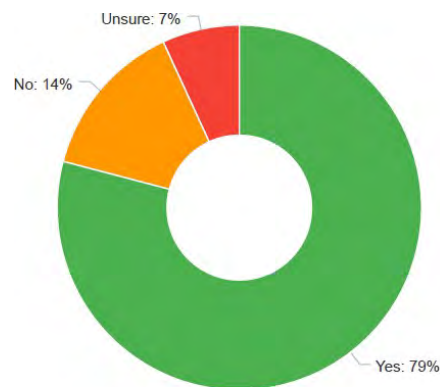
Which of the following park uses are most important to you? Rank your top 3 in order, with 1 being the highest priority.



What is your most visited park?



In your most visited park, do you feel there is a significant number of off-leash dogs outside of off-leash areas?



N 1.5k

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the City currently does a good job of balancing park space for people and dogs in your neighbourhood?

	Count	% of responses	%
Strongly agree	85	<div></div>	6%
Agree	252	<div></div>	17%
Neither agree nor disagree	245	<div></div>	17%
Disagree	372	<div></div>	25%
Strongly disagree	452	<div></div>	31%
I'm not sure	66	<div></div>	4%

N 1.5k

To what extent do you agree or disagree that there should be more dogs off-leash areas in your neighbourhood?

	Count	% of responses	%
Strongly agree	251	<div></div>	17%
Agree	275	<div></div>	19%
Neither agree nor disagree	241	<div></div>	16%
Disagree	251	<div></div>	17%
Strongly disagree	423	<div></div>	29%
I'm not sure	31	<div></div>	2%

N 1.5k

Given the City has limited resources, do you think the City should:

	Count	% of responses	%
Prioritize building new Off-Leash Areas (OLAs)	213	<div><div></div></div>	14%
Prioritize improving existing OLAs	531	<div><div></div></div>	36%
Balance building new OLAs with improving existing OLAs	482	<div><div></div></div>	33%
Unsure	246	<div><div></div></div>	17%

N 1.5k

Where should the City prioritize building new Off-Leash Areas (OLAs)? Select all that apply.

	Count	% of responses	%
In neighbourhoods without an OLA, where there is high population density and/or number of licensed dogs	540	<div><div></div></div>	59%
In neighbourhoods where existing OLAs are too crowded	217	<div><div></div></div>	24%
In all neighbourhoods	149	<div><div></div></div>	16%
In neighbourhoods without an OLA, regardless of population density and/or number of licensed dogs	137	<div><div></div></div>	15%
Other (please specify)	99	<div><div></div></div>	11%
Unsure	87	<div><div></div></div>	9%

N 918

To what extent do you feel safe and comfortable using parks where dog off-leash areas are present?

	Count	% of responses	%
Very safe	258	<div><div></div></div>	18%
Somewhat safe	317	<div><div></div></div>	22%
Neither safe nor unsafe	147	<div><div></div></div>	10%
Somewhat unsafe	397	<div><div></div></div>	27%
Very unsafe	330	<div><div></div></div>	23%

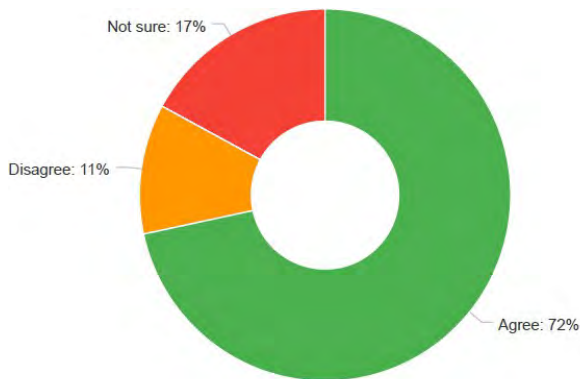
N 1.4k

Do you think that every off-leash area in a park should be fenced? Select all that apply.

	Count	% of responses	%
Yes, entirely enclosed by fence	1.2k	<div></div>	83%
Sometimes, they should be partially fenced along boundaries close to schools, playgrounds, environmentally sensitive areas, and roads	189	<div></div>	13%
Sometimes, if there are concerns in the community about interactions between off-leash dogs and other park users	149	<div></div>	10%
No, dogs and park users can interact well without physical barriers	43	<div></div>	3%

N 1.4k

In the interest of balancing park uses, do you agree that a park should be a minimum size before it is suitable for an OLA?



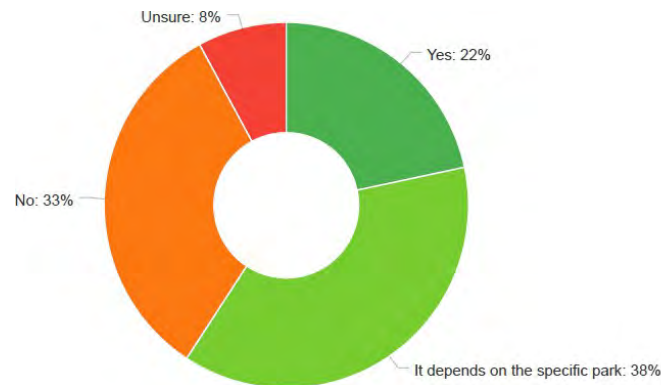
N 1.4k

What do you think the minimum size of a park should be before it is suitable for an OLA? To help with visualization, an American football field is a little over half a hectare and a professional baseball field is around a hectare in size.

	Count	% of responses	%
Parkette (smaller than 0.5 hectares)	81	<div></div>	6%
Small park (between 0.5 and 1.5 hectares)	295	<div></div>	23%
Medium park (between 1.5 and 3 hectares)	486	<div></div>	39%
Large park (between 3 and 5 hectares)	236	<div></div>	19%
City park (5 hectares or larger)	158	<div></div>	13%

N 1.3k

In order to balance park use for everyone, do you think there should be a limit on hours of operation of OLAs?



N 1.4k

When do you think an off-leash area (OLA) should be open?

	Count	% of responses	%
Whenever the park is open (between 5:30 AM and midnight)	21	<div></div>	7%
Between 7 AM-10 PM	61	<div></div>	20%
Between 7-9 AM and 7-10 PM	84	<div></div>	28%
It depends on the specific OLA	76	<div></div>	25%
Unsure	16	<div></div>	5%
Other (please specify)	42	<div></div>	14%

N 300

As demand for use of limited parkland grows, the City continues to look at various opportunities to provide space for off-leash areas in different ways. Which of the following options would you support? Select all that apply.

	Count	% of responses	%
Repurposing underutilized hard surfaces as permanent OLAs (such as fencing an unused portion of a parking lot for an OLA)	736	<div></div>	53%
Seasonal use of outdoor sports fields when not otherwise in use (such as a soccer field during wintertime)	495	<div></div>	36%
Seasonal use of outdoor hard surface spaces when not otherwise in use (such as a tennis court during wintertime)	430	<div></div>	31%
Other (please specify)	309	<div></div>	22%
Not sure	199	<div></div>	14%
Year-round time-of-use restrictions on spaces in parks (for example, the same space is an OLA in the morning and evening, but a picnic area in the afternoon)	153	<div></div>	11%

N 1.4k

If you live or work near an off-leash area (OLA), do you have any concerns about the impacts of OLAs in your neighbourhood? Select all that apply.

	Count	% of responses	%
People that don't pick up after their dogs	874	<div><div></div></div>	64%
Safety of children	673	<div><div></div></div>	49%
Personal safety of myself and others	659	<div><div></div></div>	48%
Impacts on the environment (e.g., wildlife, vegetation, soil health, erosion, etc.)	505	<div><div></div></div>	37%
Takes away park space or investments that could be used for other things	390	<div><div></div></div>	28%
Pet safety	320	<div><div></div></div>	23%
Odour	282	<div><div></div></div>	21%
I do not live or work close to an OLA	255	<div><div></div></div>	19%
Noise	231	<div><div></div></div>	17%
Other reason (please specify)	199	<div><div></div></div>	15%
Dust and dirt in the air from dog activity	182	<div><div></div></div>	13%
Hours of operations	113	<div><div></div></div>	8%
No concerns	99	<div><div></div></div>	7%

N 1.4k










Questions Specific to Off-Leash Area Users

Which of the following best describes the dog(s) you own or care for? Select all that apply.

	Count	% of responses	%
Medium/Large Dog (more than 12 inches tall at the shoulder and more than 20 pounds)	4.9k		75%
Small Dog (12 inches or shorter at the shoulder and 20 pounds or less)	1.7k		25%
Other (please specify)	243		4%

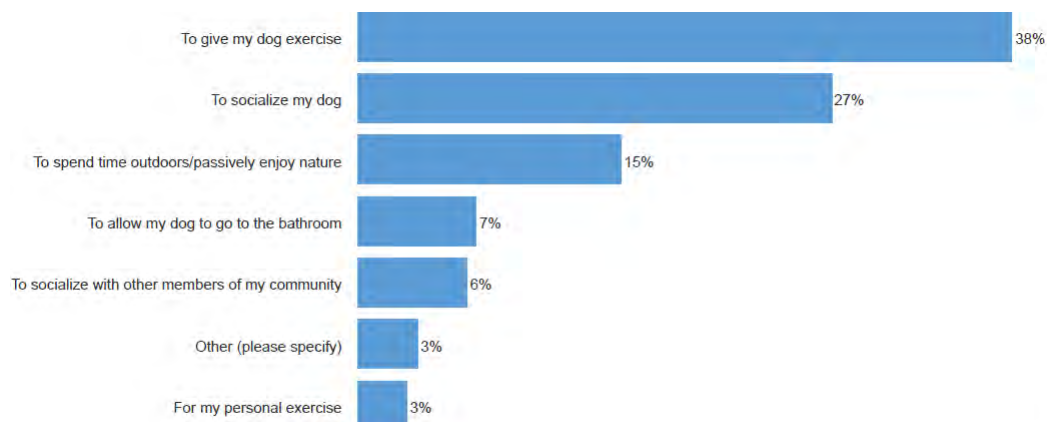
N 6.5k

How frequently do you visit Off-Leash Areas (OLAs) in Toronto?

	Count	% of responses	%
Every day (multiple times a day)	1.4k		22%
Every day (once a day)	908		14%
5 or more times per week	614		9%
2 to 4 times per week	1.0k		15%
Once a week	421		6%
A few times per month	636		10%
Less than once a month	700		11%
Less than once a year	672		10%
Prefer not to answer	139		2%

N 6.5k

Why do you visit OLAs? Rank your top 3 in order, with 1 being the most important.



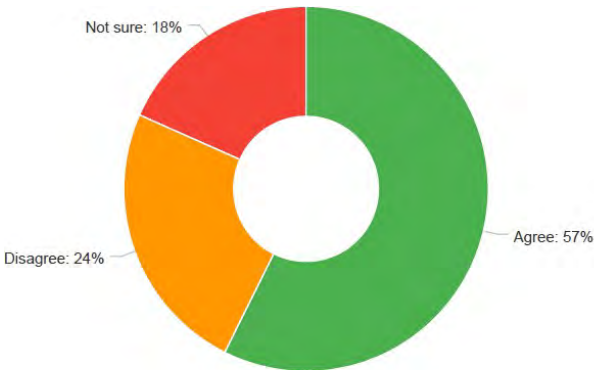
N 6.5k

Given the City has limited parkland, would you prefer:

	Count	% of responses	%
More, smaller OLAs that are closer to residents	3.5k	<div></div>	55%
Fewer, but larger OLAs	1.9k	<div></div>	30%
Unsure	1.0k	<div></div>	15%

N 6.5k

In the interest of balancing park uses, do you agree that a park should be a minimum size before it is suitable for an OLA?



N 6.5k

What do you think the minimum size of a park should be before it is suitable for an OLA? To help with visualization, an American football field is a little over half a hectare and professional baseball fields are around a hectare in size.

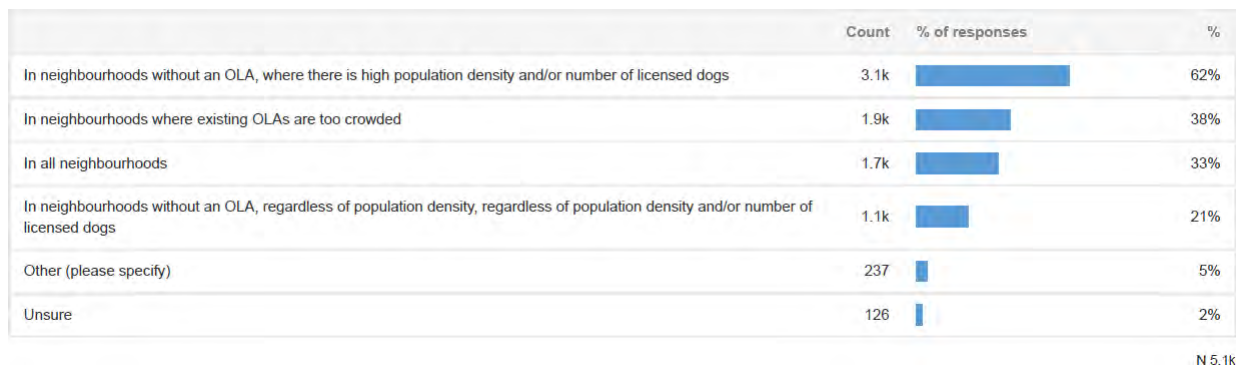
	Count	% of responses	%
Parkette (smaller than 0.5 hectares)	708	<div></div>	15%
Small park (between 0.5 and 1.5 hectares)	2.1k	<div></div>	43%
Medium park (between 1.5 and 3 hectares)	1.5k	<div></div>	32%
Large park (between 3 and 5 hectares)	387	<div></div>	8%
City park (5 hectares or larger)	111	<div></div>	2%

N 4.8k

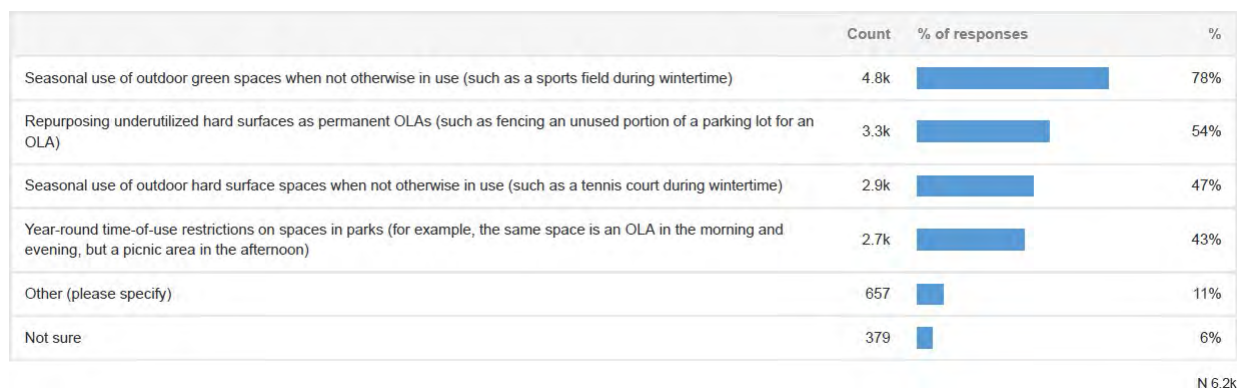
Given the City has limited resources, do you think the City should:



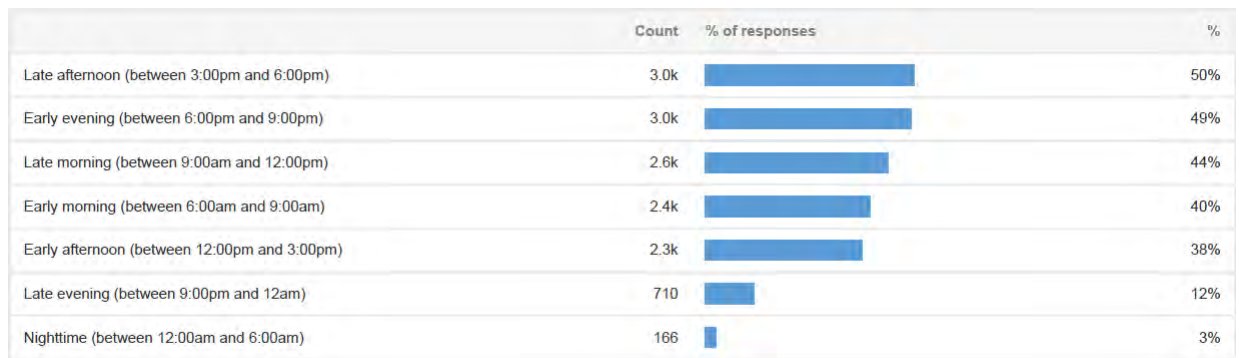
Where should the City prioritize building new Off-Leash Areas (OLAs)? Select all that apply.



