



STRATHCONA COUNTY

Dog Off Leash Strategy

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Dog Off Leash Strategy

Executive Summary

Strathcona County currently provides one designated dog off leash park—Deermound—located at the junction of Highways 21 and 628. There have been calls by residents (and dog owners) for additional off leash opportunities within Sherwood Park. Additionally, the population of Sherwood Park has been growing and with it the number of dog owners. The Open Space and Recreation Facility Strategy (OSRFS)—the County’s broad strategic plan that guides the provision of open space and recreation facility provision—makes reference to a “network of off leash dog areas”.

In order to strategically address the provision of off leash parks, Strathcona County has developed this Dog Off Leash Strategy. This Strategy will provide overall direction for the delivery of off leash parks in Sherwood Park, positioning the County effectively to respond to a growing demand for this recreation service. While the focus of this Strategy is on the urban service area of Sherwood Park, the tenets of the Strategy are transferable to other parts of Strathcona County.

Vision

Strathcona County provides appropriate opportunities for resident dog owners and their pets to recreate in safe and positive environments. These opportunities will provide health and recreational benefits for people and their dogs in such a manner that does not negatively impact other County residents.

Benefits

There are many benefits associated with the provision of dog off leash areas.

- Recognition of off leash activities as “legitimate” recreation activities.
- Focusses off leash activities in designated sites.
- Enhances community building.
- Provides venues for dog owners to get exercise.
- Helps socialize dogs.
- Responds to an identified need espoused by the community.
- Helps protect the environment.
- Enhances the safety of dogs and people.

Philosophy of Provision

Philosophical principles to consider as off leash opportunities are developed.

- Geographic provision.
- Opportunities for small and large dogs.
- Maximize existing recreation amenities for multi-use purposes.
- Maximize use of existing sites before building new.
- Stakeholder and public involvement.

Categories of Off Leash Park Provision

1. **Dedicated Off Leash Sites:** primary use is off leash activities.
 - » Minimum amenities: fencing; double entry gate; doggie bag dispensers and waste receptacles; signage; parking; shaded areas & seating; good drainage; and grass.
2. **Multi-use Off Leash Sites:** dog off leash use would be permitted in existing amenities. These could include parks and open spaces, stormwater management facilities, outdoor boarded rinks, fenced ball diamonds, and other spaces.
 - » Minimum amenities: fencing; signage; doggie bag dispensers and waste receptacles.

Performance Measurement

A series of performance measures are identified for all off leash sites. These include the following metrics:

- Inventory of sites.
- User counts.
- Safety (number of incidents).
- Physical state of the sites (maintenance & cleanliness).
- Satisfaction of users.
- Public feedback.

A specific process to evaluate the performance of the multi-purpose sites is presented. This process should be implemented to evaluate all pilot sites and could be implemented through a number of triggers. A similar process would be utilized to add to the inventory of multi-use off leash sites.

Step 1: Initiation

Step 2: Internal Assessment

Step 3: Stakeholder Engagement and Site Review

Step 4: Decision and Implementation

Partnership Opportunities

The Strategy identifies potential partnership opportunities including the implementation of an Off Leash Association. A draft terms of reference is presented herein.

Key Messages

Finally, several key messages are included in the Strategy that can be used as implementation occurs.

1. The County recognizes the value of providing dog off leash opportunities for its residents.
2. A pilot project will be implemented to provide dog off leash opportunities throughout Sherwood Park.
3. The County has invested a significant amount in the provision of outdoor recreation infrastructure, some of these facilities will be utilized for the dog off leash pilot project.
4. Dog off leash opportunities are available to County residents with dogs licensed in Strathcona County.
5. Strathcona County bylaws state that all dogs must be on leash except for in designated dog off leash sites.
6. The County has developed a four step system for evaluating the performance of a dog off leash site from pilot project through to long-term site.
7. Strathcona County is planning the development of another dedicated off leash site in Sherwood Park.

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Section

1

Introduction

Strathcona County currently provides one designated dog off leash park—Deermound—located at the junction of Highways 21 and 628. There have been calls by residents (and dog owners) for additional off leash opportunities within Sherwood Park. Additionally, the population of Sherwood Park has been growing and with it the number of dog owners. The Open Space and Recreation Facility Strategy (OSRFS)—the County’s broad strategic plan that guides the provision of open space and recreation facility provision—makes reference to a “network of off leash dog areas”.

In order to strategically address the provision of off leash parks, Strathcona County has developed this Dog Off Leash Strategy. This Strategy will provide overall direction for the delivery of off leash parks in Sherwood Park, positioning the County effectively to respond to a growing demand for this recreation service. While the focus of this Strategy is on the urban service area of Sherwood Park, the tenets of the Strategy are transferable to other parts of Strathcona County.

The Dog Off Leash Strategy is built upon a thorough program of research which included the following components:

- **Demographic Analysis:** how is the population of Sherwood Park and Strathcona County changing? How will this impact the demand for off leash opportunities?
- **Municipal Practices:** how are off leash opportunities provided in some other municipalities?
 - » **Site Visits:** how are some municipal neighbours meeting the demand for off leash parks?
- **Trends:** what are some trends and practices broadly related to dog ownership and off leash parks?
- **Engagement:** what are dog owners and the public saying about the future provision of off leash parks in Sherwood Park?

The aforementioned research is presented in two separate reports, each presented under a separate cover—the Phase 1 Report: Background Research and the Phase 2 Report: Consultation Summary. These two reports are summarized in this Strategy document.



Section

2

Research & Consultation Summary

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.

