



District of Saanich

People, Pets & Parks:

A District Wide Strategy for Sharing Saanich's Parks

Update Report

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District of Saanich

January 2022

1.0 Introduction

The District of Saanich is located within the Greater Victoria area on Vancouver Island, in British Columbia. It is the most populous municipality in the Capital Regional District, and the eighth-most populous in the province. Saanich has a wide variety of rural and urban landscapes and neighbourhoods, freshwater lakes, and nearly 30km of marine shoreline. Saanich has 171 parks, and over 100km of trails.

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.

Purpose of the Strategy

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 framework to effectively manage the District's parks and open spaces and achieve 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.

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

Planning Process

The Strategy is being developed over six phases, including three rounds of community engagement. Refer to the community engagement timeline in Appendix C, Round 1 Engagement Summary. The planning process will include the following, with phases three and four overlapping.



2.0 Update Report

The People, Pets and Parks Strategy will be 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, and stakeholder and community consultation.

This Update Report has been created to provide an update on key findings, and includes the following:

- **Demographics**
- **Background Research**
- **Service Analysis**
- **Key Findings**
- **Next Steps**
- **Appendix A:** Detailed Findings
- **Appendix B:** Pets & the Environment
- **Appendix C:** Round 1 Engagement Summary
- **Appendix D:** Public Online Survey Results
- **Appendix E:** Community Conversations and Kitchen Table Workbook Results
- **Appendix F:** Statistically Valid Phone Survey Results

The work carried out to develop this Update Report is outlined below:

Background Review:

Saanich documents, policies, and bylaws were reviewed.

Mapping and Analysis:

District of Saanich neighbourhoods, populations of people and pets, parks, and bylaw restrictions were mapped to better understand existing conditions.

Interviews with Representatives from other Jurisdictions:

Other strategies related to pets in parks were reviewed followed by interviews with representatives from other jurisdictions to explore what was working well.

Statistically Valid Phone Survey:

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.

Online Survey:

Community members completed an online survey that gathered input on current use of Saanich parks, and successes and challenges with the current park system related to pets, parks and users.

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.

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.

3.0 Demographics

3.1 Population

In 2021, the District of Saanich 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 2038.³

3.2 Estimating Saanich's Dog Population

In 2020, there were 27.9 million pets in Canada, and in 2021 there were 7.3 million dogs.²

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 in 2021 was 36.9 million people¹, and there were an estimated 7.3 million dogs in the country in 2021², 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 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.¹

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%, and the number of dogs could be between 15,740 and 22,315. This estimate is slightly lower than the Agriculture Canada estimate.

District of Saanich Estimates: According to the District of Saanich, there are 8,510 licensed dogs in the District, 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.

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

² 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>*

³ *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**

District of Saanich Estimates: **8,510 licensed dogs**

How many dogs are projected in Saanich?

There could be **25,489-25,869 dogs** in Saanich if the population reaches 127,448-129,348 residents in 2038, approximately 1,942-2,322 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. The number of licensed dogs in Saanich is slightly higher than the average. It should be noted that not every dog is licensed, and the total number of dogs in each jurisdiction is likely higher.

Jurisdiction	Population (2021)	Number of Licensed Dogs	Number of Licensed Dogs per 1,000 people
District of Saanich	117,735	8,510	72
City of Mission	41,519	4,100 (in 2021) ²	99
City of Victoria	91,867	6,814 (in 2022)	74
City of Chilliwack	93,203	6,500 (in 2021)	70
City of Calgary	1,306,784 ¹	88,606 (in 2022) ³	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

¹ Statistics Canada. 2022. *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population*

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

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

4.0 Background Research

There are regulations governing the use of parks, open spaces, and conservation areas at the local, regional, provincial, and federal levels.

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. 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 171 parks, 58 allow dogs with some restrictions, and only two parks prohibit dogs from the entire park. The following restrictions and requirements are found in the District of Saanich's Animals Bylaw.

- 1 Seasonal Restrictions:** There is one park and two beaches in Saanich with 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.¹
- 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.

