

***Proposal by Leash-Free Halton Hills
for a
New Leash-Free Exercise Park in Halton Hills***



Submitted: June 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leash-Free Halton Hills (LFHH), formerly Halton Hills Dog Owners Group, (HHDOG) is the volunteer committee which monitors, maintains and reports on the current off-leash exercise areas in Acton and Georgetown. Since 2003, LFHH and the Town of Halton Hills, Parks and Recreation Department, (ToHH) have worked closely on issues relating to the maintenance of these exercise areas and have addressed operational issues as required. LFHH is proposing that during this, the Lunar year of the Dog, an additional off-leash exercise park be developed in Halton Hills, to address the current over-crowding in our existing parks while addressing the needs of our growing community.

Two surveys have been completed to evaluate park usage and capacities; the first in 2007 the latest in 2016. The most recent survey issued jointly by Leash-Free Halton Hills and the Town of Halton Hills, Parks and Recreation Department highlighted that need by stating that 68% of the 148 families surveyed saw the need for additional off-leash space in Halton Hills.

Our partnership investigated several possible locations in Georgetown that could meet the requirements for an effective new off-leash location. After reviewing these sites, it was determined that a portion of land located at Trafalgar Sports Park would best meet the leash-free requirements outlined herein.

The projected cost of this proposal is approximately \$303,687.00. LFHH is prepared to participate in a co-funding agreement that would see an equitable sharing of costs for ancillary items. LFHH has begun further evaluating off-leash usage, promoting community partnerships and sourcing opportunities that meet our commitment to this proposal.

Membership levels in Leash-Free Halton Hills have shown fluctuations since inception. LFHH is encouraged that recent membership is increasing slowly as a result of rebranding and improved communication.

Since the first park in 2003, the demand for off-leash exercise areas has grown considerably. Heavy use has resulted in increased maintenance requirements at both parks and the need for additional space. Current hardscape degradation, specifically in Georgetown, has resulted in unsafe conditions arising during winter months and after heavy precipitation. A new off-leash exercise area would allow these issues to be addressed.

Leash-Free Halton Hills is excited to present this proposal for review. The development of a new leash-free exercise area is an important issue within Halton Hills. Canine socialization reduces public confrontation, helps increase human activity, promotes better social, physical and mental health for dogs and owners alike. This is an integral part of community development. Leash-Free Halton Hills looks forward to participating in this important project.

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MISSION STATEMENT

To establish a secure, off-leash exercise area where well-socialized canine citizens can exercise in a clean, safe environment without endangering or annoying people, property or wildlife. To develop a beautiful, well-maintained space open to all dog lovers and friends who are willing to uphold the park's rules and restrictions. To view this park as a community-designed area to satisfy the needs of dog-owners and non-dog owners alike.

BACKGROUND

In 2003, the Town of Halton Hills introduced the first off-leash experience to residents of Halton Hills at Prospect Park in Acton. In 2006, Georgetown residents were also introduced to off-leash adventures at Cedarvale Park. Since the implementation of these two off-leash areas, the growing population of Halton Hills has created the need to develop additional leash-free areas to meet the needs of people and pets.

In 2007, a survey undertaken by Halton Hills Dog Owners Group, indicated:

“that there was concern over the deteriorating condition of the off-leash zone at Cedarvale Park, which is likely a factor of high usage levels.”

The survey went further to say:

“it appears as though the provision of off-leash dog zones is adequate to meet demand until at least 2016 although continued maintenance and monitoring of usage levels is recommended.”

In 2016, discussions with ToHH staff resulted in a new detailed survey being commissioned by Halton Hills Dog Owners Group, (HHDOG). This survey was a joint project with the Town of Halton Hills Parks and Recreation staff. It targeted the community, but respondents were mainly dog owners who utilize current off-leash areas. The 2016 survey supported the findings of the 2007 survey stating that 68% of the 148 families surveyed saw the need for additional off-leash space in Halton Hills.

Monitoring of the off-leash areas has identified that both parks are being heavily used.

Cedarvale off-leash area in Georgetown averages approximately 100-125 dogs daily rain or shine, summer or winter. Prospect off-leash area in Acton averages approximately 75-80 dogs daily as well. The result of this high usage has further emphasized the need to supplement the ground cover in both parks with alternate material, presently woodchips, which is supplemented multiple times per season.

