

Memo



Date: January 26, 2011
File: 1340-10
To: City Manager
From: T. Barton, Parks and Public Places Manager, Infrastructure Planning
I. Wilson, Park Services Manager, Civic Operations
Subject: Dog Parks

Recommendation:

THAT Council directs staff to conduct a city-wide statistically valid community survey on the potential provision of additional dog facilities on public parkland;

AND THAT Council directs staff to conduct a city-wide Dog Impact Assessment on public parkland to determine current patterns of use, issues, compliance rates and areas of conflicts;

AND FURTHER THAT Council directs staff to prepare a budget request for funding the above dog initiatives to be considered by Council at the 2012 Capital Budget.

Purpose:

To report back on progress regarding two related Council resolutions:

COUNCIL RESOLUTION FROM THE JULY 26, 2010 P.M. REGULAR MEETING:

THAT Council direct staff to report back to Council as soon as possible with a list of potential parks near the downtown for consideration as a dog water access park.

COUNCIL RESOLUTION FROM THE SEPTEMBER 20, 2010 P.M. REGULAR MEETING: THAT Council receive for information the August 27, 2010 report of the Park Services Manager; AND THAT Council directs staff to forward the list of parks that allow dogs to the various neighbourhood associations for comment; AND FURTHER THAT Council directs staff to consider an area where dogs are permitted on-leash at sporting events.

Background:

Existing Facilities

The City provides two different types of dog parks within the municipal park system as per Council Policy No. 258: i) On-leash; and ii) Off-leash dog areas. The City has 76 on-leash parks, trails and city properties, seven off-leash dog areas, and two temporary off-leash dog areas, totaling 702 ha. There are an additional 133 city owned properties, parks, green spaces or future parks that do not allow dogs (totaling 220 ha). By area, about 76% of City parks and green spaces allow dogs. Kelowna residents also have access to another nine provincial or regional parks in the Kelowna area that allow dogs totaling, another 709 ha.

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Staff have completed research into the provision of dog parks in other North American cities and Kelowna ranks well above average (see Attachment 1). However, the City continues to receive requests from the public for additional dog facilities with a special emphasis on access to water in the downtown area. Table 1 summarizes dog water parks in other Okanagan municipalities.

Table 1: Comparison with other Okanagan Municipalities

Municipality	Dog Water/Beach Park	Notes
Osoyoos	No dog parks	Considering adding a dog park at or near the lake.
Penticton	1 off-leash beach area	Considering developing 2 “on-land” off-leash areas.
Summerland	1 off-leash beach area	1 “in-land” off-leash dog area from October to May.
West Kelowna	1 off-leash beach area	
Vernon	No dog beach parks (2 unofficial areas not enforced). Two off-leash parks have creeks running through them.	Okanagan Indian Band owns a beach that is not restricted and there is a designated dog beach in a nearby provincial park.

From discussions with other Okanagan municipal staff, it appears that Interior Health Authority (IHA) was unaware of these off-leash areas and was not consulted when they were established. IHA has expressed concern over mixing dogs and human swimmers on public land (see Attachment 2).

Dog Park Planning

There are many social and health benefits that dog parks provide the community clearly articulated in Attachment 2. However, dogs can also provide challenges in public spaces to manage potential conflicts. Typical issues include:

- Noise, odor, and unsightly visual character of off-leash dog areas;
- Increase in traffic and parking to the neighbourhood;
- Environmental and wildlife concerns when introducing dogs into riparian management areas and water features (e.g. creeks, lakes, ponds);
- Conflicts with existing patterns of use in parks;
- Safety concerns with aggressive dog behavior;
- Health concerns with potential disease transmission.

