

FUNDING SOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS AND DONATION OPPORTUNITIES

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The construction of at least one new dog park will be needed by 2025 to meet service level standards identified in the Needs Assessment. It is recommended that park bond funding be utilized to fund the construction of one new dog park by this time.
- The study does not recommend charging membership and/or user fees for access to dog parks. Dog membership and user fees do not exist at any nearby local jurisdictions and charging fees would likely discourage dog park visitation.
- The study recommends discussing options with the Department of Tax Administration (DTA). One opportunity includes the solicitation of voluntary contributions through Fairfax County Park Foundation (FCPF) as part of the registration process. Another option is the dedication of a portion of the dog license fee to fund a portion of the operational costs associated with maintaining dog parks, both now and in the future.
- It is recommended that FCPA staff coordinate with Fairfax County Park Foundation (FCPF) to develop new and market existing dog park donation opportunities to prospective individuals and organizations.
- Maintenance agreements with HOAs or other private organizations should continue to be considered and encouraged when establishing a new dog park on FCPA-owned property during the development review process for new residential and commercial developments within applicable areas of the County. Friends Groups are the primary dog park partnership opportunity recommended as part of this study. FCPA should work with interested community members to encourage these partnerships which form the basis for mutual support for dog parks.

ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Funding is critical for financing the ongoing costs of operations, maintenance, and associated improvements within FCPA dog parks. As such, this study reviewed funding strategies undertaken by other jurisdictions and reviewed potential funding sources within the County. The funding sources reviewed as part of this study include park bonds, membership programs/user fees, partnerships, dog license revenue, and supplemental support via sponsored improvements/donation opportunities.

PARK BOND PROGRAM

The funding from Park Bonds to FCPA is spread throughout the County for the purposes of land acquisition, new park/facility development and renovations of FCPA parks to meet the open space and recreation needs of residents.

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A needs assessment is completed decennially to determine if FCPA facilities are meeting service level standards. The needs assessment informs prioritization of Park Bond funding, as capital investment needs typically exceed the available funding. The analysis completed in the planning section of this report demonstrates that the current need for dog parks is being met, but that one new dog park by 2025 is needed. The allocation of Park Bond funding for the construction of one new dog park to meet projected service levels would be appropriate and consistent with past bond funding use.

MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS FUNDING

FCPA currently maintains nine of the 13 County dog parks and spends an estimated average of \$84,600 per year for these operations across all nine dog parks. The specific dog parks that FCPA maintains are referenced in Appendix 3 – Inventory & Evaluation of Existing Dog Parks. These operations and maintenance costs are funded by the County's General Fund.

MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS

When establishing a new dog park on FCPA, in some instances, it may be more appropriate for an HOA or other private organization to maintain the new FCPA dog park facility through a maintenance agreement or MOU with FCPA. This type of arrangement typically occurs through the development review process for new developments in certain parts of the County. Maintenance agreements for these types of developments enable the possibility of new facilities within the County and directly benefit the immediate community.

For example, a maintenance agreement to maintain Dulles Station Community Park, which includes a public FCPA dog park, was required as a proffer condition for the development of the park as part of a rezoning application in 2016. The maintenance agreement between FCPA and the Dulles Station HOA outlines the maintenance and operational responsibilities of the HOA as well as the terms and conditions.

MEMBERSHIP PROGRAMS AND USER FEES

FCPA currently does not require the public to pay fees for use or membership at dog parks. The current rules do require dogs to be licensed and vaccinated for visitors to access the park. The study reviewed how other jurisdictions both nationally and locally employ membership programs and user fees to support their jurisdiction's operations, maintenance, and improvement costs.

Research found many examples of localities across the country that employ an annual membership fee with varying amounts and discounts as shown in *Figure 33*. Research of such programs found that annual fees range anywhere from \$10 - \$78 and that some localities provide discount rates to residents and seniors while others have a standard rate for all users. Aside from annual fees, other fee structures include daily admission fees, VIP passes which work at multiple locations, and discounted rates for visitors with multiple dogs. Some jurisdictions employ a single annual permit fee for

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one dog park, while other dog parks throughout the jurisdiction remain free to the public.