As demand for use of limited parkland grows, the City continues to look at various opportunities to provide space for off-leash areas in different ways. Which of the following options would you support? Select all that apply.

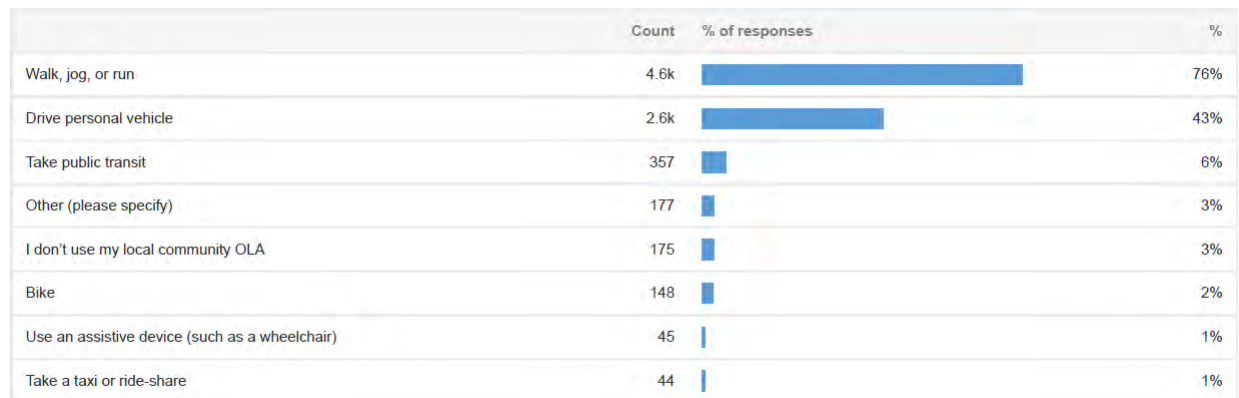


When do you normally visit OLAs in Toronto? (Select all that apply)



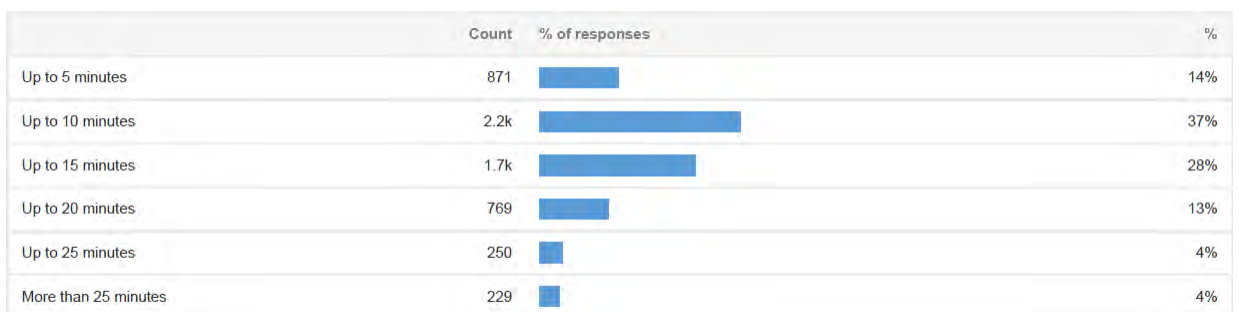
N 6.1k

How do you typically travel to your local community OLAs? (Select all that apply)



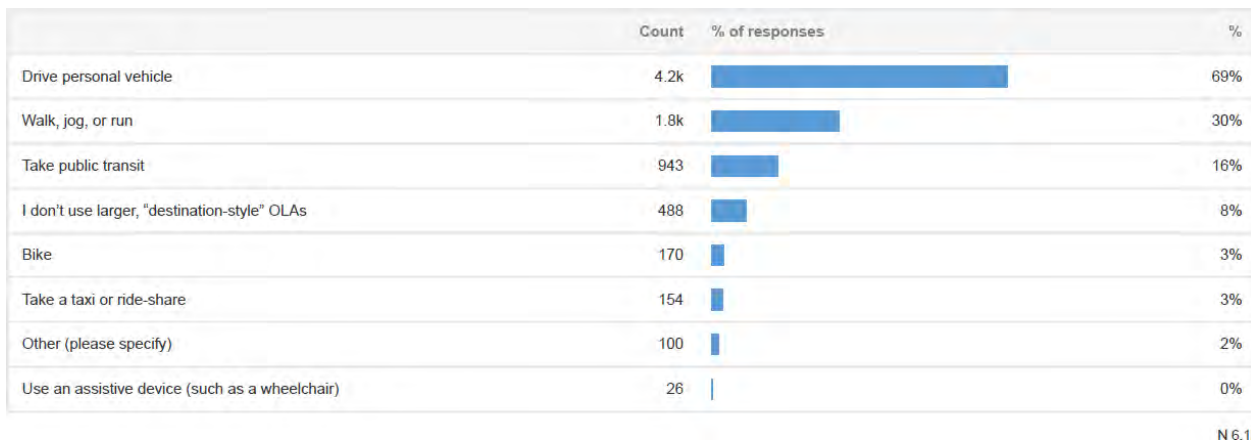
N 6.1k

How far are you willing to travel to a local community OLA?

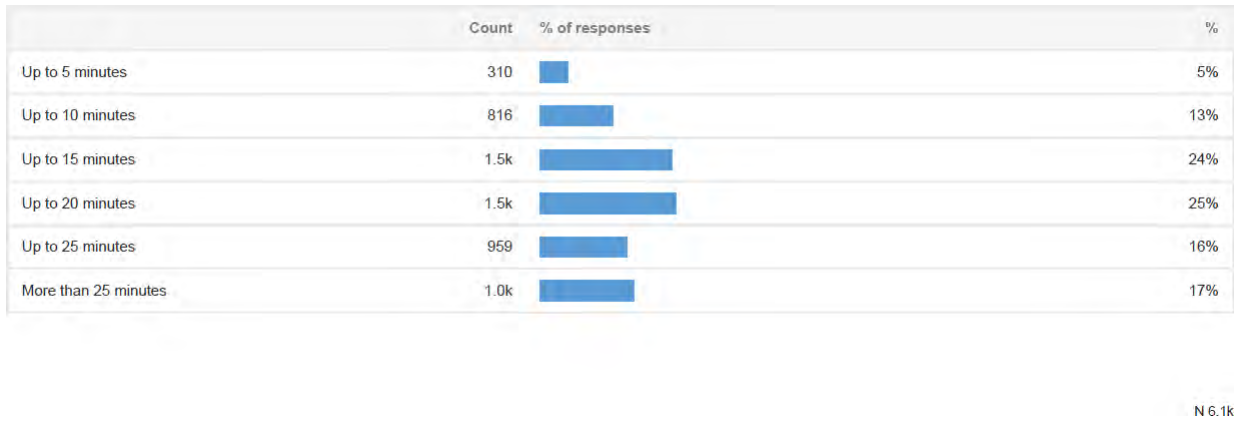


N 6.1k

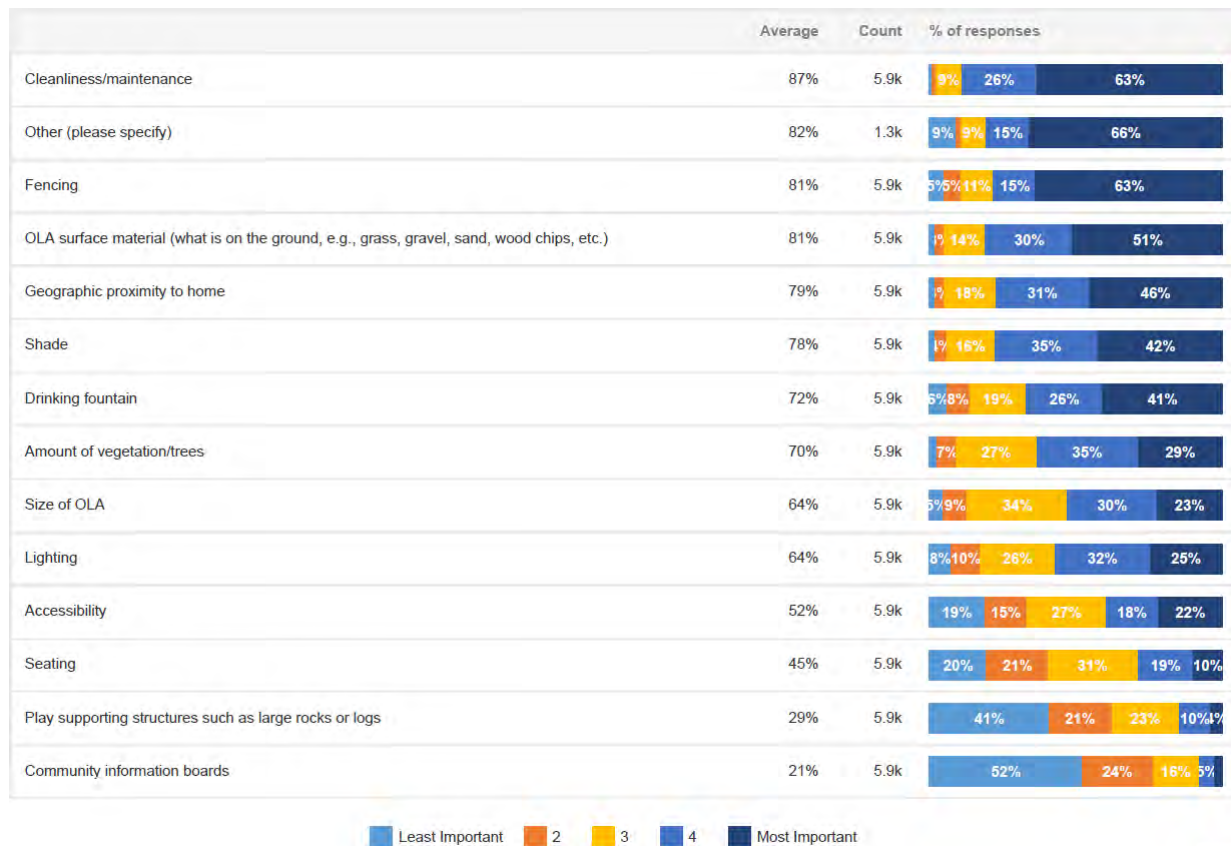
How do you typically travel to larger, “destination-style” OLAs? (Select all that apply)



How far are you willing to travel to larger, “destination-style” OLAs

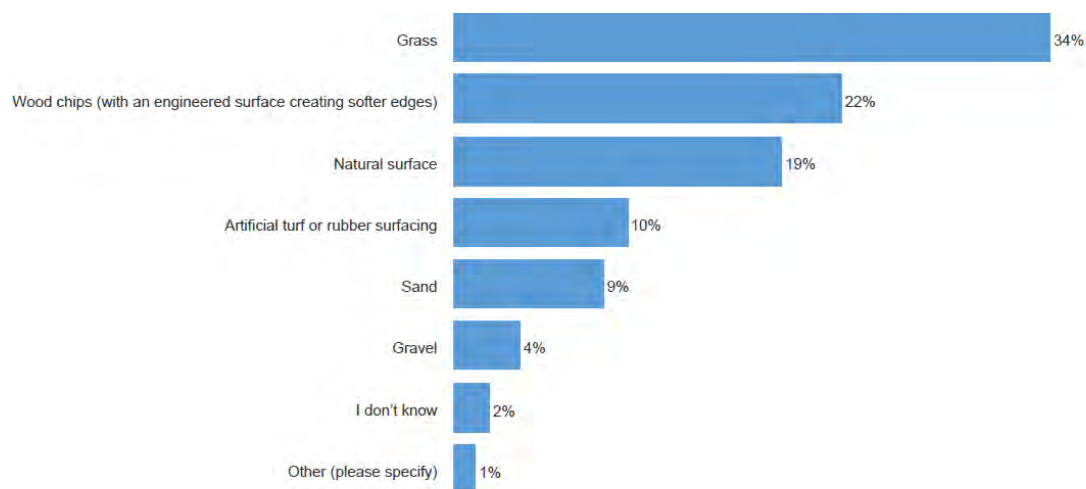


What features are most important to you when choosing an OLA? Rate each category from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important).



N 5.9k

In your experience, what surface material works best for an OLA? Rate your top 3 in order, with 1 being the best.



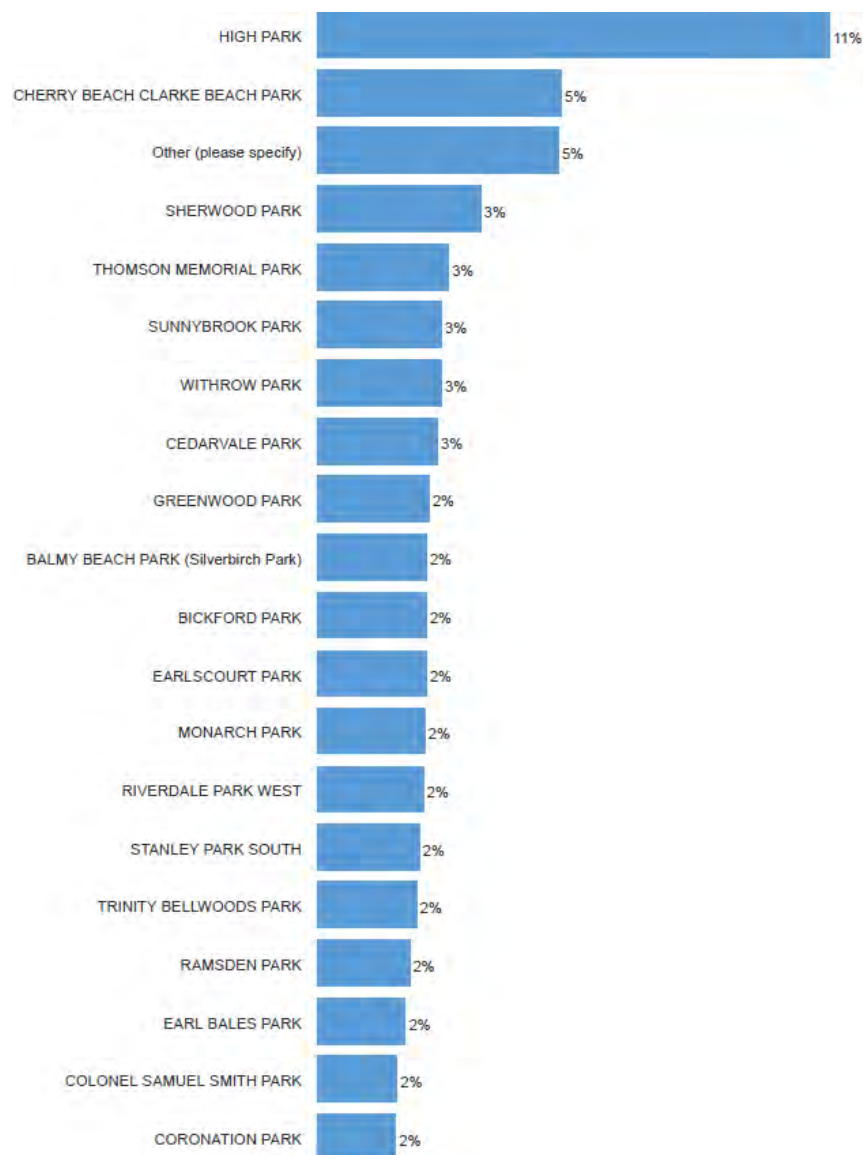
N 5.9k

Which OLA do you use most often? Select all that apply.