The introduction of dogs into public parks requires careful consideration in order to minimize potential conflicts. Over the past decade, the City has increased access for dogs to parks in a measured and controlled fashion. The provision of dog access to public parks is a privilege to residents who own dogs as long as they can share the public space with others and not negatively affect their experience. Public parks are first and foremost for the benefit of all community members. Dogs should not be introduced at minimum compromise to other community benefits. As Council contemplates the provision of more dog parks, the following are some key issues/considerations:

1. Dogs can present potential conflicts in terms of public health and safety to people playing or lying on the ground, especially young children. For this reason, dogs should not be permitted at children's playgrounds, sports fields and human beaches/swimming areas.
2. Off-leash areas should be limited to areas without other human activities. The minimum size (best management practice) for off-leash dog areas is sited at 0.4 ha (1 acre) by the American Kennel Club. This is the approximate size of the Mission Recreation Park Off-leash area.
3. On-leash dog parks should only be introduced in existing parks with adequate space that can minimize conflicts with other park uses such as children's playgrounds, sports fields, human beaches/swimming areas and sensitive environmental areas.
4. The compatibility of a dog park with adjacent private land uses needs to be carefully considered. Potential issues for adjacent property owners include increased noise, odor, traffic and parking and unsightliness.
5. Dog owners prefer centrally located dog parks in urban areas for convenience and accessibility.
6. Dog parks should be developed with the appropriate supporting infrastructure e.g. parking, washrooms, fences, signage, shade, drinking fountains for people and dogs.
7. Turf areas are very difficult to maintain under heavy-traffic dog areas. Other surface materials should be considered to minimize operational costs such as gravel, decomposed granite and wood chips.
8. Off-leash dog areas should be designed with large and small dog areas to reduce potential conflicts and the installation of appropriate fencing, gates and buffers.

Lake Access for Dogs

The City receives many requests each year to provide additional water access for dogs in the City's beach parks. Currently, the City has one (1) official city-wide beach park for dogs at Cedar Creek Beach Park in Southwest Mission.

Water access to dogs presents significant challenges including:

1. Reduced water quality. Water quality in many of the City's waterfront parks and beaches fluctuates due to increased levels of human use, goose/wildlife activities, etc. The introduction of dogs to waterfront parks and beaches will place additional pressure on water quality and the City risks beach water quality advisory alerts. Interior Health has also expressed concerns and a closure of a waterfront park may have impacts on tourism both in the short and long term and for the overall image of Kelowna.
2. Riparian Management Area. The Official Community Plan provides policy direction to protect and enhance the foreshore along the lake for environmental benefit. More detailed environmental inventories have been conducted of the foreshore that would preclude any additional dog parks. Dogs have the potential to erode the natural

environment by degrading ground cover areas and native plantings from uncollected dog waste and general dog behavior (e.g. digging, biting, eating, trampling).

3. Human Use. Dogs are not compatible with public use on existing beach and swimming areas. Interior Health advises that dog activities need to occur in isolated locations separate from public use during the swim season. Care should be taken to choose areas that avoid spillover into non-dog areas.

Staff has examined the potential feasibility of acquiring further waterfront land for the specific purpose of establishing an off-leash dog area. Other creative ideas include the construction of a dog swim pool in an 'in-land' park. However, both initiatives represent a large expenditure of public funds.

Staff has also reviewed the inventory of all municipal owned land and the vast majority of locations are not feasible. One possibility includes the area along Poplar Point Drive north of Sutherland Bay Park; it is a low use public swimming area with poor water quality and a relatively isolated location from other land uses. Having stated that, there may be issues with this location from the greater North End neighbourhood including the following:

- Historical performance of previous off-leash dog area in the nearby Sutherland Bay Park;
- Increase in vehicle traffic and parking issues in the surrounding neighbourhood;
- Conflict with existing swimming/water use.

Other possibilities for dog water access include one or more beach accesses throughout the City. The beach accesses often have lower profile and public use than the City's beach parks. However, the beach accesses from Mission Creek to Downtown are popular in the summer months for swimming and water use and a decrease in water quality may have impacts on existing use. Other challenges that would need to be resolved include:

- Proximity of waterfront houses (i.e. most beach accesses are 20.0 metres wide surrounded with residential housing);
- Increase in vehicle traffic and parking issues;
- Conflict with existing swimming/water use;
- Potential conflicts with sensitive environmental foreshore areas;
- The steep terrain of many of beach access in the Poplar Point Neighbourhood and McKinley Landing provide severe accessibility issues.

Non-waterfront Off-leash Dog Parks

Staff have generated the following list of potential 'in-land' off-leash dog areas for discussion purposes. Cost estimates have not been determined but will likely range from \$30,000 to \$200,000 depending upon location and complexity.

