

Date: October 1, 2009



TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Dog Off-leash Update

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. THAT the Board receive this report for information.*
- B. THAT the Board approve the designation of a portion of Devonian Harbour Park as an Off-leash Area as outlined in this report.*
- C. THAT the Board approve the designation of a portion of Stanley Park as an Off-leash Area as outlined in this report.*
- D. THAT the Board approve new seasonal hours at Fraser River Park as outlined in this report.*

POLICY

The “Parks Control By-Law” (section 9) identifies three designations with regard to dogs in parks: areas where dogs are prohibited; areas where dogs are allowed as long as they are leashed; and areas where dogs are allowed off-leash.

The “Parks Removal of Animal Manure, Dung, Refuse and Waste By-law” and the City’s “Animal Control By-Law” outline responsible dog ownership behaviour (including the licensing of dogs, leashing of dogs in public places, and picking up dog excrement in public places), and the enforcement of by-law provisions (including fines).

BACKGROUND

On June 8, 2009 staff provided the Board with an update on dog off-leash parks and issues. Staff presented information on 4 categories of outstanding off-leash issues:

- Pilot sites requiring evaluation
- Previous sites considered
- Requests for new locations
- Requests for extended hours

The Board supported staff’s recommended approaches regarding changes to dog off-leash areas:

- New off-leash areas require public consultation and Board approval
- Changes to existing off-leash areas involving new hours or adjustments to boundaries are delegated to staff, provided appropriate levels of consultation have taken place
- Staff will continue to evaluate requests for new areas, using established criteria.

DISCUSSION

Staff conducted public consultation processes to evaluate the establishment of two new off-leash areas in Devonian Harbour Park and Stanley Park. These areas would serve high density communities that have limited off-leash opportunities. Staff also conducted consultation processes at Fraser River Park and Portside Park to gauge public opinion of extending the off-leash hours at those locations

Devonian Harbour Park

The area proposed for the off-leash area is located north of the pedestrian/bicycle path as shown in the figure below.



Notice of this proposal was posted on signs in the park and on the Park Board's website during the month of September. Proposed off-leash hours are 6:00 am to 10:00 am and 5:00 pm to 10:00 pm. A total of 33 comments were received, 26 in favour and 7 opposed. Park Board has

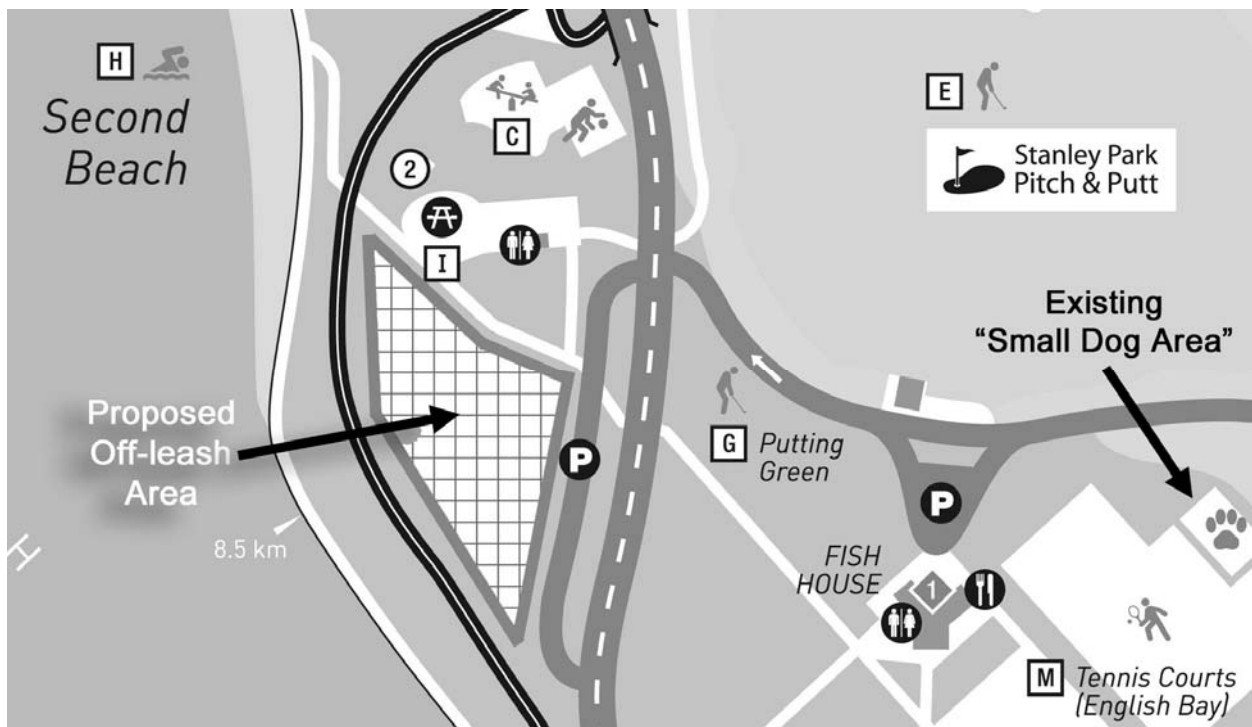
also received a petition with 240 names from supporters of establishing an off-leash area in the Coal Harbour area, who express strong support for the Devonian proposal.