	Count	% of responses	%
The OLA closest to me	3.9k	<div></div>	68%
A farther OLA, because it's larger in size	1.4k	<div></div>	25%
A farther OLA, because it's better maintained/has better features	1.2k	<div></div>	20%
A farther OLA, for other reasons (please specify)	656	<div></div>	11%

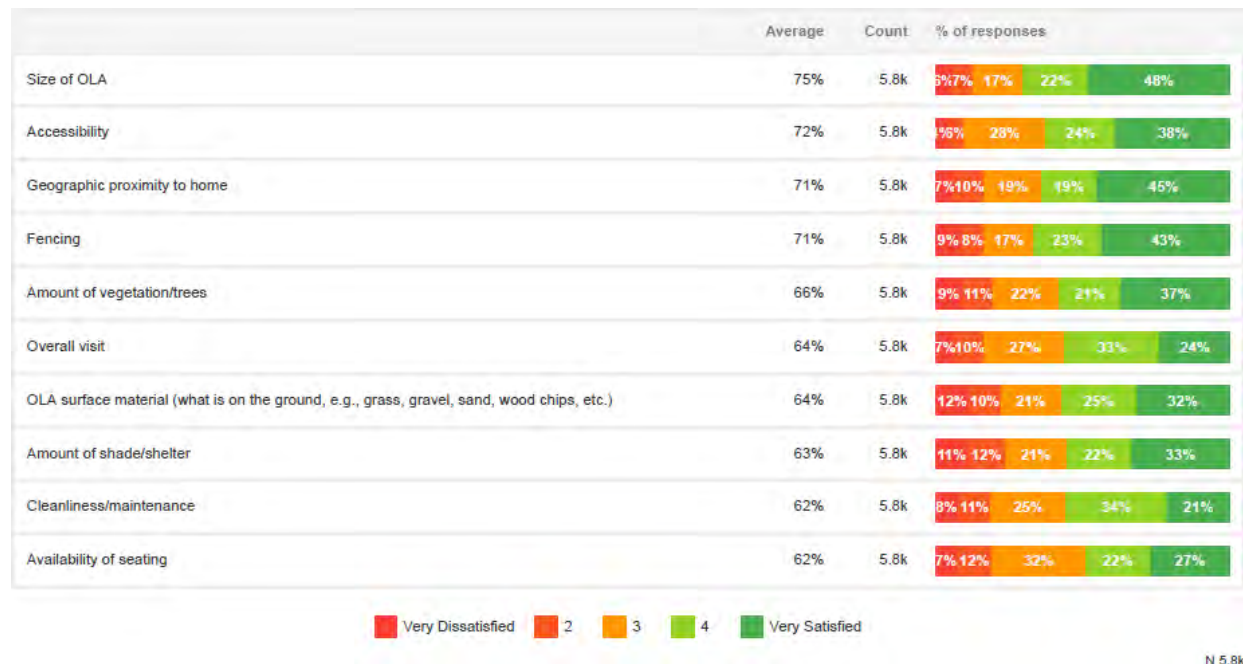
N 5.8k

Please select the name of the OLA you visit most often:

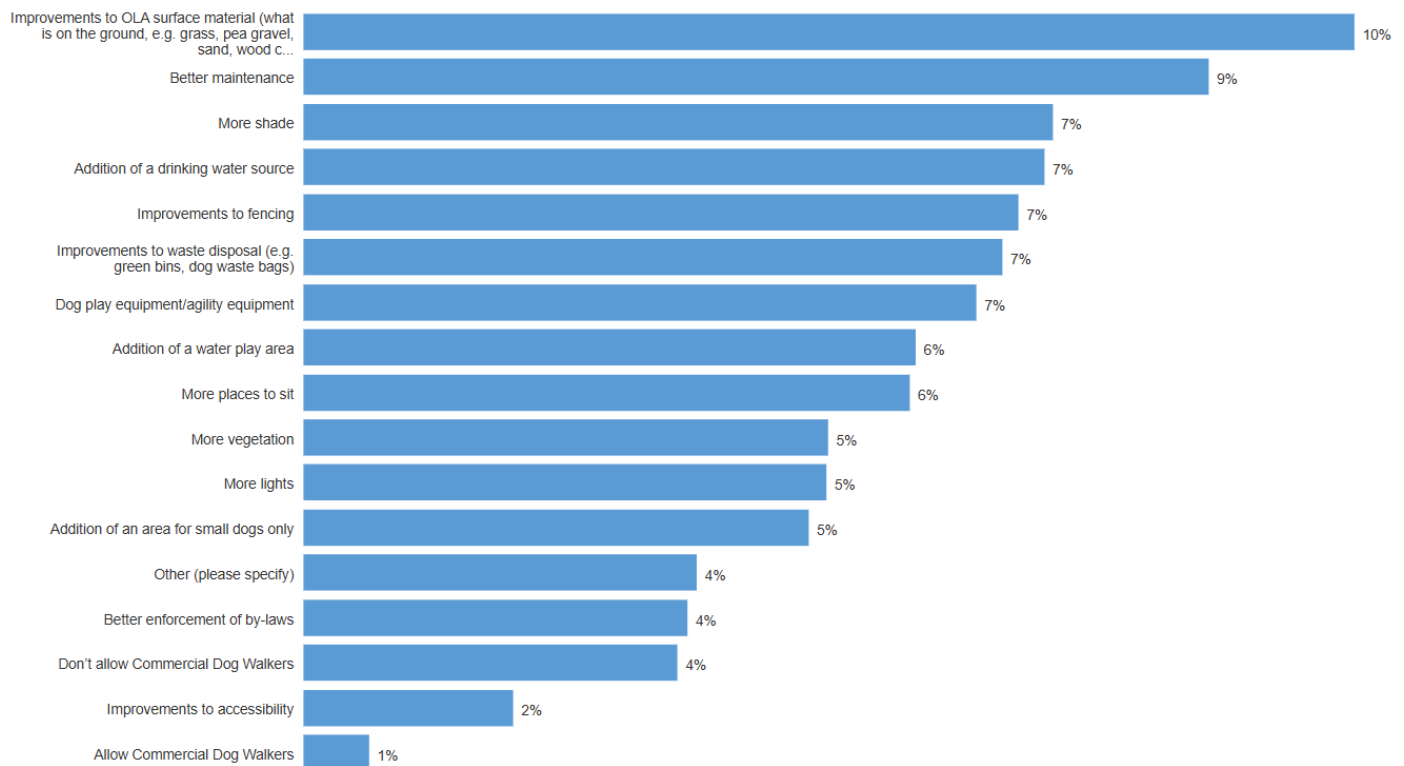


N 5.8k

How satisfied are you with the OLA you visit most often? Rate each category from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied).



How could your most visited OLA be improved? Rank your top 5 in order, with 1 being the highest priority.

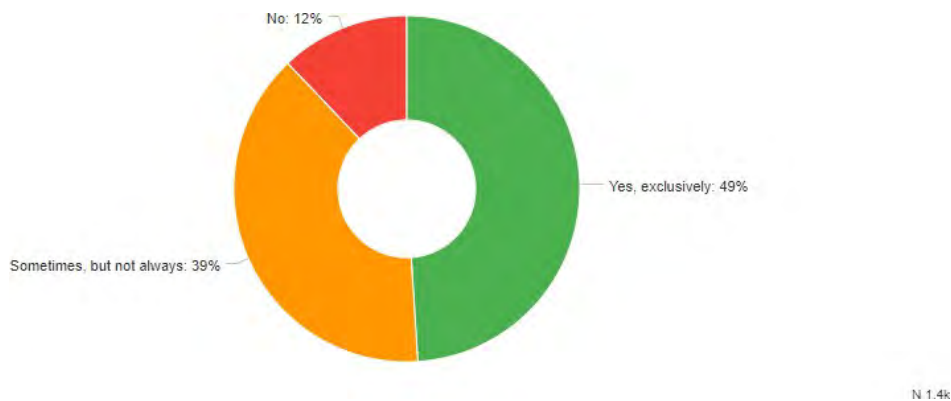


If conditions (such as maintenance and amenities) at OLAs in your community were improved, would your usage change?

	Count	% of responses	%
I would use my local OLAs more often	2.9k	<div></div>	52%
I would change which OLAs I used	285	<div></div>	5%
Both	835	<div></div>	15%
Neither	812	<div></div>	14%
Unsure	758	<div></div>	13%

N 5.6k

If your most visited OLA had an area specific to small dogs (under 20 pounds), would you use it instead of the general off-leash area for all dogs?

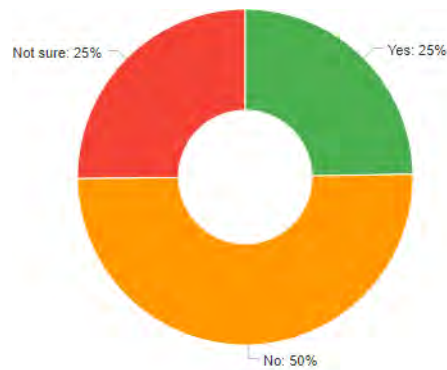


If your neighbourhood had a pet relief area in addition to the current off-leash areas in the neighbourhood, how likely would you be to use it?

	Count	% of responses	%
Very likely	1.5k	<div></div>	27%
Somewhat likely	913	<div></div>	16%
Neither likely or unlikely	842	<div></div>	15%
Somewhat unlikely	551	<div></div>	10%
Very unlikely	1.6k	<div></div>	29%
My neighbourhood already has one and my dog uses it	89	<div></div>	2%
My neighbourhood already has one and my dog does not use it	47	<div></div>	1%

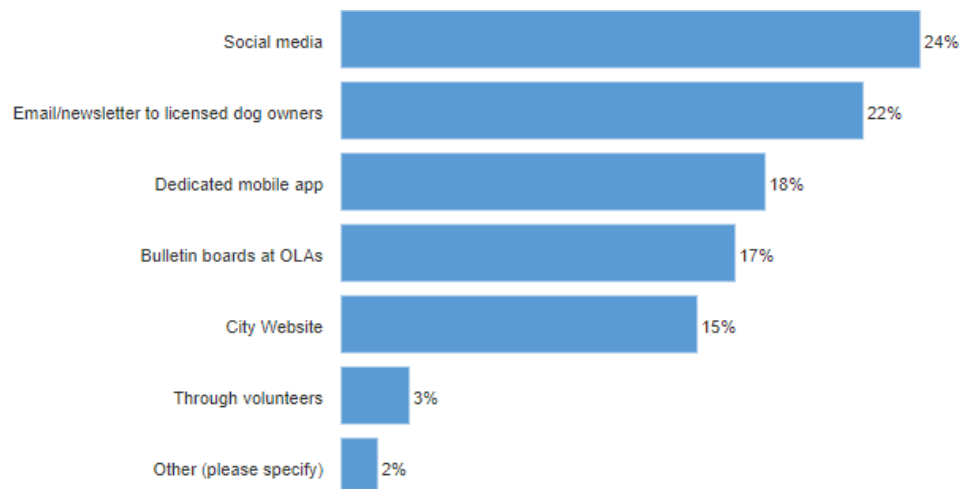
N 5.6k

If your neighbourhood had a pet relief area which was convenient for you to regularly use, would you be willing to travel farther to get to an off-leash area?



N 5.6k

How do you think the City can best communicate with dog owners and off-leash area users? Rate your top 3 in order, with 1 being the best.



N 5.5k

In what ways would you be willing to support your local OLA? Select all that apply.

	Count	% of responses	%
Providing feedback to the City on OLA matters in general through surveys and/or other engagement opportunities	4.4k	<div></div>	80%
Reporting issues at my OLA to the City	3.5k	<div></div>	63%
Participating in OLA clean up days	2.5k	<div></div>	45%
Donating towards improvements at specific OLAs	1.5k	<div></div>	26%
None of the above	355	<div></div>	6%
Other (please specify)	172	<div></div>	3%

N 5.5k

If the City were to implement a volunteer/ambassador program for OLAs, how likely would you be to participate?

	Count	% of responses	%
Very likely	556	<div></div>	10%
Somewhat likely	1.6k	<div></div>	28%
Neither likely or unlikely	1.3k	<div></div>	23%
Somewhat unlikely	952	<div></div>	17%
Very unlikely	1.2k	<div></div>	22%

N 5.5k

How many hours per month would you be willing to dedicate to volunteering at OLAs in your community?

	Count	% of responses	%
0-2 hours	814	<div></div>	39%
2-4 hours	874	<div></div>	41%
4-6 hours	269	<div></div>	13%
6-8 hours	103	<div></div>	5%
More than 8 hours	50	<div></div>	2%

N 2.1k

What roles would you be willing to do as a volunteer at OLAs in your community? Select all that apply.

	Count	% of responses	%
Joining a citywide advisory group that meets periodically to discuss OLA matters and provide feedback to the City	1.2k	<div></div>	59%
Acting as a liaison with the City and resource hub for OLA users (communicating maintenance issues to City, communicating changes from City to OLA users, maintaining the OLA bulletin board)	905	<div></div>	43%
Organizing community clean up days in the OLA	854	<div></div>	40%
Educating OLA users on municipal bylaws and responsible pet ownership	641	<div></div>	30%
Fundraising for OLAs in your community	369	<div></div>	17%
None of the above	217	<div></div>	10%
Other (please specify)	108	<div></div>	5%

N 2.1k

Demographic Questions – All Respondents

What is the age of the person filling out this survey?

	Count	% of responses	%
0 to 4 years old	5	<div></div>	0%
5 to 12 years old	1		0%
13 to 18 years old	4	<div></div>	0%
19 to 29 years old	540	<div></div>	8%
30 to 39 years old	1.9k	<div></div>	28%
40 to 55 years old	2.3k	<div></div>	36%
56 to 64 years old	917	<div></div>	14%
65 to 74 years old	590	<div></div>	9%
75 years old or above	139	<div></div>	2%
Prefer not to answer	171	<div></div>	3%

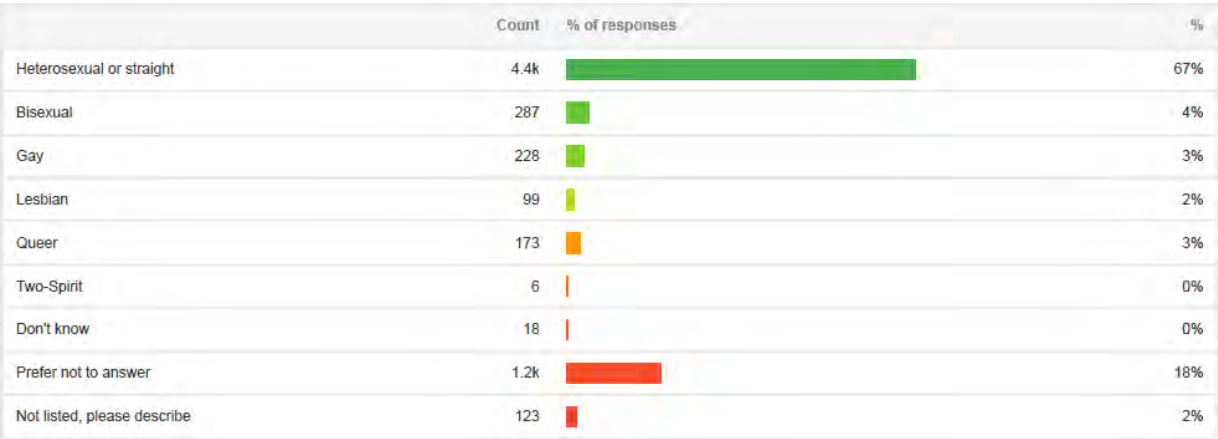
N 6.6k

Gender identity is the gender that people identify with or how they perceive themselves, which may be different from their birth-assigned sex. What best describes your gender?

