

Appendix C

Round 1 Engagement Summary

District of Saanich People, Pets and Parks Strategy

ROUND 1 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Spring/Summer 2022



PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Saanich People, Pets and Parks Strategy will encompass the entire municipality and address the growing calls from residents for Saanich to review policies and/or regulations relating to pet management in parks.

In Saanich, pet owners bring a variety of pets (animals) with them when visiting parks such as horses, cats, and birds, but the vast majority and reported incidents in parks involve dogs. This is why existing park rules and policies focus mainly on dogs.

Many communities across the country have established designated off leash areas or “dog parks” as a way to manage conflicts between owners, their pets and other park users that would prefer a pet free experience. Currently Saanich is unique in that, with a few notable exceptions, most of Saanich’s parks are considered “off leash” so long as the dogs are kept under the effective control of their owners. The Animal Bylaw has been the tool to enforce this requirement.

Given the large size of Saanich and limited enforcement resources, there is little ability to consistently enforce the bylaw.*

The Strategy will outline recommendations for a District-wide framework that considers all users and the complex factors of the parks system, protects the environment, and meets the needs of the regional community.

The project team has completed Round 1 of engagement that will inform the key directions and vision for the Strategy. In the coming months, we will continue Round 2 to receive input toward the draft Strategy and its recommendations.



* Effective June 1, 2022 CRD Animal Care was contracted to enforce the Saanich Animals Bylaw.

WHAT WE DID

The first round of engagement for the People, Pets, Parks Strategy was between May and June 2022. The project team conducted both a public survey and statistically valid telephone survey, facilitated virtual community conversation workshops and distributed kitchen table workbooks to those who preferred to self-facilitate their own discussions. Feedback in this round will inform the key directions for the Strategy and draft recommendations.



Public Survey: The public survey was available from May 20th to June 19th on the project website and in paper copies. Topics covered in the questionnaire included high level questions around vision and values and ideas for creating a cohesive and inclusive Strategy, including the benefits and challenges of establishing off leash dog areas.



Representative (Statistically Valid) Phone Survey: Mustel Group completed 300 random telephone interviews (landline and cell numbers) to achieve a representative sampling of the District population.



Community Conversations: We hosted 2 virtual public workshops with Saanich community members that allowed attendees to better understand and meaningfully engage with key issues and opportunities identified in our background review and pre-consultation enquiry. This also gave participants the opportunity to learn about the range of perspectives and priorities uncovered to date and share specific needs and expectations for the Strategy.



Kitchen Table Workbooks: Workbooks were intended for those who were unable or uncomfortable to participate in a community conversation or who preferred to facilitate their own small group conversation. Participants provided feedback on the various users of Saanich parks and opportunities to accommodate various interests, including pets in parks.

WHAT WE DID

Engagement Activity	Date	Participation
Public Online Survey	May 20 th - June 19 th , 2022	1,834
Representative (Statistically Valid) Phone Survey	May 26 th - June 3 rd , 2022	300
Virtual Community Conversations (2)	June 2 nd , 2022 June 14 th , 2022	55
Kitchen Table Workbooks	June 10 th – July 10 th , 2022	6 workbooks 24 participants

Total Engaged:
2,213

What is the purpose of a statistically valid survey and public survey?

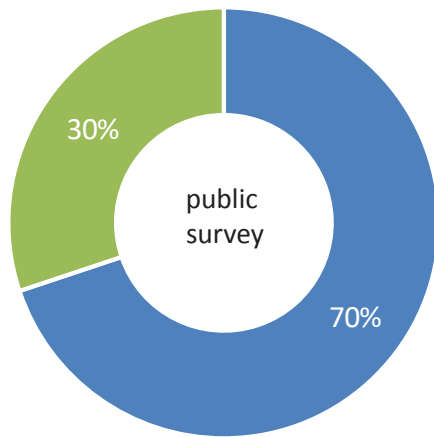


The statistically valid survey aims to represent the community at large. Respondents were drawn at random from a database of published residential and cell phone listings. The online survey was open to the general public and gave people who are interested in the Strategy an opportunity to share their input in the early stages of the process.

