



STRATHCONA COUNTY

# Dog Off Leash Strategy

## Phase 1 Report: Background Research

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STRATHCONA COUNTY

# **Dog Off Leash Strategy**

**Phase 1 Report: Background Research**

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# Section

# 1

## Project Background & Context

Strathcona County has initiated a Dog Off Leash Strategy to help plan the future provision of dog off leash spaces in Sherwood Park. The County currently provides one designated off leash area—the Deermound Off Leash Park.

Strathcona County has initiated a Dog Off Leash Strategy to help plan the future provision of dog off leash spaces in Sherwood Park. There are currently over 12,000 registered dogs in Strathcona County that are often seen utilizing a variety of trails, parks and open spaces in both the urban and rural service areas.

The County currently provides one designated off leash area, the Deermound Off Leash Park, which is located on Highway 21 and Highway 628. While the County has indicated that the Park will remain a designated off leash area, a review was conducted into the future uses and enhancements that may be required to ensure that the site best meets the needs of current and future users. The development of this Strategy provides the further opportunity to more broadly assess how the County provides off leash dog opportunities for residents.

The Strategy is being developed utilizing a variety of research mechanisms which will help inform the study and strategic directions. Background research being conducted includes:

- A review of previous and related planning exercises conducted by the County;
- Current dog ownership and activities in the County;
- Research into population demographics and how future growth may impact the demand for off leash areas;
- Trends related to dog ownership, activity preferences and the provision of off leash spaces; and
- A review of how other municipalities in “comparable” communities provide dog off leash opportunities.

Public and stakeholder engagement is also key to the development of the Strategy. Consultation mechanisms have included an online resident poll, intercept surveys, and direct consultation with vested stakeholders. These findings will be presented in the Phase 2 Summary Report.



# Section

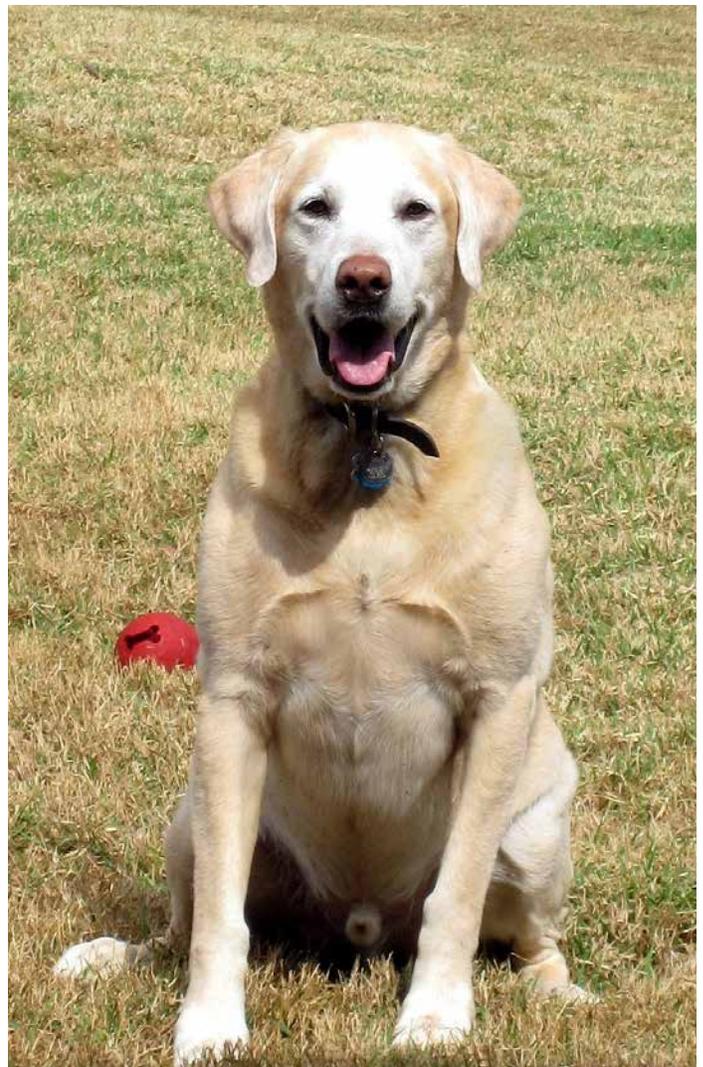
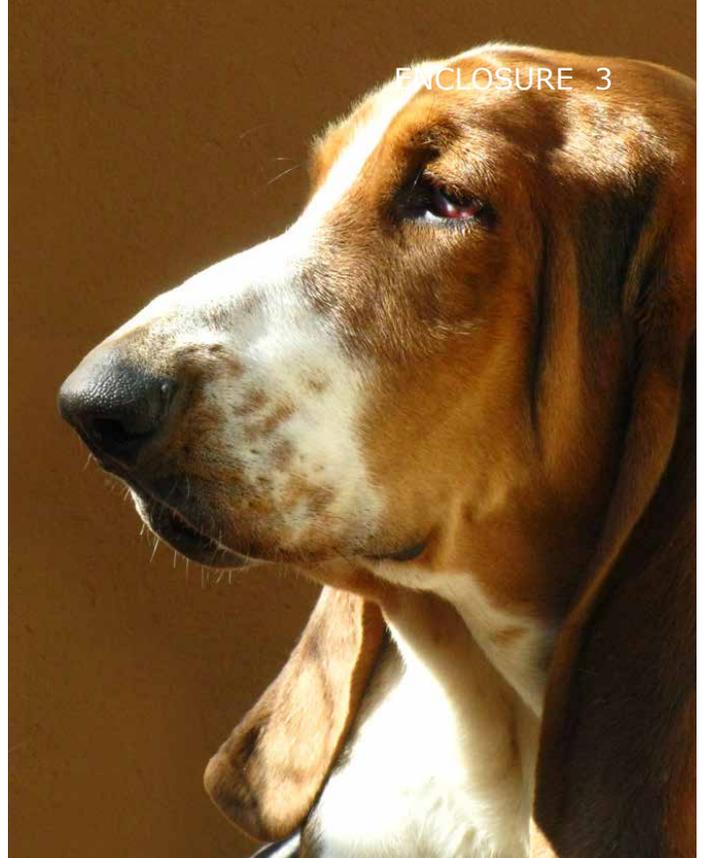
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## Related Planning

A review of previous studies and planning documentation was conducted in order to ensure that the development of the Dog Off Leash Strategy aligns with pertinent County planning foundations and overarching strategic initiatives. Summarized as follows are key elements from the County's Municipal Development Plan, Open Space and Recreation Facility Strategy (OSRFS) and Trails Strategy.

## MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2007)

- Chapter 9 of the Plan outlines overarching objectives and policies related to parks and recreation in the County.
- Objectives outlined in the Plan include:
  - » Select, develop and maintain open space to meet the present and future recreational, environmental, aesthetic and educational needs of our citizens;
  - » Provide year round park opportunities and experiences;
  - » Encourage the continued development of an integrated open space system, which serves a variety of leisure interests; and
  - » Provide a variety of park experiences for the community regardless of age, culture or income.
- Policies outlined in the Plan include:
  - » Encourage the development of multi-purpose and joint use park and recreational areas;
  - » Continue supporting the development of specialized parks, **such as dog parks** and skate parks, as well as recreational areas, such as multi purpose trails; and
  - » Cooperatively and collaboratively plan with the public and private sectors, initiatives which link and develop rural and urban open space including parks, recreation and tourism nodes, and natural areas.
- The Plan also outlines a categorization system for park spaces:
  - » Neighborhood Parks (minimum 0.8 hectares, serves neighborhood residents)
  - » Community Parks (minimum 4 hectares, serves the entire community)
  - » District Parks (minimum 8 hectares, serves the community and outlying areas)
  - » Linear Parks (minimum 10 metres wide, connects to public spaces)
- The categorization system further provides basic amenity and use guidelines.



## OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION FACILITY STRATEGY (2008)

\* Updated May 2014

- Provides a strategic framework for the County to identify and plan for the future of recreation and leisure infrastructure.
- Identifies frameworks and processes for the County to implement when undertaking new development or the enhancement of existing facilities spaces.
- Consultation and community engagement conducted for the OSRFP reflected the importance that County residents place on quality of life and community infrastructure.
- Identified that community engagement is a crucial step and priority when undertaking facility enhancement or new development.
- Identifies that financial implications (capital and operating) are important considerations when developing new recreation and leisure infrastructure, and that they need to be carefully reviewed and studied before development can successfully occur.

## STRATHCONA COUNTY TRAILS STRATEGY (2012)

- Public consultation conducted to develop the Trails Strategy revealed the popularity of dog walking with 15% of household survey respondents in the County reporting that they use the trail system for dog walking (third among all trail activities).
- Outlines future development strategies for trails in the County for both the urban and rural service areas.
- Identifies that there are increased demands for both non-motorized and motorized trails.
- Suggests trail standards, best practices and trail provision guidelines.
- Identifies financial implications of increase trail maintenance, life cycle budgeting and performance measurement.
- Outlines a vision statement for trails in the County.

Rural and urban trails throughout Strathcona County provide for a balance of recreational and active transportation uses and are provided by the County to allow for maximum positive impact to overall quality of life of residents taking into account concerns of all stakeholders.

## OTHER

In addition to the aforementioned plans and strategies, the County has also developed numerous planning documents and studies that will be important to review and follow should new or enhanced dog off leash areas be contemplated. Examples of plans and documents that could have future relevance to dog-off leash activities include:

- Area Concept Plans
- Area Structure Plans
- Land Use Bylaws
- Recreation Master Plans (for specific hamlets)
- Mature Neighborhood Strategy
- Facility Feasibility Studies
- Park Site Redevelopment Plans



# Section

# 3

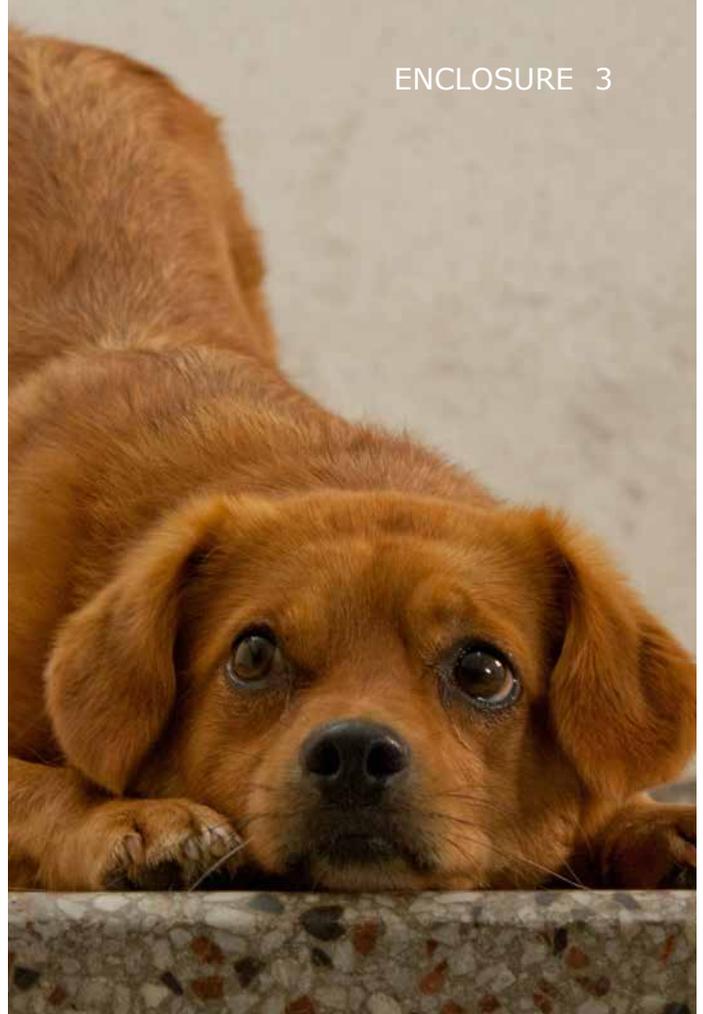
## Current Situation

Registered dog ownership data for the County is described as well as an overview of the current dog off leash area at the Deermound Dog Off Leash Park.

# Dog Ownership

Identified in the following chart is the number of registered dogs in Strathcona County on an annual basis from 2011 – 2014. During this time period, registered dog ownership has increased by approximately 1%. It should be noted that the figures presented below do not likely reflect the total dog population. While the unregistered dog population is difficult to determine, some municipalities have estimated that between 10% - 30% of dogs are not registered.

