

	Off-Leash Dog Area Policy	
	Policy Category: <i>(Follow corporate standard to be developed)</i>	
	Policy No.: <i>(Follow corporate standard, assigned by Clerk's Dept.)</i>	Implementing Procedure No.: <i>(Follow corporate standard, assigned by Policy Author)</i>
Approving Authority: <i>Council</i>		Effective Date: May 1, 2025
Approved or Last Reviewed Date: <i>N/A</i>		Next Review Year: 2030
Area(s) this policy applies to: <i>City-wide</i>		Owner Department: <i>Parks Planning, Planning and Urban Design</i>
Related Legislation, Policy(ies) and Guidelines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog Owners Liability Act • Animal Protection and Services By-law 2018-91 • City Parks and Public Properties By-law – 2025-XX (in process) • Off-Leash Dog Area Guidelines (2025) • Off-Leash Dog Area Implementation Plan (TBD/Future) 		

Note: Questions about this policy should be directed to the Owner Department.

1. Purpose Statement *(Outline why the organization is issuing the policy and its desired effect or outcome of the policy)*

This Policy establishes an approach for planning, identifying, developing, maintaining and operating *Off-Leash Dog Areas* throughout the City of Markham.

The purpose of the *Off-Leash Dog Area* Policy is to:

1. Define *Off-Leash Dog Area* classification hierarchy and sizes;
2. Define service area for each type of *Off-Leash Dog Area*;
3. Identify regulations and rules for *Off-Leash Dog Areas*; and
4. Outline a maintenance and inspection approach for *Off-Leash Dog Areas*.

The purpose of the *Off-Leash Dog Area* Guidelines is to:

1. Provide design guidelines for developing new *Off-Leash Dog Areas*; and
2. Provide site selection criteria for identifying new *Off-Leash Dog Area*.

2. Applicability and Scope Statement *(Who and what this policy applies to and/or affects)*

1. This Policy outlines provision and service levels for planning and installation of new permanent *Off-Leash Dog Areas* in existing and growth areas of the City.
2. The Policy defines the roles and responsibilities of City departments and Dog Area Users.

3. The Policy will ensure that existing and new communities in the *City* have equitable access to safe and inclusive *Off-Leash Dog Areas*.

The *Off-Leash Dog Area* Guidelines shall be used in conjunction with this Policy to plan, design and develop new *Off-Leash Dog Areas*. The Policy and Guidelines includes the following five (5) sections:

1. Service Levels and Classification
2. Design Guidelines
3. Site Selection Criteria
4. Operations and Maintenance
5. Education and Enforcement

3. Background (*Indicate any reasons, history, and intent that led to the creation of the policy*)

The 2019 Integrated Leisure Masterplan identified a provision target of at least one (1) permanent Off-Leash Dog Areas per ward. As the *City* of Markham continues to grow, there is growing demand for establishing additional *Off-Leash Dog Areas* to be integrated into communities. In 2023, with an inventory of four (4) existing permanent Off-Leash Dog Areas, The *City* implemented the Pop-up Pilot Program which constructed eight temporary (8) *Pop-up Off-Leash Dog Areas* to meet the needs of the community. These locations were monitored and evaluated to determine potential for their conversion to permanent *Off-Leash Dog Areas*.

This Policy and attached Off-Leash Dog Area Guidelines will address additional needs for *Off-Leash Dog Areas* within the *City* and address the service target identified within the 2019 Integrated Leisure Master Plan.

4. Definitions (*If applicable, define any terminology or interpret meanings of a general term*)

“Applicable Department”: The department responsible for the planning, design and construction, repair, replacement, maintenance, operations or bylaw enforcement of *Off-Leash Dog Area*.

“City”: “City” means the City of Markham or The Corporation of the City of Markham, and includes all land within its geographic boundaries, as the context dictates;

“Off-Leash Dog Area”: Off leash dog area is a public space designated by the *City* to permit dogs off-leash under the supervision and control of their individual owners.

“Pop-Up Off-Leash Dog Area”: A temporary *Off-Leash Dog Area* installed for the purposes of evaluating the feasibility and potential for a permanent *Off-Leash Dog Area*.

