



STRATHCONA COUNTY

# Dog Off Leash Strategy

## Phase 2 Report: Consultation Summary

December 03, 2014

Document: 6912451





STRATHCONA COUNTY

# **Dog Off Leash Strategy**

## **Phase 2 Report: Consultation Summary**

# Table of Contents

Section 1: <b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Section 2: <b>Consultation Findings</b>	<b>3</b>
Intercept Survey	4
Dog Owners Intercept Survey	8
Public Web Survey	11
Interviews	16
Section 3: <b>Summary</b>	<b>17</b>

# Section

# 1

## Introduction

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 at the junction of Highways 21 and 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 may provide additional 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. The research conducted includes an overview of related planning exercises conducted by the County; current dog ownership and activities in the County; demographics and growth; trends related to dog ownership, activity preferences and space provision; and off leash provision in other municipalities. This research is presented under a separate cover.

Public and stakeholder engagement is also a key input to the development of the Strategy. A summary of the consultation activities and their findings is presented in this document.



# Section

# 2

## Consultation Findings

There were a number of mechanisms employed to gather insight from residents and stakeholders regarding dog off leash spaces in Sherwood Park.

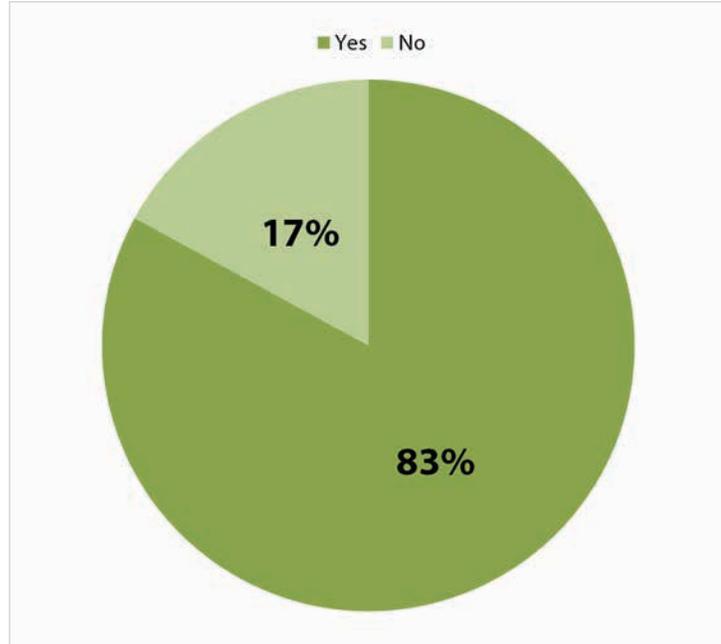
- A brief questionnaire was used to gather responses from attendees of the Strathcona County Trade Fair held in Millenium Place on April 11 – 13, 2014.
- Surveying was also undertaken with dog owners at a number of places in Strathcona County including some at the Deermound Dog Off Leash Park.
- Surveying took place on several occasions from May 13 through to June 11, 2014.
- A survey was also fielded on the County's website from April 22 through to June 22, 2014.
- Finally, several vested stakeholders and volunteers at the existing off leash park were interviewed.

# Intercept Survey

Project team members were at the Strathcona County Trade Fair April 11 – 13, 2014 at Millenium Place as part of the broader Strathcona County booth. Over the course of the weekend 101 people participated in the brief survey. Of this amount eighty-nine were County residents.

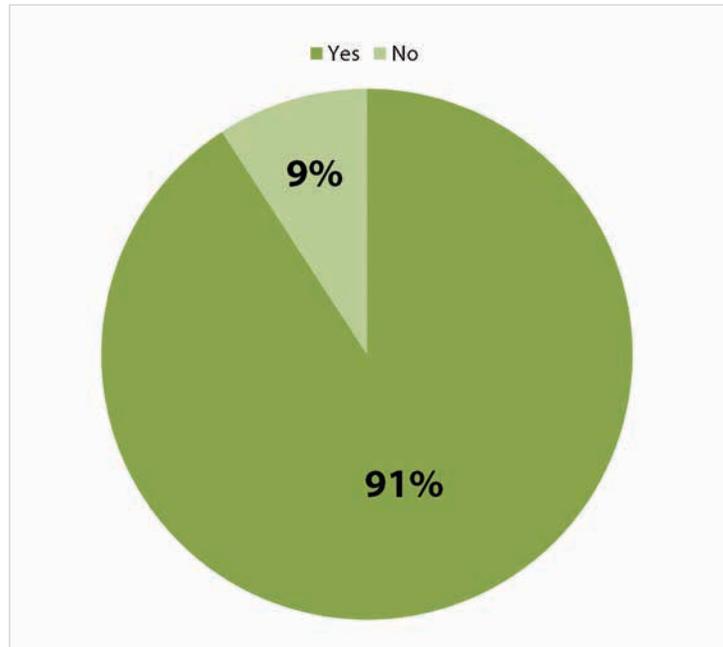
Considering only Strathcona County residents, ninety-two percent live in Sherwood Park while the remainder live elsewhere in the County. Eighty-three percent of all County residents own a dog (n=73). Of this proportion, two-thirds (67% or 49 people) own a single dog while 27% (20 people) own two dogs. One person owns three dogs while three respondents own four dogs.