	Count	% of responses	%
Woman	4.4k	<div></div>	67%
Man	1.5k	<div></div>	23%
Trans woman	3	<div></div>	0%
Trans man	11	<div></div>	0%
Gender non-binary (including gender fluid, genderqueer, androgynous)	87	<div></div>	1%
Two-Spirit	11	<div></div>	0%
Prefer not to answer	507	<div></div>	8%
Not listed, please describe	40	<div></div>	1%

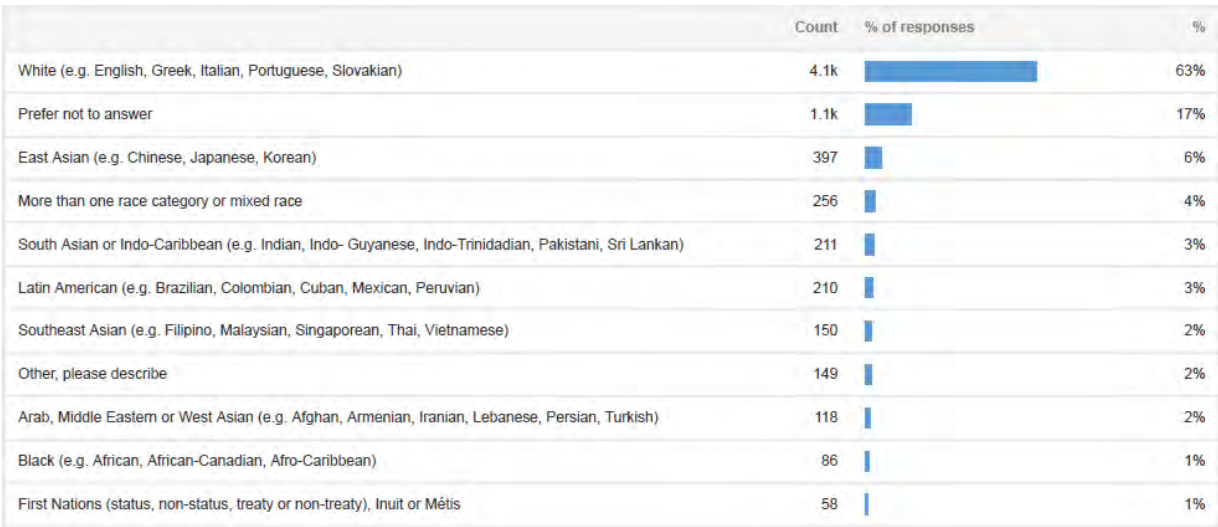
N 6.6k

Sexual orientation describes a person's emotional, physical, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to other people. What best describes your sexual orientation?



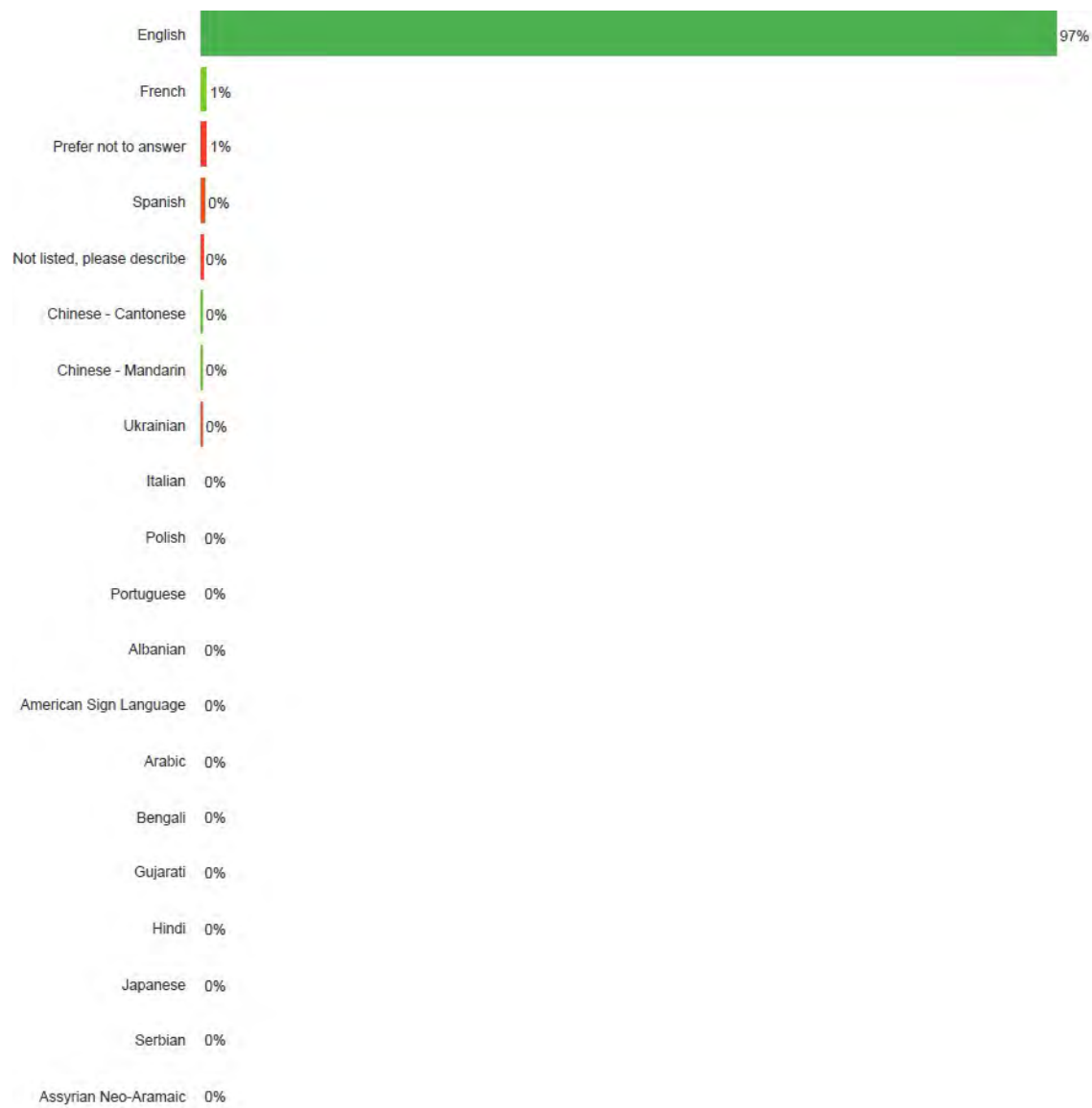
N 6.6k

People often describe themselves by their race or racial background. For example, some people consider themselves "Black", "White" or "East Asian". Which race category best describes you? Select all that apply.

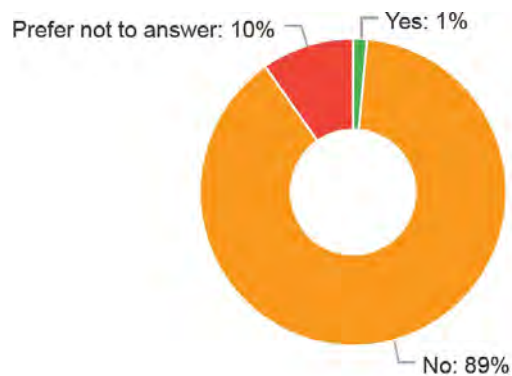


N 6.6k

What language do you prefer speaking?

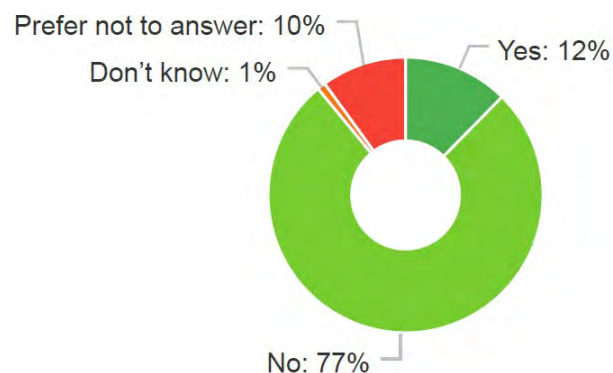


Indigenous people from Canada identify as First Nations (status, non-status, treaty or non-treaty), Inuit, Métis, Aboriginal, Native or Indian. Do you identify as Indigenous to Canada?



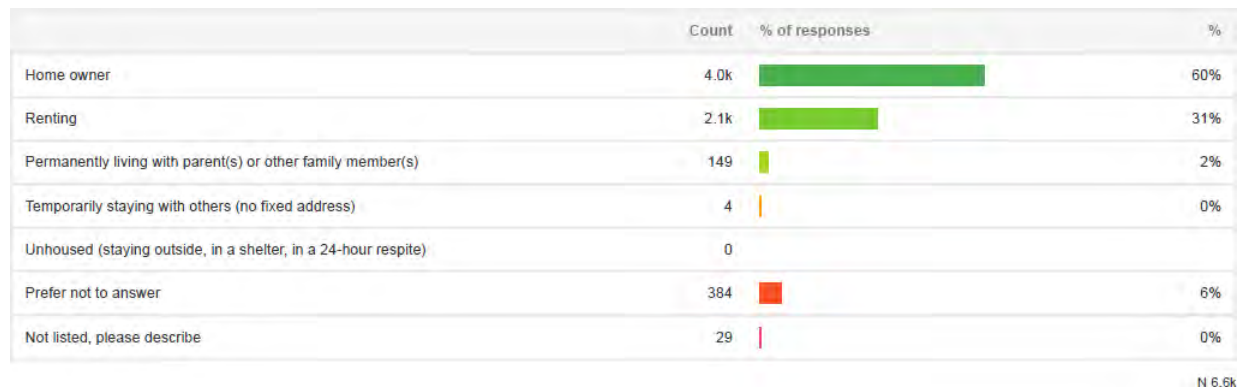
N 6.6k

Disability is understood as any physical, mental, developmental, cognitive, learning, communication, sight, hearing or functional limitation that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person's full and equal participation in society. A disability can be permanent, temporary or episodic, and visible or invisible. Do you identify as a person with a disability?



N 6.6k

What best describes your current housing situation?



What best describes you and your household's access to outdoor space?





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Tocher Heyblom Design Inc. 171 East Liberty Street, Unit 204 Toronto, ON M6K 3P6 t +1 (416) 236-3335 f +1 (866) 496-0239 e studio@thincdesign.ca

Stakeholder Meetings Feedback Summary



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Meeting Summary - Stakeholder Meeting #1

Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review

Meeting conducted on Zoom

Thursday, May 9th, 2024

6:30-8:30pm

Overview

On Thursday, May 9, 2024, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division hosted the first stakeholder engagement meeting for its Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review ("the Review"). The purpose of the review is to update the City's approach to dogs off-leash areas (OLAs) in the City of Toronto on the basis of international best practices, stakeholder engagement, and staff experience and expertise.

As part of this review, thinc design (Toronto based landscape architecture and planning firm) was engaged to conduct a series of consultations with Off-Leash Area (OLA) users, general park users, and other targeted stakeholder groups. A series of three stakeholder engagement meetings were planned to solicit input and feedback from groups who have a strong interest in OLAs in Toronto. The purpose of the first stakeholder meeting was to present and seek feedback on the provision, process, and approach of locating new OLAs in the City. Twenty-two stakeholders attended the meeting, including dog owners' associations, professional dog walkers, nature and stewardship groups, and others.

The meeting format included:

- opening remarks and introductions by City of Toronto staff;
- a presentation by thinc design on:
 - the existing and future context of OLAs in Toronto;
 - the goals and scope of the Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review;
 - an overview of the stakeholder consultation process;
 - OLA best practices; and
 - potential approaches to providing OLAs
- a group discussion facilitated by City of Toronto staff focused on the topics of:
 - OLA user preferences and usage;
 - characteristics and classification of OLAs; and
 - the planning and process development for creating new OLAs.

This meeting summary was prepared by thinc design and compiles feedback from the first of three stakeholder meetings, along with written comments submitted to the City afterwards. The summary comprises participants' opinions only, including contradictory views and issues that may be beyond the scope of the Review. Feedback has been organized below under the following headings: Key Messages, Detailed Feedback, and Feedback Beyond Meeting Scope. Attachment A of this summary comprises the meeting agenda, while a list of participants can be found in Attachment B.

Key Messages

The following key messages highlight major topics brought forward from meeting participants, which are intended to be read alongside the more detailed summary of feedback below.

1. **Proximity Matters for Regular Use:** Convenience plays a significant role in OLA selection, as closer proximity facilitates frequent visits and integrates dog walking seamlessly into daily routines. While some dog owners are willing to travel longer distances for special outings or destination OLAs, the majority prioritize accessibility and convenience for regular use.
2. **Maintenance Issues have Significant Impacts on OLA Selection:** Proper upkeep is crucial for ensuring a positive user experience, with functional gates, water access, waste management, and effective communication channels being essential components. Lower maintenance is a key factor that discourages stakeholders from using OLAs.
3. **Evidence-Based Planning Should Drive OLA Development:** Data-driven criteria, including population density, dog ownership rates, and environmental considerations, should inform decisions regarding OLA location and design.
4. **Categorizing OLAs as “Neighbourhood” and “Destination” OLAs is a Good Starting Point:** Stakeholders generally supported the categorization of OLAs into two groups but there was no consensus on what would constitute a “Destination” OLA and stakeholders disagreed on categorization of particular sites.

Detailed Feedback

User Preferences and Usage

The project team presented a list of potential criteria to consider when evaluating the need and design of new OLAs, which included geographic distance by foot and car as well as OLA characteristics such as size and features, amongst others. Stakeholder group representatives were then asked to provide feedback on their group’s preference for OLA locations, sizes, and features.

Location

- Participants generally prefer OLAs that are close by, with most willing to travel only a short distance, such as 5-15 minutes by foot, to access their local park.
 - Convenience in daily routines emerged as a key factor for encouraging regular use of OLAs.
 - There was recognition that well-designed local options could help alleviate overcrowding at destination OLAs.
 - Neighbourhood parks are seen as fostering community interaction and creating a positive atmosphere.
- Some stakeholders indicated a willingness to travel further for OLAs offering unique features such as water amenities or scenic walking paths.

Size

- The general consensus among stakeholders was in favour of having a nearby OLA, regardless of its size, rather than a larger OLA that requires further travel.
 - Concerns were raised about the lack of OLAs in many areas, leading to the use of unofficial spaces for off-leash activities (e.g., parking lots, general park spaces, etc.).
- Participants acknowledged that OLA size requirements vary across different neighbourhoods, and suggested compensating for smaller OLAs with better design features (e.g., interesting signage/communication strategy, benches, shade structure, splash pad, rocks to climb on, better surfacing, paved walkways, and small and large dog areas).

Features

- Maintenance emerged as a major issue, with complaints about broken gate latches, broken drinking fountains, flooding/mud, dirty sand, broken fencing (e.g., fencing intended to protect Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) or keep small dogs in OLAs), and inadequate surfacing.
 - Challenges getting in contact with City Staff about maintenance issues creates additional frustration.
 - The absence of water access was identified as a problem, with concerns raised about dogs using inappropriate water sources for drinking (e.g., human water fountains, brooks and rivers, etc.).
- Accessibility was emphasized as a critical consideration, with a need for OLAs that are easily accessible to all residents.
 - Existing OLAs are generally not accessible, but new ones are catching up.
 - Need to think carefully about any additions to existing OLAs (e.g., adding gravel will make OLA inaccessible).
- Participants emphasized the importance of factors such as fencing quality and height, shade, water access (turned on in time for use early in the season), and the presence of separate areas for small and large dogs.
 - Where not possible to incorporate small/large dog areas, staff could consider incorporating small dog hours.

Characteristics and Classification of OLAs

The project team presented two potential categories of OLAs to guide provision. These included Neighbourhood OLAs (i.e., used by local residents, usually smaller in size, and no special features attracting users from across the City) and Destination OLAs (i.e., used by people who travel longer distances to access, larger in size, and/or has special features in or abutting the OLA). Stakeholder group representatives were then asked to provide feedback to the City. No clear consensus emerged from the discussion.

- Participants generally agreed that categorizing OLAs into "Neighbourhood" and "Destination" parks could provide a starting point to guide provision.
- Stakeholders agreed that the definition of "Destination" parks should focus not only on size but should also emphasize factors like amenities and features.
- One participant suggested it may be helpful to add a third designation for "Urban dog parks" as the design of downtown OLAs is significantly different than other OLAs.
- Suggestions for important Destination OLA features include trails, trees, splash pads, shade, water access, benches, better surfacing, small dog areas, and accessibility.

Planning and Process Development

The project team presented a list of potential criteria to consider when evaluating the level of need and proposed location for new OLAs, including current and anticipated population density, licensed dog density, compatibility with nearby uses and neighbouring structures, and features/characteristics of sites, amongst others. Stakeholder group representatives were asked to provide feedback on the criteria that the City should consider when providing new OLAs.

Process for Evaluating Location of New OLAs

- Participants listed several priority criteria for evaluating OLA placement, including accessibility, as well as the existence of trails, trees/shade, and water access to ensure a comfortable and enriching experience for both dogs and owners.
- Participants expressed a strong interest in adding "impacts on local ecosystems" to criteria for evaluating OLA placement.
 - Avoid Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs), locations where there are known Species at Risk, and treed slopes or ravines where erosion could impact root systems.
 - Desire to conduct biological inventories to assess impacts of new OLAs on wildlife and local ecosystems.
 - Desire to consider whether trees can be managed within OLAs (e.g., trees that can withstand impacts of urine and trampling).
- Participants highlighted a number of uses from which OLAs should be situated away from to minimize negative impacts, including ESAs, wildlife habitat and education centres, schools, playgrounds, and busy thoroughfares.
- Stakeholders expressed concerns that allowing off-leash dogs on specific trail sections normalizes off-leash behaviour on all trails and that partial prohibitions are challenging to enforce.

