

REPORT

REPORT TO: Chair and Members of the Community and Corporate Affairs Committee

REPORT FROM: Heather Kaufmann
Community Development Supervisor

DATE: November 28, 2018

REPORT NO.: RP-2018-0028

RE: Proposal for an Off-Leash Park at Trafalgar Sports Park

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report RP-2018-0028 dated November 28, 2018 regarding the Proposal for an Off-Leash Park at Trafalgar Sports Park be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council endorse the Proposal for an Off-Leash Park at Trafalgar Sports Park in principle, subject to the conditions outlined in Report RP-2018-0028;

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back on the status of fundraising in 2019 along with a detailed financing strategy for consideration by Council as part of the 2020 capital budget deliberations.

BACKGROUND:

In October 2002, a community interest group known as Halton Hills – Dog Owners Group (HH-DOG) was formed. The group worked together with Town staff for a leash free zone trial. A Management Agreement was signed between HH-DOG and the Town of Halton Hills which outlines the roles and responsibilities of HH-DOG and working in cooperation with the Town to maintain the off-leash areas at Prospect Park (Acton) and Cedarvale Park (Georgetown). In 2018, the group formed a new executive and changed their name to Leash Free Halton Hills.

In 2007, Council Approved the Recreation and Parks Strategic Action Plan which outlines the need for off-leash Parks. The plan states:

“Provision of off-leash parks are best developed by way of opportunity and should ideally be developed as a joint capital project when an affiliated organization is willing to take responsibility of their operation and/or enforcement. At present, it appears as though the provision of off-leash dog zones is adequate

to meet the localized demand until at least 2016, although continued maintenance and monitoring of usage levels is recommended.”

The required action was to continue to engage community groups interested in the establishment, maintenance and ongoing management of the off-leash dog zones; this includes the establishment of an appropriate cost-sharing agreement.

In response to renewed community interest, on June 20th, 2016 Council approved Resolution No. 2016-0012 with respect to Leash Free Parks that read in part:

WHEREAS the Town of Halton Hills has had a Management Agreement in place with the Halton Hills Dog Owners” Group (HHDOG) since 2002 to engage them in the development and operation of existing leash free zones in parks;

AND WHEREAS HHDOG is working with the Town in 2016 to solicit public input on the existing use and future needs of leash free zones in Halton Hills;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT staff be directed to coordinate with HHDOG to identify future leash free options in existing and future parkland areas and report back to the Community Affairs Committee.

COMMENTS:

The purpose of this report is to advise Council of a joint capital proposal for an Off-Leash Park at Trafalgar Sports Park and to seek approval in principle in order for Leash Free Halton Hills to continue their fundraising efforts. The joint proposal is included in full detail in Appendix A of this report.

As a result of Resolution No. 2016-0012 staff worked with Leash Free Halton Hills to undertake a fulsome review which included a site assessment, background and best practices review, confirmation of need and demand for an additional off-leash Park in Halton Hills and completion of a community wide survey.

Background and Best Practices Review

In order to address Council’s direction staff completed a review of best practices for off-leash dog parks in other surrounding Municipalities in 2017. Common themes and considerations included:

- Management Model:
 - There is a range of maintenance agreement models. Some municipalities provide and maintain leash free areas as a core service, where others have agreements where volunteers maintain the off leash area;

- Many municipalities encourage dog park stewardship by setting up volunteer associations for each site. Volunteer associations may play variety of roles in operations including liaising with staff, fundraising for upgrades, encouraging compliance with rules;
- Regular presence of by-law officers is recommended to enforce rules.
- Key Site Selection Criteria:
 - Park sizes were between 1,000 m² to 29,000m² depending on quantity of parks and setting (urban/suburban/park/open space). For Halton Hills, a minimum size of 0.5ha (1 acre) was determined to be the most appropriate;
 - Site must have appropriate zoning designation. Areas designated for Parks & Open Space uses are most appropriate for off-leash dog activity;
 - Site must be accessible from a main arterial or collector road and allow space for adequate parking. Increased traffic volume in and through residential neighbourhoods must be minimized;
 - Site must be available year round. Dogs need to be exercised all year round and off-leash areas are used at all times of the year despite weather conditions;
 - Site must not conflict with other park users. Dog activity must be controlled and not threaten vulnerable site uses and users;
 - Site must meet minimum setback and layout guidelines. Dog activity must not compromise adjacent land-use and site users.
- Typical Design Standards:
 - Core features include: fencing, signage, waste receptacles, parking, lighting, seating/picnic tables and trees;
 - Optional amenities include: shade structure, potable water source, trails and dog agility equipment;
 - Double entry gate and perimeter fencing should be provided. If space permits, separate small/large dog areas should be included. (Alternate models [no fences, off hour sports fields] have not been implemented with much success in other municipalities);
 - Ensure signage is clear, concise and highly visible;
 - Consider surface and subsurface drainage patterns and implement design features to minimize risk of surface and groundwater contamination, in particular the location of dog waste receptacles;
 - Shaded areas and seating should be available;
 - Provide varied terrain and topography; consider integrating mounds, stumps and boulders to provide visual interest.