Do you own a dog?



All respondents were asked if they were aware that there is a dog off leash park, called Deermound, located at the corner of Highways 21 & 628. **Ninety-one percent were aware of the park** which is greater than the proportion who own a dog.

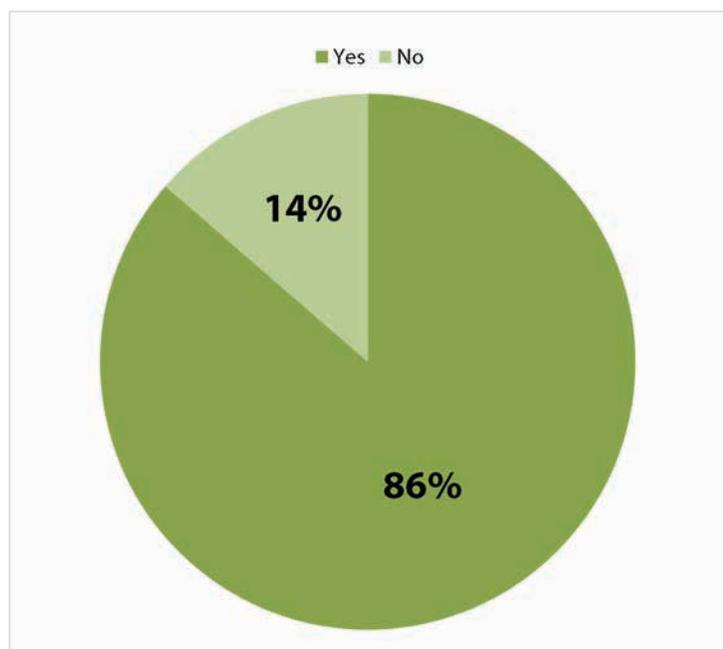
Are you aware of the Deermound dog off leash park?



Of those who own a dog and are aware of the Deermound off leash park, eighty-six percent (86%) have visited the off leash park.

Have you ever visited the park?

Subset: County residents who own a dog and are aware of the park



As illustrated in the adjacent graph, summer is the period of greatest visitation with 29% of respondents visiting Deermound daily and 71% visiting at least weekly. Winter shows the lowest proportion of daily visitors with 13% visiting daily.

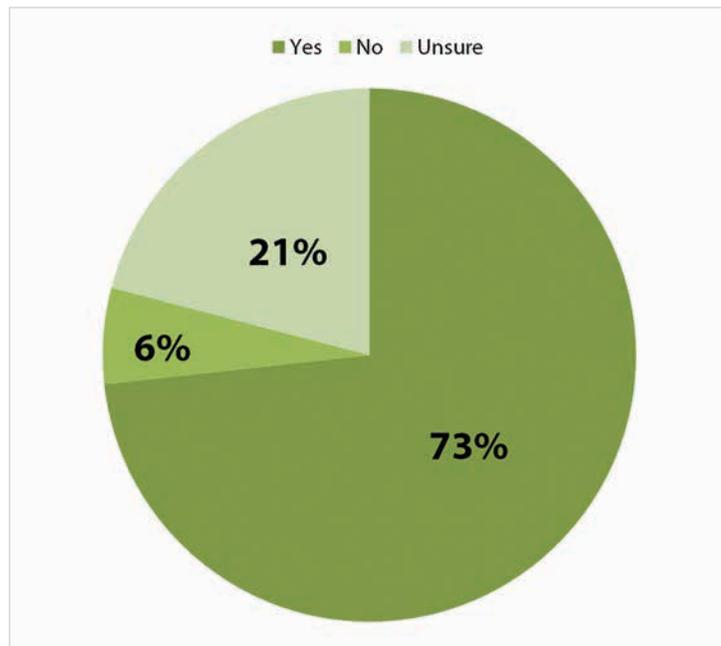
### Visitation to Deermound

Subset: County residents who own a dog, are aware of the park, and have visited it.



Respondents were next asked whether there is a need for more dog off leash parks in Strathcona County. As illustrated in the accompanying graph, **approximately three-quarters (73%) of respondents indicated there is a need for more parks.** Six percent said more off leash parks are not needed while 21% were unsure.

### Is there a need for more off leash parks in Strathcona County?



When only considering County respondents who own a dog, **77% said there is a need for more off leash parks** while 17% were unsure. Six percent of respondents said there is not a need for more off leash parks.