Membership and user registration for dog parks can occur online, email/mail, phone, and in-person. The most common methods offered are the email/mail and in-person options. One jurisdiction that the study researched employs self-pay kiosks where users can purchase passes at an unstaffed gate. Generally, gate control access restrictions are in place to prevent access without payment. Fines are assessed if entry is gained without payment. In all cases, including non-fee-based parks, proof of vaccinations and/or dog licensing are required to use facilities.

In examining the surrounding northern Virginia jurisdictions, the study identified that membership and user fees for dog park use, or amenities are non-existent. Research has also indicated that the administrative and

operational costs associated with charging fees in an amount realistic for the northern Virginia area far outweigh the revenue potential. Costs are inclusive of but not limited to administrative fees, increased maintenance, and access controls.

PARTNERSHIPS

In the past, the construction and operation of new dog parks were largely funded by self-organized sponsor groups that desired a dog park. In 2002, the sponsorship group model was disbanded due to a loss of liability insurance coverage that was previously provided under the volunteer provisions of the County's insurance program. Since the

Other Jurisdictions' User Fees		
Location	# of Sites	Fees
Chesapeake, VA	4	\$10/Yr
Town of Leesburg, VA	1	\$0
Prince William County, VA	1	\$0
Arlington County, VA	8	\$0
City of Alexandria, VA	18	\$0
New Orleans, LA	1	\$55/Yr for one dog; \$5 per additional dog
Nashville, TN (Private Partnership)	1	\$48/month; \$78/Yr 50% off for additional dogs
Kalamazoo, MI	2	\$5/day; \$25/Yr \$20 Senior Pass
Branson, MO	1	(Residents) \$25/Yr \$5 per additional dog (Non-Residents) \$30/Yr \$10 per additional dog
Iowa City, IO	2	(Residents) \$52/Yr (Non-Residents) \$57/Yr \$5 discount if spayed or neutered
Virginia Beach, VA	3	\$0
Columbia, MD (Private Association)	1	(Residents) \$35/Yr (Non-Residents) \$70/Yr
Three Rivers Park District, MN (multiple Counties)	9	\$45/Yr
Durham, NC	4	(Residents) \$17/Yr \$15 per additional dog (Non-Residents) \$22/Yr \$20 per additional dog
Glenview Park District, IL	1	(Residents) \$60/Yr \$35 per additional dog (Non-Residents) \$138/Yr \$75 per additional dog
Indianapolis, IN	4	\$125/Yr for all parks \$75/Yr for one park 50% discount for up to 2 additional dogs

Figure 33: Other Jurisdictions' User Fees Table

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disbandment of the sponsor group model, partnerships with Friends Groups remains the preferred method for partnering with the community to help FCPA both fund and maintain dog parks. The Friends Group model and program is expanded upon below.

Note that volunteering in the form of park volunteer teams and individual volunteering are additional pathways for the community to support and be involved in the operations and maintenance of FCPA dog parks. However, unlike Friends Groups, these pathways of involvement do not include the option to fundraise. More information on these forms of community support and their distinctions are expanded upon in the Volunteering section of this report.

Friends Groups

Friends Groups are individuals who come together to provide ongoing operations, programmatic, maintenance and/or fundraising support at a park, facility, or specified program, and work closely with a FCPA staff liaison to develop projects and plans. The structure and responsibilities of each Friends Group are unique and defined within an MOU between the Friends Group and FCPA.

Each Friends Group has a site-specific Staff Liaison within FCPA who serves as their primary point of contact for working on projects and events. FPCA also has a Central Outreach Friends Group Coordinator to assist with new Friends Group formation and ongoing coordination efforts. It should be noted that Friends Groups must obtain their own insurance to provide maintenance and operational volunteer support at any park facility, including dog parks. FCPA may grant Friends Groups permission to use park names, provide services, and conduct business on parkland. More information about Friends Groups can be found in the Volunteer Section of this report.

In 2019, Westgrove PACK obtained their own insurance coverage, entered into an agreement with FCPA, and became a Friends Group. The Westgrove PACK Friends Group maintains its own webpage and accepts public donations for planned improvements to the dog park through their website and through various fundraisers. This Friends Group serves as a successful example of a partnership between FCPA and the community in the development and operations of a public dog park.

DOG LICENSE REVENUE

The research done as part of this study has found that many jurisdictions utilize a portion of dog licensing or permitting revenue to fund the operation of dog parks. Dog license fees generate approximately \$830,000 in revenue for Fairfax County annually. The annual revenue from dog license fees is combined with annual tax revenue which is allocated to the General Fund which supports the operations of all county agencies. The allocation of general funding for each agency is managed through the County's annual budgeting process.

