



Date: April 9, 2025  
To: Members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee  
Subject: IE20.9 – Toronto's Dog Off-Leash Strategy: A Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on Toronto's new off-leash area strategy. We believe it is a major step forward and will be helpful to residents, park users and city staff alike. We are particularly pleased with the new approach to surface materials.

That said, the need for more effective by-law enforcement still exists. We urge you to ask Municipal Licensing & Standards to report back with solutions.

**We are requesting one important revision. Please make the guidelines for tree buffers more flexible.**

This is important for a number of reasons, including shade, health, enjoyment, voluntary bylaw compliance, cost, reducing crowding and enabling the integration of new OLAs into appropriate neighbourhood parks.

Currently, the strategy states that trees should be planted outside the fenced perimeter (p.5) with fencing installed a minimum of three metres from any tree or tree protection zone (p.10).

While high concentrations of dog urine can harm trees and trees should absolutely be protected when necessary, the above rules are atypical and problematic. Please consider:

1. **Fencing off trees is not always necessary, desirable or safe.**
2. **The 3-metre setback can make viable sites unfeasible.**
3. **Many of today's favourite OLAs would not be possible.**
4. **Most of Toronto's OLAs have unprotected trees.**
5. **All municipalities we know of have unprotected trees in their OLAs.**
6. **We are not aware of any other municipalities that require a 3-metre tree protection zone in OLAs.**

There are many factors to consider, including dog park design, size, number of dogs, number of trees and irrigation – but they are all manageable.

According to our survey of over 1,000 OLA users, trees are the most important feature of appealing OLAs.

**Please revise the tree buffer guidelines to be more flexible. Ensure they are based on evidence and in line with best practices from other municipalities.** Perhaps tree protection could be required where the concentration of urine is high and only required as needed where the concentration of urine is low.

Thank you for your consideration,

Eric Code  
Founder and Chair  
Toronto Dog Park Community

#### References

Trees in dog parks: <https://dogparksto.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Trees-in-DOLAs-Low-Res.pdf>

Survey results: <https://dogparksto.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Toronto-Dog-Park-Survey-Report.pdf>