

Off-leash Dog Areas - Update

RECOMMENDATION:

None.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL/COMMITTEE ACTION

At the June 19, 2018, Community & Intergovernmental Committee, the following motion was passed:

That Community & Intergovernmental Committee direct staff to:

- *Conduct public consultation for potential off-leash dog hours and areas, and*
- *Report back with results and recommendations in the fall of 2018.*

At the December 4, 2018, Committee of Council, the following motion was passed:

That Committee direct staff to proceed with a shared (non-fenced) off-leash dog area 1-year pilot project at the following locations:

- Skyline Park (between Western Drive and Eastern Drive); and*
- Chelsea Park (North side, away from playground)*

That Committee authorize the addition of two part-time bylaw officers to work a 16-week period from May 21 to Sept 1, 2019, covering both evening and weekend shifts, at a total cost of \$35,000, and that the cost be included in the 2019 financial plan.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides Council with a midterm update on the off-leash dog area pilot project. The report identifies successful aspects of the pilot project and outlines some adjustments that have been made based on the feedback thus far. To date, the pilot project appears to be running quite successfully.

BACKGROUND

In 2018, the City initiated a four-week public consultation campaign to determine the public's interest in designating shared off-leash dog areas in current park or trail locations. The consultation solicited 1,603 responses with approximately 70% in favour of expanding the off-leash dog park network across the city. Prior to the pilot project the City operated two fenced off-leash dog areas at the following locations:

- Maple Street Off-Leash Dog Park
- Shaughnessy Street Off-Leash Dog Park located opposite Chester Place on Shaughnessy Street

Off-leash Dog Areas - Update

DISCUSSION

At the December 4, 2018, Committee of Council, staff were directed to bring forward an update at the mid-term mark of the pilot project, to provide a status update. The pilot project went live on April 1, 2019 with staff soliciting feedback through an online survey that has been open to the public over the past 6 months. The following questions were asked:

- Are you a Port Coquitlam resident?
- Do you own a dog?
- What size is your dog?
- Which Port Coquitlam neighbourhood do you live in?
- Choose which leash optional space you are providing feedback about?
- What is your opinion of the Chelsea/Skyline Park leash-optional areas?
- When do you use the leash-optional spaces?
- Please provide any comments, suggestions or concerns about the Chelsea/Skyline Parks leash-optional areas.
- Identify any concerns you may have about shared leash-optional areas, based on your experience with Chelsea and Skyline Parks.
- Do the new leash-optional spaces reduce how much time you have your dog off-leash in non-designated areas?
- Please provide any additional comments not addressed by the questions above.

The survey was promoted through our online social media channels at the beginning of the pilot project as well as on the signage at both pilot project locations. Additionally, residents were directed to the survey if they called in with questions about dog park infrastructure. The City has only received 11 completed online surveys since the pilot was launched and these are summarised below;

- 7 out of 11 were dog owners
- 6 out of 11 were in response to Chelsea Park. 4 responses regarding Skyline Park and one regarding both
- The responses generally indicated support for the pilot, but some issues/concerns were raised including:
 - Proximity concerns to the playground (Chelsea Park)
 - Pilot has attracted additional dogs and therefore additional dog waste
 - Request for improved signage
 - Request to fence the off-leash dog area
 - Parking concerns
 - Would like to see additional off-leash areas in the City

Off-leash Dog Areas - Update

In addition to the survey, over the past 6 months the City has received 4 calls for service pertaining to the off-leash areas at Chelsea and Skyline Parks. The calls also reference similar concerns which included proximity to the playground, waste and cleanliness, noise pollution and a concern regarding the lack of fencing. It is likely that the residents which submitted these calls for service were also survey respondents given the close alignment of issues/concerns.

In regards to enforcement, two part-time officers were hired between May 30 to September 15, 2019, as directed by Council, covering both evening and weekend shifts. Over this period the officers made 141 visits and observed 122 dogs. There were no warnings or violations cited as officers were primarily patrolling to see if the parks were being used appropriately and make sure owners were in control of their dogs at all times.

The most notable concerns were at Skyline Park in regards to mowed areas, as the majority of the park is naturalized. However, mowing staff extended grass cutting to level areas of the Park to promote pocket play areas.

At Chelsea Park, most users were supportive of the location, appreciating close connectivity to Hyde Creek and surrounding trail network. Staff did relocate the off-leash area farther from the playground structure given the concerns received from residents who frequent the playground.

Overall, the off-leash dog parks seem to be functioning quite well and supported by the community. Staff will report back at the end of the pilot project (May 2020) with any additional updates and to confirm if the Committee of Council would like to transition this to a permanent service level.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

ATTACHMENTS

None.

Lead author(s): Mitchell Guest

Contributing author(s): Paula Jones