

OFF-LEASH AREA CASE STUDY SITE INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

As part of the City-Wide Study of Off-Leash Areas the City held conversations with representative from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The purpose of the conversations was to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on opportunities for improvements to help inform the City-wide recommendations.

Summaries from the then conversations with the OLA representatives are included on the following pages of this report.

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City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas
ALLAN GARDENS OLA INTERVIEW
Friday, September 20, 2019
Conference Call

Participants:

Allan Gardens Off-Leash Area Representative
City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit
Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the representative from the Allan Gardens OLA to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc and was shared with participants in draft prior to being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

The representative began their position in the spring/summer of 2019, after the previous representative stepped down. The main communication mechanism for OLA users is a Facebook page. There is desire for a bulletin board in or around the off-leash area to share information and updates.

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Fencing

Issue: Both large and small dogs are able to get out of the OLA. Large dogs can jump over the fence and small dogs can squeeze through gaps in the fence. OLA users have put in some wiring, which has helped to prevent small dogs from getting out but the wiring is not maintained.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate ways to improve and maintain fencing to prevent dogs from getting out of the OLA. Taller fences may not be a desirable solution as they are unlikely to be visually appealing.

2. Gates & winter maintenance

Issue: Gates often break, especially in the winter and repairs can take a long time to be completed. It can also be difficult to get to the OLA because of snow and ice buildup or salt used to clear paths, which can be harmful to dogs' paws.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate gate and latch materials that are stronger and less likely to break regularly. Use dog-friendly salt/ice melting options to remove snow and ice.

3. Accessibility

Issue: Several OLA users at Allan Gardens use wheelchairs and those without 'off-road wheels' have trouble accessing and using the OLA. Both the latches and the existing surface present problems for people in wheelchairs.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate the installation of accessible (e.g. paved) pathways within the OLA and gates/latches that are also accessible.

4. Surfacing

Issue: Most of the OLA is just dirt. There are mixed opinions about this surface; some are fine with it, whereas others want crushed granite. There is also understanding among OLA users that the original plan for the OLA was to provide crushed granite. OLA users have raised concerns that the dirt can cause infections in dogs and increase visits to the vet.

Proposed solution to investigate: Clarify if crushed granite was/is the planned surface and if so, consider crushed gravel as a possible surfacing option for the OLA.

5. Shade

Issue: There is minimal shade, especially in the large dog area. There was large tree, which died and was cut down without any known plans to replace it. This is especially a problem when the park is hot and busy.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate planning more trees to provide shade. Also clarify the process for adding trees to OLAs; there are other OLAs within the same ward that have received trees.

6. Lighting

Issue: The current lighting used are outdated gas lamps, which provide poor lighting.

Proposed solution to investigate: Replace current lights with modern LED lights that are brighter.

7. Access to running water

Issue: The only fountain is in the large dog area. This makes it difficult for small dog owners to get water for their dogs as they have either bring their dogs with them or leave them unattended while they get water for them. Additionally, there isn't a water fountain for people.

Proposed solution to investigate: Install a water fountain in the small dog area and potentially dual source fountains for both people and dogs.

8. Seating

Issue: Seating is limited, which is a highly desired asset in the OLA.

Proposed solution to investigate: install more benches / places to sit in the OLA.

9. Cigarette waste

Issue: OLA users appreciate the new facilities for recycling and bio-waste. However, cigarette butts are left throughout the OLA, which can be harmful to dogs.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate installing ashtrays to collect cigarette butts.

10. By-law and code of conduct signage

Issue: Signs are difficult to read and quickly understand because they are outside of the gates/fences and include technical/legal language.

Proposed solution to investigate: Install signs inside the OLA so people can see and reference them when they're using the dog park. Investigate using more common language to make it more accessible.

Pup-Up Event

Holding the Pup-Up at a few times would be ideal to get a broader range of OLA users. Busier times include Monday thru Thursday from 5:00 – 7:00pm. Suggest finalizing the date and time and sharing it with Councillor Wong-Tam before October 8th as she is holding a meeting for related to OLAs in her ward and could help promote the Pup-Up at this meeting.

City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas

BAYVIEW ARENA PARK OLA INTERVIEW

Tuesday, September 17, 2019

3337 Bayview Ave – Donut Counter

Participants:

Bayview Arena Park Off-Leash Area Representative
City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit
Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the representative for the Bayview Arena Park Off-Leash Area to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc and was shared with participants for review prior to being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

The Bayview Arena Parks OLA representative has been so since the OLA opened. They have developed connections with other local dog owners and OLA users through word of mouth and communicates with them at the park and sometimes through text messages.

