



Dogs

Part of the City of Kitchener's Parks Master Plan



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Acknowledgement

Places & Spaces is focused on the park service provided to the Kitchener community. Parks and open spaces are integral to communities, providing spaces where people play, explore, and build connections with the environment and with others.

The City is uniquely positioned to provide, care for, maintain, and secure public access to parks and open spaces for all members of its communities. The City of Kitchener recognizes that these public spaces are planned and built on land that is the traditional territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples. We recognize our responsibility to serve as stewards for the land and honour the original caretakers who came before us. Our community is enriched by the enduring knowledge and deep-rooted traditions of the diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Kitchener today. The significance of this land to Indigenous communities is respected, and we value the role that parks and open spaces can play in Reconciliation.

The City of Kitchener acts as a steward for almost 2,000 hectares of land as part of a parks and open space system. Through the implementation of Places & Spaces, we will work to better understand and address community needs and the barriers preventing use of these spaces, so that all community members in Kitchener might feel welcome, safe, and able to use our parks and open spaces.



Introduction

This section focuses on the background information and specific details that inform the context for the recommendations made for this topic.

Background

In January 2024, Kitchener was certified as a pet-friendly city under the Better Cities for Pets initiative. Part of the certification includes pet-friendly green spaces for people and pets to get healthy exercise and connect with each other.

Planning parks to accommodate the wide variety of pets starts with understanding the types and number of pets most commonly found in Kitchener households. Although there is no census for pets, the American Veterinarian Medical Association (AVMA) offers a pet populations estimate based on household numbers. By far the most significant population are dogs and cats. For the purposes of park planning, dogs will be the focus for public open space considerations.

This booklet intends to profile the existing facilities for dogs in parks today, identify the needs of dog owners in parks, and offer recommendations to suit those needs.



256,885

2021 Kitchener Population



99,812

2021 Kitchener Households



61,284*

Approximate pet dog population*



45,614*

Approximate pet cat population*

*AVMA 2022 data calculation of estimated number of cats (0.457 per household) and estimate number of dogs (0.614 total dogs per household)

Trends

Pet population growth

According to the Canadian Animal Health Institute (CAHI) a nationwide [Kynetic survey](#) conducted in September 2022 showed there are 7.9 million dogs and 8.5 million cats in Canadian households. This is a 2.5% to 5% increase over a two-year period (2020) compared to the Canadian population increase of 2.2% over that same time period.

Housing

There is no evidence to suggest housing type influences pet ownership. However, shifting housing types in Kitchener will influence the needs of pets within these environments. Higher density areas have less private outdoor space, if any. These areas, particularly infill developments, have a higher need for public or semi-public space than in suburban development types.

The total number of dwellings in Kitchener has grown by 8% between 2016 and 2021. The largest area of growth is in apartments greater than five storeys (15%) and row houses (15%). The smallest area of growth is in single-detached (6%) and semi-detached (1%) housing. The growing pet population and denser housing types indicates an increasing demand for pet-friendly public spaces.



Types of facilities

The need for pet spaces in parks is primarily centered around dogs. There are three types of facilities for dogs in Kitchener, and two possible types of facilities with regional examples:

Existing facilities:

Leashed

Any area that is not designated as a fenced dog park or leash-free area requires dogs to be kept on a leash at all times. Keeping dogs leashed remains the most consistent way to ensure public safety in shared park spaces.

Fenced dog parks

These facilities are most often referred to when using the term “dog park”. Any future reference to dog park within this booklet will relate to fenced dog parks unless otherwise described. They are off-leash areas that are completely fenced with controlled entry and exit points. All dog parks have specific rules and policies and are often surfaced with a combination of turf, mulch, and gravel trails.

Possible facilities:

Off-leash zones

Although there are no off-leash zones in Kitchener, there are regional examples of designated areas of parks or open spaces permitting off-leash activity that are not fenced or controlled.

Alternatives

Other off-leash options for dog facilities such as unoccupied sportsfields for off-leash dog use. Baseball diamonds in particular can offer well defined, fenced in areas during off-season times. Use of baseball diamonds by dog owners can, however, create conflicts between uses and users during seasonal transitions, for example the beginning and end of scheduled playing seasons.