The main issue raised was the potential for conflicts between off-leash dogs and either pedestrians or cyclists. Other issues raised include dog owners not picking up waste, noise from barking dogs and generally dog owners not obeying off-leash rules. The Stanley Park Ecology Society raised concerns about impacts on birds in the pond and on the small beach area on Coal Harbour. These concerns have been discussed with the Ecology Society and can be addressed by the installation of fencing to minimize impact on wildlife.

Staff are recommending the Board approve Devonian Harbour Park as a new off-leash area. It will serve many residents in a high density area and will provide a legitimate alternative to other park areas. Staff are recommending the installation of a split rail cedar fence along the main cycle/pedestrian pathway to reduce the potential for conflict. A shorter second fence along the perimeter path will help to keep dogs away from the beach area. Signs will be installed that clearly identify the off-leash area, times and bylaw information. Animal Control will be informed of the new off-leash designation and asked to monitor the site to ensure the rules are being obeyed.

Stanley Park - Second Beach Area

The area proposed for the off-leash area is located south of the Second Beach Picnic Area, on the west side of the parking lot, as shown in the figure below.



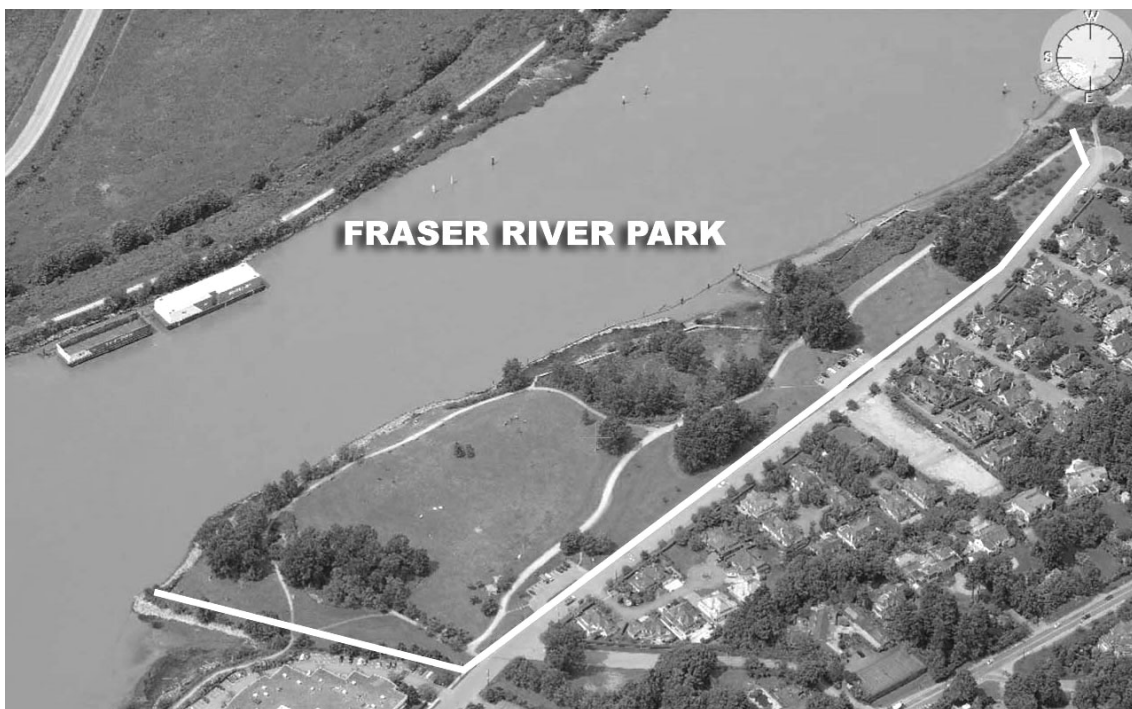
Notice of this proposal was posted on signs in the park and on the Park Board's website during the month of September. Proposed off-leash hours are 6:00 am to 10:00 am and 5:00 pm to 10:00 pm. A total of 26 responses were received, 25 in favour and 1 opposed. Comments received suggested that this would take pressure off the "small dog area" and other areas in the park where dogs currently run off-leash.