Phase 1 Report: Background Research

Several research components are presented in this Phase 1 Report. The document states that there are approximately 13,000 registered dogs in Strathcona County and that the only off leash park is Deermound—a quarter section plot at the corner of Highways 21 and 628. 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.

The Phase 1 Report presents some trends in dog ownership, the provision of off leash areas, and in the design of off leash areas. Some findings from this aspect of the research are presented below.

- 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.
- 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.
- Increasingly, designated dog off leash areas are being developed to include specialized amenities and components.
- There is increasing demand to provide designated “small dog” areas.

The provision of off leash parks in several municipalities was examined as part of the research. Information was gathered from six municipalities: Calgary, Halifax, Red Deer, Regina, Spruce Grove, and St. Albert. In several municipalities there are advocacy or advisory groups and committees to help with public education and to act as a conduit between the municipality and dog off leash park users. As well, it is not uncommon to consider multi-use aspects to off leash areas—either using other recreation and parks amenities for off leash purposes or to ensure off leash areas are part of or adjacent to other recreation areas.

Additional details of the research can be found in the Phase 1 Report: Background Research.



Phase 2 Report: Consultation Summary

There were several components to the consultation program implemented as part of this process. Attendees to the Strathcona County Trade Fair were surveyed as were dog owners at several locations in Sherwood Park and at the Deermound Dog Off Leash Park. A questionnaire was also available online to gather the general public's input. Finally several interviews were conducted with vested stakeholders.

Summary points from the consultation are as follows. For additional detail refer to the Phase 2 Report: Consultation Summary.

- Residents are generally aware of the Deermound Dog 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) received mixed reviews.
 - » Major concerns were about waste management.
 - » These areas were considered cost effective and convenient off leash opportunities.



Section

3

Vision & Benefits

A vision for the provision of off leash parks for Strathcona County is articulated. As well the benefits associated with off leash parks are presented.

Vision

Strathcona County provides appropriate opportunities for resident dog owners and their pets to recreate in safe and positive environments. These opportunities will provide health and recreational benefits for people and their dogs in such a manner that does not negatively impact other County residents.



Benefits

There are many benefits associated with the provision of dog off leash areas.

- Recognition of off leash activities as a **“legitimate” recreation activity**. With the provision of off leash parks there is recognition from the municipality that this type of recreation activity is legitimate and steps should be taken to provide opportunities to engage in this activity.
- Focuses the activity in **approved and designated sites**. By providing designated areas for off leash activities, these sites will attract the use, thus minimizing the use of other, non-designated sites. This in turn can help minimize the potential for conflict.
- Enhances **community building**. Off leash parks enable the users (primarily dog owners) to socialize with others of similar interests. This can help strengthen the community.
- Provides another venue for **exercise for residents**. Dog off leash parks provide venues for dog owners to get exercise themselves as they interact with their pets. A key tenet of recreation provision is to enhance people’s health. An off leash park is another facility that can offer this benefit.
- Helps **socialize dogs**. Off leash parks enable dog owners to socialize their pets with other dogs in designated areas. Among dog owners it is a commonly held principal that properly socialized dogs are better behaved.
- Responds to the **identified needs** of a large segment of the community. Municipalities are primary providers of recreation opportunities. While many facilities have been and will continue to be provided by municipalities, the provision of “newer” facility types to address other recreation needs are becoming more common.
- Helps **protect the environment**. Designating particular areas for off leash activities can help protect the environment by confining the off leash recreation. This can limit the use of other areas, which can lessen the impact on wildlife and also minimize the impact of dog waste by containing it to certain areas.
- **Safety is enhanced** for dogs and people. Through the provision of off leash parks, unsafe interaction between people and dogs can be minimized. As well designated areas can help ensure that dogs are not recreating in areas that might lead to injury. Designated areas lend themselves to improved enforcement.

Section

4

Future Provision

This section will describe the strategic considerations for how dog off leash areas will be provided in Sherwood Park. A philosophy of provision will be presented as well as means to provide off leash areas. A model to prioritize sites and considerations for implementation will be presented.

Philosophy of Provision

In the provision of dog off leash areas, several key tenets must guide the decision making. This does not suggest that these philosophical principles will unto themselves lead to specific designation of sites. Rather these philosophical principles need to be considered as off leash opportunities are developed.

- **Geographic distribution.** As new off leash parks become designated, it is important to consider the distribution of these parks in Sherwood Park. Deermound, the only existing off leash park, is situated south east of Sherwood Park. The County's Open Space and Recreation Facility Strategy recommends that dog off leash areas be classified as community wide amenities and not designated as neighbourhood parks. It is important that off leash opportunities be geographically dispersed throughout Sherwood Park.
- **Opportunities for small and large dogs.** While dogs of all sizes can and do successfully interact and play together, it is important that segregated opportunities that enable small dogs to interact, socialize, and play away from large dogs be provided.
- **Maximize existing recreation amenities for multi-purpose use.** Strathcona County has significant investments in outdoor recreation infrastructure that are not formally utilized year round (consider boarded rinks and ball diamonds for example). Consideration should be given to utilizing some of these facilities for off leash purposes.
- **Maximize use of existing sites before building new.** While there are occasions that require the development of new sites, it is important to consider the use of existing sites. This may mean that existing off leash sites are "refurbished" or enhanced to maximize their use.
- **Stakeholder and public involvement.** The development and / or designation of specific sites as off leash parks needs to be done with involvement from stakeholders and the public. This is critical to ensure project buy-in, to mitigate conflicts and issues early on, and to ensure amenities and designs are the most effective for users and other stakeholders.