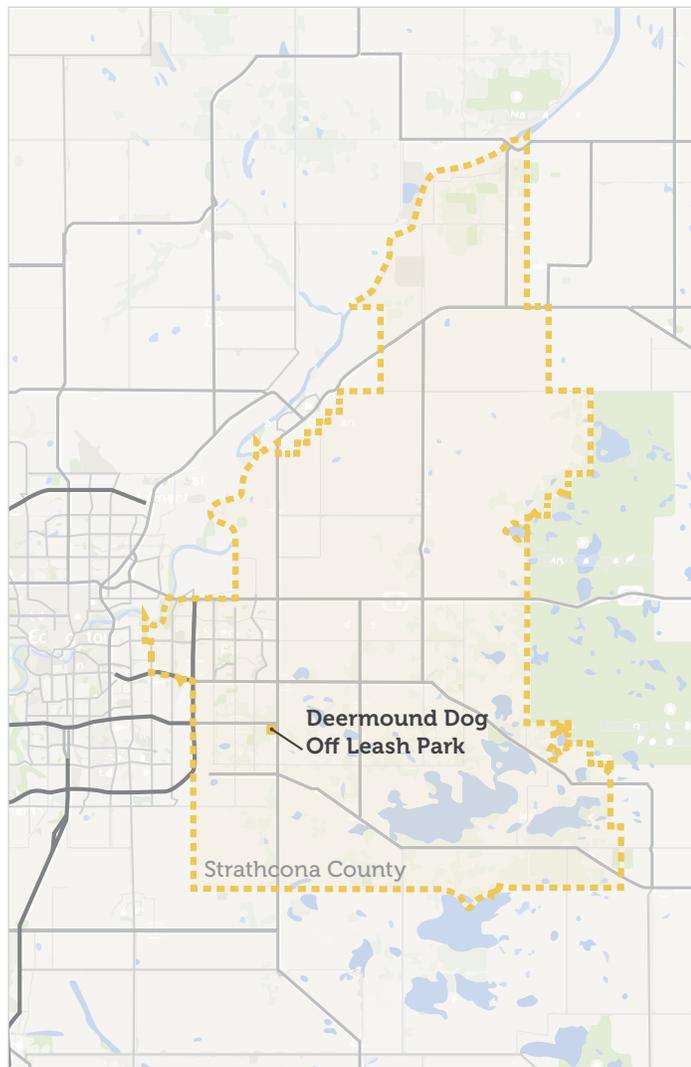
YEAR	# REGISTERED DOGS
2014	12,995
2013	12,979
2012	12,897
2011	12,869



# Deermound Off Leash Park

The Deermound Dog Off Leash Park is located on Highway 21 and Highway 628. In addition to being used extensively by off leash dog users, the park also serves as a local park and natural area for nearby residents. The park is built on a reclaimed landfill site and includes a variety of natural features and terrain. The park has a number of natural barriers (e.g. tree lines) and is partially fenced.

COUNTY VIEW



SPECIFIC LOCATION



As previously mentioned, a site review has recently been conducted to help plan for the future uses of the Deermound Dog Off Leash Park. A redevelopment plan has also been completed and identified a number of potential future amenities and improvements for the site (those improvements with a check [ ✓ ] have been completed):

- Planting to screen adjacent residents
- Berming rather than fencing
- Additional seating areas ✓
- Additional trash receptacles ✓
- Improved parking ✓
- Natural play area
- Informal gathering areas ✓
- Crushed gravel trail loop ✓
- Mulch trail loop ✓
- Site for future dog agility area
- Washroom

While utilization data can often be difficult to track for spontaneous and casual use spaces, previous public consultation and user counts conducted by the County confirm that the Deermound Dog Off Leash Park is well utilized. The County's Annual 2013 Open Space and Recreation Facility Survey found that 36% of respondents had used the Deermound Dog Off Leash Park in the previous year. If extrapolated to the total number of private dwellings (households) in the County, it can then be estimated that 11,853 households used the Deermound Dog Off Leash Park at least once in the previous year. Also of note, the survey found that in total 93% of responding households had used an outdoor park, playground trail, sport field or open space in the previous 12 months.

During March 2014 the County conducted a week long traffic (user) count at the Deermound Dog Off Leash Park. Summarized as follows are key findings from the count.

Note: A count was not completed on Wednesday, March 12th or the morning of Thursday, March 6<sup>th</sup>. The data reflected below accounts for 5.5 days of visitation.

- In total 2,410 visitations were counted in 5.5 days.
- Of the 2,410 visitor counts, 60.4% occurred on the weekend.
- The overall average number of visitor per day was 472 (729 per day on weekends, 308 per day on weekdays)
- Park traffic by time of day:
  - » 27.2% of total visits occurred between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m.
  - » 48.8% of total visits occurred between 12:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.
  - » 20.9% of total visits occurred between 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.
  - » 3.0% of total visits occurred between 7 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.
- Prime utilization hours were generally consistent when comparing weekdays and weekends.



## Section

## 4

# Demographics & Population Analysis

A review of population and demographics was undertaken. This information provides valuable context that will need to be considered when contemplating future off leash provision.

# Population Overview <sup>1</sup>



***Selected population and demographics data for Strathcona County is presented below. Also provided on the next page are population growth projections. This information may be pertinent to consider when making future decisions on the need for dog off leash areas in the County. The information also provides some context within which the strategy is being developed.***

The 2012 Municipal Census population count of 92,403 residents in Strathcona County represented an increase of 5.0% (4,405 residents) from the previous census completed in 2009. In 2012, 70.8% of the County's population (65,465 residents) lived in Sherwood Park and 29.2% (26,938 residents) lived in rural Strathcona County. Within rural Strathcona County, the highest proportion of residents live in Country residences (71.5%), followed by Farms (19.3%) and Hamlets (9.1%). Over 81% of rural residents have lived in Strathcona County for more than five years. By comparison, approximately 76% of Sherwood Park residents have lived in the County for more than five years.

Population growth in Sherwood Park was 6.2% from 2009 to 2012, while rural Strathcona County grew at a rate of 2.3% from 2009 to 2012. Since 2002, the overall population of the County has increased by 25.4%.

Identified below are a number of additional population and demographic characteristics for Strathcona County:

- Between 2009 and 2012 there was an 8.2% increase in the total number of dwellings in Sherwood Park, while the number of dwellings in rural Strathcona County grew by 4.3%.
- 50.3% of residents in Strathcona County are females, while 49.7% are males (in rural Strathcona County 51.3% of residents are male and 48.7% are female).
- The median age of residents in Sherwood Park is 37 years of age, while the median age of residents in rural Strathcona County is 41 years of age (provincial average:<sup>2</sup> 36.5 years of age).
- Sherwood Park has higher proportions of younger adults while rural Strathcona County has high proportions of older adults:
  - » Ages 20 – 44 (Sherwood Park: 33.4% of the population; rural Strathcona County: 26.5%)
  - » Ages 45 – 64 (Sherwood Park: 27.7% of the population; rural Strathcona County: 35.6%)
- Average household sizes:
  - » Sherwood Park (2.85 people)
  - » Country residences (3.02 people)
  - » Farms (2.61 people)
  - » Hamlets (2.49 people)

<sup>1</sup> Population data from Strathcona County, Municipal Census (2012) unless otherwise specified.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, 2011 Census of the Population.