The Stanley Park Ecology Society has expressed concern regarding the impact off-leash dogs might have on wildlife in the area. The heronry is over 200 meters away from the proposed off-leash area, and is well outside the buffer area identified in the Heronry Management Plan. The proposed off-leash area is also well away from any foraging areas which are along the beaches and shores of Stanley Park. The impact on woodpeckers and other wildlife in the off-leash area is unknown, but it was suggested by the society that a larger concentration of off-leash dogs will have a negative effect.

Staff are recommending the Board approve Stanley Park Second Beach Area as a new off-leash area. It is located beside a parking lot and is immediately adjacent to the Park Ranger office which is advantageous for supervision. It will serve many residents in a high density area and will provide a legitimate alternative to other park areas. Signs will be installed that clearly identify the off-leash area, times and bylaw information. Animal Control will be informed of the new off-leash hours and asked to monitor the site to ensure the rules are being obeyed.

Fraser River Park

Earlier this year, staff received a petition from dog owners with over 420 signatures requesting the off-leash hours at Fraser River Park be extended to all day. Currently, the off-leash hours at the park are 6am to 10am and 5pm to 10pm year round.



The park is located on the Fraser River at the foot of Angus Drive. The large open grass area and proximity to a sandy shoal on the river make this a popular off-leash destination. The east side of the park has a large open grass field with a popular picnic area which is booked from May to September. The large grass field, which is not irrigated or drained, was designed for informal use and is not suitable for organized sports. Ultimate Frisbee has used this field in the past, but a representative has indicated they will no longer be using it. The west side of the park includes natural riparian areas with boardwalks, smaller grass areas and a section of sandy beach that is also extremely popular.

Notice of this proposal was posted on signs in the park and on the Park Board's website, with feedback being received until August 10, 2009. A total of 112 responses were received, 88 in favour and 24 opposed.

Comments received indicate there are many regular users who value the park as an off-leash location. One prevalent sentiment is that during the winter months, the off-leash hours do not allow afternoon or evening use as it is too dark. Many respondents commented that the majority of dog owners are respectful, their dogs are well behaved and conflicts are rare.

A number of respondents who do not support the proposal commented on the large number of dogs that are in the park, and that the current off-leash hours are not obeyed or enforced. Other frequent comments included dog waste and unsanitary conditions, off-leash dogs not under the owner's control, dog walking businesses with multiple dogs and noise from dogs and owners. The potential for conflict exists in the picnic area because the off-leash hours begin at 5 pm. Various schools also use the park for field trips over the course of the school year. Neighbouring businesses sometimes use the park at lunch time during nice weather.

Giving consideration to the number of park users and residents who responded, and the different opinions expressed, staff are recommending new seasonal hours:

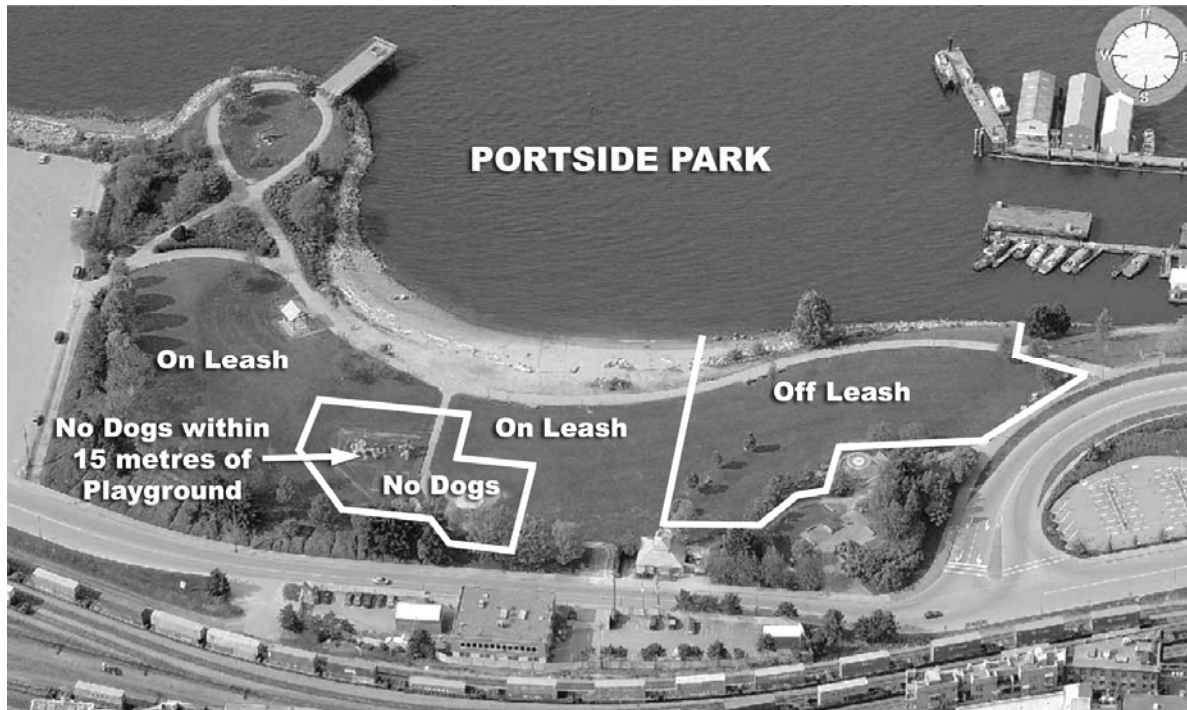
- off-leash 6 am to 10 am and 5 pm to 10 pm from May 1 to September 30
- off-leash all day, from October 1 to April 30

These hours will make the park available for off-leash dogs throughout the day during the cooler wetter months when the park is less busy. During the warmer months, the park will be on-leash from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm which will provide options for school groups and other park users who do not want to encounter off-leash dogs.

Staff have investigated the potential of fencing the picnic area to prevent conflicts with dogs. Given the size and openness of the park, fencing is not recommended for aesthetic and practical reasons. Signs stating "no dogs within 15 meters of the picnic area" will be installed. This approach is similar to the treatment used around children's playgrounds. Signs will be installed that clearly identify the off-leash area, times and bylaw information. Animal Control will be informed of the new off-leash hours and asked to monitor the site to ensure the rules are being obeyed. Park Rangers will be assigned to educate park users when hours change in May.

Portside Park

Portside park is located at the north foot of Main street, and features a fieldhouse with washrooms, children's playground and has a beach with water access to Burrard Inlet. The off-leash area is on the east side of the park as indicated below.



In response to Board direction to explore off-leash opportunities in high density neighbourhoods, staff conducted public consultation to extend the off-leash hours at Portside Park. The current off-leash hours at the park are 6am to 10am and 5pm to 10pm year round. The new off-leash hours proposed at Portside Park are:

- off-leash all day, from September 1 to June 30 and
- off-leash 6 am to 10 am and 5 pm to 10 pm from July 1 to August 30.

Notice of this proposal was posted on signs in the park and on the Park Board's website, with feedback being received until August 10, 2009. A total of 2 responses were received, both in favour. Raycam Community Centre, who supervises the summer children's program was consulted and was supportive of extending the off-leash hours, provided summer hours remain the same.

Considering the need for additional off-leash opportunities in the area, and general support for the proposal, the new hours will take effect immediately. Signs will be installed that clearly identify the off-leash area, times and bylaw information. Animal Control will be informed of the new off-leash hours and asked to monitor the site to ensure the rules are being obeyed.

SUMMARY

The addition of two new off-leash areas will provide legitimate off-leash opportunities for dog owners in the downtown core, and will take pressure off of other on-leash locations. The extension of hours at Fraser River Park and Portside Park recognizes the need for more functional year round off-leash hours to better serve the needs of existing park use.

Prepared by:
Vancouver East District
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
Vancouver, BC

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