

People, Dogs and Parks Plan

Section 1: Executive Summary

Background

Seattle welcomes dogs on leash in all of its parks. With the exception of beaches, children's play areas and ballfields, dogs and their caretakers are free to roam throughout the system. This approach adheres to a long, historical tradition of "multiple use" in Seattle's parks which, simply stated, encourages the development of spaces that accommodate diverse activities over the course of a day, a week or a year.

Growth: The City of Seattle anticipates reaching a population of more than 700,000 residents by 2020, up from 608,000 in 2010, and is projected to add another 50,000 in population by 2030. The Seattle park system is comprised of 6,200 acres of land. Because of the water-locked nature of our city, the system is not likely to grow significantly. As a city, we will face increasing demand for many uses of the park system.

Current Program: The OLA program has grown steadily since the first OLA in 1997. Seattle's current 14 fenced off-leash areas (OLAs) total 28 acres and range in size from 9 acres to .1 acre; eight of them are one acre or less in size. Except for two small areas in northern West Seattle and southeast Southeast Seattle, there is an OLA within 2 ½ miles of all residents. Maintenance of these facilities has been shared by Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR), the Citizens for Off Leash Areas (COLA) and the Magnuson Off-Leash Group (MOLG).

A 2016 estimate of possible improvements at each off-leash area is in the range of \$718,000 - \$1,363,000 (please see Section 7). The Seattle Park District will provide \$106,000 annually through 2020 for maintenance of the OLAs and will be used to address some of these projects.

Enforcement: In 2015, according to SAS data and SPR correspondence data, complaints about off-leash dogs exceeded all other complaints received by SPR and the Seattle Animal Shelter. The Seattle Park District provides funding for a new two-person team dedicated to enforcing the Animal Code in Seattle's parks. This is the first time since the mid-1990s the City has had staff dedicated to enforcing the Animal Code in parks. The number of citations has increased dramatically since they began their patrols in late March, 2016. Enforcing animal regulations should help decrease instances of off-leash violations and conflicts in parks.

Impetus for the People, Dogs and Parks Plan

The City of Seattle's 2014 Adopted Budget included a City Council Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI 69-1-B-1) regarding OLAs. Specifically, the SLI requested that SPR work in conjunction with COLA and other stakeholders to create a dog off-leash master plan. The purpose of the 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, 2014, SPR submitted a request to wait until the Park District was approved so that funding included in the District (\$106000 annually) could be used to fund the master plan efforts.

Summary of Plan Research Process

The People, Dogs, and Parks Plan is built on research, best practices reviews and outreach information and includes:

- 2015 survey of dog owners conducted in collaboration with COLA
- Citizens for Off-Leash Areas 2014-2015 Biennial Report
- COLA's report on North American Dog Off- Leash Areas Best Practices
- 2015 Focus Groups
- Recreation Demand Study survey of owners of licensed dogs
- Site visits to Portland, San Francisco and Vancouver, B.C.
- Review of other city, county and organization off-leash plans
- Discussions with animal behaviorists from the University of Washington
- Literature review of the impacts of dogs on wildlife and water quality
- Multiple Board Of Park Commissioners' briefings, discussion and public testimony
- Livability Night Out public input
- Two more Board of Park Commissioners meetings to be held on this topic

Summary of Recommendations

The Seattle Park District provides funding to improve existing OLAs. SPR and to propose several processes for the gradual addition of new OLAs. These are described below.

Adding New OLAs

For each proposed OLA, except those involving private developers, SPR will convene a committee including dog advocates, environmental advocates, a veterinarian or animal behaviorist, community members, representatives of the Office for Civil Rights and the Office of Sustainability and Environment, and SPR staff to recommend to the Superintendent whether the proposed OLA should move forward.

1. Adding OLAs through **new park/redevelopment processes**. SPR will specifically include OLAs as an element for consideration in the planning process

when SPR embarks on the development or redevelopment process for new and existing parks, along with any other suggested use that arises during the process.

2. As SPR develops [land-banked park sites](#), SPR will examine their use for new OLAs as part of the park development process.
3. **SPR will continue to consider adding new OLAs by request of the community**, whether through Neighborhood Matching Fund processes or other community processes.
4. **Support COLA in developing OLAs on non-park public land** suitable for OLAs, by convening the committee described above and assisting with design.
5. **Encourage COLA to work with private property owners** to provide OLAs on unused property that COLA could then lease and manage.
6. **Explore options to encourage private developers** to include OLAs as part of required private amenity spaces in their prospective developments.

There will still remain the issue of development costs for any of these alternatives, but those can be addressed on a case-by-case basis. SPR developed a cost estimate for development of a [one-acre OLA](#) as anticipated by SPR development standards, the desire of OLA patrons as described in focus groups and surveys conducted for this plan, and best practices for healthy environments for dogs. This planning estimate unit cost, estimated at \$950,000 per one-acre OLA, can be a starting point for planning. Obviously a multi-acre OLA would not cost a multiple of this amount because there would be economies of scale. Magnolia Manor, the most recently developed OLA, is one-third acre in size and cost \$472,000

Other issues and recommendations are described below. SPR recommends a path forward that, while not meeting all of the needs/demands of OLA advocates, still provides a way to make measured progress toward adding new OLAs while addressing the multiple major maintenance needs at SPR's current facilities and operating within existing resources.

Unfenced Off-Leash Area Recommendations

7. Based on the potential for conflict between leashed and unleashed dogs and between dogs and other park activities, limited enforcement resources, and feedback from other jurisdictions, **SPR recommends continuing to offer fenced OLAs only.**

8. Based on the potential for conflict between leashed and unleashed dogs and between dogs and other trail users, the associated need for more maintenance and enforcement and the potential for disturbing animal and bird habitat, **SPR does not recommend designated leash-optional trails.**
9. Based on the protection of many of Seattle's beaches by the Marine Reserves Rule and the potential for disturbing animal, marine and bird habitat, **SPR recommends against establishing any more OLAs with beach access.**

Recommendations to Improve Off-Leash Area Conditions and the User Experience

10. SPR will use the new Seattle Park District funds to improve existing OLA's based on the facility assessment.
11. SPR recommends that COLA actively seek sponsorships and work with SPR on guidelines for sponsorship acknowledgement.
12. SPR recommends dog walkers be required to obtain a business license from the City of Seattle and a \$100 dog walker license from FAS. From the time of enactment of this requirement, for a duration of two years, dog walkers will be allowed to bring up to 10 licensed dogs (unlicensed dogs are NOT allowed in off-leash areas) and to walk 10 licensed dogs on leash in Seattle's parks, except for those areas designated as non-dog areas. At the conclusion of the two-year period, dog walkers who have obtained the three-course [certification in animal behavior](#) from the University of Washington will be allowed to continue to walk up to 10 licensed dogs. Dog walkers who have not obtained the certificate will be limited to three licensed dogs. Once they have received certification, they can increase the number of licensed dogs they walk to 10. This recommendation is derived from discussions with a UW animal behaviorist who made and supports it, and who has grave concerns relating both to animal and human safety, about the ability of untrained dog walkers to manage large packs of dogs successfully.
13. As a deterrent to off-leash activity, SPR recommends working with Seattle Animal Shelter to identify repeat violators of leash laws and to consider raising fines for repeat violators.