Dog park facilities, a closer look

Dedicated dog parks and off-leash areas are a common development in parks across the province and country. They are still relatively new though, only first being implemented in the early 1980s. They are well used locally and offer many community benefits. However, there are many factors to consider when planning dog facilities:

Benefits:

- Social interaction among and between people and dogs.
- Opportunity for interactions and relationships with other dog owners.
- Off-leash exercise for dogs, particularly for those without private outdoor space.
- Peace of mind that off-leash dogs will not conflict with park goers.

Disadvantages:

- Potential conflict between dogs, resulting in physical injury in people, dogs, or both.
- Increased spreading of diseases within dog populations, particularly in smaller spaces for dog facilities.
- Abuse of rules by dog owners including inattention, littering, and inappropriate dog park behaviours.
- Noise nuisance to nearby residences, places of work, etc.
- Isolated and exclusive single-use facility (by design) within a public park setting.

Facilities in Kitchener

Kitchener features five dog parks, two of which are considered “micro” dog parks with less fenced in area than the remaining three.

Public engagement has suggested a willingness to drive up to 18 minutes to visit their preferred location, reflected in the circled service areas on the map:



Fenced “micro” dog park

- George Lippert Park
- Idlewood Park



Fenced dog park

- Kiwanis Park
- McLennan Park
- The Auditorium

Micro dog parks are defined as dog parks with an area of less than 2,000 m². Any dog park larger than 2,000 m² is categorized as a “fenced dog park.”

2km

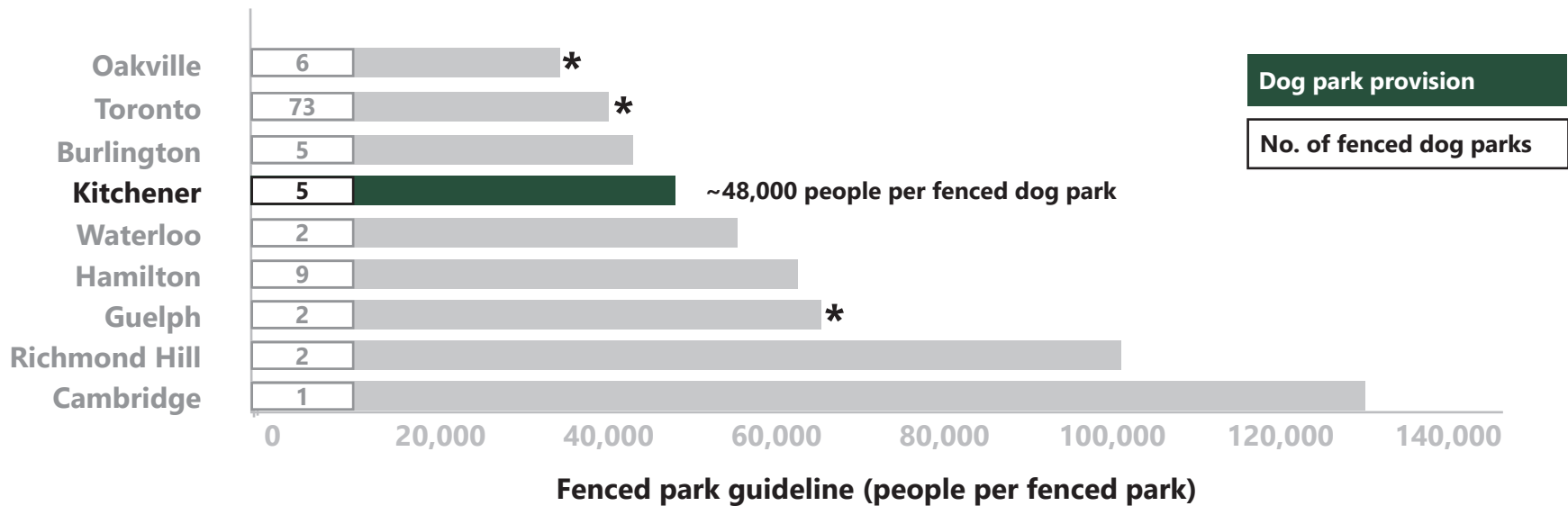


Provincial precedents

Fenced dog parks are a frequently requested recreational space across the province. Understanding how Kitchener's facilities compare to others in Ontario can be done by looking at the number of dog facilities available per person.

