

Meeting Summary - Stakeholder Meeting #2

City-Wide Study of Existing Dog Off-Leash Areas
Design, Operations, Maintenance & Best Practices
East York Civic Centre – Council Chambers
Wednesday, August 21, 2019
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

OVERVIEW

On Wednesday, August 21, 2019, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division hosted the second stakeholder meeting for its City-Wide Study of Existing Dog Off-Leash Areas (OLA). The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the project and to present and seek feedback on: examples of designs, operations, and maintenance best practices from other jurisdictions; a proposed structure and approach to case study profiles; and a revised proposed case study site selection criteria and proposed case study sites. Approximately 30 people attended the meeting, including Dog Owners' Associations, dog walkers' groups, and others.

The meeting included: opening remarks and an update on the study from Sue Wenzl (City of Toronto); introductions and agenda review by Ian Malczewski (Swerhun Inc.); a presentation from Trish Clarke (thinc design) on best practices, the proposed structure and approach to the case study profiles; and the revised proposed case study site selection criteria and ten proposed case study sites. Following the presentation, participants asked questions of clarification and engaged in small table discussions, a facilitated report back, and full room discussion.

This meeting summary was prepared by Swerhun Inc., an independent third-party facilitation firm supporting the City of Toronto and thinc design in stakeholder and community engagement for the City-Wide Study of Existing Dog Off-Leash Areas. This summary captures feedback shared at the meeting and is not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript. A draft of this summary was shared with participants for review before it was finalized.

KEY MESSAGES

These key messages highlight major topics brought forward from meeting participants; they should be read in concert with the more detailed summary of feedback below.

The density of the surrounding neighbourhood / projected dog population should be included in the selection criteria. The selected sites should include at least a few OLAs that are in higher density neighbourhoods (since these are under the most pressure).

Strong desire to be advised of and included in the Pup Ups. Connect with the DOA reps in advance of the Pup Ups in case study sites to help identify issues and get advice on how / when to host Pup Ups.

Some suggested additional selection criteria. There were no objections to the proposed case study site selection criteria. Participants suggested some additional criteria for consideration.

QUESTIONS OF CLARIFICATION

Following the overview presentation, participants asked a few questions of clarification. Questions and answers are summarized below.

Question: What does it mean for an OLA to be selected as one of the ten case study sites as part of this study?

Answer: The intention of the Case Studies is to serve as exemplars to demonstrate how the researched global Best Practices may be applied to real sites and solve issues that are common across

all of the City's OLAs. The intention is for each attribute of interest to be represented across the ten sites. That way, design solutions that address each variable may be developed accordingly. These design interventions will be summarized as a type of “lessons learned” and be used to inform future design work — should OLA renovations be undertaken — when adequate resources and funding are secured.

Question: Can you share a list of all the places/cities you looked at in your best practices review?

Answer: Yes, we will include the list in the Meeting Summary. (See Attachment C).

Question: Will this study result in the closure of any off-leash areas or reductions in size?

Answer: This is not the intention of the study. The intent of this study is to review existing off leash areas and develop criteria for the improvement of the off-leash areas. The People Dogs and Parks Policy includes a process which needs to be followed for the closure of an off-leash area.

Question: Is there an opportunity for all off-leash areas to have lighting and water for drinking?

Answer: Not all parks have access to the necessary infrastructure needed to add lighting and water to the off-leash areas. Including these elements is determined at the design and planning phase based on cost and access.

Question: How do you plan to engage non-dog owners in this Study?

Answer: They will be engaged through the public surveys and Pup Ups.

DETAILED FEEDBACK

Feedback about the proposed structure and approach to case study profiles

The team shared and sought feedback on a proposed checklist that will be used to gather data on the case study sites (see Attachment D). Feedback included additional elements to include as well as additional detail to collect on elements already included.

Additional elements to include:

- Whether there are safety concerns for humans and dogs, including algae in water;
- Whether it has seasonal access;
- Number of dog and people injury reports;
- Presence of graffiti;
- Amount of use (i.e. days and times the OLA is busier vs. less busy);
- Opening and closing times;
- Amount of traffic through the park (not just the OLA) including pedestrians, cyclists, motorized vehicles;
- Presence of a small dog area.

Additional detail on existing elements:

- Depth of surfacing;
- Types of gates; and
- When waste bins are available (i.e. if they are provided year-round).

Feedback about the revised case study site selection criteria and proposed case study sites.

The team presented and sought feedback on the revised case study site selection criteria and ten proposed case study sites. The purpose of sharing the proposed case sites was to seek feedback on how well participants felt they reflect the range of different OLAs across the City.

