



District of Saanich

# People, Pets & Parks:

A District Wide Strategy for Sharing Saanich's Parks

## Draft Strategy

---

People, Pets and Parks:  
A District Wide Strategy for Sharing Saanich's Parks

District of Saanich

---

May 2023



## Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
1.0 Introduction	8
2.0 Methodology	9
3.0 Demographics	11
4.0 Background Research	14
5.0 Service Analysis	16
6.0 Benefits of Pet Ownership	17
7.0 Environmental Research	18
8.0 Community Values and Challenges	19
9.0 Vision, Guiding Principles, & Recommendations	21
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>23</b>
Planning, Enforcement, and Education	
1. Bylaw & Regulations	24
2. Education & Enforcement	28
3. Stewardship	29
4. Maintenance	30
Leash Optional Areas	
5. Typologies	31
6. Monitoring & Evaluation	38
<b>Implementation</b>	<b>40</b>
Appendix A: Leash-Optional Typology Examples	
Appendix B: Park System Analysis (to be finalized)	
Appendix C: Detailed Findings	
Appendix D: Pets & the Environment	
Appendix E: Round 1 Engagement Summary	
Appendix F: Round 1 Engagement Appendices	
Appendix G: Round 2 Engagement Summary	
Appendix H: Round 2 Engagement Appendices	

# Executive Summary

## ***Introduction***

The District of Saanich initiated the People, Pets and Parks Strategy (the Strategy) in 2021 to respond to a growing population of people and pets, increasing density, changing community needs, concern for the environment, and an increase in park visitation. The purpose of the Strategy is to provide positive relationships between people, pets and the environment.

Pets are a welcome part of the Saanich community, and both people and pets benefit from outdoor recreation and use of public parks. However, as the population of Saanich and the Capital Regional District continues to grow, so does the demand for parks and other outdoor amenities. With an increased use of shared outdoor spaces, some challenges have arisen, including differing community expectations, conflicting park uses, increased park management requirements, and environmental impacts.

The People, Pets and Parks Strategy provides recommendations and a framework to guide the future shared use of Saanich parks, and describes where we are, where we want to go, and how we can get there.

## ***The Strategy Process***

The People, Pets and Parks Strategy is informed by existing District of Saanich strategies related to parks and trails, existing pet related policies and bylaws, precedent research including pet policies and management strategies from other jurisdictions, stakeholder and community engagement, and an in-depth analysis of Saanich's parks system.

Two rounds of engagement were important to the creation of this Draft Strategy. Throughout the community engagement process, the project team sought to ensure that concerns and aspirations from all perspectives were heard, understood, and considered and that the Strategy recommendations linked back to the public input received. Engagement included stakeholder workshops, virtual community conversations, an open house, a statistically valid phone survey, and two open online questionnaires.

There were a variety of perspectives from pet owners and non-pet owners, and the Strategy highlights common values and challenges, building a Strategy from that foundation. The range and complexity of views, even among pet-owners, did not lead to one easy solution. It required balancing conflicting views, finding compromises, and returning to the community's common values.

The Vision statement, guiding principles, and goals below set the direction for the Strategy. They recognize the complexity of meeting diverse community needs, the broader objectives within the parks system, and the aspiration of finding the right balance. While the statements are broad, they provide a touchstone and are directly linked to the community values we heard in the first round of community engagement.

### **Vision Statement**

*Saanich parks are safe, accessible, and enjoyable for all park users and provide a variety of experiences that balance the different needs of people and pets while protecting environmental integrity and promoting stewardship.*

### **Guiding Principles**

1. Parks are welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for everyone, including pet owners and non-pet owners.
2. The importance of parks is essential to pets and their owners' health and well-being.
3. Planning for pet amenities encourages stewardship and protects environmentally sensitive areas, wildlife, and biodiversity.
4. We all contribute to and have a shared responsibility for creating welcoming and inclusive parks.

### **Goals**

1. Ensure park rules, regulations and bylaws are clear and easily understood.
2. Improve compliance with pet rules and licensing.
3. Improve protection of important and sensitive environmental areas.
4. Create a diversity of opportunities in parks for people with pets.
5. Ensure there are adequate places in parks for people who don't want to encounter dogs or other pets off-leash.

## ***Overarching Approach***

The creation of the recommendations in this Strategy explored many different options for park amenities, regulations, and management strategies to find the best ways to address the values and challenges and to achieve the Vision. A multi-pronged approach to managing pets in parks is proposed that:

- Shifts the Animal Bylaw and Park Management Bylaw from allowing dogs to be off-leash and under control to requiring all pets to be on-leash, under control unless in a designated leash-optional area or on designated trails.
- Provides leash-optional opportunities, dog exercise areas, trails and amenities in each neighbourhood.
- Prioritizes communication, education, signage, and enforcement.

## ***Key Recommendations***

The most substantial recommendations include **updating the Animal Bylaw** to require all pets to be on-leash in Saanich parks unless within a designated leash-optional area or trail. The requirement for pets to be under control in parks, even when off-leash, still applies and the definition has been updated to be consistent with that of the CRD. This approach is a substantial change from the current state of dogs being allowed off-leash, under control in all parks, unless otherwise specified.

There were several factors that led to this recommendation. There were many requests from across the community for better clarity on where people are likely to encounter dogs off-leash and requests for areas without off-leash dogs. Changing the Animal Bylaw to require pets on-leash in parks unless otherwise specified will improve clarity, recognizes diverse needs of park users, reduce conflicting uses, and protect habitats that are important to natural systems in Saanich and include some of Canada's most threatened ecosystems.

It was not only non-dog owners making the request for more areas without off-leash dogs. Some dog owners do not currently let their dogs off-leash for a variety of reasons, such as their pets still being in training, being shy, or reactive.

**A detailed review of Saanich parks** was done to identify the best places in the park system for leash-optional areas. The review took a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood approach and considered the park type, existing amenities, size of open space, environmental sensitivity, and a variety of other factors. The goal was to identify those parks that are best suited to accommodating dogs off-leash.

The results of the park review showed that there are a limited number of parks that have large enough open spaces for dogs to run an exercise that do not have sports

amenities, playgrounds, restoration areas, or environmentally sensitive areas. As a result, the recommendation for parks with leash-optional areas includes many parks that have sports fields where leash-optional uses could be allowed when the fields are not in use. This approach will require additional maintenance of sports fields to ensure fields are safe and maintained to an appropriate standard of play.

### ***Proposed Leash-Optional, Under Control Areas***

There are 57 parks, plus one beach with multiple access points, that have been identified as places that can accommodate leash-optional areas. Three types of leash-optional areas are proposed:

- Leash-optional areas with no fencing (or limited fencing to separate uses)
- Leash-optional areas with full fencing
- Leash-optional trails

The parks proposed for leash-optional areas are listed in the table on the following page. Unfenced locations could have strategic fencing added where it would reduce environmental impacts or prevent conflicts with playgrounds or other recreational amenities.

Of the 57 parks, 12 have been identified for permanent, fenced leash-optional areas, including:

- Brodick Park
- Cuthbert Holmes Park
- Emily Carr Park
- PKOLS (Mt. Douglas Park)
- Regina Park
- Houlihan Park
- Hyacinth Park
- Lambrick Park
- Layritz Park
- Rainbow Park
- Rudd Park
- Sierra Park

One beach, Cordova Bay Beach, has been identified for designated year-round, leash-optional beach access.

A 1.5km trail loop has been identified within PKOLS (Mt. Douglas Park) that will be available year-round for leash-optional trail access. A large fenced area with trails has also been identified within Cuthbert Holmes Park.

