WINNIPEG Network of Dog Owner Groups (WINDOG) Submission

Regarding Winnipeg's Draft Off-leash Area Master Plan (OLAMP)

to

Executive Policy Committee

July 11, 2018

WINDOG requests that EPC amend the Off-Leash Area Master Plan to designate Winnipeg's regional, community and large neighbourhood dog parks as 'single-use'.

The OLAMP places a high priority on balancing the recreational needs of dog owners with those of other park users. But 'single-use' does not upset the balance.

With 1000 parks, 750 athletic fields, 100 pools and splashpads, 26 golf courses, skateboard parks, disc golf courses, and hundreds of kilometers of bike and pedestrian trails, there are plenty of places besides dog parks where Winnipeggers can participate in recreation activities. By way of contrast Winnipeg has set aside less than 200 of it's 10,000 acres of greenspace for off-leash dogs.

Most of the city's greenspace and its trails are either designated as 'on-leash' space or space where dogs are not permitted at all.

WINDOG requests that the City set aside land for dogs and their families in the same way it has created municipal golf courses, soccer and baseball fields, skateboard parks, and children's pools and splash pads for specific user groups.

OLAMP Consultation and Public Demand for Single-Use OLAs

During the OLAMP public consultations, representatives of established off-leash area stewardship organizations like Maple Grove, Little Mountain and Kilcona, and representatives of new groups like Friends of King George V Dog Park who are working to establish off-leash areas in their own neighbourhoods repeatedly spoke of the need to designate off-leash areas as 'single-use' – where only those activities associated with off-leash dogs are permitted.

The organizations' requests for 'single-use' off-leash areas was echoed by individual dog owners. But city officials and project consultants were resistant to the concept.

The draft plan, released in May, specified that all regional, community and large neighbourhood dog parks are 'multi-use'. Winnipeggers have responded, continuing to press for single-use dog parks through the online survey, by contacting their City Councillors directly, and by signing the petition that WINDOG presented to Protection, Community Services and Parks on July 3.

What the OLAMP Says About Single-Use OLAs

The OLAMP acknowledges that the public has expressed

> "a strong desire for the establishment of 'single-use' OLAs in order to mitigate conflicts between park users that currently occur within 'multi-use OLAs."

The plan indicates that its authors understand the benefits, and the strong demand for single-use OLAs (page 10, paragraph 7). It indicates that Parks is committed to establishing single-use OLAs over multi-use OLAs.

However, as WINDOG's Board recently discussed with OLAMP's Project Manager, Rob Zanewich and Parks Services Administrator, Jonina Ewart, the authors' intent and personal commitment to the development of single-use OLAs is contradicted by language in the OLAMP itself.

> "OLAs that do not have 'single-use' in the title imply that they are all 'multi-use', meaning that all activities permitted in the park can occur in the designated off-leash area."

The OLAMP only allows "multi-use" city's regional, community and large neighbourhood OLAs to be designated as or converted to 'single-use' on a case-by-case basis.

The OLAMP designates only the smallest neighbourhood OLAs – those between .04 and .1 ha. - as 'single use'. Currently no OLA in Winnipeg is small enough to receive the single-use designation, not even the smallest. Bonnycastle, at .15 hectares, is classified as a 'large' multi-use neighbourhood dog park. Incompatible recreational activities specified in the OLAMP, like running/jogging and mountain biking are allowed.

Identifying that any activity permitted in a given park is permitted in its multi-use off-leash area not only legitimizes cycling and jogging, it opens the door for people to engage in all kinds of other incompatible recreation activities – soccer, softball, football, and disc golf; tobogganing; kite buggying; flying model airplanes; picnicking and barbecuing; running exercise and yoga classes; and taking wedding photos.

Incompatible Features and Activities

The OLAMP identifies several incompatible features and activities that must be avoided or mitigated if they are adjacent to a proposed off-leash area. Incompatible features include multi-use trails/pathways. (Picnic areas, sports fields and areas of "high intensity park uses" are also deemed incompatible.)

The inconsistency in the OLAMP is obvious; the City won't allow an OLA to be located next to a multi-use trail (or other incompatibles) without mitigation measures such as fencing, but it will allow multi-use trail activities inside a dog park.

Related Issues

Fencing

The OLAMP indicates that single-use OLAs must be fenced.

WINDOG's view is that, while fenced off-leash areas is a preferable way of protecting dogs and minimizing user group conflict, a single-use OLA does not necessarily need a secure boundary.

This view is informed by our experiences at Maple Grove, Little Mountain and Kilcona.

Single use OLAs can be defined by permeable boundaries and clear signage informing other park users that they are entering an OLA where only activities related to off-leash dogs are permitted.

Time-Sharing

A variation on the 'multi-use' for regional, community and large neighbourhood OLAs poses a threat to existing off-leash recreational opportunities. The OLAMP identifies that the City could designate dog parks that are heavily used by mountain bikers, runners and other recreational users as 'single use' during certain periods. It goes on to say that off-leash use of the dog park could be restricted outside of those hours. In other words, off-leash dogs would not be allowed.

This doesn't sound like a dog park; it sounds like a municipal park that allows off-leash dogs for a few hours a day.

Amendment

Section 2.3.4 indicates that the OLAMP will be reviewed every five years. The statement implies the plan will be around for a long time. That means it won't always be possible to ask the authors about their intent.

For that reason, it is critical that the framework document for establishing and managing OLAs, accurately reflects its creators' intent and their commitment to single-use off-leash areas.

Therefore WINDOG requests that the OLAMP be amended as follows:

> Delete: *"OLAs that do not have 'single-use' in the title imply that they are all 'multi-use', meaning that all activities permitted in the park can occur in the designated off-leash area."*
>
> Replace with: *"Winnipeg off-leash areas are designated as single-use. Only activities associated with off-leash dogs will be permitted."*
>
> Delete – *all references to 'multi-use' OLAs.*

The 'single use' designation addresses dog owners' risk of legal liability associated with incompatible activities in OLAs, offers better protection to dogs and the public, and

enhances what is supposed to be a pleasant recreational experience for dogs and their families.

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