Respondents in favour (and unsure) about the need for more off leash parks commented:

- Another off leash park is needed in Sherwood Park. It needs to be more convenient to get to and near neighbourhoods. (27 respondents made this comment). Three comments specifically mentioned the north side of Sherwood Park as a good, balanced location.
- The current off leash park can get quite congested, particularly in the parking area. (15)
- There needs to be a fenced area in the existing park or a new area that is fenced is needed. (6)
- A park for small dogs is necessary. (6)
- We are a growing community and the number of dogs is increasing so it makes sense that another off leash park be developed. (4)
- People are using other areas of Sherwood Park as off leash areas anyway. (2)
- Consider using existing areas in Sherwood Park where there are fences already—these could be multi-use recreation areas. (2)

Those who said there is not a need for more off leash parks offered a number of comments. One comment was made by more than one respondent: the existing park needs some improvement such as addressing water across pathways and adding trash receptacles in the treed areas for doggy bags.



# Dog Owners Intercept Survey

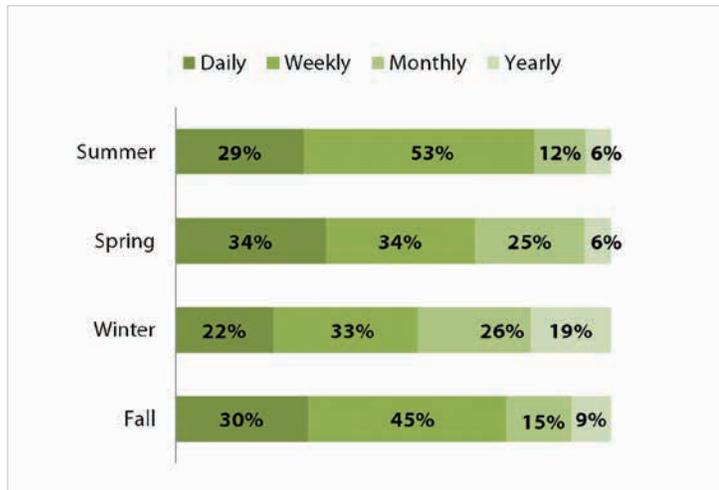
An intercept survey was undertaken with dog owners at several places throughout Strathcona County including Ardrossan, Deermound, and the Farmers' Market. Surveying was conducted periodically from May 13 through to June 11, 2014. In total 48 questionnaires were completed with 70% owning one dog, 23% owning two dogs and 6% owning three dogs. **Ninety percent of all respondents were aware of the Deermound off leash dog park.**

Of those respondents aware of Deermound, 88% had visited it. As illustrated in the adjacent graph, daily visitation is at its lowest during winter when 22% visit it daily compared with 36% in spring.

Respondents who had used Deermound then gave it an **overall rating**. As noted in the graph, almost all (97%) rated it as good (37%) or very good (60%). Three percent rated it as poor.

## Use of Deermound

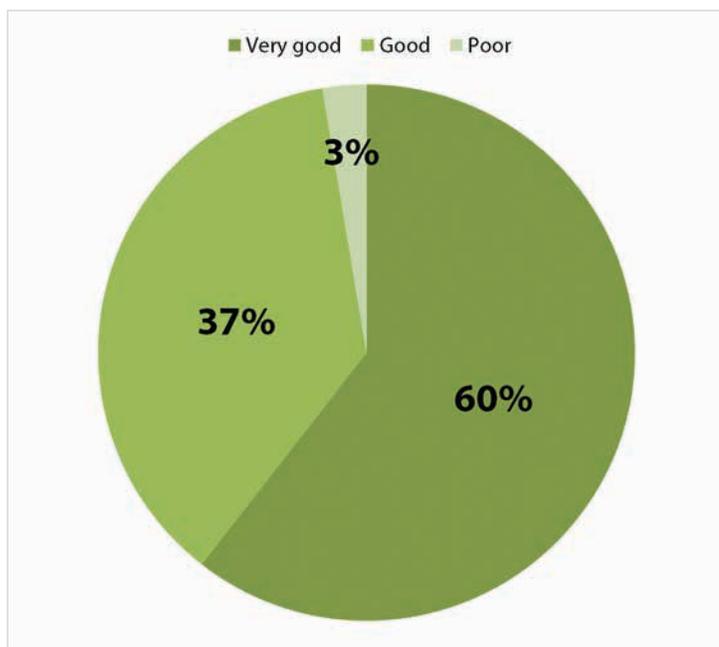
Subset: Respondents who are aware of the park and who also use it



\* Due to rounding, figures may not total 100%.