# Growth Projections

Strathcona County has developed a five year population growth projection (2013-2017) which estimates that annual growth in the County will be between 1.41% and 1.81%. If these growth projections are accurate, the County could exceed 100,000 residents by 2017. As reflected in the table below, the rate of growth is expected to be higher in the urban service area of Sherwood Park, with rural Strathcona County experiencing steady population growth.

If the growth rates outlined in the above chart (1.41% to 1.81% annual growth) were extrapolated to the year 2023, the population in the County would be between 107,787 and 120,211 residents. If extrapolated to the year 2033, the population in the County would be between 123,986 and 143,830 residents.



	2013 PROJECTION	2014 PROJECTION	2015 PROJECTION	2016 PROJECTION	2017 PROJECTION
URBAN SERVICE AREA (SHERWOOD PARK)	66,607 (1.74%)	68,074 (2.20%)	69,541 (2.16%)	71,009 (2.11%)	72,476 (2.07%)
RURAL STRATHCONA COUNTY	27,097 (0.59%)	27,322 (0.83%)	27,546 (0.82%)	27,771 (0.82%)	27,996 (0.81%)
<b>TOTAL COUNTY</b>	<b>93,704</b> <b>(1.41%)</b>	<b>95,396</b> <b>(1.81%)</b>	<b>98,780</b> <b>(1.77%)</b>	<b>98,780</b> <b>(1.74%)</b>	<b>100,471</b> <b>(1.71%)</b>

# Section

# 5

# Trends

Outlined in the following section are a number of trends related to dog ownership and the provision of off leash areas.

# Trends in Dog Ownership

A May 2013 Ipsos Public Affairs survey measured a number of pet ownership characteristics of Canadians. The survey found that 32% of Canadian households own a dog; while a slightly higher proportion (34%) own a cat. Of interest, dog ownership characteristics in Canada vary when compared to the United States. While a similar proportion (34%) of Americans own a cat, nearly half (48%) of households in the United States have a dog.

Pet ownership appears to be related to household income levels. Almost two-thirds of Canadian households earning over \$60,000 per year have a pet, while just under half of households earning less than \$60,000 have a pet.<sup>3</sup>

A 2011 Market Indicators Report published by the Government of Canada's Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada department also reflects a number of trends related to dog ownership and related consumer patterns. The Report estimates that approximately 35% of Canadian households own a dog with the total dog population in Canada exceeding five million. Reflecting both consistent growth of dog ownership and an increased preference for specialty dog foods, it is projected that overall dog food sales will exceed \$1.1 billion dollars by 2016.<sup>4</sup> The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council of Canada further estimates that pet owners spent an estimated \$6.5 billion in 2012 on pet related products.



<sup>3</sup> Ipsos Public Affairs eNation Survey (May 2013)  
[http://www.ipsos-na.com/dl/pdf/knowledge-ideas/public-affairs/IpsosPA\\_TS\\_CatsMeow.pdf](http://www.ipsos-na.com/dl/pdf/knowledge-ideas/public-affairs/IpsosPA_TS_CatsMeow.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Market Indicators Report (2011).

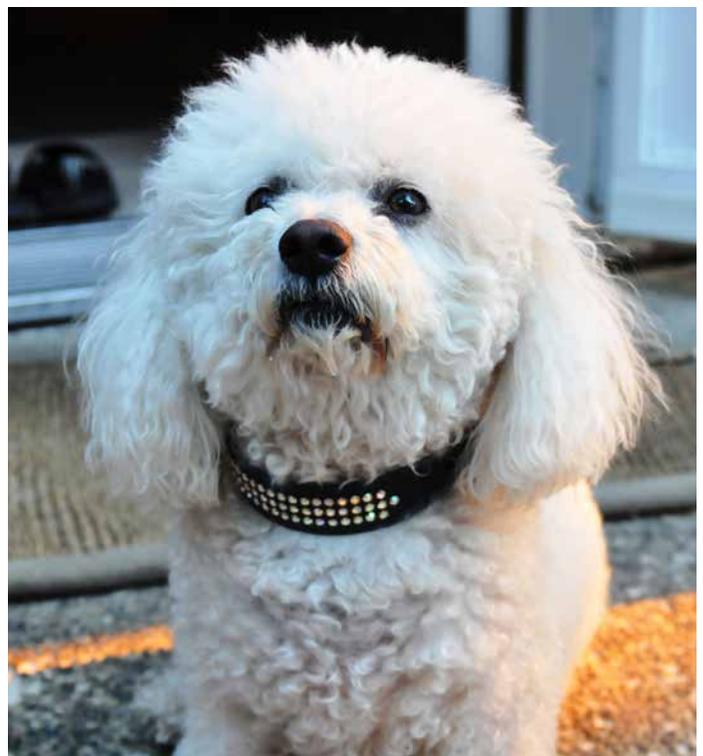
# Trends in the Provision of Off Leash Areas

A growing trend observed in many communities, including Alberta, is to permit dogs to be off leash in community parks and open spaces. The City of Calgary (as further outlined in Section 6) was one of the first communities to permit off leash activities in 150 public park spaces. This model has been adopted or piloted by numerous communities across Canada in order to accommodate an increased demand for accessible and convenient off leash areas by residents.

Permitting off leash activities in community parks spaces can also help increase overall utilization of parks and open spaces, while also helping mitigate deviant dog owner behaviour. This is accomplished in large part through the development of policies and the addition of amenities that encourage appropriate usage and create positive park and open space experiences. Allowing dog owners to utilize more broadly park spaces in their communities and neighbourhoods can also encourage higher levels of physical activity and community connectiveness.

Increasingly, a number of municipalities are also utilizing outdoor sports facilities for varying levels of dog off leash activity. These facilities often include boarded outdoor rinks, rectangular sports fields and baseball diamonds. Permitting dog off leash activities in these facilities can help ensure usage during non-prime seasons and in some cases help justify the expenses associated with development and ongoing maintenance.

While many communities are moving towards a more inclusive off leash policy in community park spaces and outdoor facilities, there are often a number of important considerations that must be factored into the decision. These include balancing multiple uses in park spaces, providing necessary amenities and ensuring safety for both animals and park users.



# Trends in the Design of Off Leash Areas

Historically, most designated dog-off leash areas have been located on sites with minimal capacity to be used for other purposes (e.g. utility right of ways, reclaimed landfill sites) and with minimal user amenities. However in recent years many municipalities have experienced an increased demand for user amenities and the overall number of spaces available for dog off leash users. This trend has resulted in a number of municipalities developing policies and standards to help guide the provision of current and future off leash areas.

The chart on the following page from the City of Surrey's 2012 Dog Off Leash Master Plan provides an overview of the design and amenity standards that a number of municipalities have implemented to help guide dog-off leash site development.