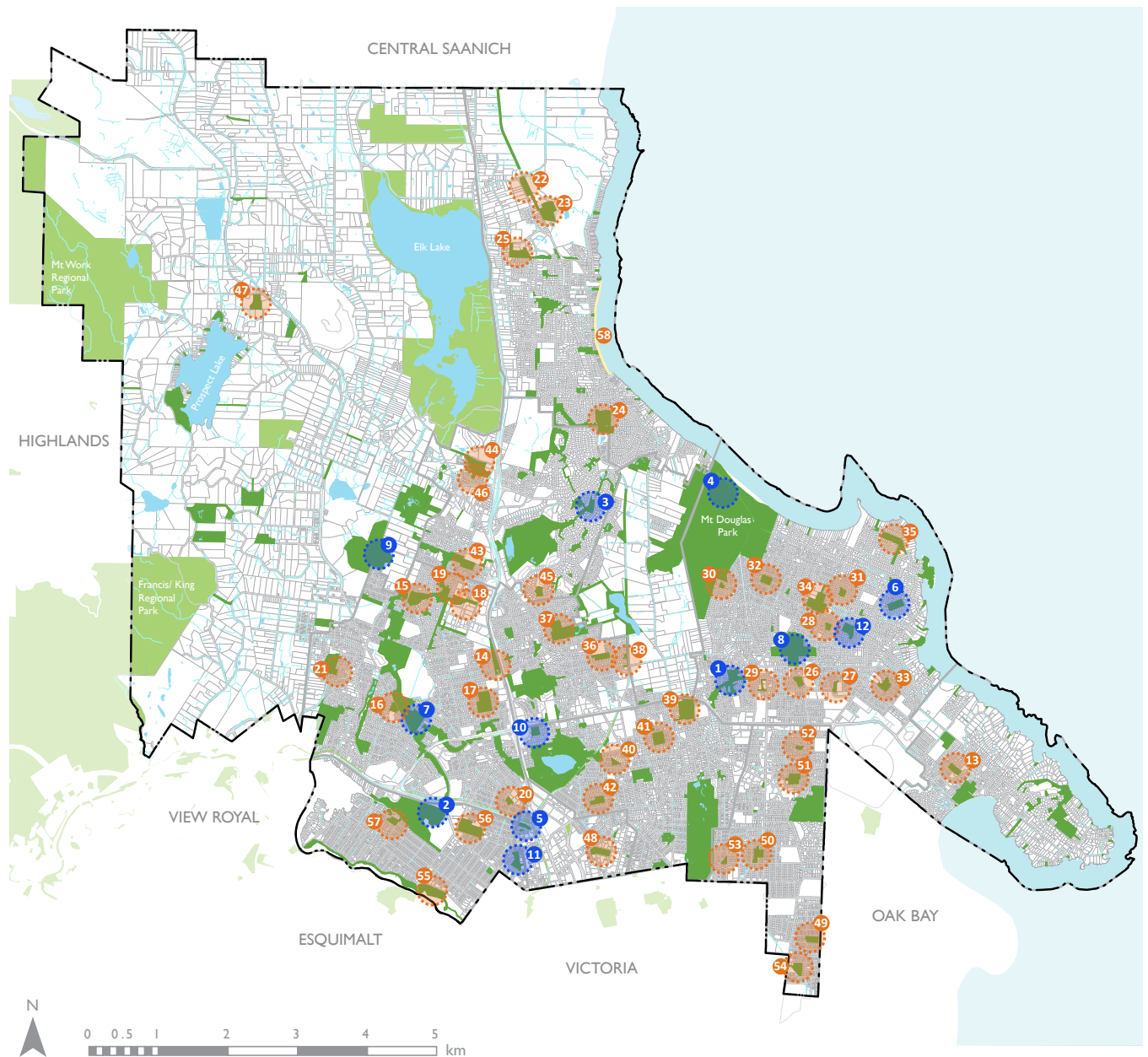
Opportunities for leash-optional areas should be taken into account when pursuing future parkland acquisition. There may also be opportunities for pet amenities to be incorporated into future developments.

## Parks with Proposed Leash-Optional, Under Control Areas

Park Name	Local Area	Type
Allenby Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
Ambassador Park	North Quadra	Unfenced
Baxter Park	Carey	Unfenced
Beckwith Park	North Quadra	Unfenced
Blair Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Braefoot Park	Quadra	Unfenced
Brodick Park	Gordon Head	Fenced
Browning Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
Brydon Park	Royal Oak	Unfenced
Commonwealth Place	Royal Oak	Unfenced
Copley West Park	Carey	Unfenced
Cordova Bay Beach (multiple access points)	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Cuthbert Holmes Park	Tillicum	Fenced + Trail
Edge Park	Carey	Unfenced
Emily Carr Park	Royal Oak	Fenced
Fairburn Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Fowler Park	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Francisco Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Glanford Park	Carey	Unfenced
Glencraig Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Gorge Park	Tillicum	Unfenced
Hampton Park	Tillicum	Unfenced
Harvest Lane Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Horner Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
Houlihan Park	Gordon Head	Fenced
Hyacinth Park	Carey	Fenced
Industrial Buffer Park	Carey	Unfenced
King Alfred Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Kings Road Nature Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
Lambrick Park	Gordon Head	Fenced
Layritz Park	Rural Saanich	Fenced
Leeds Park	Quadra	Unfenced
Lochside Park	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Majestic Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Maltwood Park	Royal Oak	Unfenced

Park Name	Local Area	Type
Maynard Park	Cadboro Bay	Unfenced
Mcbriar Park	North Quadra	Unfenced
McMinn Park	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Meadow Park	Tillicum	Unfenced
Montague Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Moor Park	Carey	Unfenced
Mount View Park	Carey	Unfenced
Normandy - SCP Park	Royal Oak	Unfenced
Onyx Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
PKOLS (Mt. Douglas Park)	Gordon Head	Fenced + Trail
Prospect Lake	Rural Saanich	Unfenced
Rainbow Park	Quadra	Fenced
Regina Park	Saanich Core	Fenced
Reynolds Park	Quadra	Unfenced
Rosedale Park	Carey	Unfenced
Rudd Park	Tillicum	Fenced
Rutledge Park	Saanich Core	Unfenced
Sayward Hill Park	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Sierra Park	Gordon Head	Fenced
Tolmie Park	Quadra	Unfenced
Tyndall Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Vantreight Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Wetherby Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced





MAP LEGEND	
	Fenced Parks/Trails
1	BRODICK PARK
2	CUTHBERT HOLMES PARK
3	EMILY CARR PARK
4	PKOLS (MT DOUGLAS PARK)
5	REGINA PARK
6	HOULIHAN PARK
7	HYACINTH PARK
8	LAMBRICK PARK
9	LAYRITZ PARK
10	RAINBOW PARK
11	RUDD PARK
12	SIERRA PARK
	Unfenced Parks/Trails
13	MAYNARD PARK
14	BAXTER PARK
15	COPLLEY WEST PARK
16	EDGE PARK
17	GLANFORD PARK
18	INDUSTRIAL BUFFER PARK
19	MOOR PARK
20	MOUNT VIEW PARK
21	ROSEDALE PARK
22	FOWLER PARK
23	LOCHSIDE PARK
24	McMINN PARK
25	SAYWARD HILL PARK
26	BLAIR PARK
27	FAIRBURN PARK
28	FRANCISCO PARK
29	GLENCRAIG PARK
30	HARVEST LANE PARK
31	KING ALFRED PARK
32	MAJESTIC PARK
33	MONTAGUE PARK
34	TYNDALL PARK
35	VANTREIGHT PARK
36	AMBASSADOR PARK
37	BECKWITH PARK
38	McBRIAR PARK
39	BRAEFOOT PARK
40	LEEDS PARK
41	REYNOLDS PARK
42	TOLMIE PARK
43	BRYDON PARK
44	COMMONWEALTH PLACE
45	MALTWOOD PARK
46	NORMANDY - SCP PARK
47	PROSPECT LAKE
48	RUTLEDGE PARK
49	ALLENBY PARK
50	BROWNING PARK
51	HORNER PARK
52	ONYX PARK
53	WETHERBY PARK
54	KINGS ROAD NATURE PARK
55	GORGE
56	HAMPTON
57	MEADOW
58	CORDOVA BAY BEACH: PARKER PARK AGATE PARK McMORRAN PARK CORDOVA BAY PARK FENN AVE BEACH ACCESS WALEMA AVE BEACH ACCESS D'ARCY LANE BEACH ACCESS TIMBER PLACE BEACH ACCESS

Figure 1. Proposed Fenced and Unfenced Leash-Optional Areas and Trails

## Cuthbert Holmes Park

- Leash-optional Area Size: 4 hectares
- Boundary: Fenced
- Park Type: Wooded trail
- Proposed fenced off-leash area on a large berm within a wooded park with trail.
- Dogs are welcome on all other trails on-leash.



*Cuthbert Holmes Park, GoogleEarth*

### Location: PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park)

- Leash-optional trail length: 1.9km
- Leash-optional area Size: 0.4 hectares
- Boundary: Proposed fenced area + Proposed fenced off-leash trail
- Park Type: Wooded trail
- Proposed fenced off-leash trail with a 1.5km loop, and a fenced converted gravel pit.
- Dogs are welcome on all other trails on-leash.



PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park), GoogleEarth

**Other Recommendations**

Other key recommendations that emerged through research, analysis, and community engagement include:

- increased waste management
- Increased park maintenance, especially sports fields
- improved signage
- increased education and communication

**Implementation**

The implementation of the Strategy must take multiple actions simultaneously and phase in changes over time. An increase of capital and operating resources, as well as dedicated staff time is required to achieve most of the recommended actions. The most substantial additional resources needed include:

- A dedicated staff person to make bylaw updates, support coordination with adjacent jurisdictions, create a Communications and Signage Plan, implement park upgrades at designated leash-optional areas, and to monitor and adapt the plan.
- Seasonal staff person to provide outreach and education during summer months.
- Capital funding to establish leash-optional amenities (fencing, signage, waste bins, etc.)
- Operational resources, such as an additional refuse collection truck and staff to accommodate increased refuse collection.
- An additional staff person to increase maintenance of sports fields and to maintain new fenced leash-optional areas and amenities.
- Additional staff for enforcement through the bylaw enforcement services provided by the CRD.

There may also be opportunities for new amenities for pets through private developments. These will be particularly important to include in medium and high-density areas where limited private outdoor space will increase pressure on the park system.

Other partnerships could include the Capital Regional District, adjacent jurisdictions, pet advocacy organizations, and environmental organizations.

**Recommended Capital Costs**

Overall, the recommendations represent an investment in the range of **\$5.3-7.1 million** over the next 5 years, with the majority of funding allocated in the first 1-3 years to establish new support amenities leash-optional areas.

**Total Staff Costs**

Additional staff are needed to implement the Strategy and to increase the level of service for bylaw enforcement, refuse collection, and maintenance. Estimated staff costs are:

2024-2026	\$792,000 per year
2027 forward	\$821,000 per year



# 1.0 Introduction

The District of Saanich initiated the People, Pets and Parks Strategy in 2021 to respond to a growing population of people and pets, increasing density, changing community needs, concern for the environment, and an increase in park visitation. The purpose of the Strategy is to provide a positive relationships between people, pets and the environment.