- Typical Maintenance Requirements:
 - Physical site conditions should be monitored for condition of surface materials, functioning of site lighting, gate closures and potable water systems (if present);
 - Turf maintenance required (if grass surface) – note season is longer than typical sportsfields;
 - Site needs to be regularly inspected for the presence of uncollected dog waste and capacity of waste bins;
 - Maintenance of parking areas all year (including winter).

Survey and Community Need

According to the Canadian Animal Health Institute, approximately 41% of Canadian households include at least one dog. Currently in the Town of Halton Hills there are 1255 active dog licenses. Historically, Enforcement Services staff has received complaints about dogs off leash. However, these are not tracked as there are no incidents associated with these complaints unless there is an aggressive dog incident requiring action by staff. Halton Hills Canine Services attends and addresses these concerns when possible. Increasingly, staff receives complaints of dogs being off leash in areas where they are not allowed to be. Staff are aware of complaints of dogs off-leash at Trafalgar Sports Park, Gellert Community Park and the Hungry Hollow Trail system.

In 2016, HHDOG worked collaboratively to issue a survey with respect to the use of the current off leash areas. The survey was a joint project with the Town of Halton Hills and HHDOG in response to increased demand for a third off leash area in Georgetown South. It targeted the whole community, but respondents were mainly dog owners who utilize current off-leash areas. 68% of the 142 families surveyed saw the need for additional off-leash area in Halton Hills. The top reasons survey participants identified a need for an additional off leash area included:

- travel distance from home
- overcrowding
- existing dog parks are too small (approximately 0.3ha in size)
- looking for a different experience (agility equipment, water play, prefer to walk on trails with dog, etc.).

Leash Free Halton Hills has been monitoring the attendance at both off-leash parks and has identified that both parks are being heavily used. Cedarvale off-leash area in Georgetown averages approximately 100-125 dogs daily and Prospect off-leash area in Acton averages approximately 75-80 dogs daily.

Membership levels in Leash-Free Halton Hills have varied from year to year. Leash Free Halton Hills is encouraged that recent membership levels are increasing slowly as a result of rebranding and improved communication. Currently, membership in Leash

Free Halton Hills varies between 100 and 120 families. Current membership rates for 2018 are \$20.00 for one year or \$35.00 for two years. Additional services such as Greyhound owners pay a premium rate to access features such as Greyhound Hour (dedicated park use).

However, Leash Free Halton Hills notes it is challenging to recruit membership compared to traditional sports groups for the following reasons:

- leash free parks are open/free to all
- no permits required for use
- membership is not mandatory.

With the Town's population increasing with the additional Vision Georgetown Secondary Plan Area it is expected that the level of use of the current off-leash areas will increase, and may increase incidents of off-leash dogs in unauthorized areas. The Town does not currently have a service level standard, however with additional population, the level of use in off-leash parks will increase. Due to these factors, there is merit in considering a third off-leash Park in Halton Hills.

Site Review

In consultation with Leash Free Halton Hills, staff undertook a detailed review of a number of sites in Georgetown South. Several small parks or parkettes were reviewed in Georgetown South and were found unsuitable based on the criteria. The review also included Gellert Community Park and the storm water management pond on Ten Side Road. These sites were also ruled out by Leash Free Halton Hills due to unfavorable site characteristics including size, accessibility, location and topography. The undeveloped Town owned lands at Gellert Community Park between the tennis courts and Danby Road were not considered at this time due to ongoing studies related to the Gellert Phase 2 expansion. Preliminary plans for these lands by staff have not been approved by Council. It was found through this site review, that there were no existing parks in Georgetown South that can accommodate a new leash free park. Future parkland within Vision Georgetown was also reviewed, but there are likely limited opportunities without displacing other sport facilities. This is based on the minimum leash free park size and the proposed parkland sizes and distribution per the approved Secondary Plan. The size of park desired by Leash Free Halton Hills is larger than the existing leash free parks.

