



## MEMORANDUM

Date: September 15, 2016  
To: Board of Park Commissioners  
From: Holly Miller, Senior Policy Advisor  
Subject: Draft People, Dogs and Parks Plan

### **Requested Board Action**

Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) has developed the Draft People, Dogs and Parks Plan (Draft Plan) and is seeking Board of Park Commissioners' (Board's) review and comment on recommendations contained therein, prior to final action on the Draft Plan by the Superintendent. The Board was briefed in February 2016 on the Superintendent's preliminary recommendations, before the Draft Plan was released for public review and has heard extensive public testimony on the issue and the draft proposal to date. Public comment on the Draft Plan is welcome until October 14. The Board is scheduled to make final recommendations to the Superintendent at the November 8, 2016 meeting of the Board.

### **Project or Policy Description and Background**

The Draft Plan was developed in response to a 2014 City Council (Council) Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI), amended to allow funding from the Municipal Park District (Park District) to provide resources for developing the Draft Plan. The Council requested development of a master plan to identify a long term plan for the City's existing 14 Off Leash Areas (OLAs), and for maintenance, acquisition and expansion of OLA projects. A map of existing OLAs is attached. (See Attachment 1)

The Draft Plan is a long term plan which will guide the operations of existing OLAs, explore alternative service models and create strategies for development of future OLAs. It provides direction on how to spend Park District funding (approximately \$106,000 per year) designated for existing OLAs over the approved six year Park District spending plan (2016-2020).

### **Public Involvement Process**

The Draft Plan is built on research, best practice reviews and outreach information, including:

- Survey of 4011 licensed dog owners;
- COLA report on North American Dog Off Leash Areas Best Practices;
- Seven focus groups of both dog owners and non-dog owners;
- Site visits to Portland, Vancouver, B.C., and San Francisco;
- Review of other city and county off leash plans;
- Discussions with University of Washington animal behaviorists;

- Literature review of impacts of dogs on water quality and wildlife;
- Feedback from the Board’s February review of the Superintendent’s Preliminary Recommendations;
- Two public hearings before the Board; Two public comment opportunities at the Livability Summits;
- Presentation by COLA to Park Board on August 11, 2016;
- Public hearing for Board to be held on September 22, 2016.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

Seattle welcomes dogs on leash in all of its parks. With the exception of beaches, children’s play areas and ballfields, leashed 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 and a year. The demands for more off leash areas mirror the demands for spaces for many other park activities – among them ballfields, trails, children’s play areas, open space, swimming pools and community centers. These requests are all rational given the growth and diversity of interests in our city and yet, geographic and economic limitations impact any significant expansion of our system. The next decades will call on our ingenuity and patience to attempt to address these needs.

The Draft Plan represents, we believe, a prudent approach to managing off leash areas based on the principle underpinning the first cycle of the Park District of “Fix it First.” This principle directs us to focus limited available resources towards making existing facilities more sustainable, usable and accessible. This includes a necessary emphasis on the plan and care for existing facilities, the maintenance, repair and upgrades needed for these existing OLAs and limited law enforcement capacity (one animal control officer assigned to patrol parks). Our proposed Plan also recommends the incremental addition of new OLAs based on community engagement processes but does not create a “blueprint” for future OLAs in certain parks. The Draft Plan recognizes the reality that siting OLAs, like many other park facilities or improvements, requires extensive community engagement and discussion. Similar to the many other current demands on our system and resources, the proposed Plan defines a path forward that allows for reasonable and sustained expansion of services for dogs, within the context of these other needs as well.

The Draft Plan contains recommendations regarding:

- The process for adding OLAs;
- Unfenced OLAs; and
- A process to improve OLA conditions and the user experience.

### **Process for Add New OLAs:**

SPR is committed to working with communities and volunteer groups, most notably, the Citizens for Off Leash Areas (COLA), to identify and develop new OLAs. SPR supports the addition of new OLAs in several ways, as described below. For each proposed new OLA, SPR will convene a committee including dog advocates, environmental advocates, a veterinarian or animal behaviorist, community members and SPR staff. This committee will consider the proposal and will make a recommendation to the Superintendent.

