

Community and Operations Services Committee – April 19, 2023

Response to Correspondence CO-23-06 from various residents requesting an off leash dog park at Somerset Park (Ward 2)

That the Community and Operations Services Committee recommend to City Council:

WHEREAS at the February 13, 2023 meeting of the Community and Operations Services Committee, [Correspondence CO-23-06](#), dated January 17, 2023, from various residents (3) requesting an off leash park at Somerset Park was referred to staff for a report;

AND WHEREAS the correspondence requests that Somerset Park be made off leash before 10:00 or 11:00 a.m.;

AND WHEREAS it is important that dog owners keep their dogs on leash so that parks and public spaces remain safe and enjoyable for everyone;

AND WHEREAS Municipal Law Enforcement Services has indicated that this park does have several historical complaints or issues related to off leash dogs;

AND WHEREAS dogs off leash outside of designated off leash areas are subject to enforcement under the Parks and Facilities By-law (By-law 83-2000) and the Responsible Pet Owners By-law (By-law 14-2010) due to the potential for conflict and safety concerns;

AND WHEREAS the desire for off leash areas need to be balanced with the safety and needs of other park users, park programming, environmental considerations, accessibility, and community support;

AND WHEREAS the City has developed “Guidelines for the Design and Placement of Off-Leash Areas” (“Guidelines”), appended as Attachment 1, which guides decision making process when considering suitability of off leash areas;

AND WHEREAS, Staff have reviewed the request from residents against the Guidelines and has identified the following concerns with designating Somerset Park for off leash use:

- lack of ability to control dogs running at large (no fencing) given the close proximity to a junior playground (ages 5-12), neighbouring properties, and walkways;
- the potential for conflict with other park users or adjacent property owners;
- the difficulty with enforcement and education especially where there is no clear fencing to delineate off leash use;

- the intended use of the park as passive recreational space that is inclusive to all users;
- the proximity of natural heritage features including woodlands and creeks which could be impacted by dogs running at large including the disturbance of wildlife, birds, vegetation, water quality and shoreline stability;
- the potential for increase in visitors using the park for off leash purposes beyond current park capacity.

AND WHEREAS, in addition to the concerns highlighted above, there has not been any consultation with the neighbourhood;

AND WHEREAS, Facility Management Services has confirmed that Somerset Park is not scheduled for Capital upgrade/redevelopment until the mid-2030's;

THEREFORE be it resolved that the Community and Operations Services Committee recommend:

That Correspondence CO-23-06, dated January 17, 2023, be referred to Facility Management Services staff for consideration as part of any future redevelopment.

Guidelines for Design and Placement of Off-Leash Areas

Date: October 2017



1.0 Introduction

The City of Oshawa's Parks Development section uses the following design standards and guidelines to aid in the location selection, construction, and maintenance of Off-Leash Areas. For proposed Off-Leash Areas, these design standards and guidelines help determine the rationale for site selection and any changes that may be required to an existing site to ensure success. The goal of the Guidelines is to provide a framework for well-planned and designed parks that accommodate all park users and minimize conflict. Off-Leash Areas will also assist with fostering responsible dog ownership and awareness of City By-laws.

A new Off-Leash Area may also be considered in conjunction with the redevelopment of an existing park or a new park development.

2.0 Guidelines

2.1 Off-Leash Area Site Selection

- **Geographic Distribution amongst other Off-Leash Areas:** To be determined by qualitative need on a case by case basis. Off-Leash Areas should be distributed in the City such that there is equitable distribution to these facilities in the City.
- **Land Suitability:** The site should be relatively flat and have clear site lines. If a desirable site has excessive slopes, it should be designed such that erosion and run-off do not become an issue.
- **Protection of Natural Areas:** Off-Leash Areas should not be located in or in close proximity to natural areas where flora and fauna, such as ground nesting birds, small mammals, and native plants, would be disturbed. Natural watercourses and their associated ecosystems are to be properly protected from any disturbance caused by users of Off-Leash Areas.
- **Buffer from Dissimilar Uses:**
 - **Residential:** A minimum setback of 20m is required from all adjacent residential land uses to the Off-Leash Area. The buffer space should

allow for neighbors to have no more disturbances from a dog park than other typical park uses. Buffers may include vegetation and/or berms to aid in noise and visual attenuation.