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Typically, FCPA receives less than 1% of the budget for Fairfax County's general fund.²⁶ In addition, no portion of the annual dog license fee revenue is earmarked specifically for the operations and maintenance of dog parks.

SPONSORED IMPROVEMENTS AND DONATION OPPORTUNITIES

Sponsored improvements and donation opportunities to support new dog park construction and ongoing operational costs were researched as part of this study. Sponsored improvements and donation opportunities that other local jurisdictions employ include websites and/or brochures that provide information for donating or sponsoring specific improvements to dog parks. For example, the City of Fairfax has a website dedicated to their sole dog park that provides information about sponsoring specific dog park amenities and improvements, with sponsorship levels listed for each.

Currently, FCPA does not have marketing material, or a website dedicated to sponsored improvements or donation opportunities for existing dog parks. However, donations are accepted for FCPA's Westgrove Dog Park through the Westgrove PACK website, as they jointly operate this dog park in partnership with FCPA through a MOU agreement.

The Fairfax County Park Foundation (FCPF) is a nonprofit 501(C)(3) organization that supports FCPA by raising private funds, obtaining grants, and creating partnerships that supplement tax dollars needed to meet the County's need for parkland, facilities, and services. FCPF accepts some contributions for dog parks and events. FCPF can facilitate a campaign to encourage donations and sponsored improvements for dog parks, although the opportunity to donate towards FCPA dog parks is largely unknown to the public due to the absence of a formal project with marketing material and targeted outreach campaigns.

FCPA currently offers a variety of dog classes and events. Classes include obedience training, competitive agility, and non-competitive agility. Dog-focused events include "Dog Daze" at The Water Mine in Lake Fairfax Park and "The Ides of Bark" at Grist Mill Park. These events and classes are generally offered at larger staffed parks throughout the County and are not hosted at dog parks to avoid potential conflicts with regular use of the park. Classes are held for a fee paid to FCPA.

FCPF accepts monetary and in-kind contributions from charitable sponsors to help offset costs of these dog events in addition to accepting voluntary donations at the event. In addition, vendors can have an on-site presence during an event for a fee. The donations and fees associated with these events are used for the operational costs of the event and any net revenue is typically donated to a charitable organization such as the Park Foundation and/or canine organization.

²⁶ <https://fairfaxparkfoundation.org/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

FCPA requires additional funding to support any increased maintenance or improvements in existing dog parks or the construction of any new dog parks in the County. This study puts forth recommendations for a variety of funding sources to be considered.

PARK BOND PROGRAM

As determined in the needs analysis done as part of this study, construction of at least one new dog park will be needed by 2025 to meet service level standards. It is recommended that park bond funding be utilized to fund the construction of one new dog park by this time.

MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS FUNDING

Additionally, this study identified that the current level of maintenance for FCPA dog parks provided by staff is bound by the available funding appropriated through the County's General Fund. The study identified that increased maintenance frequency and oversight by staff or volunteers would alleviate many of the issues identified by visitors in the survey. Additional funding from the County's General Fund would be needed to provide the additional level of maintenance and oversight by FCPA staff.

MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS

Maintenance agreements created in conjunction with the establishment of new FCPA dog parks on FCPA or other county-owned property, help expand services where there is increased development and subsequently additional recreational demands in the County. These types of agreements with HOAs or other private organizations should continue to be considered and encouraged where appropriate when evaluating new construction of an FCPA dog park during the development review process for new residential and commercial developments within applicable areas of the County.

MEMBERSHIP PROGRAMS AND USER FEES

The study does not recommend charging membership and/or user fees for access to dog parks. Dog membership and user fees do not exist at any nearby local jurisdictions and charging fees would likely discourage dog park visitation. Additionally, research has indicated that the administrative and operational costs associated with charging fees reasonable for this area far outweigh the investment return. Costs are inclusive of but not limited to administrative fees, increased maintenance costs, and access controls.

PARTNERSHIPS

FCPA should work with interested community members and encourage partnerships which form the basis for mutual support for dog parks. Friends Groups are the primary partnership opportunity recommended as part of this study.

