



REPORT

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

REPORT FROM: Kevin Okimi, OALA, CSLA, PMP
Manager of Parks and Open Space

Suzanne Jones
Clerk & Director of Legislative Services

DATE: October 7, 2019

REPORT NO.: RP-2019-0032

RE: Off Leash Dog Park at Trafalgar Sports Park - Update

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report RP-2019-0032 dated October 3, 2019 regarding the Off-Leash Park at Trafalgar Sports Park – Update be received;

AND FURTHER THAT the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to sign the updated Management Agreement as outlined in Report RP-2019-0032;

AND FURTHER THAT Council

A) Approve the request to implement a surcharge of \$5.00 per dog license to be directed into a fund to be used for the improvement of Leash Free Parks; and

B) Direct the initial contribution of the dog license surcharge (pending Council approval) of up to \$16,000 (over five years) be directed towards the construction of the Off-Leash Park at Trafalgar Sports Park;

OR

C) Deny the request to implement a surcharge of \$5.00 per dog license.

AND FURTHER THAT Council

A) Approve the updated financing model as requested by Leash Free Halton Hills as outlined in Report RP-2019-0032 [\$15,500 total projected funding (5.2%) with \$8,000 funding available (2.7%)], and refer the project to Budget Committee for consideration as part of the 2020 Capital Budget;

OR

B) Require that Leash Free Halton Hills agree to contribute 10% of the project total (\$30,000) prior to the project proceeding as approved in the original joint project;

AND FURTHER THAT any shortfall in the cashflow required for the project be funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve until funding is received through future revenues from the surcharge or fundraising and can be repaid to the reserve, as outlined in Report RP-2019-0032;

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back on the status of fundraising commitments and project status in 2020 as outlined in Report RP-2019-0032.

BACKGROUND:

In October 2002, a community 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) in 2002 and an additional park at Cedarvale Park (Georgetown) in 2006. 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 strategic plan recommended that staff continue to monitor and engage community groups interested in the establishment, maintenance and ongoing management of the off-leash dog zones including the establishment of an appropriate cost-sharing agreement for new facilities.

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:

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.

In December 2018, Council approved Report RP-2018-0028 which read in part:

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.

The conditions outlined in the report were as follows:

- Council Approval of a detailed financial strategy;
- fundraising targets (10% of the total budget) met by group;
- update of Management Agreement conditions if necessary.

COMMENTS:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the joint capital project for a leash free park in Trafalgar Sports Park in advance of the 2020 Capital Budget Committee and to update the joint project requirements as requested by Leash Free Halton Hills (LFHH). The conceptual plan for the Trafalgar Sports Park Leash Free Park is included as Appendix A.

Public Input

As outlined in the original joint project, a public consultation process was undertaken to receive comments on the proposal for a leash free park at Trafalgar Sports Park. A web page and survey were set up on the Town's Let's Talk Halton Hills site from June to September 2019 to receive feedback on the proposal. Overall, there was support for the proposal (81%), and over 200 responses were received. There were some concerns about the overall need for leash free parks, operations of the current leash free parks, and the potential of leash free parks displacing other needed programs and facilities (i.e. washrooms, youth activities, etc.). There were also some concerns expressed that Trafalgar Sports Park is not as accessible and requires most users to drive to the site. Generally though, the project was supported by the majority of respondents. The summary of the Let's Talk Halton Hills consultation including comments, is included as Appendix B.

Update on Fundraising:

LFHH has raised a total of \$8,000 of funding to be committed to the TSP Leash Free Park. Leash Free Halton Hills continues to plan fundraising activities including: 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.

Although they have not secured the total amount of fundraising as outlined in the original joint project approved by Council (\$30,000), LFHH is willing to commit to raising an additional \$2,500 per year for the next three years to be used towards this project. This would result in a total of \$15,500 raised by LFHH towards the project (\$8,000 in 2019, \$7,500 projected fundraising 2019-2022).

The amount raised to date is short of the 10% of the project total (\$30,000 required) which will be further discussed below. The projected total represents approximately 5.2% of the total funding approved in principle by Council. The current amount raised (\$8,000) represents 2.7% of the total project cost.

Dog License Surcharge:

To offset the lower contribution, LFHH has requested that the Town consider charging a \$5.00 per license surcharge on all dog licenses sold, to provide a capital funding stream that could offset the balance of the funds still to be raised in order to meet the 10% fund raising target.

The Town Clerk and Licensing/Enforcement staff have reviewed this request and have identified the following concerns:

- Current dog licensing fees are in line with neighbouring municipalities, increasing fees may be a disincentive for residents to license their dogs.
- The Town provides options to purchase a 1 year, 2 year or 3 year license. A \$5.00 increase equals a 13% increase on a 1 year license, a 9% increase on a 2 year license, and a 6% increase on a 3 year license. These are substantial increases.
- The additional fee (surcharge) would be charged to all residents obtaining a license, whether or not they are users of local dog parks.

Based on the historic total number of licenses issued annually, this type of surcharge would raise approximately \$3,200 annually. LFHH is requesting that the first 5 years of this surcharge be directed towards the Trafalgar Sports Park Leash Free Park for a total contribution of \$16,000. Funds collected after the initial amount would be used for future leash free area improvements.

