

# Council calls on new strategy to locate new leash-free dog parks

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Leash-free dog parks are a great way to get outside with your four-legged family member and meet fellow dog-lovers as your pets socialize amongst themselves.

For many, it's an ideal, but for some homeowners it is something that should be more of a destination rather than just over the back fence.

This has been a perennial issue for the Town in finding suitable locations for off-leash dog parks, but efforts are set to ramp up following a request from Council.

Last week, Council approved a new non-programmed park for Hartwell Way.

A naturalized space, the park will feature several neighbourhood amenities, including raised community garden beds.

The proposal for community garden spaces was warmly received by residents. A similar proposal to include an off-leash area, however, received significantly

more push-back, resulting in Council voting to remove it from the final design last week.

But, in doing so, they also tasked staff with drafting a report on possible dog park locations in non-residential areas.

“We haven’t really identified...the best solution for a dog park in Aurora and in the report we were given it did identify we have a deficit and there is a need for dog parks,” said Councillor Rachel Gilliland. “It is no secret that especially during the pandemic I think so many new puppies are in the area and the demand is only going to be more. I...feel that we would still want to have some sort of direction to staff to at least find some alternative areas moving forward to put a dog park. If it is not this park, maybe it needs to be somewhere else, but I feel we’re in this merry-go-round suggesting some places...to only have us shelve all the hard work that we’re doing.”

Councillor Gilliland requested the report come forward to Council this month, a request that Al Downey, Aurora’s Director of Operations, said would not be possible due to time constraints. He did say, however, that if the Town looks at the issue of dog parks again it will be looked at through a non-residential lens.

“One of the challenges we had with putting [dog parks] into new parks as directed by Council is once we have a public survey, everyone seems to like a dog park [but] they just don’t like a dog park near their home,” said Mr. Downey, noting staff are still working on a report on dog waste. “We are working diligently on that report as well, so it would be nice to get the two of them to coincide to some degree. I will work as diligently as possible, but I cannot make the next cycle.”

While Councillor Gilliland welcomed the report, she said she was not opposed to the report looking at residential areas as well.

“I do think there is a lot of advantage to having a dog park in a residential area like the fact you can walk down the street or around the corner, meet a neighbour, and it is promoting active transportation,” she said. “You’re not forcing someone to get into a car and go somewhere, but maybe we haven’t found the most appropriate spot.”

Less enthusiastic was Councillor Wendy Gaertner who said residents might not only object to possible odours from a nearby dog park, but also the noise.

“It is a very noisy endeavour,” she said. “Inserting it into a residential community that is already built. If we do have one future community that is going to be built, at least one, then if you have a dog park already in the subdivision plan then people are aware it is going to be there. I think that is why we have trouble with this. This is the second time we have had trouble inserting a park into a neighbourhood.

**“I have a feeling we have to find an industrial commercial area.”**

A different perspective was offered by Councillor Sandra Humfryes.

Rather than solely investigating a traditional off-leash dog park, it is, she said, worthwhile to **consider off-leash dog trails wherever possible.**

“Maybe residents have said **they don’t really want to go and drive to a park, but they want to walk,**” she said. “Instead of finding areas that are non-residential, maybe we can have sections of leash-free dog walking on our trails. **Lots of residents would love that where they can walk their dogs.**”

By Brock Weir  
Editor