Bellevue Parks & Community Services

DRAFT
Off-Leash Dog Study

April 14, 2009

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Executive Summary

In summer of 2008, several citizens expressed interest to the Park Board and City Council in creating an off-leash facility at the Downtown Park for smallish dogs, and other residents have requested an off-leash facility be incorporated into the Eastgate Area Properties Master Plan. Since the requests, staff has been examining current Bellevue off-leash practices and those of other communities. This report summarizes findings and makes recommendations on the direction that Bellevue should take in providing facilities for dogs off-leash in our park system, which are outlined below:

Summary:
The three principle recommendations are:

1. Level of Service
    - 1 facility / 30,000 residents, which is similar to Seattle.
    - Three (3) additional off-leash facilities would be needed to meet this service level.
2. Geographic dispersion in the identified need areas
   The Robinswood facility currently serves the east Bellevue area. It is recommended that new facilities be located in the following underserved areas of the community:
    - Downtown Bellevue
    - Central Bellevue
    - South Bellevue

3. Criteria for off-leash area location
   Seek sites for Off-Leash Area development that:
    - are without established recreational uses;
    - consider previous community-based planning processes;
    - provide generous residential buffers;
    - assure close-by parking;
    - are compatible with other uses;
    - complement visual park character;
    - can address sensitive environmental concerns; and
    - consider transit/bus routes

The following are candidate off-leash sites that best meet the above principles for the identified underserved areas of Bellevue:

- Downtown
    - McCormick Park
- Central Bellevue
    - Wilburton Hill Park or Highland Glendale
- South Bellevue
    - Lakemont Park – detention area

In the event any of the above candidate sites can not be developed it is recommended that other sites be considered according to the three principles shown above.

Other key recommendations:

- Staff recommends off-leash needs for east Bellevue be fulfilled at Robinswood Park with some facility improvements;
- Encourage residential developers to provide dog relief areas for their tenants;
- Off-leash areas be dedicated, fenced area of 1 acre minimum where possible; the Downtown location is intended to serve smaller dogs, and can therefore be a smaller area;
- Explore advocacy group partnerships;
- Implement new off-leash areas on a 1 year trial basis;
- Fund these costs utilizing the existing Neighborhood Enhancement Program.

Currently, there are opportunities for dog owners and their pets to experience Bellevue Parks. Dogs are allowed in all 70 Bellevue Parks and trails while on leash with only 3 exceptions; beach parks in swimming season, Robinswood synthetic turf area, and the Botanical Garden. Bellevue also operates one centrally located off-leash facility at Robinswood Park. Off-leash facilities at Marymoor, Medina, and Luther Burbank Park, while not in the corporate limits, also serve Bellevue's off-leash community to some degree. The 40 acre off-leash facility at Marymoor Park is considered to be the premier off-leash facility in the Northwest. With Bellevue's regional off-leash needs served by Marymoor, recommendations in this study focus smaller sized facilities that serve localized Bellevue needs.

There are 3 major types of off-leash facilities; dedicated, fenced sites known as Off-Leash Areas (OLA), shared use facilities, and off-leash trails. The OLA type is the current method used at Robinswood and is the recommended facility type for new locations. OLA's have operational and risk advantages such as peer pressure policing, reduced conflict potential between general park users and dogs, and don't require on-site staff. Portland and other agencies that operate or have tried shared use facilities indicated that an entire park can turn into to an off-leash area without on-site supervision, and for this reason it is not recommended. Off-leash trails are not common, and are not recommended unless part of a fenced OLA because of increased risk for general park user and dog conflict.

When considering off-leash areas per capita, levels of service vary throughout the region and country. Nationally, Portland and Seattle are in the highest level of service range for large cities, and thus considered among the "dog-friendliest" cities in the country. Bellevue is currently in a moderate service level range comparatively. It is recommended that the off-leash area service level be modestly increased from 1 off-leash area to 2 – 4 off-leash areas, which would put the Bellevue off-leash level of service in the high range, similar to Seattle. The objective of this recommendation is to serve off-leash needs at a high level while meeting broad community needs. More than 4 off-leash facilities would place Bellevue's level of service in the highest range regionally and nationally.

Geographic distribution of off-leash facilities is also recommended. When considering existing off-leash areas in and around Bellevue, west Bellevue's off-leash needs are

served by the 8 acres (12 acres during winter months) of off-leash area at Medina Park, north Bellevue is served by Marymoor Park, and east Bellevue is served by Robinswood Park. Potential areas for improved off-leash service level are downtown Bellevue, central Bellevue, and south Bellevue.

In downtown Bellevue small dog relief areas are appropriate at a size similar to that of a single family residential yard. Parks & Community Services will work with Planning & Community Development staff to encourage residential developers to provide dog relief areas for their tenants.

Locating off-leash facilities in a mature park system like Bellevue's is difficult without displacing existing passive and active uses. Criteria for locating off-leash areas has been developed and applied to the Bellevue Park system to identify candidate off-leash sites. No Bellevue Park sites clearly meet all the criteria. This is not an indication of overly restrictive criteria rather it demonstrates the lack of available, unencumbered land. The candidate sites are McCormick Park in downtown Bellevue, Highland/Glendale or Wilburton Hill Park in central Bellevue, and the detention facility at Lakemont Park in south Bellevue.