Strictly by number of dedicated dog parks, Kitchener is about the same as the median Ontario city.

However, comparing Kitchener to the provincial average is not an ideal indicator of adequate quality and quantity of dog facilities locally. The number of fenced dog facilities can indicate Kitchener's supply, but equally important are the qualities of each dog facility location, where they are in the city, what function they serve, and how they are accessed.



* Formally offer leash-free areas in addition to the fenced dog park locations

Managing dog facilities

Fenced dog parks in Kitchener are typically simple geometric fenced in areas with mulch or turf cover, waste bins, and in some cases, water sources.

The City of Kitchener spends approximately \$25,000 annually to maintain the existing fenced dog park inventory. The majority of those costs (\$18,000) are related to maintaining the surface and cleaning litter at the McLennan Park facility. Depending on its size and amenities, the average fenced dog facility costs between \$5,000 and \$10,000 annually to maintain.

Over 90% of these annual costs relate to labour and equipment, 75% of that labour goes towards litter clean up and landscape maintenance.



Addressing housing trends

One of the largest areas of residential growth in Kitchener is apartment dwellings over 5 storeys in height. This trend will only continue with the advent of Strategic Growth Areas (SGA) being established through the core of the City. These SGAs will all provide land use zoning of unlimited densities, with limitations shifted to building heights. The highest level SGA will have unlimited densities and unlimited height residential developments permitted.

There is a positive correlation between pet population and resident population. Lack of traditional private yard space has not shown to be a deterrent to dog ownership. There is and will continue to be a reliance on shared or public spaces in order to properly care for dogs. Park space is not, and cannot be the only option. Parks can offer leashed and leash-free opportunities, but equally important are streetscapes and private amenity spaces within higher density developments in particular.

Private dog amenities within high density developments are not only possible, but they currently exist in Kitchener. Charlie West (60 Charles St. W) and Garment St. Condos (100 Garment St.) include dog runs, sheltered areas, and dog wash stations. These were built to accommodate the nearly 50% projected dog ownership within the building. These types of facilities do not compensate for park space, but rather provide alternative options in lieu of traditional yard space.

Parks should and can adapt to properly account for the needs of pets and pet owners. In the face of increasing built-form density and significantly reduced capacity to acquire park spaces, dog park spaces need to continue to be supported by alternative options, public and private alike.





Data Sources

This section highlights the relevant sources of information and research used to develop recommendations for this topic. A total of 12 data sources, including engagement, have informed the Parks Master Plan recommendations. For more detailed information on each data source, please refer to the Places booklet.



Legislation



Equitable engagement



Engagement with the broader community



Engagement with City of Kitchener departments



Engagement with partner organizations



Comparative analysis



External research



Policy



City of Kitchener strategies



Region of Waterloo strategies



Best practices



City of Kitchener staff experience



Findings

Several themes emerged across topic areas, engagement audiences, and data collection methods. The following section reflects major themes that cut across several datasets from engagement methods. Findings relevant to more than one theme are reflected in each. For more detailed information on the overall engagement effort, please refer to the Places booklet.

Accessibility

Accessibility of dog park facilities emerged as a theme, highlighted by the quote below:

Please make these areas more accessible. I have an all-terrain mobility scooter and I can't use anything in Waterloo that is legal for my dogs to run

Safety

Safety for dogs, owners and other park users was noted as the most important consideration when creating shared spaces for people and dogs. Most important to have in fenced dog parks include adequate waste management, safety measures for both dogs and

people, and amenities for both dogs and people. The majority of instances of conflict within a dog park was found to be caused by dog owners who let dogs off-leash in unpermitted park areas, most often in natural areas or wooded trails. Further, most dog owners prefer those same natural areas and wooded trails to off-leash dog parks.

Information

The need for signage for all park goers, including dog owners and non-dog owners, was a common theme emerging from the responses.