Off Leash Park Provision: Categories

There are two primary categories for the provision of off leash parks: dedicated and multi-use. Both of these categories need to be included in the overall provision of off leash parks.

Dedicated Off Leash Sites

Dedicated off leash sites are those spaces which are dedicated to off leash usage. The Deermound Dog Off Leash Park is an example of a dedicated off leash site. While some County residents use the park and area for general leisure and experiencing nature, its primary use is for off leash activities. This would be an example of a County-wide / special purpose park as identified in the Open Space and Recreation Facility Strategy.

The following chart outlines the risks and mitigation strategies that accompany the provision of dedicated off leash areas.



RISK	MITIGATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict among the various users of the site • Site not respectfully maintained • Nearby residents non supportive of off leash use • The sites may not be nearby or situated in a manner that offers equitable access • Available sites may not be linked to trail system and / or may not be near residential areas • Disturbance of nature and wildlife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly designated times of use • Broader public education campaign • Situate / develop off leash park away from residential areas • Education / information to designated user groups • Signage for proper use and maintenance • Appropriate doggie bag dispensers and waste bins • Enhanced bylaw enforcement • Volunteer Off Leash Association could monitor use and educate users • Consult with neighbours and stakeholders regarding usage of the site for off leash activity • Provide communication channels to the County for queries and concerns • Publish all off leash opportunities in Sherwood Park (online, print, etc) • Appropriate way finding signage

Multi-Use Off Leash Sites

Multi-use off leash sites would see existing amenities be permitted for dog off leash use. These sites **could** include parks and open spaces, stormwater management facilities, outdoor boarded rinks, fenced ball diamonds, and other spaces. Considering the rinks and diamonds, it is expected that this would occur primarily during the amenities' "off season". For example an outdoor boarded rink could be used as an off leash park during the spring, summer, and fall months. Similarly, fenced ball diamonds could serve as off leash parks during the "off season." This "piggy back" use may be considered a neighbourhood park classification or a community park classification as described in the Open Space and Recreation Facility Strategy.



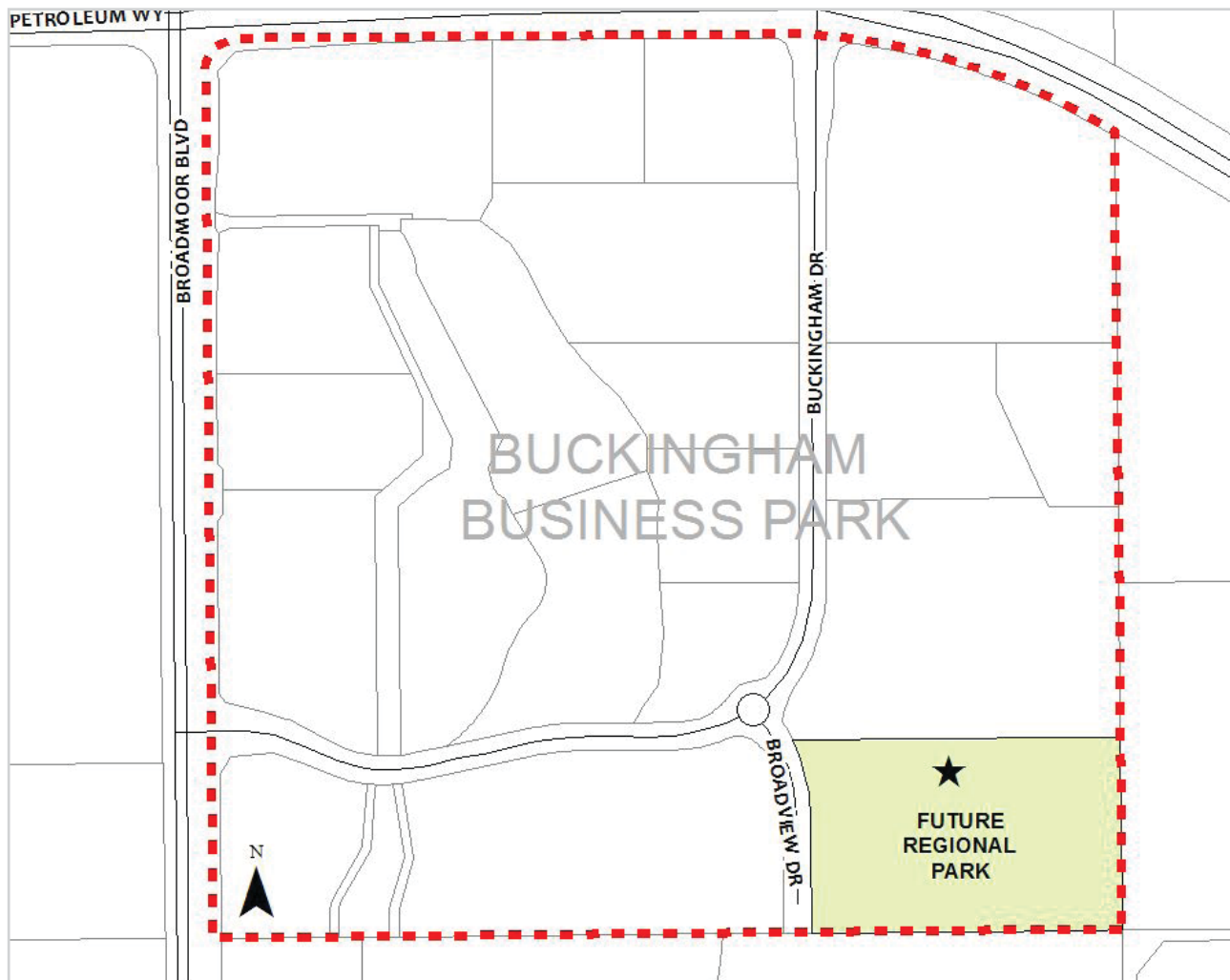
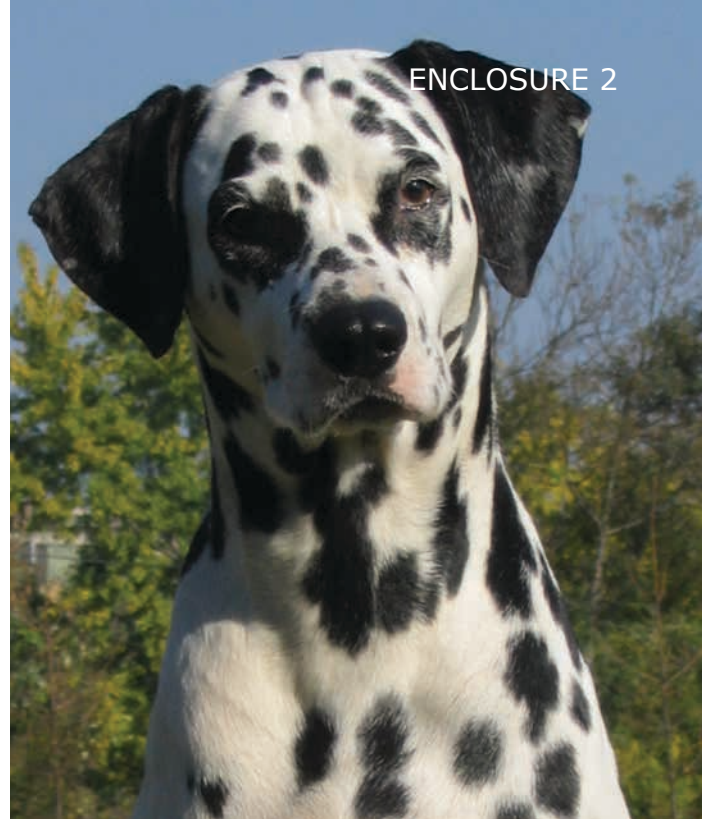
RISK	MITIGATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict among the different users • Site not respectfully maintained • Nearby residents non supportive of off leash use • The sites (e.g. boarded rink, fenced diamond) may not be nearby or situated in a manner that offers equitable access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage at the site describing proper use and maintenance • Clearly designated times of use • Broader public education campaign • Education / information to designated user groups (e.g. ball organizations) • Appropriate doggie bag dispensers and waste bins • Enhanced bylaw enforcement • Volunteer Off Leash Association could monitor use and educate users • Consult with neighbours and stakeholders regarding additional usage • Provide communication channels to the County for queries and concerns • Publish all off leash opportunities in Sherwood Park (online, print, etc) • Greater opportunities may be provided as additional recreation amenities are provided in Sherwood Park