## Overall, how would you rate Deermound?

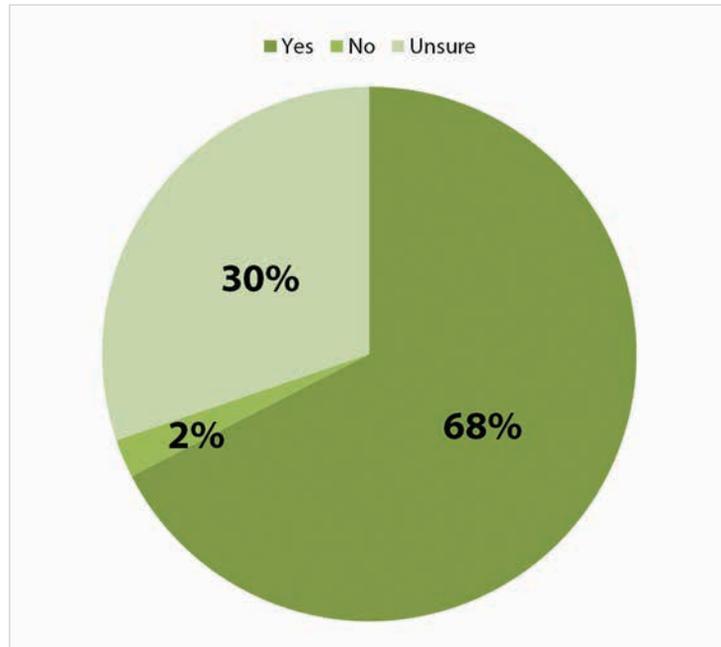
Subset: Respondents who have visited Deermound.



Respondents who had visited Deermound also provided some **suggestions for improvements to the site**. The most frequently cited improvement is the addition of water stations or places to get drinking water for the dogs (7 mentions). Other suggestions by more than three people included: drainage needed to mitigate muddy trails (5); more baggy stations & garbage bins in the treed area (4); enhanced enforcement for waste pick-up, licenses, etc (4); and additional benches and picnic tables.

All respondents were asked if there is a need for more dog off leash parks in Strathcona County. As illustrated in the accompanying graph, approximately **two-thirds (68%) of respondents said more parks are needed**. Thirty percent were unsure while two percent said more parks are not needed.

Is there a need for more off leash parks in Strathcona County?



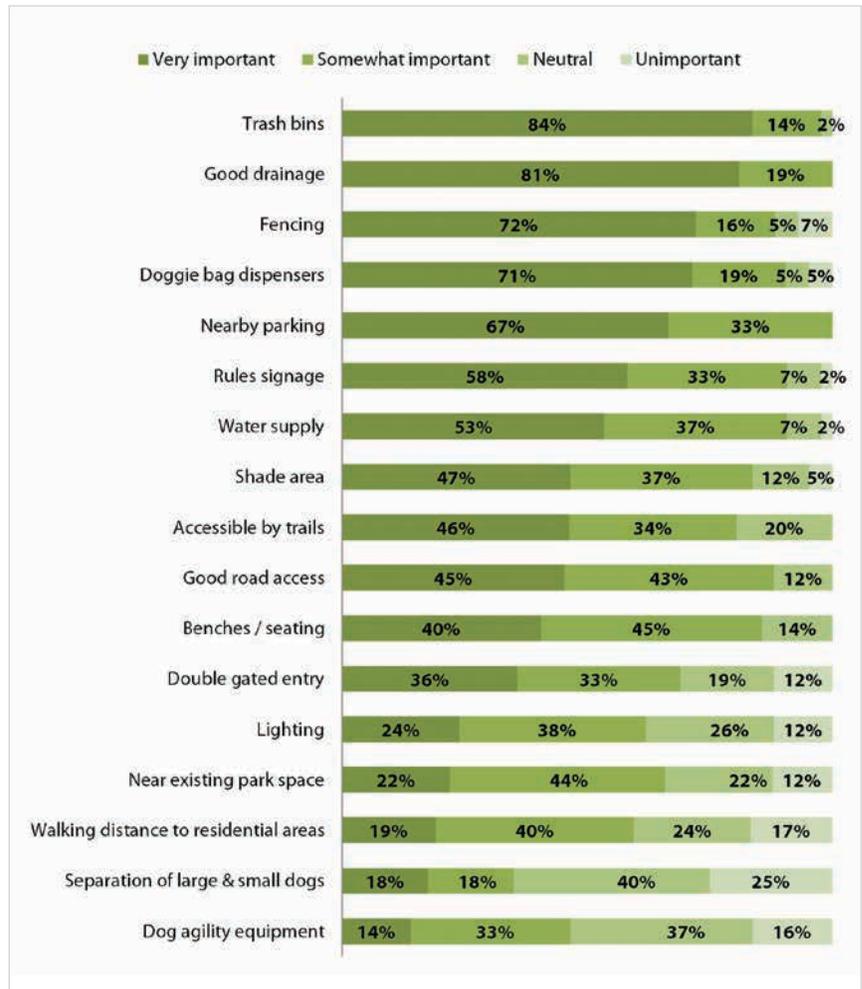
## Important of Amenities in an Off Leash Park

Subset: Respondents who said "yes" or "unsure" to the need for additional off leash parks.

There were several reasons given for people's support of additional off leash parks. Comments made by multiple people included the following.

- Deermound is a long way to drive. (7)
- More options should be provided. (5)
- Dog parks socializes and exercises dogs. (4)
- Peak times at Deermound means the parking lot is congested. (4)
- Dog parks encourage people to be active. (2)

Those respondents who said there is a need for additional off leash parks and those that were unsure (n=42) were then presented with a series of potential amenities for an off leash park. For each amenity respondents were asked to indicate how important it is to include it in an off leash park. As illustrated in the accompanying graph over three-quarters of respondents said it is very important to include trash bins (84%) and have good drainage (81%) in an off leash park.