Costs to fully develop off-leash facilities are approximately $100K for a one acre facility with approximately $15K in annual maintenance and operation costs. No money is currently budgeted for off-leash area development or improvements. It is recommended that the Neighborhood Enhancement Program (NEP) be used as the funding mechanism and public process for implementing new off-leash areas in least served areas, and those are identified as downtown Bellevue, central Bellevue, and south Bellevue. It is further recommended that the candidate sites that closest meet location criteria be the sites considered in the NEP process, and that when one facility is implemented in an identified need area, the off-leash need will be considered fulfilled. For example, if through the NEP process an off-leash facility is constructed at Wilburton Hill Park, then Highland Glendale will not be considered in future NEP cycles because the need for central Bellevue has been served.

Robinswood Park off-leash facilities are an integral part of serving Bellevue's overall off-leash needs. The existing Robinswood facilities have never been formally endorsed as off-leash facilities and it is recommended that they be endorsed by the Park Board. Off-leash facilities at Robinswood are converted spaces from other farm uses. It is recommended that improvements be made to the Robinswood facilities such that it becomes Bellevue's premier off-leash facility. Currently, no money is budgeted for improvements, or maintenance and operation for the Robinswood off-leash areas and funding secured through the NEP or other sources.

Introduction

The concept of formalized off-leash facilities in public parks is a relatively new concept for stewards of public lands. A ground swell of interest for off-leash areas peaked in Seattle during the mid 1990's. Not having a formula to follow, Seattle has learned

through an evolution of trial and error the nuances of off-leash area development. To date, no national or local standards exist for off-leash area development. Recommendations in this report are based on our experiences managing the Robinswood Park off-leash facility as well as the experiences and practices of other agencies and individuals.

In mature communities like Bellevue it can be difficult locating new off-leash facilities because there isn't a ready supply of available, undeveloped land. Bellevue's challenge is establishing new off-leash uses without eliminating or displacing established passive and active uses.

Current Practice

Dogs are allowed in all 70 Bellevue Parks on leash during park hours with exceptions:

- Beach Parks during swimming season
- Botanical Garden
- Synthetic sports fields

City of Bellevue Parks & Community Services Department currently manages one centrally located off-leash facility with the community at Robinswood Park.

Facility Types

There are three basic off-leash use types found in the region: dedicated off-leash facilities referred to as Off-Leash Areas (OLA), shared use facilities, and off-leash trails. Off-leash facilities vary in type, size, shape, amenities, and methods of management. Some off-leash facilities are big, some small, some wooded, some operated by advocacy groups, some are operated by governmental agencies, and some are a combination. Some jurisdictions also separate dog behavior within their off-leash facilities.

Shy Dog and Active/Aggressive Dog Areas

Dogs come in different shapes, sizes, and behaviors. There are small dogs that are passive and some active, or aggressive. The same is true of larger dogs, with some being passive and others being more active, or aggressive. In order to reduce conflicts and accommodate varying dog behaviors some off-leash facilities like those in Lake Oswego, Oregon separate small/shy dogs and active/aggressive dogs. Active/aggressive off-leash areas require more land area than small/shy dogs areas due to the inherent nature of the activity patterns of each facility. For example, games of fetch are a predominant activity in many off-leash areas. The very nature of throwing a ball requires significant area. When several games of fetch are taking place at one time, dog behavior can escalate. This can be intimidating for some small or shy dogs. These behaviors can be seen at our Robinswood facilities. Neither off-

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leash area at Robinswood is designated for specific dog types or activities however the area along 148th Ave NE is primarily used by active dogs. The off-leash area near the tennis center typically attracts timid/shy dogs, or dogs and their owners that prefer a less aggressive off-leash experience.

Off-Leash Areas (OLA)
OLA's are land areas dedicated for off-leash use that are typically fenced. Amenities can vary greatly from one location to another, but often include waste receptacles, waste disposal bags, water for pets to drink, surface improvements such as mulch or sand, double gated entries, benches, and an information board or kiosk for posting notices and regulations. This method is used at all (11) Seattle off-leash sites, and Robinswood Park, and is the recommended facility type.

OLA Benefits and Drawbacks

- Benefits
  - Contains off-leash use
  - Operational advantages
    - Peer pressure aids policing
    - Reduced conflicts between general park users and dogs
    - No on-site staff supervision required

- Drawbacks
  - Need a site that does not displace existing uses
  - Can be unattractive

Shared Use Areas
This form of use designates a site or portion of a site for off-leash use during specific periods. Shared use areas are typically unfenced with limited or no improvements and have set seasonal or daily operation hours. For example, Mt. Tabor Park in Portland allows off-leash use in a designated area daily from 7:00 AM – 9:00 PM. Portland uses this method in 27 of their 31 off-leash facilities with mixed results. City of Medina is one of the few area municipalities that uses this method. Certain areas of Medina Park are designated for year-round off-leash use and other areas are seasonal, or restricted.

Shared Use Benefits and Drawbacks

- Benefits
  - Shares Park with other uses
  - Lower development cost option
  - Lower turf impact option
- Drawbacks
  - Difficult to enforce hours
  - Entire Park becomes off-leash facility