Clear signage for where dogs can be expected to be off leash - this is important for people not comfortable around dogs, but also for DOGS who are uncomfortable around dogs.



Inclusion

Engagement data suggests the majority of dog owners are willing to drive up to 18 minutes to access dog parks. Mapping suggests this is generally achievable city-wide, except for the communities of the south end of the city. Data also suggests the majority of dog owners are willing to walk up to 14 minutes to a preferred dog park location.

When asked how Kitchener might create parks that are accommodating for everyone including dogs, dog owners, and those uncomfortable around dogs, the following findings emerged:

- Create designated off-leash areas with clear signage and fences to clearly demarcate areas
- Create more dog parks that are larger, closer to home and easy to get to
- Enforce leash rules
- Include more waste disposal bins and bags
- Offer education for dog owners, and non-dog owners

In addition to the physical components summarized above, a specific question about pay-to-use dog park facilities was available for response. Nearly half of the responses were somewhat or extremely unlikely to pay for dog park use.



Having a fenced off area for dogs to be leash-free at every park, or at least one leash-free dog park area in every neighbourhood, that is within a walkable distance, would be ideal. There are a lot of dogs in my area, and the closest dog park is a 20 minutes drive away to McLennan. It would be really nice to have one that we could walk to, or at least have a shorter distance to.



Health and wellbeing

The strongest themes that were found during consultation were related to activities within the dog facility itself. These include conflicts between dogs, cleanliness of the facility, and its maintenance (e.g., surface quality, garbage)

As our human population grows so too does the dog population. I believe it's imperative that we provide numerous locations for dogs to be able to be dogs - safely running free and playing.

Environmental sustainability

Some respondents suggested using natural spaces for off-leash areas. According to [ProtectNatureTO](#), off-leash dogs can impact habitat negatively through physical and temporal displacement by inducing stress responses in wild animals and can indirectly or directly lead to mortality, while also spreading disease through dog waste.



A woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and black leggings, is bending over to pet two small, fluffy white dogs. The dogs are on a ground covered with brown wood chips. In the background, there is a black chain-link fence and some green foliage. To the right, a person in a light-colored shirt and pants is partially visible, standing and looking towards the woman and dogs. The overall scene is outdoors, possibly in a dog park or training area.

Recommendations

This section summarizes the recommendations specific to this topic that are informed by the broad and local context, data sources, and findings. Each recommendation begins with a number representing the order in which its implementation is prioritized. For a comprehensive list of all recommendations made for this master plan update and the implementation framework, please refer to the Places booklet.

The future of dogs in parks

Recognizing the proportion of dogs to people within the city is an important first step. Kitchener has 5 fenced off-leash sites for an estimated dog population of 61,000, or approximately 1 dog park for every 15,000 dogs.

Off-leash dog facilities will continue to be a well used park feature in Kitchener. Simply creating more dog parks throughout the city however, is not the only solution to a growing population and growing pet population needs. Expansion of the fenced inventory should directly relate to population growth and fill existing gaps. Placing a fenced dog park in every park to ensure equal access is simply not feasible, sustainable, nor balanced with other public park uses.

A balance of accommodation is necessary, including facilities outside of public parks or other off-leash facilities. Leash free areas, where conditions are suitable and safe, can accommodate for the demand for off-leash areas in Kitchener, offset costs of operating fenced dog parks, and expand recreational potential of underused green spaces.

30: Review existing dog facilities

Audit existing fenced dog parks to assess accessibility needs, waste management, and general improvements to user experiences.

Concerns that emerged in the consultation findings should be addressed regardless of the direction of future dog park facilities. Issues of safety and maintenance were prevalent in consultation themes. Reviewing each existing fenced dog park facility will reveal any potential site-specific improvements that can address the varied experience of dogs and dog owners, including accessibility, shade, seating, and garbage collection systems.



33: Pilot off-leash areas

Create a pilot project to use select hydro corridors and park space as designated off-leash areas. Establish permanent off-leash areas throughout Kitchener informed by the results of the pilot project.