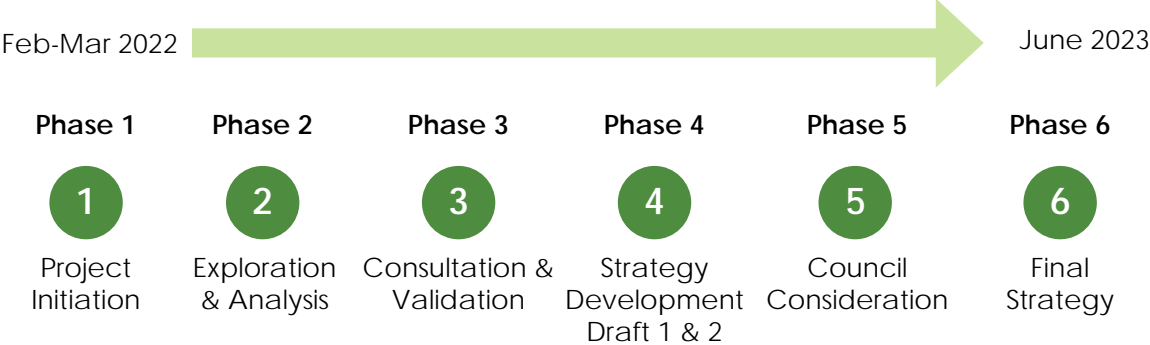
Pets are a welcome part of the Saanich community, and both people and pets benefit from outdoor recreation. As the population of Saanich and the Capital Regional District continues to grow, so does the demand for parks and other outdoor amenities. With an increased use of shared outdoor spaces, some challenges can arise, including differing community expectations, conflicting park uses, increased park management requirements, and environmental impacts.

Saanich has a wide variety of rural and urban landscapes and neighbourhoods, freshwater lakes, and nearly 30km of marine shoreline. The recent State of Biodiversity Report highlights that Saanich has over 800 hectares of parks, of which about 500 hectares (62%) are in a natural state. The District is home to some of BC's most unique and rare ecosystems such as Coastal Douglas-fir forests and Garry Oak meadows. Many valuable natural areas are protected in Saanich, but most are not. For example, only 1.8% of coastal sand ecosystems are protected.

The People, Pets and Parks Strategy provides recommendations and a framework to guide the future shared use of Saanich parks, and will describe where we are, where we want to go, and how we can get there.

## Planning Process

The Strategy was developed over six phases, including three rounds of community engagement (*two rounds completed as of this Draft*). The process provided a chance to consider the key values and challenges, as well as possible management models for pets in parks. A more detailed engagement timeline is included in Appendices E - Round 1 Engagement Summary, and subsequent engagement results in Appendices E, F, G, and H.



## 2.0 Methodology

The People, Pets and Parks Strategy is informed by existing District of Saanich strategies related to parks and trails, existing pet related policies and bylaws, precedent research including pet policies and programs from other jurisdictions, stakeholder and community consultation, and in-depth analysis of Saanich's parks system. The main report highlights and summarizes key findings and recommendations. More detailed information can be found in the Appendices.

Multiple research and analysis methods were used to develop this Strategy, recognizing that there are quantitative and qualitative information, diverse perspectives and needs, and many specific conditions within Saanich parks to consider. Key elements of the research methodology includes:

### **Background Review**

Saanich documents, policies, and bylaws were reviewed, as well as data from service calls and bylaw enforcement. Detailed findings are provided in Appendix A.

### **Mapping and Analysis**

District of Saanich neighbourhoods, populations of people and pets, parks, and bylaw restrictions were mapped to better understand existing conditions. Parks were systematically assessed to determine opportunities and constraints relating to pet management. Detailed findings in Appendix A.

### **Research from other Jurisdictions**

Other strategies related to pets in parks were reviewed. Interviews were conducted with representatives from other jurisdictions to explore what was working and not working, as well as challenges to implementation. Detailed findings are provided in Appendix A.

### **Internal Engagement**

The project team included an interdepartmental engagement with staff from parks, environment, planning, communications, and bylaw. Saanich staff provided information about the pilot pop-up dog parks, restoration and ecological initiatives, and information about service calls, costing, and staff capacity. Engagement with CRD Animal Care staff informed the Strategy by providing information about enforcement time spent, key locations, and key issues arising.

## **2.1 Community Engagement**

### **Statistically Valid Phone Survey**

A random sample of community members participated in a statistically valid phone survey which gathered input about existing park use, community priorities, and the challenges and benefits of shared use of parks by people and pets in Saanich. Detailed results are provided in Appendix F.

### **Online Questionnaires**

Community members completed two online questionnaires that gathered input on current use of Saanich parks, and successes and challenges with the current park system related to pets, parks and users. An opportunity to provide feedback on this Draft Strategy is also being provided through an online form.

### **Community Conversations and Kitchen Table Workbooks**

Community members attended two online workshops to better understand and meaningfully engage with key issues and opportunities identified during background review. Workbooks were provided to those unable to attend a workshop or preferred to facilitate their own group conversation. Although not statistically valid, the thoughts, preferences, and needs of community members from a range of perspectives provided considerable detailed information and more detailed and nuanced discussions of key concerns and hopes.

### **Online Stakeholder Workshops**

Various stakeholders, including representatives from dog owner interest and advocacy groups, intergovernmental agencies, and environmental and stewardship groups attended online workshops to share their specific interests and expertise. In Round 2, these workshops were valuable in exploring key issues, values, concerns, and needs through open discussion.

### **Public Open House**

An Open House was held on February 1, 2023 to give participants an opportunity to learn about the work completed to date and provide feedback on Strategy directions. Participants recorded their comments and ideas on each topic in individual workbooks. The Open House panels were posted to the District's web page.

Engagement Summaries and detailed results are provided in Appendices E-H.

Additional public engagement on the Draft Strategy will be considered in a final round of engagement including an information session and online questionnaire.



## 3.0 Demographics

The District of Saanich is located within the Greater Victoria area on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. It is the most populous municipality in the Capital Regional District, and the eighth-most populous in the province. In 2021, the District of Sannich had a population of 117,735, and the population is projected to grow at an annual growth rate of 0.5-0.6%, an increase of approximately 700-800 new residents each year to 2038.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.1 Estimating Saanich's Dog Population\*

The exact number of dogs that are part of Saanich households is unknown. The only specific count of the dog population is through licensing and not everyone follows the bylaw and applies for a license or keeps it up to date.

However, there are a few different methods that can be used to estimate the number of dogs in Saanich:

**Agriculture Canada Estimates:** The population of Canada was 36.9 million people in 2021<sup>1</sup>, and there were an estimated 7.3 million dogs in the country in 2021<sup>2</sup>, or approximately 0.2 dogs for every person. In 2021, Saanich had a population of 117,735. **If we assume there are 0.2 dogs per person, there could be approximately 23,547 dogs in Saanich.**

If the population of Saanich reaches 127,448-129,348 residents in 2038, there could be 25,489-25,869 dogs, approximately 1,942-2,322 additional dogs.

**Statistically Valid Phone Survey Estimates:** Based on the results of the statistically valid phone survey of 300 Saanich residents, 33% of households in Saanich have dogs, and each household with a dog has an average of 1.2 dogs. In 2021, Saanich had 48,048 private dwellings.<sup>1</sup>

The survey's margin of error is +/-5.7%. So, the number of households with dogs in Saanich could be between 27.3% and 38.7%. **Based on the statistically valid survey, the number of dogs could be between 15,740 and 22,315.**

*\* Dog numbers are considered comparable to pet numbers in this section as dogs vastly outnumber other pet species in parks.*

**District of Saanich:** According to the District of Saanich, there were 8,510 licensed dogs in the District in 2021, however, it is likely that not every dog in Saanich is licensed.

Based on these estimates, there could be as many as 23,547 dogs in Saanich, with over half unlicensed in the District. There are also dog owners in the broader Capital Regional District who use Saanich parks.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. 2022. *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released November 30, 2022.*

<sup>2</sup> Government of Canada. (2021, June 30). *Government of Canada. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Retrieved September 12, 2022, from <https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/international-trade/market-intelligence/reports/sector-trend-analysis-pet-food-trends-canada>*

<sup>3</sup> *Saanich Housing / Demographics Conditions, 2019*

### How many dogs are in Saanich?

Agriculture Canada Estimates: **23,547 dogs**

Statistically Valid Phone Survey Estimates: **15,740-22,315 dogs**

### How many dogs could be in Saanich in the next 15 years?



There could be **25,869 dogs** in Saanich if the population reaches 129,348 residents in 2038, approximately 2,322 additional dogs.

### 3.3 Comparison of Dog Licensing Numbers

The table below summarizes the number of licensed dogs per 1,000 people in other jurisdictions. Although licensing compliance is not 100% and the actual number of dogs in each community may vary, the number of licensed dogs per 1,000 people in Saanich (72 per 1,000 people) is comparable to other communities (67 per 1,000 people on average).

Saanich could have approximately **9,349 licensed dogs** by 2038 if the current number of licensed dogs per resident is maintained.