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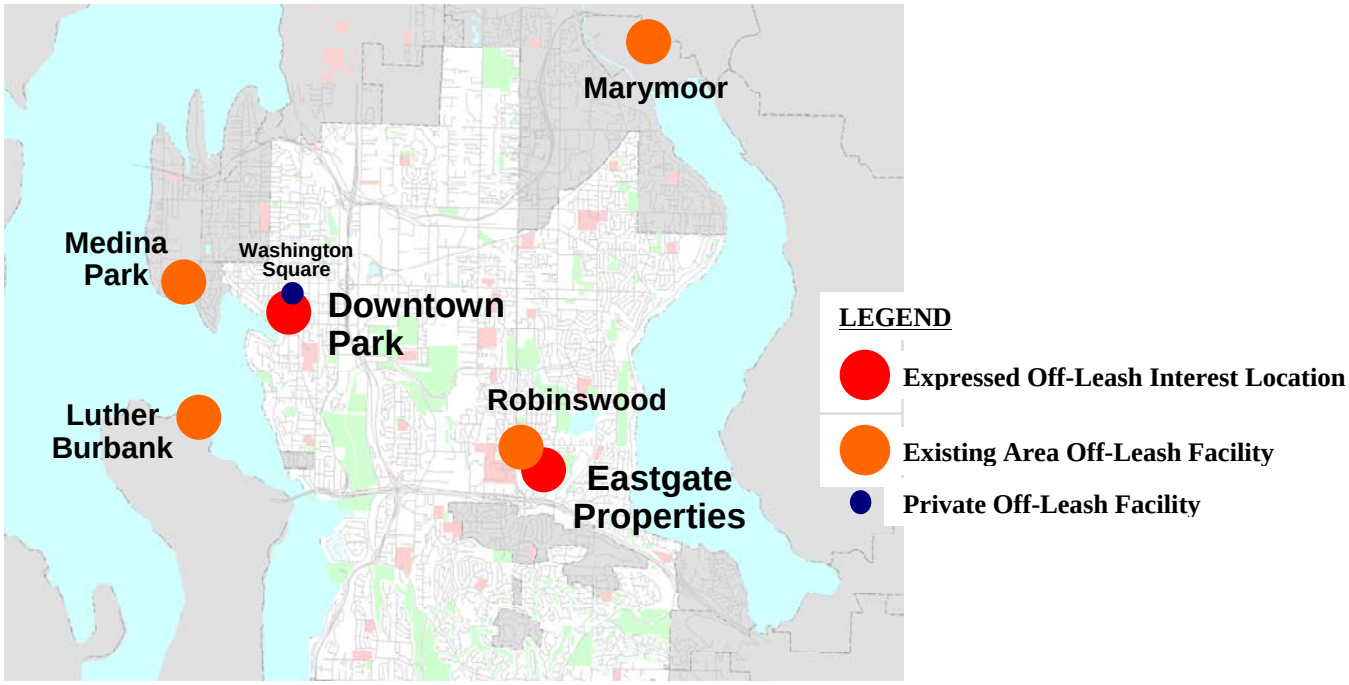
- Frequent conflicts with other park users

Off-Leash Trails
Trails sanctioned for off-leash use are not common, however many communities including Bellevue, allow dogs on trails on leash. Bellingham has several trails that were viewed as under utilized and off-leash use is allowed. "Public lands managers have found that even where dogs on leash are permitted on trails, owners often allow their dogs to run free. In a survey conducted at Angeles National Forest, where dogs are allowed on trails as long as they are on a leash, 90 percent of the dogs observed on trails were off leash" (National Park Service, Chester, 2003).

Area Facilities

Currently, there are 35 public off-leash facilities in western Washington with many more at various stages of study, planning, and implementation. In the Bellevue area there are four public off-leash facilities, which are Robinswood Park, Marymoor Park, Medina Park, Luther Burbank Park, and a privately owned facility on the Washington Square property in downtown Bellevue. See map below.



Robinswood Park - Bellevue

Within Robinswood Park there are two off-leash areas, a +/- 1.25 acre area along 148th Ave SE and a +/-0.5 acre area near the tennis facility, for a combined total of approximately 1.75 acres. These off-leash areas were not designed specifically for dog use. The 148th Ave area was created in 1989 to temporarily hold horses during renovations at Kelsey Creek and was designated a temporary off-leash facility in 2002. Built in the 1970's, the equestrian riding area near the tennis facility has been an ad-hoc off-leash facility for approximately 15 years. Horses still have priority, however no

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equestrian use has been observed in 10 years. The area has been available for rental for the past 6 years.

The off-leash facilities at Robinswood Park are approximately 4 miles from Bellevue City Hall.

Washington Square – Bellevue

A private condominium developer in downtown Bellevue has constructed a 16' x 18' (288 s.f.) off-leash area for their residents use. The facility features stone paving, brick walls, benches, mutt mitt dispenser, waste receptacle, and ornamental fencing. This site demonstrates that the private sector in downtown Bellevue has recognized a need to provide such facilities. It also shows that small off-leash areas, while not conducive for active dog activities like games of fetch, can be effective in an urban environment where space is at a premium and dog relief areas are needed. Facilities such as this better serve small animals which tend to be predominant in higher density residential areas.

Marymoor Park - Redmond

The largest managed off-leash area in western Washington is located at Marymoor Park, approximately 7.5 miles from Bellevue City Hall. Considered by many to be the premier off-leash area in the northwest, the facility occupies 40 of the parks 640 acres. Marymoor Park is owned by King County with the off-leash area operated by Serve Our Dog Area (S.O.D.A.), a Seattle area off-leash advocacy group. Because of its' size, close proximity to major highways, available parking, many trails, open areas, and access to a natural water feature, and a privately-operated dog washing station, the Marymoor off-leash facility attracts users from throughout western Washington. Nominal fees are charged for parking.

Medina Park – Medina

Medina's off-leash area is an unfenced, shared use park facility where off-leash areas and general park uses coexist. Approximately 12 of the parks 18 acres are open for off-leash activities from October through April. May through September, approximately 8 acres of

Medina Park are available for off-leash activities. Medina Park has a variety of experiences for dogs including open play area, pond, and trails. Medina Park is approximately 2 miles from Bellevue City Hall and is managed by the City of Medina.

