

## **ITEM                    HENLEY PARK OFF-LEASH DOG TRIAL**

**Department        City Services and Assets**

**Author Initials: RM**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The City of Canada Bay adopted a Dogs in Public Places Strategy in December 2019. The strategy identified Henley Park as potentially suitable for an off-leash dog area. A Henley Park off-leash trial occurred from 10 February to 15 March 2020 during which time we invited the community to provide feedback.

This report details the feedback received from the community. It also recommends that Henley Park becomes a permanent dog park and a fence is installed along the Flavelle Street edge at a cost of approximately \$17,000.

### **STRATEGIC CONNECTION**

This report supports YourFuture2030 strategic delivery areas:

- IIP 1.2.2.        Provide quality active and passive Recreation Services and Facilities that contribute to health and wellbeing
  
- EP 2.2.1.        Plan for, and maintain, parks and open spaces to provide active and passive recreation opportunities for everyone's enjoyment.

### **REPORT**

#### **Background**

Henley Park is located in Concord on the corner of Flavelle Street and Pitt Street. Originally a general cemetery, it became a park in 1938. There is a gated children's playground in one corner of the park. No organised sports are played in the park, however it is used for informal recreation such as exercising and throwing a frisbee.

The draft NSW Greener Places – Open Space for Recreation Guide includes performance criteria for household proximity to dog exercise areas. It states that there should be: "Access to an off-leash opportunity within 10 minutes (800m) walking distance of all houses."

While preparing the Dogs in Public Places Strategy in 2019, staff investigated whether there is currently an adequate supply of dog parks in the City. The 800m criteria mentioned in the previous paragraph was used. It was identified that residents within 800 metres of Henley Park do not currently have this opportunity, unlike the majority of other residents within Canada Bay (See Attachment One – Map showing portion of Canada Bay that falls within 800 metres of an existing off-leash dog exercise area).

The adopted strategy identified an opportunity to explore options for the establishment of a dog off-leash exercise area in Henley Park to address this need.

### **Community Consultation**

A Henley Park dog off-leash trial occurred from 10 February to 15 March 2020, during which time we invited the community to provide feedback.

#### How was the community engaged?

Four thousand postcards were produced and delivered to residents within 800 metres of Henley Park to promote the trial. It was also promoted via the Council website, E-news, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, a Collaborate email campaign, flyers at Concord Library, on-site signage and at an on-site listening post.

#### On-site listening post

Council staff were at Henley Park on Sunday 23 February from 3.30 – 5.30pm to answer questions in person. Councillor Yap also attended this on-site session. Over 15 groups of residents attended the listening post. The most common question posed was:

*If the trial is successful and the community supports the park becoming an off-leash dog park, would the park be fenced? If so, how much of the park would be fenced?*

Council officers explained that the feedback collected would be analysed and reported back to Council. The formation of an off-leash dog park would also need to incorporate the principles outlined in the recently adopted Dogs in Public Places Strategy with reference to issues such as fencing, other amenities and enforcement.

Fencing options are discussed in more detail later in this report.

#### Consultation Results – Summary

A total of 46 submissions were received during the consultation period. A Community Engagement Outcomes Report is provided as Attachment Two. Some of the key results are summarised below:

Do you think this park is suitable as an off-leash dog park?

- Yes – 85%
- No – 15%

Three most common activities the park is currently used for:

- Walking my dog on-leash
- Walking my dog off-leash
- Visiting the children's playground

Three biggest concerns about dogs being off-leash in Henley Park:

- Dogs running out onto nearby roads
- Owners not picking up dog droppings
- Inconsiderate attitude/manners of some dog owners

Key reasons given by respondents who don't think this park is suitable as an off-leash dog park:

- A need to maintain a shared space for all of the community
- Dogs deter some people from using the park

## **Infrastructure Considerations**

### **1. Fencing**

The Dogs in Public Places includes the following guidance in regards to fencing:

*Council's Open Space and Recreation Strategy notes that some organisations advocate that fencing dog parks can reduce conflict between dogs and other users. However it also notes that this can concentrate use in one area, increase wear and tear and maintenance costs, and that it is challenging to design fenced areas to be multipurpose spaces available for a range of users and uses. Council's preference is not to fence dog parks.*

*Dog exercise areas may be fenced when other options have been considered and a need is still identified for the safety of dogs and/or people.*

*Council may undertake partial fencing when there is the need to reduce a risk but a site is not suitable for full fencing.*

In addition, both the Dogs in Public Places Strategy and NSW legislation requires owners to be able to exercise effective control over their dog when in public places, including voice control within off-leash exercise areas. In theory this means owners are not allowed to let their dog off-leash if there is a risk it could ignore voice commands and run on to a road.