In recent years, Strathcona County has also completed a number of upgrade and additions to the Deermound site. These include:

## 2010

- Gravel trail development (\$166,183); and
- Fencing (\$10,016).

## 2011

- Addition of second gate (~\$500);
- Mulch trail & plantings (\$23,850); and
- Concrete pad for portable washroom (\$1,500).



	METRO VANCOUVER (GVRD, 2001)	SALT LAKE COUNTY, UTAH (Salt Lake County, 2008)	MARKHAM, ONTARIO (Markham, 2008)	RICHMOND HILL, ONTARIO (Richmond Hill, 2008)	DENVER, COLORADO (Denver Parks & Recreation, 2010)
SIZE	Large enough to avoid overcrowding and limit impacts on park resources.	Regional dog parks to be min.10 acres.	Minimum park size 0.5 ha (1.2 acres).	Minimum park size 1 ha (2.5 acres).	Minimum 0.4 ha (1 acre), preferably 0.8 – 1.2 ha (2 – 3 acres).
SETBACKS / ADJACENCIES	Off leash areas should be separated from active recreation sites, especially children's playgrounds.	Residential adjacencies are to be avoided as these have been identified as the source of most conflict.	Min 120 m setback from residential and commercial property lines.  Avoid playgrounds, sports fields, sports facilities, and other conflicting amenity or use.	Min 15 m setback from other recreational facilities.  Min 30 m setback from playgrounds.	Min 30 m setback from playgrounds.  Min 60 m setback from arterial streets unless.  Site is completely fenced.
DISTRIBUTION	Metro Vancouver to provide off leash areas with a regional or destination role new sites should relieve pressure on existing parks and / or environmentally sensitive areas.	Regional dog parks serve the entire county.  Community dog parks serve an 8 km area.  Neighbourhood dog parks serve a 3km area.	(No defined criteria, though a local dog off leash group must be established.)	Dog parks should be accessible by transit and walking.	Provide equitable distribution across the city.  No other dog parks should be within 1.6 – 3.2 km radius depending on population density.
PARKING	Regional off leash areas should provide sufficient off-street parking.	Provide parking for regional parks.  Neighbourhood parks may not require off-street parking if well connected to pedestrian routes.	Provide parking for min. 12 vehicles.	Dog parks should have parking.	Dog parks should provide access to on-street parking.

Many municipalities are also placing a higher emphasis and focus on environmental issues when contemplating dog off leash site development or enhancement. Potential environmental issues that can arise at dog off leash sites include:

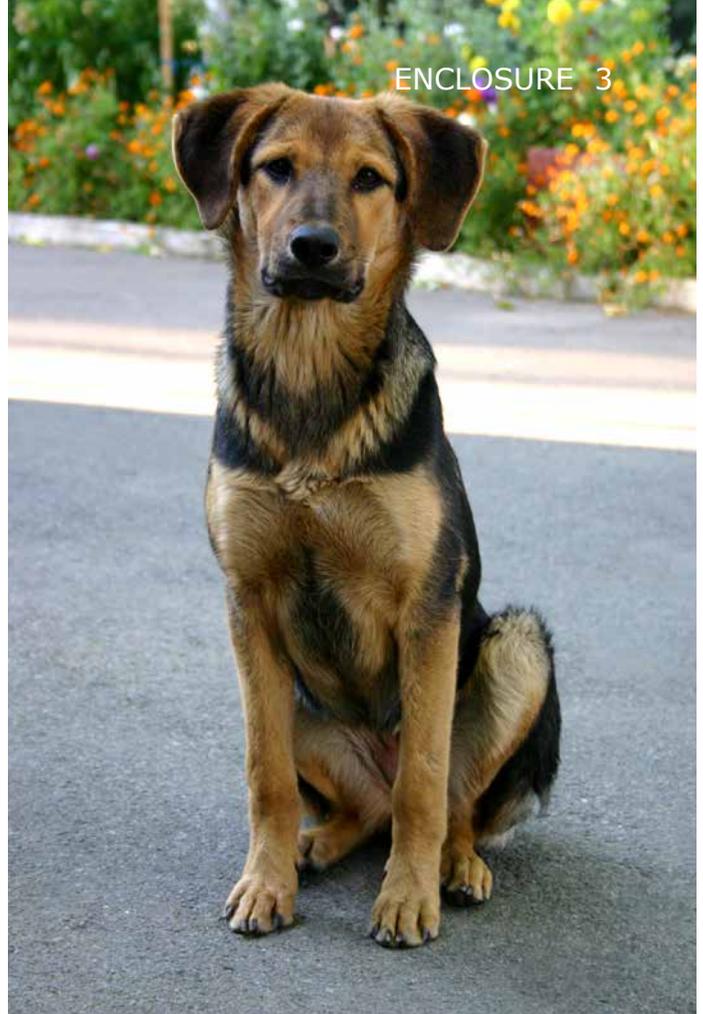
- Soil erosion
- Disturbance / elimination of site vegetation
- Disturbances to wildlife and other animals
- Contamination of groundwater and water bodies

The effects of dog off leash areas on water bodies pose a particularly significant concern for planners. While water features such as ponds or streams are popular amenities for many park and open space users, these amenities require careful consideration if already existing or created in dog off leash areas. Given that dogs often drink or bathe in water bodies when available it is important to put in place appropriate measures to mitigate the risk of water borne diseases that can be harmful to animals and humans. Strategies implemented by some municipalities include:

- Regular testing of water bodies in or adjacent to dog off leash areas.
- Providing drinking stations in dog off leash areas.
- Installing water circulation stations (e.g. fountains, pumps) in stagnant water features located in or adjacent to dog off leash areas.
- Installation of signage and public education campaigns.
- Ensuring dog off leash sites have proper drainage to reduce standing water.

A common consideration, and often debate, for many municipalities is regarding to fencing and barriers in designated dog off leash areas. The increasing demand and trend to provide designated 'small dog' areas has fuelled this issue. While many municipalities continue to fence dog off leash sites, others have taken the philosophical approach to leave the sites unfenced and/or implement natural barriers such vegetation, water features and elevations (e.g. berms).

Another growing trend observed in the provision of dog off leash areas is the installation of dog agility and play features. Including these amenities in dog off leash areas can improve utilization as well as provide opportunities for more structured usage such as canine training classes and competitions. In some instances the installation of these amenities occurs through a partnership between the local municipality and community organizations or the private sector. These amenities can additionally provide an opportunity for dog off leash sites to generate revenue through the booking of these specialized amenities and sponsorship.