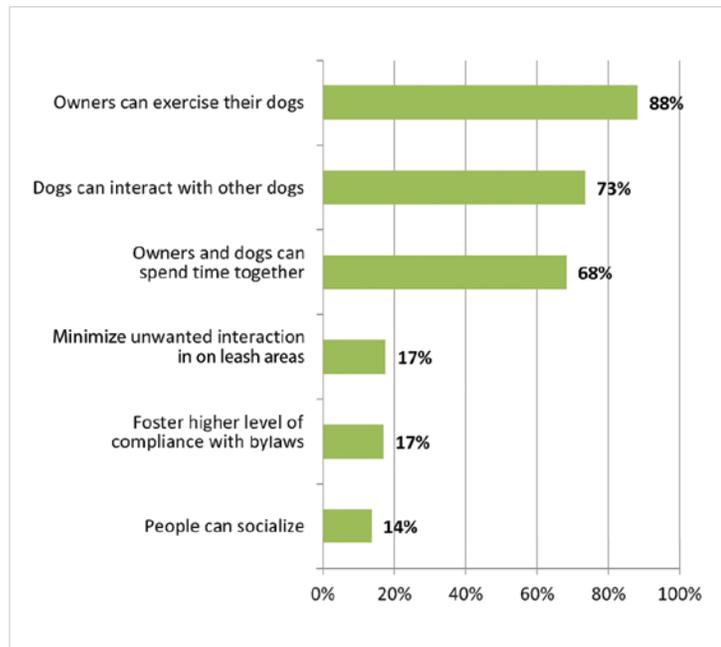
\* Due to rounding, figures may not total 100%.

# Public Web Survey

A survey was available on the County's website from late April to late June 2014. The County promoted the survey on its website, through the electronic billboards in its facilities, and through a number of other electronic, social, and traditional media mechanisms. In total 692 full and partial questionnaires were completed. The findings are presented herein. While not all respondents indicated their residency, it is assumed that all are residents of Strathcona County.

To begin, respondents were asked to identify the **primary benefits** of the County providing dog off leash areas. As illustrated in the accompanying graph, 88% of respondents identified a place for owners to exercise their dogs as one of the top three benefits.

Primary Benefits of the County Providing Dog Off Leash Areas

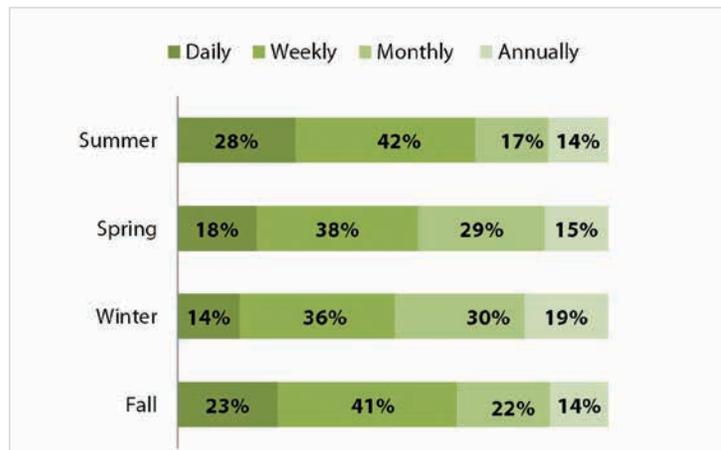


**Eighty-eight percent of respondents own at least one dog**, while twelve percent are not dog owners. Seventy percent of dog owners own one dog; 27% own two dogs; and four percent own three or more dogs.

**Ninety-four percent of all respondents are aware of the Deermound dog off leash area** located at the corner of Highways 21 & 628. When considering only dog owners, 94% are aware of Deermound. **Ninety-two percent of dog owners have visited Deermound.** Considering those who have visited the off-leash park, summer gets the greatest amount of visitation with 28% using it daily. See the accompanying graph.

Use of Deermound

Subset: Respondents who have visited the park.



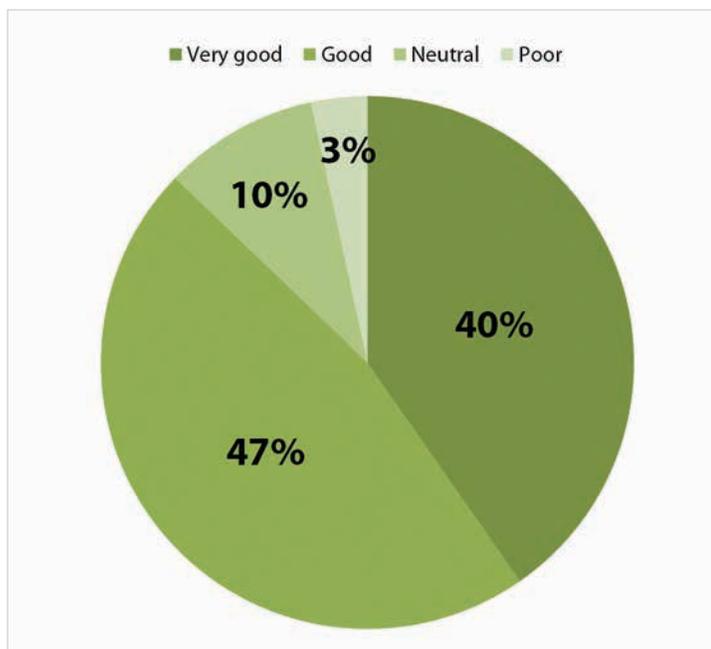
\* Due to rounding, figures may not total 100%.