New OLAs may be added in the following ways:

- Through new park development or existing park redevelopment processes. Land-banked sites will be examined for suitability as OLAs as they are developed.
- Through requests by communities, whether through Neighborhood Matching Fund processes or other community processes.
- By supporting groups like COLA in developing new OLAs on non-park public land suitable for OLAs, by convening a committee, as described above, assisting with design and committing to provide maintenance when an OLA is developed.
- By supporting the efforts of groups like COLA to work with private property owners to provide OLAs on unused property.
- By encouraging private developers, through the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection, to include OLAs as part of prospective developments.
- SPR will support community groups, most notably COLA, in exploring new partnerships and sponsorships to support the improvement of existing OLAs, and the creation of new OLAs.

#### **Unfenced Off Leash Areas**

- SPR is committed to continue to offer only fenced OLAs due to the potential for conflict between leashed and unleashed dogs and between dogs and other park users, limited enforcement resources, and feedback from other jurisdictions that have implemented unfenced OLAs and are now moving away from these types of designations.
- SPR does not recommend designated leash-optional trails due to reasons listed above plus maintenance and environmental concerns. Forest stewards report frequent damage to newly planted native plants by off leash dogs.

#### **Process for Improving Off Leash Area Conditions and the User Experience**

- SPR proposes using new Park District funding (\$106,000/year through 2020) to improve existing OLAs based on the facility assessments included in the Draft Plan. SPR is committed to working closely with COLA and local community groups on some of the specific improvements at existing OLAs to ensure our assessments and planned improvements are aligned with users' experience, with the caveat that improvements must meet SPR's construction and maintenance specifications as well as all applicable codes.
- As stated above, SPR will support community groups, most notably COLA, in exploring potential partnerships and sponsorships to support the improvement of existing OLAs, and the creation of new OLAs.
- Given the tremendous concerns expressed to us by residents and other dog owners, regarding the number of dogs that some professional dog walkers have typically brought to existing OLAs, SPR's Plan proposes a requirement that requires professional dog walkers using OLAs to become licensed (\$100/year). Further to ensure safety of all OLA users, for two years, dog walkers will be allowed to bring 10 licensed dogs into parks. At the end of two years, dog walkers who have obtained the three-course certification from the U WA or another equivalent program authorized by the Superintendent, will be allowed to continue to bring up to 10 licensed dogs to an OLA. Dog walkers who have not received certification will be restricted to three dogs.

- SPR recommends working with the Seattle Animal Shelter to consider raising fines for repeat violators of this new approach to professional dog walker use of public OLAs.

### **Implementation Plan**

Following adoption of a final Dogs, People and Parks Plan, SPR will work with COLA and other stakeholders to implement the Plan.

### **Public Input**

Public comment on SPR's Dogs, People and Parks Plan is welcome until **October 14, 2016**. SPR staff will then summarize public comment for the Board to consider in their deliberations. SPR has already received numerous emails and letters from parties interested in this issue. Attached is a spreadsheet containing an initial summary of comments received to date (See Attachment 2).

SPR has worked with COLA throughout the development of the DRAFT Plan. COLA has submitted proposals/comments which include, but are not limited, to the following issues/ideas:

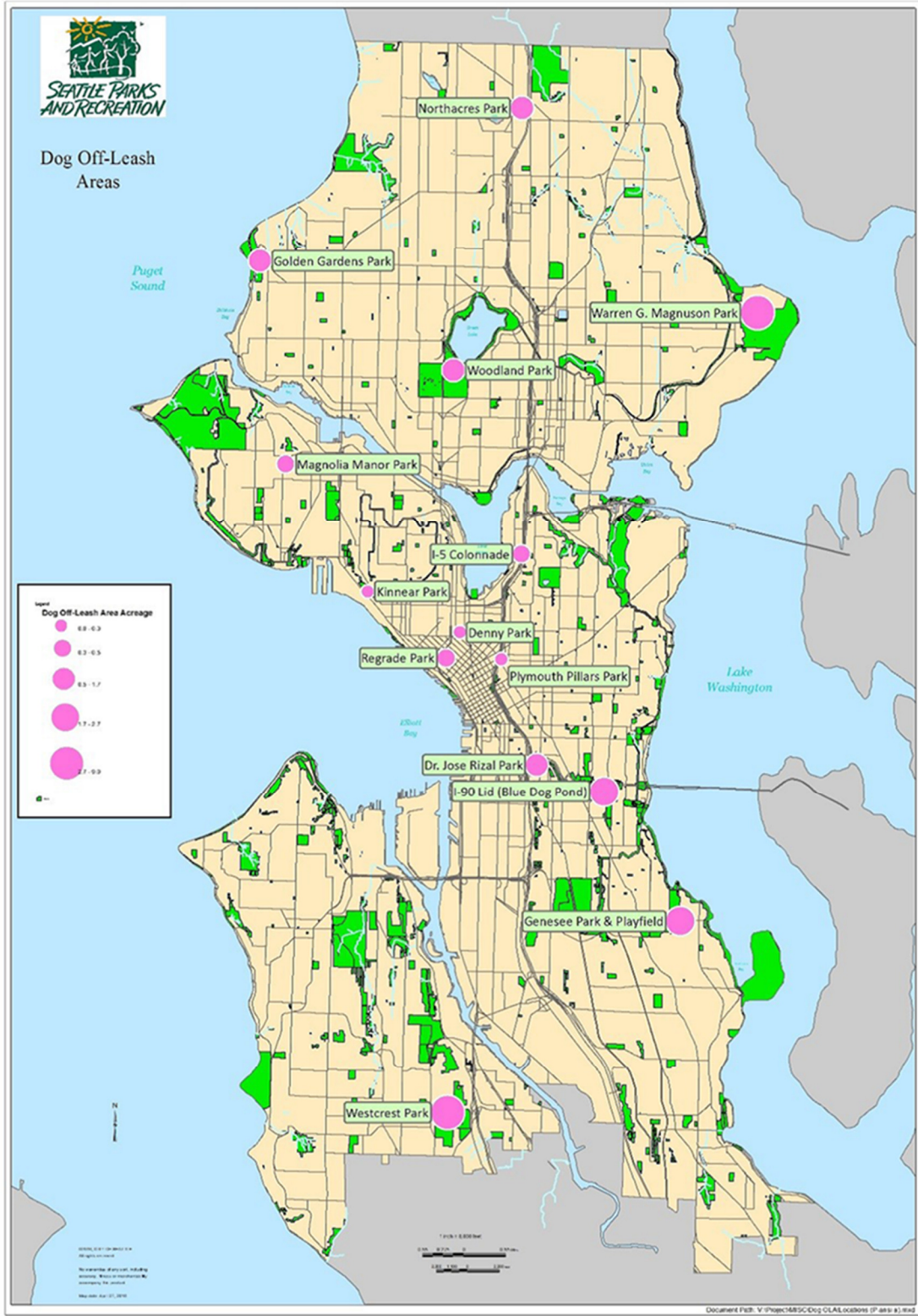
- Need for expanding the OLA system in a meaningful way.
- Need for SPR to maintain all OLAs not on SPR property.
- Requests to provide beach access on beaches that are not critical habitat.
- Requests to create 12 pilots for community driven solutions.
- That SPR and the City commit to increasing the maintenance budget for OLAs.
- A request to maintain a 10-dog limit for dog walkers if they advocate for more land.
- Request to provide an OLA in every neighborhood.
- Request to extend the "in lieu of citation" policy to allow unlicensed dog owners one month to obtain a license instead of 24 hours.

All of these recommendations, from COLA and other interested parties will be summarized for the Board for their consideration during their deliberations.

### **Next Steps**

September 22, 2016: Public Hearing before the Board of Park Commissioners  
 October 14, 2016: Public comment period ends  
 November 8, 2016: Board of Park Commissioners' Deliberation  
 Early 2017: Finalize Plan

# ATTACHMENT 1 Map of Dog Off Leash Areas



ATTACHMENT 2  
**Summary of Feedback to Date**

Since the publication of the DRAFT People, Dogs, and Parks Strategic Plan, SPR staff have received 150 Citizen's for Off Leash Area (COLA) form letters in addition to the comments below. An example of the letter is attached.