Process for Evaluating Need for New OLAs

- A desire for evidence-based prioritization was expressed, whereby the establishment of OLAs is prioritized based on evidence and data, such as population density and the number of dogs in an area, to ensure efficient allocation of resources.
- Some participants noted a preference that the City prioritize improving the safety and uniform enforcement of existing OLAs before adding any new OLAs
- Some participants noted an interest in moving away from the old process that required people to advocate for new OLAs, while others would still like to see a requirement for an association before an OLA can be built.
- Participants expressed an interest in providing flexible guidelines for OLA establishment, to allow for a solution-based approach that is adaptable to different community needs and circumstances.
- Interest in looking at number of complaints received in certain areas about off-leash dogs to determine where new OLAs may be needed.

Feedback Beyond Meeting Scope

Education and Enforcement Promotes Responsible Dog Ownership

- Stakeholders underscored the need for comprehensive education and enforcement strategies to promote responsible dog ownership and ensure compliance with OLA rules.
- Education is viewed as the key to fostering a culture of responsible behaviour amongst dog owners. Clear signage, educational programs, program wardens, outreach efforts, and cultural context/language appropriate information for park users were proposed.
- Effective enforcement by trained by-law officers is crucial for addressing non-compliance issues and maintaining a safe and enjoyable environment for all OLA users.
 - Interest in more enforcement of dog licensing regulations and/or partnerships with vets to encourage licensing.
- Interest in supporting volunteer groups that will get involved, take ownership, and partner with by-law officers to manage OLAs.
- Some participants suggested that adding more dog parks may not solve the underlying issues, highlighting the importance of education and enforcement (e.g., Calgary has over 100 OLAs for a much smaller population and still has similar conflicts).

Call for Tools to Measure Impact of Expanding into Areas where People, Environment, and Dogs Intersect

- Stakeholders indicated concerns that adding more OLAs will not solve existing conflicts but could have major impacts on the health and wellness of parks.
 - Interest in examining data to determine if adding new OLAs is an effective approach.

- Concerns were raised about promoting the use and addition of new Destination OLAs because they require more travel (e.g., more emissions) and may contribute to biodiversity loss because they are often built in environmentally sensitive areas.
- Interest in erecting clear signs indicating where OLAs share space with other uses such as multi-use trails.
- Suggestion that the City consider closing existing OLAs located in environmentally sensitive areas (e.g., High Park) to prevent further harm to the ecosystem.

Q & A from Participants

Prior to and during the discussion, participants asked a few questions of clarification. Questions and answers are summarized below.

Question: Why are we here again – we gave input back in 2019/2020?

Answer: This round of stakeholder engagement has a broader focus than the previous engagement in 2019 and 2020, such as today's meeting around locating new off-leash areas. Additionally, for topics that were previously covered, staff have been implementing, where possible, the recommendations that came out of the 2019 and 2020 meetings and are hoping for further input based on that experience to inform the report back to Council later this year.

Question: Is the 2021 thinc design report available to view?

Answer: The stakeholder engagement summaries are available online on Toronto.ca, and the full report will be included in PFR's report back later this year, as part of this Review.

Question: Will sessions be recorded or will slides be shared?

Answer: The slide decks for each stakeholder meeting will be shared with participants and other parties who have expressed interest directly. Slide decks will also be shared on the project webpage following the conclusion of all stakeholder sessions.

Question: Could the City rely more on developers to include outdoor dog areas as a part of new developments?

Answer: At present, the City is encouraging developers to incorporate pet amenities within new multi-unit buildings through the City's "Pet Friendly Design Guidelines and Best Practices for New Multi-Unit Buildings (2019)."

Attachment A. First Meeting Agenda

Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review

Stakeholder Meeting #1: May 9, 2024

Workshop Agenda

6:30 PM Welcome and Housekeeping

- Welcome
- Land Acknowledgement
- Code of Conduct
- Introductions

6:35 PM Presentation

- Existing/Future Context
- Goals/Scope of Review
- Consultation Process
- OLA Best Practices
- Potential Approaches to Providing OLAs

6:45 PM Discussion Period

- Discussion Topic 1: User Preferences and Usage
- Discussion Topic 2: Characteristics and Classification of OLAs
- Discussion Topic 3: Planning and Process Development

8:25 PM Wrap up and Next Steps

8:30 PM Adjourn

Attachment B. First Meeting Participant List (May 9, 2024)

The following is a list of organizations that were invited to the first Stakeholder Meeting. Those organizations that were represented at the meeting are signified in bold text. In addition to the organizations listed below, there were a number of other organizations and three Toronto dog owners without any organizational affiliation who attended the meeting. Furthermore, some organizations who could not attend provided written feedback on the meeting content.

Dog Owner Associations/Off-Leash Area Groups:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allan Gardens Dog Owners Association• Balmy Beach Park Dog Owners Association• Bayview Arena Park Dog Owners Association• Beresford Park• Bickford Park• Bill Johnson Park• Botany Hill Park• Cassels Avenue Playground• Cherry Beach• Colonel Danforth Park• Colonel Sam Smith Park• Coronation Park• David Crombie Park• Don Valley Brick Works• Earl Bales Park• Friends of Sherwood Park• Garment District Neighbourhood Association• Gerrard-Carlaw Parkette• Good Dogs Social Club• Grand Manitoba Park• Grange Park• Greenwood Park• Harbourfront Dog Team• Hideaway Park• High Park• Hillcrest Park• Humber Bay Park West• Kew Gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• King's Mill Park• L'Amoreaux Park• Linkwood Lane Park• Marie Curtis Park• Merrill Bridge Road Park• Monarch Park• Norwood Park• Orphan's Green• Paws for Parks• Ramsden Park• Regent Park• Riverdale Dog Walkers Group• Riverdale Park West• Sandy Bruce Park• Seaton Village Residents Association• Sir Winston Churchill Park• Sorauren Avenue Park• South Stanley Park• St. Andrew's Playground• Stan Wadlow Park• Sunnybrook Park• Thompson Street Parkette• Thomson Memorial Park• Toronto Dog Park Community• Vermont Square• Warden Woods Park Dog Owners Association• Wildwood Crescent Playground• Withrow Park• Woburn Park• Wychwood Car Barns Park• Yonge and York Mills Park
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Other Organizations:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AccessTO• Canadian Association of Professional Dog Trainers• Canadian Dog Walkers Association• Coyote Watch Canada• High Park Natural Environment Committee• High Park Nature Centre• Park People• Protect Nature TO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Toronto Accessible Sports Council• Toronto Catholic District School Board• Toronto District School Board• Turtle Protectors
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Meeting Summary - Stakeholder Meeting #2

Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review

Meeting conducted on Zoom

Thursday, May 16th, 2024

6:30-8:30pm

Overview

On Thursday, May 16, 2024, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division hosted the second stakeholder engagement meeting for its Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas Review ("the Review"). The purpose of the review is to update the City's approach to dogs off-leash areas (OLAs) in the City of Toronto on the basis of international best practices, stakeholder engagement, and staff experience and expertise.

As part of this review, thinc design (Toronto based landscape architecture and planning firm) was engaged to conduct a series of consultations with Off-Leash Area (OLA) users, general park users, and other targeted stakeholder groups. A series of three stakeholder engagement meetings were planned to solicit input and feedback from groups who have a strong interest in OLAs in Toronto. The purpose of the second stakeholder meeting was to present and seek feedback on design elements related to OLAs in the City. Twenty-four stakeholders attended the meeting, including dog owners' associations, professional dog walkers, nature and stewardship groups, and others.

The meeting format included:

- opening remarks and introductions by City of Toronto staff;
- a presentation by thinc design on:
 - the existing and future context of OLAs in Toronto;
 - the goals and scope of the Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review;
 - an overview of the stakeholder consultation process;
 - OLA best practices; and
 - potential approaches to designing OLAs.
- a group discussion facilitated by City of Toronto staff focused on the topics of:
 - site configuration considerations;
 - prioritizing between size, design, and amenities; and
 - balancing design features and amenities.

This meeting summary was prepared by thinc design and compiles feedback from the second of three stakeholder meetings, along with written comments submitted to the City afterwards. The summary comprises participants' opinions only, including contradictory views and issues that may be beyond the scope of the Review. Feedback has been organized below under the following headings: Key Messages, Detailed Feedback, and Feedback Beyond Meeting Scope. Attachment C of this summary comprises the meeting agenda, while a list of participants can be found in Attachment D.

Key Messages

The following key messages highlight major topics brought forward from meeting participants, which are intended to be read alongside the more detailed summary of feedback below.

1. **Setback Requirements Differ According to Site Characteristics:** Stakeholders agreed that OLAs need to be distanced from sensitive uses, such as schools, playgrounds, sports fields, and natural areas like ESAs¹/ANSIs² to address safety and environmental concerns such as dogs interacting with children or wildlife. Suggested strategies for site placement ranged from developing standalone dog parks in underutilized spaces to eliminating conflicts with surrounding uses to centralizing OLAs in existing parks to prevent potential non-compliance in areas that have better access.
2. **Existing Conflicts may be Mitigated through Thoughtful Design:** Stakeholders proposed methods such as strategically locating OLA entrances and signage to deter off-leash behaviour outside designated areas, implementing fencing or hedges where suitable to safeguard surrounding uses and sensitive habitats, providing year-round water sources to deter dogs from accessing inappropriate water sources, and emphasizing user education to promote responsible dog ownership.
3. **A Balanced Approach to Fencing OLAs is Needed:** The suitable application of fencing in OLAs entails addressing concerns regarding proximity to other uses, user safety, environmental impact, and aesthetics. While some stakeholders support full fencing to prevent dogs from escaping, ensure park user safety, protect wildlife, and preserve environmentally sensitive areas, others warn of potential negative impacts such as heightened dog aggression, increased inattention in dog owners, and misuse by Commercial Dog Walkers. The decision to install fencing should be made on a case-by-case basis, considering factors like location, park usage, and community preferences.
4. **Design Considerations are Size-Dependent:** The City's approach to OLA design and amenities should be adapted according to the size of the space. Stakeholders generally agreed that small OLAs necessitate durable surface materials like K9 turf and emphasized the need for surfacing that is usable year-round. Conversely, it was established that larger OLAs typically benefit from grass surfacing, supplemented by walkways to promote movement and interaction. Concerns regarding turf maintenance, hill erosion, and material sourcing emphasize the importance of meticulous planning and environmental consideration when selecting surface materials.
5. **Essential Design Features Vary Depending on the User:** Key design features in OLAs may include year-round access to clean drinking water, adequate lighting for safety and accessibility, shade (e.g., umbrellas, trees, etc.), benches, well-maintained surfacing, and dog-friendly amenities like climbing structures and wading pools. There was no consensus on which features should be considered "must-haves" versus "nice-to-haves". Some argued that features like lighting and winterized water, while important, might vary in necessity based on budget and neighbourhood preferences.

¹ Environmentally Sensitive Areas

² Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest

Detailed Feedback

The project team presented a list of potential guidelines for evaluating the design of new OLAs, which included considerations related to site configuration (setbacks, size, topography); surfacing (grass, mulch, K9 turf); fencing, screens, and entrances; accessibility; signage; lighting; water; shade; and other amenities. Stakeholder group representatives were then asked to provide feedback on the topics outlined below. The feedback that was provided during the second stakeholder engagement meeting is detailed below.

Site Configuration Considerations

Setbacks from Other Uses

- Stakeholders highlighted the challenges associated with managing OLAs that interface with other uses, including the difficulty of enforcing on-leash areas and timed use for off-leash areas.
- Stakeholders stressed the importance of ensuring safety by keeping OLAs sufficiently separated from schools, sports fields, and playgrounds.
 - They noted that dogs sometimes get too excited if children are playing nearby or if food has been dropped, which may lead to negative interactions between dogs and general park users (e.g., stealing their balls, toys, food, etc.).
- Participants also underscored the importance of considering the compatibility of OLAs with natural areas and the necessity of adequate setbacks from these areas.
 - Dogs sometimes interact with Environmentally Significant Areas/Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest when they are let off-leash before entering an OLA, which can harm plants, trees, birds, and wildlife.
 - Dogs can pollute natural water sources and stormwater with their feces.
- It was noted that making OLAs more attractive to users is unlikely to eliminate non-compliance, which underscores the importance of using setbacks to ensure general park users' safety.

Mitigating Conflicts with Other Uses

- Stakeholders emphasized the importance of finding methods to mitigate negative impacts associated with OLAs that cause distress/harm to general park users, nearby residents, natural areas, and/or other nearby uses such as schools.
- Stakeholders suggested using fences to separate OLAs from playgrounds and park entrances to minimize conflicts.
- Participants highlighted the need to strategically place OLA entrances to avoid conflicts with other park users (e.g., avoid long distances between park entrances and OLAs to discourage owners from letting dogs off-leash before reaching the OLA).
- A desire to avoid using a one-size-fits-all approach to setbacks was expressed by several stakeholders.
 - Closer situation to certain uses may be feasible depending on the design of the OLA (e.g., use of trees/hedges or timed locking gates to limit noise impact).

- Education about responsible dog ownership and interactions between dogs and nature/wildlife was suggested to mitigate negative impacts to surrounding uses/areas.
- One stakeholder suggested that preventing OLAs from developing in certain areas may fuel conflicts caused by non-compliance (i.e., if OLAs are not allowed to be located near people's residences, dog owners will break the rules and use the areas that are most convenient for them to access).
- Participants suggested locating OLAs outside of existing parks in underutilized spaces to mitigate negative impacts (e.g., locating OLAs in industrial areas, hydro corridors, under the Gardiner Expressway, etc.).
- Stakeholders also suggested using pilot programs/experimentation to assess the effectiveness of various setback distances and mitigation measures across different OLA locations.

Fencing

- Participants expressed varying opinions about the usefulness of fencing in OLAs.
- Certain participants cautioned against the overuse of fencing for the following reasons:
 - it can make dogs feel trapped, which in turn leads to more aggression;
 - it can attract Commercial Dog Walkers, who may leave a higher number of dogs to roam free in the area largely unattended; and
 - fencing can limit the communal use of a park space.
- Other participants supported full fencing for the following reasons:
 - to prevent dogs from escaping;
 - to prevent negative interactions with other park users;
 - to prevent dogs from interacting with wildlife; and
 - to preserve environmentally sensitive areas.
- A desire was expressed to ensure that, where fencing is required, it is high enough, can prevent small dogs from escaping, and is well-maintained.
- Stakeholders expressed a desire for better fencing to be provided around seasonal OLAs like Cherry Beach, Woodbine Park and Kew-Balmy Beach.

Relationship Between OLA Size, Surface Type, and Required Durability

- Stakeholders generally agreed that small OLAs require more durable surface materials like K9 turf, mulch, or concrete, while grass is usually more appropriate for large OLAs.
- Stakeholders raised the following concerns about the practicality and maintenance of certain surface types:
 - K9 turf:
 - may get hot when not adequately shaded;
 - can become olfactory sensitive due to urine and fecal smells;
 - dog hair gets easily stuck in turf; and
 - concerns about the invasiveness of turf.
 - Concrete:
 - likely only useful in very urban settings; and
 - needs to be hosed down regularly.

- Grass:
 - hard to plant grass seed if dogs are already using the area;
 - in at least one ward, a councillor has refused to resod areas that are heavily used by dogs; and
 - wearing down grassy hills can cause erosion and muddy areas.
- Mulch/woodchips:
 - concerns about sourcing adequate materials (e.g., depending on the source, mulch can smell bad or come with pests).
- Participants emphasized the need for solutions that are suitable for all seasons.
- Participants also noted the importance of considering how other features interact with surface materials, such as walkways providing accessibility through grassed areas and encouraging human movement around the OLA and the use of mounds/moguls to make the surfacing more interesting.