Luther Burbank Park – Mercer Island

Key attributes of the newly renovated 1.5 acre off-leash area at Luther Burbank Park are the separate fenced active dog and shy dog play areas. The off-leash areas are improved with a sand mix surface material. While there are bigger off-leash facilities in Seattle and the surrounding area, the Luther Burbank facility is popular due to its' water frontage on Lake Washington and proximity to I-90. This facility is located approximately 6 miles from Bellevue City Hall and is managed by the City of Mercer Island.

Advocacy Groups

Off-leash advocacy groups exist throughout the Seattle area. Many advocacy groups promote off-leash activities and lobby governmental agencies for new off-leash opportunities or facility improvements. The role of advocacy groups like Citizens for Off-Leash Areas (C.O.L.A.) and Serve Our Dog Area (S.O.D.A.) has evolved into a necessary operational relationship for City of Seattle and King County. C.O.L.A. provides maintenance and management for Seattle's off-leash areas, and S.O.D.A. is steward for facilities at King County's Marymoor and Grandview Parks. The stewardship role for S.O.D.A. and C.O.L.A. holds the advocacy group accountable for the condition of their respective facilities. In ten years of managing off-leash facilities, City of Seattle has had good working relationships with their advocacy groups as well as challenging experiences. Seattle indicated that it can be difficult keeping advocacy volunteers active at some locations, which has lead to a lapse in facility maintenance.

In Bellevue, Bellevuedogs.org has expressed an interest in an off-leash area at Downtown Park, and People for Off-Leash Recreation (P.O.L.R.) are interested in off-leash opportunities at the Eastgate Area Properties currently undergoing a master planning process. P.O.L.R. has an agreement with City of Mercer Island for stewardship of the Luther Burbank off-leash facility. Parks staff are actively discussing with Barbara Eisenstein of P.O.L.R. design strategies and volunteer off-leash area management improvements for Robinswood Park At this time no formal arrangements have been established for off-leash area stewardship by either P.O.L.R. or Bellevuedogs.org.

Use Influences

Not all dog owners use off-leash facilities. Reasons for this vary. Some dog owners indicate that there is undesired, aggressive dog behavior at off-leash facilities, owners don't control their pets, pets get dirty, and locations are not convenient. Some dog owners are content using their yards.

For dog owners that do use off-leash facilities, facility size, terrain, surface materials, and amenities are some of the influences that determine how far someone is willing to travel for a particular off-leash experience. We have found that people tend to travel farther for

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desired experiences not available closer to them. Features that draw users from greater distances tend to be large tracts of land, water, and vehicle accessibility. Facilities more than a few miles from a major highway, tend to serve localized areas.

The Luther Burbank off-leash facility on Mercer Island is an example of how key features influence use. The Luther Burbank off-leash facility is a relatively small site (1.5 acre), that has Lake Washington water access, available parking, and nearby highway access (I-90). These key components make the off-leash area at Luther Burbank Park function more like a community/regional facility rather than a local/neighborhood facility normally associated with a 1.5 acre off-leash area.

Marymoor Park off-leash area has a regional user draw due to the shear size of the facility (40 acres) and the variety off-leash experiences afforded to a large site. Marymoor off-leash area has nearby highway access, parking, water access, trails, and open play areas, with ample space between activity areas. Users can experience a sense of romping around in the country at Marymoor off-leash area, which is something most communities can not offer simply because large tracts of land are not available for dedicated off-leash use.

Level of Service

For the purposes of this study, Level of Service (LOS) refers to quantities of off-leash facilities, not condition or amenity quality. Service levels shown below are a combination of local data collected as part of research for this report and statistics published in July 2007 by The Center for City Park Excellence, a division of The Trust for Public Land.

No Service Level

Following are cities that do not have off-leash facilities:

Surrounding Bellevue

- Kirkland, WA*
- Bothell, WA
- Woodinville, WA
- Issaquah, WA**
- Renton, WA**
- Redmond, WA***

Nationally

- Detroit, MI
- Louisville, KY
- Las Vegas, NV
- Tulsa, OK
- Jacksonville, FL
- Anaheim, CA

* *OLA currently under consideration*

** *Private off-leash facility in City*

** **Rely on King County / S.O.D.A. to provide*

Low Service Level

- San Antonio, TX
  1 facility / 1,260,000 residents
- Columbus, OH
  1 facility / 731,000 residents
- Memphis, TN
  1 facility / 672,000 residents
- Baltimore, MD

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1 facility / 640,000 residents

- Washington D.C.
  1 facility / 582,000 residents
- Atlanta, GA
  1 facility / 483,000 residents

Moderate Service Level

- Minneapolis, MN
  1 facility / 93,000 residents
- Cincinnati, OH
  1 facility / 110,500 residents
- ***Bellevue***
  1 facility / 120,000 residents
- Tucson, AZ
  1 facility / 129,000 residents
- Raleigh, NC
  1 facility / 171,000 residents
- Miami, FL
  1 facility / 193,000 residents

High Service Level

- New York City
  1 facility / 64,000 residents
- Seattle
  1 facility / 50,000 residents
- Everett
  1 facility / 34,000 residents
- San Francisco
  1 facility / 27,500 residents
- Portland
  1 facility / 17, 500 residents
- Mercer Island
  1 facility / 11,000 residents

While the method to determine service levels above isn't exact science, it does show how communities compare. Bellevue is currently in the moderate range for level of service nationally when considering off-leash facilities within the City limits. Bellevue currently has 1 facility / 120,000 residents. The following illustrates how adding off-leash facilities influences the off-leash area service level and how Bellevue would compare to other cities:

- 2 facilities = 1 / 60,000 residents
  Seattle = 1 / 50,000 currently
  Seattle= 1 / 42,000 with 2 OLA's currently in planning stage added
- 3 facilities = 1 / 40,000 residents
  Everett = 1 / 34,000
- 4 facilities = 1 / 30,000 residents
  San Francisco = 1 / 27,000
- 5 facilities = 1 / 24,000 residents
- 6 facilities = 1 / 20,000 residents
  Portland = 1 / 17,500
- 7 facilities = 1 / 17,000 residents
- 8 facilities = 1 / 15,000 residents
- 9 facilities = 1 / 13,000 residents
- 10 facilities = 1 / 12,000 residents
- 11 facilities = 1 / 11,000 residents
  Mercer Island = 1 / 11,000

All of the scenarios above place Bellevue in a high level of service range without considering nearby off-leash areas at Medina, Marymoor, and Luther Burbank Parks. Nearby off-leash opportunities at Medina, Marymoor, and Luther Burbank Park's, while outside the City limits, do serve Bellevue citizens in some manner and should be considered when determining an appropriate service level. It is recommended that an appropriate level of service for Bellevue be in the 1/30,000 residents to 1/60,000 residents range, or 2 to 4 off-leash facilities.

Risk

Agencies contacted as part of this report implement a variation of the following recommendations made by Margret Langworthy, Risk Management Representative with Washington Cities Insurance Authority (WCIA), an insurance pool for multiple Washington municipal agencies:

"*Park Layout*

- *Locate the off-leash facility away from children's playgrounds, beaches, picnic areas, sports fields, and horse and horse or bicycle/motorcycle tracks (unless on a time-sharing basis).*
- *Clearly define where on the grounds the dogs must be leashed and where they may be unleashed. This is particularly important in a multi-use park, and can be accomplished with a combination of landscaping, fencing, and appropriate signage at each entry point to the park.*
- *Consideration should be given to the adequate land spacing between different parts of the park to minimize any spillover effects of one area on another.*

Signage

- *Signage designating where dogs must be leashed and where they may be unleashed should be specific, clear and consistent throughout the park.*
- *Rules particular to the off-leash area should be posted.*
- *Reference to RCW 16.08.040 may be appropriate.*

Waste Removal

- *Rules should specify that dog owners are responsible to clean up after their pets. However, it should be recognized that additional costs for maintenance staff, time and equipment may be needed to repair fencing, fill holes dug by dogs, and to clean up dog waste left by irresponsible dogs owners. Documentation should be kept and maintained as for any other park maintenance activity."* [1]

Most agencies have additional risk and liability regulations however the above recommendations are a common thread for area off-leash facility stewards.

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Location Criteria

Size

In general, larger facilities tend to attract users from greater distances and small facilities tend to serve localized areas. While some communities establish a minimum size for off-leash facilities, it important to first consider the target needs and available land, which will affects the size and location of an off-leash facility. As exemplified by facilities in and around Bellevue, off-leash areas vary greatly in size from 288 square feet at a private facility to 40 acres at Marymoor Park. The 288 square foot facility is essentially a dog relief area in an urban center, whereas the 40 acre Marymoor facility is the largest off-leash facility in the Northwest that attracts users from the entire region. Bellevue's large scale (regional) off-leash needs are served by Marymoor and other area facilities, therefore serving community needs are the primary focus of this assessment.

Yards in many single family areas of Bellevue serve as small, private off-leash areas, therefore the need in these areas is for larger spaces that offer complementary off-leash activities such as 'fetch'. Downtown Bellevue is a higher density residential zone where land area is at a premium. Because downtown Bellevue residents don't have yards, small off-leash areas or dog relief areas can be successful.

Portland's 1999 Task Force on Off-leash Dogs recommended 5,000 square feet (.11 acre) as a minimum size.[2] San Francisco has set a minimum of 10,000 square feet as a minimum with 30,000 (.70 acres) square feet when possible. [3] Our observation, as well as that of other off-leash area stewards we spoke with indicate that people tend to own smaller dogs in high density areas, like downtown Bellevue. The preferred minimum off-leash area size is 1 acre, however in downtown Bellevue a large off-leash area my not be necessary to be successful and a facility of approximately 5,000 square feet is appropriate. Areas of less than 500 square feet can be effective dog relief areas and have merit, but should not be considered off-leash areas because the limited size doesn't foster dog play. It is recommended that the City encourage residential developers to provide dog relief areas for their tenants.

[1] City of Olympia Parks, Arts and Recreation, Draft Off-Leash Dog Park Feasibility Study, Sept. 9, 2006.
[2] "Off-Leash Program Evaluation & Recommendation Report to Council;" Portland parks and Recreation, December, 2004; p. A-45.
[3] www.sfgov.org/recpark_page.asp?id=2184; accessed 2/25//09

Spill-Over

We have experienced issues at the Robinswood off-leash facility where dog owners open their car doors and allow their dogs to run free to the off-leash area. Dogs are required to be on leash outside of the designated off-leash area. The concern is potential dog and general park user conflict. All other off-leash stewards contacted as part of this study reported this same problem. While we can require dogs be on leash when not in the designated off-leash areas, the rules are not always adhered to. Locating the off-leash

area near parking facilities, and away from potential conflict areas such a playgrounds and sports fields, potential for conflict can be reduced.

Parking
Our experience and that of other agencies we talked to state that off-leash facilities should have adequate, nearby parking. Locations with existing parking facilities are preferred.

ADA Accessibility
Sites with existing ADA accessible parking and pedestrian routes would be preferable.