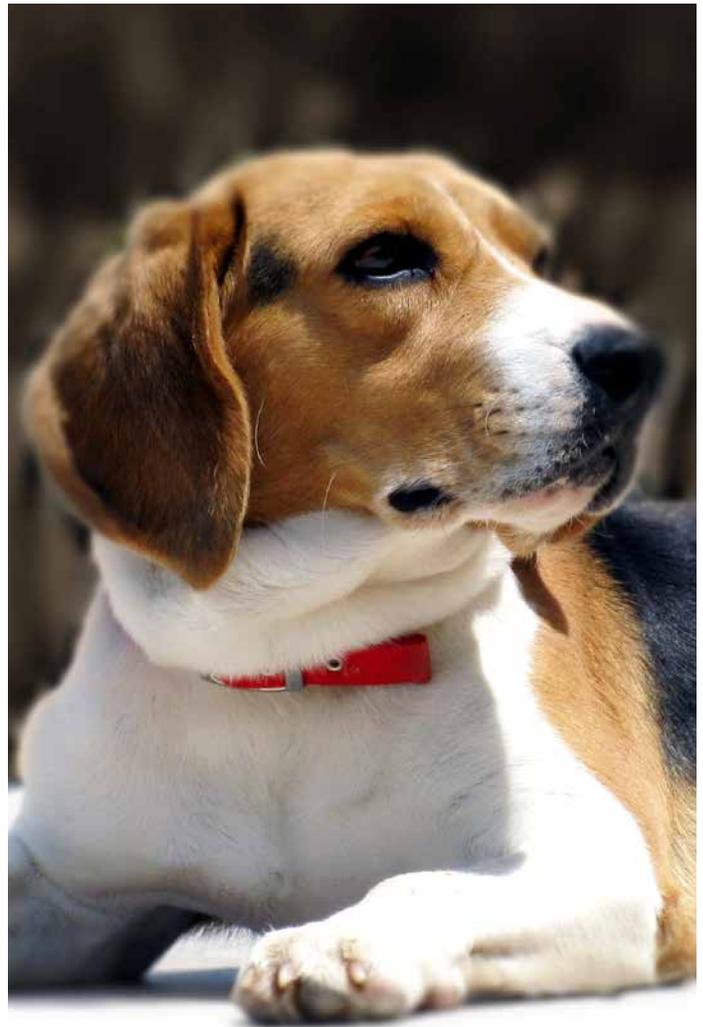


# Public Engagement & Education

As the demand for dog off leash areas grows in many communities, so does the need for municipalities to successfully engage and educate both potential users and nearby residents. Successful public engagement can help identify the spaces and facilities that might be suitable for dog off leash uses, as well as those that are not.

Increasingly, many municipalities are also putting an emphasis on public education and advocacy. In many instances the municipality has taken an active role in creating advisory or ambassador groups that can help provide a conduit between dog users, residents and the municipality. These groups can help fill important roles such as monitoring dog off leash areas and help identify issues and required improvements. Many municipalities have also activated these groups as part of a broader public education campaign and when dealing with specific projects.

Ongoing engagement and consultation with dog off leash area users can also prove beneficial and help mitigate issues. In addition to activating dog advocacy groups, many municipalities have put in place regular intercept surveys at site, online feedback mechanisms, social media, and site visits by staff.



# Section

# 6

## Municipal Practices Research

Research was conducted into the provision of dog off leash activities in six municipalities across Canada (Calgary, Halifax, Red Deer, Regina, Spruce Grove, St. Albert). Representatives from all six municipalities were contacted and provided feedback on their respective experiences in providing dog off leash sites and amenities. The objective of the research was to identify a variety of approaches in the provision of dog off leash areas and to identify best practices that might be applicable in Strathcona County.

# Calgary

The City of Calgary permits dogs to be off leash in 150 community parks across the city. Four of these sites are fully fenced. It is estimated that in total more 1,250 hectares of space are available for off leash use, representing approximately 17% of the City's total park inventory. While the City of Calgary does not operate any designated or specified dog off leash parks, one is available through the not for profit Calgary Associated Dog Fanciers.

In 2010 the City developed an Off Leash Area Management Plan to help guide the provision of existing off leash areas in Calgary and better manage new areas that may come online in the future. Included in the Plan is a classification system for off leash areas as well as a service framework which establishes both the amenities and service levels for the three categories of sites.

## CITY OF CALGARY OFF LEASH AREAS SERVICE LEVELS

LEVEL OF OFF LEASH SERVICE	TYPE OF OFF LEASH DOG USE AREA		
	NEIGHBOURHOOD	COMMUNITY CLUSTER	REGIONAL
Approximate Size Range	Under 4.3 ha	4.3 – 19.9 ha	19.9+ ha
Proposed Service Area	800 metre walking distance	8 minutes driving distance	20 minute driving distance
BASE SERVICE			
Standard waste removal service	✓	✓	✓
Standard maintenance schedule	✓	✓	✓
Clear signage	✓	✓	✓
Online maps	✓	✓	✓
Responsible pet ownership & other educational information	✓	✓	✓
Bylaw enforcement (where required)	✓	✓	✓
Parking	—	✓ Off site (On site only when necessary and feasible)	✓ Off / on site
Partial / fully enclosed fencing or natural barriers to separate use	✓ (Where necessary & feasible)	✓ (Where necessary & feasible)	✓ (Where necessary & feasible)
Increased waste removal service in enclosed areas	✓	✓	✓
Benches	—	✓ (Where feasible)	✓
Enhanced maintenance schedule	—	—	✓
Washrooms (where feasible) in Regional OLAs only	—	—	✓ (Where feasible)

## CITY OF CALGARY OFF LEASH AREAS SERVICE LEVELS

LEVEL OF OFF LEASH SERVICE	TYPE OF OFF LEASH DOG USE AREA		
	NEIGHBOURHOOD	COMMUNITY CLUSTER	REGIONAL
ENHANCED SERVICE: POTENTIAL VOLUNTEER / SPONSORSHIP-BASED SERVICE			
Dog waste bags & dispensers	✓ (Where feasible)	✓ (Where feasible)	✓ (Where feasible)
Drinking water for dogs	✓ (Where feasible)	✓ (Where feasible)	✓ (Where feasible)
Responsible pet ownership information & seminars	✓ (Where feasible)	✓ (Where feasible)	✓ (Where feasible)
Other enhancements proposed or funded by stewards	✓ (Where feasible)	✓ (Where feasible)	✓ (Where feasible)

2012 City of Calgary Off Leash Area Management Plan

Another key component to the Plan was the development of procedures and set criteria to evaluate requests for the elimination of existing off leash areas as well as the addition of new sites in the future. The Plan outlines the conditions and circumstances that need to exist for a site to be evaluated along with a detailed scoring system to determine the future of each site. Evaluation criteria include:

- Number and nature of bylaw or 3-1-1 complaints relative to park size and number of users.
- Number and severity of risk.
- Number and severity of damage to turf, shrubs and trees.
- Number and severity of damage to amenities.
- Negative impact on wildlife or natural area habitat identified using appropriate quantitative methodologies.
- User patterns.
- Number and type of pathway users.
- Amount of dog feces not picked up.
- Negative impacts on nearby water quality.

