



Report to: Development Services Committee

Meeting Date: May 30, 2023

SUBJECT: Recommendation Report, 2023 Pop-up Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program

PREPARED BY: Mattson Meere, Project Manager, Parks Planning, Ext. 5790
Christian Jattan, Senior Planner, Parks Planning, Ext. 2451

REVIEWED BY: Richard Fournier, Senior Manager, Parks & Open Space Development, Ext. 2120

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report entitled “2023 Pop-up Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program’ dated May 30, 2023 be received;
2. That Council endorse the recommended locations of the Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program as per Attachment A attached hereto;
3. That a new 2023 Urban Design Capital Budget be established and funded from Development Charges (Parks Development Reserve) in the amount of \$287,334; and further,
4. That staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report outlines the purpose of the 2023 Pop-up Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program, the recommended sites based on the defined site selection criteria, and the cost considerations that inform the requested budget for implementation. The Pilot Program recommends the implementation of eight pilot sites, including one site per ward. The Pilot Program will launch in the summer of 2023 and aims to serve the short-term need for more off-leash dog areas across the City of Markham, while the City undertakes the Off-Leash Dog Area Policy and Implementation Plan. The Pilot Program will also provide an opportunity to test the suitability of the selected sites to potentially become permanent off-leash facilities in the future.

The recommended off-leash dog area pilot sites were selected based on a review of parks across the City to identify potential candidate sites. The candidate sites were then evaluated in more detail using site selection criteria that are based on best practices. The eight recommended sites include Cricklewood Park (Ward 1), Victoria Square Park (Ward 2), Monarch Park (Ward 3), Mintleaf Park (Ward 4), Blodwen Davies Park (Ward 5), Berczy Park South (Ward 6), Aaniin Community Center Park (Ward7) and Ada Mackenzie Park (Ward 8).

Each of the proposed off-leash dog area pilot facilities will consist of construction fencing enclosing the off-leash area, separate small dog and large dog areas where feasible, an enclosed forecourt entrance area, signage and a garbage can. The existing ground cover, consisting of turf grass or tall grass mown to a suitable height, will be utilized as the surface material for the 2023 Pop-up program. Staff compared the option

of renting or purchasing the construction fencing and recommend purchasing the fencing to minimize throwaway costs and to support the re-use of the fencing for future off-leash pilot sites or other City uses. A Capital Budget of \$287,334 funded from Development Charges (Parks Development Reserve) is required to implement the Pilot Program.

Staff will engage Markham residents about the project using Your Voice Markham to gather feedback throughout the Pilot Program. An evaluation of the Program will be completed after a four month and 12 month period, and lessons learned will be incorporated into the City's upcoming Off-Leash Dog Area Policy and Implementation Plan.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Council and obtain approval for the establishment of a new project to implement a Pop-up Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program starting in the summer of 2023. The objective of the Pilot Program is to provide eight pilot off-leash dog areas in order to provide Markham residents with greater access to off-leash dog areas in the short-term, while the City advances an Off-Leash Dog Area Policy and Implementation Plan. The pilot off-leash dog areas will provide designated and fenced areas where dogs can exercise and socialize off-leash in a safe and controlled environment.

BACKGROUND:

On February 6, 2023, the Budget Committee directed Parks Planning and Development staff to study how an off-leash dog area pilot program could be implemented this summer in order to provide additional off-leash dog areas to service Markham's communities. Other municipalities have recently implemented similar programs as a quick and cost effective approach to meeting the growing need for these facilities. The implementation of one pilot off-leash dog area per ward will also provide an opportunity to test the suitability of the selected sites for becoming permanent off-leash dog area sites in the future.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

A review and evaluation of potential off-leash dog area pilot sites was completed for each ward. Staff developed the list of selection criteria, based on best practices to assess the suitability of various locations and inform the final recommendation of pilot sites.