Noise
Off-leash areas can generate considerable noise. It is recommended that a generous buffer be provided when located in residential areas. Experienced off-leash stewards recommend a minimum of 100' buffer from residences and other use areas where noise generated in the off-leash area could create conflicts. Natural terrain, berms, and vegetation can effect how sound carries and in these cases, less than 100' sound buffer may not be necessary. Sound barrier walls or fencing could be considered if a suitable site is within 100' from residential living areas if natural sound barriers are not adequate. Urban centers like downtown Bellevue typically experience higher noise levels than single family residential areas. A 100' noise buffer distance may not be attainable in downtown Bellevue. It is recommended that noise levels be considered when locating off-leash areas and adjustments can be made to the off-leash facility as part of a trial evaluation period.

Environmental Impact
Off-leash area stewards contacted for this study stated that fenced off-leash areas generally have less waste than the rest of their parks. Our research concurs with the following statement regarding waste in off-leash areas, "People seem to police themselves fairly well in these facilities. Dogs will of course produce waste whether they are in an off-leash dog area or another part of the park. The fact that people apparently are more conscious picking up their pet's waste in an off-leash area indicates that the net amount of waste entering the environment may actually be less in a park with an off-leash dog area. That being said, off-leash dog parks should be sited in such a way to minimize impact to environmentally sensitive areas such as streams, steep slopes, wetlands or areas with high wildlife habitat value." [4]

4. City of Olympia Parks, Arts and Recreation, Draft Off-Leash Dog Park Feasibility Study, Sept. 9, 2006.

Criteria
Several communities expressed success filtering runoff water when creating 25' minimum width vegetative buffer strips near environmentally sensitive areas. While vegetative buffer strips may work filtering run-off water from off-leash areas, it is preferred that off-leash areas avoid environmentally sensitive areas if possible.

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The following recommended criteria for considering new off-leash sites is based on our own experiences operating the Robinswood facility, and those of Seattle, Portland, and other agencies.

Criteria for off-leash area location

Seek sites for Off-Leash Area development that:

- Are without established recreational uses;
- Consider previous community-based planning processes;
- Provide generous residential buffers;
- Assure close-by parking;
- Are compatible with other uses;
- Complement visual park character;
- Can address sensitive environmental concerns;
- Consider transit/bus routes; and
- Geographically dispersed

Candidate Sites

No site in the park system clearly meets all criteria. That is not because the criteria is overly restrictive, rather Bellevue's Park system is mature and recreational uses are established. Also, there isn't a large supply of available, undeveloped or unencumbered land. Following are candidate sites that most closely meet the desired criteria for facilities needed in central Bellevue, downtown Bellevue, and south Bellevue:

Central Bellevue Sites:

Wilburton Hill Park is the preferred off-leash location for central Bellevue because it meets more of the recommended criteria than the other locations. Highland Glendale and Kelsey Creek Farm meet many of the recommended criteria. Other park sites in central Bellevue meet few criteria. Following describes criteria advantages and drawbacks for each of the central Bellevue area sites closest to meeting desired criteria:

- Wilburton Hill Park – end of the parking lot in utility easement
    - Criteria advantages
        - Doesn't displace existing use
        - Generous buffer - nearest homes more than 500' away
        - Buffer between existing park use areas
        - Nearby, available parking
        - Not in a sensitive environmental area
    - Drawbacks
        - In utility easement- need agreement with utility company

- Highland Glendale
    - Criteria advantages
        - Doesn't displace existing use
        - Buffer – wooded area buffering homes
        - Buffer between existing park use areas

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        - Minimal available parking
        - Upland portion of site not in sensitive environmental area
        - Near bus route
    - Drawbacks
        - In utility easement – need agreement with utility company
        - Homes within 150' preferred buffer zone

- Kelsey Creek Park
    - Criteria advantages
        - Buffer distance from homes adequate
        - Buffer between existing park use areas
        - Parking available parking
    - Drawbacks
        - Potential animal conflicts near farm
        - Large area of environmentally sensitive land
        - Would displace existing passive open space use

<u>Downtown Bellevue</u>

Parks sites in downtown Bellevue don't meet many of the desired criteria. There are few parks and those parks are developed and have established uses. McCormick Park is the recommended downtown Bellevue off-leash area site because it meets more of the criteria than the other downtown park sites. McCormick Park also meets the preferred 5,000 square foot minimum size for a downtown off-leash area. Downtown Park and Wildwood Park meet a few criteria. Following describes criteria advantages and drawbacks for each of the downtown Bellevue area sites that meet some of the desired criteria:

- McCormick Park – N.E. 12th Street north of library
    - Criteria advantages
        - Doesn't displace existing use – under utilized site
        - Nearby, available parking
        - Not in a sensitive environmental area
        - Close to transit routes
    - Drawbacks
        - Near residential
        - Majority of available parking across NE 12th ST. pedestrian bridge

- Wildwood Park
    - Criteria advantages
        - Limited street parking
        - Close to transit routes
        - Buffer distance adequate
    - Drawbacks
        - Displaces existing park uses
        - Would impact visual character of park

- Downtown Park
  - Criteria advantages
    - Available parking
    - Near transit routes
  - Drawbacks
    - Has undergone significant community planning process
    - Displaces existing passive park uses
    - Would impact visual character of park

South Bellevue

While south Bellevue has the most parks and open space in the City, locating an off-leash south of I-90 is difficult because most of the sites are environmentally sensitive and no ideal candidate sites exist. An good candidate site for an off-leash facility in south Bellevue is area sometimes referred to as the 'bowl' at Lakemont Park. The area is a +/- 2.75 acre City of Bellevue storm water detention facility. Concerns related to maintaining turf quality to prevent soil erosion and outflow water quality related bacteria from fecal matter are issues that make the site less than ideal.