1. Parkinson Recreation Park - Off-leash Dog Area

There is an underutilized area of Parkinson Recreation Park near a bend in Mill Creek (south of the Basil Meikle Tennis Courts) that could be developed as an off-leash dog area (beyond the creek riparian area). The location is central to the City, complementary with many of the existing facilities in the park including the new Angel Way multi-use trail and has supporting infrastructure including nearby parking and washrooms.

2. Hollywood Road South at East Kelowna Road

A portion of this municipal parkland was developed in 2010 as a Mountain Bike Skills Park. There still remains a large undeveloped field that could be developed for off-leash dogs. There is an existing gravel parking lot and port-a-pottie on site. The Mission Creek Greenway, a popular on-leash dog trail, runs adjacent to this park and provides a valuable connection.

3. Boyce-Gyro Beach Park - Parking Lot

The City recently constructed a gravel parking lot at the north end of Watt Road as part of Boyce-Gyro Beach Park (former Lakeshore Mobile Home Park). The property has a large grass open space north of the parking lot that could be developed into a temporary off-leash dog park. Supporting infrastructure already exists in the form of parking and washrooms in the park. However, there are also some challenges that need to be managed including:

- a. Potential development plans for a partnership with the adjacent property owner (e.g. possible disposal of a portion of the property).
- b. Low lying area with drainage problems (e.g. standing water).
- c. Potential conflicts with adjacent property owners and local residents over noise, traffic, and parking.

4. Walrod Park

The City owns a property on Walrod Road for a future community park in the North End neighbourhood. The existing building is currently being leased to the Justice Institute, but there is a large open space area that remains open to the public. This area could be converted to an off-leash dog area.

5. Black Mountain Community Park

The City owns a parcel of land in the Black Mountain neighbourhood on Gallagher Road for a future community park. The City is currently constructing a multi-use trail through the park to connect Gopher Creek Linear Park to the new Highway 33 underpass. The remainder of the land could be developed into an off-leash dog area for the Black Mountain, Kirschner and Toovey Height residents.

6. Dehart Park

A temporary off-leash dog area could be developed at the future location of Dehart Park at Dehart Road and Gordon Drive. The need for an off-leash dog area in this location of the City is less than other areas because of the success of the two nearby dog-off leash areas at Mission Recreation Park and Cedar Creek Beach Park. While this land could be converted into a temporary dog park, pending park construction of Dehart Park, several of the other neighbourhoods in the City likely have a greater need.

7. Cameron and Osprey Parks

There is some potential to create small off-leash areas in these parks along the perimeter. Both parks were developed many years ago without consideration for dogs and so retrofitting for dogs requires careful consideration. Design issues include the need to

ensure the on-going operation of the existing sports fields and children's playgrounds. Resident's of the South Padosy neighbourhood have submitted the most amount of public input to the City in support of more dog parks.

8. Downtown Library Greenspace

There are two municipally owned parcels of land immediately adjacent to the Downtown Library i) the corner of Ethel and Doyle; and ii) east of the Library Parkade. A temporary off-leash dog area for small dogs could be established on one of these sites to provide service to local downtown residents. Long-term, the City anticipates development on these parcels.

9. Future RCMP lands

The City recently acquired a large vacant parcel of land on Clement Avenue between St. Paul and Richter Street. The building for a new RCMP complex is likely several years away and a temporary off-leash dog area could be established.

10. Waterfront Park - In-land Area

There is a portion of green space in Waterfront park near Rapsody Plaza on Water Street that is underutilized and could be retrofitted into an off-leash dog area. There would be no water access; however there is merit in providing an in-land off-leash area in the downtown area. Careful consideration would need to be given to the design of the off-leash dog area to ensure the aesthetics of Waterfront Park are not compromised nor the capacity of hosting summer events in the park.

11. Gyro Beach Park - On-leash

Gyro Beach Park is currently designated no-dogs allowed due to the potential conflict with the beach/swimming area, playground and volleyball areas. The construction of the Lakeshore Multi-use corridor will be complete in the next couple of months and it connects with the park trail through Gyro Beach Park. Staff anticipates a strong desire for dog owners to walk through the park with their dogs on-leash.