Balancing Design Features and Amenities

“Must Have” Design Features

- Participants underscored the importance of designing OLAs to be enjoyable for both dogs and humans, with features like trails, play structures, appropriate natural features, and varied landscapes.
- Participants emphasized the importance of including drinking water sources in OLAs regardless of size (more about what they are located near) to prevent disruption to ecosystems or inappropriate use of water sources such as sump pumps and human water fountains.
 - Some participants stressed the necessity of winterized water taps, in particular.
- Some stakeholders advocated that lighting is essential for OLAs to ensure accessibility and safety (especially during periods of the year where it gets dark early in the evening).
- Shade was also noted as a “must have” for many participants, with several noting an interest in trees, in particular.
 - Participants noted the importance of ensuring that tree species be carefully considered to ensure they are not invasive and can withstand impacts of OLAs.
- The importance of establishing maintenance strategies within each OLA was noted as crucial for ensuring that design features are maintained.
 - A desire was expressed to supply park communities with shovels, wheelbarrows, soil, etc. to help local groups maintain OLAs.
 - Importance of “healthy surfaces” was expressed.

“Nice to Have” Design Features

- Some stakeholders argued that features like winterized water and lighting should be seen as optional, citing concerns about cost, neighbourhood disturbance, and practicality.
- Participants highlighted an interest in natural fencing, such as hedges, for aesthetic and functional purposes.

- Stakeholders noted a desire for various amenities like climbing surfaces for dogs, umbrellas, benches, human water fountains, small dog areas, and wading pools.

Feedback Beyond Meeting Scope

Collaborations with the Private Sector

- Some stakeholders noted an interest in collaborating with the private sector to provide OLAs in the following ways:
 - by encouraging/requiring developers to include OLAs in new developments;
 - by working with the private sector to create “OLA Clubs” (e.g., paid OLAs); and
 - by exploring user fees for specific OLAs (e.g., destination OLAs).

Exploration of Revenue Generation Tools

- An interest in exploring opportunities for revenue generation was noted by some participants, including by the following means:
 - Creating outdoor advertising spaces near OLA entrances to fund better maintenance of OLAs; and
 - Working with pet supply companies to sponsor some OLAs.

Q & A from Participants

Prior to and during the discussion, participants asked a few questions of clarification. Questions and answers are summarized below.

Question: Why is any setback necessary? Are regular parks required to have setbacks?

Answer: Setbacks are an important way to separate OLAs from abutting park and community uses. For example, separating an OLA from a playground or sports field for safety concerns or residential area to avoid noise pollution for residents.

Question: How many city parks currently have both an OLA and an ESA?

Answer: City staff noted they would have to check with their colleagues to get this answer and provide it to the stakeholder once received.

Question: Are native grasses being considered rather than the standard turf grass?

Answer: Native grasses tend to be tall and not ideal for mowing, the OLAs need to have utility for exercising, mowing, reducing tick exposure. There is a doggy turf, and rye grass mixes that could be cut to three inches and be able to withstand dog wear and tear and urine.

Question: Are solar lights being considered as a lighting option?

Answer: Solar lighting is an option that can be explored when developing OLAs, but this would be dependent on the particular budget and Parks staff views on maintaining solar panels, circuitry and lights.

Attachment C. Second Meeting Agenda

Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review

Stakeholder Meeting #2: May 16, 2024

Workshop Agenda

6:30 PM Welcome and Housekeeping

- Welcome
- Land Acknowledgement
- Code of Conduct
- Introductions

6:35 PM Presentation

- Existing/Future Context
- Goals/Scope of Review
- Consultation Process
- OLA Best Practices
- Potential Approaches to Designing OLAs

6:45 PM Discussion Period

- Discussion Topic 1: Site Configuration Considerations
- Discussion Topic 2: Prioritizing Between Size, Design, and Amenities
- Discussion Topic 3: Balancing Design Features and Amenities

8:25 PM Wrap up and Next Steps

8:30 PM Adjourn

Attachment D. Second Meeting Participant List (May 16, 2024)

The following is a list of organizations that were invited to the second Stakeholder Meeting. Those organizations that were represented at the meeting are signified in bold text. In addition to the organizations listed below, there were a number of other organizations and five Toronto dog owners without any organizational affiliation who attended the meeting. Furthermore, some organizations who could not attend provided written feedback on the meeting content.

Dog Owner Associations/Off-Leash Area Groups:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allan Gardens Dog Owners Association • Balmy Beach Park Dog Owners Association • Bayview Arena Park Dog Owners Association • Beresford Park • Bickford Park • Bill Johnson Park • Botany Hill Park • Cassels Avenue Playground • Cherry Beach • Coronation Park • Colonel Danforth Park • Colonel Sam Smith Park • David Crombie Park • Don Valley Brick Works • Earl Bales Park • Friends of Sherwood Park • Garment District Neighbourhood Association • Gerrard-Carlaw Parkette • Good Dogs Social Club • Grand Manitoba Park • Grange Park • Greenwood Park • Harbourfront Dog Team • Hideaway Park • High Park K9 Committee • Hillcrest Park • Humber Bay Park West • Kew Gardens • King's Mill Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L'Amoreaux Park • Linkwood Lane Park • Marie Curtis Park • Merrill Bridge Road Park • Monarch Park • Norwood Park • Orphan's Green • Paws for Parks • Ramsden Park • Regent Park • Riverdale Dog Walkers Group • Riverdale Park West • Sandy Bruce Park • Seaton Village Residents Association • Sir Winston Churchill Park • Sorauren Avenue Park • South Stanley Park • St. Andrew's Playground • Stan Wadlow Park • Sunnybrook Park • Thompson Street Parkette • Thomson Memorial Park • Toronto Dog Park Community • Vermont Square • Warden Woods Park Dog Owners Association • Wildwood Crescent Playground • Withrow Park • Woburn Park • Wychwood Car Barns Park • Yonge and York Mills Park
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Other Organizations:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AccessTO• Canadian Association of Professional Dog Trainers• Canadian Dog Walkers Association• High Park Natural Environment Committee• High Park Nature Centre• Coyote Watch Canada• Park People• Protect Nature TO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Toronto Accessible Sports Council• Toronto Catholic District School Board• Toronto District School Board• Turtle Protectors
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Meeting Summary - Stakeholder Meeting #3

Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review

Meeting conducted on Zoom

Thursday, May 23rd, 2024

6:30-8:30pm

Overview

On Thursday, May 23rd, 2024, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division hosted the third stakeholder engagement meeting for its Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas Review ("the Review"). The purpose of the review is to update the City's approach to dogs off-leash areas (OLAs) in the City of Toronto on the basis of international best practices, stakeholder engagement, and staff experience and expertise.

As part of this review, a series of three stakeholder engagement meetings were planned to solicit input and feedback from groups who have a strong interest in OLAs in Toronto. The purpose of the third stakeholder meeting was to present and seek feedback on bylaw enforcement, education, communication, and volunteer involvement in OLAs in the City. Nineteen stakeholders attended the meeting, including dog owners' associations, professional dog walkers, nature and stewardship groups, and others.

The meeting format included:

- Opening remarks and introductions by City of Toronto staff
- Presentation by thinc design on:
 - the existing and future context of OLAs in Toronto;
 - the goals and scope of the Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review;
 - an overview of the stakeholder consultation process;
 - OLA best practices; and
 - potential approaches to bylaw enforcement, education, communication, and volunteer involvement in OLAs
- Group discussion facilitated by thinc design focused on:
 - community involvement in OLAs
 - communication about OLAs
 - bylaw compliance and education related to OLAs

This meeting summary was prepared by thinc design and compiles feedback from the third of three stakeholder meetings, along with written comments submitted to the City afterwards. The summary comprises participants' opinions only, including contradictory views and issues that may be beyond the scope of the Review. Feedback has been organized below under the following headings: Key Messages and Detailed Feedback. Attachment E of this summary comprises the meeting agenda, while a list of participants can be found in Attachment F.

Key Messages

The following key messages highlight major topics brought forward from meeting participants, which are intended to be read alongside the more detailed summary of feedback below.

1. **Volunteer Programs Require Stronger City-Backing:** While meeting participants maintained that volunteer programs could play a crucial role in supporting Off-Leash Areas (OLAs) by contributing to maintenance, stewardship, educational initiatives, and community engagement, they also underscored the necessity for stronger support from the City to optimize the effectiveness of any future programs. Challenges such as volunteer recruitment, resource management, and the need for greater recognition of volunteers within the OLA community were highlighted. To this end, stakeholders proposed an ideal model for OLA volunteer programs, advocating for a combination of park-specific volunteer groups tailored to individual park needs in addition to a city-wide advisory group.
2. **Communication and Education Campaigns should be Multifaceted and Tailored to Specific Sites:** Improving community engagement and compliance with OLA regulations demands a multifaceted approach to communication and education which aims to foster a culture of responsible dog guardianship in parks. According to the meeting participants, achieving this requires a comprehensive communication and education strategy which entails implementing a variety of initiatives, including both site-specific and city-wide communication campaigns, city-backed volunteer programs, and innovative outreach methods that extend beyond conventional channels like signs and social media.
3. **Enhanced Enforcement Measures Are a Top Priority:** Stakeholders underscored the importance of a balanced approach to education and enforcement in ensuring compliance within OLAs. Recognizing the significance of enforcement challenges, stakeholders advocated for augmenting resources and authority for bylaw officers and relevant City personnel. Additionally, they emphasized leveraging community partnerships and embracing innovative solutions to bolster adherence to OLA regulations.

Detailed Feedback

The project team presented relevant statistics and information about dog-related issues in parks, existing bylaw enforcement practices and challenges, potential approaches to communication and signage related to OLAs, and a list of potential models and activities for OLA volunteer/ambassador groups in the City. Stakeholder group representatives were then asked to provide feedback on the topics outlined below. The feedback that was provided during the third stakeholder engagement meeting is detailed below.

Community Role in OLAs

Challenges Encountered by Volunteers

- Low Participation and Engagement
 - Participants stated that many dog parks struggle to engage volunteers beyond a few dedicated individuals, leading to burnout and limited impact.
 - While some stakeholders acknowledged that it is possible to engage volunteers together for sporadic events like annual clean ups, there was a clear desire for assistance with recruiting volunteers for sustained involvement in dog park associations (e.g., encouraging high school students to volunteer to conduct maintenance tasks as a means of earning volunteer hours).
- Education and Behaviour Management
 - Stakeholders recognized the importance of educating dog owners about responsible behaviour within parks. However, they voiced frustration over encountering resistance from certain dog owners when approached about adhering to OLA regulations, such as controlling their dogs, cleaning up after them, and addressing any damage caused, resulting in tensions between volunteers and park users.
 - Many participants voiced frustration over challenges associated with reaching a bylaw officer when enforcement was required, including delays in response time and limitations in bylaw officers' capacity to enforce compliance.
- Resource Management
 - Challenges exist amongst stakeholder groups in managing resources like maintenance equipment effectively, with issues such as theft, misuse and disuse reported.

Roles for Volunteers and Stakeholders

- Maintenance and Stewardship
 - Participants generally agreed that OLA volunteer groups can be highly impactful when they have appropriate support from the City.
 - Stakeholders emphasized the vital role of volunteer groups in park maintenance and stewardship, which could include tasks such as repairing holes, managing resources (e.g., dog poop bags, tools, etc.), leveling surfaces, and reporting rule violations.

- Educational Initiatives and Community Engagement
 - Participants suggested that volunteer groups could contribute to community engagement and education by:
 - answering park users' questions and educating them about responsible pet ownership, park rules, safety in OLAs, and bylaws;
 - acting as ambassadors by liaising between the City and park users, promoting City services such as licensing, and fostering a sense of community within the OLA; and
 - hosting training on bylaw compliance, environmental stewardship, and dog training.

Preferred Models for Volunteer Programs

- Stakeholders agreed that the preferred model for OLA volunteer programs includes park-specific volunteer groups as well as a city-wide advisory group.
 - Park-specific groups would be tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of individual parks (e.g., volunteers in specific parks would have knowledge related to unique park conditions, such as environmentally sensitive areas).
 - City-wide advisory groups would provide oversight and support for multiple or all park sites to ensure efficacy and sustainability of individual park groups.
- Participants expressed a desire for stewardship programs to receive official support from the City. This backing would provide a clear mandate for volunteer groups, offer supportive training for volunteers, and enhance recognition of their role within the community.
- Many stakeholders referred to Calgary's Off-Leash Ambassador program as a positive example of how a program could be run.

Communications

Effective Communication Strategies

- Engaging Signage
 - Participants stressed the importance of site-specific signage, advocating against uniformity across the city. They emphasized the need for signage to offer clear guidelines and explanations tailored to each individual Off-Leash Area (OLA).
 - Stakeholders voiced a desire for signs to be positioned at eye-level with more engaging graphics to get people's attention before they enter an OLA and mitigate against language barriers (e.g., Vancouver's use of three different coloured signs to signify off-leash areas, on-leash areas, and no-dog areas).
 - Many participants expressed a need for signage to not only outline rules for both dogs and humans but also explain the rationale behind these rules, making it clear why certain behaviours are expected. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of providing user-friendly instructions for handling situations where rules are not followed, such as diffusing aggressive dog behaviour or knowing whom to contact in case of an emergency.

- Participants recommended expanding signage content beyond rules to encompass helpful tips, OLA etiquette guidelines, information about dog body language, and details about environmentally sensitive areas, among other relevant topics.
- There was an overarching interest in taking a comprehensive approach to signage, aiming to ensure that it functions cohesively and effectively on a city-wide scale.
- Stakeholders expressed a desire for signage that gives clear direction to park users and clear messaging about their role in caring for the space (e.g., “this environmentally significant area needs your extra care)
- **Diverse Outreach**
 - Beyond traditional methods like signs and social media, participants suggested that outreach should extend to local vet offices, pet stores, community events, libraries, and schools and should utilize evidence-based approaches such as community-based social marketing to create meaningful changes.
 - Stakeholders noted that it would be helpful if there was a team separate from bylaw officers that could be contacted when there are high stress OLA situations (e.g., dog fights/bites).
- **Volunteer Identification**
 - Stakeholders recommended equipping volunteers with identification attire/tools (such as badges/ID, vests or uniforms featuring the City logo, City-branded informational pamphlets, advertisements in OLAs identifying volunteers, etc.) to enhance community recognition of their role, thereby enabling them to serve as more effective ambassadors.

Bylaw Compliance and Education

Issues Related to Off-Leash Areas

- **Enforcement Challenges**
 - Participants underscored that enforcement of park rules, licensing requirements, and bylaws stands out as one of the most significant challenges concerning OLAs, primarily due to resource constraints and delays in response times.
 - Participants stressed the adverse effects of allowing dogs off-leash in on-leash areas, highlighting the negative impacts on other users who share the space, especially in areas frequented by children such as nearby schools and nature education centers.
 - Stakeholders highlighted that the low rate of licensed dogs in Toronto poses challenges in addressing non-compliant behaviours. For instance, stakeholders expressed concern that in situations where a person is bitten by a dog and lacks information about the dog's vaccination status, the resolution process becomes significantly more complicated.
 - Stakeholder expressed concern that more OLAs will not resolve enforcement challenges as there are already many OLAs that people decline to use, choosing instead to use on-leash areas

- Concerns that, with more people working from home, having OLAs close to residential areas can lead to excessive noise that disrupts people not only during the evening, but also throughout the day
- Interest in limiting the number of Commercial Dog Walkers that can use individual OLAs to avoid overcrowding, inequitable use of space, and prevent dog packs from creating conflicts within OLAs
- Dog Behaviour Concerns
 - Participants highlighted that aggressive dog behaviour and lack of control of dogs is causing increasing risks to both park users and animals.
 - Stakeholders noted concerns that the number of dog bites reported constitute only a fraction of what is actually occurring.
 - One participant expressed the view that badly behaved dogs are often brought into fenced OLAs because they cannot be trusted in other spaces.
 - Participants noted the negative impact that large numbers of dogs (especially groups brought in by commercial dog walkers) can have on OLAs and dog owners' willingness to use them.
- Managing Impacts of Dogs on Ecological Resources
 - Participants stressed the significance of dogs' impacts on park vegetation and wildlife habitats (e.g., health impacts of dog feces on natural areas, dogs chasing coyotes, ducks, etc.).
 - Specific concerns about high density areas that are located close to large natural areas without a dog park nearby were cited by one participant.
 - Participants voiced frustration that dog owners are unaware of the significance of dogs' impacts on ecological resources and are ignoring regulations about dogs in natural areas.

