

## People, Dogs and Parks - Off-Leash Policy

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<b>Division:</b>	Parks, Forestry & Recreation	<b>Approved by:</b>	City Council
<b>Date Approved:</b>	March 1, 2007 * Approval date is approximate		
<b>Date Revised:</b>	January 27, 2010	<b>Unit:</b>	Parks
		<b>Category:</b>	Parks, Forestry and Recreation
		<b>Sub-cat:</b>	Parks

### Policy Statement

The City of Toronto (the "City") recognizes the social benefits of dogs and their owners having access to and being accommodated within the parks system.

This policy pertains to the provision of off-leash areas for dogs in City-owned or operated parks, greenspaces and waterfront areas ("City Parks").

Provision of these off-leash areas will be based on each neighbourhood's characteristics and needs.

Consideration must be given to balancing the needs and interests of the community, impact on the natural environment and sustainability of the off-leash area, when identifying appropriate locations for off-leash areas.

The City further recognizes the requirement for responsible pet ownership within City Parks.

Dogs must be kept on leash at all times in all City Parks unless otherwise posted.

### Procedure for New Off-Leash Area

- 1) New off-leash areas will be considered in conjunction with capital redevelopment of existing parks or new park development against the policy criteria.
- 2) A request for an off-leash area will be reviewed by staff from Parks, Forestry and Recreation and relevant staff in other City divisions against the criteria set out in the policy.
- 3) Residents interested in establishing an off-leash area must establish a local dog owners' association (DOA).
- 4) If Parks, Forestry and Recreation deems a site suitable for an off-leash area where no dog owners' association (DOA) exists, the Parks & Environment Committee may waive the DOA provisions.
- 5) Requests shall not be accepted in relation to property that is not owned or

managed by City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division.

6) The Ward Councillor shall be notified by Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff of the request for an off-leash area and shall be kept apprised of the outcome of the review process.

7) If the request does not meet the criteria for an off-leash area, Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff shall advise the Ward Councillor and the applicant(s) in writing of the reasons why the location is not appropriate.

8) Where Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division and other relevant staff have determined that the request meets the off-leash policy criteria and a suitable location within the neighbourhood has been identified, the request will be programmed in the capital budget / parks planning process.

9) Notice of a neighbourhood meeting shall be provided to the Ward Councillor and the local community, as part of the consultation process when the existing park redevelopment or new park development is occurring.

10) Notice shall be posted a minimum of 20 business days prior to the date of the meeting.

11) Members of the public are encouraged to attend the meeting and provide comments on the park project, including proposed off-leash areas. Staff will take the public's input into account in finalizing the design of the park development.

At the meeting, park project staff shall review the proposed off-leash area with the attendees:

- overall project
- request for an off-leash area
- neighbourhood and park characteristics
- size and location of area
- slopes and their sustainability
- hours of operation
- rules and regulations
- fencing requirements or use of natural barriers where deemed appropriate
- signage
- tree or forest protection required
- amenities (lighting, seating, access to water for people and dogs, waste and recycling programs)
- other landscape components.

12) A follow-up meeting will be held with the community to present the design and timeline for implementation of the new park project if necessary.

13) Once the off-leash area is established the site information will be posted on the Parks, Forestry and Recreation website and at the site.

There are no fees associated with the request for an off-leash area nor any fees for off-leash area users.

## **Location Criteria for Establishment of Off-Leash Areas**

The General Manager shall consider opportunities for off-leash areas as part of the capital process of redevelopment of existing parks or development of new parks.