Considering those respondents who had visited the Deermound off leash park, 87% rated it as very good (40%) or good (47%). Three percent rated it as poor.

Respondents then provided some **suggestions to improve Deermound** off leash park. Comments made by at least six respondents included the following.

- Poor drainage is an issue that needs to be dealt with. There is a lot of sitting water in the spring throughout the park; it really needs to be addressed along the trails. (58 respondent comments)
- Parking at peak times is very crowded forcing people to park on the highway. (51)
- Additional garbage cans and doggy bag stations are needed around the park particularly in wooded areas or on the inside of the park area. (43)
- More enforcement of rules; waste clean-up; proper behaviour is needed. Would like to see bylaw officers more often. (31)
- Provide a clean swimming / water area for dogs. (20)
- A separate fenced area for small dogs would be appreciated. Old and infirm dogs could use a separate area as well. (19)
- Generally a fenced area would be good. Some concerns were expressed about dogs running away or getting onto roads. (15)
- A water supply that could be used for drinking water for dogs would be great. Some dogs are getting sick drinking the standing water on the site. (12)

Overall, how would you rate Deermound?



- More educational signs on the proper use of the park as well as responsibilities of the owners would be good. (11)
- A dog wash area would be good. (9)
- The sloughs could be fenced off to prevent dogs from accessing them. (8)
- Washroom facilities for people are needed. (6)
- More benches are needed. (6)
- Implementing a volunteer program and information centre to better educate owners and to monitor use of the park. (6)

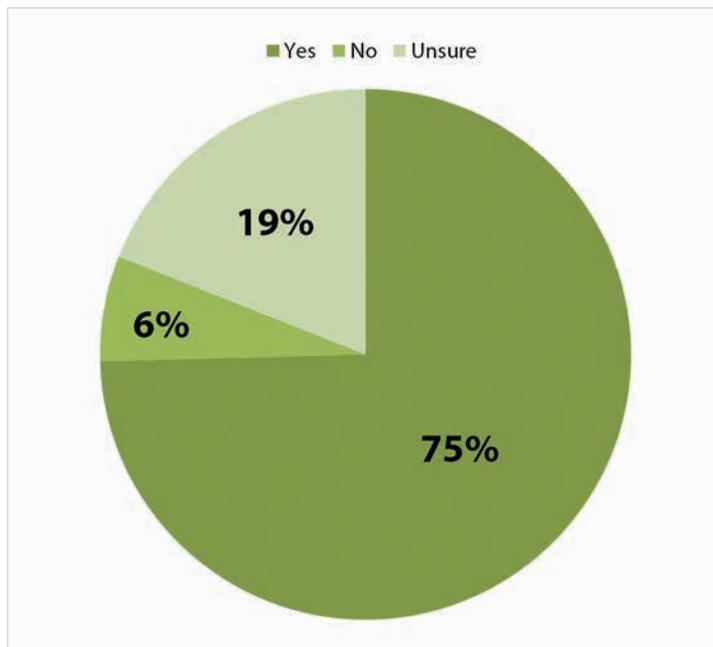
All survey respondents were asked whether there is a need for more dog off leash parks in Strathcona County. As illustrated in the graph, **three-quarters (75%) of respondents said more dog off leash parks are needed.** When considering only County dog owners, the responses were similar with 78% suggesting more parks are needed and 6% saying no more are needed.

Respondents then provided reasons for their opinion. Comments made by more than fifteen respondents in **favour of more off leash parks** in Strathcona County included:

- Another off leash park would help minimize the crowding at the Deermound site. (94 respondents made this comment)
- Another park in Sherwood Park would be more convenient than just one on the south. (87)
- The number of dogs in the County warrants another park. This number is growing as well. (33)
- Another off leash site would alleviate the long drive that currently exists for many and which serves as a barrier. (30)
- A person should not have to drive to play with his or her dog off leash. That is the only option for people now. (25)
- Providing another off leash park in Sherwood Park would help direct people who are currently using on-leash areas in the community for their off leash activities. (21)
- An off leash option for smaller dogs is needed; another site could provide this option. (16)