“Service Levels”: the measure of how a park will meet the needs of residents, ensuring equitable access and a standard of facilities and services.

5. Policy Statements *(Detail the specific regulations, requirements, or modifications to organizational behaviour to be addressed by this policy)*

The Policy establishes design standards and provision standards, supports equitable access by residents, provides clear direction on how to locate, size, design and maintain *Off-Leash Dog Areas* while mitigating potential conflicts on existing or adjacent land uses.

The Policy was developed through a detailed review of the City of Markham context (current off-leash approaches and facilities), a best practices review, an evaluation of Markham's pop-up off-leash pilot program and community and stakeholder engagement strategies.

1. Design Guidelines outline the standard, non-permitted, and sponsorship features for the *Off-Leash Dog Areas*.

1.1 Standard features:

- 1.1.1 Separate large (minimum 70% of total size) and small dog areas (30% minimum of total size)
- 1.1.2 Double gated entrance with concrete pad
- 1.1.3 Maintenance access gates
- 1.1.4 Sub-drainage and connection to catch basin
- 1.1.5 Surfacing:
 - 1.1.5.1 Community and Neighbourhood *Off-Leash Dog Areas* - Wood fibre
 - 1.1.5.2 Urban *Off-Leash Dog Area* - Artificial turf or Wood fibre
- 1.1.6 Fencing:
 - 1.1.6.1 Community and Neighbourhood *Off-Leash Dog Areas* - 1.5m high black vinyl chainlink fence
 - 1.1.6.2 Urban *Off-Leash Dog Area* - Metal Ornamental Fence
- 1.1.7 Benches for seating
- 1.1.8 Waste receptacles
- 1.1.9 Pathway connections (1.8m wide) outside *Off-Leash Dog Area*
- 1.1.10 Tree buffer planting outside *Off-Leash Dog Area*
- 1.1.11 Wayfinding, code of conduct, and by-law signage
- 1.1.12 Water service and water tap
- 1.1.13 Parking

1.2 Non-Permitted features:

- 1.2.1 Lighting
- 1.2.2 Waste bag dispensers
- 1.2.3 Agility equipment
- 1.2.4 Picnic tables
- 1.2.5 Pathway inside the *Off-Leash Dog Area*
- 1.2.6 Planting inside the *Off-Leash Dog Area*

1.3 Sponsorship features:

- 1.3.1 Shade Structures;
- 1.3.2 Community Notice Boards;
- 1.3.3 Other items as approved by the applicable departments

2. Service levels and classifications ensure appropriate access to *Off-Leash Dog Areas* are provided to all residents. Service levels, classification, sizes, distribution and provisions of *Off-Leash Dog Areas* shall be as follows:

2.1 Service levels and classification:

- 2.1.1 *Community Off-Leash Dog Area*: Community *Off-Leash Dog Areas* will typically serve dog owners living within a radius of 3.75 kilometres;
- 2.1.2 *Neighbourhood Off-Leash Dog Area*: Neighbourhood *Off-Leash Dog Areas* will typically serve dog owners living within a radius of 1.5 kilometres;
- 2.1.3 *Urban Off-Leash Dog Area*: Urban *Off-Leash Dog Areas* will typically serve dog owners living within a radius of 1.5 Kilometres.

2.2 Off-Leash Dog Area Sizes:

- 2.2.1 Urban – 0.04 ha to 0.1 ha (400 sq.m to 1000 sq.m)
- 2.2.2 Neighbourhood – 0.1 ha to 0.3 ha (1000 sq.m to 3000 sq.m)
- 2.2.3 Community – 0.3 ha to 0.5 ha (3000 sq.m to 5000 sq.m)

2.3 Distribution of Off-Leash Dog Areas will prioritize the following:

- 2.3.1 Areas of the City without access to an Off-Leash Dog Area (15-minute walking distance)
- 2.3.2 Density of the population of licensed dogs
- 2.3.3 intensification areas

2.4 Provision Levels:

- 2.4.1 Maximum one Community Off-Leash Dog Area within each ward.
- 2.4.2 A neighbourhood Off-Leash Dog Area will not be provided within 3 km of another *Off-Leash Dog Area*.

