



MEMORANDUM

Date: January 21, 2016
To: Board of Park Commissioners
From: Susan Golub, Manager, Policy and Performance Unit
Subject: Off-Leash Area Plan

Requested Board Action

This update will describe progress to date in the development of the Off-Leash Area Plan. No action from the Board is requested; the January 28 meeting will be an opportunity for the Board and Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) staff to engage in a conversation about off-leash area issues.

Project Background

The 2014 Adopted Budget included a City Council Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI, 69-1-B-1) regarding off leash areas (OLAs). Specifically, the SLI requested Seattle Parks and Recreation work in conjunction with the Citizens for Off Leash Areas (COLA) and other stakeholders to create a dog off leash area (OLA) master plan. The purpose of the OLA master plan is to identify a long term plan for the City's existing 14 OLAs, as well as for maintenance, acquisition, and expansion of OLA projects. In May of 2014, Parks submitted a request to wait until the Park District was approved so that funding included in the District (about \$100,000 annually) could be used to fund the master plan efforts.

Public Involvement Process

In July 2015, Seattle Parks and Recreation invited Seattle dog owners to complete an online survey to understand their behaviors and needs. A link to the survey was made available through the Off-Leash Area (OLA) Strategic Plan page of the SPR website and publicized by local organizations, such as COLA, and various local media outlets. Approximately 3,900 responses were received.

In addition, Parks and Recreation held seven focus groups to hear from people interested in off-leash areas. Through a selection process to ensure representation of a variety of viewpoints, the focus groups included people who self-identified as off-leash area users, individuals opposed to dogs off-leash in parks, and representatives of environmental interests. A facilitator led the focus group discussions aimed at:

- Learning how members of the public perceive off-leash issues;
- Exploring potential alternative designs used in other cities (e.g., hours, off-leash without a fence, using the corner of a regional park, whether we need more fenced areas);
- Identifying potential solutions/options with broad community support;

- Informing development of a set of guiding principles to assist Seattle Parks and Recreation decisions; and
- Understanding priorities for Park District funding.

Input received from the survey, focus groups, on-line comments, and emails will help inform recommendations in the draft Off-Leash Area Plan. Additional public review will occur when the draft plan is completed, currently estimated for late February.

Issues for Discussion

The purpose of the January 28 Park Board discussion is to hear the Board's thoughts on the issues staff are considering for the Off-Leash Area Plan. There are no recommendations before the Committee; the following list includes the issues staff are considering.

1. Should we allow/encourage sponsorships and advertising? It is likely additional funds for off-leash area maintenance and amenities could be raised through sponsorships and advertising at the off-leash areas. Advertising could be in the form of inward-facing signs on off-leash fences. While this type of advertising is consistent with Parks and Recreation's sponsorship policy, it would be a departure from current practice.
2. Should we have unfenced, hours-only off-leash areas? Some cities have unfenced park areas which are used as off-leash areas during specified hours of the day. In these cities, hours-only off-leash areas are very popular with dog owners. Staff heard the following concerns from parks and recreation staff in other cities: 1) Because these areas are unfenced, dogs go beyond the designated off-leash areas; 2) Dog owners do not abide by the specified off-leash hours and the "hours-only" areas become all-day, unfenced off-leash areas.
3. How should new OLAs be added to the system? One approach to create new OLAs would be similar to the approach used for other park uses, such as children's play area, patches and athletic facilities. This would allow for new OLAs to be added to the system through public involvement processes around new park development and/or existing park redevelopment. Another approach would be for Parks and Recreation to identify gaps in the City and pursue locating off-leash areas in these neighborhoods.
4. Should there be a restriction on the number of dogs an individual can bring to an off-leash area? Parks staff have seen professional dog walkers bring as many as ten dogs to an off-leash area. Currently people in Seattle are limited to three dogs per household. Should this limit carry over to how many dogs a person can bring to an OLA?

Marymoor Park in King County has a large off-leash area with a three dog per person limit, plus a permit which allows professional dog walkers to bring more dogs. Should Seattle investigate/institute a professional dog walkers' permit?

Budget

The Off-Leash Area Plan will review maintenance needs at the existing 14 OLAs. Funding for the maintenance improvements will be from the \$106,000 provided in the Park District's Improve Dog Off-Leash Areas initiative.

Schedule

Leah Tivoli, the former lead for the Off-Leash Area Plan, recently began a new job in the City Budget Office. The extensive research and public process Leah conducted, and her work on the draft Plan, provide a strong base for moving forward, although at a slower pace than originally hoped. We now anticipate the draft Plan available for public review in March.

Additional Information

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<http://www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/offleash/>

Attachments

Attachment 1: Off-Leash Area Map

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Off Leash Area Peak/Capacity Analysis Map