There are methods to mitigate concerns about outflow water quality and soil erosion that could be further explored. To ensure desired outflow water quality levels are achieved water runoff could be consistently monitored. Results from outflow water monitoring can influence facility use patterns and filtration improvements. Vegetative bio-filtration has proven successful for some jurisdictions. The Parks and Utilities Departments would need to work closely to ensure operational objectives are met.

Seasonal or regulated facility use similar to beach park rules that don't allow dogs during swimming season could also aid in managing the off-leash area at a desired level. The Lakemont bowl is large enough to be divided. Off-leash use could rotate between the divided areas to allow for surfacing repairs and conditioning in the idle areas. The objective of off-leash area rotation would be to allow for vegetation recovery such that overall site conditions are good and limit soil erosion.

If the Lakemont Park bowl is determined to be inappropriate after further study, it is recommended the following be considered; opportunities with King County regarding the possibility of locating a facility at Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park, or acquired as land is acquired off-leash opportunities be considered.

Following are criteria advantages and drawbacks for Lakemont Park:

- Lakemont Park – "bowl" detention facility area
  - Criteria advantages
    - Available parking
    - Does not displace established uses
    - Geographically dispersed
    - Buffer from residential areas

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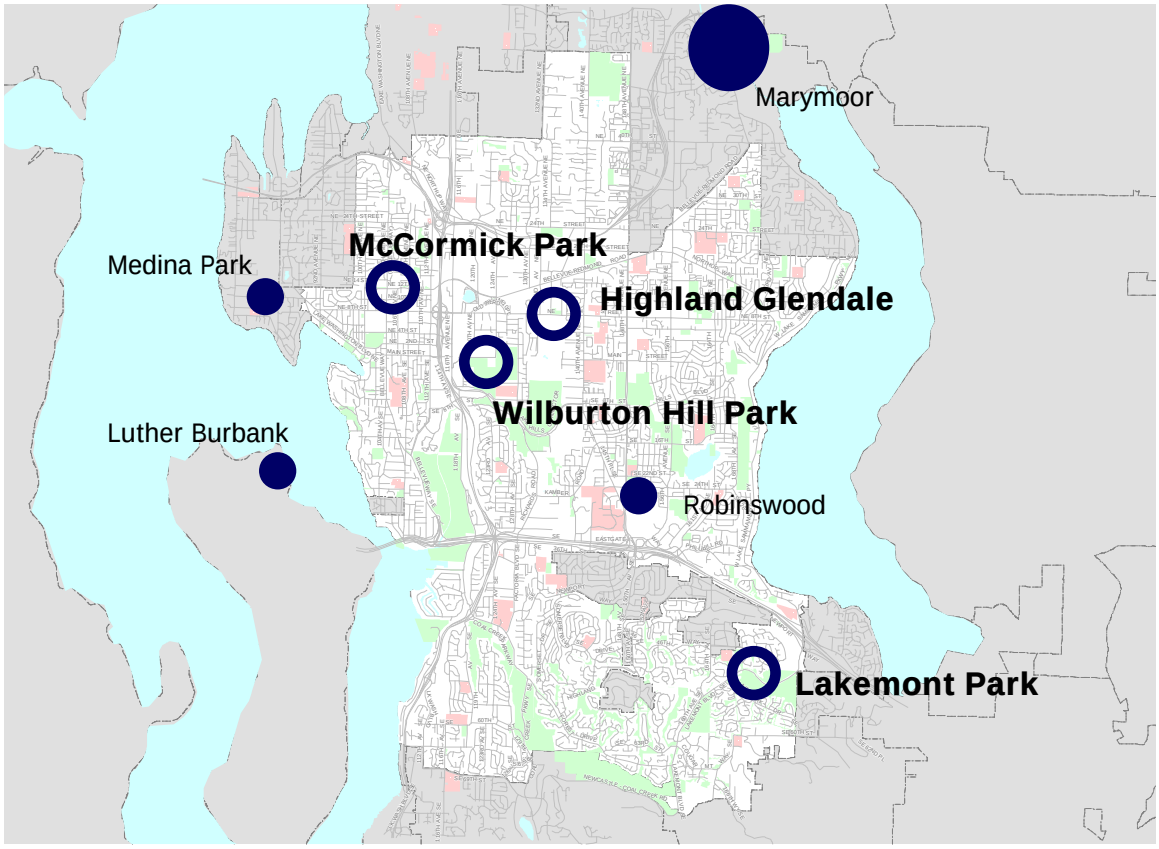
- Drawbacks
  - Erosion control issues
  - Runoff water quality concerns



Existing and Candidate Off-Leash Sites

Legend

Candidate Site

Existing Off-Leash Facility

Features and Development Costs

Development costs for a fully improved off-leash area that includes surface improvements, fencing, gates, water, amenities, and waste dispensers is approximately

$100K per acre. These costs can vary depending based on site conditions, amenities, surface materials, and water availability. Annual maintenance costs for a fully developed off-leash facility of 1-2 acres is approximately $15K.

Implementation

Currently there is no funding for additional off-leash area construction. It is recommended that sites be considered through the NEP process. The NEP will provide a public process as well as a funding mechanism for implementation. It is also recommended that only sites that meet most or many of the preferred criteria be considered.

Site geography, amenities, citizen needs, and use patterns can be different from location to location and unpredicted conflicts can sometimes arise after an off-leash facility has been constructed. Many communities implement off-leash facilities on a trial basis and make adjustments as needed. It is recommended that any new off-leash area constructed be evaluated for one year before it is adopted as a permanent location.