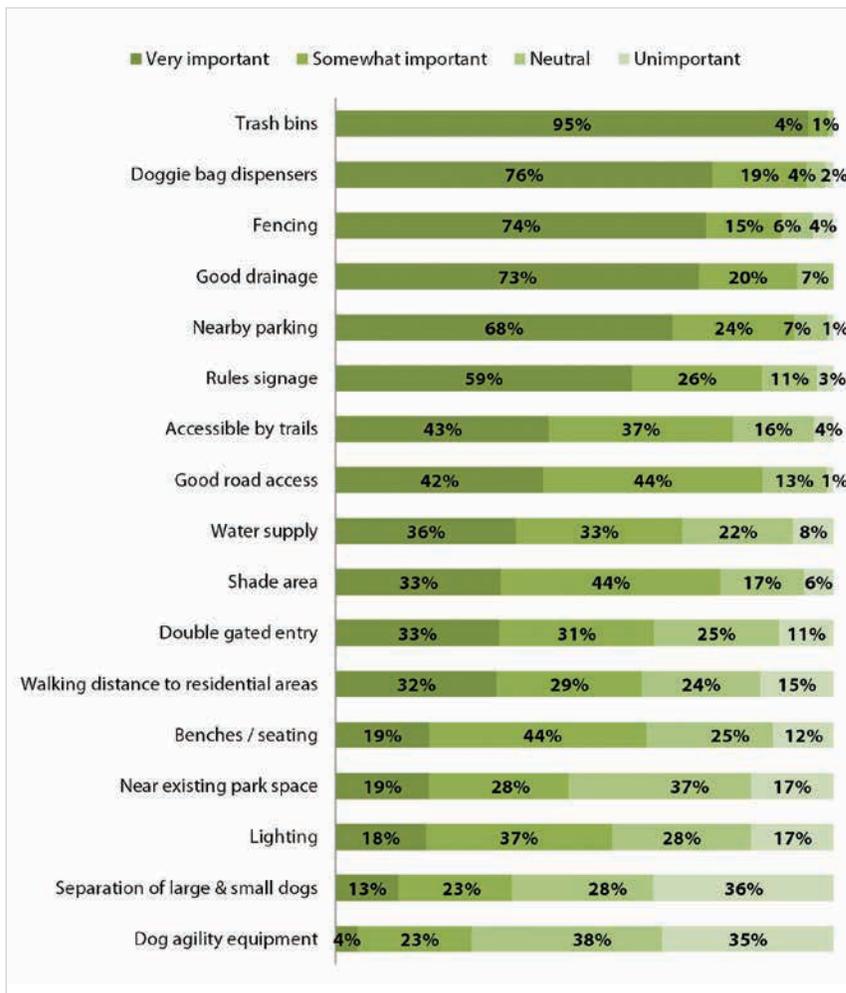
The most frequently made comment by respondents who **do not feel there is a need** for another off leash park is quite simple—the existing park at Deermound is a large park with sufficient size that can accommodate a great deal of use. (10 respondents made this comment.)

Is there a need for more off leash parks in Strathcona County?



Next, respondents were presented with a list of potential park amenities and asked to indicate their importance to include in a dog off leash park. As illustrated in the accompanying graph the five most important amenities are: trash bins (95% rated this as very important); doggie bag dispensers (76%); fencing (74%); good drainage (73%); and nearby parking (68%).

### Important of Amenities in an Off Leash Park



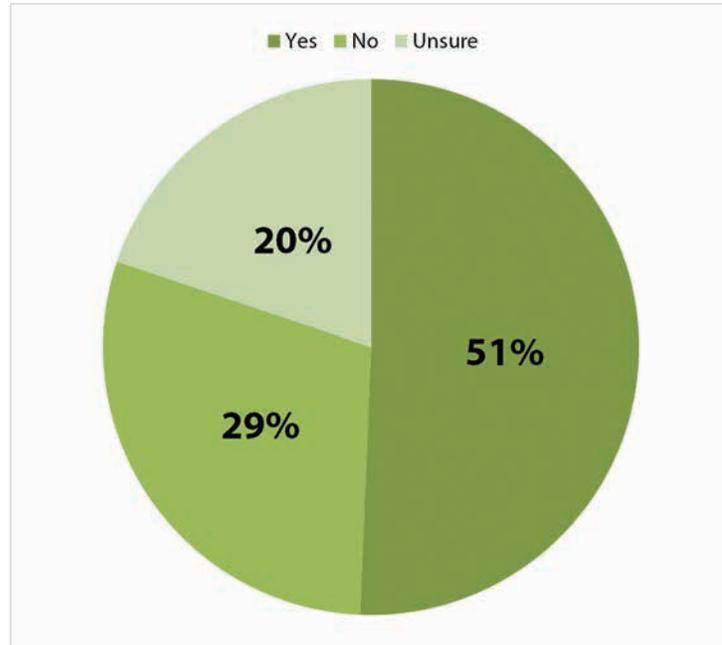
\* Due to rounding, figures may not total 100%.

Dog off leash parks do not necessarily need to be dedicated spaces. They could, for example, be boarded outdoor rinks that are used as off leash areas at certain times of the day. Survey participants were asked if Strathcona County should consider this type of approach for dog off leash parks. Approximately half (51%) of respondents think the County should consider the use of other areas—such as boarded rinks—for off leash areas.