Proposed Location

Once the Georgetown South review was completed, Town staff investigated alternate locations that might be feasible. It was determined that a portion of land located at Trafalgar Sports Park would best meet the leash-free requirements of the community.

The Trafalgar Sports Park Master Plan was approved by Council in 2000 and envisioned fourteen full sized soccer fields, four major ball diamonds and related

parking and amenities, as well as lands for Cemetery use. The plan was developed to address the future community parkland needs, the growth of soccer play and to lessen the reliance on school board and leased sports field and diamond facilities (i.e. Croatian Centre). A total of eleven full sized soccer fields and one major lit ball diamond and related parking have been built over the last 17 years.

In 2013, Council approved an update to the Master Plan (see Appendix B) with the signing of an MOU with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton regarding the provision of a public section at the Holy Redeemer Cemetery (known as the Devereaux Cemetery). The schematic Master Plan defines generalized zones, in order to allow flexibility in the detail implementation of each zone, while maintaining the overall compatibility with the park as a whole.

Change of Use

In the current Trafalgar Sports Park Master Plan (2013 update), the area around the proposed off leash park includes a parking area, an area for court sports (beach volleyball or tennis), a community amenity zone (playground, washroom building, splash pad), a community green (sportsfield and event space) and a youth activity zone (skatepark, BMX, multi-courts). There are also areas of Trafalgar Sports Park that remain undeveloped, and could be repurposed if a demonstrated need arises. If Council approves the location of the leash free park at Trafalgar Sports Park, some of the proposed uses from the 2013 Master Plan Update will not be able to be accommodated, or may be reduced in size. As part of the Recreation and Parks Strategic Action Plan consultation in 2019, staff expect to reaffirm the demand for the activities shown in the Master Plan for Trafalgar Sports Park. The undeveloped parkland at Gellert Community Park may be suitable for some of the proposed activities given its proximity to the residential areas in Georgetown South and Vision Georgetown. This will be fully explored as part of the Gellert Phase 2 review by staff and in coordination with the Recreation and Parks Strategic Plan review consultation.

Staff note the following advantages of a leash free park at Trafalgar Sports Park:

- does not impact existing park users or adjacent neighbours as a retrofit in an existing neighbourhood park would;
- infrastructure exists for water and electrical servicing;
- would encourage existing off leash users of the park to use the leash free park (instead of existing sportsfields);
- parking could be shared with other users;
- elements of water play would not impact environmental objectives or current operational use (irrigation).

Scope of Project

The full scope of the project (based on amenities identified by the group) includes general provisions such as fencing and signage as well as surfacing, grading and

parking. In addition to the standard features the park would also include a shelter, trees, benches, picnic tables, water supply and lighting.

The total cost for the additional dog park at Trafalgar Sports Park is between \$250,000 and \$300,000.

A full breakdown of the costs can be found on page 18 of the Proposal in Appendix A.

The proposed location and design of the off-leash park can be found in Appendix C.

The current operating model for the existing parks is a joint management model, where the Town maintains the grass, collects waste from the receptacles and provides woodchips (for installation by the groups), as well as maintains the parking lots. The Town is also responsible for major capital repairs such as fencing, signage and lighting. The group undertakes the day to day operation including inspections, waste cleanup, identifying any problems with park users, and managing special use times and activities.

Fundraising and Partnerships

As recommended by the Strategic Plan, Leash Free areas are recommended to be developed in partnership with user groups. Staff are recommending that the Trafalgar Sports Park Off-Leash Area be a Joint Capital Project with Leash Free Halton Hills. In past joint capital projects, groups have typically provided a minimum of 10% of the total project costs. For this project, the group would need to raise approximately \$25-30,000.

Leash Free Halton Hills has partnered with the Town on past Leash Free Projects. Past contributions include:

- \$2,200 for Prospect Park (of a total of \$14,900);
- \$3,000 for Cedarvale Park (of a total of \$24,000);
- \$3,239.88 for shelters at both parks.