Other important elements of the Plan include stakeholder engagement guidelines and broad based design and amenity standards for off leash areas. Signage in off leash areas is a specific focal point of interest in the Plan. In recent years the City has removed and replaced a large proportion of signage in park and open spaces. A shift is also occurring towards reduced signage with a higher level of responsibility being placed on the dog owner.

The City of Calgary is currently establishing an Off Leash Ambassador Program based on the success of piloting a similar program in two off leash areas in the city. Five objectives have been established for the initiative:

- Promote responsible pet ownership, positive pet interactions and safety in off leash areas through the provision of information and demonstrations.
- Answer questions regarding Calgary's bylaws in off leash areas.
- Act as positive role models in off leash parks in terms of adhering with Calgary's bylaws.
- Provide an avenue for citizens to express concerns and pass along concerns to City staff.
- Promote the work of Animal & Bylaw Services and the services available at the Animal Services Centre, such as animal adoption and licensing.

While Calgary's innovative and inclusive approach to providing dog off leash areas is cited as a success some issues do exist. One identified issue is that smaller community parks lack visible and designated entry and exit points. Many of these sites are also located in close proximity to highly used sports fields, trails and other popular open spaces. Enforcement of community parks that permit dog off leash usage is the responsibility of the City's regular by-law enforcement branch. This responsibility includes the handling of complaints. However the Off Leash Area Management Plan has helped provide some guidance for regularly occurring issues.

# Halifax

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) provides 5 designated dog off leash areas. In addition dog off leash use is allowed on six sports fields during the summer and fall and 29 sports fields during the winter. In 2007 the HRM finalized a comprehensive Off Leash Parks Strategy which identified six core goals:

- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Balance
- Cleanliness
- Environmental and Cultural Sustainability
- Natural Beauty

Public engagement was core to developing the Strategy and further identified as a critical requirement for any future dog off leash planning. A process was also identified to guide the identification and implementation of future off leash sites in the community.

- Step 1: Proposal (submitted by interdepartmental committee member or community group)
- Step 2: Initial review by interdepartmental committee
- Step 3: Community consultation
- Step 4: Implementation

Two overarching philosophical principles of parks spaces in Halifax is to provide residents with natural experiences and to promote inclusivity in all parks and open spaces. These principles have an impact on dog off leash areas in a couple key ways. The HRM does not use fences or “unnatural” barriers in dog off leash areas to avoid creating sites that feel constricted or caged in. The municipality also encourages non dog owners to use park sites that permit dogs to be off leash. Looping trails were identified as desired by residents in consultation conducted for the 2007 Strategy and have been included in all dog off leash areas.

Enforcement in off leash areas is provided by the HRM Animal Services branch. The development of the 2007 Strategy and accompanying by-laws is credited with reducing dog related complaints by an estimated 80%.

# Red Deer

The City of Red Deer provides two designated dog off leash sites; Oxbows Off Leash Park and Three Mile Bend Off Leash Park. The Three Mile Bend Off Leash Park is part of a larger 55 hectare natural and recreation area located along the Red Deer River, while the Oxbows Off Leash Park is a 16 hectare site that was recently opened specifically for dogs. The City has three designated parks by-law officers that are responsible for the sites and any other animal related issues in City parks. This model allows for the City to more directly manage park and dog off leash specific issues and engage in public education.

The Oxbows Off Leash Park includes a number of unique amenities and specialized components which include:

- Varying terrain
- Amphitheatre for shows
- A staging area
- Passive dog zone for smaller dogs and training
- Multiple picnic sites
- Interpretive kiosks
- Private booking area for classes

The design process for the Oxbows Off Leash Park included the formation of a committee and consultation with dog enthusiasts and residents. The park was developed on a former landfill site which restricted some amenities and components that required excavation. Based on demand from dog park users a water station was installed with potable water for dogs.

Both sites are linked into the local and regional trail systems. Three Mile Bend Off Leash Park is adjacent to a recreation areas which includes a canoe pond. As dogs often use the pond for bathing and drinking regular water tests are conducted and the City has installed a solar powered aeration system.

# Regina

The City of Regina has one designated dog off leash park and five outdoor boarded rinks that are available from May 1st – September 30th. By-law enforcement for all animal related issues is contracted to the Regina Humane Society.

A dog owner's advocacy group, the Regina Off Leash Association (ROLA) exists in the community. The not for profit groups purpose is to work for the collective benefit of dog owners and users of off leash dog park areas in the City of Regina, by facilitating education, communication, and the development and sustainability of existing and future off leash areas.

Issues identified in current off leash areas include occasional dog attacks, waste not being picked up and a general lack of space. The City's Community Development Advisors are currently looking to engage further with the Humane Society on a public education and other strategies to combat these issues and have a more active presence. The City is also considering the addition of new amenities to the dedicated off leash site. Amenities being considered include increased vegetation, a double gated entry, trails and fencing options.

The City of Regina is currently considering setting provision thresholds for off leash dog areas. City council passed a resolution requesting that administration prepare a report that explores the City's ability to require an off leash dog area in each new development that has a population of 5,000. The current provision level including outdoor boarded rink is 1 space for every 32,183 residents.

# Spruce Grove

The City of Spruce Grove has two dog off leash parks; Cpl. Jim Galloway Memorial Off Leash Area & Marlboro Off Leash Park. The Cpl. Jim Galloway Memorial Off Leash Area is a fenced off leash area located on the southern edge of the community. The site offers a number of amenities which include:

- Double-gated entry area to unleash and leash dogs
- Designated area for small dogs
- 8.6 acres of fenced off leash park area
- 1 kilometre (900 metres) of gravel walking trails
- Multiple seating areas with benches and trees
- Doggie bag dispensers and waste receptacles
- 44 parking stalls
- Portable toilet

The site also incorporates a number of natural features such as varied terrain and wooded areas. The Marlboro Off Leash Park is unfenced and accessible from the communities multiway trail system. Bylaw enforcement of both sites is the responsibility of the City's regular bylaw enforcement department. While not formalized, the City has also permitted specified dog owner groups to utilize boarded outdoor rinks in the community.