Implementation

Dedicated Off Leash Sites

A dedicated off leash park should be developed in the north half of Sherwood Park. This would balance the geographic provision of dedicated parks (Deermound is south of Sherwood Park) and would provide another dedicated use park to accommodate the dog owners. Strathcona County should target the development and operation of a dedicated off leash park by 2018.

The Buckingham Business Park Area Structure Plan identifies a regional park within its development concept plan. A portion of the regional park may be considered as a future dog off leash site (see the map below). Within the 4.5 hectare identified regional park, approximately 0.8 hectares may be considered for the use of a future dog off leash site.



SITE CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to consider any potential dedicated dog off leash park sites by filtering it through a set of criteria. Using these criteria will help prioritize several sites in order to arrive at the site with the greatest utility.

The criteria are noted in the following table and take into consideration a diversity of attributes. Through their relative weightings and associated scoring, potential sites can be adjudicated.

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	SCORING	WEIGHTING
ADJACENCY	How close is the site to existing recreation and park facilities?	<p>3 points: On the same site as major County wide facility.</p> <p>2 points: Same site as other recreation / parks facility.</p> <p>0 points: Only recreation facility on the site.</p>	2
GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	How close is the site to existing dedicated off leash parks?	<p>3 points: A great distance apart.</p> <p>2 points: Some distance apart.</p> <p>1 point: Minimal distance apart.</p>	3
MOTORIZED ACCESS	How easy is it to access the site?	<p>3 points: On a major arterial road.</p> <p>2 points: Immediately off a major arterial road.</p> <p>1 point: Access only using residential roads.</p>	2
PARKING	How much parking is available?	<p>3 points: A great deal of parking is available.</p> <p>1 point: Some parking is available.</p>	3
NON-MOTORIZED ACCESS	How easy is it to access the site?	<p>3 points: Accessible using a paved trail.</p> <p>2 points: Accessible having to use sidewalks.</p> <p>0 points: Not readily accessible without using roadways.</p>	2
LOCATION	What is the surrounding neighbourhood?	<p>3 points: Light industrial.</p> <p>1 point: Residential.</p>	3
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT	Are there sensitive habitats on the site? (e.g. wetland)	<p>3 points: None.</p> <p>1 point: Some.</p>	2
VISIBILITY	Is the entire site visible from the road and parking lot?	<p>3 points: Visible from both.</p> <p>2 points: Visible from one.</p> <p>0 points: Not visible entirely from either.</p>	1
LAND OWNERSHIP	Who owns the land?	<p>2 points: County owned.</p> <p>1 point: Non County owned.</p>	1
SIZE	How large is the site?	<p>3 points: > 3 hectares.</p> <p>2 points: 1.5-3 hectares.</p> <p>1 point: 0.75 – 1.5 hectares.</p> <p>0 points: > 0.75 hectares.</p>	3

AMENITIES

Based on the research presented in the Phase 1 Report: Background Research and in the Phase 2 Report: Consultation Summary (both under separate covers), the following off leash park amenities have been identified. It should be noted that these park amenities are a recommended standard for a functioning off leash park.

