

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, April 18, 2023 **WARD(S):** ALL

TITLE: ALTERNATIVE LOCATION FOR A LOCAL OFF-LEASH DOG
AREA IN WARD 3

FROM:

Vince Musacchio, Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To report back on a proposed alternative location for an off-leash dog area in Block 37 and seek approval to proceed with construction of a local off-leash dog area at Giovanni Caboto Park.

Report Highlights

- The City of Vaughan recognizes the value local off-leash dog areas bring to dogs and their families, which is why in June 2021, Council endorsed the Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy.
- At that time, Council approved a plan to develop a second primary off-leash dog park at Major Mackenzie Drive and Hwy 27, and six (6) local off-leash areas
- In September 2022 staff were requested to review alternative locations for a local off-leash dog area in Block 37, including Giovanni Caboto Park.
- Staff hosted a three (3) week online survey to collect community input on layout options for a local fenced-in off-leash dog area within Giovanni Caboto Park.
- 146 participants responded to the online survey with 70% expressing support for an off-leash dog area at Giovanni Caboto Park, 12% neutral and 18% expressing an objection.
- Based on staff's analysis and the results of the community engagement process, it is recommended to move forward with next steps to implement a local off-leash dog area at Giovanni Caboto Park.

Recommendations

1. THAT staff proceed with implementing a Local Off-Leash Dog Area at Giovanni Caboto Park and be authorized to negotiate a contract change order with current vendors to expedite construction in 2023.

Background

Recognizing the importance of off-leash areas to dogs and their families, Vaughan Council endorsed the [Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy \(PDF\)](#) in June 2021.

Developed through extensive consultation with City staff, residents and stakeholders, the strategy includes criteria for site selection and establishes roles and responsibilities for Local Off-leash Dog Area Stewards. The criteria used to evaluate potential sites for off-leash areas include:

- Governance – including existing by-laws, policies and regulations; potential for community stewardship; safety and security; and community input.
- Accessibility – including available parking, number of residents served and proximity to sidewalks and trails.
- Location – including available land owned by the City, as well as proximity to residential areas, children’s play spaces, outdoor sports fields and courts and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Design – including size of area and site characteristics (e.g. drainage, grading, vegetation, microclimate).

To be considered as a potential site, a location must score a minimum of 75% on the above criteria. If a location meets this minimum score, it is then evaluated based on community feedback, cost and the potential for external funding, as well as layout and availability of amenities. To be selected, a site must also have a minimum of three (3) Local Off-Leash Dog Area Stewards registered with the City through the Stewardship Program.

Following the evaluation process and informed by the input received through public consultation, six (6) locations for new local off-leash facilities were identified and approved for implementation within the Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy.

A second primary off-leash dog area was approved at Highway 27 and Major Mackenzie Drive at the newly named Mackenzie Valley Park to serve residents west of Highway 400 and to complement the primary location at Concord Thornhill Regional Park. Public consultation on this second primary location was conducted from February

14 to March 7, 2023, and preliminary results indicate general support. Completion of this location is expected by mid 2024.

As of September 2022, the following is the status of off-leash dog area locations:

	Location	Type	Ward	Status
1	Mackenzie Glen District Park	Local	Ward 1	Open for use
2	Legion Park	Local	Ward 2	Open for use
3	Chancellor District Park	Local	Ward 3	Under review
4	Matthew Park	Local	Ward 3	Open for use
5	Sugarbush Heritage Park	Local	Ward 4	Open for use
6	Martin Tavares Park	Local	Ward 4	Planned
8	Block 11	Local	Ward 4	Under review
9	Block 12	Local	Ward 4	Under review
10	York Hill District Park	Local	Ward 5	Under review
11	Concord Thornhill Regional Park	Primary	Ward 5	Open for use
12	Mackenzie Valley Park (Highway 7 and Major Mackenzie Drive)	Primary	Ward 2	Planned
13	North Maple Regional Park	Primary	Ward 1	Under review

One of the original locations was identified at Chancellor District Park (Ward 3) with construction of the off-leash area scheduled to begin in the summer of 2022. However, in August 2022, additional consultation with residents adjacent to the park was conducted. Following the consultation, in September 2022, Vaughan Council passed a resolution to review alternative locations for a local off-leash dog area in Ward 3, including Giovanni Caboto Park.