Site Selection Criteria	
Natural Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located outside of TRCA flood line. • Located outside of environmentally sensitive areas.
Site Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can accommodate an off-leash area of approximately 0.2 hectares.
Site Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential Uses – 50m setback to property line. A reduced setback may be considered when separated by a public street or when there is a significant difference in elevation. • Park amenities (i.e playgrounds, splash pads, etc.) – 25 m setback. • Regional roads, arterial roads – 10 m setback.

Site Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within a 15-minute walking distance to neighbourhoods. • Accessible for regular City maintenance. • Preferably accessible by an existing walkway.
Surface Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located on mown or unmown grass areas. • Generally flat with positive drainage. • Absence of hazards such as steep slopes.
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration for proximity to on-street parking or an existing designated park parking area.
Potential for a Permanent Off-Leash Dog Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize locations with potential to support a permanent off-leash dog area in the long-term to minimize restoration costs.

One of the objectives of the Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program is to identify and prioritize locations with a high potential to support a permanent off-leash dog area in the future. The selection of sites based on their long-term potential provides an opportunity to test their performance and receive feedback from the public as part of a pilot phase before proceeding with a second permanent phase, which involves a higher capital investment to implement a higher construction standard that maximizes operating, maintenance and lifecycle values.

Recommended Sites

Parks Planning and Development staff completed a scan of parks throughout the City of Markham by applying the selection criteria listed above and undertaking a constraint mapping exercise that applied the identified setbacks from residential uses and existing park facilities to outline how much area is available for an off-leash facility. A short-list of sites that met the selection criteria were then visited in-person by staff to verify the site conditions. The recommended sites are listed below and an overview of the sites are provided in Appendix A.

Recommended Sites for Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program	
Ward 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cricklewood Park
Ward 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victoria Square Park
Ward 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monarch Park
Ward 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mintleaf Park
Ward 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blodwen Davies Park
Ward 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berczy Park South
Ward 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aaniin Community Centre Park
Ward 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ada Mackenzie Park

Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program Facility Requirements

The design and installation of the pilot off-leash dog area facilities will include the following site elements to provide a functional space at an efficient cost:

- Construction fencing enclosing the off-leash area with separate small dog and large dog areas where feasible;
- An enclosed forecourt entrance area;

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- Existing ground cover consisting of turf grass or tall grass areas that will be mown to a suitable height; and
 - Signage and a garbage can.

Fencing Cost Considerations

Fencing is one of major costs of the Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program. The Pilot Program proposes to use construction fencing to enclose the off-leash dog areas. Construction fencing provides a flexible option that can be installed and removed relatively quickly. Staff considered two options for procuring the fencing:

Option 1 - Purchase construction fencing for re-use towards future off-leash areas or other uses.

Option 2 - Rent fencing for a 12 month period.

Staff recommend proceeding with the purchasing option to reduce throwaway costs, support potential re-use of fencing for piloting other off-leash dog area locations and to ensure the pilot facilities are in place until a permanent off-leash facility can be constructed. In addition, other departments have expressed an interest in the City purchasing the construction fencing to support other needs, such as events.

Two different types of construction fencing were reviewed as part of the analysis: a six foot high galvanized fence and a four foot high green or black fence. Staff recommend proceeding with the six foot high galvanized fence as is the best overall option when considering cost, availability, aesthetic and re-use. The four foot high green or black fencing was reviewed, but it has a cost premium that would add approximately \$12,000 per site and \$96,000 to the cost of the Pilot Program. The black or green four foot fencing is also less useful for re-use by other City departments and could delay the launch of the program because of the 8 week lead time for ordering this fencing.

Surface Treatment Cost Considerations

The surface treatment is another important consideration and cost for off-leash dog areas. A mulched surface provides an ideal surface that is better suited to wet conditions compared to leaving the designated area as turf grass, which can become muddy during period of wet weather and snowmelt. However, the provision of mulch over a large area adds a considerable cost (approximately \$15,000) to each site. Furthermore, if the site is not used as a permanent location, there is an additional cost (approximately \$16,000) to remove and dispose of the mulch. The Pilot Program does not recommend the provision of mulch in the pilot off-leash areas to help manage implementation costs at cost of approximately \$31,000 per pilot site.