Table 1. *Number of Licensed Dogs per 1,000 People Dog Management Categories and Decision Matrix*

Jurisdiction	Population (2021)	Number of Licensed Dogs (2021)	Number of Licensed Dogs per 1,000 people
City of Mission	41,519	4,100 (in 2021) <sup>2</sup>	99
City of Victoria	91,867	6,814 (in 2022)	74
District of Saanich	117,735	8,510	72
City of Chilliwack	93,203	6,500 (in 2021)	70
City of Calgary	1,306,784 <sup>1</sup>	88,606 (in 2022) <sup>3</sup>	68
City of Langley	28,963	1,700 (in 2022)	59
City of Abbotsford	153,524	6,600 (in 2021)	42
Average Number of Licensed Dogs per 1,000 people			67

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. 2022. *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population*

<sup>2</sup> <https://fvcurrent.com/article/fraser-valley-dog-parks/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.calgary.ca/Services-and-Amenities/Total-Number-of-Licensed-Pets/gcw3-s66r>

## 4.0 Background Research

This section includes highlights from the review of Saanich documents, policies, and bylaws, as well as data from service calls and bylaw enforcement. There are regulations governing the use of parks, open spaces, and conservation areas at the local, regional, provincial, and federal levels.

**Official Community Plan:** The Official Community Plan outlines a vision for Saanich with environmental integrity, social well being, and economic vibrancy at its core. Community values include environmental stewardship, vibrant neighbourhoods with access to parks and open space, enhanced connection to nature, and a safe, inclusive and healthy community.

**Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations:** The Federal Government's Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations apply to the Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary which, in Saanich includes Cadboro Bay, Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. Dogs and cats are not permitted to run at large in a Migratory Bird Sanctuary and game officers may destroy any dog or cat found chasing or molesting migratory birds in a migratory bird sanctuary. Refer to Appendix B for a map of the Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary.

**Provincial Parks:** Most frontcountry provincial parks allow dogs/pets as long as they always remain on a leash. Some provincial parks offer special designated off-leash or swimming areas for dogs. Taking pets into the backcountry, especially dogs, is not recommended, and not permitted in some parks.

**Capital Regional District (CRD) Parks and Trails:** Dogs are welcome at all CRD regional parks and trails, although some areas require dogs to be on a leash, and some parks have seasonal restrictions in certain areas.

## 4.1 Existing Saanich Regulations

Currently, the District of Saanich has various restrictions for dogs in parks. Of Saanich's 172 parks, dog are allowed in all parks except for two. Some parks have restrictions such as time of year, leash requirements, or limitations for certain recreation amenities like sports fields and playgrounds. The following restrictions and requirements are found in the District of Saanich's Animals Bylaw.

- 1 **Seasonal Restrictions:** One park and two beaches in Saanich have seasonal restrictions for public health reasons and environmental protection. There are eight parks with permanently enclosed baseball / softball fields (18 diamonds in total) which have seasonal restrictions for dog use (about 5% of parks).
- 2 **On-leash Requirements:** Saanich has one park with on-leash requirements for the whole park and one park with on-leash requirements for certain areas of the park for public safety reasons and environmental protection. There are 55 parks with playgrounds or spray pads (about 32% of parks) where dogs must be on-leash within a 10 meter radius. In addition, Saanich's Animals Bylaw prohibits dogs from being off-leash on a highway, school ground, college ground, or at the Royal Oak Burial Park.<sup>1</sup>
- 3 **Partial Restrictions:** There are two parks in Saanich that prohibit dogs from certain areas of the park in addition to having on-leash requirements. Saanich has five parks with an artificial soccer field (about 3% of parks) where dogs are not allowed on the field itself, but are allowed elsewhere in the park.
- 4 **No Dogs Allowed:** There are two parks that prohibit dogs from the entire park for environmental reasons (about 1% of parks).

Additional information, including the rationale for restrictions in specific parks, is available in the Appendix C: Detailed Findings.

<sup>1</sup> *District of Saanich, Animals Bylaw, 2004, No.8556*

## 5.0 Service Analysis

An assessment was undertaken to compare the number of licensed dogs in each of Saanich's 12 local areas relative to the population of people and amount of park space available. Capital Regional District parks, institutional lands, and other open spaces were not included. The full list is available in Appendix C: Detailed Findings.

- The local areas with the highest density of dogs per hectare of parks space include Saanich Core, Shelbourne, North Quadra, Cordova Bay, and Tillicum.
- The local areas with the lowest density of dogs per hectare of parks space include Rural Saanich, Blenkinsop, Gordon Head, Royal Oak, and Quadra.

This information helps to determine which areas in Saanich have the highest number of dogs in relation to the amount of park space available, and where there could be higher demand for park space.

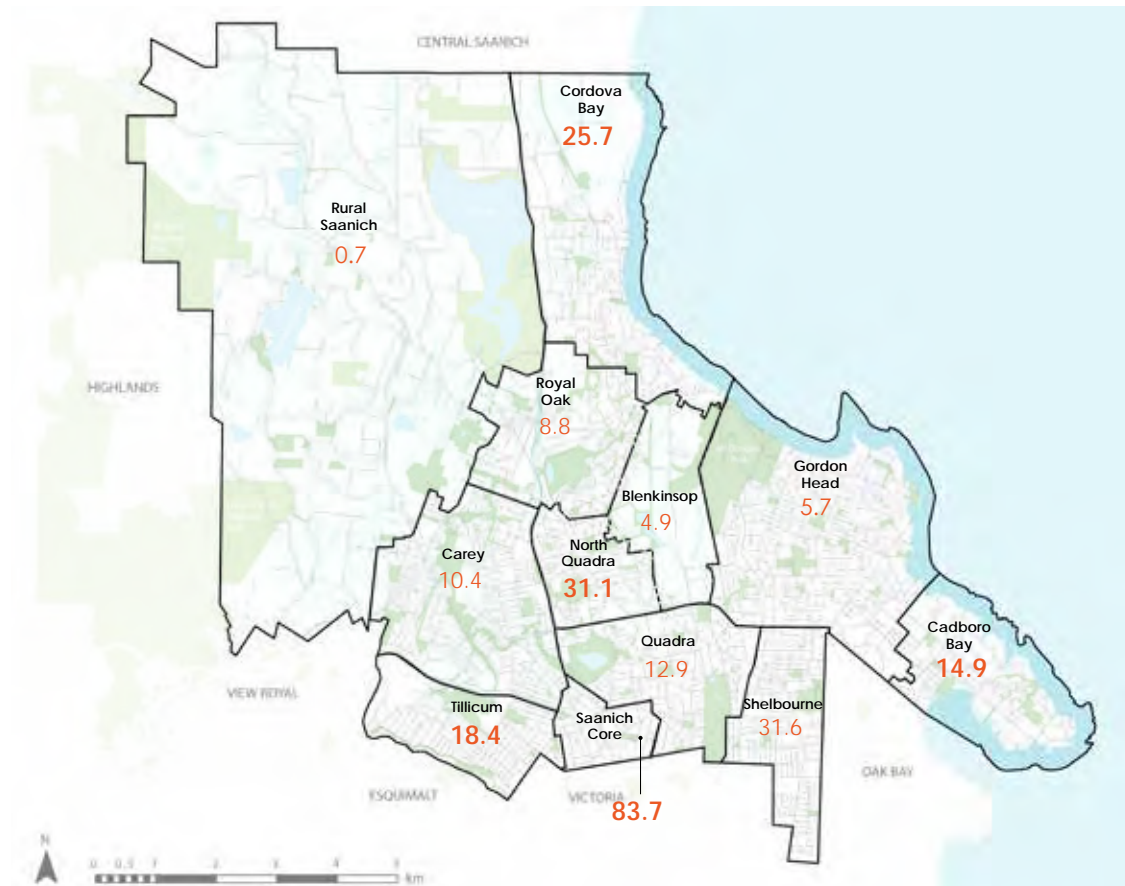


Figure 1. Licensed Dogs per Hectare of Park Space

## 6.0 Benefits of Pet Ownership

Community engagement showed how passionate people are about their pets and emphasized the importance of pets in social, physical, and mental health and well-being. This section of the report highlights some of the findings from background research related to the benefits of pet ownership.

### Did you know?

Studies have shown<sup>1</sup> that the bond between people and their pets is linked to several health benefits. Pets can provide a comforting and calming effects or may be motivators for people to get outside for fresh air and exercise. Depending on the animal, benefits may include:

#### DECREASED

- blood pressure
- cholesterol levels
- triglyceride levels
- feelings of loneliness
- anxiety
- symptoms of PTSD

#### INCREASED

- opportunities for exercise and outdoor activities
- cognitive function in older adults
- opportunities to socialize

Animals are often used in therapeutic environments and to support health outcomes. A few examples include:

- Reading to dogs helped children with ADHD improve social skills and reduce behavioural problems.
- Giving a child with diabetes a fish to care for and linking the fish care with their own blood sugar monitoring improved outcomes.
- Children with autism had lower anxiety levels when playing with guinea pigs.
- Guide dogs and other support animals can bring substantial improvements to quality of life, mobility, and safety for those with disabilities or special needs<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. April 29, 2022. How to Stay Healthy Around Pets. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/keeping-pets-and-people-healthy/how.html>.

<sup>2</sup> National Institutes of Health. Human-Animal Interactions: Therapeutic and Surprising. [https://www.nichd.nih.gov/about/overview/directors\\_corner/prev\\_updates/063017-human-animal](https://www.nichd.nih.gov/about/overview/directors_corner/prev_updates/063017-human-animal)

<sup>3</sup> Americans with Disabilities Act National Network. <https://adata.org/guide/service-animals-and-emotional-support-animals>

## 7.0 Pets and the Environment

Community engagement determined that the environment should be a key consideration in the development of the Strategy. This section of the report highlights some of the findings from background research related to the impact of pets on the environment.