Neighbourhood Parks

The City has received several requests over the past year to allow on-leash dogs in neighbourhood parks. Many of the City's neighbourhood parks are under 0.3 ha and currently do not allow dogs due to their relatively small area and potential conflict with existing uses. These parks were designed and built many years ago before the popularity of dogs in public spaces. Many of them have a central children's playground and a surrounding grass play area. The introduction of on-leash dogs has potential for public safety conflicts especially with children.

Some neighbourhood parks may be easier than others to retrofit for dogs although each park will be different and needs to be assessed on its own. Typical construction costs will include fencing installation to delineate children play areas, trail construction to keep dog owners and dogs on hard surfaced areas, and signage installed to clearly communicate the rules. These improvements could cost \$15,000 to \$30,000 per park and detail design would need to be carry-out to determine more accurate cost estimate.

Note: The provision of dogs in parks is now considered as part of the planning and design process for all new parks.

Recommendation: The above measures represent an increase in service level to dog owners, but could result in a decrease in service level to other park users. There is a lack of data on public park preferences regarding these issues. More data needs to be carefully considered when evaluating the addition of more dog parks in the City. Staff recommends conducting a statistically valid community survey to help determine general preferences of dogs in public parks. In addition to the community survey, staff recommends conducting a dog impact assessment to determine current patterns of use, issues, compliance rates and areas of conflicts. The two initiatives will help provide a balanced approach and inform further decisions on dogs in parks. The results will be presented back to Council with further recommendations. This approach is consistent with the advice provided by IHA (see Attachment 2). IHA raises the issue of public liability which must be thoroughly considered.

External Agency/Public Comments:

Update on Comments from Community Associations and Dogs at Sporting Events

As requested at the September 20, 2010 Council meeting, staff forwarded dog park information to the various Kelowna neighbourhood associations for comment. Only the Glenmore Valley Community Association responded, with the following comments:

- It was agreed by general consent that the current status of dog parks in Glenmore did not need to be changed.
- The members also agreed that dogs should not be allowed on beaches used by people.

Update on Comments from the Sportfield Advisory Committee

Staff has discussed the idea of allowing dogs at sports field parks with the Sportfield Advisory Committee. Dogs would likely have a significant impact on the quality of the turf and could affect overall public safety. The Committee has offered the following comments:

- In consideration of designating sports fields for off-leash use in the winter months when amateur league use is not scheduled, the Committee feels that there are too many potential variables i.e, a mild winter may allow for an extension to the playing season, which would adversely affect use by dogs.
- In consideration of a dog pen or corral adjacent to competitive sports facilities where tournament participants could leave their dog(s) contained and unattended, the Committee was not in favour as they felt there is too much potential for conflict.
- The Committee favours locating an off-leash dog park component within Parkinson Recreation Park because then each of the existing Recreation Parks would have an off-leash facility.

Financial/Budgetary Considerations

Staff estimates that a statistically valid community survey and a comprehensive dog impact assessment would cost approximately \$25,000. Funds for this initiative have not been allocated in current City budgets and would need to be requested as part of the 2012 Capital Budget. Staff cannot begin the project until adequate funding is in place.

The establishment of new off-leash dog areas or retrofits to existing park will need to be funded from the City's Capital Budget in future years. There will also be additional maintenance and operation costs that will need to be funded from the City's Operation Budget. The addition of new dog parks also needs to be supported by additional resources to the RDCO dog enforcement program and/or the City's Bylaw and Enforcement Division.

Personnel Implications

The potential addition of more dog areas to municipal parks will attract much public interest and a wide variety of viewpoints. In order to provide a balanced approach and find appropriate compromises, significant staff resources will need to be committed amongst Infrastructure Planning, Communications & Media Relations and Parks Services.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

- Internal Circulation
- Alternate Recommendation
- Legal/Statutory Authority
- Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements
- Existing Policy
- Community & Media Relations Comments

Submitted by:

T. Barton, Parks and Public Places Manager

I. Wilson, Park Services Manager

Approved for inclusion

R. Cleveland, Director, Infrastructure Planning

- cc: Director, Recreation and Cultural Services
- Director, Communications & Media Relations