# St. Albert

The City of St. Albert currently has one designated dog off leash area located at Lacombe Lake Park. Lacombe Lake Dog-Friendly Park is integrated into the broader park space which includes a stocked pond, trails, picnic areas and a playground. The site is currently not fenced with limited barriers, although consideration is being given to restricting dog off leash activities to the west part of the park site. Dispensers are available in Lacombe Lake Park but are not filled by the City. The pond is well used by many dogs but is not currently tested.

Another designated off leash site is expected to open in the fall of 2014 at the Campbell Dog-Friendly Park site. Final planning and development of the site is ongoing, with expected amenities to include:

- Park furniture such as benches, signage, garbage cans, dog waste bag dispensers and picnic tables.
- A combination of natural safety barriers and plantings for fencing in strategic locations.
- A small pedestrian bridge to cross the storm pond.

The City is also currently looking a barrier options for the new Campbell Dog-Friendly Park site given the proximity to a major roadway. A Dog Advisory Committee was engaged to help plan for the Lacombe Lake Dog-Friendly Park and was re-engaged in the initial planning of the new Campbell Dog-Friendly Park site.



5 City of St. Albert Animal Bylaw.

To expand dog off leash opportunities in St. Albert, the City is currently embarking on a pilot project to permit off leash usage in 18 community park spaces (one in each community node). The pilot project was formalized as part of the City's new Animal Bylaw which comes into effect on September 1, 2014. As part of the pilot project, each of the 18 new community off leash areas will be monitored for a period of one year and then re-evaluated. The following criteria and process were used to select the 18 park sites being piloted for the initiative:<sup>5</sup>

27. (1) *The City Manager shall designate areas that may be used as off leash areas in accordance with section 13 of the Bylaw.*
- (2) *The City Manager shall use the following criteria when designating off leash areas:*
  - (a) *off leash areas must be on City owned or controlled land,*
  - (b) *off leash areas must not encroach into Tot Lots,*
  - (c) *off leash areas may include areas that are regularly used as a programmable park space (sports fields), and*
  - (d) *the City Manager shall endeavor to establish at least one off leash area in every neighbourhood.*
- (3) *The City Manager shall establish a process and policy for:*
  - (a) *adding new off leash areas to new neighbourhoods,*
  - (b) *reviewing off leash areas from time to time, and*
  - (c) *accepting applications from residents, groups or organizations for adding, removing or altering an off leash area.*

Bylaw enforcement of the existing and new off leash areas will be the responsibility of the City's Bylaw Enforcement branch. However the City has hired two summer staff to go door to door to inform the public about the new bylaw and off leash areas.

# Section

# 7

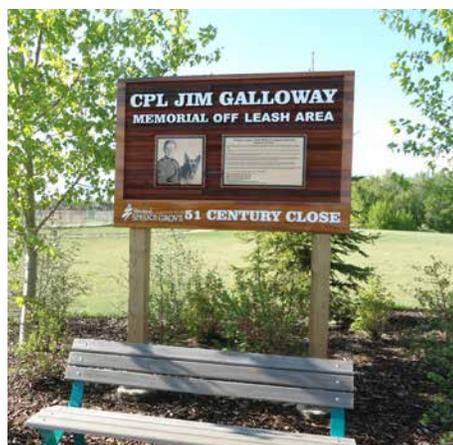
## Site Visits

To gain a further understanding of the current dog off leash facilities in the region members of the project team also visited facilities in Spruce Grove (Cpl. Jim Galloway Memorial Off Leash Area), Stony Plain (Umbach Off Leash Dog Park), St. Albert (Lacombe Lake Dog Friendly Park) and Fort Saskatchewan. Identified below is a brief overview of the findings from each site visit.

## SPRUCE GROVE

(CPL. JIM GALLOWAY MEMORIAL OFF LEASH AREA)

- Distinct, separated small dog area.
- The site is fenced with a double gated entry.
- Forested area in the middle of the site is fenced to keep dogs out.
- Former landfill site.
- Trails exist throughout the site.
- Benches are available for users throughout the site.
- Interpretive signage greets visitors to the park explaining the parks name and context.
- City park staff maintains the site, which includes filling dog bag dispensers and emptying garbage.



## STONY PLAIN

(UMBACH OFF LEASH DOG PARK)

- 25 acre site located near the Stony Plain North Business Park.
- Amenities include a pond, walking paths, park benches and a large, grassy dog-run area.
- Washroom facilities are available on-site.
- Signage with a number of rules and guidelines has been posted at the entry to the site.
- The site is not fenced, and backs onto a wetland area.
- Located within the site are a number of natural trails and a shelter.



## ST. ALBERT

### (LACOMBE LAKE DOG FRIENDLY PARK)

- Part of major community park space which includes stocked pond, trails, picnic areas, playground and skate shack.
- Majority of dog off leash activities occur in the west portion of the park.
- The site is not currently fenced or partitioned, although this is planned.
- Dogs were observed to be regularly using the fishing pond for bathing and drinking.
- The site includes trails, however the integration with other on-site amenities has resulted in dog owners being asked to keep their dogs on leash when using the trails.



## FORT SASKATCHEWAN

- Located in the Eastgate Industrial Park.
- Site is a storm retention pond that has been allocated for dog off leash users.
- Approximately 2.5 hectares.
- Basic amenities have been added which include a gated entry, signage, garbage receptacles and doggy bags.
- The site is fenced.
- Open from 6 am - 11 pm daily.



# Section

# 8

## Background Research Summary & Implications

Key findings from the background research, presented herein, are described in this section.

The research conducted and presented in this report provides pertinent background information that along with public and stakeholder engagement can be used as a basis for the development of the Dog Off Leash Strategy. Identified as follows are key findings from the background research that may have future implications in the development of the Strategy.

- National data suggests that between 30-35% of Canadian households own a dog. While somewhat limited, available data suggests that dog ownership rates are similar in Strathcona County.
- Previous municipal planning identifies the continued need and demand for multipurpose parks and open spaces in the County, including dog off leash areas.
- The Deermound Dog Off Leash Park is well utilized by residents. Traffic counts from March 2014 suggest that winter usage levels are highest on weekends and in the early afternoon.
- Many municipalities across Canada are experiencing increased demand to provide dog off leash areas.
- To accommodate a growing demand for off leash areas and increase the utilization of parks and open spaces many municipalities are allowing dogs to be off leash in certain community park spaces, outdoor sports fields and outdoor boarded rinks.
  - » Most municipalities that have implemented or piloted this approach have set specific guidelines to identify appropriate spaces and evaluate future provision.
- Many municipalities have established dog advocacy or advisory groups to help with public education and to act as a conduit between the municipality and dog off leash park users. In some instances, these groups have also been engaged to assist with the identification and design of new spaces.
- Increasingly, designated dog off leash areas are being developed to include specialized amenities and components.