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Unneutered male dogs

Issue: Previously, the Code of Conduct prohibited unneutered male dogs in OLAs; they are now allowed. Unneutered male dogs, especially if untrained, can be aggressive and have resulted in injuries, including one person who had a piece of their finger bitten off in the OLA.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate why the Code of Conduct was revised to allow unneutered male dogs in OLAs and consider amending the policy.

2. Shade

Issue: This OLA does not have any shade/shelter and becomes very hot, which results in minimal use, especially during the summer months. The existing surface, pea gravel, also gets very hot.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate ways to provide shade to keep the OLA cooler and more usable during hot weather. Investigate other surface options (e.g. smaller versions of pea gravel) that may not get as hot. Don't change the surface without first determining if there is a better option. *The City noted that this OLA is in a hydro corridor*

and the lack of shade may be a result of rules and regulations set by Hydro One, which the team will need to investigate further.

3. Size

Issue: This OLA is small and prevents dog owners from walking their dogs. Instead people and dogs stand around in groups and dogs often become territorial.

Proposed solution to investigate: Directed exercise (i.e. walking on a path / trail) is beneficial for both dogs and humans. Having OLAs that are large enough to accommodate people taking their dogs for a walk should be investigated. Agility equipment is not a desirable replacement for space to walk.

4. Gates

Issue: The gates often break during the winter and require a large crew of park staff to fix.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate why gates are breaking and potential alternative materials that are less likely to break.

5. Salt

Issue: The paths around the OLA and the area between the double gates are heavily salted during the winter. The salt can be harmful to dog's paws and act as a barrier to use.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate alternative ways to keep ice off the paths, e.g. shoveling and/or a dog-friendly salt. At the very least, do not salt the area between the double gates that provide access to the OLA.

6. Water

Issue: Water is not provided at the OLA, which requires people to bring their own from home.

Proposed solution to investigate: Park staff have explained that water cannot be run to the OLA because it is in a hydro corridor. As an alternative, explore opportunities to provide access to water at the arena (e.g. a fountain or tap outside).

Pup-Up Event

Early evening/after work may be the best time to host the Pup-Up. However, it is difficult to identify a specific time when the OLA is used more frequently because local dog owners don't often use the OLA because of the issues identified above. The team should find ways to connect with local dog owners that don't use the OLA (e.g. people walking their dogs in the hydro corridor) and ask arena/park staff when the OLA is more heavily used.

City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas
BERESFORD PARK OLA INTERVIEW
Friday, September 27, 2019
720 Bathurst Street – CSI Annex

Participants:
Beresford Park Off-Leash Area representative
City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit
Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the representative from the Beresford Park OLA to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc. and was shared with participants for review prior to being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

The representative began their position as the OLA representative about 3 years ago along with another member of the community. Communication between the OLA reps and other OLA users is generally informal (e.g. discussions at the OLA). The representative suspects that many people aren't aware that they are the reps for the OLA and suggested a more formalized system with publicly available contact information would help with communication (*see point 4 below for additional information*).

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Fencing

Issue: Beresford Park does not have a fence and is next to a road that has relatively high traffic, especially during the morning and afternoon rush hour periods. The lack of barrier between the road and the OLA can be dangerous for dogs if they run out on to the street or across the street to the playground area.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate possible barriers between the OLA and the road and/or options to reduce the speed of cars (e.g. speed bumps, reduced speed limits, etc.). Many OLA and park users like not having a fence/barrier between the OLA and rest of the park because it promotes a mix of uses and interaction between different park users.

2. Human Litter (meat scraps)

Issue: An individual dumps meat scraps in the park across the street from the OLA. This attracts dogs across the street, which increases their risk of getting hit by the car and can

also make dogs sick if they eat the meat. It can also be harmful to children and other park users because the meat attracts wasps.

Proposed solution to investigate: The City and park users have had difficulty stopping the individual from dumping the meat but have recently become aware of who it is, and the frequency has decreased. Investigate additional opportunities to enforce consequences as dumping meat scraps is not allowed in parks.

3. Enforcement and reporting

Issue: There have been conflicts between dogs in the off-leash area, with certain dogs attacking other dogs. These instances are further problematic if/when dog owners either don't have recall over their dog or take the attitude that other dogs should simply get used to their dog's behaviour. Some dog owners are hesitant to call 311 to report issues because they don't know what action will be taken; they are nervous the other dog may be put down and/or they may be identified as the person issuing a complaint.