Site Restoration Considerations

Any site that is used for the Pilot Program will see significant wear on the existing turf grass surface, which will need to be restored and sodded if the site is not selected for a permanent off-leash facility. The estimated cost to restore a site back to a suitable park condition ranges from approximately \$30,000 to \$50,000. The requested project budget does not include any cost for potential site restoration work should a pilot site not be

selected for a permanent facility. If restoration work is needed, then additional funding will need to be funded from the Non-DC Growth Reserve.

Project Cost

The individual site cost and total project cost for the eight recommended sites are summarized in the table below. The preferred option of purchasing the construction fencing has a total cost of \$287,334.

Off-Leash Pilot Program Typical Site (First 12 Months)	Costing Options	
	Purchase Construction Fencing (Recommended)	Rent Construction Fencing
Fencing	\$15,000	\$12,000
Landscape Works (Site Prep)	\$15,000	\$15,000
City Works (Signage, Waste Receptacle)	\$500	\$500
Subtotal (1 Site)	\$30,500	\$27,500
Subtotal (8 Sites)	\$244,000	\$220,000
Contingency (7%)	\$17,080	\$15,400
Capital Admin Fee (9%)	\$21,960	\$19,800
HST (1.76%)	\$4,294	\$3,872
Total Project Cost (First 12 months)	\$287,334	\$259,072

Implementation Timing

Following approval of the Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program by Council, staff will initiate the procurement process with the aim of installing and opening the facilities in summer of 2023.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Lessons Learned

Staff will continue to monitor the success of the Pilot Program and complete an evaluation after a four and 12 month period. Some potential indicators include:

- Usage and attendance based on general observation. Data may be collected by asking visitors to complete a short survey about the number of users and how frequently they visit the site.
- Community feedback based on comments from users and other members of the community about the positive aspects of the program and opportunities for improvement.
- Compliance with regulations and public safety based on feedback from Markham’s Animal Services.
- Performance and durability based on assessment of how the pilot facilities hold up to the demands of ongoing use and maintenance.
- Demand on staff resources based on feedback from Parks Planning and Development, Operations, Animal Control, and other departments.

The lessons learned from the Pilot Program will be integrated into the City’s Off-Leash Dog Area Policy and Implementation Plan.

Public Engagement

To inform the public about the proposed pilot off-leash dog areas across the City, it is recommended that the Pilot Program be communicated through the City's social media channels and by local Councillors. Residents living within 250 metres of a proposed pilot off-leash dog area will also be sent a public notification by mail.

To raise awareness and gather ongoing feedback about the Pilot Program and specific locations, staff recommend installing signage with an overview of the program and a weblink to an online survey on Your Voice Markham. The website and survey will provide an opportunity for users and any member of the public to learn more about the program and provide feedback regarding what is working and areas for improvement.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The new 2023 Urban Design Capital Budget will be funded from Development Charges (Parks Development Reserve) in the amount of \$287,334. Other financial considerations for future consideration include the annual maintenance cost.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

The Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Programs is aligned with *Building Markham's Future Together: 2020-2023 Strategic Plan*, particularly the goals of an Engaged, Diverse, Thriving and Vibrant City, and for a Safe, Sustainable and Complete Community.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Parks Planning and Development, Operations, Animal Services, Corporate Communications and Finance have been consulted and will continue to be involved in the implementation of the Off-Leash Pilot Program.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Giulio Cescato
M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Director of Planning &
Urban Design

Arvin Prasad
M.C.I.P., R.P.P.
Commissioner of
Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A – Pop-Up Off-Leash Dog Area Pilot Program – Citywide Map