Tactics for Promoting Compliance

- Combining Education and Enforcement
 - While stakeholders acknowledged the importance of both education and enforcement in promoting compliance and behaviour change in OLAs, they expressed a keen interest in bolstering enforcement measures by providing additional resources and authority to bylaw officers and associated City staff to support initiatives such as active ticketing, conducting licensing compliance checks, and implementing policy reforms related to licensing.
 - Some participants suggested that communications relating to OLA rules should not only note what not to do but should also list examples of responsible OLA behaviour.
 - Stakeholders expressed a desire to see a closer alignment between the concept of positive pet guardianship and land stewardship as part of OLA education efforts. They also emphasized the importance of conveying to park users the privilege associated with accessing and utilizing these spaces.
- Utilizing Community Resources
 - Participants suggested that the City should leverage partnerships with vet offices, dog groomers, dog walkers, school boards, newcomer groups, and other

community organizations to enhance education and outreach efforts related to OLAs.

- Examining Repeated Non-compliance
 - Stakeholders observed a common occurrence in OLAs where a few dogs are responsible for instigating conflicts among others. They suggested that identifying these main instigators, either individually or by recognizing common traits, could significantly improve the management of disruptive behaviour in OLAs.
- Innovative Solutions
 - Suggestions for innovative solutions to complement traditional enforcement measures were shared by many participants, including pop-up training sessions and a recommendation for keycard activated electronic gates limited to users with vaccinated/licensed dogs.

Q & A from Participants

Prior to and during the discussion, participants asked several clarification questions. Questions and answers are summarized below.

Question: How often is the bylaw which requires handlers to be in control of their dog in parks enforced?

Answer: Per the Parks Bylaw, while in a City Park all owners/persons in charge of a dog must always keep their dog(s) on a leash and under control (except in a designated off-leash area). Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS) enforcement officers undertake frequent proactive enforcement patrols in priority parks (where there are persistent and problematic bylaw compliance issue, including dogs off-leash and not under control) and visit most other parks monthly. During patrols, all aspects of relevant bylaws are assessed for compliance.

Question: Is impounding dogs that are not in compliance with City off-leash bylaw requirements an option?

Answer: Under the Animals Bylaw, MLS has the authority to seize and impound at large dogs when no owner is present. When a dog is off-leash and the owner is present, the dog is not at large so the seizure powers in the Animals Bylaw would not be applicable. In those cases, MLS officers continue to educate the owner about bylaw requirements and the importance of always keeping dogs on a leash and under control. Officers may also take enforcement action when appropriate, including laying charges.

Question: Is having Peace Officers who are able to demand identification an option?

Answer: As part of this review, MLS will be reviewing all options for enhanced bylaw compliance and enforcement strategies. When possible, bylaw officers do conduct enforcement in partnership with Toronto Police to improve bylaw compliance.

Question: How do limitations on bylaw officers' powers impact their approach to compliance efforts?

Answer: Bylaw enforcement officers do have legal authority to ask for ID, but if the individual refuses to show their ID, they cannot arrest them. Consequently, where necessary (e.g., in Canoe Landing), bylaw officers have conducted strategies in conjunction with Toronto Police to improve bylaw compliance and the park has significantly improved as a result.

Question: On a yearly basis, how many fines are actually given in association with dogs in parks?

Answer: From January to May 2024, 28 charges have been issued for dog related issues in parks. In 2023 11 charges were issued. . MLS takes a compliance and education first approach to enforcement. Our priority is education as many dog owners do not know they are breaking the rules.

Attachment E. Third Meeting Agenda

Citywide Approach to Off-Leash Areas Review
Stakeholder Meeting #3: May 23, 2024

Workshop Agenda

6:30 PM Welcome and Housekeeping

- Welcome
- Land Acknowledgement
- Code of Conduct
- Introductions

6:35 PM Presentation

- Existing/Future Context
- Goals/Scope of Review
- Consultation Process
- OLA Best Practices
- Potential Approaches to Bylaw Enforcement, Education, Communication, and Volunteer Involvement in OLAs

6:45 PM Discussion Period

- Discussion Topic 1: Community Involvement in OLAs
- Discussion Topic 2: Communication about OLAs
- Discussion Topic 3: Bylaw Compliance and Education related to OLAs

8:25 PM Wrap up and Next Steps

8:30 PM Adjourn

Attachment F. Third Meeting Participant List (May 23, 2024)

The following is a list of organizations that were invited to the third Stakeholder Meeting. Those organizations that were represented at the meeting are signified in bold text. In addition to the organizations listed below, there were a number of other organizations and four Toronto dog owners/walkers without any organizational affiliation who attended the meeting. Furthermore, some organizations who could not attend provided written feedback on the meeting content.

Dog Owner Associations/Off-Leash Area Groups:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC Residents Association • Allan Gardens Dog Owners Association • Balmy Beach Park Dog Owners Association • Bayview Arena Park Dog Owners Association • Beresford Park • Bickford Park • Bill Johnson Park • Botany Hill Park • Cassels Avenue Playground • Cherry Beach • Colonel Danforth Park • Colonel Sam Smith Park • Coronation Park • David Crombie Park • Don Valley Brick Works • Earl Bales Park • Friends of Humber Bay Park • Friends of Sherwood Park • Garment District Neighbourhood Association • Gerrard-Carlaw Parkette • Good Dogs Social Club • Grand Manitoba Park • Grange Park • Greenwood Park • Harbourfront Dog Team • Hideaway Park • High Park K9 Committee • Hillcrest Park • Humber Bay Park West 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kew Gardens • King's Mill Park • L'Amoreaux Park • Linkwood Lane Park • Marie Curtis Park • Merrill Bridge Road Park • Monarch Park • Norwood Park • Orphan's Green • Paws for Parks • Ramsden Park • Regent Park • Riverdale Dog Walkers Group • Riverdale Park West • Sandy Bruce Park • Seaton Village Residents Association • Sir Winston Churchill Park • Sorauren Avenue Park • South Stanley Park • St. Andrew's Playground • Stan Wadlow Park • Sunnybrook Park • Thompson Street Parkette • Thomson Memorial Park • Toronto Dog Park Community • Vermont Square • Warden Woods Park Dog Owners Association • Wildwood Crescent Playground • Withrow Park • Woburn Park • Wychwood Car Barns Park
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- Yonge and York Mills Park

Other Organizations:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AccessTO • Canadian Association of Professional Dog Trainers • Canadian Dog Walkers Association • Coyote Watch Canada • High Park Natural Environment Committee • High Park Nature Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park People • Protect Nature TO • Toronto Accessible Sports Council • Toronto Catholic District School Board • Toronto District School Board • Turtle Protectors
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Commercial Dog Walker Engagement - Summary Report

City of Toronto – Parks and Recreation

March 2025



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Introduction

In June 2024, City Council directed Parks and Recreation (P&R) to develop criteria to determine sites acceptable for Commercial Dog Walkers and to propose a list of acceptable sites across the city as part of the review of the City's approach to dog off-leash areas. As part of the review, City staff undertook a review of other jurisdictions, a public survey, engaged with stakeholders through a public meeting, reviewed 311 service requests to determine potential considerations for CDW access to OLAs which were presented and discussed with stakeholders, including Commercial Dog Walkers, for feedback and informed the guidance developed.

This document provides a summary of the feedback and insights collected.

Project Background

Commercial Dog Walker Overview

At the time of consultation, there were 201 permitted Commercial Dog Walkers in the City of Toronto. The City of Toronto requires that individuals who walk four to six dogs on a commercial basis obtain a permit. A permit must be renewed after its expiration (one year, six months, or three months). While using City parks, Commercial Dog Walkers are required to:

- Display a permit in a visible manner when walking four to six dogs;
- Maintain valid commercial general liability insurance coverage;
- Ensure that all dogs under their care are wearing a valid City of Toronto dog license tag;
- Dispose of dog waste in bins provided; and
- Abide by existing designated off-leash areas, area boundaries, and hours of operation.

Commercial Dog Walkers are prohibited from bringing dogs into certain areas including:

- Playgrounds, splash pads and wading pools;
- Skateparks, tennis courts and sports fields;
- Ice rinks and toboggan hills;
- Blue Flag designated beaches;
- Campgrounds;
- Parks designated as unsuitable for Commercial Dog Walkers;
- Areas posted prohibiting dogs; and

- Areas posted prohibiting Commercial Dog Walkers.

Failure to comply with any of these conditions are subject to fines and repeat offenders will have their permit(s) suspended.

Potential Considerations

In June 2024, City Council directed Parks and Recreation (P&R) to develop criteria to determine sites acceptable for Commercial Dog Walkers and to propose a list of acceptable sites across the city as part of the review of the City's approach to dog off-leash areas ([2024.MM19.3](#)).

Through the engagement and review process, the City identified potential criteria options for consideration, including:

- Size of Dogs Off-Leash Area.
- Fencing of Dogs Off-Leash Area.
- Consideration for the proximity of Dogs Off-Leash Area to other land uses e.g. residential, Environmentally Significant Areas, etc.
- Availability of Small Dog Area in Dogs Off-Leash Area.
- Hours of Operation restrictions for Commercial Dog Walkers.

How We Reached People

A number of different methods were used to inform the public and stakeholders of the engagement process, include:

Project webpage

The webpage (toronto.ca/OLAstudy) provided up-to-date information about the project, details about engagement activities, and a sign-up button for community members to subscribe to the mailing list and receive email updates.

Targeted Stakeholder Emails

An email update was sent to a list of stakeholders notifying them of the upcoming engagement opportunities, including relevant dates, links and other details. The stakeholders included but were not limited to: Licensed Commercial Dog Walkers, Friends of Parks groups, Dog Owners' Associations, Dog-related Advocacy groups, and participants in the previous focus groups for the Citywide Dogs Off-Leash Areas review in May 2024.

Mailing list

An email update was sent to the project mailing list notifying subscribers of the online survey, including relevant dates, links and other details.

Social media

The online survey was promoted through posts on the Parks, Forestry and Recreation division's [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#) accounts. The survey was promoted on October 24 and 25, 2024.

Engagement Activities

The engagement activities included an online public survey and a virtual public meeting.

Online Public Survey

An online citywide public survey was undertaken from October 16 to November 7, 2024 focused on the following areas:

- Dog ownership and current use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas;
- Commercial Dog Walker use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas; and
- Review of potential considerations for CDW access to OLAs

Respondents also had the opportunity to write feedback or suggestions on anything else the City should consider.

a. Who We Heard From

The online survey received 1,363 complete responses. Of the 1,363 respondents who completed the survey, 102 (seven per cent) identified as Commercial Dog Walkers. This represents approximately 49 per cent of active permits in the City of Toronto at the time of engagement. Approximately 1,200 respondents (73 per cent) identified as owning one or more dog(s).

b. Overview of Survey Results

When asked if they had any concerns with the current use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas by Commercial Dog Walkers:

- 74 per cent of respondents said No
- 26 per cent of respondents said Yes

When asked if Commercial Dog Walkers should be allowed to use every Dogs Off-Leash Area in Toronto:

- 51 per cent of respondents said yes, Commercial Dog Walkers should be able to use every Dogs Off-Leash Area.
- 16 per cent of respondents said no, there should be limits on which Dogs Off-Leash Areas Commercial Dog Walkers can use and limits on what hours Commercial Dog Walkers can use Dogs Off-Leash Areas.

- 15 per cent of respondents said yes, Commercial Dog Walkers should be able to use every Dogs Off-Leash Areas, but with limits on hours of use.
- 13 per cent of respondents said no, there should be limits on which Dogs Off-Leash Areas Commercial Dog Walkers can use.

Current Use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas (All Respondents)

When asked to select the name of the Dogs Off-Leash Area they visit most:

- 15 per cent of respondents said High Park
- 10 per cent of respondents said Ramsden Park
- 6 per cent of respondents said Cherry Beach Clarke Beach Park
- 6 per cent of respondents said Sherwood Park

When asked if they had used a City of Toronto designated Dogs Off-Leash Area, 124 respondents selected that they had never used an off-leash area in Toronto or not used an off-leash area in the past six months. When asked why they had not used a Dogs Off-Leash Area:

- 31 per cent of respondents said they prefer to keep their dog on a leash, and not use off-leash areas.
- 27 per cent of respondents said the nearest off-leash area is too far away from them.
- 27 per cent of respondents said the nearby off-leash area is too crowded.

When asked if they had any concerns with the current use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas by Commercial Dog Walkers:

- 74 per cent of respondents said No.
- 26 per cent of respondents said Yes.

Questions for Commercial Dog Walkers

The 102 Commercial Dog Walkers that completed the survey were presented with additional questions specific to their practices. When asked which best described the dog(s) in their care:

- 76 per cent of Commercial Dog Walkers said medium/large dog (more than 12 inches tall at the shoulder and more than 20 pounds)
- 35 per cent of Commercial Dog Walkers said small dog (12 inches or shorter at the shoulder and 20 pounds or less)

- 22 per cent of Commercial Dog Walkers selected other, with all responses indicating that they walk a mix of both depending on their client.

When asked to rank which features are most important to them when choosing a Dogs Off-Leash Area:

- 24 per cent of Commercial Dog Walkers said the size of the Dogs Off-Leash Area.
- 21 per cent of Commercial Dog Walkers said the geographic proximity to their home and/or business.
- 20 per cent of Commercial Dog Walkers said fencing.
- Eight per cent of Commercial Dog Walkers said surface material e.g. grass, gravel, sand, wood chips.
- Eight per cent of Commercial Dog Walkers said cleanliness/maintenance.
- Eight per cent of Commercial Dog Walkers said shade.

Potential Consideration (All Respondents)

When asked if the City were to limit what hours Commercial Dog Walkers could use Dogs Off-Leash Areas:

- 37 per cent of respondents said whenever the off-leash area is open
- 29 per cent of respondents said from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- 11 per cent of respondents said they were unsure
- 10 per cent of respondents said from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

When asked to rank what the most important things are that need to be taken into consideration when deciding if a Dogs Off-Leash Area is suitable for Commercial Dog Walker use:

- 30 per cent of respondents said the off-leash area must be fenced.
- 30 per cent of respondents said the off-leash area must be big enough.
- Nine per cent of respondents said the off-leash area must have a space for small dogs.
- Nine per cent of respondents said the off-leash area must not be located in or near an Environmentally Significant Area.
- Nine per cent of respondents said there must be enough parking.

When asked what the minimum size of Dogs Off-Leash Area is appropriate for Commercial Dog Walkers to be allowed to use:

- 50 per cent of respondents said Commercial Dog Walkers should be allowed to use any off-leash area.
- 15 per cent of respondents said Commercial Dog Walkers should only be allowed at off-leash areas over 1,000 m².
- 13 per cent of respondents said Commercial Dog Walkers should only be allowed at off-leash areas over 1,500 m².
- 12 per cent of respondents said Commercial Dog Walkers should only be allowed at off-leash areas over 500 m².

When asked what an appropriate separation distance is if the City were to limit Commercial Dog Walker use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas based on proximity to residential properties:

- 34 per cent of respondents said they do not know.
- 20 per cent of respondents said other.
- 17 per cent of respondents said 20 metres.
- 15 per cent of respondents said five metres.

c. Survey Comments

Respondents also provided written comments in response to survey questions. These comments are summarized by theme in Appendix A.

Public Meeting

The project team convened a virtual public meeting on November 12, 2024, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to gather input from Commercial Dog Walkers and other stakeholders on potential considerations for Commercial Dog Walker use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas. The project team presented the project background, timeline and key insights based on previous engagement. Facilitators hosted five separate breakout rooms to collect feedback and comments.

a. Who We Heard From

Licensed Commercial Dog Walkers and identified stakeholders were invited to participate. Participants included:

- 25 (61 per cent) identified as a Commercial Dog Walker
- Nine (23 per cent) attended the meeting as an individual

- Four (10 per cent) identified as a member of Ratepayers' or Neighbourhood Association
- One (Three per cent) identified as a representative of Dog Owners' Association
- One (Three per cent) identified as a member of a dog/dog park advocacy group

b. Overview of Feedback

Participants discussed potential considerations for Commercial Dog Walker use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas. Participants were asked to consider potential impacts and what actions could be taken to ensure the success.

Size of Off-Leash Area

Larger parks are preferred for accommodating more dogs, separating groups, and ensuring safety. Medium or smaller parks often become overcrowded, leading to conflicts or unused spaces.

Benefits of Large Dogs Off-Leash Areas:

- More space for play, running, and visibility.
- Potential to create sections for dog sizes.
- Addresses overcrowding in parks located in dense areas.
- Larger Dogs Off-Leash Areas can be used by Commercial Dog Walkers who walk more dogs.

Current Status of Small Dogs Off-Leash Areas:

- Often underused or vacant (e.g., Sandy Bruce)
- Crowding issues discourage use (e.g., Wychwood Barns).
- May not accommodate larger dogs or groups effectively.