Proposed solution to investigate: Explore opportunities to increase education about the reporting system, i.e. how someone can report an issue in the OLA and what happens when someone reports an issue to the City. Examine problematic areas across the City and deploy enforcement staff and resources to those problematic areas.

4. Roles and responsibilities of OLA

Issue: The specific roles and responsibilities of the OLA reps are somewhat unclear. This can make it difficult for the OLA reps to fulfill their responsibilities and reduce their ability to be a useful resource for other OLA users and the City.

Proposed solution to investigate: If not already in place, investigate a process for formalizing the roles and responsibilities of the OLA representatives. Look for opportunities to communicate/publicize the set roles and responsibilities as well as the OLA reps' information. This could include having the roles and responsibilities and a list of all the OLA reps on the City's website with designated contact information so that OLA users know who to contact for their specific OLA. Investigate options to allow for a team of advocates for each OLA that could be led by one or two OLA reps. The additional advocates could help with education and communications.

The OLA representative also identified a number of features that are working well at the Beresford Park OLA, including: most OLA users follow the rules, including picking up after their dogs; the lack of fencing between the OLA and the rest of the park promotes a mix uses and positive interactions between many park users; and the grass is good surface.

Pup-Up Event

Weekday mornings or evenings are consistently busy (i.e. starting at 9:00 am or 5:00pm). The weekend is less consistently busy. Suggest talking with families using the playground across the street to get their perspective on the off-leash area.

City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas
CHERRY BEACH OLA INTERVIEW
Tuesday, September 24, 2019
Conference Call

Participants:

Cherry Beach Off-Leash Area Representative
City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit
Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the representative from the Cherry Beach OLA to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc. and was shared with participants in draft before being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

The Cherry Beach representative has been going to the beach for over 30 years with her dogs and has seen the area evolve from an unofficial off-leash area to an official off-leash area. They became the official OLA representative more recently by default as the position was not filled by anyone else. The OLA has a very active Facebook group; while there are some ongoing technical issues with the administration it is used by the OLA rep and others as an effective means of communication. There are also a number of active professional dog walkers that use the OLA regularly and are very helpful with communicating information and updates to the many people who use the OLA. The OLA representative also noted that they have good communication with the Parks Supervisor.

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Communicating with all OLA users

Issue: While the Facebook group is a very effective communication tool there is an awareness that it is not reaching all OLA users, especially younger and older users who don't typically use Facebook.

Proposed solution to investigate: The OLA rep and other active users have discussed using other forms of social media (e.g. twitter) to reach out to younger OLA users. Additional signs where information and updates can be posted may also help to reach more people.

2. Erosion and waste from the lake

Issue: As the OLA is on a landfill large pieces of rebar and rusted metal protrude from the ground. These pieces of rebar and metal are dangerous for both dogs and people.

Proposed solution to investigate: There is recognition that the City has made a concerted effort to mitigate erosion and the large pieces of metal and rebar, including: putting up orange fencing to act as a barrier for dogs and people; and putting down rocks/stones to prevent further erosion and cover the pieces of metal. While it may not be feasible, an ideal solution would be to remove the pieces of metal.

3. Flooding

Issue: Parts of the OLA area often flood, which creates a 'toxic swamp'. The flooding prevents dogs and people from getting to the west side of the OLA. There are also concerns that the water in the flooded areas may be harmful to dogs.

Proposed solutions to investigate: Investigate improved drainage options to help reduce flooding and standing water.

4. Dog waste left in the park

Issue: People not picking up after their dogs or picking up and leaving it in the OLA is an ongoing issue.

Proposed solutions to investigate: There is recognition that dog owners are responsible for picking up after their dogs and this requires a behaviour change by OLA users. Additional waste/compost bins at all entrances; additional signage; and stations where OLA users can pick up bags for dog waste may also help to correct this behaviour. *The City explained that compost bins have been added to all OLAs along with an education campaign that dog waste should be put in either garbage or compost bins but not recycling bins. It may not be possible to put bins at every entrance due to an inability to access and collect waste at entrances closer to the water. The City also explained that while they do not have resources to supply dog bags, the community can fundraise and connect with parks staff about options for distributing bags at the OLA.*

5. Loss of trees

Issue: A number of trees have been lost in the OLA, which may be contributing to erosion.

Proposed solutions to investigate: The OLA representative and other users are aware there is an opportunity to fundraise to bring in native tree species. The OLA rep and other users are continuing to follow-up with parks staff to see what can be done through fundraising.