Respondents then provided **reasons for their position** on the use of facilities such as outdoor boarded rinks for dog off leash areas. For many (41 respondents), the notion was considered a good one as it would **make use of existing space** that is not being used (e.g. boarded rinks in the summer and ball diamonds in the winter). Using these types of facilities would provide **easier access to off leash areas** than currently exists because they would be closer to their homes than Deermound (34 comments). Using existing spaces would be **cost effective** versus developing new spaces (12 comments). There were several comments that suggested allowing this activity makes sense since people are already using the rinks for off leash activities already (15). Boarded rinks were considered good venues for small dogs in particular (11) while the secure aspect of the rinks (or ball diamonds) was appealing as well (9).

There were a number of comments that questioned the use of facilities such as boarded rinks or ball diamonds for off leash activities. The most frequently cited comment was that **boarded rinks are just too small and cannot accommodate very many dogs** (52 comments). Use by larger numbers could result in conflict. The next biggest **concern was related to dog waste**—many commented that there are some owners that do not pick up after their dogs (33). In a smaller space like a rink or ball diamond, it would not take long for there to be problems with the amount of dog waste left. Some wondered who would then be responsible to ensure the waste was removed. The lack of trees and variety in these facilities was considered unappealing to several respondents (12 mentions).

Should the County consider the use of areas like boarded rinks for off leash areas?



# Interviews

Interviews were convened with three individuals who volunteer at the Deermound Off Leash park and who have some interaction with Strathcona County. These volunteers have helped post signage at the park, have done some maintenance of trails, and work on park clean ups. During the interviews they offered some suggestions for improvement at Deermound and then shared some thoughts about future off leash development in Sherwood Park.

In terms of park upgrades at Deermound **improvements to the main pathway was suggested, particularly as it relates to drainage**. The main path can be quite wet and soft to walk on (and dirty for dogs). Some work to alleviate these wet and messy conditions was suggested. The addition of water to enable some **dog washing** was suggested as was some lighting in the parking lot. Additional benches in the park (particularly near the trees) were considered good additions as was additional garbage cans. While there have been some calls for additional garbage cans in the wooded areas, there are challenges with getting them emptied.

Deermound is seen as a **very good park**. The site is extremely large and offers a variety of terrain in a wilderness setting. The path system encourages circulation of the site and results in owners getting exercise as well. For the most part, owners take good care of the site—particularly in terms of dog waste and garbage. However there are still some challenges with this. Even with on-leash areas there are some problems with this issue it is not confined to the off leash park. Efforts have been made to strike annual clean ups of the site but there are some difficulties recruiting sufficient volunteers.

Additional **visitation to the site by bylaw enforcement** was considered important. While some visitation does occur, a greater presence and longer stays was seen as helpful in ensuring waste pick-up occurred and that dogs are licensed.

In terms of any additional off leash parks in Sherwood Park, there was agreement that **more than one park is a good idea**. There were some calls to consider geographic distribution—in other words with Deermound south east of Sherwood Park a new park could be in the north. Having several parks throughout Sherwood Park was considered a worthy thought. It was also suggested that for certain hours early in the morning, the green space throughout Sherwood Park could be used as off leash space. In regards to the formal development of another off leash park, one person interviewed suggested it be fully fenced.

The comments made by those interviewed regarding Deermound speak to consideration for any new off leash park.

- Ensure there is proper drainage.
- Provide ample seating throughout the site.
- Garbage bins should be provided around the site.
- Signage and enforcement should be implemented to encourage appropriate use of the park.

Finally the notion of formally **resurrecting the Off Leash Association** was seen as positive. The Association could serve as a formal mechanism that the County could use to liaise with the off leash community. Formalizing the group could make recruiting for volunteers easier. It would also provide some legitimacy to these individuals when they interact with park users.

# Section

# 3

## Summary

Some overall findings can be gleaned from the consultation activities. These summary statements are noted on the following page. It should be noted as well that a summary of the consultation will be included in the final strategy.

# Summary Points from the Consultation

- Residents are generally aware of the Deermound off leash park.
- The majority of dog owners that provided feedback had visited Deermound. It is a highly rated park.
  - » There were several improvements suggested for Deermound:
    - Improved drainage, particularly around pathways.
    - Available water for drinking and washing dogs.
    - Additional garbage bins.
    - Enhanced bylaw enforcement.
- Generally, there is a need for additional off leash parks in Strathcona County. Reasons for this included:
  - » Crowding at peak times at Deermound.
  - » More convenient locations in Sherwood Park.
  - » The desire for fenced areas.
  - » Separation of large and small dogs.
  - » There is a growing dog population in a growing community.
- The use of other spaces as off leash parks (e.g. boarded rinks, fenced ball diamonds) periodically received mixed reviews.
  - » Major concerns were about waste management.
  - » These areas were considered cost effective and convenient off leash opportunities.