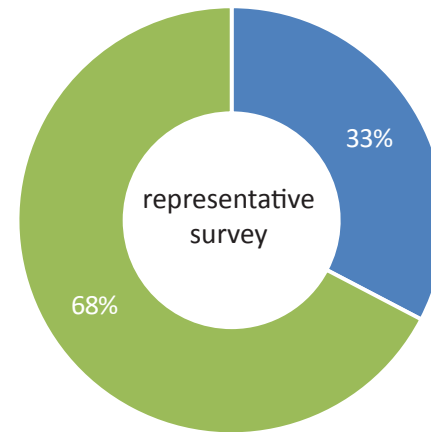
The following sections provide an overview of who we heard from and what we heard through all of the engagement activities in this phase. For more detailed results from each activity, please see the appendices.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

Dog Ownership

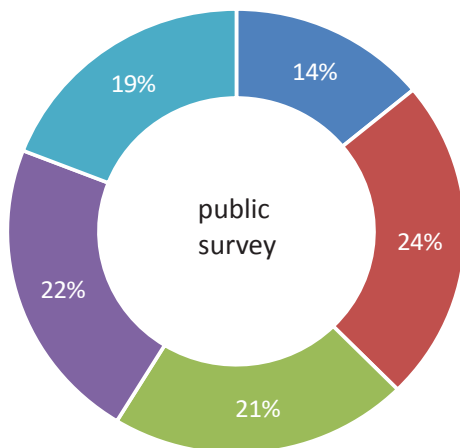


- Owns a Dog
- Does Not Own a Dog

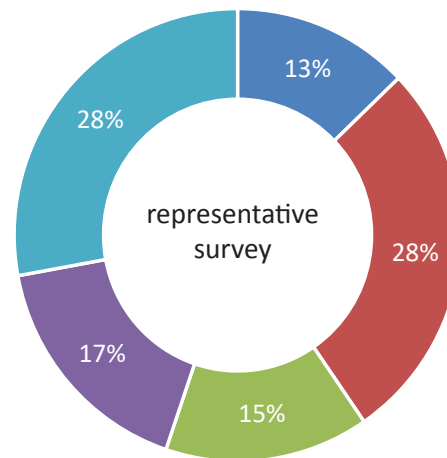


Most public survey respondents identified as dog owners, while most respondents to the representative survey did not own a dog.