6. Holes being dug by dogs

Issue: Dogs often dig holes; some of which are quite large (up to 3 feet deep), which can be dangerous for both people and dogs. This is especially problematic further away from the water where the soil is compacted and refilling holes can be difficult.

Proposed solutions to investigate: Many of the OLA users understand it is the dog owner's responsibility to refill any holes dug by their dog and will often remind and encourage individuals to do so when they see holes being dug. Tools (e.g. shovels) that can be left at the OLA and a bin with soil may help OLA users refill larger holes. Investigate additional options for filling holes in areas where soil is compacted.

7. Gates

Issue: The Cherry Beach OLA does not have safety/double gates. This can result in dogs escaping when other users and their dogs are entering the park.

Proposed solutions to investigate: Investigate adding double gates to entrances/exits to the OLA.

Pup-Up Event

Regular OLA users typically go to the park weekday mornings around 9:30 am and again at 3:30 pm. There is also a number of people that use the OLA after work around 6:30/7:00pm. However, they may start going sooner as the days get shorter. The OLA is also heavily used on the weekends as many non-regular users come to the park at this time. If feasible, a small incentive for participants (e.g. a doggy loot bag) may help to increase participation.

City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas

HIGH PARK OLA INTERVIEW

Wednesday, September 25, 2019

720 Bathurst Street – CSI Annex

Participants:

High Park Off-Leash Area Representatives

City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit

Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the two representatives from the High Park OLA to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc. and was shared with participants for review prior to being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

Both of the OLA representatives have a long-standing history of participation with High Park. One participant has been a user of the park for over 20 years. The second representative has over 30 years' participation in High Park related to dogs. Both have volunteered for 15 years on an advisory committee related to dogs in High Park. They predominantly use a Facebook page, High Park K9, and an email to connect with other OLA users. They also use the bulletin board situated in the park.

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Communication

Issue: At times there can be a lack of information or clarity on plans for long-term maintenance being completed by the City. If the OLA representatives don't know/understand the long-term plans they in turn cannot keep other OLA users up to date. Additionally, OLA users have a great deal of useful information about the OLA they could share related to ongoing and site specific issues if they were more regularly included in the conversations with park staff about long-term operations.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate developing a process that would allow park staff to provide regular updates on ongoing maintenance / operations and gather information from OLA reps and users (e.g. an advisory committee or something similar).

2. Erosion issues at the Spring Road entry

Issue: The Spring Road OLA entry has significant issues with erosion and safety, and many users will go to another gate to avoid icy conditions and exposed tarp staples where the sand covering has eroded. The exposed tarp staples are located on the off leash trail that is west of Spring Road, opposite the metal staircase. Dogs have to be on-leash at the other gate, but people don't always follow this rule.

Proposed solution to investigate: Long-term solutions for the erosion by the staircase where the OLA entry at Spring Road is located. Look into the feasibility of connecting the two-sides of the OLA where users are currently not abiding by proper leash requirements so that it is legally allowed.

3. Fencing

Issue: Some of the current fencing is old and flimsy, and in certain areas heavy rainfall has eroded the surrounding sand creating muddy conditions. Dogs have escaped and/or have got stuck and hurt in the damaged fencing. In some cases, temporary fencing has been put up in the past to fill the gaps, however the barricades don't always work, and dogs manage to crawl underneath and/or get stuck. This is especially problematic in the area that leads down to the creek, which dogs and their owners regularly accessed prior to temporary fencing being put up.

Proposed solution to investigate: Look into installing post and paddle fencing and in some cases extending the height of the existing fencing. This could help create a more permanent and safer solution. Strive to strike a balance with fencing height and materials that prevent dogs from getting out of OLA while maintaining a natural look and feel.

4. Gate damage

Issue: Many gates to the OLA are damaged or no longer attached to a fence because of rotting wood. While there is some history of human-involved damage, this does not appear to be the primary cause of the issue. If dogs hop the fence or become stuck and the gate is not accessible, it creates an issue for the dog owner.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate a higher standard of maintenance and/or improved materials for the gates and fencing, ensuring that they are accessible for all users.

5. Waste management

Issue: There used to be non-organic and organic bins near the main OLA entry to Dog Hill east of Colborne Lodge Dr, which were well-received by OLA and park users. These bins were removed and resulted in issues with people leaving dog waste on the ground in the area for a period of time. This issue has subsided recently as people have become aware of and are using bins at nearby locations.