Hydro corridors present a unique opportunity for off-leash areas as green spaces containing maintained turf and often public trails for passive recreational use. They have limited alternative uses due to their primary role of power distribution and are restricted accordingly.

Kitchener has over 53 hectares of hydro corridor that are currently under a land use agreement for public recreational use. In order to minimize the risks of off-leash areas, properties are shortlisted using the following criteria:

- Defined boundaries with one or more types, including fencing, sidewalks, and roadways
- Does not share space with other open spaces such as public parks, playgrounds, or school grounds
- Does not share space with naturalized areas
- Regularly maintained turf surface
- Public trail access
- Multiple accessible points of entry

The location that meets all of the above criteria is the largest continuous hydro corridor property in the city known as **Forest Heights Community Trail**, located in the Forest Heights community between Ira Needles Blvd. and Driftwood Dr. The property is 11.48 hectares of hydro transmission corridor, with five roadway frontages, four barrier-free walkway block access points, and almost one kilometre of existing multi-use trail.

Map legend:

- 1 Walkway block access, barrier-free
- 2 Walkway block access
- 3 Trail access
- 4 Trail connection
- 5 Open maintained turf



Highland Rd. W.

Ira Needles Blvd.

Rolling Meadows Dr.

Highview Dr.

Highview Dr.

Driftwood Dr.

Proposed pilot project parameters:

Location(s): Forest Heights Community Trail (hydro corridor)*

Duration: 24 months

Scope:

Establish on-site signage at key locations to define the area as a temporary leash-free zone.

Install waste facilities at key locations.

Monitoring:

Seasonal staff inspections and on-going input from local residents and facility users.

Evaluation of pilot project:

Public feedback:

- Use of green space, before and after pilot program
- Instances of conflicts among people and dogs, before and after pilot program
- Reception within local community

Surface evaluation:

- Turf conditions before and after pilot program

Operational commitment:

- Frequency of maintenance calls during pilot program.

*The location that has been proposed was selected based on its characteristics and location matching the criteria of a possible off-leash area. Should the recommendation be supported, a public engagement process will be required prior to any action taken on the pilot project to understand and respond to local neighbourhood feedback.



35: Build a south-end dog park

Establish an off-leash dog facility located in one of the southern residential communities sized to accommodate the projected 20-year population growth in the area.

The advantages and disadvantages of fenced dog park facilities can be partly mitigated through a variety of design tactics. For example, small sites with high pedestrian and dog traffic can see increased conflict between dogs, disease spreading, and surface damage, among others. Small sites can be successful when demand is balanced with other dog facility options. Here are other considerations based on public feedback:

Size

Large fenced areas provide ample space whereas micro-dog parks tailored to local areas can supplement the dog park inventory with quieter, less crowded experiences.

Access and accessibility

Getting to, into and through facilities are a critical success factor. Distance to parking facilities can act as both a barrier to use, and as a means for dogs to decompress before and after visiting.

Movement

Providing dogs an opportunity to move along a trail network or around intentionally designed obstacles supports socialization, training and cognitive health for dogs.

Shade

Another factor important for dogs, dog owners, and all park users is providing shade within fenced areas.

Water

Access to water is equally important for dogs and people. Water sources outside of fenced areas for people to use to fill containers or individual bowls should be considered.

Garbage

Large capacity waste receptacles are necessary for dog parks year-round to accommodate peak use, and during the winter when garbage maintenance is reduced.



36: Dogs in Community parks

Support “micro” dog parks in Community class parks, where brought forward by grassroots initiatives, grant programs, or supported by local consultation, and balanced with other recreational interests.

Spaces revised the hierarchy of park classifications in Kitchener defining parks by their uses rather than their size. This classification system allows for flexibility in park classifications as demands change over time.

Each Community class park contains many open space uses such as sportsfields, play areas, and non-programmed open space. Community parks are intended for more uses and higher use. Dog parks often require parking, either on-road or in the park itself. Community class parks can generally provide dedicated parking for users.

Where supported by the local community through grassroots efforts or community engagement, and balanced with these other open space amenities, “micro” sized fenced dog parks are supported as a means to provide access to leash-free dog facilities in Community class parks.



Recommendations summary

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