

## **REPORT**

### ***Parks & Recreation***

**To:** Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council  
**Date:** August 28, 2023

**From:** Dean Gibson,  
Director of Parks and Recreation  
**File:** 2327594

**Item #:** 2023-519

**Subject:** **Interim Relocation of the Downtown Dog Off Leash Area (824 Agnes Street)**

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#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** Council approve, in principle, the relocation of the Downtown Dog Off Leash Area (OLA) from 824 Agnes Street to 68 Sixth Street on a temporary basis, and

**THAT** staff proceed with next steps as outlined in this report to:

- a) provide a draft licensing agreement for Council consideration at the September 11, 2023 meeting,
  - b) begin preparing the site to meet City standards as a dog OLA, and
  - c) continue working on planning for permanent off-leash space(s) in the Downtown neighbourhood given the time and space constraints, including an opportunity to explore the potential for a shared use area or enclosed dog OLA as part of the discussion with the community to develop a Master Plan for Albert Crescent Park towards the end of this year.
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#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to recommend that the downtown dog off-leash area (located at 824 Agnes Street) be relocated to 68 Sixth Street on a temporary basis, for approximately 9 months.

#### **SUMMARY**

The existing temporary Dog Off-Leash Area (OLA) has been in place since 2009 and consisted of two adjacent, but separate, sites. The lower site located on leased private

land at 813 Carnarvon (0.21 acres in size), was closed and relocated to Simcoe Park prior to redevelopment in 2019. The remaining upper portion of the OLA (located at 824 Agnes Street) is adjacent to a development site (810 Agnes St) which, as part of the proposed development, will be transformed into a commemorative park. The 810 Agnes Street development application has been given Third Reading by Council, and the OLA is scheduled to be closed at the end of September 2023. The vacant lot at 68 Sixth Street is proposed for a temporary interim off-leash facility in the downtown core (Refer to Attachment A of this report for locations).

## **BACKGROUND**

On March 11, 2019, based on a two-phase community engagement process, Council endorsed the recommendation to relocate the lower portion of the Downtown Dog Off-Leash Area (referred to as OLA), formerly located on leased private land at 813 Carnarvon Street, to within Simcoe Park.

Through the engagement process it was also communicated that the upper portion of the OLA, located at 824 Agnes Street, was gifted to the City in 1979 by the Chinese Benevolent Association (CBA) and, as part of Chinese Reconciliation Process in 2016, there was overwhelming support for a park at this location which would commemorate Chinese history and contributions and provide a green space and refuge in the densely populated Downtown neighbourhood. As a result, the upper portion of the temporary dog off-leash area would also require relocation at a future date.

The 810 Agnes Street development application has been given Third Reading by Council and demolition is expected to commence in fall 2023. Although staff were aware of the eventual closure of the remaining upper portion of the OLA, the proposed timeline to commence the development project is sooner than anticipated. The OLA closure is requested by September 29, 2023 to accommodate demolition, construction staging, overhead crane swing and underpinning to support the new 810 Agnes Street development. This timeline leaves insufficient time to determine a suitable and available site (e.g. privately or city-owned lands) for a new permanent OLA. In response, staff have quickly sought out temporarily available vacant and/or underutilized sites within the Downtown neighborhood as an interim measure.

This approach is supported by the [People Parks and Pups Strategy](#), adopted by Council in February 2022, to “work with third party landowners to identify underutilized open areas outside New Westminster’s municipal jurisdiction that might be suitable for temporary off-leash use”. This interim approach also allows time for staff to confirm which sites may be available and suitable for a permanent OLA in the Downtown. In recent years, in an effort to ensure dog relief areas are readily available in the downtown, new residential multi-family developments have been required/requested to provide such facilities “on-site” for use by their resident’s pets (minimum 100 sq. ft.). In addition, a relief station is also located along the new Agnes Street Greenway. These types of amenities complement OLA’s, and serve the additional purpose as space for exercise and socialization of dogs.