Giovanni Caboto Park had already been shortlisted as a potential off-leash dog area location through a site selection process that applied the evaluation criteria established through the Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy. Following Council's direction, City staff reviewed and re-evaluated the potential options for off-leash dog areas in Ward 3 and determined Giovanni Caboto Park warranted community consultation and input.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Item 3, Report No. 31 CW\(WS\) June 22, 2021 Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy](#)

[C40 Communication - June 22, 2021 CW\(WS\) Report No. 31, Item 3 Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy](#)

Analysis and Options

Public Consultation Overview

Staff solicited public input on a proposed off-leash dog area at Giovanni Caboto Park through an online survey that ran from January 17 to February 7, 2023. Through the survey, participants were invited to provide feedback on the following:

1. Indicate their preference for a proposed site configuration among three options.
2. Indicate their preference among the three proposed options for a landscape buffer treatment, which would be situated between the off-leash dog area and existing playground along the eastern edge of the space.
3. Identify their travel methods to the proposed location.
4. Identify personal usage of the off-leash dog area once constructed.
5. Confirm personal dog ownership.
6. Identify whether they travel to other existing City of Vaughan off-leash dog areas.
7. Opportunity to provide additional comments.
8. Indicate their interest in becoming a local off-leash dog area steward.

Site Configuration Options

The survey included three proposed site configuration options for residents to choose from:

Option A – In this option, the large dog area is situated in the middle of the park just south of the tennis/pickleball court, north of the baseball diamond, east of the parking lot and west of the playground. A relatively thin landscape buffer physically separates the fenced-in off-leash area from the existing playground. The small dog area is located just south of the parking lot.

Option B – In this option, both the large and small dog areas are situated in the middle of the park just south of the tennis/pickleball court, north of the baseball diamond, east of the parking lot and west of the playground. A relatively thin landscape buffer physically separates the fenced-in off-leash area from the existing playground.

Option C – In this option, the small dog area is situated in the middle of the park just south of the tennis/pickleball court, north of the baseball diamond, east of the parking lot and west of the playground. A larger landscape buffer physically separates the fenced-in off-leash area from the existing playground. The large dog area is located just south of the parking lot,

Communications

The online survey was promoted through:

1. Direct mail notice to residents within 250 metres of the park – to a total of 585 addresses.
2. City social media channels (25 posts across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn).
3. Public Service Announcement issued on Jan. 17, 2023 to local, GTA, national and cultural media outlets and published to the Vaughan website.
4. The City digital sign network.
5. Ten (10) lawn signs within the park and local neighbourhood.
6. Six (6) mobile signs within Block 37.
7. Councillor eNewsletters.
8. Vaughan Engagement eNewsletter.
9. Vaughan eNews to more than 24,000 subscribers.
10. Targeted email distribution to 39 residents who had previously expressed an interest in receiving information about off-leash dog areas in the Block 37 community.
11. Email to the Pine Valley Village Community Association.

Online Survey Key Findings

The online survey collected results from 146 respondents. Below are key takeaways:

Support: The majority of respondents (70 per cent or 103 people) expressed support and excitement for an off-leash dog area within the park. 72 per cent of survey respondents were dog owners. When correlated to dog ownership, 10 per cent who indicated that they are not dog owners expressed support or were neutral for an off-leash dog area within the park.

Preferred site configuration: Based on a site assessment, staff determined the centre of the park as the best location for the fenced-in off-leash dog area. However, survey participants were asked to weigh in on the specific placement of the large- and small-breed dog areas given a) proximity to the playground, b) proximity to homes on Matthew Drive, and c) size of the off-leash area. 63 per cent of survey respondents indicated that a larger size for the off-leash area was a leading factor in their decision on a preferred option. 61 per cent preferred Option A depicted in Attachment 1 as the more desirable site configuration. When asked about the landscape buffer treatment preferred between the fenced area and playground, 63 per cent preferred planting trees over shrubs, tall grass or sod.

Access and usage: 46 per cent of respondents indicated they currently travel to one of the five existing off-leash dog areas in the Vaughan, and 54 per cent do not travel to other off-leash dog areas. If constructed, over half of the participants (55 per cent) noted they would use the off-leash location at Giovanni Caboto Park every day, while some

(25 per cent) indicated they would visit often – once or more a week. Furthermore, 82 per cent of survey respondents who would use the off-leash area at Giovanni Caboto Park indicated they would walk to the site. This is an indication that providing this amenity will likely reduce car usage and travel time for this community.

Findings: Concerns for a local off-leash area

Opposition: 12 per cent (17) of respondents were neutral to the proposed off-leash area, expressing slight hesitation or concern – largely around improved enforcement and education. 18 per cent (26) of respondents expressed concerns about the location, raising issues such as current unsanctioned off-leash activity, nuisance, parking and safety. Based on a mapping of the responses, findings show that residents who expressed opposition tended to reside closer to the proposed location. When correlated to dog ownership, approximately 50 per cent of those who expressed opposition indicated that they are dog owners.

Concerns about irresponsible dog owners: Some respondents expressed concern that an off-leash dog area would result in an increased amount of dog waste in Giovanni Caboto Park, and that enforcement around the picking up of dog waste is currently lacking. Some feel that some dog owners coming to the area from outside the neighbourhood may be less inclined to respect the rules of the off-leash dog park and would be less likely to clean up after their dogs.