Age



- 18-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

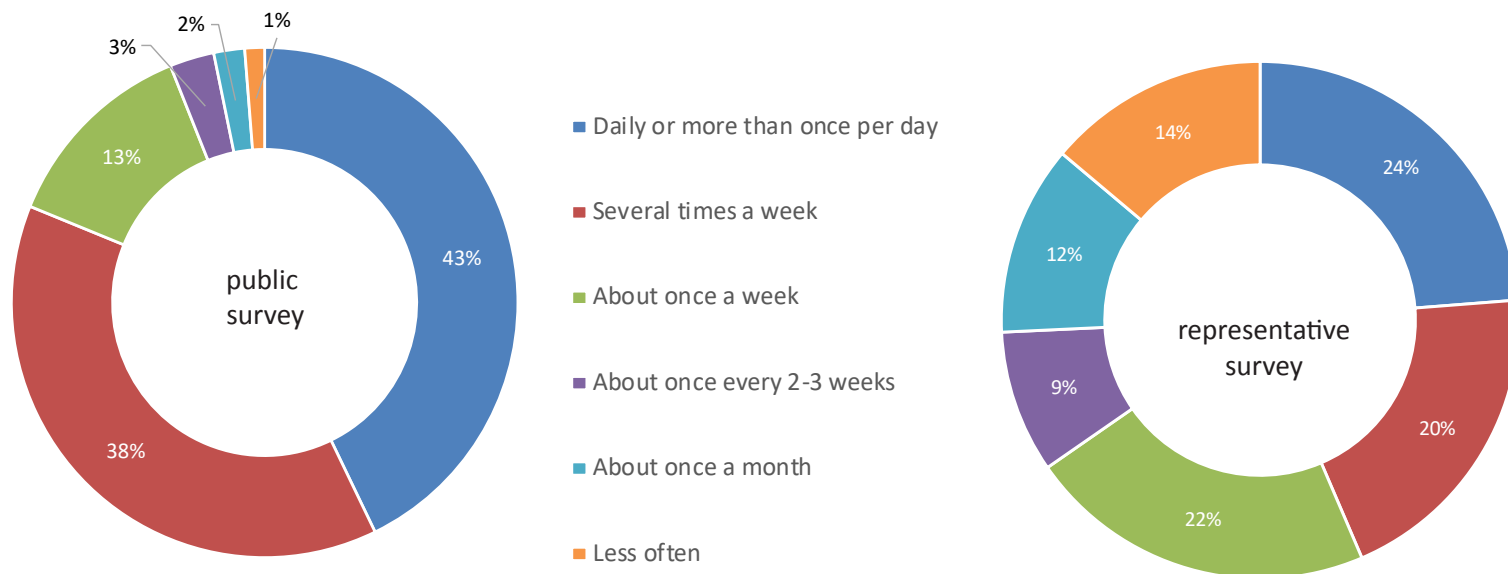


In both surveys, the smallest percentage of participants was between 18 and 34 years old.

The representative survey included a slightly greater proportion of residents 65 and older, while the largest age group in the public survey was between 35 and 44 years old.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

Frequency of Park Visitation



Most public survey participants visit Saanich public parks and beaches daily (or more than once per day) or several times a week.

Compared to the public survey, there was a greater proportion of representative survey respondents who visit less often or once a month.

WHAT WE HEARD



What do we value about Saanich parks?

When thinking about Saanich parks, participants in both the public survey and statistically valid telephone survey prioritized opportunities to connect with nature and environmental protection/wildlife habitat. This is followed by cleanliness of parks/facilities, variety of users and spaces, and safety.

**Opportunities
to connect with
nature**

62% selected this
in the public survey
and 35% in the
representative survey

**Environmental
protection and
wildlife habitat**

41% selected this
in the public survey
and 52% in the
representative survey

**Cleanliness of
parks and facilities**

36% selected this
in the public survey
and 43% in the
representative survey

WHAT WE HEARD



Who uses Saanich parks?

We know that the Strategy should serve a diversity of needs. From the community conversations and kitchen table workbooks, participants discussed the many user groups that are important to consider throughout this process. Some of the key groups mentioned include (in no particular order):

- First Nation communities
- Dog owners (particularly dogs with special needs, small dogs, service dogs)
- Cat owners
- Dog trainers and dog walkers
- People and dogs who use parks for mental and physical health benefit (including those who do not feel safe alone in public spaces or who need calm/quiet spaces)
- Equestrian users
- Community events and programming attendees
- Recreational park users (e.g., sports groups, trail walkers/runners, mountain bikers, cyclists, bird watchers)
- Sensitive species and animal habitat (e.g., migratory birds, native trees, fish)
- Volunteers and park stewards
- Scientists, researchers and citizen scientists
- Commuters and people without cars
- People in densified areas
- New immigrant families and cultural groups
- Parents, toddlers and young children (including nature-based preschools)
- Seniors and those with disabilities (i.e., who use mobility assistance devices)
- Vulnerable populations (e.g, unhoused people, drug-users)
- People who do not currently use the parks (may face barriers due to health issues, fear of other uses/users, etc.)

WHAT WE HEARD



How can we best share our parks?

When it comes to people and pets sharing Saanich parks, protection of natural areas and sensitive ecosystems, and safety for people were the most important considerations.