Proposed solution to investigate: Facilitate accurate expectations within the community about waste management; communicating when and why bins are moved as well as alternative locations. *Note added after the meeting:* See Attachment 1 for a map provided by the City identifying the organic and non-organic waste bins in High park.

6. Education about ESA

Issue: High Park is an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) in the City of Toronto; the OLA representatives suggested that more OLA and general park users would respect and follow by-laws in the park if they knew more about ESAs and the importance of protecting the natural environment. They also noted that they are keen to connect with other groups at High Park to help promote the importance of the natural environment and the ESA specifically.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate opportunities educate park users and help facilitate connections between OLA users and other High Park groups (e.g. ProtectNatureTO). Investigate education opportunities such as having experts come to the park to host sessions on Black Oak Savannah, hosting a Jane's Walk in High Park through the OLA to learn about the natural environment, and promoting community clean-up days.

Pup-Up Event

The representatives highlighted two sets of times that would be useful for the pup-up event. As a destination OLA, weekends are best and very busy as it draws people from all over the City. On weekdays there are more dog walkers during the day (10:00am – 4:00pm) and neighbourhood people in the morning. It was recommended that Thanksgiving week be avoided due to people taking travelling and taking extended holidays.

City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas

L'AMOREAUX PARK OLA INTERVIEW

Friday, September 20, 2019

Conference Call

Participants:

L'Amoreaux Park Off-Leash Area Representative

City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit

Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the representative from the L'Amoreaux Park OLA to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc and with the OLA representative in draft before being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

The representative started their position a few months ago when this study began and they became aware that L'Amoreaux Park did not have a rep. At this point they communicate primarily through word of mouth in the park and have put their email up on the OLA bulletin board.

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Fencing

Issue: There are some gaps and holes in the fence, which allows dogs, primarily small dogs, to get out.

Proposed solution to investigate: Find holes/gaps and fix them to prevent dogs from getting out. Stay in contact with the OLA representative to help identify problem spots and fix them before they become large enough for dogs to get out.

2. Gates

Issue: The latches often stick, making it difficult to both open and close the gates.

Proposed solution to investigate: Examine the latches on the gates and make necessary repairs. Investigate alternative latches that are less likely to stick.

3. Access to running water

Issue: There is no direct access to water in the OLA. There is a small washroom near the parking lot, which some OLA users get water from. However, the washroom is not always open.

Proposed solution to investigate: There is a desire to have a water fountain in the OLA and if possible, a tri-level fountain that can be used by dogs, children, and adults.

4. Small-dog area

Issue: The OLA at L'Amoureux Park does not have a small dog area and small dogs and their owners can become uncomfortable in the OLA, especially if/when large dogs are rambunctious. This is particularly problematic if large dogs are left unattended.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate opportunities to include a small dog area at the L'Amoureux Park OLA and other OLA's in the city that currently don't have one. At the L'Amoureux Park OLA, specifically examine if it would be possible to add a portion of fence across the triangular corner of the OLA for a small dog section.

5. Promoting the code of conduct and by-laws

Issue: The OLA is often used by people from Markham who do not have their dogs licensed in Toronto and are therefore are technically not allowed to use the OLA.

Proposed solution to investigate: Increase signage in the OLA that outlines the code of conduct and by-laws, e.g. put the signs at each entrance/exit and put them inside the OLA so that OLA users can see and reference them while using the dog park.

6. Food waste around the OLA

Issue: There is a shelter area in the park near the OLA that many people use to have picnics and consume food. However, because there aren't any garbage cans near the shelter food, including chicken bones, are often left on the ground. Food waste can attract dogs and can be dangerous for them to consume.

Proposed solution to investigate: Consider adding garbage cans near the shelter area. City staff also suggested calling 311 as calls get recorded and tracked, which helps to identify persistent issues and enforcement.

7. Drainage

Issue: The entrance to the OLA becomes wet and swampy when it rains. OLA users often avoid using this entrance when it's wet.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate surfacing and improved drainage to prevent water buildup and swampy conditions.

8. Shade and trees

Issue: There are three trees in the OLA, which are either dead or in bad shape. These trees had provided shade, which helped to keep the park cool and accessible during hot weather.

Proposed solution to investigate: Additional deciduous trees are preferred as a means of providing shade. However, it's understood that because this OLA is in a hydro corridor new trees may not be permitted. Investigate alternative options for providing shade.

Pup-Up Event

The OLA is busy on weekday evenings (6:00 pm onward) and Saturday mornings; either of these times would be good times to host the Pup-Up. The OLA can also be quite busy on Sunday evenings.