2.5 Off-Leash Dog Areas shall only be considered and proposed on compatible land uses such as:

- 3.1.1 Public Parks;
- 3.1.2 Open space;
- 3.1.3 Transportation or infrastructure right-of-way;
- 3.1.4 Utility right-of-way; or
- 3.1.5 Other City owned lands such as community centres.



3. *Off-Leash Dog Area* sites shall be selected using the 'Site Selection Criteria' outlined in the Off-Leash Dog Area Guidelines.
4. Operations and Maintenance include waste collection, maintenance schedules, monitoring frequency, and assessment checklist:
 - 4.1 General Clean-up
 - 4.2 Disposal of dog waste
 - 4.3 Responsibility of dog owners:
 - 4.3.1 Cleaning up after their pets
 - 4.3.2 Properly disposing of waste into the designated waste receptacles
 - 4.3.3 Carrying a sufficient supply of dog waste bags
 - 4.4 Responsibility of City Parks Operations Staff:
 - 4.4.1. Maintain cleanliness and upkeep of the area
 - 4.4.2. Disposal of waste from designated waste receptacles and green bins
 - 4.4.3. Provide adequate waste receptacles, green bins and signage
 - 4.4.4. Follow the maintenance schedule and inspect the area weekly
 - 4.4.5. Empty waste receptacles and green bins weekly during peak usage (April to September)
5. Education and Enforcement includes an ambassador program, promoting dog licensing, public outreach, and following the code of conduct:
 - 5.1 Ambassadors will serve as liaisons between the community and the *City*:
 - 5.1.1 Promote safety for all users
 - 5.1.2 Educate dog owners about responsible ownership, and *Off-Leash Dog Area* rules
 - 5.1.3 Encourage compliance and foster adherence to off-leash regulations
 - 5.1.4 Facilitate building of a supportive community of dog owners
 - 5.2 Public outreach:
 - 5.2.1 Social media campaigns addressing *Off-Leash Dog Area* protocol and proper etiquette
 - 5.2.2 Using graphic-based signage to encourage compliance
 - 5.2.3 Website updates for neighbourhoods with existing, planned, or new *Off-Leash Dog Area*
 - 5.3 Promote Licensing:
 - 5.3.1 Media campaign to promote the benefits of licensing
 - 5.3.2 Collaborate with dog/pet-related businesses to offer discounts for licensed dogs
 - 5.3.3 Work with veterinary offices to encourage registration
 - 5.3.4 Licensing days at local parks



5.4 Code of Conduct:

- 5.4.1 Individuals using any off-leash areas in Markham must adhere to the Animal Protection and Services By-Law 2018-91 regulations, the Dog Owners Liability Act, and the Code of Conduct provided by Animal Services.

6. Roles and Responsibilities (*Outline roles and responsibilities of those involved in the implementation of the policy*)

The applicable departments and their roles and responsibilities are as follows:

1. The **Parks Planning** division of Planning & Urban Design department shall be responsible for updating the *Off-Leash Dog Area Policy* and for identifying and selecting sites for the new permanent *Off-Leash Dog Area* in the *City*.
2. The **Parks Design & Construction** division of the Planning and Urban Design department shall be responsible for applying the *Off-Leash Dog Area Policy* and Guidelines to design and construct new *Off-Leash Dog Areas* in the *City*.
3. The **Operations Department** shall be responsible for the regular maintenance and repairs of *Off-Leash Dog Area* including waste management, regular maintenance schedules, monitoring frequency and completing the assessment checklist.
4. The **Animal Care** division of the Legislative Services Department shall be responsible for enforcement of the applicable rules, regulations and bylaws and handling of all animal-related complaints. The Animal Care division shall also be responsible for maintaining and updating the *Off-Leash Dog Area* 'Code of Conduct' and provision of rules signage for the *Off-Leash Dog Areas*.
5. The **Sponsorship, Marketing & Advertising** division of the Corporate Communications department shall be responsible for administration and coordination of sponsorship opportunities and leading social media campaigns for *Off-Leash Dog Areas*.