BACKGROUND – continued

In 2017, HHDOG was rebranded and became Leash-Free Halton Hills (LFHH). Elections were undertaken, and a new Executive was selected. Since then LFHH has had several meetings with ToHH staff to address unresolved issues including park maintenance, signage and the need for a new off-leash exercise area.

Leash-Free Halton Hills has since increased its community participation, is actively working to increase membership and is seeking partnerships with community groups and local businesses.

MEMBERSHIP

Since our inception, Leash-Free Halton Hills membership has been 100% voluntary.

Membership fees raised go directly to maintaining, improving and promoting the leash-free experience.

Unlike local sports teams, Leash-Free Halton Hills does not require a mandatory membership. LFHH membership fees are dramatically less than those of local hockey, baseball and football teams. LFHH members do not require uniforms, referees, or scoreboards. We don't rent ice time, we don't schedule tournaments, we don't have trophies. We promote safe, open spaces for families to exercise their pets.

Currently, membership in Leash-Free Halton Hills varies between 100 and 120 families.

In addition, a Special membership is extended to a group of users that promotes healthy interaction of Greyhound dogs. Several of these members travel from outside of Halton Hills from areas like Peel, Toronto and Wellington in order to enjoy this unique opportunity. Our Greyhound Hour is the only one like it in the area.

Voluntary membership does not infer lack of use.

Cedarvale off-leash area in Georgetown for example, averages approximately 100-125 dogs daily rain or shine, summer or winter.

Prospect off-leash area in Acton averages approximately 75 dogs daily as well.

Leash-Free Halton Hills is currently looking at dynamic ways to promote and establish a broader membership base.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Response

Of the 148 total respondents to the dog-park survey; 36 live in Acton (24%).

While 88 of respondents live in Georgetown (59.5%), 4 respondents from Limehouse & Hornby (2.7%).

Non-residents comprised 20 respondents (13.5%)

Respondents that have never used the dog-parks: 10 of 146 (6.8%)

(one respondent was not a dog owner, one skipped question)

Accessibility

In Acton area, 15 of 34 (44%) users walk to Prospect Off-leash, suggesting that the dog-park is favorably located. (1 doesn't use parks/ 1 did not answer).

For Cedarvale-users; 75 of 94 (80%) drive, 9 of 94 (10%) walk, 1 of 94 cycle.

For Cedarvale-users from Georgetown-South, 33 of 33 (100%) drive to this dog-park.

During Peak Usage Times - Overall, of 138 respondents to the question (residents and non-residents)

24% answered park is uncrowded

36% answered park is crowded

16% answered –'don't use dog-parks'

24% answered 'other'

During Peak Usage Times - at Prospect, of 36 respondents:

13 (36%) answered park is uncrowded

12 (33%) answered park is crowded

5 (14%) answered –'don't use dog-parks'

5 (14%) answered 'other'

2 answered no response

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS – continued

During Peak Usage Times - at Cedarvale

Georgetown, Glen Williams, Hornby, Limehouse, of 86 respondents:

- 37 (43%) respondents answered - park is crowded
- 15 (17%) respondents answered - park is uncrowded
- 17 (20%) respondents answered - don't use
- 17 (20%) respondents answered - other

Georgetown-South, of 39 respondents:

- 19 (49%) said park is crowded
- 4 (10%) said park is uncrowded
- 16 (41%) answered 'don't use' or other

Non-Usage of Cedarvale Dog-Park

The top three reasons cited for not using Cedarvale were:

- 1) 'Other' (than given)
- 2) Overcrowding
- 3) Distance

For 'Other', the main concerns were:

- a) Behavior of owners, dogs, including not picking up feces
- b) Poor ground conditions
- c) Location – not in walking distance

See a Need for an Additional Off-leash?

Overall: of 142 Responses from residents and non-residents:

- 68% said Yes
- 32% said No

Acton area: of 34 responses:

- 19 (56%) said Yes
- 15 (44%) said No

Top 3 reasons:

- 1) Overcrowding
- 2) Looking for a different experience
- 3) Dog-parks are too small

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS – continued

Georgetown area: of 73 respondents:

73% said Yes

27% said No

Top 3 Reasons:

- 1) Distance
- 2) Looking for different off-leash experience
- 3) Current park too small/overcrowded

(*Source: local area break-down data are from the raw responses on Survey-Monkey, not summaries.)