- **Non-Residential:** Depending on adjacent land use, a setback may or may not be required as an Off-Leash Area may be considered beneficial or undesirable. If the Off-Leash Area poses risks / undesirable traits to the adjacent land uses, the setback and buffer type used for residential land uses would apply.
- **Park Facilities:** Consideration will be given to the need for additional buffer space between the Off-Leash Area and other recreational facilities such as playgrounds, trails, picnic shelters, etc. This buffer can be determined through proper layout of the overall park space and assessment of other park uses to minimize potential conflict.
- **Size:** The size of the Off-Leash Area will be dependent upon the particular park in which it is proposed, other park activities, facilities, proximity to residences, etc. The acceptable range for a standard Off-Leash area is 0.5 hectares to 2.5 hectares. If a smaller Off-Leash Area is all that can be accommodated in a particular park, and if there is appropriate community support, then a smaller size will be considered.
- **Community Support:** Consultation as outlined in Section 3.0 has indicated support for the project.

2.2 Enclosure Design

- **Fencing Requirements:** Future off-Leash Areas require a suitable enclosure to ensure compatibility with other park uses while also establishing a clear boundary between on and off leash areas. Fencing style to be determined based on site character and setting.
 - **Page Wire:** To be used in natural settings and layouts where large quantities of fencing are required. Fencing type to be 1200mm tall galvanized wire fencing with 50mm x 100mm openings. Top and bottom wire to be 10 gauge and filler wires to be 12.5 gauge. Page Wire to be fastened to 150mm diameter peeled cedar farm posts.
 - **Chain link:** To be used in traditional parkland setting. Fencing type to be 1200mm tall galvanized chain link fencing attached to galvanized posts.
 - **Ornamental:** To be used in smaller urban park settings and fencing style to match with the aesthetic of the surrounding built form. Fencing style to be specified at time of location approval.
- **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (A.O.D.A.) Compliance:** Barrier free access to the site shall be provided, as well as an area through the corral and at the entry. Benches and accessible parking will also be provided. Barrier free paths through the Off-Leash Area should be provided.

- **Entrance Design:** An entry corral, consisting of a 3 meter x 3 meter fenced area with two gates, should be provided to allow for pet owners to safely unleash their dog prior to letting them in the Off-Leash area.
- **Parking:** Sufficient dedicated parking, convenient to the site, should be provided such that the dog park does not create undue burden on the surrounding neighborhood. Parking to provide the appropriate A.O.D.A. required spaces. Off-Leash Areas smaller than 0.25 hectares do not require dedicated parking.
- **Surfacing:** A variety of surfaces may be used depending on size of Off-Leash Area proposed.
 - Turf: Natural turf grass is the preferred choice for standard sized Off-Leash Areas larger than 0.5 hectares in size. In smaller areas, turf grass may not have sufficient time to regenerate due to use. It is recommended that lawn areas be rested periodically to allow for the turf grass to recover. Artificial turf is not recommended.
 - Pea Gravel: Pea Gravel is recommended in smaller Off-Leash Areas where turf grass would not regenerate due to the high use.
 - Mulch: To be used as an alternative to pea gravel or for heavy wear locations within turf grass Off-Leash Areas.
- **Signage:** Rules shall be clearly posted, including codes of behavior, hours, and requirements for entry.
- **Waste Collection:** Trash containers shall be provided in the Off-Leash Area, making sure that they are located with easy access for maintenance vehicles.
- **Site Furnishings:** Benches should be provided in convenient locations to allow for gathering and resting throughout the Off-Leash Area.
- **Pathways:**
 - Limestone Screenings: Interior paths should be constructed out of granular material with a limestone screenings topcoat. These secondary paths provide an accessible route within the Off-Leash Area.
 - Asphalt Pavement: The primary connection pathway from the parking / entrance area of the park to the Off-Leash Area should be constructed out of Asphalt with a minimum width of 2400mm to aide in accessibility and ease of maintenance.
 - Concrete Pavement: Concrete pavement to be used in high wear locations and primary entry areas, including but not limited to the double corral gate.
- **Shade:** The site should provide a good mix of mature trees to promote shaded areas. Shade structures may be beneficial where trees aren't available.
- **Water:** Source of potable drinking water for dogs may be considered available. Ideally, water source is brought to within Off-Leash Area enclosure and dispensary is installed for consumption if funding allows.
- **Lighting:** Lighting is not required.