### Did you know?

- There are many ecologically sensitive areas in Saanich, including riparian areas, wetlands, estuaries and mudflats that provide significant habitat for wildlife and birds, reduce the risk of erosion, and naturally capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- Saanich is home to 184 species at risk and rare ecosystems, including nationally significant Garry Oak meadows and Coastal Douglas Fir Forest ecosystems. The State of Biodiversity Report (2023) describes the variety and importance of Saanich's natural areas in more detail.
- Pets can negatively impact natural ecosystems by causing soil compaction, erosion on slopes, damage to vegetation, spreading of invasive plants, and disturbing wildlife, birds and species at risk.
- Dog waste is a source of E. coli bacteria in the environment, and humans, wildlife and other dogs can catch parasites and diseases from dog waste. This is one reason why dogs are often excluded from swimming areas.
- Disturbances increase alertness and stress response in wildlife, and birds which can mean that wildlife spend less time feeding, breeding, sleeping, and caring for young. Disturbances to foraging and nesting birds results in lost time foraging and an increase in time spent away from nests, and may lead to declines in population.
- In a study on wildlife and dog disturbance in Boundary Bay Regional Park (near Tsawwassen), dogs disturbed wildlife 15% of the time overall. 25% of off-leash dogs disturbed wildlife, and 2% of on-leash dogs disturbed wildlife.
- Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary (MBS) is located in urban Greater Victoria, near the southern tip of Vancouver Island. It is home to approximately 270 bird species, and the site supports over 75 species of animals and plants of federal and provincial conservation concern. Low numbers of migratory birds, for various reasons, remain a concern today.

A more detailed summary of this environmental research is included in the Pets & the Environment Appendix D of this document.



## 8.0 Community Values and Challenges

This section brings together the key findings from the first phases of the project, including the background review and the first round of community engagement. The focus of this work was to identify the range of community values and the primary challenges.

### COMMUNITY VALUES

#### 1 Open Space

Both dog owners and non-dog owners recognize the value of having open space for dogs to play and get exercise off-leash in Saanich parks. Some indicated that the value of play cannot be replicated while on-leash, and the positive effects on physical and mental health for both dogs and their owners was the number one benefit of off-leash opportunities.

#### 2 Variety of Parks

The community values having access to a variety of different types of parks that are distributed throughout the District. Some community members value having different types of parks to bring pets, including enclosed areas (pilot pop-up dog parks), trails and natural areas. There are also community members who would like to enjoy different types of parks without dogs being present, and see having off-leash dogs around as a barrier to their enjoyment and safety in parks.

#### 3 Safety

Park users agree that safety is an important consideration when it comes to people and pets sharing Saanich parks. Safety concerns for both people and dogs are considered to be one of the top challenges with having dogs off-leash in parks. Community members recognize that there are safety issues related to off-leash dogs in parks, including negative and aggressive interactions between dogs, and risks to the elderly and children.

#### 4 Environmental Considerations

The community values environmental and wildlife protection, as well as having opportunities to connect with and recreate in nature. Some community members would like to see additional environmental protection in areas, and others want to ensure that there are still a variety of options for recreating with dogs off-leash in nature.

#### 5 Park Maintenance and Waste Management

The community values park cleanliness, well-maintained playing fields, and effective waste management. These considerations are important for spaces where people and pets are sharing space in Saanich's parks.

#### 6 Sense of Community

The community values the personal connections that can be formed by bringing pets to parks, and by interacting with other community members. Many community members recognize the importance of having and facilitating positive interactions between park users.

## CHALLENGES

### **1 Dog Behavior and Lack of Training/Control**

The top challenge related to pets in parks highlighted by both dog owners and non-dog owners in the engagement process was owners not having control over their off-leash dogs. A frequently mentioned reason was the lack of clarity on the definition of "under control". Owners' lack of awareness and training skills were mentioned. A large number of community members have had a conflict with an off-leash dog in Saanich, including having their dog attacked or approached aggressively by an off-leash dog.

### **2 Environmental Considerations**

Saanich is home to sensitive and rare ecosystems, and many species at risk. Dog owners and non-dog owners highlighted the importance of environmental and wildlife protection. Many dog owners and non-dog owners alike expressed concerns with off-leash dogs disturbing and chasing wildlife, and impacting natural and re-naturalized areas in Saanich parks. Saanich and its volunteers and partners have been investing considerable resources into restoring forest and riparian ecosystems, which need to be protected from impacts.

### **3 Communication and Education**

The community indicated that bylaws and restrictions are confusing and not well understood, and that there is a lack of awareness of etiquette related to people and pets in parks. Members of the community mentioned that there isn't enough information or signage available, and that confusion can cause tension, conflicts, and confrontations between park users.

### **4 Increasing Demand**

More people and pets are putting pressure on the parks system and there are unmet needs for places to safely exercise and socialize pets, particularly in high density areas. There is unmet demand for fenced leash-optional areas, places for pets other than dogs, and places without dogs.

### **5 Park Equity**

Some community members avoid parks in Saanich due to off-leash dogs being present. Of the 172 parks in Saanich, there are only two parks where dogs are not permitted. Only 60 parks have some type of on-leash requirement including parks where dogs must be leashed within 10 meters of a children's playgrounds (about 35% of parks). There was agreement that parks should be spaces for all to enjoy, and consideration should be given to the enjoyment and safety of all park users.

## 9.0 Vision, Principles, and Goals

The community values and challenges were used to develop a vision statement and guiding principles to set the direction for the Strategy. These statements recognize the complexity of meeting diverse community needs and broader objectives within the parks system and the aspiration of finding the right balance. While the statements are broad, they provide a touchstone linking back to the community values.

### *Vision Statement*

*Saanich parks are safe, accessible, and enjoyable for all park users and provide a variety of experiences that balance the different needs of people and pets while protecting environmental integrity and promoting stewardship.*

### *Guiding Principles*

1. Parks are welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for everyone, including pet owners and non-pet owners.
2. The importance of parks is essential to pets to their owners' health and well-being.
3. Planning for pet amenities encourages stewardship and protects environmentally sensitive areas, wildlife, and biodiversity.
4. We all contribute to and have a shared responsibility for creating welcoming and inclusive parks.

### *Goals*

1. Ensure the rules, regulations and bylaws are clear and easily understood.
2. Improve compliance and pet licensing.
3. Improve protection of important and sensitive environmental areas.
4. Create a diversity of opportunities in parks for people with pets.
5. Ensure there are adequate places in parks for people who don't want to encounter dogs or other pets.

# Recommendations

## Recommendations

The creation of the recommendations explored many different options for park amenities, regulations, and management strategies to find the best ways to address the values and challenges and to achieve the Vision. The process included interviews and research of other communities' strategies, a detailed analysis of the Saanich parks system, and a second round of community engagement.

A multipronged approach to managing pets in parks is recommended that:

- Establishes a bylaw that requires dogs to be on-leash except in designated areas or on designated trails where dogs can be off-leash and under control.
- Prioritizes communication, signage, and enforcement.
- Provides a variety of leash-optional opportunities, dog exercise areas, trails and amenities across the District.

The recommendations are outlined in this section under the following headings:

### **Planning, Enforcement, & Education**

- Bylaws & Regulations
- Education & Enforcement
- Stewardship
- Maintenance

### **Leash-Optional Areas**

- Leash-Optional Area Typologies
- Proposed Leash-Optional Areas in Saanich parks
- Standard Amenities
- Special Amenities
- Boundaries
- Signage
- Monitoring & Evaluation

# Planning, Enforcement, & Education

## 1. Bylaws & Regulations

The existing animal bylaw for Saanich currently allows dogs off-leash as long as they are under control. Through engagement, it was found that there is a need to better define "under control" and to clarify confusing and inconsistent rules.

We heard that there are not enough places in Saanich parks where people can enjoy parks without encountering dogs off-leash. Environmental stewardship groups noted that important natural areas, sensitive ecosystems, and restoration areas need additional protection.

Along with changes in rules, new opportunities are needed to continue to meet the needs of dog owners who prefer to exercise their dogs off-leash. We heard from many dog owners that their dogs need time off-leash so they can run (faster than most of their owners) and get the exercise and mental stimulation they need to be happy and healthy. Dog owners noted the importance of enjoying natural areas for their own mental and physical health.

As the Saanich population grows, striking a balanced approach with well-defined regulations will help mitigate conflicts, ensure park use is available to everyone, and better protect the environment.

### 1.1. Update the Animals Bylaw, 2004, No. 8556

- Update the bylaw to specify that dogs are welcome in parks and are to be on-leash unless otherwise specified, and under control at all times on- or off-leash. (Also see Recommendation 1.3)
- Update the definition of "under control" in the Animal Bylaw to match the CRD definition: According to the CRD, "under control" means a person in possession of a dog in a park has a clear line of sight to the dog at all times and the dog immediately returns to the owner when called or signaled.
- Update the bylaw to allow animals other than dogs in Saanich parks when on-leash (e.g. cats, reptiles, birds, etc.). Expand the bylaw to include leashing and under control requirements in parks to a broader range of pets (e.g. cats, pigs, reptiles, birds, etc.).

**VALUES SUPPORTED** - *Open Space, Variety of Parks, Safety, Environmental Considerations*

**CHALLENGES ADDRESSED** - *Dog Behaviour and Lack of Training/Control, Communication and Education, Environmental Considerations, Park Equity*

*The updates to bylaws and regulations are intended to clarify and refine expectations of park users in order to address the challenges of Dog Behaviour and Lack of Training/Control, Communication and Education, and help protect sensitive ecosystems and allow all park users to feel safe in their environment.*

- Update the bylaw to be consistent with the Federal Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations in terms of requiring pets on leash and not running at-large or harrasing/harming wildlife. [See FMBSR for specific language

### **What does "under control" mean? <sup>1</sup>**

A controlled dog will stay by your side under any circumstances, whether it is enforced by a leash or by voice. A controlled dog off-leash will return to its owner 100 percent of the time it has been called. They will not run after wildlife, go off trail, dig, and damage vegetation. They will not run up to people or jump on people. They will not run up to other dogs. A controlled dog will remain by their owner's side.