In 2017, Leash-Free Halton Hills was presented a new off-leash study from the Town of Halton Hills, Parks and Recreation staff in response to a request for further details arising from the 2016 Survey. This study focused on local issues including population, level of service and canine population. Data from this study is included in this proposal.

Level of Service

- Level of service currently provided in Halton Hills – 1:30,000 (# of parks / population)
- Level of service currently provided in Georgetown – 1:40,000
- Level of service currently provided in Acton – 1:15,000
- Level of service in Halton Hills with 3rd off-leash park – 1:20,000

Canine Population

Obtaining accurate data on the number of dogs in Halton Hills has proven to be a difficult task. LFHH directly contacted local veterinary practices to obtain rough numbers of canine patients but was rebuffed with only general information that was deemed inaccurate. Inquiries through ToHH did generate numbers of licensed dogs of approximately 1300. LFHH feels this number is

Canine Population – continued

also, inaccurate. Based on a National survey of Canadian dog owners, it is estimated that 30% of all families have at least one dog in their household. This would make the *estimated* canine population of Halton Hills in excess of 3000. Further data shows a large percentage of dog owners for personal reasons, do not license their pets.

SITE REQUIREMENTS

After discussions between Leash-Free Halton Hills Executive, ToHH Staff, survey respondents and general public, a criteria and list of site requirements was created.

For some, an off-leash area may provide the primary opportunity for dog owners, guardians and handlers to interact with other people and exercise and socialize their dogs while offering a primary source of recreation. We believe that they deserve to have their taxpayer dollars applied towards a safe, accessible place where they can meet other people while exercising themselves and their dogs.

The land must be large enough to accommodate all the dogs and their owners. It should be at least two acres or more, surrounded by a 5'-6' fence. The property should also include shaded areas, a suitable water source, adequate resting areas, shelters and waste disposal bins. The exercise area needs adequate drainage to preserve soil quality, which will in turn facilitate cleanliness.

Sufficient parking space available near the off-leash area is mandatory. To ensure the safety of everyone, it is recommended that two separate double-gated entry areas be installed. For the enjoyment and comfort of all the park's guests; benches and waste receptacles, along with plastic pick-up bag dispensers must also be available. Ideally, the off-leash area should include a separate area for large dogs and a smaller alternate area for puppies/small dogs, as this will aid in socialization and reduce conflicts.

Additional site requirements include the following:

- secure rustic fencing
- 2 double-gated entry areas at separate locations, as well as a maintenance gate at one end
- walking path inside perimeter of park fence to facilitate walking in all weather
- adequate lighting for coverage of hours of use year round

SITE REQUIREMENTS – continued

- code of conduct signage as at other two LFHH parks
- seating in the form of benches mounted on concrete pads located around inner perimeter of park
- gravelled area at all gate entries areas to minimize mud and improve drainage
- access to potable water for dogs to drink
- access to hose for rinsing/cooling off, pet washing station
- large gazebo for inclement weather
- trees for shade and interest
- raised rough (tall grasses etc.) garden so dogs have somewhere to explore
- additional security fence wings outside back end of leash-free area to help keep dogs safe from road and train tracks when visiting wading pond
- access to year-round washroom facilities
- roadside signage to identify leash-free park
- wheelchair accessibility

PROPOSED NEW LOCATION

Leash-Free Halton Hills working with ToHH Parks and Recreations staff, investigated several possible locations in Georgetown that could meet the requirements for an effective new off-leash location. After reviewing these sites, it was determined that a portion of land located at Trafalgar Sports Park would best meet the leash-free requirements outlined herein.

The initial options presented by ToHH Parks and Recreation staff included several locations in Georgetown South. Three locations near The Gellart Centre were ruled out by LFHH due to unfavorable site characteristics including size, location and topography. Several small parks or parkettes were also reviewed in Georgetown South and were found similarly unsuitable.

An additional site in Georgetown South near a stormwater management pond was reviewed with interest and included in LFHH's initial short list. LFHH eventually ruled out this site due to concerns over water quality, pet health, safety and servicing.

Vision Georgetown

Leash-Free Halton Hills was closely monitoring the "Vision Georgetown" project anticipating lands be included within the development for a new leash-free area. LFHH Executive attended all public meetings as well as presentations of the Initial Draft Proposal and Final Draft Proposal. Input was provided throughout the consultation process outlining the need for such a space to be included. As of the Final Draft Proposal, land outlined for new park usage was not large enough for an off-leash area. Further, proposed open space was generally connected to proposed school locations conflicting with any off-leash activities.