Protection of
natural areas
and sensitive
ecosystems

41% selected
this in the public
survey and 43% in
the representative
survey

Safety for
people

36% selected
this in the public
survey and 77% in
the representative
survey

Safety for
dogs/pets

40% selected
this in the public
survey and 38% in
the representative
survey

Location and
distribution
of off-leash
areas for
dogs

35% selected
this in the public
survey and 40% in
the representative
survey

**From Community
Conversations &
Kitchen Table
Workbooks**

Sharing our parks can enhance cooperation and foster a culture of responsibility. Participants suggested ways to support these shared spaces including waste management, planning for a variety of spaces and diverse programming, use of physical boundaries (e.g., fencing), improved signage, and training/education for pet owners.

WHAT WE HEARD



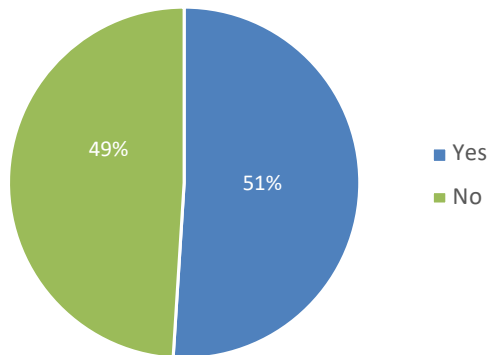
How can we best share our parks?

From the representative survey, there were high levels of agreement for statements related to the coexistence, comfort and safety of people and dogs, indicating that overall experiences with dogs in Saanich are positive for most.

However, half of residents (51%) have had a negative experience or conflict with an off-leash dog in the past (57% of dog owners, 48% of non-owners).

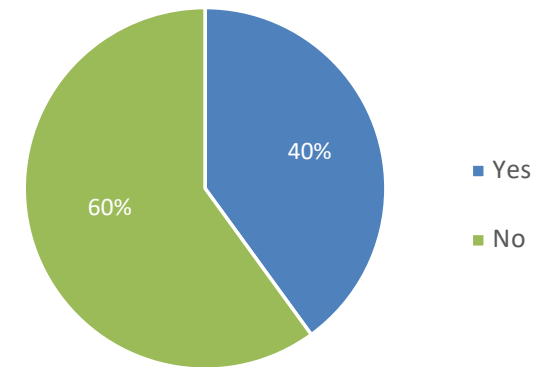
Having their dog attacked or approached aggressively by another dog is the most frequent report by dog owners.

Have you ever had a negative experience or conflict with an off-leash dog? (representative survey)



Over half of public survey respondents responded that they do not avoid parks because of off-leash dogs. 40% stated that they avoid Saanich parks for this reason.

Are there parks you avoid because of the high number of off-leash dogs? (public survey)



“

Our dog is reactive. He walks on leash at all times. Unfortunately, sometimes dogs are off leash and will approach him. I don't mind dogs off leash if they have good recall and their owners don't let them approach others, but maybe designated areas for dogs to be off leash would help. It can be challenging to take our dogs for walks because of this and we tend to avoid parks where this is common.

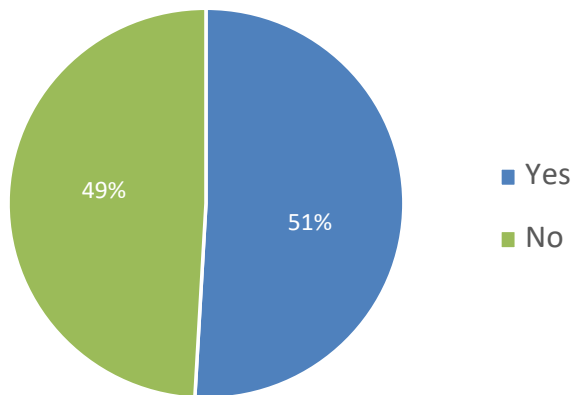
”

WHAT WE HEARD

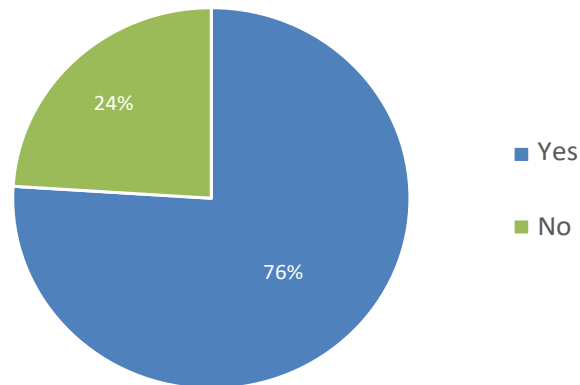


How can we best share our parks?