Dog Parks per 100,000 Residents

FY 2008



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<i>City</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Number of Dog Parks</i>	<i>Dog Parks per 100,000 Residents</i>
Portland, Ore.	550,396	31	5.6
Las Vegas	558,880	23	4.1
San Francisco	764,976	27	3.5
Bakersfield	315,837	7	2.2
Tampa	336,823	7	2.1
St. Petersburg	246,407	5	2.0
Henderson	249,386	5	2.0
Colorado Springs	376,427	7	1.9
Seattle	594,210	11	1.9
Austin	743,074	13	1.7
Jersey City	242,389	4	1.7
New York	8,310,212	135	1.6
Sacramento	460,242	7	1.5
Anchorage/Anchorage Borough	279,671	4	1.4
Riverside, Calif.	294,437	4	1.4
Albuquerque	518,271	7	1.4
Minneapolis	377,392	5	1.3
San Diego	1,266,731	16	1.3
Chandler, Ariz.	246,399	3	1.2
Cincinnati	332,458	4	1.2
Glendale, Ariz.	253,152	3	1.2
Lexington/Fayette	282,114	3	1.1
Fresno	470,508	5	1.1
Denver	588,349	6	1.0
Pittsburgh	311,218	3	1.0
San Jose	939,899	9	1.0
Tucson	525,529	5	1.0
Long Beach	466,520	4	0.9
St. Louis	355,663	3	0.8
Lincoln	248,744	2	0.8
Raleigh	375,806	3	0.8
Oakland	401,489	3	0.7
Miami	424,662	3	0.7
Stockton	287,245	2	0.7

<i>City</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Number of Dog Parks</i>	<i>Dog Parks per 100,000 Residents</i>
Charlotte/Mecklenburg	890,515	5	0.6
Nashville/Davidson	590,807	3	0.5
Boston	608,352	3	0.5
Omaha	424,482	2	0.5
Virginia Beach	434,743	2	0.5
Chicago	2,836,658	12	0.4
Louisville	713,877	3	0.4
Greensboro, N.C.	247,183	1	0.4
Fort Wayne	251,247	1	0.4
Plano	260,796	1	0.4
Indianapolis	795,458	3	0.4
Buffalo	272,632	1	0.4
St. Paul	277,251	1	0.4
Philadelphia	1,449,634	5	0.3
Phoenix	1,552,259	5	0.3
Aurora, Colo.	311,794	1	0.3
Houston	2,208,180	6	0.3
Arlington, Tex.	371,038	1	0.3
Los Angeles	3,834,340	10	0.3
Tulsa	384,037	1	0.3
Cleveland	438,042	1	0.2
Honolulu/Honolulu County	905,034	2	0.2
Mesa	452,933	1	0.2
Kansas City, Mo.	475,830	1	0.2
Milwaukee/Milwaukee County	953,328	2	0.2
Atlanta	519,145	1	0.2
Oklahoma City	547,274	1	0.2
Washington, D.C.	588,292	1	0.2
El Paso	606,913	1	0.2
Dallas	1,266,372	2	0.2
Baltimore	640,150	1	0.2
San Antonio	1,328,984	2	0.2
Memphis	674,028	1	0.1
Fort Worth	681,818	1	0.1
Columbus	747,755	1	0.1
Jacksonville	805,605	1	0.1
Anaheim	333,249	0	0.0
Corpus Christi	285,507	0	0.0

<i>City</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Number of Dog Parks</i>	<i>Dog Parks per 100,000 Residents</i>
Detroit	916,952	0	0.0
Newark, NJ	280,135	0	0.0
Santa Ana	339,555	0	0.0
Toledo	316,851	0	0.0
Wichita	361,420	0	0.0
	<i>Total, All Cities:</i>	466	
		<i>Average, All Cities:</i>	0.8
		<i>Median, All Cities:</i>	0.5

If a city has more than one agency, dog parks are combined.



July 29, 2010

MEDICAL HEALTH OFFICER HEALTH GUIDANCE STATEMENT ON: PARK USE BY DOGS

For many people, dogs provide an irreplaceable source of companionship, friendship and security. In Canada, approximately one third of all households own a dog (Ipsos Canada, 2001). Increasing urbanization and a growing urban dog population contributes to pressures on park space where both people and dogs can exercise, play and socialize.