Robinswood

Should an off-leash area be developed as part of the Eastgate Area Properties development facilities at Robinswood would be a duplication of services for the east side of Bellevue. It is recommended that one facility either at Robinswood or Eastgate Area Properties be fully developed, with Robinswood being the recommended location as much of the infrastructure is in place.

The existing Robinswood facilities have never formally been endorsed and it is recommended that they be endorsed by the Park Board. Because the facilities at Robinswood are converted spaces from other uses, it is recommended that improvements be made to the facilities such that it is Bellevue's premier off-leash facility. Robinswood off-leash area improvements may include expanding the facility size, surfacing materials and trail connections between the two off-leash areas. Currently, no money is budgeted for maintenance and operation, or for improvements for the Robinswood off-leash area. Operation and improvement funding could be secured through the NEP or other sources.

Recommendations

The three principle recommendations are:

1. <u>Level of Service</u>
   It is recommended an overall Level of Service for off-leash areas in Bellevue be approximately 1 facility / 30,000 residents, which is similar to Seattle. The City currently manages one facility at Robinswood Park. Three (3) additional off-leash facilities would be needed to meet this service level.

2. <u>Geographic dispersion in the identified need areas</u>

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The Robinswood facility currently serves the east Bellevue area. It is recommended that new facilities be located in the following underserved areas of the community:

- Downtown Bellevue
- Central Bellevue
- South Bellevue

3. Criteria for off-leash area location
   Seek sites for Off-Leash Area development that:
   - are without established recreational uses;
   - consider previous community-based planning processes;
   - provide generous residential buffers;
   - assure close-by parking;
   - are compatible with other uses;
   - complement visual park character;
   - can address sensitive environmental concerns; and
   - consider transit/bus routes

The following are candidate off-leash sites that best meet the above principles for the identified underserved areas of Bellevue:

- Downtown
  - McCormick Park
- Central Bellevue
  - Wilburton Hill Park or Highland Glendale
- South Bellevue
  - Lakemont Park – detention area

In the event any of the above candidate sites can not be developed it is recommended that other sites be considered according to the three principles shown above.

Other key recommendations:

- Staff recommends off-leash needs for east Bellevue be fulfilled at Robinswood Park with some facility improvements. Fully developing off-leash areas at Robinswood to serve east Bellevue will allow the City to best meet interests of the community as well as the development objectives previously expressed by Park Board and Council for sports fields and a potential building at the Eastgate Area Properties;

- The City encourage residential developers to provide dog relief areas for their tenants;

- Off-leash areas be dedicated, fenced area of 1 acre minimum where possible; the Downtown location is intended to serve smaller dogs, and can therefore be a smaller area;

- Explore advocacy group partnerships;

- Implement new off-leash areas on a 1 year trial basis;

- Fund these costs utilizing the existing Neighborhood Enhancement Program.
  No money is currently budgeted for off-leash area development or improvements. It is recommended that the Neighborhood Enhancement Program (NEP) be used as the funding mechanism and public process for implementing new off-leash areas in least served areas and those are identified as downtown Bellevue, central Bellevue, and south Bellevue. It is further recommended that the candidate sites that closest meet location criteria be the sites considered in the NEP process, and that when one facility is implemented in an identified need area, the off-leash need will be considered fulfilled. For example, if through the NEP process an off-leash facility is constructed at Wilburton Hill Park, then Highland Glendale will not be considered in future NEP cycles because the need for central Bellevue has been served.

Acknowledgements and Resources

The following resources provided valuable information for this report:

People for Off-Leash Recreation (POLR), Barbara Eisenstein
Bellevuedogs.org,
Citizens for Off-Leash Areas (COLA), Toni L. Imfeld
Serve Our Dog Area (SODA)
City of Lake Oswego, Oregon, Parks and Recreation
City of Seattle, Parks and Recreation, Dewey Potter
City of Portland, Parks and Recreation, Bob Downing and Mike Brady
City of Mercer Island, Parks and Recreation, Keith Kerner
City of Olympia, Parks, Arts and Recreation, Jonathon Turlove
King County Animal Control, Al Dams
Douglas County Parks and Trails Division, Castle Rock, CO
Washington Recreation and Parks Association (WRPA)
National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA)

Internet Resources:
http://www.nps.gov/jotr/parkmgmt/dogs.htm National Park Service
http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/Parks/OffLeash.aspx Municipal Research Service Center
http://www.whidbey.com/fetchparks/ Free Exercise Time for Canines and Humans (FETCH)
http://www.olae.org/ Off-Leash Area Edmonds (OLAE)
http://home.earthlink.net/~ejlmp/dpd.html - Off-leash area design site
http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/ccpe_Dog_Park_Report.pdf Trust for Public Land
http://www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=1022 National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA)
http://www.northstarpubs.com/PRB808_Glasser_Dog.php Parks and Recreation Business publication

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http://www.nycgovparks.org/facilities/dogruns New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
http://www.dogplay.com/Activities/dogpark.html - Dog Play, dog park links and resources
http://www.explorerdog.com/ Off-leash links and locations
www.sfgov.org/recpark_page.asp?id=2184;

Printed Resources:

An Inquiry into Portland's Canine Quandary, Portland State University, 2003.
Visiting the Dog Park, Cheryl S. Smith, Dogwise Publishing, March 2007.
City of Olympia Parks, Arts and Recreation, Draft Off-Leash Dog Park Feasibility Study, Sept. 9, 2006.
"Off-Leash Program Evaluation & Recommendation Report to Council;" Portland parks and Recreation, December, 2004; p. A-45.