City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas

MERRILL BRIDGE ROAD PARK OLA INTERVIEW

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

720 Bathurst Street – CSI Annex

Participants:

Merrill Bridge Road Park Off-Leash Area Representative
City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit
Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the representative from the Merrill Bridge Road Park OLA to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc and shared with the participants for review prior to being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

The representative has been a co-chair for the Merrill Bridge Road Park OLA since October 2018, and became the sole representative in June 2019. They have developed connections with other local dog owners and OLA users through the dog park email list which has approximately 150 subscribers, an active Facebook page which they help manage, as well as by communicating with people directly in the park. There is also a message board that has the dog park Facebook page information.

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Communication with the City / governing bodies

Issue: Difficulty getting in contact with Parks and Metrolinx staff regarding a fallen tree in the rail corridor that is impacting the fence at the south edge of the park. This fallen tree has damaged the fence and the fence is the only barrier for the OLA. On a broader scale, there is a general concern about a lack of responsiveness from the City regarding ongoing issues.

Proposed solution to investigate: Education about the various actors involved with OLA maintenance, and streamlining reporting so issues are tracked and dealt with in a timely manner. *City staff also said they will continue to follow up with Metrolinx about having the fallen tree removed.*

2. Maintenance

Issue: As part of the OLA is grass, dogs dig holes that need to be repaired to avoid safety concerns for dogs and people. The park has a City bin where dog owners can retrieve soil to patch holes, however the supply has run out. Part of the issue is signage and communication; the code of conduct states that dog owners are responsible for repairing damage caused by their dogs, however very few do.

Proposed solution to investigate: Ensure that the Code of Conduct is visible to prompt dog owners to repair OLA surfaces if their dog causes damage. Research how maintenance tools are distributed amongst OLAs and whether there would be the opportunity for Merrill Bridge to receive more soil.

3. Communication and action regarding allowable/regulated OLA uses

Issue: Commercial dog walkers aren't legally allowed to walk their dogs in Merrill Bridge Road Park; however, many use the OLA due to a lack of proper signage. Additionally, there has been a range of opinions about OLA representatives policing park space.

Proposed solution to investigate: The City explained that non-emergency municipal service is data driven and calling 311 to report illegal uses of the OLA will not only track the comment, but reoccurring issues could prompt more response. It may also be helpful to inform the Canadian Dog Walkers Association so they can remind their members to not use areas they are prohibited in. Installing larger, clearer signage near the OLA entrance that states the Code of Conduct and by-laws may help mitigate this issue.

4. Proper waste disposal

Issue: OLA users are pleased that there is garbage, recycling and compost bins on-site. However, dog waste is often put in the recycling bin, which contaminates the recycling.

Proposed solution to investigate: Better signage and moving the recycling bin away from other bins to discourage people from putting in dog waste in the recycling bin.

5. No small-dog area

Issue: Big dogs and large puppies often dominate the OLA, and can contribute to an unsafe or uncomfortable environment for small dogs and their owners. Large dogs can trample small dogs.

Proposed solution to investigate: Review options to see if an area for small dogs is feasible at this location to help create a safer, more inclusive environment.

Pup-Up Event

There is a large group and broad range of dog-sizes in the OLA between 8:00-10:00am on weekday mornings, as well as 4:30-6:00pm, after standard working hours. Saturday mornings are also quite busy.

City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas

SANDY BRUCE PARK OLA INTERVIEW

Friday, September 20, 2019

Conference Call

Participants:

Sandy Bruce Park Off-Leash Area Representative
City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit
Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the representative from the Sandy Bruce Park OLA to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc and shared with the participants for review prior to being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

The representative has been involved for two years. An email address has been created and posted that the OLA. There is also have a Facebook page, which is used to share information and has approximately 120 members.

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Communication

Issue: The response rate from the City used to be quite reasonable. However, more recently it has started to take much longer (i.e. months and on one occasion a year) to get a response from the City on issues raised. There is also a perception that the standard answer to nearly all requests is “no” without explanation as to why. If responses from City staff are limited or delayed it can be difficult for the OLA representative to act as an effective liaison between the City and OLA users. If OLA users are not receiving information from the OLA rep, they often reach out to the City directly, resulting in the City receiving many additional inquires that could be streamlined through the OLA rep.

Proposed solution to investigate: Develop a system that records and tracks inquiries from the OLA representative so they and the City can more effectively follow-up. Provide clarity on if/how OLA users can fundraise for certain features for their OLA (e.g. a water fountain).

