



April 08, 2025

Infrastructure and Environment Committee  
Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2  
iec@toronto.ca

Dear Councillor McKelvie and Committee members,

**Re: Agenda Item IE20.9 Toronto's Dog Off-Leash Strategy: A Citywide Approach to Dogs Off-Leash Areas**

With Toronto projected to welcome over 600,000 dogs in the coming years, many of whom will live in apartments, the demand for public spaces for exercise and toileting will increase. The ABC Residents Association ( ABCRA ) acknowledges the City's commitment to addressing the pressing need by developing an updated Off-Leash Dog Strategy, and we support its goals. If implemented effectively, this Strategy could lead to a more harmonious coexistence between dog owners and the community. The Strategy's intent to promote responsible dog ownership through public education and robust bylaw enforcement is crucial for its success.

While we found the short, one-week window insufficient to absorb and analyze the 66-page report and its nine appendices fully, this letter offers some ABCRA's comments on the Strategy. It also provides input on how the Strategy can help address specific issues in Ramsden Park.

The ABCRA appreciates key components of the Strategy, especially the refined *Location Criteria and Design Guidance*. Focusing on minimum size thresholds, setbacks from sensitive land use, and consistent design standards—like fencing and noise mitigation—reflects a more thoughtful approach to DOLA development.

We also support a structured *Community Engagement Process* that includes local voices in decision-making. However, we urge the City to prioritize resident feedback in densely populated areas where DOLAs can affect nearby uses. Addressing concerns like noise, crowding, and limited parkland is crucial. Further refinement of perimeter treatments and pre-consultation protocols would help ensure DOLAs fit better within their communities.

**ABCRA Feedback on the Dog Off-Leash Area Strategy**

**Treatment of 311 Data:** This report uses 311 data to evaluate community concerns, but many residents hesitate to file complaints due to the requirement to provide their names and addresses.

Limited responses and lack of enforcement further discourage reporting. To better understand community issues, it's important to consider anonymous complaints and supplement 311 data with community surveys, local media reports, and direct observations.

**Bylaw Enforcement and Education:** Bylaws must be enforced consistently, with fines applied in problem areas. An education-only approach has proven insufficient. Additional enforcement resources are needed for the DOLA network's expansion. Empowering park bylaw officers to issue on-the-spot tickets would be more effective than the current warning system.

**Late-Night Use and Neighbourhood Impacts:** To ensure responsible use of Dog Off-Leash Areas, the City needs to consider the impact on nearby residents, especially after 11:00 p.m. We suggest clearly defined and posted hours for all OLAs. We specifically recommend hours from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. for those near residential areas.

**Signage and Lighting:** Clear, well-placed signage outlining rules, etiquette, and hours of operation is essential to support the responsible use of DOLAs. However, too many signs can dilute their impact, so signs should be visually distinct and concise. Lighting should be limited to necessary safety needs, using warm-tone and buffered to reduce the impact on nearby homes.

### **Addressing the Impacts of Off-Leash Dogs in Non-DOLA Spaces**

Irresponsible off-leash activities in unauthorized areas of downtown parks and public streets are on the rise, putting vulnerable residents like children and seniors at risk. According to CBC, incidents of dog bites and attacks are increasing. The City should engage the Medical Officer of Health to assess these risks and recommend solutions.

While education is important for responsible pet ownership, it must be supported by increased enforcement of bylaws. Without this, the distinction between designated and undesignated areas becomes unclear, undermining the City's Off-Leash Strategy. To improve the situation, the City should respond more quickly to dog-related complaints, and enforcement officers should actively monitor and ticket owners of off-leash dogs and those who fail to pick up after their dogs. Additionally, some dog owners neglect to fill in holes dug by their pets, creating trip hazards. Improving surfacing and adding signage to encourage responsible dog management should be considered.

We must stress that consistent enforcement of bylaws regarding off-leash dogs outside designated Dog Off-Leash Areas is essential for keeping Toronto's public spaces safe and enjoyable for everyone. When enforcement is inconsistent, residents—especially those with children, mobility issues, or a fear of dogs—can feel unwelcome in parks and trails. Allowing dogs off-leash in unauthorized areas can lead to visitor conflicts and negatively impact the environment.

### **Improvements to Ramsden Park**

Ramsden Park is a beloved public space that serves a large and diverse community. ABCRA supported the establishment of the Designated Off-Leash Area (DOLA) for local dog owners to exercise and

socialize with their pets within walking distance of their home even though it doesn't fully meet compliance standards regarding setbacks from homes and the Ravine Protection Bylaw. However, we face ongoing complaints due to its proximity to a dense residential area that increased with the influx of commercial dog walkers. The prohibition of commercial dog walkers, supported by ABCRA and the Ramsden Park Dog Owners Association, has helped reduce noise and conflict, improving the experience in the DOLA and the quality of life for abutting residents. We endorse the continuation of this restriction and acknowledge the City's decision (MM19.3) to formalize this policy.

Furthermore, we expect the City to make its best efforts to upgrade the Ramsden DOLA to meet the new compliance standards outlined in the Strategy and to work towards aligning the site with the Strategy's evolving expectations of the community.

To this end we request to be consulted on the development of new signage that reflects the Strategy's commitment to clear, accessible, and consistent communication. This signage should specifically address the need to minimize noise and disruptive behaviour. It must reinforce expectations for respectful use of these spaces, including quiet hours and responsible dog management. Furthermore, it should clearly state that non-compliance may lead to enforcement action. Additionally, we ask for the implementation of a regular schedule for bylaw inspector visits to DOLAs that do not meet the standards set by this Strategy.

We thank the Infrastructure and Environment Committee for your leadership and welcome continued consultation as the Dog Off-Leash Strategy is implemented across the City and in Ramsden Park.

Sincerely,

The ABC Residents Association,  
Ian Carmichael and John Caliendo,  
Co-Chairs

abcra@abc.ca

The ABC Residents Association is a volunteer organization committed to enhancing the quality of life in our neighbourhood through active participation in municipal issues. We serve the residents living in Toronto's Yorkville / North Midtown community between Yonge Street west to Avenue Road and Bloor Street north to the CPR tracks.