Public survey participants were almost equally divided on whether they would support having a park where no dogs were allowed.



The majority (76%) of representative survey respondents agree that specific areas where dogs are not allowed off-leash will help reduce conflicts.



85% of representative survey respondents agree or strongly agree that **“dogs are a welcome part of the community”**

WHAT WE HEARD



What are the benefits and challenges to having dogs off-leash in Saanich?

Opportunities

Positive effects on physical and mental health (for both dogs and their owners)

Many participants commented that the opportunity to exercise off-leash is incomparable and they feel the quality and quantity of exercise a dog receives off leash cannot be replicated while on leash. The freedom and space for dogs to play and run is appreciated by both dog owners and non-owners.

Designated or enclosed off-leash areas

Some respondents expressed that off-leash dogs should only be permitted within an enclosed area. They feel that this compromise from the current system allows dogs the freedom of being off-leash while leaving other areas for people who do not wish to be near dogs can enjoy. A variety of dog areas that are different in size and distributed throughout the District are needed. This also relates to appropriate location of designated areas (i.e., not near Environmentally Sensitive Areas [ESAs], busy roads, etc.).

Sense of community

Parks have become top of mind for residents through the COVID-19 pandemic and increase in dog ownership, resulting in a strong demand for open spaces in which to connect. Some respondents have shared that taking their dog off leash allows them to connect with other members of the community and enhances interactions as people stand and interact while their dogs are getting exercise and socializing.

Challenges

Dog behaviour and irresponsibility (of owners)

Irresponsible dog owners and those who are unable to control their dogs are major challenges according to respondents. This is a sentiment shared by both dog owners and non-dog owners alike. Many respondents point to a lack of training and unruly behaviour as a significant issue with off-leash dogs.

Waste management

Many people commented on a correlation between off-leash dogs and improper waste disposal, as owners are not always keeping a close eye on their dog leaving excrement. Others feel that there should be dog bags at parks to facilitate cleaning up.

Safety concerns

The lack of separation between dogs and people is a big barrier to enjoyment and safety in parks, particularly with regards to children and the elderly (stated more by non-dog owners). Safety issues between dogs is another concern.

Impact on natural areas

A key challenge in Saanich has been the impact that park users and off leash dogs have on surrounding sensitive ecosystems, wildlife, and natural areas.