- **Fencing:** the site should be fenced around its perimeter.
- **Double Entry Gate:** a double entry should be included to facilitate putting the dog on a leash prior to leaving the park.
- **Doggie Bag Dispensers & Waste Receptacles:** these amenities should be at the entryway and throughout the site to accommodate users.
- **Signage:** signage at the entry to inform users of code of conduct, hours of use, and County contact information is necessary. Signage within the site itself is necessary to outline code of conduct. Information about the Volunteer Off Leash Association should be included on the entry signage.
- **Parking:** as the site is a community wide facility, parking is necessary to facilitate its use. Parking needs to be gravel or paved as per Land Use Bylaw.
- **Shaded Areas & Seating Needs to be Available:** as well the park should include treed elements.
- **Good Drainage:** good drainage is needed to ensure the park is usable at all times of the year.
- **Grassed:** the site needs to be grassed to eliminate the demand for water for washing dogs after use.

It is important to note that the design of the off leash park needs to be finalized through the involvement of the community. All processes should align with the Strathcona County Public Engagement Policy GOV-002-025. A **possible** approach to engage the public in the park design is presented below.

1. Strathcona County will develop a Terms of Reference for an Off Leash Park Design Committee.
2. Strathcona County will recruit from the public for representatives to serve on an off leash park design committee with County representatives. The Committee will recommend a design to Strathcona County.
3. Using information gathered through the development of the Dog Off Leash Strategy, and working with a Landscape Architectural Technologist, the Committee will create one or more off leash park concept(s).
4. Park concept(s) will be presented to the public to solicit feedback and support.
5. Based on the feedback, a final design will be developed. The Committee will review the final design and recommend that the County accept the design.

OPERATING COST CONSIDERATIONS

In the operations of a dedicated off leash park there are several elements that need to be addressed.

- **Enforcement:** all users of the off leash park should have a current license for their dog—this is a County bylaw.¹ As well rules of use for the park need to be enforced including proper conduct and waste management. The County's Bylaw Enforcement needs to develop an approach, including a schedule, to manage these enforcement duties. There may be some impact on staffing.
- **Clean Up & Maintenance:** regular park maintenance and site clean-up needs to be managed. These tasks could include regular site maintenance and upkeep (e.g. restocking doggy bags, picking up litter), to any repairs to the site (e.g. fence mending, bench repair and replacement), through to any landscaping tasks (e.g. grass cutting, tree removal). There does need to be a body to ultimately oversee the day-to-day type care of the site. These tasks could be the bailiwick of a volunteer association (e.g. Off Leash Association) and/or could be managed through Strathcona County. Consideration needs to be given regarding how these tasks are handled.
- **Communication:** clear and open communications need to exist between Strathcona County and the public regarding the use and operations of the off leash parks. Communication elements can range from signage onsite regarding rules of use through to broader communication regarding location of the park, hours of operation, etceteras. Communication could occur through direct messaging to dog licensees and broad market communiqués through mass media, social media, etcetera.
- **Evaluation:** performance evaluation is described further on in this report. There are resources that are required to both implement an evaluation program but also to analyze the information collected and then to address any issues. This is particularly important with the multi-use sites as the inventory may change depending upon the outcome of the measures collected.

¹ Dog licenses from other jurisdictions will be accepted.

Multi-Use Off Leash Sites

These sites will see off leash activities occur in already built infrastructure. Outdoor boarded rinks (excluding those with a concrete or paved surface) and fenced ball diamonds will be considered. Also considered will be other built infrastructure including parks and open space, stormwater management facilities, and utility corridors. This multi-use approach will be implemented on a pilot basis and on a site by site approach. At the end of one year the “performance” of each site will be determined.

Communication and information sharing will be paramount to the implementation of this approach. The success of this approach will also be furthered through the involvement of a volunteer association to assist with education and monitoring.

OUTDOOR BOARDED RINKS

Outdoor boarded rinks are one possibility for a multi-use off leash site. They exist throughout Sherwook Park and are enclosed spaces. As with all other potential multi-use sites, initiation into program should be on a site-by-site basis.

BALL DIAMONDS

Ball diamonds could be included in multi-use off leash sites because of their geographic distribution and due to the enclosed design of some. As with the boarded rinks, the inclusion of any of these sites needs to be determined individually. All sites begin as a pilot; continuation is dependent upon site evaluation.

AMENITIES

Based on the research presented in the Phase 1 Report: Background Research and in the Phase 2 Report: Consultation Summary (both under separate covers) the following off leash park amenities have been identified. It should be noted that these park amenities are a recommended standard for a functioning multi-purpose off leash park.

- Fencing: the site should be fenced around its perimeter or boarded. (i.e. boarded rink, fenced diamond—multi-use sites need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis).
- Signage: describing usage, hours of use, code of conduct, County contact numbers, about the Off Leash Association (if applicable).
- Doggie bag dispenser and waste containers.

The first year should be considered a pilot project and each site’s performance will be evaluated on an individual basis at the end of the first year.



OPERATING COST CONSIDERATIONS

In the operations of multi-use off leash areas there are several elements that need to be addressed. (These cost considerations are similar to those identified for dedicated off leash sites.)