¹ District of Saanich, Animals Bylaw, 2004, No.8556

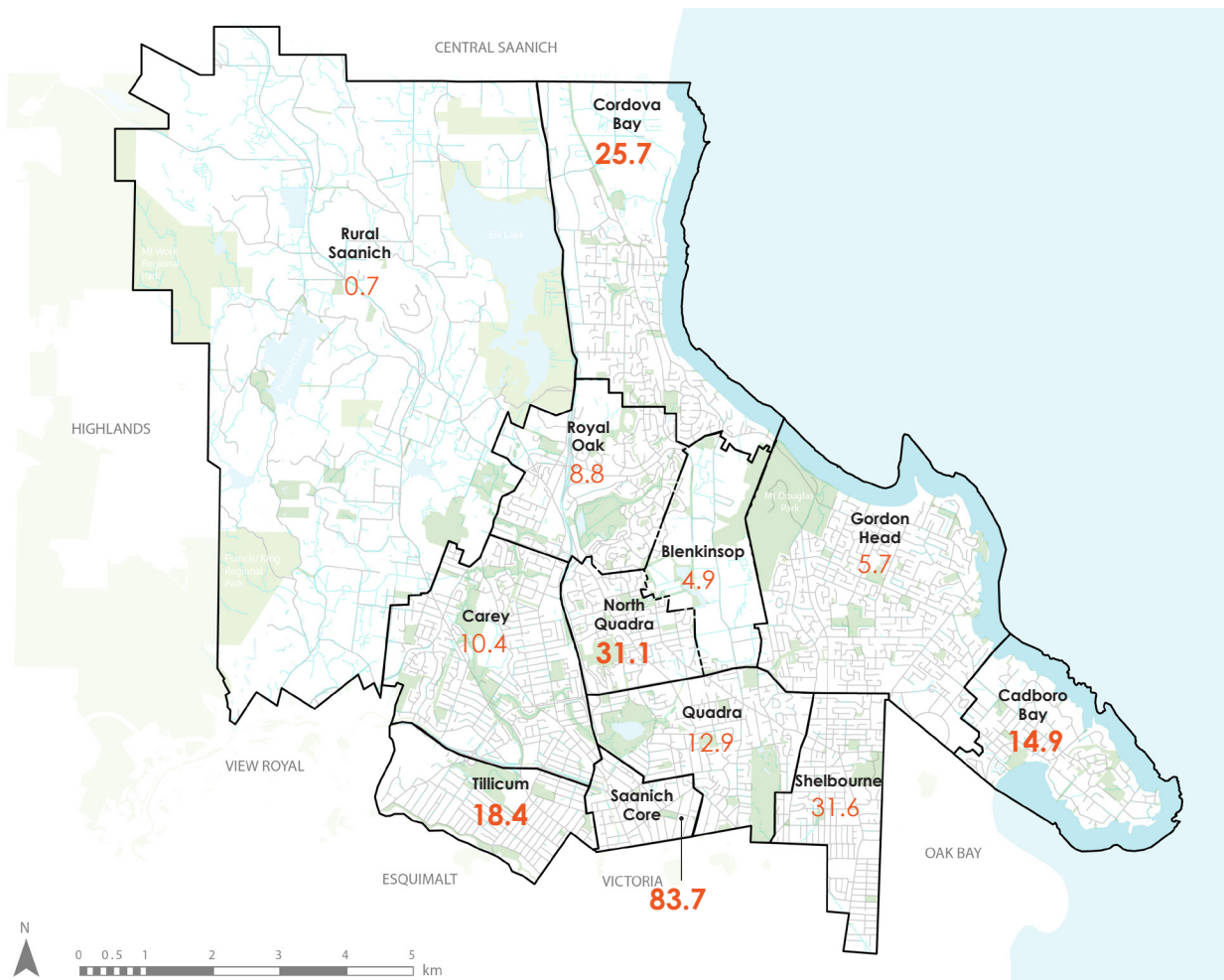
5.0 Service Analysis

5.1 Local Area Assessment

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 the Appendix.

- 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.



Dogs Per Hectare of Park Space

6.0 Environmental Research

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 Garry Oak, and Coastal Douglas Fir Forest ecosystems.
- 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 birds, for various reasons, remain a concern today.

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

7.0 Key Findings

The following section highlights key findings from the background review, mapping and data analysis, research, and the community engagement process. It also includes findings from the survey results from the Pop-up Dog Park Pilot Project (completed separately). The Appendix includes additional and more detailed information on the Key Findings.

What are the Community's Values?

1 Open Space

- All park visitors 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.

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

- All park visitors 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 Cleanliness and Waste Management

- The community values park cleanliness, and waste management is an important consideration for people and pets sharing 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.

7 Park Equity

- Some community members avoid parks in Saanich due to off-leash dogs being present. Of the 171 parks in Saanich, there are only two parks where dogs are not permitted. Only 59 parks have some type of on-leash requirement including parks with children's playgrounds (about 34% 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.

What are the Challenges?

1 Dog Behavior and Lack of Training/Control

- The top challenge related to pets in parks 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 also 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. All park users highlighted the importance of environmental and wildlife protection. All park users expressed concerns with off-leash dogs disturbing and chasing wildlife, and impacting natural and re-naturalized areas in Saanich parks.

3 Communication and Education

- The community indicated that bylaws and restrictions are confusing and not well understood. There is also 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 also unmet demand for fenced off-leash areas, and places for pets other than dogs.

8.0 Next Steps

The next steps for the project include the development of the draft People, Pets and Parks Strategy. The Strategy will include a summary of demographic and policy context, an overview of trends and best practices for accommodating pets in parks, and recommendations to strengthen and enhance the District's ability to continue to provide experiences for people and their pets which respect the environment as well as other park visitors and activities.



Key elements of the Draft People, Pets, and Parks Strategy will be brought forward to the public in the second round of public engagement.



Keep up to date and participate in Round 2 of engagement!

- Online Survey #2
- Public Open House

For more information and to sign-up for updates visit the project webpage at saanich.ca