There are a number of existing unfenced off-leash dog exercise areas in Canada Bay adjacent to roads, which operate successfully. Examples include Halliday Park, Lysaght Park and Taplin Park.

During the consultation process a significant number of people asked whether it was Council's intention to fence Henley Park if it becomes a permanent off-leash exercise area.

### **Community feedback regarding fencing**

There was a wide range of suggestions put forward by the community in regards to fencing, if the park was to become a permanent dog off-leash exercise area. General trends indicate:

- perimeter residents would like the park to remain as is
- dog owners with smaller dogs are happy without a fence
- dog owners with larger or more athletic dogs would like a fence – even if it’s only in a portion of the park

The following were identified by respondents as the three most important elements needed for a successful off-leash park:

1. Is entirely fenced in
2. Located within walking distance
3. Is not fenced in/is also available for other uses

Note that Items 1 and 3 show contrasting views.

### Fencing options

Four fencing options were considered through this process.

The preferred option as recommended by Council staff is to fence the Flavelle Street boundary of the park only. This option supports shared usage by different user groups while reducing risk of dogs running on to the busiest adjacent road, and avoids concentrated wear and tear in one area. There is also alignment with the adopted Dogs in Public Places Strategy which states “*Council may undertake partial fencing when there is the need to reduce a risk but a site is not suitable for full fencing*”.

The cost associated with the fencing along this one road frontage is estimated at \$17,000.

The other three options considered are as shown below.

1. No fencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raised by 6 respondents</li> <li>• Aligned with the adopted Dogs in Public Places Strategy which states “Council’s preference is not to fence dog parks”</li> <li>• Supports shared usage by different user groups</li> <li>• Avoids concentrated usage in one area (wear and tear issues)</li> <li>• Cost estimate: \$0</li> </ul>
2. Fence entire Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raised by 13 respondents</li> <li>• Goes against the preference stated in the adopted Dogs in Public Places Strategy</li> <li>• Can create a perception that usage of the park from other user groups is discouraged</li> <li>• Ensures dogs will not run on to any roads</li> <li>• Cost estimate: \$45,000</li> </ul>

3. Fence portion of the park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raised by 18 respondents</li> <li>• Goes against the preference stated in the adopted Dogs in Public Places Strategy</li> <li>• Breaks up the park and detracts from existing large open space</li> <li>• Cause the greatest wear and tear issues (in a concentrated area)</li> <li>• Ensures dogs will not run on to any roads</li> <li>• Seen to sterilise an area of the park and discourage shared use</li> <li>• Fencing cost estimate: \$30,000</li> </ul>
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## **2. Other Infrastructure Needs**

Beyond fencing and location, the submissions showed that the most popular elements for a successful dog park are:

1. A drinking fountain
2. Litter bags and bins
3. Natural shade

These facilities either already exist or will be added into the park should it be resolved to become a permanent off-leash exercise area.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

A budget of \$100,000 for 2019/20 was allocated for off-leash dog exercise area site improvements. Sufficient funding is available for the proposed Flavelle Street fence and associated dog park infrastructure. An additional \$40,000 in 2020/21 and \$40,000 in 2021/22 is also allocated for improvements to infrastructure in the dog parks.

It has previously been identified that an ongoing maintenance budget would need to be provided for any additional off-leash dog exercise areas. It is considered that the condition of new off-leash dog exercise areas would not be able to be satisfactorily maintained without a specific budget allocation.

## **Conclusion**

The community feedback from the dog off-leash trial at Henley Park showed that 85% of respondents believe the park is suitable as a permanent dog off-leash exercise area.

A number of respondents provided feedback in regards to fencing at Henley Park. This report recommends that a fence is installed adjacent to Flavelle Street to minimise the risk of dogs running on to a busy road, without segmenting park users. This approach would be in accordance with Council's approach in the Dogs in Public Places Strategy.

Note that the Dogs in Public Places Strategy would be updated to reflect the resolutions passed by Council in regards to Henley Park.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. THAT Henley Park (excluding the fenced playground) becomes a permanent off-leash dog exercise area
2. THAT a fence is installed adjacent to the Flavelle Street site frontage.

### Attachments:

1. Map showing portion of Canada Bay that falls within 800 metres of an existing off-leash dog exercise area - 6663181 (*distributed under separate cover*)
2. Community Engagement Outcomes Report – 6660205 (*distributed under separate cover*)

