

# REPORT

## *Parks & Recreation*

**To:** Mayor Cote and Members of Council      **Date:** December 13, 2021

**From:** Dean Gibson      **File:** 1978742  
Director of Parks and Recreation

**Item #:** 2021-669

**Subject:** **People, Parks & Pups- A 10-Year Strategy for Sharing Public Space**

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** Council receives the draft “People, Parks & Pups Strategy”, as outlined in this report and included as Attachment A, to guide the planning and design for people and dogs in parks and open spaces across New Westminister; *and*

**THAT** Council provides feedback on the draft Strategy.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to present the People, Parks & Pups Strategy (the “Strategy”) as developed to support a proactive approach to sharing New Westminister’s limited park space among those with and without dogs. As a ten-year framework, this Strategy provides recommendations to guide the ongoing planning, design and management of dog off-leash activity across the city. The draft Strategy is now complete, and staff are now presenting the Strategy for Council’s comment.

### **SUMMARY**

New Westminister parks and open spaces are shared by residents with and without dogs. As the population of our City grows, so do the number of dogs. Statistics Canada 2016 estimates suggest the number of Canadian households with dogs is roughly equal to the number of households with children. As a result of growth in New Westminister, a new community-driven approach is needed to help improve the access, design, stewardship, and enforcement of dog activity in parks in order to address the needs of all residents.

The “People, Parks and Pups Strategy” was informed by two phases of community consultation, staff workshops and an Advisory Group formed specifically for this project. Input was also received from the Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Realm Advisory Task Force and parallel community Advisory Committee.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2014 Mayor and Council endorsed the Dog Off-Leash Management Plan to help guide the planning, design and operations of the off-leash areas across the City. However, in today’s environment, the City is increasingly challenged with balancing the expectations of dog owners with available resources. For example, increased development has recently resulted in the City relocating off-leash areas (OLA’s) as City-owned land is sold and/or developed for other civic purposes.

As demand for more OLA’s continues to grow with the population, the Parks & Recreation Department recognized the need for a Dog Off-Leash Area Strategy that cultivates a proactive approach to providing adequate space for dogs while balancing the many other (and often competing) recreational needs within the community.

In 2020, staff engaged Space2Place consultants to develop a 10-Year Strategy that promotes the comfort and safety of all park users by fostering responsible dog ownership and clarifying rules, boundaries and etiquette for dog off-leash activity in parks and open spaces. Additionally, the Strategy seeks to provide recommendations for planning and designing appealing and safe dog off-leash spaces in our parks and open spaces that are easily accessed by local residents who rely on them.

## **EXISTING POLICY AND PRACTICE**

The Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan (2008) and the Dog Off-Leash Management Plan (2014) currently guide the planning and design for new or improved dog off-leash areas.

The City’s public engagement practices are guided by the Public Engagement Strategy (2016) and Public Engagement Policy (2021).

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Consultation**

The People, Parks and Pups Strategy was informed by two phases of community consultation, staff workshops and an Advisory Group formed specifically for this project. Feedback was also received from the Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Realm Task Force and parallel Advisory Committee. The Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Realm Task Force supports Council’s consideration of the People, Parks and Pups Strategy.

Input from New Westminster residents was heard primarily through two virtual public open house events. Each open house launched with an online presentation, which was recorded and made available on the [Be Heard New West](#) engagement platform, followed by small group discussion. Through this engagement process, participants were invited to utilize a digital mapping tool to identify locations in New Westminster and identify what is and isn't working well when considering off-leash activity in our city, and to suggest improvements. This mapping tool, together with comments from the online forum and over 400 survey responses helped identify what is top of mind for New Westminster residents when considering dog off-leash activity in parks and open space.

A more fulsome summary of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Engagement Process is included as **Attachment B** to this report.

### Strategy Themes and Recommendations

The Strategy provides a research-based and community-driven plan for developing and managing our city's parks for both people with and without dogs. The proposed strategy (see Attachment A) provides specific recommendations under four themes. Following is a summary of these themes and recommendations:

#### **1. Designating Space**

- 1.1 Prioritize under-served areas when establishing new OLA space.
- 1.2 Aim to provide an OLA within 1km (15 min. walk) of most residents.
- 1.3 Work with 3<sup>rd</sup> party landowners to identify underutilized lands for temporary off-leash use.
- 1.4 Ensure new OLA spaces are designed to facilitate universal access and conduct an accessibility audit for existing OLA's.
- 1.5 Engage a Registered Professional Biologist to evaluate impacts of off-leash areas in close proximity to environmentally sensitive areas.