Individual volunteers and park volunteer teams remain as other options for the community to be involved in and support FCPA dog parks, however these forms of community involvement differ from Friends Groups because they do not have the ability to fundraise for dog park improvements. The different volunteering options are expanded on further in the Volunteering section of this report.

Friends Groups

Friends Groups can be established at the planning stage of a new dog park to help fund and guide the development. They can also be established for an existing dog park to help facilitate additional improvements and operational needs. The relationship between FCPA and the Friends Group is defined through the establishment of a MOU agreement and may include ongoing operational support, programming, maintenance, and fundraising support for the dog park. The establishment of a Friends Group is a formal process undertaken with FCPA's Friends Group Coordinator and requires establishment of a non-profit entity registered with the IRS. It also requires insurance independent from Fairfax County. It should be noted that volunteering is only one facet of a Friends Group; the formation of a PVT may be more appropriate if providing maintenance and operational oversight within a dog park is a primary interest. Additional information about volunteering can be found in the Volunteer section of this report.

Westgrove Dog Park is the only FCPA dog park that has an established Friends Group partnership with FCPA as defined by an MOU between the Westgrove PAK Friends Group and FCPA. This study recommends exploring the potential community interest in forming Friends Groups for the other remaining dog parks. This level of outreach would require ongoing coordination and would require dedicated staff resources, as described in the Implementation section of this report.

Friends Groups should also be encouraged during the establishment phase of a new dog park as detailed in "Process for Establishing New FCPA Off Leash Dog Areas" section of this report. The interested group should consult with FCPA's Central Outreach Friends Group Coordinator to determine if the establishment of Friends Group is appropriate for the group's needs. The following should be considered when forming a Dog Park Friends Group:

- How organized and established does the group intend to be?
- What level of involvement does the group want in the management of the dog park?
- Does the group wish to fundraise for improvements or operations of the dog park?
- Does the group intend to provide services and conduct business on parkland?

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DOG LICENSE REVENUE

As the population of dogs grows within the County, so too should the funding to support the dog parks that they may frequent. Dog park funding appropriated through dog license revenue is an effective method of ensuring funding for this expected increase in recreational demand over the years. As such, the study recommends soliciting a portion of the dog license fee collected by the Department of Tax Administration (DTA) to fund a portion of the operational costs associated with maintaining dog parks, both now and in the future. Additionally, earmarked funding from the dog license fee would allow for an increased maintenance regime as detailed above and supported by the public.

SPONSORED IMPROVEMENTS AND DONATION OPPORTUNITIES

FCPF is equipped to facilitate donations and sponsored improvements at dog parks. This study identified that marketing material and outreach campaigns that focus on dog parks are needed. It is recommended that FCPA staff coordinate with FCPF to create a formal project and to market existing dog park donation opportunities with recognition benefits for prospective donors. Recommended marketing efforts are detailed below.

Marketing Recommendations

- It is recommended that FCPA staff coordinate with Fairfax County Park Foundation (FCPF) to develop new and market existing dog park donation opportunities from individuals and organizations.
- An FCPF mailing insert depicting existing donation opportunities that can support FCPA dog parks should be prepared and marketed. The mailing insert should be included with the dog license annual renewal mailing. Another development opportunity is conducting dog-focused direct mail campaigns.
- A dedicated FCPF webpage that accepts donations or sponsored improvements for individual dog parks should be established. The page should provide estimated sponsorship levels for potential improvements, such as the addition of a drinking fountain or a shade canopy. The webpage should link to FCPA's dog park webpage, other County dog-related webpages as appropriate, and may be promoted through relevant social media outlets.
- Signage, flyers, or brochures that inform visitors of dog park sponsorship and donation opportunities may be posted at dog parks, distributed at dog events or classes, and provided to local dog related businesses.

SPONSORED IMPROVEMENTS RECOMMENDATIONS

Research of other jurisdictions showed that many improvements and amenities within dog parks are provided through sponsoring. This study recommends pursuing and

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establishing the following dog and dog park-related sponsoring opportunities in Fairfax County:

- Sponsored dog park amenities, such as benches, shade structures, etc.
- Dog-related community events hosted by a sponsor, such as low-cost vaccines, micro-chipping, and special merchandise sales where a portion of the proceeds could be donated to FCPF to be used specifically for dog park improvements.

In return for sponsoring improvements, amenities, or events, the sponsor could receive recognition through donation plaques, social media, and ParkTakes.