2. Slope and drainage

Issue: The Sandy Bruce Park OLA has a large slope, which becomes quite slippery and dangerous in the winter and is not accessible for some OLA users. As snow and ice melt the water pools at the bottom of the hill. Ice then builds up at the bottom of the hill and again can become a dangerous environment for OLA users.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate installing a railing to make it easier and safer for everyone to move up and down the slope. Investigate the existing drainage system and make any necessary repairs/improvements.

3. Gates with concrete pads

Issue: The concrete pads at the gates/entrances to the OLA are flush with the ground. This results in significant snow and ice buildup, which can prevent the gates from closing and allows dogs to get out.

Proposed solution to investigate: Consider raising the concrete pads and/or using animal-safe de-icing materials to prevent snow and ice buildup and gates from staying open.

4. Surface maintenance

Issue: The OLA surface is woodchips and often requires maintenance and additional woodchips. Otherwise the OLA becomes very muddy. There is a perception that other OLAs with woodchips are restocked more regularly.

Proposed solution to investigate: Clearly communicate the replenishment cycle the City follows for woodchips (i.e. which park gets restocked and when). Share information about if/how OLA users can fundraise to help replenish woodchips as needed; there is strong potential for the local community to raise funds for this and other needs at the OLA.

5. Design implementation

Issue: Some aspects of the construction of the OLA do not appear to match the original design (e.g. location of rock walls). There is a perception that the design may not have been followed without an explanation as to why.

Proposed solution to investigate: Ensure park designs are properly implemented and explanations for any changes can be explained.

Pup-Up Event

The OLA is generally busiest on weekday evenings (5:00 – 7:00 pm) and weekend mornings (10:00 am – 12:00 pm); either of these times would be good times to host the Pup-Up.

City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas
SUNNYBROOK PARK OLA INTERVIEW
Wednesday, September 18, 2019
720 Bathurst Street – CSI Annex

Participants:
Sunnybrook Park Off-Leash Area Representative
City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit
Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the representative from the Sunnybrook Park OLA to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc. and was shared with participants in draft prior to being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

The representative has held their position for the last two to three years and is also a registered professional dog-walker in the neighbourhood. The OLA has a Facebook page for communication, but the discourse can, at times, be a source of tension. The representative prefers face-to-face communication and finds that it's the best way to facilitate sensitive issues. As a very frequent user of the OLA, they reach out to other users if there is a known problem that someone is experiencing.

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Water supply

Issue: The water source in the park is on dirt or clay, and experiences drainage issues. It puddles at the base, which can be a hazard to dogs if they roll around or drink the water. There has been a lack of response from the City in the past when OLA users notify the city for maintenance.

Proposed solution to investigate: Install a pebble or concrete slab base under the water source to prevent pooling of water. A dual-level water fountain for both dogs and people would also be great to have.

2. Fencing

Issue: The fence near the forested conservation area is too low, and because it is made of horizontal timber with chicken wire, small dogs can escape when it gets damaged. It can be unsafe if dogs escape, particularly with a neighboring parking lot.

Proposed solution to investigate: Review the height and materials of the fence to see if other feasible materials could be used instead.

3. Small dog park location

Issue: In order to access the small dog area, people and their dogs have to pass through the large dog area which can create tension. Some people don't feel safe with their small dogs interacting with the larger dog population.

Proposed solution to investigate: Review the possibility of extending the fence line to a nearby service door in the OLA, in order to allow for a separate entrance.

4. Equipment, maintenance and winterization

Issue: The latches on the entry gates are often broken, and the platforms are not maintained in the winter. Ice builds up, which contributes to the damage of the entry gates and is a hazard to users of the park. While OLA users will often help maintain the park, the conditions can become very poor. Traditional salt is harmful to the pads on dog's paws.

Proposed solution to investigate: Clearer communication about maintenance expectations and determining resources for OLA users to help effectively maintain the park in the winter. Implementing other means of snow and ice removal, such as dog-safe salt or sand.

5. Communication about the OLA uses

Issue: Due to Sunnybrook's size and location, there are many different users who enjoy the park amenities. Some people picnic, bring in strollers, and bike through the OLA. These uses, at times, can conflict with dogs in the OLA.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate ways to promote the code of conduct and responsible behaviour in the OLA so that all users can enjoy the park. *The City explained that prohibiting specific users/uses would go against the mandate of City Parks, which is an inclusive use for all residents to enjoy.*

6. Size of OLA and nearby uses

Issue: A dead-end pathway behind the dog park is intended as an on-leash area, however many people take their dogs off-leash because it is quiet, has water, and allows their dogs to be walked. The OLA lacks flat open areas where dogs can be walked and have more interaction, instead of just running in circles.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate if it would be possible to extend the OLA to include the pathway area behind the existing area.