Participants agreed with many of the revised selection criteria proposed and several said the case study sites meet the selection criteria and reflect the range of different OLAs across the City. Participants also suggested a few additional selection criteria for the team to consider when finalizing the 10 case study sites:

- **Density of the surrounding neighbourhood / projected dog population**, including making sure the selected sites include at least a few in higher density neighbourhoods (since these are under the most pressure);
- **Seasonality**: include both OLAs that are open year-round and OLAs that close seasonally;
- **Destination versus local use**, include OLAs that attract people from different parts of the City and OLAs that are used exclusively by local communities;
- **Lighting**, include OLAs both with and without lighting;
- **Surface depth**, include OLAs that have a range of surfacing depths;
- **Different types of traffic in park**, including OLAs near cyclist, pedestrian, and motorized vehicle routes;
- **Safety issues**, such as Thomson Memorial Park, which has had threats of assaults and physical altercations, and Marie Curtis Park, where coyotes have entered the OLA to mate with dogs.
- **The selected case study sites should have a designated DOA representative** or key contact person to help promote the study and gather feedback.

Other comments/suggestions related to the site selection criteria and case study sites:

Consider adding more unfenced OLAs. The proposed case study sites only include one unfenced area, it may be beneficial to have more unfenced areas.

Consider sharing a map of the selected sites, to ensure that they achieve a broad geographic coverage.

Make sure to connect with DOA reps in advance of Pup Ups in case study sites to help identify issues and get advice on how / when to host Pup Ups.

Specific parks suggested for case study sites. A few participants suggested specific OLAs that they felt should be included in the case study sites, including:

- **Marie Curtis Dog Park.** A participant said this OLA has a number of significant issues, including inappropriate fencing; poor surfacing; no lighting; close to a natural area; coyotes entering the OLA to mate with dogs;
- **Colonel Samuel Smith Park.**

Feedback about the public survey

A week prior to the meeting on August 7th the City shared a “beta” version of the first public survey for the study and asked stakeholders to share feedback by August 21st (the feedback deadline was extended to Sunday, August 25 in the meeting at participants’ request). At the meeting, the City provided a brief overview of the survey and asked if participants had any additional feedback, not already shared prior to the meeting.

Participants said they appreciated the opportunity to share advice about the survey and shared the following feedback:

- Consider removing the dog license question. The question about whether or not a dog is licensed seems irrelevant unless the City is going to enforce the rule that only licensed dogs are allowed in OLAs.
- Explain the rationale for the demographic questions, (e.g. questions asking respondents to identify language, gender, economics, etc.) *Response: The demographic questions help the City understand if the survey has captured a sample that is representative of the broader population. These questions can also help the City better understand and explain who is using the OLAs.*
- Consider modifying the question style/format. Some of the questions only ask for respondents' top three answers, which can be quite limiting. Consider instead using a 5-point scale that allows respondents to rate all their responses.
- Consider adding more response options for Question 6 ("why do you go to the dog park") that are less practical and reflect many reasons why people go to dog parks, e.g. joy, happiness, etc.
- Consider replacing "vegetation" with "tree" in Question 10: "important areas for improvement."
- Consider adding a question about complaints, such as a question that asks respondents to identify the number of times they have complained to the City about an OLA.
- Advertise the survey at OLAs and with the stakeholders. Include a notice with a link on bulletin boards at the OLAs and send stakeholders a link once live so we can share it with our networks.

NEXT STEPS

The City, Swerhun Inc. and thinc design thanked participants for their time and feedback and committed to sharing a draft summary in the coming weeks. Swerhun reminded participants to email any additional feedback after the meeting to mwheatley@swerhun.com by Wednesday, August 28th. The City reminded participants to email to dola@toronto.ca by Sunday August 25th and let stakeholders know they will share the final survey once it is live.

Attachment A. Meeting Agenda

Stakeholder Meeting #2

City-Wide Study of Existing Dog Off-Leash Areas
Design, Operations, Maintenance & Best Practices
East York Civic Centre – Council Chambers
850 Coxwell Avenue
7:00 – 9:00pm

Workshop Purpose

To provide an update on the project and to present and seek feedback on:

- examples of designs, operations, and maintenance best practices from other jurisdictions
- a proposed structure and approach to case study profiles
- revised proposed case study site selection criteria and proposed case study sites;

Proposed Workshop Agenda

7:00 Welcome, introductions, agenda review

Swerhun Inc.
City of Toronto

7:15 Overview of examples, case study profile approach, and proposed site selection criteria

thinc design

Questions of Clarification

7:45 Discussion

1. What do think of the proposed structure and approach for the case study site profiles? Is there any other information you would like to see included in the profiles?
2. How well do you feel the proposed case study sites reflect the range of different OLAs across the City? How would you refine the case study site selection criteria (if at all) to ensure the selected sites better represent the City's OLAs?