- **Separate Areas for Large and Small/Shy Dogs:** Where space permits, two enclosed areas may be provided to allow for the separation of large and small/shy dogs. The Larger enclosure should be at least 0.4 hectares in size before a separate small dog enclosure is provided.
- **Visual Character and Aesthetics:** Off-Leash Areas should be located so as not to detract from the aesthetic quality of a park or open space. Ideally, the Off-Leash Area should be designed to integrate well into the existing site.
- **Buffer Plantings:** If it is necessary to buffer the Off-Leash Area, vegetation should be planted on the outside of the fence to aid in the aesthetic quality of the site and to assist in mitigating noise associated with the Off-Leash Area.
- **Maintenance Access:** Service gates and trash barrels should be located such that maintenance vehicles may easily enter from an existing park road, parking lot, or street frontage.

3.0 Consultation



The development of Off-Leash Areas will follow the same process as any other park development/re-development project including consultation. Staff will engage the public to:

- confirm the level of interest in an Off-Leash Area in south Oshawa;
- obtain local feedback on the siting and proposed off-leash area; and,
- gain commitment from volunteers to participate in the Off-leash Ambassador Program as per Section 4.0.

Based on this consultation staff will use the feedback to confirm the need for an off-leash area in south Oshawa and finalizing the proposed public input will help to determine the most appropriate locations for the off-leash area in south Oshawa.

Additional public consultation will also be undertaken to gauge level of interest/demand across the City in order to properly plan for future off-leash areas including future planning in new construction and park redevelopment.

4.0 Off-leash Ambassador Program

The establishment of a formal volunteer led group to work collaboratively with Parks Operations, Animal Services, and M.L.E.L.S. is essential in ensuring the success of an off-leash area.

The volunteer group would assist in:

- coordinating volunteer activities and fundraising;
- raising awareness among dog owners and park users of the by-laws and off-leash rules;
- monitoring and reporting on conditions at off-leash area (e.g. damage, maintenance) and activity in off-leash area (e.g. non-compliance issues);
- light maintenance work including poop and litter pick up within and around enclosed area and filling of holes; and,
- reporting of incidents to the City.

Volunteers must be familiar with the City's by-laws and act as a positive role model to promote responsible pet ownership and safety.

The City will provide ongoing maintenance including garbage removal, grass cutting, and site maintenance in accordance to current standards and operations.

5.0 Off-Leash Area Code of Conduct

Dog owners are subject to the Oshawa's Responsible Pet Owners By-law and the province of Ontario's Dog Owner's Liability Act.

All dogs must be on-leash in all public spaces unless otherwise signed that it is an off-leash area. In accordance with City By-laws dogs must be under their owner's control at all times which means in Off-Leash Areas dogs should be in view of their owners at all times and under voice control/command.

Dogs must be leashed when entering and leaving a leash-free area. All dogs must be licensed, vaccinated and wearing up to date tags. All litter, including dog waste, must be picked up and disposed of properly. Un-scooped poop is a health concern for dogs and humans and poses an environmental concern.

Dog owners should know their own dogs and leash them if necessary (even in a leash free area). Dogs are not to disturb or chase people. Users should take care and respect the wildlife and vegetation in the park.

Aggressive dogs, female dogs in heat, unneutered and sick dogs are not to use the park. If a dog becomes aggressive towards other dogs or humans, it must be leashed immediately and removed from the park. Please report dog attacks to Municipal Law Enforcement Services.

Dog walkers are welcome at the park, but must follow the City of Oshawa's by-law of a maximum of four dogs per walker. This has been put in place to ensure that all dogs are under control at all times.

User groups wishing to hold events may be allowed within the enclosure but must follow the City's park permitting policy.

Where issues persist with compliance an Off-Leash Area may be reviewed and reconsidered on a case by case basis.