The following criteria will be used in staff's review of the suitability:

- Neighbourhood characteristics (adjacent land uses, population density, housing types, licensed dog population, proximity of existing and other potential off-leash areas located within a 15 minute walk or 1 kilometre)
- Compatibility with the park's design, established uses, features and components
- Potential impacts on the park's functionality, condition and natural environment
- Proportion of park to be taken up by the proposed off-leash area
- Proximity to residences and off-leash area exclusions

## **Off-Leash Area Exclusions**

Off-leash areas shall not be established within the following areas:

- playgrounds, splash pads and wading pools
- horticultural display areas or ornamental gardens
- skateboard bowls, tennis courts and other sports pads
- sportsfields and stadiums
- artificial or natural ice rinks, toboggan hills
- animal display areas
- campgrounds
- designated heritage, memorial, commemorative and ceremonial areas
- burial grounds
- areas posted prohibiting dogs
- swimming beaches, with the exception of Kew-Balmy and Woodbine beaches from November 1st to March 31st below snow fence line only

### **Natural Environment Areas**

- Areas protected by Municipal Code Chapter 658, Ravine and Natural Features Protection must be approved by Urban Forestry.
- Areas protected by Ontario Regulation 166/06 and lands owned by Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) must be approved by TRCA. Criteria reviewed include, but are not limited to assessment of site in relation to hydraulic floodways, conservation of land, protection of watercourses / fish, habitat / groundwater and recharge / discharge zones
- Areas that have undergone tree / shrub / wildflower planting or where plans exist for such planting to occur
- Natural shorelines with natural vegetation that would be disturbed by compaction and foot / paw traffic
- Areas containing species of concern, including local or regionally uncommon, rare, threatened or endangered species

## **Off-Leash Area Fencing Requirements**

Off-leash areas within parks 2 acres and under must be fenced.

Off-leash areas to be located within the vicinity of the identified exclusions must be fenced.

For all other off-leash areas, fencing or physical delineation compatible with the site is required around off-leash areas that meet the policy criteria.

**Pedestrian Pathways,  
Boardwalks and Linkages**

Dogs using these pedestrian areas must be kept on a leash no greater than 2.4 metres in length. Dogs and their walkers must stay to the right of the pathways at all times. Dogs shall not interfere with or obstruct other pathway users.

**Off-Leash Area User  
Exclusions**

The following dogs are not permitted in off-leash areas:

- female dog in heat
- any dog that must be muzzled or leashed in accordance with a notice issued under Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 349, Animals, or the *Dog Owners' Liability Act* (DOLA) or an order issued under DOLA
- dogs not licensed in the City of Toronto or the municipality in which the dog resides.

Commercial dog walkers, as defined in Municipal Code Chapter 608, Parks, are not permitted in off-leash areas where signs are posted prohibiting commercial dog walkers.

**Monitoring and Dispute  
Resolution Process**

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff shall track issues as they arise and shall liaise with dog owners / walkers using the off-leash area, By-law Enforcement, Animal Services and other park users in an effort to resolve issues as effectively as possible.
- Parks, Forestry and Recreation shall monitor the off-leash areas.

**Cancellation of Off-Leash  
Designated Area**

Designation of an off-leash area may be cancelled by the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation where in the opinion of the General Manager:

- the off-leash area is not being used on a regular basis
- extensive damage to the park and / or natural environment is occurring
- the park is no longer suitable for an off-leash area
- conflicts between park users cannot be resolved
- repeated, ongoing non-compliance with the Code of Conduct for off-leash area use posted at each off-leash area and the City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapters.

**Appeal Process**

Residents who wish to appeal the decision to cancel the off-leash area designation may do so within 30 days, in writing, to the General Manager of

Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

**Enforcement and Fines**

Dog owners / walkers and commercial dog walkers must comply with Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 349, Animals, Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 608, Parks, Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 591, Noise, the Dog Owners' Liability Act, R.S.O. 1990, and all other relevant laws, by-laws, policies, rules and regulations.

[http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184\\_349.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184_349.pdf)

[http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184\\_608.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/municode/1184_608.pdf)

**Liability**

Dog owners / walkers and/or commercial dog walkers are legally responsible for their own dog(s) and any injuries or damage caused by their dog(s). Individuals who choose to use off-leash areas do so at their own risk.