Additional Considerations:

- In smaller Dogs Off-Leash Areas, restrictions could be implemented on the number of dogs per person to manage usage and reduce crowding.
- Potential issues from any further restrictions to access (e.g. parking, overcrowding) should be carefully considered as part of the criteria development.

Fencing in Dogs Off-Leash Areas

Fencing is critical for keeping dogs contained, especially near major streets, playgrounds, or schools, and can contribute to the comfort of all park users. High-quality, well-maintained fencing contributes to a positive park experience for all.

Most participants had more general suggestions around fencing and there was no clear consensus that it was an important consideration for determining which sites are appropriate for Commercial Dog Walker use. Some Commercial Dog Walkers indicated a preference for using fenced sites.

Proximity to Residential and Environmentally Significant Areas

Dogs Off-Leash Areas must balance recreation, conservation, and community needs, especially near Environmentally Significant Areas. Clear boundaries, and design features such as fencing and signage, help minimize environmental impacts while reducing conflicts with nearby homes. Adequate setbacks from residences and schools are essential to address noise, activity, and safety concerns. Smaller Dogs Off-Leash Areas may allow for reduced setbacks if aligned with park capacity and residential density.

Mitigating Environmental Impact:

- Participants noted that Dogs Off-Leash Areas within Environmentally Significant Areas can create an enriching experience for both dogs and people, however, use of these spaces can have impacts.

Proximity to Nearby Homes:

- Dogs Off-Leash Areas located near homes can lead to conflicts due to noise and increased activity, especially with more residents working from home.
- Adequate setbacks from residences and schools reduce potential disturbances and safety concerns, particularly for young children.

User Considerations and Accessibility:

- Dogs Off-Leash Areas should be accessible to local residents and dog walkers to reduce illegal off-leash activity and vehicle travel to distant parks.
- Larger destination Dogs Off-Leash Areas like High Park and Cherry Beach are vital for Commercial Dog Walkers but must be managed carefully to prevent overcrowding.

Small Dog Areas at Off-Leash Areas

Small Dogs Off-Leash Areas provide safe spaces for smaller dogs and are most practical in medium or large parks. In smaller parks, they can reduce the main Dogs Off-Leash Area size and may create capacity issues if retroactively added. While most Commercial Dog Walkers walk a mix of dogs and often do not rely on small dog areas, these spaces can be valuable to reduce crowds and conflict.

Value of Small Dog Areas:

- Beneficial for small dogs that fear large dogs, providing them a safe space to play.
- Works well in larger Dogs Off-Leash Areas (e.g., Ramsden, Kew Beach, Sunnybrook) but impractical in smaller parks like (e.g. Greenwood).

Commercial Dog Walkers Do Not Often Use Small Dog Areas:

- Commercial Dog Walkers often walk a mix of dogs, and small dogs in packs are typically accustomed to larger dogs.
- Separate small dog areas are not frequently used by Commercial Dog Walkers and should not be used as a criteria to limit their access to existing Dogs Off-Leash Areas.

Hours of Use of Off-Leash Areas

Commercial Dog Walkers typically use Dogs Off-Leash Areas during weekday business hours, while dog owners prefer early mornings, evenings, and/or weekends. Time restrictions should be considered on a park-by-park basis, with consideration to individual park characteristics, proximity to residences, and existing complaints at the location. This will help prevent underuse and the unfair targeting of Commercial Dog Walkers.

General Access and Usage Patterns:

- Most Commercial Dog Walkers use Dogs Off-Leash Areas during weekday business hours e.g. 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., aligning with client needs.
- Many dog owners, and even some Commercial Dog Walkers, avoid peak times, choosing early mornings, evenings, or weekends to reduce conflict and avoid crowding.

Challenges of Restricting Hours:

- Limiting access can create peak usage periods, leading to overcrowding and increased pressure on Dogs Off-Leash hours.
- As Commercial Dog Walkers are not the only source of noise, restricting hours of access will not solve noise concerns that occur outside of business hours.
- Clients working non-standard hours (e.g., shift workers) rely on Commercial Dog Walkers to walk dogs outside traditional business hours.

Park-Specific Considerations:

- Time restrictions should reflect the unique characteristics of individual parks (e.g., proximity to residences, noise complaints).
- Some parks (e.g., Coronation) already have restrictions that result in underuse during designated hours.

- Avoid restricting hours universally; instead, address capacity issues and enforce existing noise bylaws.
- Collect data on peak hours and park usage to inform time regulation decisions.

c. Public Meeting Comments

Respondents also provided additional feedback. These comments are summarized by theme in Appendix B

Appendix A – Written Comments from Public Survey

1. Concerns with CDW Use

386 respondents (26 per cent) provided written comments describing their concerns with the current use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas by Commercial Dog Walkers. Comments indicated the following themes:

- **Difficulty controlling multiple dogs in Dogs Off-Leash Areas:** Respondents noted that fights can break out when dogs become agitated, and Commercial Dog Walkers often manage too many dogs at once to safely intervene or maintain control of their group.
- **More dogs under care than is legally permitted:** Respondents expressed concerns that some Commercial Dog Walkers exceed the permitted limit of six dogs, resulting in overcrowded and potentially unsafe conditions in off-leash areas.
- **Concerns about dog waste management:** Respondents highlighted the challenge of ensuring proper waste disposal, noting that Commercial Dog Walkers often fail to pick up after the dogs in their care. With 4-6 dogs under supervision, it can be difficult for a single person to track where and when each dog defecates, leading to sanitation issues in Dogs Off-Leash Areas.
- **Need for increased bylaw enforcement:** Respondents emphasized the need for more bylaw enforcement, particularly to ensure that dog owners comply with regulations regarding Dogs Off-Leash Areas. They suggested that additional bylaw officers should patrol to enforce these rules and promote safety, without unfairly penalizing all Commercial Dog Walkers. Concerns were raised that current enforcement levels are insufficient to serve as an effective deterrent.
- **Safety concerns due to poor dog behavior in Off-Leash Areas:** Respondents expressed feeling unsafe in off-leash areas due to the behavior of poorly socialized dogs, often forming large, intimidating packs. This leads to increased incidents, including fights within the pack. The lack of effective voice control by dog walkers was noted as not only unfair to the dogs but also a safety risk to other park users.

2. Hours of Use

132 respondents provide written comments related to what hours would be most appropriate if the City were to limit what hours Commercial Dog Walkers could use off-leash areas. Comments indicated the following themes:

- **Commercial Dog Walkers should be able to access Off-Leash Areas at any time:** Respondents believe Commercial Dog Walkers should have unrestricted

access to parks where they are currently permitted at any time, as they typically use the parks during off-peak hours and are already regulated. Limiting access would negatively impact dogs and clients who rely on their services.

- **Access to Off-Leash Areas during work hours:** Respondents said that Commercial Dog Walkers should use Dogs Off-Leash Areas during working hours, which would allow dog owners to use off-leash before and after work. They should be able to use during work hours as it will assist with their work and growing their client base.
- **Limit access during peak hours:** Respondents suggest Commercial Dog Walkers should not have access during peak hours, which have been identified as early mornings, evenings, weekends, and lunch hours. Some recommend park-specific rules to address lower-traffic times, in consideration of children, the elderly, and nearby schools.

3. Potential Consideration for CDW Access

160 respondents provided written comments describing other things that should be taken into consideration when deciding if a Dogs Off-Leash Area is suitable for Commercial Dog Walker use. Comments indicated the following themes:

- **Commercial Dog Walkers following the rules should not be restricted further:** Respondents advocated for no restrictions on Commercial Dog Walkers who adhere to existing regulations, emphasizing that they should be able to walk neighbourhood dogs on behalf of residents without unnecessary limitations. They stressed that responsible dog walkers should not be subject to restrictions.
- **Support for enhanced bylaw enforcement:** Respondents emphasized the importance of increased bylaw enforcement to ensure compliance with regulations and promote safety. They argued that the responsibility for monitoring Commercial Dog Walkers should not fall solely on dog owners. As licensed professionals, Commercial Dog Walkers should be trusted to perform their duties appropriately, with the recommendation that their licenses be revoked if they fail to meet required standards.
- Additional comments highlighted items not related to Commercial Dog Walker use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas including the need for increased maintenance, improved access to water and drinking fountains, and the proximity of Dogs Off-Leash Areas to schools and playgrounds.

4. Separation Distance from Other Land Uses

275 respondents provided written comments expressing feedback or suggestions on an appropriate separation distance of Dogs Off-Leash Areas based on proximity to residential properties. Comments indicated the following themes:

- **Proximity to residential properties should not be a consideration:** Many responses argue that proximity to residential areas should not limit Dogs Off-Leash Areas from Commercial Dog Walkers, as dogs can bark regardless of the person walking them.
- **Combine with other efforts to mitigate noise:** Some respondents argued that noise concerns should be addressed by fencing and considering natural barriers, in addition to distance. A significant number of people argue that since noise is inevitable near parks, more parks should be created, to meet the demand and reduce congestion in existing areas.
- **Preserving use of existing Dogs Off-Leash Areas:** Respondents suggested that while these measures can be applied to new Dogs Off-Leash Areas, pre-existing Dogs Off-Leash Areas should remain accessible to Commercial Dog Walkers without additional restrictions, as these parks have been used historically without issues.

5. Minimum Size of Off-Leash Area

144 respondents provided written comments expressing feedback or suggestions what the minimum size of Dogs Off-Leash Area is appropriate for Commercial Dog Walker use. Comments indicated the following themes:

- **Preference for larger Dogs Off-Leash Areas:** Respondents generally favoured larger Dogs Off-Leash Areas for Commercial Dog Walkers as more suitable to reduce congestion and ensure safety for both dogs and park users. Smaller parks were seen as inappropriate for walkers with several dogs. However, there were respondents that indicated that the size of Dogs Off-Leash Areas should not be a primary concern, as long as the area is fenced and manageable. Many stressed flexibility to allowing Commercial Dog Walkers to use OLAs within their working area, with restrictions based on overcrowding rather than park size.
- **Reduce the number of dogs allowed per Dogs Off-Leash Area:** Respondents also emphasized that another key factor in Dogs Off-Leash Areas is the number of dogs allowed at any given time. They suggested that smaller areas should have reduced dog limits, with some advocating for a maximum number of dogs per park.

6. General Feedback

Respondents were invited to share general feedback on anything else the City of Toronto should consider about the criteria for suitable use of Dogs Off-Leash Areas by

Commercial Dog Walkers. 740 respondents participated. Comments focused on the following topics:

- **Consider the size and amenities of Dogs Off-Leash Areas:** Large Dogs Off-Leash Areas with sufficient shade, water, and waste bins are essential to support the needs of dogs, owners, and Commercial Dog Walkers. Smaller parks may require separate spaces for small and large dogs to ensure safety.
- **Enforce existing rules and regulations:** Many respondents emphasize the importance of bylaw enforcement to address issues like off-leash dogs outside designated areas, aggressive dogs, and overcrowding. They suggest stricter monitoring of licensing and behavior in off-leash areas for all users, not just Commercial Dog Walkers.
- **Avoid restrictions that harm service accessibility:** Commercial Dog Walkers provide essential services to working individuals, the elderly, and those with mobility challenges. Restrictions could limit access to affordable pet care and negatively impact small businesses that depend on Dogs Off-Leash Areas for their operations.
- **Protect Environmentally Significant Areas:** Dogs Off-Leash Areas near Environmentally Significant Areas should have measures to prevent dogs from damaging these zones. Respondents recommend removing or better managing Dogs Off-Leash Areas within or near Environmentally Significant Areas to prevent ecological harm.
- **Balance access with safety and fairness:** Some respondents express concerns about conflicts between dogs and other park users, particularly near schools, playgrounds, or high-traffic areas. They suggest considering park location and existing complaints, such as noise or parking issues, when determining access.
- **Expand Dogs Off-Leash Area availability:** Many respondents highlight the need for more off-leash parks to alleviate overcrowding and conflicts. They argue that the current number of Dogs Off-Leash Areas is insufficient to meet the growing demand from dog owners and Commercial Dog Walkers.
- **Recognize the professionalism of Commercial Dog Walkers:** Respondents note that Commercial Dog Walkers are often more experienced and attentive than individual dog owners. They suggest prioritizing experienced walkers and ensuring their access to Dogs Off-Leash Areas, as they provide an important service while managing dogs responsibly.
- **Prioritize equitable park access for all users:** Parks are shared spaces, and ensuring harmonious coexistence between dog owners, walkers, and other park users is crucial. Respondents propose accommodating different user needs without overly restricting any group, emphasizing shared responsibilities and mutual respect.

Appendix B – General Comments from Public Meeting

1. Signage and Clear Communication

- Increased and clear signage is essential, including:
 - Dogs Off-Leash Area boundaries, safety guidelines, and environmental protection.
 - Signage should indicate a clear separation between Dogs Off-Leash Areas, schools, playgrounds, and other park areas to maintain safety for all users.
- Proper signage fosters compliance and reduces disputes.

2. Fencing and Safety

- Durable, unchallengeable fencing is critical.
- Minimum fence height of about five feet with chain links small enough to prevent escape but not trap debris.
 - Some parks (e.g., Cherry Beach, Cedarvale, Kew Gardens) have fencing that is too low or poorly maintained, leading to escapes or safety concerns.
 - Ground erosion, accumulation of debris, and snow can make fences effectively shorter and less secure.
- Regular maintenance of fences is necessary to retain their effectiveness.
- Double-gated entry systems to ensure dogs do not escape.
- Fences should clearly outline the boundaries of the Dogs Off-Leash Area, ensuring clarity for users.
- Fencing needs vary depending on park location and size. Parks near busy roads, dense areas, or schools require higher and more secure fencing.
- Fencing material should balance cost, environmental concerns, and durability, with options like chain-link. While fencing may be an expensive part of building Dogs Off-Leash Areas, it is crucial for safety.
- Prioritize fencing in Dogs Off-Leash Areas with increased density and risks such as neighbouring major streets.

3. Park Balance

- Dogs Off-Leash Areas must balance other park uses (e.g., playgrounds, sports fields, summer camps).
- Safety for dogs and park users should remain a priority in Dogs Off-Leash Area planning and maintenance.

4. Environmental Protection

- Parks must balance conservation with recreational use to protect green spaces and wildlife while meeting community needs.
- Consider the impact of Dogs Off-Leash Areas on Environmentally Significant Areas.

- No new Dogs Off-Leash Areas near Environmentally Significant Areas, unless strict conditions protect these areas, but avoid retroactive restrictions on existing Dogs Off-Leash Areas.
- Current Dogs Off-Leash Areas bordering or in Environmentally Significant Areas need improved monitoring to minimize environmental impact.
- Dogs Off-Leash Areas in or near Environmentally Significant Areas, like Cherry Beach and High Park, require clear boundaries, fencing, signage, and responsible use to minimize impacts.

5. Proximity to Nearby Homes

- Adequate setbacks from residences and schools reduce potential disturbances and safety concerns, particularly for young children.
- Noise from Dogs Off-Leash Areas can be minimized through thoughtful placement of new locations, education for park users, and consistent bylaw enforcement.

6. Size and Capacity

- Dogs Off-Leash Areas should be large enough to provide dogs with proper exercise without overwhelming other park users.
- Small dog areas are situational—useful in busy parks but not always necessary.
- Size should be chosen carefully, with attention to user data when planning new locations; some participants suggested avoiding strict size limitations.
- Dogs Off-Leash Areas should reflect neighbourhood needs such as density and other users of the park.

7. Accessibility and Amenities

- Accessibility for on-foot visitors e.g. people who travel to the park by foot, should be improved, with attention to pathways and trails.
- Better landscape design and tree planting to provide shade and canopy coverage.
- Water fountains, waste bins, and shaded areas should be closer to or inside Dogs Off-Leash Areas for convenience and comfort.

8. Planning Small Dog Areas

- Space for small dog areas can reduce the size available for the main Dogs Off-Leash Area size, especially in smaller parks.
- Retroactive implementation in existing parks could create capacity issues elsewhere.
- Ensure fences for small dog areas are around five feet high to prevent access by larger dogs or coyotes.

9. Bylaw Enforcement

- Efficient, consistent enforcement is crucial to address disputes and ensure compliance.
- Enforcement must target all users of Dogs Off-Leash Areas, not just Commercial Dog Walkers.
- Effective enforcement fosters trust and reduces user conflicts.
- Commercial Dog Walkers are professionals who typically manage their dogs well; additional regulation may not be necessary.