In response to a request from the City of Kelowna, Interior Health Medical Health Officers have been asked to comment on the public health impacts of dogs in parks. In the City of Kelowna there are 259 parks. Dogs are permitted in 81 of them, 7 of which are designated as off-leash dog parks.

The review of the issue is hampered by the relative lack of baseline information, much of the data is suggestive of problems but good data collection has not apparently been undertaken.

Public parks have an important role to play in facilitating physical activity. Environment is critical for increasing opportunities for exercise and is an important area to address sedentary behaviours associated with a variety of chronic illnesses (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Dog owners complete significantly more minutes of walking and total physical activity. Parks which are open to dogs provide for animal socialization activities, physical and mental stimulation and exercise for active dogs.

Having a pet dog improves both physical and mental wellbeing (Wells, 2007). Directly, there is the obvious effect of increased physical activity, however there are important indirect effects of pet ownership brought on by increased social contact and the possibility that the human-dog bond provides a psychological buffer against stress. Additionally, pets can have a positive influence on a child's development and self esteem (Lang & Klassen, 2005)

Dog owners perceived that they had more social support to walk and do other forms of physical activity and reported higher neighbourhood cohesion than did non-owners (Cutt *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, there are educational advantages and opportunities for owners to learn about dogs through observation and discussion with more experienced owners when interacting at public parks.

Effectiveness of current enforcement of City by-laws designed to reduce negative consequences of dog ownership.

Currently, the City of Kelowna outlines the responsibilities of dog owners to clean up after their dogs, train their dogs to obey commands, license and vaccinate their dogs, use a leash no longer than 2 meters and stay at least 10 meters away from playgrounds. These bylaws are often not enforced, and much of the public health concerns of allowing dogs in

all of Kelowna's parks can be managed by promoting strong local ordinances and uniform enforcement, as well as by implementing community-wide education programs. Ultimately, dog owners must take the initiative to be responsible and conscientious, ensuring that their actions support the privilege of sharing parkland and open spaces with the community.

While most dogs are friendly with no intentions to cause harm to anyone, at times, some dogs may act aggressively towards humans or other dogs. Dog bites are a serious and often underestimated medical and public health problem, and continue to be a source of preventable injury (Shuler *et al.*, 2008; Voelker, 1997).

While most dogs may be well intentioned and trained, dogs may bite humans under a variety of conditions. The peak incidence of dog bites is from June to August. The likelihood of a child sustaining a dog bite in their lifetime is approximately 50% (Beck & Jones, 1985).

In Canada, 81% of reported dog bites occur in children aged 14 years or younger (CHIRPP, 2006). Children aged 5-9 represent the higher risk group for dog attacks (Lang, 2005). The psychosocial consequences of trauma caused by a dog bite can affect the quality of life of the injured child and his or her family (Kahn *et al.*, 2003). Injuries to the upper body occur more frequently in younger children and the body part most often affected is the face (40.5%) (CHIRPP, 2006). Scarring is a common consequence related to dog bites, and the resulting emotional distress should not be underestimated, particularly for face wounds (Schmitt, 1998).

Most injuries are caused by a dog known to the victim (Lang & Klassen, 2005). While dog bites are a concern in public parks, most injuries occur at the victim's own home (34%) or other home (30%) with 3% of injuries occurring in a public park.

Prevention is the best method for avoiding injury. It has been suggested that the risk of bite injuries reinforces the need for owners to be vigilant about socializing and training their dogs. Prevention strategies should focus on public education and training of dogs and their owners.

Current compliance with existing City of Kelowna bylaws on the use of leashes to control dogs is not known but anecdotally, it is less than ideal. While many animals can be well trained, all dogs have the potential in certain circumstances to become aggressive. Even the best trained of animals, such as guide animals and police animals are maintained on-leash. Off-leash parks should be limited for the purposes of dogs without other human activities occurring in such areas.

While most dogs are friendly, some people can have exacerbations of underlying disease when exposed to dogs, others may become anxious or fearful when approached by a dog.