8:45 Overview of survey and short discussion

City of Toronto

8:55 Wrap up and next steps

9:00 Adjourn

Attachment B. Participant List

The following is a list of organizations that were invited to the Stakeholder Meeting. Those organizations that were represented at the meeting are signified in bold text.

Dog Owner Associations / Off-Leash Area Groups:

- **Allan Gardens**
- 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
- **Davis Crombie Park**
- Don Valley Brick Works
- Earl Bales Park
- **Gerrard Carlaw Parkette**
- Grand Manitoba Park
- Grange Park
- Greenwood Park
- **Hillcrest park**
- High Park
- **Humber Bay Park West**
- **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
- Ramsden Park
- Regent Park
- Riverdale Park West
- Sandy Bruce Park
- Sherwood Park
- 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**
- Vermont Square
- **Warden Woods Park**
- Wildwood Crescent Playground
- **Withrow Park**
- Woburn Park
- **Wychwood Car Barns Park**

Other Organizations:

- Access TO
- **Canadian Dog Walkers Association**
- **Harbourfront Dog Team**
- Park People
- **Riverdale Dog Walkers Group**
- Toronto Dog Park Community
- Toronto Accessible Sports Council

Attachment C. List of places/cities included in the best practices review

Regional:

1. Mississauga, ON
2. Hamilton, ON
3. London, ON
4. Thunder Bay, ON
5. Ottawa, ON
6. Guelph, ON
7. Sudbury, ON

National:

1. Calgary, AB
2. Surrey, BC
3. Vancouver, BC
4. Halifax, NS
5. Edmonton, AB
6. Winnipeg, MB
7. Regina, SK

International:

1. United States:
 - a. Chicago, IL
 - b. Seattle, WA
 - c. New York, NY
 - d. Philadelphia, P A
 - e. Portland, OR
 - f. Denver, CO
 - g. Austin, TX
 - h. Seattle, WA
 - i. Tampa, FL
 - j. San Francisco, CA
2. Australia:
 - a. South Australia
 - b. Sydney, NSW
3. New Zealand
 - a. Christchurch, NZ
4. Europe:
 - a. London, UK
 - b. Munich, DE
 - c. Switzerland
 - d. Paris, FR
 - e. Madrid, ES

Attachment D. Proposed structure and approach to case study profiles

City of Toronto DOG OFF LEASH AREA			
GENERAL INFORMATION			
Name:			
District:		Main Intersection:	
Size (ha):		Shape:	Topography:
SURFACING			
Surface Type: Engineer Wood Fiber Mulch Natural/Grass Pea Gravel Granite Chip Sand			
Surfacing Observations: Material Migration Poor Drainage Erosion Pooling/Mud Holes/Digging Root Exposure Compaction			
Surfacing Depth (mm):			
FENCING			
Fencing: Y / N		Gates: Y / N	# of Gates:
Fencing Type: Iron Omega Chain Link Post and Paddle Wire Mesh Other:			
Gate Location:		Double Gate:	
Fence Observations: Cut Holes Large Gaps Rust Damage Warped/Sagging Unsafe Other:			
Fence Height (m):			
TREES			
Trees within OLA: Y / N		Trees providing shade within OLA: Y / N:	
If trees within OLA, are they fenced off: Y / N			
Tree Damage: Compaction Roots Exposed Damaged Canopy Urine Ring Stripped Bark Other:			
Number of Trees within OLA:		DBH:	
WATER			
Irrigation: Y / N		Dog Drinking Fountain: Y / N	Human Drinking Fountain: Y / N:
Beach/Water Access: Y / N			
AMENITIES			
Landscape Features: Boulders Logs Play Amenities None Other:			
Signage: Y / N		Type:	Community Board: Y / N
Lighting: Y / N		# of Lights:	Location:
Seating: Y / N		Type:	Amount:
# of City Bins:		Waste Bins: Green / Blue / Black	
ACCESSIBLE			
Within OLA: Y / N		To OLA: Y / N	Transit Connection: Y / N
Walkability: Poor Satisfactory Good Great			
Adjacent Amenities: Playground Sports Field Washroom Splash Pad Other:			

OTHER OBSERVATIONS