**ANALYSIS**

With this timeline, staff have contacted seven property owners of vacant and/or underutilized sites within the Downtown neighborhood to gauge interest in permitting temporary use as a dog OLA. While six of the seven requests were declined for a variety of reasons, the property owner of 68 Sixth Street, Provincial Rental Housing Corporation (PRHC), has agreed to enter into a licensing agreement with the City for approximately 9 months (Sept. 2023 to June 2024). As part of this agreement, the City would agree to close the interim dog OLA and vacate the site prior to issuance of a Building Permit so as to not delay the construction of the planned supportive housing development at this site.

Staff from BC Housing and City of New Westminster will continue to advance the Special Development Permit and Building Permit plans for the housing project, and the temporary location of the OLA will not impact the construction timeline of the development.

**Site Descriptions**

The existing Downtown dog OLA is located at 824 Agnes Street, between Agnes Street and Victoria Street. The site is approximately 800 sq. meters in size with a 7 meter grade change from top to bottom (estimated equivalent of 46 steps). The site is fully enclosed with a chain-link fence with two operable gates and gravel surfacing.

The proposed site for the interim Downtown dog OLA is located at 68 Sixth Street, at the southwest corner of Sixth Street and Agnes Street. The vacant site is approximately 800 sq. m. in size, flat and is enclosed with a chain-link fence. This site is a 6-7 minute walk from the 824 Agnes site. The preparation work required to meet City standards for a dog OLA will include:

- Decommissioning and removal of groundwater monitoring wells
- Clean-up of debris and weeds
- Addition of access gate and minor fence repairs
- Addition of wood mulch surfacing (4-6")
- Posting signage

Pending Council approval, signage would be posted on both sites providing: 1) advanced notice of OLA closure at 824 Agnes (closure anticipated on September 29, 2023); and 2) advanced notice of opening the temporary OLA at 68 Sixth Street (estimated to be in mid-September). In addition to site signage, letters of notification would also be provided to the Downtown BIA, Downtown Residents Association and residents and businesses adjacent to 68 Sixth Street. Staff will also provide information through other channels such as the City’s website, social media and on Citypage online.

**NEXT STEPS**

Pending Council approval of the interim relocation plan, staff will provide a draft licensing agreement for Council consideration at the September 11, 2023 meeting. Parks Planning and Engineering Operations staff will begin preparing the site to meet City standards as a dog OLA.

Parks planning staff will continue working on planning for permanent off-leash space(s) in the Downtown neighbourhood given the time and space constraints. This will include an opportunity to explore the potential for a shared use area or enclosed dog OLA as part of the discussion with the community to develop a Master Plan for Albert Crescent Park towards the end of this year.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The 2023-2027 Capital Plan includes approximately \$75,000 in 2023 for planning, design and implementation of Dog Off-Leash Area Enclosures. The estimated costs for the temporary relocation of the OLA is estimated to be under \$10,000.

**INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Interdepartmental liaison has occurred between staff from Parks & Recreation, Engineering Operations, Climate Action, Planning and Development and the Office of the CAO. The Finance Department has reviewed the Financial Implications section of this report.

**OPTIONS**

The following are options for Council’s consideration:

- 1. To approve, in principle, the relocation of the Downtown Dog Off Leash Area from 824 Agnes Street to 68 Sixth Street on a temporary basis; and
- 2. To proceed with next steps as outlined in this report; or
- 3. Provide alternate direction to staff.

Options #1 and #2 are recommended.

**CONCLUSION**

The relocation of the Downtown OLA to 68 Sixth Street will provide an interim off-leash area in the heart of Downtown, a densely populated area with a high number of licensed dogs. Activation of an underutilized, vacant lot as a temporary dog OLA provides space to exercise dogs as well as the added benefit of space for neighbours to connect and socialize.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Existing Dog OLA Location and Proposed Temporary Interim Location

## **APPROVALS**

This report was prepared by:

Erika Mashig, Manager-Parks & Open Space Planning, Design and Construction

This report was reviewed by:

Dean Gibson, Director of Parks and Recreation

Serena Trachta, Acting Director Climate Action, Planning and Development

Jennifer Miller, Manager of Public Engagement

This report was approved by:

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer