

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) has received an abundance of questions and commentary over the past years related to the operation and expansion of dog parks within the County. The perceived demand for more dog parks coupled with the operational challenges of the County's existing dog parks formed the backbone of this study. The intent of the study was to address these questions and challenges through comprehensive analysis, research, and public outreach to better inform the planning, design, and operation of existing and future dog parks. The study developed recommendations to address these questions and challenges. In addition to developing recommendations, updated guidance and a number of tools were developed as part of this study, such as revised dog park siting and design guidelines, a revised dog park monitor checklist, and a dog park incident report form. These items are included in Appendix 1 of this report.

The study was conducted by a team consisting of subject matter experts across many FCPA functional areas, including the Planning & Development, Park Operations, and Park Services Divisions; Public Information Office; Community Connections Program, and the Financial Management Branch. The Fairfax County Park Foundation (FCPF) was also instrumental in the preparation of the analysis and recommendations provided in this report. The team identified the following focus areas to be addressed by the study:

- Evaluate countywide dog park need and update dog park countywide planning approach and site placement guidelines
- Review and revise dog park design standards
- Review and develop operations and maintenance best practices for dog parks
- Recommend potential design and operational improvements to FCPA existing dog parks
- Evaluate dog park volunteering opportunities and identify appropriate responsibilities
- Research and recommend funding sources, partnerships, and donation opportunities
- Analyze rules, enforcement, and etiquette

These focus areas have been organized into six themes which each have a dedicated section within the report. The six themes are: *Planning; Design; Operations & Maintenance; Volunteering; Funding Sources; Partnerships and Donation Opportunities; and Rules & Enforcement*. Each section of this report provides recommendations and supporting analysis. The *Key Takeaways* part of each section provides an overview of the primary recommendations with a brief description of the analysis that informed the specific recommendation. Below is a composite of those Key Takeaways for each section.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

PLANNING

- FCPA should construct at least one new dog park by 2025, using the list of master planned but unbuilt dog parks for potential locations. The selection of the dog park should be based on community support and prioritization utilizing the planning criteria established in this report and described below. This will satisfy the estimated service level need based on the projected population for 2025 as well as the substantial community interest expressed through the dog park study survey.
- Following the selection and construction of one planned dog park, establish a schedule for the construction of the remaining six dog parks that are master planned but not yet built, and identify funding sources for the construction of these parks. Construction of these parks should be prioritized utilizing the planning criteria established in this report and described below. Building and establishing these planned dog parks will exceed the number of dog parks required to satisfy the County's estimated service level need over the next 20+ years, close dog park gaps in planning districts and help better meet community demand as indicated by both the location and quantity of licensed dogs and the community survey.
- FCPA should explore options for planning a new dog park in the Baileys and Jefferson Planning Districts, as well as the Bull Run Planning District, and/or identify and convey information about the privately owned publicly accessible dog parks in these districts. These districts currently do not have existing or planned FCPA dog parks. These actions would help close these gaps.
- In the future, FCPA should employ the following planning criteria (in addition to Needs Assessment standards) when planning for dog parks:
 - Geographic distribution - Planning Districts
 - The recommended access-based service areas for dog parks; 20-minute drive access (countywide) and consideration of 10-minute walk access in densely populated neighborhoods. Note that these access-based service areas were developed based on public input received from the dog park study survey.
 - Density of licensed dogs in the County
- The total number and location of privately owned and publicly accessible dog parks in the county is currently unknown. FCPA should conduct an inventory of these facilities in the County. This effort should be prioritized in the Baileys and Jefferson Districts as well as the more dense Special Planning Areas (as defined in Figure 18) in the County where these types of dog parks are more likely to be constructed, to better understand how access and need is being met in these areas. These dog parks and dog runs located within private developments should continue to be encouraged through the development review process, where appropriate.
- FCPA should consider hosting additional dog-related events, building on what has been offered in the past, and following examples from other similar jurisdictions, to meet public need and interest.

- To provide more robust information about dog parks and dog park events, as requested by the public, FCPA should consolidate all information related to dog parks, dog classes and events hosted by FCPA, dog park volunteer information, donation opportunities, and dog-owner related requirements (vaccination, rabies clinics, etc.) into a single webpage.
- FCPA should adopt the newly revised dog park siting criteria, which were developed as part of this study to better accommodate the evolving County landscape.
- Going forward, FCPA should utilize the newly prepared dog park siting tools. These siting tools factor in the revised siting criteria as well as feedback received from the public on dog park preferences. These tools will standardize, streamline, and enhance the dog park site planning process.
- FCPA should adopt the updated process for establishing a new dog park. This process, developed as part of this study, more fully captures current planning procedures and the public participation process.
- FCPA should continue to coordinate with the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) stormwater department on annual dog park inspections so that FCPA can readily address any areas in need of improvement as it relates to site level stormwater compliance.

DESIGN

- The standards and guidelines for dog park planning, siting, placement, and design have evolved since the establishment of FCPA's first dog park. As part of this study, industry trends, best design practices, public feedback, and County policy were analyzed. This study report puts forth a revised and refreshed set of standards and guidelines to be consistently referenced for the planning and development of new FCPA dog parks. The standards and guidelines may also be used as an optional resource for design guidance by private communities such as homeowner's associations (HOAs) or by developers of privately owned publicly accessible dog parks (which are typically created through rezoning applications and proffers). To emphasize, the guidelines and standards presented in this report apply to new FCPA dog parks; private communities and developers may utilize them as a resource as needed, however, there is no requirement to do so.
- Review of other jurisdictions' dog park design guidelines has proved that there is no universal consensus on the best type of surfacing. All surfacing types, such as natural turf, washed stone dust, wood mulch, and synthetic turf have pros and cons related to use, maintenance, and cost to be considered. Washed stone dust should continue to be FCPA's surfacing of choice, due to its minimal maintenance need and high durability. For newly developed FCPA dog parks, natural turf can be considered if the enclosed dog area is larger than 3 acres.
- All FCPA dog parks have crusher fines/washed stone dust surfacing with the exception of Westgrove, Chandon and Blake Lane dog parks. The survey results indicated dissatisfaction with the condition of the surfacing in some of these parks. It was found that excessive slope and the absence of a containment edge within these dog parks was a contributing factor to

the surface condition. Reducing the slope and adding a concrete or timber curb in these dog parks would help improve the surfacing condition by limiting the migration of the surface material.

- Designated areas for large dogs and smaller, younger, or older dogs were expressed as a need through survey responses, comments, and emails. Additionally, nearly all guidelines reviewed as part of this study recommended some variation of separated areas. Designated areas are recommended as part of the design guidelines for new dog parks.

OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE

- Overall, research found that FCPA's dog park maintenance standards and practices are largely consistent with the practices employed by other jurisdictions. However, research also identified a gap in some maintenance task frequencies due to a corresponding gap in funding for labor and material resources. Increasing the frequency of these tasks would address many of the concerns expressed within the survey, although would require additional funding for resources. Revised maintenance task frequencies have been provided within the Recommendations portion of the Operations & Maintenance Section.
- The survey indicated that dog waste bag stations were often empty, due to heavy use of the dog park and visitors taking bags for non-park use. The study recommends setting a standard of restocking pet waste bags once per week and installing signage discouraging visitors from taking more bags than needed while at the dog park. Signage at the dog park should prominently display contact information to report any maintenance issues that need to be addressed.
- Locations of trash receptacles are currently inconsistent throughout FCPA dog parks. This study recommends placing trash receptacles within the entry corral area or immediately adjacent to the outside of the dog park fence in all FCPA dog parks. Consistently placing trash receptacles in these locations will encourage visitors to dispose of dog waste and allow maintenance staff to empty the receptacles without entering the dog area(s).
- As part of this study, visitors' satisfaction levels with different aspects of the operation and design of FCPA dog parks were assessed as part of a countywide dog park survey. Survey results indicated the key improvements that users would like to see in dog parks are surface condition, a water source, rule enforcement, and shade. Suggested key improvements to the operation and design of each dog park are provided as part of this report. New features and maintenance frequency of existing dog parks are limited by current funding. This report puts forth recommendations for exploring additional funding sources, volunteering opportunities, and partnerships to improve the conditions of dog parks and increase the maintenance frequency across all dog parks.

VOLUNTEERING

- FCPA should leverage the interest conveyed by the public in volunteering in FCPA's dog parks.
- FCPA can and should support formation of park volunteer teams (PVT) in dog parks via the existing PVT program. To support their formation, as well as the formation of Dog Park

Friends Groups, FCPA should provide more robust information about dog park PVT and Friends Group opportunities on the dog park webpage.

- There are three volunteering paths that can be taken in FCPA dog parks: individual volunteers/dog park monitors, PVTs, and Friends Groups. An ambassador program could be explored in the future, though this would require additional staff support to develop guidelines and manage the program.
- FCPA should utilize the dog park monitor checklist for volunteers (which was refined as part of this study) and explore options for digitizing it in the future.
- FCPA should utilize the incident report form for volunteers, developed as part of this study.

FUNDING SOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS AND DONATION OPPORTUNITIES

- The planning analysis identified that construction of at least one new dog park will be needed by 2025 to meet service level standards adopted in the 2016 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 park 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) to use a portion of the dog license fee to fund a portion of the operational costs associated with maintaining FCPA 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 promote existing dog park donation opportunities that can be marketed 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.

RULES AND ENFORCEMENT

- No changes to FCPA's existing dog park rules or operating hours are recommended. The survey results, paired with staff observations, determined that many issues related to rules within FCPA dog parks are due to a need for additional enforcement, as opposed to the rules themselves. This study report recommends advocating for additional volunteers, partnerships, and clear reporting procedures to help curb any undesired dog park use or etiquette.

- Conduct a signage audit at each FCPA dog park to ensure that rules, regulations, and FCPA contact information are clear and consistent. Signage should state that there could be fines or penalties that can be ticketed by law enforcement officers. Signs should also provide a non-emergency police number for reporting any issues. Having clear and consistent signage at the dog parks is critical for visitors, volunteers and FCPA staff alike.
- FCPA's [Dog Park Webpage](#) should be reviewed and updated to ensure that rules, reporting procedures, contact information and operating hours are prominently displayed.
- On FCPA's dog park webpage, future informational brochures, and signage, include the following statement to provide clearer language on the requirement for owners to pick up their dog's waste, "Dog owners are required to pick up all waste from their dog (County Code 26-04-41.1.). Violators may be subject to penalties and fines."
- FCPA should develop a dog handling and behavior brochure to further promote safe and enjoyable use of dog parks for all.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Four implementation strategies centered around coordination and communication have been formulated as part of this report to help address many of the recommendations provided within each of the themed sections. These strategies include:

- Enhance FCPA's dog park webpage
- Create a "Dogs in Public Spaces/Dog Park Information" brochure
- Provide a single point of coordination for all dog park-related matters across the agency
- Adopt a project schedule for construction of one planned dog park