

WORKING TOWARDS AN OFF LEASH DOG PARK IN THE CITY OF VAUGHAN

Background Information Package

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Introduction

Residential intensification has changed all of our lifestyles, and dog owners can be no exceptions. Parks are now the community's backyard and outdoor living room.

- Off leash dog parks have become an essential element in the fabric of neighboring cities from Markham to Burlington
- Mississauga's 1996 pilot project has been serving as a worldwide model for success
- Nobody polices better than dog owners themselves. We don't like being blamed for other people's messes
- Pet food sales in Canada are now almost \$2 billion (2006) with projected sales increases of 4% over the next five years¹
- Ontarians spent on average \$422 on pet expenses in 2005. This is a 30% increase in the same expenditure from 2001².

¹ Source – Rolf C. Hagen Inc

² Statistics Canada's Report on Spending Patterns

The City of Vaughan is the only municipality within the Greater Toronto Area without a leash free park.

- 416 area code – Toronto has 30+ dog parks
- 905 area code – Mississauga – 7, Oakville – 5, Brampton – 3, Ajax – 2, Aurora – 1, Caledon – 1, Markham - 1

Vaughan City Council approved the creation of the Off Leash Working Committee with the aim that citizen members, with the assistance of city staff, would identify and rank a number of sites appropriate as locations for a park of benefit to dog-owners and their pets.

Terms of Reference:

- A forum for obtaining advice and a sounding board for issues related to leash free dog parks in the City of Vaughan
- Liaise with the City of Vaughan, local ratepayer associations, land owners to identify, assess potential sites, as well as to fund raise
- Input on licensing and by-law issues, as it relates to a off leash park

Mandate

To provide the City of Vaughan municipal staff with:

- informed feedback, recommendations, and advice regarding issues and initiatives from citizens and other interested stakeholders
- feedback and input respecting the selection and creation of a leash-free park(s) in the City of Vaughan
- advice on specific activities related to the management and administration of the park
- advice on by-law and licensing issues

Membership

- Chair – Councillor Tony Carella (Ward 2)
- Additional council member – Councillor Bernie DiVona (Ward 3)
- Representatives from each ward (5)
- Representatives from dog advocacy group (3)
- Business owner serving pet business (1)
- Parks Development (2)
- By-law and Licensing (2)

Milestones (2007)

- February 27 - Inaugural meeting
- March 20 - Created Working Committee Terms of Reference, Reviewed Mississauga Dog Park User System and Rules of Use, Identified Off Leash Sites, Scoring Criteria and Weighting
- April 25 - Adopted Selection Criteria Primary and Secondary, reviewed Air Photo Maps of Proposed Sites
- May 14 - Finalized Terms of Reference for the Committee, Presented Primary Site Evaluation Phase Results
- May 24 – Presented Secondary Site Evaluation Phase Results, Identified Top Sites, Reviewed Draft Signage
- Nov 15 – Presented Evaluation Results of Top Sites, Developed a Framework for Management of the Leash Free Park, Assigned Roles and Responsibilities
- Nov 21 - Adopted the Management Framework with Roles & Responsibilities, Reviewed the Details of the Working Committee Final Report to Council
- Dec 3rd - Councillor Carella presented Off Leash Committee Final Report to Committee of the Whole which included recommendation for seven sites
- Dec 10th - Final Report and recommendations unanimously approved by City Council

Evaluation Criteria – First Tier

- Minimize environmental impact - avoid ESA and ANSI's
- Maximize distance from busy areas - children's play areas, school yards, sports fields, and seasonally active areas
- Impact on neighborhood - evaluate ease of access/egress, traffic implications and proximity to major streets
- Property - potential size, ownership, and site safety
- All sites scored, top 10 scores move to 2nd tier

Evaluation Criteria – Second Tier

- Site visit of top 10 sites - examine topography, micro climate and drainage
- Status of Site - new or existing park
- Active Areas - proximity to school yards, active and passive children's play areas, seasonally active areas and sports fields and athletic running tracks
- Cost Implications -estimate to for land preparation, fence installation, parking space and other factors

Top Seven Recommended Sites

1. William Foster Woods, NE Corner Major Mac and Islington Ave.
2. Hydro Corridor abutting Glen Shields neighbourhood, access off Centre St.
3. Concord-Thornhill Regional park, either within the hydro corridor or at eastern end of site
4. Area north of Patricia Kemp Community Centre, south of Operations Yard
5. Vacant lands NW of intersection of Jane St. and Major Mac.
6. Hydro Corridor abutting Patricia Kemp Community Centre
7. Vacant lands immediately north of Harry Putter Driving Range at Islington Ave. and Rutherford Rd.