It is illegal for dogs to harass wildlife - this includes chasing, barking at, or biting other animals. Dogs should also not be digging holes or playing/running through important ecosystems or restoration areas.

According to the CRD, "under control" means a person in possession of a dog in a regional park has a clear line of sight to the dog at all times and the dog immediately returns to the owner when called or signaled.

### **Why should dogs and other pets be "under control"?<sup>1</sup>**

The rule of thumb for having dogs and other pets under control is meant to keep both pets and people safe. Dogs are the most frequent pet in parks, so they are often the primary focus. You never know how another dog or trail user will react to your dog. Some dogs are reactive and do not want to be approached by other dogs. Some people do not want to be approached, sniffed, or jumped on by a dog. Respect for all dogs and people using parks and public spaces means being accountable for your dog's behaviour.

Well trained dogs have good recall most of the time. However, even well trained dogs vary in their behaviour. Dogs do not always behave or listen consistently. Owners should use good judgement and leash their dogs when these circumstances arise and not default to having their dogs off-leash because they are "usually" under control.

*1 Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust. Dog Blog #3. <https://dnrt.org/dog-blog-3-what-does-under-control-really-mean/>*

1.2. Update Parks Management and Control Bylaw, 1997, No. 7753

- Update point #23 to include pets as well as persons:  
*"No person or pet shall molest, disturb, frighten, injure, catch, trap, or snare any bird or animal in any park or any beach.*

1.3. Designate specific parks, areas within parks, and trails as leash-optional areas for dogs.

An analysis of the Saanich parks system was undertaken to determine parks, areas within parks, and trails that have potential for designation as leash-optional areas. The results of that analysis has led to the recommendations below. The detailed suitability analysis is shown in Appendix A. Also refer to the leash-optional area design recommendations for more information.

*Applying and updating the suitability analysis:*

The suitability analysis is based on existing conditions, but as new parks are added or the uses of parks change, adjustments to the analysis may be required. For example, if a park or park area undergoes ecological restoration or a playground is added, it may no longer be suitable for a leash-optional area. The policy of allowing dogs off-leash on sports fields could change if alternative leash-optional areas are provided or if maintenance resources are not adequate to ensure everyone's safety and the quality of fields.

***Guidelines for designation of leash-optional areas***

- Dogs are welcome in all Saanich parks on-leash with few exceptions.
- Dogs will not be permitted in Saanich parks that are zoned P-5 (Conservation Area).
- Dogs are welcome at P-4N parks if on a leash. P-4N parks (Natural Parks) may have leash-optional areas if 1) the area is not environmentally sensitive, 2) the area is not being restored, or 3) the area is fenced to protect environmental values.
- Beaches: Dog are welcome at beaches if on a leash. One beach, Cordova Bay Beach, welcomes dogs both on- and off-leash year-round.
- Sports Fields and Courts:
  - Dogs will be allowed off-leash on turf grass sports fields when the field is not in use, as a general case. However, the District may limit access to some fields in the future.
  - Dogs will not be permitted on artificial turf fields
  - Dogs will not be permitted on sport courts (all hard surface sports including tennis, pickleball, lacrosse, skateboard, etc.)



### ***Proposed Leash-Optional, Under Control Areas***

There are 57 parks, plus one beach with multiple access points, that have been identified as places that can accommodate leash-optional areas. Three types of leash-optional areas are proposed:

- Leash-optional areas with no fencing (or limited fencing to separate uses)
- Leash-optional areas with full fencing
- Leash-optional trails

The parks proposed for leash-optional areas are listed in the table on the following page. Unfenced locations could have strategic fencing added where it would reduce environmental impacts or prevent conflicts with playgrounds or other recreational amenities.

Of the 57 parks, 12 have been identified for permanent, fenced leash-optional areas, including:

- Brodick Park
- Cuthbert Holmes Park
- Emily Carr Park
- PKOLS (Mt. Douglas Park)
- Regina Park
- Houlihan Park
- Hyacinth Park
- Lambrick Park
- Layritz Park
- Rainbow Park
- Rudd Park
- Sierra Park

One beach, Cordova Bay Beach, has been identified for designated year-round, leash-optional beach access.

A 1.5km trail loop has been identified within PKOLS (Mt. Douglas Park) that will be available year-round for leash-optional trail access. A large fenced area with trails has also been identified within Cuthbert Holmes Park.

Opportunities for leash-optional areas should be taken into account when pursuing future parkland acquisition. There may also be opportunities for pet amenities to be incorporated into future developments.

## Parks with Proposed Leash-Optional, Under Control Areas

Park Name	Local Area	Type
Allenby Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
Ambassador Park	North Quadra	Unfenced
Baxter Park	Carey	Unfenced
Beckwith Park	North Quadra	Unfenced
Blair Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Braefoot Park	Quadra	Unfenced
Brodick Park	Gordon Head	Fenced
Browning Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
Brydon Park	Royal Oak	Unfenced
Commonwealth Place	Royal Oak	Unfenced
Copley West Park	Carey	Unfenced
Cordova Bay Beach (multiple access points)	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Cuthbert Holmes Park	Tillicum	Fenced + Trail
Edge Park	Carey	Unfenced
Emily Carr Park	Royal Oak	Fenced
Fairburn Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Fowler Park	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Francisco Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Glanford Park	Carey	Unfenced
Glencraig Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Gorge Park	Tillicum	Unfenced
Hampton Park	Tillicum	Unfenced
Harvest Lane Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Horner Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
Houlihan Park	Gordon Head	Fenced
Hyacinth Park	Carey	Fenced
Industrial Buffer Park	Carey	Unfenced
King Alfred Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Kings Road Nature Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
Lambrick Park	Gordon Head	Fenced
Layritz Park	Rural Saanich	Fenced
Leeds Park	Quadra	Unfenced
Lochside Park	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Majestic Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Maltwood Park	Royal Oak	Unfenced

Park Name	Local Area	Type
Maynard Park	Cadboro Bay	Unfenced
Mcbriar Park	North Quadra	Unfenced
McMinn Park	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Meadow Park	Tillicum	Unfenced
Montague Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Moor Park	Carey	Unfenced
Mount View Park	Carey	Unfenced
Normandy - SCP Park	Royal Oak	Unfenced
Onyx Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced
PKOLS (Mt. Douglas Park)	Gordon Head	Fenced + Trail
Prospect Lake	Rural Saanich	Unfenced
Rainbow Park	Quadra	Fenced
Regina Park	Saanich Core	Fenced
Reynolds Park	Quadra	Unfenced
Rosedale Park	Carey	Unfenced
Rudd Park	Tillicum	Fenced
Rutledge Park	Saanich Core	Unfenced
Sayward Hill Park	Cordova Bay	Unfenced
Sierra Park	Gordon Head	Fenced
Tolmie Park	Quadra	Unfenced
Tyndall Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Vantreight Park	Gordon Head	Unfenced
Wetherby Park	Shelbourne	Unfenced

## Cuthbert Holmes Park

- Leash-optional Area Size: 4 hectares
- Boundary: Fenced
- Park Type: Wooded trail
- Proposed fenced off-leash area on a large berm within a wooded park with trail.
- Dogs are welcome on all other trails on-leash.



*Cuthbert Holmes Park, GoogleEarth*

### Location: PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park)

- Leash-optional trail length: 1.9km
  - Leash-optional area Size: 0.4 hectares
  - Boundary: Proposed fenced area + Proposed fenced off-leash trail
  - Park Type: Wooded trail
- 
- Proposed fenced off-leash trail with a 1.5km loop, and a fenced converted gravel pit.
  - Dogs are welcome on all other trails on-leash.



PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park), GoogleEarth

1.4. Work with adjacent jurisdictions to explore ways to improve consistency of bylaws and enforcement.

- Develop a consistent, shared definition of "under control" across as many South Vancouver Island jurisdictions as possible.
- Share information about key challenges and mitigation approaches and educational resources. This could be done through a Working Group with Parks, Bylaw, Communications, CRD, and other municipalities.

1.5. Develop a Commercial Dog Walkers Permit.

Develop a Commercial Dog Walkers Permit similar to the Capital Regional District's (CRD). CRD Parks uses a permit system to control and manage special uses within regional parks to minimize the impact on the natural environment, park users, park operations, and facilities.

The CRD's commercial dog walking permit comes with a list of agreed upon terms and conditions, some of the terms include:

- Permit holders must only use approved parks.
- Permit holders must carry at least one leash and one collar for each dog at all times.
- Permit holders must wear a visible identifier (lanyard) issued by CRD Regional Parks that identifies them as a commercial dog professional and must have in their possession a valid copy of the permit.

## 2. Education & Enforcement

The District of Saanich contracts with the Capital Regional District (CRD) Animal Care Services for enforcement of the animal bylaw.