7. Lack of interactive elements

Issue: There is a lack of tactile amenities in the OLA for dogs to interact with. While it is important to have human-focused amenities such as benches, it is very important to improve the OLA with dogs in mind.

Proposed solution to investigate: It is understood that due to finances and physical layout of the OLA, it may not be feasible for high-cost solutions. Instead, investigate low-cost best practices being implemented in other cities.

8. Parking

Issue: The parking lot next to the OLA is often full of visitors coming to the nearby hospital.

Proposed solution to investigate: Increased enforcement of allowable parking in the lot and clearer signage to direct people trying to access the OLA to the other parking lots near the other side of the OLA, when the main lot is full.

Pup-Up Event

The busiest time during the week is 10:00am until noon, with high turn over, including dog owners and dog professionals, and other users. It is also busy at the same time on the weekends.

City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas

WYCHWOOD CAR BARNS PARK OLA INTERVIEW

Wednesday, September 18, 2019

720 Bathurst Street – CSI Annex

Participants:

Wychwood Car Barns Park Off-Leash Area Representative
City of Toronto – Parks Standards & Innovations Unit
Swerhun Inc.

OVERVIEW

As part of the City-Wide Study of Existing Off-Leash Areas the City is hosting conversations with representatives from the 10 Off-Leash Area (OLA) Case Study Sites. The City and Swerhun Inc. had a conversation with the representative from the Wychwood Car Barns Park OLA to better understand ongoing issues and seek feedback on potential opportunities for improvements that can help inform the City-wide recommendations being developed through the study.

This summary was written by Swerhun Inc and shared with the participants for review prior to being finalized. It provides a review of key topics discussed in the conversation; it is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Communications with dog owners and OLA users

The representative began their position in the summer of 2019. There is a Facebook page for OLA updates, but it isn't very active. Word of mouth is currently the most useful way to communicate with users, and although it needs cleaning and updates, there is access to a bulletin board.

Common issues and proposed solutions

1. Drainage and surfaces

Issue: The park has a crushed granite surface which shifts with use to the edges of the OLA and causes drainage issues. There is a low-lying area in the south-west corner that has a drainage system, but it doesn't appear to be working well and hasn't for quite some time. Whenever it rains or ice melts, it becomes a pool and there are reports of dogs becoming sick from drinking or bathing in the mud.

Proposed solution to investigate: The surface material itself is not the issue for owners and dogs, however there is a need for additional crushed granite. One suggestion is to have a volunteer clean-up day. There is also need for clarity about what's allowed and encouraged in terms of self-regulated maintenance, i.e. what are OLA users allowed to do in terms of clean-up and fundraising for materials to help with maintenance.

2. Off-leash area hours and access to running water

Issue: The OLA is closed from 12:00 – 3:00pm daily, this rule was established when the OLA was created. There is a desire to have the OLA opened during these hours; many people use the OLA at this time, including people who take their dogs out on their lunch hour. Access to water is within the OLA, therefore people walking their dogs in the area during 12:00-3:00pm are unable to access water for their dogs.

Proposed solution to investigate: Investigate if it would be beneficial and possible to have the OLA open from 12:00 – 3:00pm daily.

3. Seating and shade

Issue: There are two picnic tables and a trellis in the OLA, but the type of seating isn't preferred, and the trellis doesn't provide adequate shade.

Proposed solution to investigate: Install benches in the OLA, as well as more shade covering whether it be a physical structure or trees in order to keep the area cooler, particularly in the summer months.

4. Communication about dog licensing

Issue: There's a perception from some OLA users that licensing dogs is a cash-grab from the City and that the capital doesn't go back into the parks, rather the City at-large.

Proposed solution to investigate: Better communication is needed to address this perception, and more education on how the funds from licensing dogs is used as well as the revenue sources for OLAs.

In addition, the representative inquired about community fundraising to maintain and improve the OLA. The City explained that there is a branch that manages partnerships and fundraising and said they would share information about how to contact this branch.

Pup-Up Event

Saturdays are the busiest day, but this may change when the Wychwood Market moves indoors. 10:00am and after working hours (between 5:00-6:00pm) are the busiest times during the week.