| <b>Comments</b>  | <b>Frequency</b> |
|--|------------------|
| <b>COLA form letter</b>  | <b>154</b>       |
| Please provide more off leash areas  | 33               |
| Please provide more off leash enforcement  | 22               |
| Please do not provide more beach access  | 16               |
| Please do not provide unfenced off leash areas   | 15               |
| Current off leash areas need work and more amenities   | 14               |
| Please put off leash areas within walking distance to each neighborhood  | 14               |
| Dogs run loose because there are not sufficient off leash areas  | 13               |
| Lack of waste removal/dog refuse issues  | 12               |
| Please provide unfenced off leash areas  | 10               |
| Off leash dogs drive people from parks   | 10               |
| Please provide more beach access   | 7                |
| Off leash dogs destroy newly planted greenspaces, create erosion and bring in invasive plant seeds that stick to their fur | 7                |
| Please support increased fees and requirements for dog walkers   | 6                |
| Existing off leash areas are degraded because too many dogs are using them   | 5                |
| Please do not spending any more on off leash areas until SPR enforces leash and scoop laws                                 | 5                |
| Please do not allow dog parks in greenspaces   | 5                |
| Please provide leash-optional trails and/or pilot  | 4                |
| Please provide off leash parks at Carkeek and Discovery Parks  | 4                |
| Please do not support increased fees and requirements for dog walkers  | 3                |
| Please stop persecuting dog owners for off leash dogs  | 3                |
| Please do not allow dog walkers in off leash areas (during certain times)  | 3                |
| Please provide more and better signage   | 3                |
| Please provide separate small dog/large dog areas  | 4                |
| New off leash areas would reduce conflict  | 4                |
| Please keep dogs out of Lincoln, Seward and Discovery Parks  | 3                |
| Please support more funding for off leash areas  | 2                |
| Dog owners should buy their own land for off leash areas   | 2                |
| Please provide more bag dispensers near garbage cans   | 2                |

| <b>Comments</b>  | <b>Frequency</b> |
|--|------------------|
| Please put an off leash area fenced off with grass in every park   | 1                |
| Please be sure to include visual and audio buffers to design of off leash areas near residences                    | 1                |
| Please provide more fees and more limits for dog walkers   | 1                |
| Please increase taxes on dog owners to cover cost of waste disposal and destruction of property                    | 1                |
| Dog parks build community, reduce crime and drug use   | 2                |
| Dogs keep owners healthy and active  | 1                |
| Please provide ADA accessible dog parks and beaches  | 1                |
| Please revamp licensing to pay for more staff at unleashed off leash areas to pick up poop and perform maintenance | 1                |
| Please require dog owners to take a class prior to getting a dog   | 1                |
| Please require dog owners to pay \$30 year to pay for more off leash areas and access to off leash areas           | 1                |
| Please increase the size of existing off leash areas; do not create new ones                                       | 1                |
| Please allow owners to determine whether dog is fit for off leash play   | 1                |
| Please enforce pet licensing   | 1                |
| Please provide port-a-potties for dog owners at off leash areas where there is no restroom                         | 1                |
| Owning a dog is a luxury   | 1                |
| COLA needs better stewards and leadership  | 1                |
| Park District funds were to improve existing off leash areas, not create new ones                                  | 1                |
| Survey of dog owners only, please survey park users and citizens generally   | 1                |

### **Example of COLA Form Letter**

I am writing to express my disappointment in and opposition to the Parks and Recreation DRAFT Master Plan for Off-Leash Areas. This plan is a disappointment because it fails to address a growing need in Seattle. We need creative, available solutions to redress the years of taxpaying dog owners in Seattle being underserved. Seattle has only 25 acres of off-leash land in 14 OLAs, half of which is in two off-leash areas in Magnusson and Westcrest Park. In the last fifteen years, only 2.3 acres of dog parks have been created. Further, we have extremely limited swimming access for dogs in Seattle, currently limited to one beach for dogs to swim in Magnusson.

Unlike in other urban cities on the west coast, we cannot walk to our dog parks. The tiny unattractive fenced gravel areas called OLAs in some neighborhoods do not serve as anything other than a potty spot and thus cannot address the huge need for exercise and good socialization. In NYC, San Francisco, Portland, and Vancouver BC, dog owners have an average of 120 acres for off leash use which are equitably distributed to be walkable from most homes, and cities such as Chicago, San Diego, New York, Vancouver, and 60 cities across the California coast allow dogs to swim.

Rather than use \$104K of Park District moneys as budgeted (for OLA infrastructure, expanded space, increased accessibility and maintenance), SPR chose to spend the entire 2015 budget on a study. Not only were tax dollars used outside the designated budget, the resulting plan ignores the results of that study and proposes to make very few changes to our current inadequate infrastructure. This will not stand to support the explosive growth our city is projected to experience over the coming years. I demand an innovative approach to including our taxpayer needs as dog owners, with a true gap analysis and equitable framework for growing our system SIGNIFICANTLY.

This is a citizen issue, not a dog issue. And an issue for both dog owners and non-dog owners, as dogs are running loose in all public parks in Seattle creating safety hazards for citizens and dogs alike. As our population continues to grow and become more dense, the need will continue to grow for available, usable off leash areas for our dogs.

Please record my opposition to the Superintendent's recommendations and my support of many more off-leash areas, particularly those with beach access.