- **Enforcement:** all users of the off leash site should have a current license for their dog—this is a County bylaw.² As well rules of use for the park need to be enforced including proper conduct and waste management. The County's Bylaw Enforcement needs to develop an approach, including a schedule, to manage these enforcement duties.
- **Clean Up & Maintenance:** regular park maintenance and site clean-up needs to be managed. These tasks could include regular site maintenance and upkeep (e.g. restocking doggy bags, picking up litter), to any repairs to the site (e.g. fence mending, bench repair and replacement). There does need to be a body to ultimately oversee the day-to-day type care of the site. These tasks could be the bailiwick of a volunteer association (e.g. Off Leash Association) and/or could be managed through Strathcona County. Consideration needs to be given regarding how these tasks are handled.
- **Communication:** clear and open communications need to exist between Strathcona County and the public regarding the use and operations of the off leash parks. Communication elements can range from signage onsite regarding rules of use through to broader communication regarding location of the park, hours of operation, etceteras. Communication could occur through direct messaging to dog licensees through to broad market messages through mass media, social media, etcetera.
- **Evaluation:** performance evaluation is described further on in this report. There are resources that are required to both implement an evaluation program but also to analyze the information collected and then to address any issues. Evaluation is particularly important with the multi-use sites as the inventory may change depending upon the outcome of the measures collected.

The cost considerations are reflective of those identified for dedicated off leash sites. It is important to note that costs associated with multi-use sites could be less than those associated with the dedicated sites. The types of costs, however, may be identical.



² Dog licenses from other jurisdictions will be accepted.

Considerations

There are a number of considerations regarding the implementation and operation of off leash areas.

- There is no fee for use of the sites.
- Only licensed dogs are able to use the sites. It is a bylaw in Strathcona County that all dogs be licensed. Enforcement, particularly during the first year of implementation will need to be enhanced significantly.³
- A Volunteer Off Leash Association needs to be operational. There had been an association previously but it has lapsed. The County should work to start anew or to resurrect the association.
 - » There are several benefits to having an off leash association:
 - An association can work to monitor usage at the sites. Data gathered can be used as part of the site evaluations.
 - An association can serve as a communication conduit between park users and Strathcona County. Issues of concern or queries from users can be funneled through an association to the County.
 - Association members can liaise with park users and can directly communicate user rules and expectations.
 - Basic site maintenance and clean up can fall into the realm of an association. While this is not to suggest that an association would be responsible for site maintenance, accessing the volunteers to assist with this task can help ensure the sites are clean and welcoming in a manner that reduces the burden on County staff.



- The existence of an association can also ensure that decisions made about the design and operation of any site are made through consultation with key stakeholders. Involving impacted stakeholders in decisions can help ensure the best decisions are made. It also helps when having to communicate these decisions to the broader public to show that Strathcona County made decisions collaboratively.
- There may be a variety of partnership and/or sponsorship opportunities available as this strategy is implemented. These opportunities may impact the operations and costs. See Section 6 of this document for more discussion on partnering opportunities.

³ Dogs licensed in other jurisdictions are welcome at the off leash sites.

Section

5

Performance Measures

Ongoing evaluation of the performance of the dog off leash sites needs to be undertaken. This is particularly true for those multi-purpose sites. This section will identify measures and processes to use.

Measuring the effectiveness of the parks can be assessed using the following metrics. It is important to measure the performance of the parks annually beyond the pilot approach, particularly for the multi-use to ensure appropriate usage and satisfaction, to consider future opportunities, and to justify investment.

- **Number of Different Sites:** an inventory is important including the total number of sites and the areas (ha) of the sites. This can be considered when evaluating provision per capita. Mapping should be undertaken to illustrate to County residents and dog owners where the off leash opportunities are, including pilot sites, as well as basic rules of use.
 - » Counts and mapping should be completed annually. This is particularly important with the use of pilot projects and with individual site evaluations.
- **User Counts:** these figures will demonstrate overall use and can help in future planning. As well these figures can help justify the investment.
 - » Counts can occur through the use of a volunteer association and through enforcement staff. Specific efforts need to be taken to ensure a standardized approach to information gathering is undertaken. (i.e. schedule counts to identify peak times, utilization, etc)
- **Safety (Number of Incidents):** consider total number of incidents reported to the County and to the Volunteer Off Leash Association (if active). Also consider the number of incidents that required formal follow-up. This can assist in determining levels of monitoring and enforcement. As well it will impact elements of usage such as hours of operation.
 - » A collation of information from County enforcement, the RCMP detachment, and any reports filed by individuals and the volunteer association. These incidents should be monitored regularly but should be compiled annually.
- **Physical State (Maintenance & Cleanliness):** this can influence costs of operations, impact of the voluntary association, etceteras.
 - » Ongoing qualitative input will be gathered from users through and from the volunteer association (if implemented). Particularly with the multi-use sites, the state of the site needs to be examined prior to its original designated use. For example an examination of the boarded rinks needs to occur prior to its preparation for winter use. Notes should be recorded on a site by site basis that can be aggregated.
- **Satisfaction of Users:** parks are provided to address the demand from users so it is important to gather levels of satisfaction. This can be done through onsite surveying and ongoing web feedback mechanisms.
 - » Feedback can be gathered ongoing online and reviewed periodically in the event specific action is required. Specific onsite surveying could be implemented to gather the thoughts of park users in a manner that gets immediate feedback. A program of surveying needs to be done to ensure feedback is gathered from all sites. Annual review of the feedback is needed. Through the Open Space & Recreation Facility Strategy, an annual survey is fielded. This mechanism could be utilized to gather feedback from site users.
- **Public Feedback:** while not a structured initiative, any comments or complaints emanating from the public (including neighbours to the parks) should be examined in the context of park provision. This feedback may have some impact on hours of operation, monitoring, etcetera
 - » This will be an ongoing mechanism in which information is recorded according to individual site (if pertinent) then aggregated for overall analysis. There may be occasions in which public feedback can be gathered leveraging other research mechanisms and methods. For example questions about off leash parks may be included in surveying done by the County for other purposes.