Staff does not recommend implementing a surcharge for the reasons outlined above but has provided Council with options to approve the surcharge or not.

A breakdown of dog licensing revenue collected and additional revenue based on Leash Free Halton Hills' proposed \$5.00 increase is attached as Appendix C. Additionally, municipal comparison pricing is attached as Appendix D.

Joint Project funding considerations:

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 2019 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, regardless of membership;
- no permits required for use; and
- membership is optional.

LFHH has indicated that the factors above, as well as the need to continue to improve/manage the existing leash free parks, make providing the 10% funding match that has been provided in the past, not achievable from the group fundraising alone, given the scope of the project. Existing leash free parks do not have full amenities (such as water supply) which the group continues to fundraise for. Leash Free Halton Hills has also constructed shade structures in both leash free parks over the last few years (fully funded by the group).

The total budget of the project is from \$250,000-\$300,000 resulting in a 10% joint project match of \$25,000 to \$30,000, however, there may be opportunities to reduce the total cost through detailed design, material selections and value engineering.

If Council approves the surcharge requested by LFHH, it would provide approximately \$16,000 towards the joint project over the next 5 years. This in combination of with the group's commitment of \$15,500 would be a total contribution of \$31,500 which is just over the 10% of the total estimated project budget.

LFHH is requesting that Council consider the project on its own merits based on the funding committed by the group (projected at 5.2% or 10% depending on if the surcharge is approved).

LFHH is requesting that the project proceed regardless of whether the surcharge suggested by LFHH is approved or not, based on the current funding available and committed. Typically fundraising agreements are formalized with the finances available at hand, not projected fundraising revenues, unless special funding sources such as Trillium grants which have time limitations are part of the funding strategy. Should future fundraising commitments not be met, there may not be any way to recover the funds that were committed.

Staff recommend that the partnership be advanced when 10% of the funds are available or secured through firm commitments per the funding approved in the original joint

project, but have provided Council with options to approve the revised funding strategy and surcharge or not, based on Leash Free Halton Hills' request.

Management Agreement Updates

The original Management Agreement was prepared for the Prospect Park Leash Free Area. It does not specifically include the Cedarvale Park Leash Free Area, but has served as the basis of the operation at Cedarvale Park as well. While there are no major updates proposed to the Management Agreement, LFHH has identified that there are challenges with grass maintenance due to the fact that typical field/turf maintenance ends in late October and begins in Mid April, but depending on weather conditions turf may continue to grow beyond these times. The Town typically does not have seasonal staff and machines available outside of these core times to perform maintenance, though it is acknowledged that there is continued use of the leash free parks. Staff attempt to prioritize when possible to address these needs, but the group may be required to cut turf themselves at some of these shoulder seasons. It is recommended that Staff work with LFHH to update Schedule B of the Management Agreement which specifies responsibilities of each group, and that the management agreement be updated to include all leash free parks, including the new park at Trafalgar Sports Park if approved.

Next Steps

If Council approves the funding and proposed surcharge as proposed by Leash Free Halton Hills, the project will be included in the preliminary 2020 Budget for Council's consideration. Leash Free Halton Hills would continue to promote and fundraise. Leash Free Halton Hills would enter into a financial agreement to outline their commitment to funding over the next three years. Should Council decide to require the funding levels originally approved as part of the joint project and/or not approve the surcharge, Staff will report back on the status of the fundraising efforts and financing strategy in coordination with Leash Free Halton Hills as part of future budget processes once the fundraising targets have been met.

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:

If Council approves the funding strategy outlined in this report, the project will be included in the Preliminary 2020 Budget for Council review at Budget Committee. Any shortfall of fundraising/surcharge less than the 10% originally identified as part of the joint project funding will need to be funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve either permanently, or on an interim basis until future funds are received. Should LFHH still be required to contribute the full \$30,000 (10%) of the project budget, the project will not be included in the 2020 Budget, but will be included in 2021 as part of the Capital Forecast as a potential community partnership project.

The additional operating costs of the leash free park based on the Town's responsibilities in the Management Agreement would be approximately \$10,000 / year for the new park at Trafalgar Sports Park, and the operating impact will be addressed in the detailed capital budget submission.

CONSULTATION:

Town Staff have consulted with and will continue to work with Leash Free Halton Hills, Friends of Devereaux House, Clerks (Licensing & Enforcement Services), Transportation and Public works (Park & Cemeteries), and the Town Treasurer.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

The Town posted the project information for the proposed Leash Free Park at Trafalgar Sports Park on the Town's Let's Talk Halton Hills Page in order to obtain broader public input than past surveys, as well as requesting input from user groups who use the park. The summary of the Let's Talk Survey is contained in Appendix B. In general, there was support for another leash free park located 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 worked 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.

CONCLUSION:

Leash Free Halton Hills is requesting that Council approve a modified funding strategy and surcharge on dog license fees, for the joint capital project for the construction of an Off-Leash Park at Trafalgar Sports Park.

Reviewed and Approved by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. J. Leighton".

Moya Jane Leighton, Manager of Accounting and Town Treasurer

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Harris".

Warren Harris, Commissioner of Recreation and Parks

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent Marshall".

Brent Marshall, Chief Administrative Officer