Leash-Free Halton Hills has initiated a program to create partnerships with local service clubs to help offset costs of additional park amenities such as a water/drinking fountain, exercise/agility equipment and additional seating. Leash Free Halton Hills has begun work to encourage participation of local pet-related businesses to sponsor off-leash activities which will promote social interaction and an increase awareness and usage.

Staff have explored a request for a dog license surcharge to contribute to the capital campaign, and it is not recommended on a preliminary basis. The affordability for obtaining a dog licence with the Town has proven to be successful in getting residents to comply with licensing requirements. Dog licensing rates vary from municipality to municipality. Municipalities that do have higher rates for dog licensing are mainly those who have dedicated municipally staffed Animal Control Officers.

Leash Free Halton Hills planned fundraising activities include: pet walkathon, Christmas in the Park, membership BBQ, in-park advertising and a calendar. Leash-Free Halton Hills also participates in community events where possible, such as: Canada Day activities, Fall Fairs, and Santa Claus Parades.

Leash Free Halton Hills is hoping the fundraising will continue to increase awareness of off-leash availability in Halton Hills and increase membership including park usage. The group has set up a page on their website (<https://leashfreehaltonhills.com/new-park-proposal/>) about the proposal.

Conditions of Approval

Staff is requesting approval from Council in principle for the Trafalgar Sports Park off-leash dog park, subject to the following conditions:

- Council Approval of a detailed financial strategy;
- fundraising targets met by group;
- update of management agreement conditions if necessary.

Next Steps

Upon Council approval of the project in principle, Leash Free Halton Hills would initiate a promotion and fundraising plan, and staff will prepare a detailed financing strategy. Staff will report back on the status of the fundraising efforts and financing strategy as well as any required updates to the management agreement terms in coordination with Leash Free Halton Hills as part of a comprehensive joint capital project proposal for consideration as part of the 2020 Capital Budget review.

Staff will not begin detailed design of the project until the financial strategy has been approved by Council and community fundraising targets have been substantially reached.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

A.3. To provide a broad range of educational, recreational and cultural services that meet the needs of our residents.

A.10 To encourage and promote community volunteerism.

H.1 To provide infrastructure and services that meets the needs of our community in an efficient, effective and environmentally sustainable manner.

H.2 To ensure that infrastructure required for growth is provided in a timely manner.

H.4 To partner with other orders of government, and the private sector, to plan and finance infrastructure expansion and improvements.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no immediate financial impact associated with this report. Once approval in principle has been provided by Council, a detailed financial strategy will be prepared by staff along with any financial implications in 2019. The group will continue to fundraise and the project would be considered by Council as part of the 2020 Budget Committee. The project has been included on a preliminary basis in the 2020 Capital Forecast as a potential community partnership project.

CONSULTATION:

Town Staff have consulted with and will continue to work with Leash Free Halton Hills, Friends of Devereaux House, Enforcement Services and Park & Cemeteries (Public Works) staff.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Leash Free Halton Hills held a community fundraiser on September 28, 2018 where the proposed off-leash Park was presented to their members and attendees. There has been no other public consultation at this time regarding the proposed location at Trafalgar Sports Park.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

The Town is committed to implementing our Community Sustainability Strategy, Imagine Halton Hills. Doing so will lead to a higher quality of life. The recommendation outlined in this report advances the Strategy's implementation. This report supports the cultural vibrancy and social well-being pillar(s) of Sustainability and in summary the alignment of this report with the Community Sustainability Strategy is Good.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Staff will work with Leash Free Halton Hills to conduct a comprehensive public consultation on the proposed location at Trafalgar Sports Park to obtain broader community feedback on the proposal, and report back to Council as part of the detailed financial strategy and formal joint capital project proposal. Additional feedback will be obtained through the public consultation in 2019 for the update to the Recreation and Parks Strategic Plan.

CONCLUSION:

Council approval in principle is being sought for the Leash Free Halton Hills Proposal for the construction of an Off-Leash Park at Trafalgar Sports Park so that Leash Free Halton Hills may then initiate a community fundraising plan and Town staff can prepare a detailed financing/funding strategy as part of a Joint Capital Project Proposal.

Reviewed and Approved by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Okimi". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Kevin Okimi – Manager of Parks and Open Space

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Harris". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Warren Harris, Commissioner of Recreation and Parks

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent Marshall". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Brent Marshall, CAO