- 2.1. Work with the CRD to develop educational resources to increase public knowledge about licensing and bylaws.
  - A shared communication strategy should be developed for CRD and District of Saanich parks, to encourage compliance with bylaws.
  - Use a wide variety of distribution methods to ensure residents receive the messaging multiple times. Options could include signs in parks, hard copy materials, and online resources.
  - Update the Saanich Petiquette Poster.
- 2.2. Increase licensing rates through annual licensing drives and communication blitz in the spring each year. Communicate the benefits of licensing and allocate a portion of the funding toward pet amenities and programs.
- 2.3. Improve tracking of animal bylaw enforcement by documenting the location and coding the bylaw infractions with consistency. Tracking should include the dog name, license number, owner's name and address wherever possible.

The CRD codes calls-for-service related to pets in parks into the following categories:

- Dog at large (off-leash and not under control)
- Dog attack
- Dog barking
- Dog in prohibited area
- Failure to remove excrement
- Other violations of the Animal Bylaw related to other types of pets

Additional categories for calls for service should identify the park name and include:

- Dog injuring animals or people
- Dog damaging or disturbing natural areas
- Dog harassing or chasing wildlife
- Dog damaging sports fields
- Other pets and their owners in Saanich parks contravening the Animal Bylaw.

**VALUES SUPPORTED** - *Safety, Sense of Community*

**CHALLENGES ADDRESSED** - *Dog Behaviour and Lack of Training/Control, Communication and Education, Park Equity*

*Changes in Education and Enforcement help to clarify expectations of pets and owners in order to create a safer public spaces and a more inclusive community.*

- 2.4. Explore options for enhanced enforcement and progressive fines for repeat offenses to change habitual non-compliance.
- 2.5. Track infractions and establish policies that make it possible to close areas to dog access if waste management or other regulations are not followed.

### 3. Stewardship

- 3.1. Create a pilot program for one full-time seasonal park ambassador to increase education and awareness about pets in parks.
- 3.1. Support the development of stewardship groups, formed by local volunteers, to support sustainable management and maintenance of leash-optional areas.
- 3.2. Develop an outline of the roles and responsibilities of stewardship groups. Volunteer responsibilities should include:
  - Monitoring park conditions including damage and maintenance requirements.
  - Reporting instances of noncompliance of bylaws and/or etiquette. To avoid conflict, volunteers should only record noncompliance, and should not "police" others' behaviour.
  - Peer education on topics such as etiquette, understanding dog behaviour, and responsible dog ownership and licensing.
  - Fundraising for leash-optional area special amenities.
- 3.3. Add Take a Bag - Leave a Bag station at all parks. Create opportunities for community members to "Adopt a Bag Station".

**VALUES SUPPORTED** - *Park Cleanliness and Waste Management, Sense of Community*

**CHALLENGES ADDRESSED** - *Dog Behaviour and Lack of Training/Control, Increasing Demand, Communication and Education*

*Stewardship facilitates an improved sense of community and responsibility among park users and allows a better understanding of individualized park conditions and needs.*

## 4. Maintenance

- 4.1. Increase resources for maintenance and management of leash-optional areas, especially sports fields and fenced areas.
- 4.2. Increase resources and infrastructure for pet waste management.
- 4.3. Regularly evaluate the allocation of maintenance resources based on monitoring, service calls in parks, and data collection on level of use and condition.

**VALUES SUPPORTED** - *Park Cleanliness and Waste Management*

**CHALLENGES ADDRESSED** - *Dog Behaviour and Lack of Training/Control, Increasing Demand*

*Improvements to monitoring and evaluation will help to quickly identify and address park needs and improve overall park cleanliness and waste management.*



## Leash Optional Areas

### 5. Typologies

5.1. Establish four typologies of leash-optional areas within the Saanich parks system:

- Unfenced Leash-Optional / Under Control Areas
- Fenced Leash-Optional/Under Control Areas
- Parks with Leash-Optional/Under Control Trails
- Leash-Optional/Under Control Beach Areas

Leash-optional area Typologies				
	Unfenced Leash-Optional / Under Control Areas	Fenced Leash-Optional/Under Control Areas	Parks with Leash-Optional/Under Control Trails	Leash-Optional/Under Control Beach Areas
Purpose	Provide leash-optional areas that are more widely available.	Provide fenced leash-optional areas that service residents from across the District.	Provide leash-optional trails in natural areas.	Provide leash-optional access to beach areas not within the Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary
Size	Site dependent	0.14 ha or larger	Site dependent	Site dependent
Boundary	May have partial fencing	Secure fencing	May have partial fencing	N/A
Amenities	Standard amenities	Standard and special amenities	Standard amenities	Standard amenities

**VALUES SUPPORTED** - *Open Space, Variety of Parks, Safety, Environmental Considerations*

**CHALLENGES ADDRESSED** - *Dog Behaviour and Lack of Training/Control, Environmental Considerations, Park Equity*

*Establishing different park typologies maintains a variety of open space access available, helps to protect sensitive ecosystems and more clearly designate areas for park users where they will not encounter off-leash dogs. It also provides places for people who want to work on recall and other dog training and may not have that space where they live.*

The table below and the following examples of the typologies outline standard amenities and optional amenities. Each location will have specific design considerations.

Amenities	Unfenced Leash-Optional / Under Control Areas	Fenced Leash-Optional/ Under Control Areas		Parks with Leash-Optional/ Under Control Trails	Leash-Optional/ Under Control Beach Areas
		Provide for all designated areas	Provide as space allows		
Standard Amenities					
Open space	●	●	●	●	●
Waste bins	●	●	●	●	●
Take a Bag / Leave a Bag Station	●	●	●	●	●
Seating	●	●	●	●	
Barrier-free access (wherever possible)	●	●	●		
Special Amenities					
Separated small / shy dog areas			●		
Water stations (where possible)		●	●		
Natural elements		●	●		
Pathway/trail loop			●		
Agility features			●		

## Standard Amenities - "Must-Haves"

- Standard amenities should be provided at all leash-optional areas including: open space, seating, waste bins, and barrier-free access.
- Waste bins should be located in all parks including at all leash-optional areas to encourage owners to pick up and dispose of dog waste. Bins should be placed in locations so they are also easily accessible by maintenance staff with parks garbage trucks. Offer increased waste bins at locations and trails that are popular or have a lot of service calls related to waste management.
- All leash-optional areas should provide benches and other seating options. If applicable, seating should be located along an accessible pathway and in a shaded area.
- All leash-optional areas should be accessible to allow use by all wherever possible. Leash-optional areas should be connected with pathways that are unobstructed (a minimum 1.5 m wide), and made of compliant surfacing. For fenced areas, gates should be wide enough to easily accommodate people with mobility aids and their pets.
- Preferred surface type for leash-optional areas is turf grass. Leash-optional areas with a higher intensity and concentrated use could require surfacing that is more durable than turf. Wood chips is well-suited for high-traffic areas, including entrances and pathways, and sand and pea gravel can be useful in areas with poor drainage.

**VALUES SUPPORTED** - *Open Space, Park Cleanliness and Waste Management*

**CHALLENGES ADDRESSED** - *Increasing Demand, Park Equity*

*The provision of standard amenities allows the comfortable and positive use of open spaces to be accessible to all park users*

## Special Amenities - "Nice-to-Haves"

- Special amenities could be added to some leash-optional areas if appropriate.
- At fenced leash-optional areas, provide two separately fenced 'all dog' and 'small/shy dog' areas in parks that have enough open space (more than 0.14 ha.)
- Consider providing water stations on a concrete pad if servicing requirements allow.
- If feasible, provide varied terrain and topography, and natural elements to provide visual interest, and varied play opportunities. Vertical elements like stumps also help deflect urine concentration away from any existing trees.
- Larger leash-optional areas should include a pathway/trail loop within the leash-optional area.
- Add agility features to provide a variety of play opportunities at leash-optional areas. This could be a popular amenity at destination leash-optional areas.

In the first online questionnaire, the top three amenities desired at leash-optional areas were:

- a pathway/trail loop
- drinking water availability
- terrain features like mounds, stumps and boulders.

**VALUES SUPPORTED** - *Open Space, Variety of Parks, Safety, Environmental Considerations*

**CHALLENGES ADDRESSED** - *Increasing Demand, Park Equity*

*The provision of some special amenities can help to improve the quality and positive impact of open spaces, and can further improve the comfort and safety of pets and park users.*

## Boundaries

- Fencing or signage should be considered, where possible and appropriate, to provide protection and separation from adjacent, incompatible land uses, and environmentally sensitive areas including:
  - Environmentally sensitive areas
  - School grounds, playgrounds and spray pads (or other areas frequently used by children)
  - Roads, and parking lots
  - Busy multi-use trails and pathways
  - Sports fields
  - Community gardens
- Fencing should be a minimum of 4 feet (1.2 meters) tall, and could be chain-link, post and wire, or post and rail. Wire mesh panels may be required for post and rail fences to prevent access.
- Fenced leash-optional areas should have double-entry gates that are self-closing, wheelchair accessible, and lockable (for maintenance purposes). These help prevent pets from escaping and provide a secure area for leashing/un-leashing.
- Fenced leash-optional areas should have entry points that are located away from corners or narrow areas to reduce congestion and potential conflicts with entering/exiting. Multiple entry points may be needed where the area is large or there are multiple main pathway connections.

## Signage

All parks, including those with and without fenced leash-optional areas, will require updated signage. Signage for all dog/pet related signage across all parks in Saanich should have consistent branding/design/language of all dog/pet related signage across all parks in Saanich for consistency and to create recognizability.