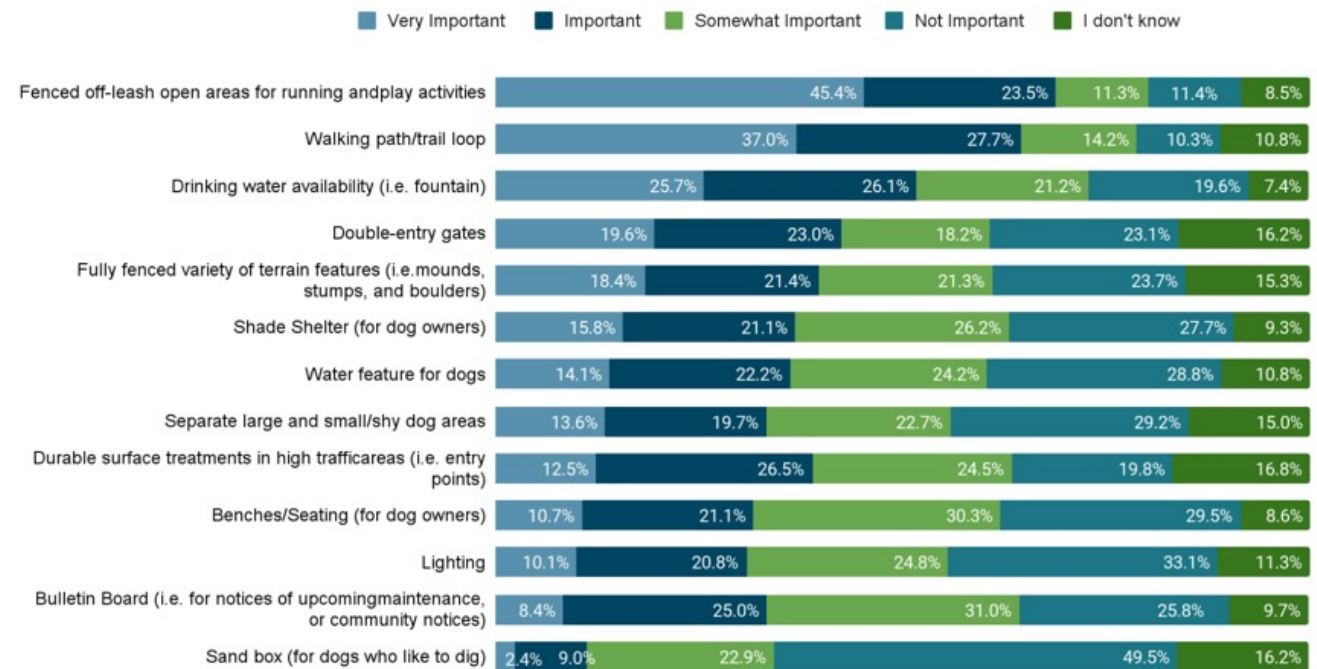
WHAT WE HEARD



What else needs to be considered as part of the Strategy ?

- Variety of Off-Leash Areas:** Different types of off-leash areas are needed. Some dogs are not well suited for enclosed or fenced areas as they are reactive or do not want to socialize and may need more exercise.
- Inclusivity:** Recognition and respect for all users of the parks system. The Strategy should consider all needs and perspectives to support a dynamic and connected community.
- Communication:** Additional and better signage to distinguish areas where dogs are permitted off-leash or not. This is also related to the availability and dispersal of information around where pets are welcome, how to train dogs, how to protect natural areas, etc.
- Compliance:** Bylaw enforcement should be considered in the Strategy to ensure regulation has impact. Some would like to see more patrol officers, as well as potentially heftier fines.

- Park Features for Dogs:** For nearly half (45.4%) of the public survey respondents, fenced off-leash open areas for running and play was classified as very important dog park features. Respondents also prioritized walking path/trail loops (37%).



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Engagement in this first round of the process will inform the directions of the Strategy and outline what needs to be considered in the next phase. Based on what we have heard, we know that the Strategy needs to centre the following key principles:

Variety of Needs & Spaces for Dogs

It is important that the Strategy recommendations recognize the needs of different park users while protecting natural areas and habitat. Parks should accommodate different types of pets/dogs depending on size, behaviour, level of training, age and mental state. The Strategy should consider a variety of spaces for pets, including open off-leash and fenced off-leash areas as well as on-leash parks.

Accessible Amenities

Acknowledging that Saanich parks cannot be “everything to everyone”, the District needs to consider how amenities are equitably distributed throughout parks in the region to accommodate the growing population. Decisions will need to be made about balancing values to ensure equitable access to parks.

Safety and Comfort

We know the safety and comfort of park users should be addressed, particularly for children, people who may not have familiarity with dogs, and people afraid of dogs or with allergies.

Education and Awareness

It is important that new (and existing) regulation is communicated to all park users. This includes adequate signage in parks and materials on off-leash and on-leash dog areas across the region. There is a high level of interest in more training and education opportunities for dog owners. This may also include awareness around how regulations will be enforced.

NEXT STEPS

In the coming months, we will continue Round 2 of engagement to receive input on the draft Strategy and its recommendations.

Engagement opportunities will be shared on the [project webpage](#).