Multi-Purpose Dog Off Leash Site Evaluation

In order to effectively evaluate any multi-use sites piloted as off leash sites and to measure the performance of any multi-purpose dog off leash site in the future, Strathcona County needs to employ a systematic process. The following describes how this process works.

STEP 1: INITIATION

- The review of a site is initiated. All sites included in the pilot project need to be reviewed annually.
- Beyond the mandatory review that accompanies any pilot project, any site is reviewable. Actions that trigger the review of a site may include:
 - » Five formal complaints emanating from a single site.
 - » A formal request from Strathcona County Council or Administration.
 - » Recommendation from any volunteer off leash association in partnership with Strathcona County.
- All reviews must be accompanied by documentation that identifies the site, impetus for review, any interim actions regarding site operations (e.g. temporarily closed), etc. Communications need to occur informing people that a particular site is being reviewed. Should the operation of the site change while the review is underway, communication efforts need to be undertaken.

STEP 2: INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

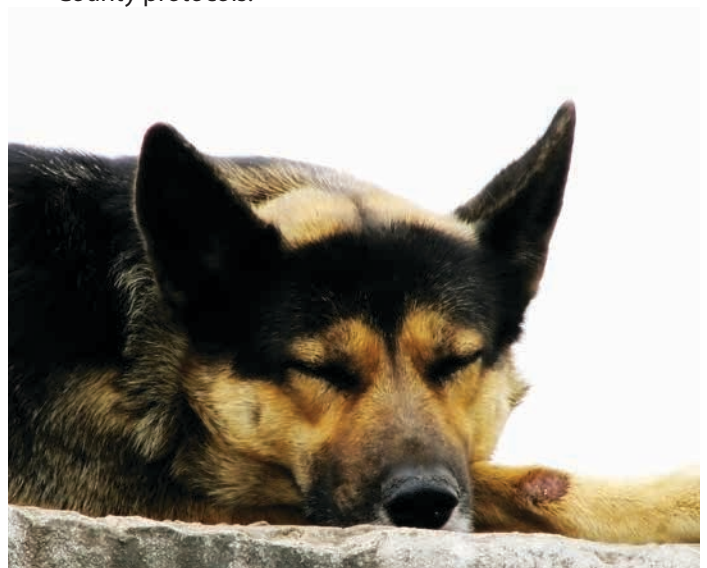
- In a timely manner, assessment is conducted on the site in question. Input is solicited from each of the County Departments included: Planning & Development Services; Recreation, Parks, and Culture; and Bylaw Enforcement.
- Inputs to review include data representing the criteria identified as performance measures (above).
- Where sufficient information exists, actions regarding the site are implemented (proceed to Step 4). Should additional information be required beyond this internal review the evaluation proceeds to Step 3.

STEP 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND SITE REVIEW

- Where deemed appropriate stakeholder engagement may be initiated. This could include site users, neighbours, and the general public.
- The partnering Volunteer Off Leash Association may be engaged.
- Where appropriate, an onsite assessment may be conducted.

STEP 4: DECISION AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Based on the information gathered throughout the process a decision is made regarding the operations of the site. It is recommended that any partner Off Leash Association be part of this process.
- Implement the decision.
- The decision is communicated based on Strathcona County protocols.



Addition of a New Multi-Use Off Leash Site

A process to add a site to the inventory of multi-use off leash sites is similar to the above noted evaluation process.

STEP 1: INITIATION

- Based upon the evaluations of existing sites (including a review of performance measures) there may be requests for additional sites to be added to the inventory. It is important to note that any new sites are to be operated as pilot projects in their first year.
- Requests for additional sites may originate from:
 - » Strathcona County Council or Administration.
 - » Recommendation from any volunteer off leash association in partnership with Strathcona County.
- All requests must be accompanied by documentation that identifies the site, impetus for its addition to the inventory, etc.

STEP 2: INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

- In a timely manner, assessment is conducted on the site in question. Input is solicited from each of the County Departments included: Planning & Development Services; Recreation, Parks, and Culture; and Bylaw Enforcement.
- Consideration needs to be given to the current provision of sites and the performance of the sites. The Dog Off Leash Strategy and the Open Space and Recreation Facility Strategy should be consulted as well.



STEP 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND SITE REVIEW

- Appropriate stakeholder engagement should be initiated. This could include off leash users, neighbours, the general public, etc. Any engagement initiatives need to adhere to the Strathcona County Public Engagement Policy and guidelines.
- The partnering Volunteer Off Leash Association needs to be engaged at this time as well.
- Where appropriate, an onsite assessment may be conducted.

STEP 4: DECISION AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Based on the information gathered throughout the process, a decision is made regarding the inclusion of a new multi-use site as an off leash site. It is recommended that any partner Off Leash Association be part of this process.
- The decision is communicated based on Strathcona County protocols.



Section

6

Partnering Opportunities

There are opportunities for partnerships with Strathcona County with the provision of dog off leash parks. These potential partnerships can take a number of forms.