What's In an Off Leash Dog Park?

- Area is totally enclosed in fencing
- Double-gated entrance/exit
- Rules of Use
- Separate area for young and/or small dogs
- Community bulletin board
- Waste bags and disposal containers

Waste Management

- By-law requires owners/users to clean up after their pets
- Peer pressure will ensure that leaving pet waste behind is not an acceptable behaviour
- Waste in the waste containers will be removed from park on a regular basis



Rules of Use



To ensure the safety and enjoyment of all park users, both two and four legged, please adhere to the following rules of responsible conduct:

The Vaughan Off Leash Dog Area is for dogs, their owners/handlers and those accompanying them. **THIS IS NOT A CHILDREN'S PLAY GROUND.** Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult at all times and kept under strict supervision. Do not allow children to run in the area or chase after dogs.

Leash your dog when entering or exiting the park. Please **DO NOT** open both gates at the same time and please carry the leashes within the park.

Limit of 3 dogs per handler. A handler aged 12 or older must be present and in control of their dogs at all times.

Dogs should be spayed or neutered – No female dogs in heat allowed.

Ensure that your dog(s) is vaccinated and in good health before using the Off Leash Area.

Puppies must have their 12-week shots. It is advised that a puppy be 4 months old before coming to the leash-free park.

Dogs must be licensed and shall wear a visible dog tag at all times.

Dogs must be under control and in sight of their handler at all times. Be ready to take control of any situation, you are responsible for your dog's behaviour.

Owners/handlers must pick up after their pet. In Vaughan it's the law to "stoop and scoop". Waste bags are provided. Failure to do so could result in a \$130 fine.

Fill in any holes your dog digs or make appropriate repairs to disturbed areas.

Human food and glass bottles not permitted.

Aggressive dogs are not permitted within the Off Leash Area. Persistent aggressive action by dogs or people will not be tolerated; both the handler and the dog will be asked to leave. Violators may have their park privileges suspended.

Spiked or pinch collars are prohibited on the dogs when inside the Off Leash Area.

Respect the rights of others.

Be safe and have fun! Woof!



The Impact of an Off Leash Dog Park for Stratford, Ontario

- North American tourists who travel with their dogs have added Stratford to their itinerary since they established a dog park and advertised it on their website, thus contributing to the local economy. While Stratford is already a tourist destination for the theatre, these are new tourists with different interests.
- Dog parks offer an excellent place for dogs to become well socialized, thereby reducing behavioural problems when they are walked on city streets or other city parks. The presence of a dog park will also draw owners there, reducing use of other public spaces.
- Stratford has erected display boards at the dog park and sell ads to the many businesses that cater to the 'dog economy'; the advertising revenues derived from that help offset the costs of operating a dog park. Further, a dog park inevitably results in a strong volunteer group who keep it clean and safe, and thus reduces the workload of municipal employees.
- A dog park - like a tennis court, baseball diamond, or any other city amenity designed for the exclusive use of people for a particular activity - allows dog owners a place to share an interest, socialize and exercise while engaged in their favourite activity. In particular, a dog park enables the elderly and disabled, who otherwise could not exercise their dogs properly, to enjoy the proven health benefits of pet ownership and escape the isolation that age and disability can bring.



Direct Benefits to Community

- Suitable location for people to legally let their dogs off leash
- Safe location for dog owners to exercise their dogs off leash
- Feedback from information gathered by Vaughan UnLeashed in several dog businesses in Vaughan area confirms that many dog owners will take advantage of this opportunity
- Unique destination site in Vaughan
- Vaughan residents and other visitors will be exposed the many amenities of the park area
- Potential enhancement to area with the introduction of this feature
- Additional planting is proposed if the park is approved
- Opportunity to be the lead in the City in helping to provide a much needed service.

Opportunities for Partnership

- Off leash working committee is committed to dialoging and working with all interested stakeholders in the development of an off leash park
- Input on design of park and surrounding landscape
- Opportunity to have representatives active in group overseeing park and participate in day to day oversight