Prior to the Final Draft Report, ToHH staff presented LFHH with another proposed location, The Trafalgar Sports Park. The site included many features that LFHH deemed crucial including adequate exercise area, parking adjacent to the off-leash area and the potential for onsite

PROPOSED NEW LOCATION – included

water. These features, included with LFHH Site Requirements, make the Trafalgar Sports Park a favorable choice for a new off-leash area.

Proposed New Location



PROPOSED NEW LOCATION – included

This location has the additional benefit of being near adjacent sports fields where families often bring their dogs with them. This off-leash area would allow these families to exercise and socialize the dogs safely reducing the potential of pet/human conflicts.

COSTING

Costing outlined below has been provided to Leash-Free Halton Hills by ToHH staff, Parks and Recreations Dept.

	Qty	Unit	Unit Price	Total
General Provisions				
Fencing	460	m	\$150.00	\$69,000.00
Signage	2	ea.	\$250.00	\$500.00
			Subtotal	\$69,500.00
Surface				
Drainage Base (Tile Drain)	0	m	\$25.00	\$0.00
Rough Grading	2000	m2	\$3.00	\$6000.00
Fine Grading	10500	m2	\$2.00	\$21,000.00
Seeding	10500	m2	\$1.50	\$15,750.00
			Subtotal	\$42,750.00
Granular				
Rough Grading	900	m2	\$3.00	\$2700.00
Granular Driveway and Parking	900	m2	\$25.00	\$22,500.00
Limestone Path (2m wide)	850	m2	\$30.00	\$25,500.00
			Subtotal	\$50,700.00
Enhancements				
Shelter (Basic)	1	ls	\$30,000.00	\$30,000.00
Trees	40	ea.	\$500.00	\$500.00
Benches	4	ea.	\$1000.00	\$4000.00
Picnic Tables	2	ea.	\$500.00	\$1000.00
Lighting	5	ea.	\$5000.00	\$25,000.00
			Subtotal	\$80,000.00
			Subtotal	\$242,950.00
25% Contingency (misc., costs, fees, bonding, permits, HST portion etc.)				<u>\$60,737.50</u>
			Total	<u>\$303,687.50</u>

Co-Funding Participation

Leash-Free Halton Hills respects the need for a partnership in funding an off-leash area. LFHH is willing to participate in funding this project; however, standard funding models for sports teams are not representative of the funding levels for a public park of this nature. As outlined in the Membership portion of our proposal, membership is nominal and voluntary; it is not a prerequisite of using the off-leash area.

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. LFHH 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. It is our expectation that this will encourage new membership and increase funding.

Co-funding is an important portion of this proposal but should not be considered the determining factor when assessing the need for a new leash-free area or the urgency in which it is required. Co-funding should be considered a long-term partnership between Leash-Free Halton Hills and the Town of Halton Hills in which the community benefits.

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising activity over the past few years has had minimal success. Generating funds has primarily been focused on membership levels and donations.

Late in 2017, LFHH elected a new Executive team. This has rejuvenated the group, while again focusing attention on our Mission and overall goals. Since then, Leash-Free Halton Hills has participated in new ventures including the Local Community Open House held in fall of 2017 and most recently the Earth Day and Sustainability Fair in 2018.

Fundraising activities are currently being planned.

Leash-Free Halton Hills fundraising activities may include some of the following:

- Supplementary Dog Licensing Fee
- Pet walkathon
- Christmas in the Park
- First annual Membership BBQ
- Annual Calendar
- On-site Membership drive
- Go-fund-me page
- In-park advertising opportunities

Leash-Free Halton Hills looks forward to participating in additional community events where possible, including:

- Canada Day activities
- Fall Fairs, both Acton and Georgetown
- Santa Claus Parades, both Acton and Georgetown

It is our belief that by increasing awareness of off-leash availability in Halton Hills, membership, fundraising and park usage will increase.

PARTNERSHIPS

Leash-Free Halton Hills has begun actively seeking partnerships with local businesses and community groups to work with and/or sponsor activities at our off-leash exercise areas.

In our research for this proposal, we have investigated how other off-leash areas handle this important activity. We hope to build from their experiences while creating local partnerships that will make the off-leash experience in Halton Hills a truly enjoyable time for everyone.

Leash-Free Halton Hills has already started approaching potential partners. Our initial contacts are being met with eagerness and anticipation.