



Dogs, People and Parks Plan



**CITY COUNCIL PARKS, SEATTLE CENTER,
LIBRARIES AND WATERFRONT COMMITTEE**

DECEMBER 15, 2016

Legislative History

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- 1996 Ordinance created 7 one-year pilot off leash areas (OLAs); gave Superintendent authority to close them for environmental or public health concerns.
- 1996 Resolution expressed intent to develop relationship with the Citizens for Off Leash Areas (COLA)
- 1997 Ordinance added 90 days to one-year pilots.
- 1997 Ordinance made permanent the seven OLAS established as pilots in 1996 and listed four more sites for consideration as OLAs.

Legislative History cont.

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- 1997 Resolution described expectations related to COLA.
- 2014: City Council SLI requiring plan for existing OLAs and for maintenance, acquisition and expansion of OLAs.
- 2016: Dogs, People and Parks Plan developed in response to City Council SLI.
- Plan prioritizes spending for Seattle Park District funding of approximately \$106,000/year for six years – first facility funding for OLAs.

Plan Public Involvement Process

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Draft Plan is built on research, best practice reviews and outreach opportunities:

- Survey of 4011 licensed dog owners
- Report by COLA on North American best practices
- Seven focus groups of both dog owners and non-dog owners
- Site visits to Portland, Vancouver, B.C. and San Francisco
- Review of other city and county off leash plans

Public Process cont.

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- Discussions with UW animal behaviorists
- Literature review on environmental impacts
- Feedback from Park Board review of Superintendent's preliminary recommendations
- Park Board Public Hearing
- Public comment at Livability Summits
- COLA presentation to Park Board in August
- Additional Park Board study session

Summary of Recommendations- General Principles

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- Licensed dogs are welcome, on leash, in all Seattle parks – excluding non-OLA beaches, children’s play areas and ball fields.
- OLA’s are an acceptable use of park property and can support the SPR mission of “Healthy People, Healthy Environment and Strong Communities.”
- Plan adheres to tradition of “multiple use” in Seattle parks which encourages development of spaces that accommodate diverse activities.
- Increasing demand for OLAs mirrors increase in demand for all park facilities.

General Principles cont.

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- Draft Plan represents a prudent approach to managing OLAs, based on the principle of “Fix it First” – first cycle of Park District funding.
- Recommends incremental addition of new OLAs based on community engagement process; does not create a “blueprint” for future OLAs in specific parks.

Recommendations

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Draft Plan contains recommendations regarding:

- Process for adding new OLAs
- Unfenced OLAs
- Plan to improve OLA conditions and the user experience

Process for Adding new OLAs

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For each new OLA, SPR will convene a committee including dog advocates, environmental advocates, veterinarians or animal behaviorists, community members and SPR staff who will meet and make recommendations to the Superintendent. SPR will maintain a list of approved OLAs for development when funding is available.

SPR supports addition of new OLAs in several ways:

- Through new park development or existing park redevelopment processes, including land-banked sites.

Process for Adding New OLAs cont.

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- Through requests by communities, whether through Neighborhood Matching Fund requests or other community planning process.
- By supporting groups like COLA in developing new OLAs on non-park public land suitable for OLAs or on unused private property by convening a review committee, assisting with design and providing maintenance and coverage for liability if funding is provided (for maintenance).

Process for Adding New OLAs cont.

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- Encourage private developers, through SCDI, to include OLAs as part of prospective developments.
- Support community groups, such as COLA, in exploring new partnerships and sponsorships to support the improvement of existing OLAs and the creation of new OLAs. All improvements must meet SPR design and safety standards.

Unfenced Off Leash Areas

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- Continue to offer only fenced OLAs due to potential conflict between leashed and unleashed dogs, between dogs and other park users, limited enforcement resources and feedback from other jurisdictions that have implemented unfenced OLAS and are now moving away from them.
- Do not recommend leash-optional trails due to reasons listed above plus maintenance and environmental concerns.

Improving OLAs and the User Experience

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- Draft Plan includes prioritized list of improvements to existing OLAs based on input from crew chiefs, COLA and comprehensive evaluation of each site.
- Use new Park District funding (\$106,000/year through 2020) to improve existing OLAs based on facility assessments included in Draft Plan.
- Required professional dog walkers to become licensed (\$100/year).

Improving OLAs and the User Experience cont.

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- Require dog walkers to get animal behavior certification either from the UW **or** from another certification program approved by the Superintendent within two years.
- Grandfathering will allow existing licensed dog walkers to bring 10 licensed dogs into OLAs for two years. At the end of two years, dog walkers who have obtained the three-course certificate from the U WA or another equivalent program authorized by the Superintendent, will be allowed to continue to bring up to 10 licensed dogs into an OLA.

Proposed Modifications to Draft Plan based on Public Input

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- Clarify language in Plan to more clearly express Department support for off leash areas.
- Modify language to clarify SPR is committed to taking an enterprising approach to finding ways to site more OLAs.
- Add COLA appendix to plan that outlines potential new OLA sites, with stipulation that any proposed OLA must be reviewed by the processes described above.
- Designate a staff person to be SPR lead on Plan implementation and to serve as liaison with COLA, Magnuson Park Off Leash Group (MOLG) and other interested residents.

Proposed Modifications to Draft Plan cont.

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- Support the concept of pilot sites with the understanding that we can support only fenced areas. All OLAs are initially “pilot sites.”
- Evaluate proposals for OLAs through normal SPR community engagement process including the review Committee described in the Draft Plan.
- Maintain OLAs on non-park, publicly-owned land (perhaps SDOT or utility-owned property) assuming we are funded to do so.

Proposed Modifications to Draft Plan cont.

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- Support efforts by COLA and MOLG to engage in fundraising and grant writing for off leash areas.
- Initiate a public engagement process in the development of 3 or 4 pilot sites. Possible sites are Hubbard Homestead Park, Stone Way at 125th, Maple Leaf Reservoir and Adams Street Boat Ramp.
- Review plans for OLA improvements with COLA.

Proposed Modifications to Draft Plan cont.

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- Understand COLA wants more OLAs with water access. Agree to develop standards for water access including public health standards, accessibility, fencing, safety, environmental protections. May require special land use permits.
- Hold regular meetings/check-ins between COLA, MOLG and SPR.