

Report to Council



Date: September 15, 2016
File: 1840-10
To: City Manager
From: Robert Parlante, Parks & Buildings Planning Manager
Subject: Off-leash Dog Beaches & Parks Community Engagement

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the Off-leash Dog Beaches & Parks Community Engagement Report from the Manager, Parks & Buildings Planning dated September 14, 2016 with respect to the public consultation on proposed specific dog beach and park sites;

AND THAT Council direct staff to prepare budget proposals for consideration in the 2017 Capital Budget for the development of off-leash dog beaches at Poplar Point and Downtown Sails;

AND THAT Council directs staff to consider the implications of including an off-leash dog beach and additional parking in relation to the long-term comprehensive Pandosy Waterfront plan and report back to Council;

AND THAT Council directs staff to not proceed with the further development of an off-leash dog park at Munson Pond;

AND FURTHER THAT Council directs staff to prepare budget proposals for consideration in the 2017 Capital Budget for the development of an off-leash dog beach on a two-year trial basis at Lake Avenue beach access.

Purpose:

To provide additional designated off-leash dog beach locations distributed across the City waterfront in response to the findings of the statistically valid survey completed in early 2016.

Background:

Provision for dogs in any community generates strong, frequently polarized, opinions on the subject. Dog owners are one of the user groups of our park system, and as a progressive, mid-sized city this needs to be considered. However, irresponsible dog ownership is a frequent cause for irritation and results in a number of complaints to the City each year.

In order to more accurately understand public feeling on the subject, the City undertook a statistically valid survey in January/February 2016. The findings of this survey identified the majority of residents (55%), both dog owners and non-owners, felt more dog beaches were necessary across the City. Based on community feedback, five potential locations were identified, four beaches and one park. Further public consultation on these specific locations was then conducted.

The beach locations were selected from existing City-owned properties in consideration of a number of factors:

- public safety;
- good distribution of locations across the City waterfront;
- impact on the surrounding neighbourhood;
- water-quality less suitable for human swimming;
- impact on the environment and wildlife;
- proximity to suitable car parking;
- proximity to other park facilities and recreational uses.

It was acknowledged, due to nature of the majority of the City owned waterfront and the desire to distribute off-leash areas across the City, that several of the potential dog beach accesses would be in residential neighbourhoods.

Concept plans were developed, and discovery sessions held at four of the locations specifically targeting feedback from residents in the immediate vicinity. A fifth session was held downtown in Kerry Park, and together with online engagement, sought feedback from all Kelowna residents on the five locations.

A frequent concern raised at all locations was that no one location should be developed in isolation, as each location is relatively small and could not sustain the large influx of users this would induce. Staff are therefore proposing multiple locations be pursued as off-leash dog beaches in parallel.

Poplar Point, Downtown Sails

Responses at these discovery sessions was equally split at Poplar Point, and a majority in favour at the Sails.

Poplar Point is one of the smaller locations proposed. However, the proximity to Knox Mountain, one of the City's most popular parks for walking, makes it an ideal spot for an off-leash dog beach. Dog owners already use the area unofficially, and it would not be a difficult transition to make it an official off-leash area. The proximity of the roadway was a common concern at this location. The beach is proposed to be fenced and gated to avoid dogs straying onto the road, and signage added to remind owners dogs must be on a leash when arriving at, and leaving from, the beach area, in order to improve the current situation.

The **Sails 'Mini' Beach** location received broad support, and the concept of it as just a small cooling off area embraced. The convenient, central location was popular. The beach is mostly contained by an existing, small retaining wall, but in order to avoid unsightly fencing on the downtown waterfront, it is proposed that dogs must remain on a leash, both in and out of the water, from 9 am. to 6 pm. weekdays, when the surrounding area is busy with pedestrians, cyclists and cars.

Cedar Avenue

This location proved to be the most supported by the general public, both online and at the in-person discovery sessions. The water quality is less suitable for human swimming, and would serve as an effective spot for dog owners to allow their pets to swim. The central location serves both the Pandosy area and the southern half of the Downtown area: the most popular locations in the statistically valid survey.

Lack of parking, however, was a common concern for this location. Staff propose evaluating this location as an off-leash dog beach with associated additional parking, against other potential recreational uses in the long-term comprehensive Pandosy Waterfront plan. Staff would then report back to Council with their findings, before a commitment is made to any specific park use in this important future park location.

Munson Pond

This location is not endorsed by staff for several reasons. While two different design options located the dog park away from the environmentally sensitive wetland, both would occupy the valuable buffer zone adjacent. The ground is also very boggy, and the modification required to make the area suitable year round would be both costly and environmentally intrusive.

The area is rich in wildlife, and has only recently been opened up to the public for exploration. It has proved to be very popular with both seniors and naturalists. While there was only a slight majority opposed from the small number of exit surveys received, there were several valid concerns raised that could not easily be addressed in the design.

Lake Avenue

The Lake Avenue discovery session received many strongly felt comments from local residents opposed to a dog beach in this location. However, it also received broad support from the wider community both online and at the city-wide open house.

Notwithstanding the differences of public opinion, this location has many advantages over the other sites considered. The space is larger than the other options considered, and well-located next to City Park and the downtown core. There is only limited parking available at Lake Avenue, but ample parking in City Park on the other side of the bridge. Several of the concerns raised had already been addressed by the schematic design, namely a fence to protect both the riparian area and the cycle path over the creek. The outflow of Mill Creek into the lake will ensure good water circulation. It is also hoped the increased 'eyes on the beach' from dog-owner's year round would deter undesirable or illegal activities that are often reported in the area.

In consideration of both the strength of local opposition, and the advantages this location offers, staff recommend the dog beach proceed on a two-year trial basis, concluding in 2019. This trial period will also coincide with the temporary closure of the dog park at Rowcliffe Park nearby while construction occurs.

Internal Circulation:

Divisional Director, Infrastructure
Divisional Director, Civic Operations
Divisional Director, Community Planning & Real Estate
Parks Services Manager
Bylaw Services Manager
Communications Supervisor
Communications Advisor

External Agency/Public Comments:

Refer to the Off-leash Dog Beaches & Parks Community Engagement Report (Attachment 1).

Alternate Recommendation:

The fourth recommendation be replaced with:

AND THAT Council directs staff to suspend any further consideration of a dog beach at Lake Avenue in the short-term, but instead monitor use at the other three dog beach locations for a period of two years, and report back to Council.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

Existing Policy:

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

Personnel Implications:

Communications Comments:

Submitted by:

Robert Parlante, Manager, Parks & Buildings Planning

Approved for inclusion:



A. Newcombe, Divisional Director, Infrastructure

Attachment 1 - Off-leash Dog Beaches & Parks Community Engagement Report

Attachment 2 - Off-Leash Dog Beaches and Parks Presentation

Appendix A - Information Panels Concept Designs

Appendix B - Dog Park Signage Sample

Appendix C - Dog Park Discovery Session Letters Sample

Appendix D - Surveys

Appendix E - Survey Feedback Results

Appendix F - Correspondence

cc: Divisional Director, Infrastructure
Divisional Director, Civic Operations
Divisional Director, Community Planning & Real Estate
Parks Services Manager
Bylaw Services Manager

Communications Supervisor
Communications Advisor