Key Locations:

- Main park entrances and parking areas
- Transition areas between leash-optional areas and other parts of a park
- Entrances to fenced leash-optional areas
- Edges of environmentally sensitive areas, where applicable

### Unfenced Leash-Optional Areas

Signage content:

- Map extent of leash-optional area or exclusion areas such as playgrounds
- Relevant bylaws, including licensing requirements
- Time of day or seasonal restrictions, where applicable
- Etiquette guidelines
- Map or notes about environmentally sensitive areas, where applicable
- CRD contact information for bylaw enforcement or questions
- District contact information for service requests
- QR Code or District website link for information and resources
- Separate signs with a recognizable color and design encouraging owners to pick-up and properly dispose of dog waste.

### Fenced Leash-Optional Areas

Signage content:

- Relevant bylaws
- Etiquette guidelines
- If provided, signage identifying 'all dog' and 'small/shy dog' areas. At 'small/shy dog areas', define small as *"the same size or smaller than whatever dog is using the area when you arrive."*
- CRD contact information for bylaw enforcement or questions
- District contact information for service requests
- QR Code or District website link for information and resources

**VALUES SUPPORTED** - Safety, Environmental Considerations, Sense of Community

**CHALLENGES ADDRESSED** - Dog Behaviour and Lack of Training/Control, Communication and Education, Environmental Considerations, Park Equity

Maintaining a clear separation and signage between adjacent uses minimizes negative impacts and conflicts, and helps to protect the public, the environment, and pets.



Park Entrance Signage



Park Entrance Signage



Park Entrance / Educational Signage



Bylaw / Adjacencies Signage



Park Adjacencies Signage



Leash-optional area Signage

## 6. Monitoring & Evaluation

- 6.1. Develop a monitoring and evaluating program to ensure that all leash-optional areas are functioning in a safe, and effective manner and emerging issues are identified in a timely manner.
- 6.2. Consider developing a standardized set of evaluation criteria for dog leash-optional area monitoring for staff and volunteer stewardship groups to use to assess parks. The following information should be tracked:
  - Number and nature of by-law and etiquette infractions.
  - Number and severity of safety issues.
  - Severity of damage or maintenance issues (waste bins, signage, fencing etc.).
  - Severity of disturbances to natural areas.
  - Number and nature of disturbances to wildlife.
  - Extent of uncollected dog waste.
  - Other observations about park use (crowding etc.).
- 6.3. The community should be engaged in the process of monitoring and evaluating leash-optional areas. An online tool should be developed for park users and stewardship groups to report bylaw infractions and issues at parks to the District of Saanich or to CRD Animal Care Services. Park signage could include a QR code, website or contact.
- 6.4. Solutions should be determined by the District of Saanich to address high-priority issues identified by staff, volunteer stewardship groups, and community members. Solutions could include the following:
  - Increased maintenance.
  - Additional waste management / collection.
  - Repairs to infrastructure / signage.
  - Additional standard, or special amenities.
  - Additional bylaw patrol or enforcement.
  - Temporary closure or relocation to resolve issues.

**VALUES SUPPORTED** - *Open Space, Environmental Consideration, Park Cleanliness and Waste Management*

**CHALLENGES ADDRESSED** - *Communication and Education, Environmental Considerations, Increasing Demand*

*Improvements to the overall maintenance and management of parks helps to create a positive experience of open space use, ensures ongoing sensitive ecosystem protection, clearly displayed regulations, and promotes better adaptability to increased park use and demand.*



# Implementation

## Implementation Plan

The recommendations in this report are intertwined and require coordinated and phased implementation. Some recommendations require capital funding while others require additional staff time. Monitoring and evaluation is recommended to determine the effectiveness of management strategies and investments in new amenities.

Actions	Description	Cost / Staff Time	Timeline
Hire a Pets in Parks Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To implement key recommendations in this strategy including bylaw updates, communications and signage plan, establishing a staff working group, implement monitoring and evaluation processes and tools, and oversee park upgrades for leash-optional areas and amenities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 FTE / temporary posting for 3 years with optional extension.</li> <li>\$105,000 per year</li> </ul>	2024
Update Bylaws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A number of bylaw updates are recommended.</li> <li>Coordination with other jurisdictions is required (CRD).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bylaw and Legislative Services</li> </ul>	2024
Bylaw Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional bylaw enforcement time is needed, especially when the bylaw changes and in the spring/summer as park use increases along with the potential for conflicts and seasonal restrictions (i.e. sports fields).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional bylaw officers/ enforcement time to start is estimated at 2 FTEs through the contract Saanich has with CRD Animal Care Services</li> </ul>	2024
Pilot a Summer Park Stewards Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit and train one full-time, seasonal staff to provide education and outreach about pets in parks at key locations.</li> <li>This program could also support monitoring and evaluation actions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 full-time, seasonal staff (summer).</li> <li>\$45,000 per year</li> </ul>	2024
Communications and Signage Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a Communication Plan that includes content/key messages, identifies the best communication tools, and provides a plan for hard copy and digital distribution tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pets in Parks Coordinator to lead.</li> </ul>	2023/2024

Actions	Description	Cost / Staff Time	Timeline
Increase Waste Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An additional garbage truck and staff are required to service additional waste receptacles.</li> <li>Assess waste management demands to determine if additional resources are required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff to expand waste collection service - 1 FTE = \$92,000</li> <li>Order another waste collection truck, anticipated delivery 2027. Cost for truck, fuel, maintenance, insurance, and replacement funds over +/-8 years= \$270,000.</li> <li>Staff to operate third waste collection truck, 1.5 FTEs = \$138,000 (current cost)</li> </ul>	<p>Add 1 FTE to expand waste collection 2024</p> <p>Order truck 2024</p> <p>Additional 1.5 FTE 2027</p>
Increase Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional staff to maintain fenced leash-optional areas (surfacing, amenities, repairs, waste management).</li> <li>Additional staff to maintain sports fields that are damaged by dog use. Leash-optional areas, especially those that also have sports fields, require additional turf maintenance and filling in of holes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 FTE for site maintenance \$92,000</li> <li>Maintenance supplies and tools \$100,000</li> </ul>	2024 - ongoing
Upgrade existing parks with designated leash-optional areas and trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add/upgrade signage</li> <li>Add dog waste bag stations</li> <li>Add missing amenities (waste bins)</li> <li>Determine if fencing is needed to separate uses or protect environmental areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pets in Parks Coordinator to lead.</li> <li>\$8,000-\$10,000 per location; \$400,000 - \$550,000 total.</li> <li>Additional \$250,000 allowance for partial fencing at some locations to address site concerns @ \$50,000 annually for 5 years.</li> </ul>	<p>Signage, waste bins, and bag stations late 2023 - 2025</p> <p>Fencing 2024-2028</p>

Actions	Description	Cost / Staff Time	Timeline
Establish fenced leash-optional areas	New fenced leash-optional areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cuthbert Holmes Park</li> <li>• PKOLS</li> <li>• Regina Park</li> <li>• Brodick Park</li> <li>• Emily Carr Park</li> <li>• Houlihan Park</li> <li>• Hyacinth Park</li> <li>• Lambrick Park</li> <li>• Layritz Park</li> <li>• Rainbow Park</li> <li>• Rudd Park</li> <li>• Sierra Park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pets in Parks Coordinator to lead.</li> <li>• \$350,000-500,000 per location; \$4.2-6.0M total.</li> </ul>	Phase in 1-2 locations per year
Establish a Staff Working Group and Regional Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff time will be required in the long-term to continue to maintain and manage leash-optional areas, communications, and enforcement and to address challenges as they arise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pets in Parks Coordinator to lead.</li> <li>• Additional staff time from parks, planning, operations, etc.</li> </ul>	2027 - ongoing
Monitoring and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrared people counters could be installed at leash-optional areas with fences and gates to measure use patterns.</li> <li>• Annually, re-evaluate priority areas for new amenities and maintenance actions.</li> <li>• Track service calls about waste bins and contravention of the updated bylaw, including locations and re-evaluate level of service.</li> <li>• Gather feedback from the public on leash-optional areas to continue to identify the highest priority amenities and locations, as well as management, maintenance, and enforcement needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pets in Parks Coordinator to lead.</li> <li>• Counters, training and staff implementation \$50,000 over 5 years.</li> <li>• Clerk/administrator staff time to track and analyze service calls.</li> </ul>	2025 - ongoing

## Unit Costs

Estimated capital unit costs for supply and installation of amenities for leash-optional areas and trails, excluding maintenance and life-cycle replacement costs.

Garbage Can	\$3,000.00
Sign	\$250.00
Benches	\$5,000
Potable water access point	\$5,000 hook up, \$10,000 per fountain
4' Fencing /Gate	\$200/Liner Meter

## Total Estimated Capital Costs

- **\$5.3 - \$7.1 million over 5 years** of which \$4.2 - \$6.0 million is allocated for new fenced leash-optional areas and \$400,000-500,000 is allocated for park upgrades for unfenced/partially fenced leash-optional areas.

## Total Staff Costs

2024-2026	\$792,000 per year
2027 forward	\$821,000 per year

- 1 Full Time Pets in Parks Coordinator (3-year term position) - \$105,000 per year
- 1 FTE for increased site maintenance - \$92,000 per year
- 1 FTE for expanded refuse collection (starting 2024) - \$92,000 per year
- 1.5 FTE for refuse collection (starting 2027) - \$134,000 per year
- 1 full-time, seasonal staff, Pilot Ambassadors Program - \$45,000 per year
- 2 FTE additional bylaw officers / enforcement time (through the CRD) - \$230,000 per FTE / Total \$458,000 per year (includes staff, vehicle, overhead, etc.)