Dog bites represent an unwanted interaction between humans and dogs who are misbehaving. Some people have health concerns that would be impacted by a close interaction with the best trained animals. Asthma and dog specific allergies can be exacerbated. The prevalence of these diseases are respectively about 11% and 4% of

child populations. The risk for exacerbation of underlying disease of individuals can vary considerably and consideration must be given to the most sensitive and high risk persons in policy development. Some persons may become fearful or avoid interactions with specific animals, including dogs. The prevalence of phobias or discomfort amongst persons approached by a dog is not known.

Even when dogs are not aggressive, some animals get excited and can run towards, jump on or sniff other visitors to the park. Injuries other than bites may result although data are lacking on the frequency of such circumstances. While some people enjoy the opportunity to play with a friendly dog, others do not and may feel it is an intrusion of their own enjoyment of the public park. There is a lack of data in the literature on the public park experiences of people who do not own dogs, however this should be considered when evaluating the use of public parks for all community members.

Uncollected dog waste (fecal and urine) can negatively affect park aesthetics as well as public health and safety. In natural parks or along the edge of water bodies, accumulating dog waste can adversely impact sensitive habitat areas. Where animal wastes are left in public parks, risk for zoonotic disease is increased.

Kelowna Dog Regulation and Impounding Bylaw (No. 5880-88) require that all owners pick up their dog's fecal waste; however these rules are not always followed, particularly when dogs are off-leash (Holland *et al.*, 1991). Public education has greatly increased awareness of the connection between uncollected feces and zoonotic disease, yet a proportion of pet owners, even if in the minority, do not pick up their pets' waste. Dog urine has the potential to carry pathogens that can cause human illness. Exposure by persons is more likely from activities that involve other than walking across an area (e.g. lying on beaches, picnicking, sport and fun games). Children are more likely to be exposed to such pathogens (Seah *et al.*, 1975).

The risk of these diseases can be reduced by strict enforcement of existing bylaws concerning dogs. The current effectiveness of by-laws in eliminating canine fecal contamination is not known for Kelowna.

Hand-washing is important in reducing the risk for infection in a park utilized by dogs and appropriate washing facilities should be available where dogs are permitted.

Public health impacts of dogs in parks are a factor of how a park is actually used by pet owners, rather than simply the accessibility of the area to animals (Ludlam & Platt, 1989). Providing dog waste bags and conveniently placed receptacles in popular dog walking areas can increase the rate of compliance with dog waste bylaws. Dog waste left in public spaces can contribute to tension between those park users with and those without dogs.

As previously indicated to the City of Kelowna, good beach operation should include efforts to reduce fecal contamination from all sources. The 2007 study by the City of Kelowna demonstrated the contribution of E. Coli in beach recreational water attributable to canines was of the order of 15%, second only to geese (24%). Further, the use of beaches by persons playing or lying on the ground is a strong rationale for excluding dogs from beaches used by humans.

Summary:

Policy development on expanding access to parklands by dogs is compromised by the lack of information related to:

- Public opinion and public preferences.
- Current compliance with municipal bylaws related to use of leashes and removal of dog feces.
- Impact on behaviour and concerns of non-dog owners who may actively avoid contact with areas where dogs frequent.
- Risks to persons with underlying health conditions.

Changes in policy should be accompanied by evaluation of impacts on persons affected by the policy change.

While the majority of dog owners are responsible, the current effectiveness of signage, enforcement and education activities is questioned in respect to dog owners who do not comply with expectations outlined in bylaws.

Recommendations:

1. Pet ownership should be encouraged as a health promoting activity, both from the perspective of the intrinsic value of companionship as well as the increased physical activity incurred, particularly amongst dog owners.
2. Dogs should be prohibited from playgrounds, locations where children frequent for play purposes (playing fields, school yards etc.) and beaches with their adjacent park strips that are used by people.
3. Information on public opinions, public behaviours of non-dog owners and current compliance with leash and clean-up bylaws should be obtained to help inform policy changes.
4. If increased access to park space is to be provided to dogs, that this be undertaken in a measured fashion, so that impacts can be monitored on the majority of persons who are not dog owners.
5. Sufficient resources for education and enforcement should be dedicated to ensure that the benefits of expanding access to parks by dogs exceed the risks.
6. Parks where dogs can be permitted should also provide good hand-washing facilities.
7. Off-leash parks should be limited for the purposes of dogs without other human activities occurring in such areas.

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¹ References available