There are partnering opportunities in terms of the **operations** of the off leash parks. These opportunities are most likely with volunteer organizations and would involve basic park maintenance and monitoring of use to identify areas of concern. Communication with users could also be a role of the volunteer organization. As well the development of park “rules” can occur through the work of Strathcona County and a volunteer association.

Sponsorship provides another partnership opportunity. These opportunities may involve overall site naming; more likely however is sponsorship of site elements. Strathcona County should consider the provision of doggy bag dispensers, benches, and so on, as opportunities that people and / or businesses can sponsor (i.e. contribute capital funds). Consideration should be given to a monument/commemorative furniture program. There may as well be sponsorships that contribute to operating costs. As with other recreational amenities, contracts can be drawn up to include signage at the parks. Sponsorship opportunities may be primarily available at dedicated off leash sites, however there can be some smaller opportunities at the multi-use sites.

While it is expected that partnership opportunities will be identified and addressed at the outset of park provision, there will be occasions that arise after the parks are operational. Some ad hoc opportunities may arise that will need to be addressed by Strathcona County. For example, an organization may wish to add agility elements to a park, or a firm may wish to assume a sponsorship position at a park. In these instances, as with any partnership opportunities, reference should be made to Strathcona County’s Community Partnership Projects in the Municipal Policy Handbook. The Recreation, Parks, and Culture Department has a process related to sponsorship as well.

There are many examples of partnerships between Strathcona County and outside entities. While these partnerships have been successful it is important to recognize that there must be benefits to all parties. As important, Strathcona County must ensure that any partnerships considered do not compromise the intended use of the park or its users.



Off Leash Association

A volunteer Dog Off Leash Association can serve as a significant partner of Strathcona County. As noted in Section 4 (page 18), there are many benefits associated with an active off leash association. This terms of reference can be used to implement an association.

Mission

The Off Leash Association will serve as Strathcona County's liaison with the public regarding the development and operation of dog off leash sites in Strathcona County.

Duties

- Assist with communication of messages regarding off leash provision to the public and dog community.
- Assist with the monitoring of off leash sites.
- Assist with the maintenance of off leash sites.
- Provide input to the County regarding the enhancement of any sites, the potential addition of a multi-use off leash site, and the operation of existing sites.
- Transmit messages from the public and off leash site users to Strathcona County.
- Provide advice regarding issues or initiative brought forward by Strathcona County regarding off leash provision and other related issues.

It is important to note that the association is advisory in nature to the County and is not a decision making body. In addition any communications undertaken by the Association to the public and stakeholders needs to be approved by Strathcona County.

The Association will be encouraged to become a "Registered Non-Profit Association" to provide the ability to pursue grant opportunities and other funding options. These funds could assist with the provision and enhancement of the off leash sites.

Composition

The Off Leash Association is a volunteer organization that exists at the discretion of Strathcona County. While the Association may have its own volunteer pool, for the purposes of this Strategy the Association is deemed to be the specific body that directly liaises with a County representative. Recommendations to consider when forming an Association include the following:

- Residents of Strathcona County
- A minimum of half of the representatives must reside in Sherwood Park
- A minimum of half of the representatives need to have a dog.
- All pets of the Association's members must be appropriately licensed.
- Members hold their position for an initial term of two (2) years. Future terms are to be determined by the Association in conjunction with Strathcona County.
- Membership is up to twelve (12) members.

Initially, Strathcona County will advertise to fill the Association positions. Prospective members will be provided with the Terms of Reference. Interviews may be implemented to select members. Initially, the Strathcona County representative to the Association will select Association members. Subsequently, other members of the Association will work with the County representative to select members.

Interaction With the County

The Association meets at least biannually with a designated representative from Strathcona County. Additional meetings and communication may occur at the discretion of Strathcona County in conversation with the Association. A specific schedule of meetings will be developed by the Association and the County representative. Meetings will involve the sharing of information from each entity (Association and Strathcona County). The County representative will serve as Chair-person of the meetings and will develop agendas. Meeting notes will be recorded.

Note: Prior to the initiation of an association, consultation with Strathcona County Administration will be required. The form and function of this volunteer organization will be focussed on community involvement to ensure successful implementation of this strategy.

Section

7

Key Messages

As this Strategy becomes implemented, it is important that Strathcona County effectively communicate about it and its elements. Some key messages that should be integrated into the communications plan are presented herein.

The implementation of this strategy will rely heavily on key messages being communicated to the public broadly and to dog owners specifically about the County's provision of off leash parks. These key messages are noted below.

1. The County **recognizes the value** of providing dog off leash opportunities for its residents. There are many benefits garnered by the community, dog owners, and their dogs by providing these opportunities.
2. A **pilot project** will be implemented to provide multi-use off leash opportunities throughout Sherwood Park. The intent is to provide off leash opportunities in a more convenient manner to residents beyond that available through use of the Deermound Dog Off Leash Park.
3. The County has invested a significant amount in the provision of outdoor recreation infrastructure including parks and open spaces, boarded rinks and fenced ball diamonds. To better leverage this infrastructure into **year round use**, some of these facilities will be utilized for the dog off leash pilot project.
4. Dog off leash opportunities are primarily available to **County residents with dogs** licensed in Strathcona County. Visitors with licensed dogs from other jurisdictions can utilize the sites as well. According to Strathcona County bylaws, all dogs are to be licensed.
5. Strathcona County bylaws state that all dogs must be on leash except for in **designated dog off leash sites**.
6. The County has developed a four step system for **evaluating the performance of a dog off leash site**. The process can also be utilized to consider additional off leash areas.
7. Strathcona County is **planning** for the development of another **dedicated off leash site** in Sherwood Park.