Addressing concerns about irresponsible dog owners: A key component of the Council-approved Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy and a key driver of success of the implementation of new off-leash dog areas is the comprehensive Local Off-Leash Dog Area Stewardship Program. This stewardship program is a mechanism for establishing close relationships between the City, local residents and the dog-owner community. The program is a collaborative effort that seeks to foster partnerships with local residents who are not just passionate about their pets, but also care about their neighbourhoods and want to take ownership of the success of off-leash dog areas. The City will work with these stewards to understand safety concerns and maintenance requirements, and empower them to foster a positive social environment for dogs and people by providing the necessary resources to educate others on local off-leash dog area regulations and etiquette. To establish a new off-leash area, a minimum of three (3) stewards must register for the Stewardship Program. A total of sixteen (16) survey respondents indicated interest in becoming a steward, eight (8) of whom are within 500 meters of the park. Staff will contact these candidates to confirm their commitment to participate in the stewardship program.

Concerns with conflicts between off-leash dog area and park users: Some respondents indicated that the proposed off-leash dog area would conflict with existing programming such as baseball, the playground and children walking to school, noting

the park is very busy during summer months. More specifically, a few respondents expressed their concern with the possible increase in vehicle traffic on Chancellor Drive and Matthew Drive as a result of dog owners parking and visiting the off-leash area at Giovanni Caboto Park.

Addressing concerns about conflicts between various park users: Standard off-leash dog area fencing reaches a height of 5 feet, includes double-gated entry/exist points and signage about dog etiquette. Off-leash area signage will state that dogs need to be accompanied by their owners at all times and must be on-leash when outside of the designated fenced-in off-leash area. The City will work with stewards to ensure these requirements are being met and any safety concerns are addressed.

Proactive and effective communication and education about the off-leash area is paramount to create a positive and respectful environment for residents who may have a fear of dogs. The future establishment of this local off-leash dog area provides the opportunity for the City to support the overall education and awareness of good dog ownership and owner responsibilities. Examples of communication and outreach strategies include making use of the existing City communication channels, posters in the park and engaging with local schools and nearby community centres. Safety for park users, dogs and their owners are of the utmost importance, therefore the location will be clearly identified and provide necessary safety information for all users.

Regarding concerns about the potential for increased vehicle traffic, the majority of respondents (82 per cent) who said they would use the off-leash area noted they would walk to the park. There is also a parking lot with approximately 30 dedicated park spaces located immediately west of the proposed off-leash area which may alleviate concerns about increased street parking.

Verbatim Comments

“I think this is a great idea. There are quite a few dog owners in the area and I know it would be nice to have a dog area close to home.”

“Thank you, thank you, thank you! We are beyond excited that a dog park is coming to our local community!”

“I think it's long overdo and look forward to seeing this done. What is the expected date of completion and will there [be] regular updates on the progress? Can residents sponsor a bench on behalf of their family or a tree?”

“I anticipate more dog owners coming to the area not respecting the rules of the park and cleaning up after their dogs.”

“Don't touch current parks. Enforce [on]-leash requirement. Build new parks and have the areas built at the new parks.”

“I think this is a bad area to have a dog park. There are huge safety concerns because of its proximity to playgrounds, sidewalks and the school. There is an assumption that the dog owners will be responsible and I can assure you that many in this area are not.”

Next steps and timing:

- Council Approval (April 2023)
- Contract Change Orders (May-June 2023)
- Construction (July-September 2023)
- Open for Use (October 2023)

Financial Impact

Construction of the Local Off-Leash Dog Area at Giovanni Caboto Park will be funded through approved Capital Project PD-9583-21. Some additional costs relating to additional fencing, material price increases, landscape buffer planting and associated site works are anticipated to be in the range of \$15,000 to \$20,000. Staff will leverage existing contract pricing and contingency allowances to negotiate a change order that is appropriate for the type and quantity of work proposed. Utilizing existing contracts to complete construction will reduce overall project costs and time delays associated with preparing, issuing, and managing a separate procurement for this project.

Operational Impact

The relocation of the planned Local Off-Leash Dog Area from Chancellor District Park to Giovanni Caboto Park will not have any additional operational impact from what was previously approved through the June 2021 Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy for both Animal Services Enforcement in terms of additional equipment, vehicles or staff, and Park Operations for any incremental maintenance costs.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

None.

Conclusion

A public consultation process was undertaken to assess overall support for a new local off-leash dog area at Giovanni Caboto Park. Through the public engagement process, a majority of survey respondents expressed their support for an off-leash dog area.

Based on the findings of the public engagement, staff recommend moving forward with next steps to refine the design and proceed with developing a local off-leash dog area at Giovanni Caboto Park.

For more information, please contact: Jamie Bronsema, Director, Parks Infrastructure Planning and Development, ext. 8858.

Attachment

1. Giovanni Caboto Park Proposed Local Off-Leash Dog Area

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