#### **2. Attracting Use**

- 2.1 Introduce Dog Parklets as a new typology for providing dog off-leash areas in high density neighbourhoods.
- 2.2 Evaluate opportunities to extend OLA space with 'separable' areas rather than a separate small/shy dog area (i.e. with movable fence).
- 2.3 Evaluate the best surface material for new or renovated OLA's based on intensity of use, maintenance requirements and comfort for majority of dogs.
- 2.4 Integrate vegetation and protective edging, where feasible, to enhance the experience of the OLA.
- 2.5 Review existing OLA signage for rules and guidelines based on the feedback received through the engagement process to develop this Strategy.

### **3. Managing Operations**

- 3.1 Locate waste bins in convenient locations for dog owners to deposit dog waste.
- 3.2 Identify opportunities to promote dog license renewal and make the process more convenient, such as offering at community events.
- 3.3 Collaborate with Animal Services to identify priority locations to regulate unsanctioned off-leash activity, and implement a plan for increased enforcement supported by educational outreach.
- 3.4 Identify high, medium and low priority improvements for each existing off-leash area with an implementation plan that includes target timelines and resource planning.
- 3.5 Develop a standardized procedure for annual evaluation of dog off-leash areas including a condition assessment of standard amenities.

### **4. Working Together**

- 4.1 Initiate a stewardship program for community members, local businesses and other organizations to adopt an off-leash area.
- 4.2 Engage an animal behaviour expert to generate educational resources on dog behaviour and OLA etiquette to promote the comfort and safety of all park users, including dogs.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Pending Council's feedback on the draft Strategy, a final version of the document will be brought back to Council for adoption in early 2022 and subsequent implementation later that year.

The Strategy identifies quick starts where action can be taken in the next 12 to 18 months to improve conditions and service levels:

- 1) Pilot a 'separable' area at the Queen's Park OLA;
- 2) Construct the city's first Dog Parklet as part of the Agnes Greenway Project;
- 3) Monitor and engage the local community to evaluate the success of the Dog Parklet after 12 months;
- 4) Initiate the stewardship program and invite residents to engage with staff on how to structure and operate this program;
- 5) Conduct an accessibility and standard amenity audit for all existing OLA's;
- 6) Review locations for additional waste receptacles and sign regarding responsible disposal of dog waste in key locations, as identified through the Engagement Process; and
- 7) Review opportunities for integrating agility features at the off-leash areas located in Ryall Park and Moody Park.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

With population growth and people living in smaller spaces, it is important that the Strategy (specific to the context of New Westminster) consider all points of view in planning, designing and maintaining space for dogs that respects a diversity of park and open space uses that meets the needs of all users.

The Strategy also aims to contribute to the city's climate action goals with provision of dog off-leash areas located within 1km (15 min. walk) of most residents. Recommendations related to the City's Biodiversity Strategy include setbacks for OLA's from environmentally sensitive areas, responsible disposal of dog waste and protective edging surrounding trees and vegetation vulnerable to dog activity.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

While some of the short term recommendations in the Strategy can be implemented with existing resources or current projects underway, much of the medium and long term will require additional funding over time. The 2022 proposed Capital Plan includes \$5,000 carry forward from 2021 and a request for \$70,000 in 2022 towards dog off leash projects. Additional funding to implement medium and long-term recommendations will be proposed through the 2026-2030 capital planning processes as work plans for each year are developed.

The many recommendations in the Strategy are anticipated to have implications for the resourcing of parks and open space maintenance. Staff will propose incremental operating budget adjustments, as required, to support the implementation of the Strategy over the next ten years.

## **INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Staff from the following Departments participated in the staff workshop including: Office of the CAO, Climate Action, Planning and Development, Engineering Services (Operations and Animal Services) and Parks and Recreation.

## **OPTIONS**

The following are options for Council's consideration:

- 1) To receive the draft "People, Parks & Pups Strategy", as outlined in this report and included as Attachment A, to guide the planning and design for people and dogs in parks and open spaces across New Westminster; *and*
- 2) Provide feedback on the draft Strategy; *or*
- 3) Provide alternate direction to staff.

Staff recommend Option #1 and #2.

**CONCLUSION**

The completion of the People, Parks & Pups Strategy aims to advance the comfort and safety of all parks and open space users in New Westminster. The strategy's implementation will achieve this goal through providing adequate space for our growing population; fostering responsible dog ownership, clarifying rules, and establishing boundaries and etiquette for dog off-leash activity in parks and open spaces; and integrating a variety of attractive and safe dog off-leash spaces (both new and improved) that are easily accessed by residents who rely on them.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Draft- People, Parks and Pups Strategy  
Attachment B: Summary of Engagement Phase 1 and 2

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