

## RULES & ENFORCEMENT

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- No changes to FCPA’s existing dog park rules or operating hours are recommended. The survey results, paired with staff observations, determined that most issues related to rules within FCPA dog parks are due to a need for additional enforcement, as opposed to the rules themselves.
- Having clear and consistent signage at the dog parks is critical for visitors, volunteers, and FCPA staff alike. A signage audit at each FCPA dog park to ensure that rules, regulations, and FCPA contact information are clear and consistent is recommended.
- 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’s dog park webpage should be reviewed and updated to ensure that rules, reporting procedures, and operating hours are prominently displayed.
- FCPA should develop a dog handling and behavior brochure to further promote safe and enjoyable use of dog parks for all.

### ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

As part of this study, the current rules and enforcement procedures for FCPA dog parks were examined to determine what, if any, modifications might be needed. FCPA benchmarked existing rules, enforcement, and etiquette procedures against other nearby jurisdictions. In addition, some rules and enforcement procedures were vetted through the public survey. Below are the current FCPA dog park rules.

## EXISTING FCPA DOG PARK RULES

### OLDA Hours of Operation

7 a.m. to one half-hour after sunset Monday through Friday. On weekends and federal holidays, the hours are 8 a.m. to one half-hour after sunset (County Code 108.1-5-1 (s)).

### The following are prohibited in FCPA off-leash dog areas:

1. Dogs barking incessantly.
2. Food (includes treats, bones and edible toys) and glass containers.
3. Dogs under four months of age.
4. Female dogs in heat.
5. Animals other than dogs.
6. Children under the age of nine.
7. Professional training of dogs.

### Other rules that apply to dog parks:

1. Users of the facility do so at their own risk. Neither Fairfax County nor the Park Authority shall be liable for any injury or damage caused by any dog in the off-leash area. Handlers are legally responsible for their dogs, and any injury or damage to facilities caused by them.
2. Aggressive dogs (defined as dogs posing a threat to human beings or other dogs) are not allowed at any time. Dogs must be removed from the off-leash dog area at the first sign of aggression.
3. All dogs must be legally licensed and vaccinated and shall wear a visible dog license and have vaccination documents available upon request.
4. The off-leash dog area is for dogs, their handlers, and those accompanying them only.
5. Dogs must be on leash when entering and exiting the off-leash dog area.
6. Dogs must be under the control of their handler and in view of their handler at all times.
7. Handlers must be 16 years or older. Children ages 9 -15 years must be accompanied by a chaperone, 16 years or older.
8. Handlers must have possession of the dog leash at all times.
9. Handlers are limited to a maximum of two dogs.
10. Handlers are responsible for removal and disposal of waste.
11. Handlers must prevent dogs from digging holes and are responsible for filling them.

### OLDA Hours of Operation

7 a.m. to one half-hour after sunset Monday through Friday. On weekends and federal holidays, the hours are 8 a.m. to one half-hour after sunset (County Code 108.1-5-1 (s)).

## DOG PARK RULES BENCHMARK COMPARISON

In examining nearby jurisdiction's dog park rules, the study found that current FCPA dog park rules are similar, with some minor variations in the number of dogs permitted per handler and the age of children permitted in a dog park. Dog park hours of operation for the other jurisdictions studied showed that dawn to dusk is typical. Nearby jurisdictions that were analyzed for comparison to FCPA's current rules include:

- Prince William County
- Arlington County
- City of Alexandria
- Washington, D.C.
- Leesburg

Some of these jurisdictions permitted children of all ages to enter a dog park if they were accompanied by an adult, while other jurisdictions had age limit rules similar to FCPA's rule that states handlers must be 16 years or older and children ages 9 -15 years must be accompanied by a chaperone. Some of the local jurisdictions researched permitted three dogs, while others have a limit of two dogs. Currently, FCPA limits handlers to two dogs maximum within dog parks, which is supported by 66% of the respondents that completed the survey as shown in *Figure 34* below. FCPA established these rules as a safety precaution, as it may be difficult to supervise multiple dogs or properly look after a dog and young children at the same time.

### **DOG PARK RULE ENFORCEMENT**

Regarding enforcement, FCPA posts dog park rules on signage at each dog park as well as on FCPA's dog park website. FCPA staff enforce dog park rules when they are on-site performing maintenance tasks, but staff's presence at each of the dog parks is largely limited to performing maintenance tasks. FCPA encourages visitors to call the Fairfax County Police Non-Emergency phone number that is displayed within the park to deal with violations of rules and regulations if they are unable to resolve the situation civilly in person. Dog park users are also reminded that dog parks are public, shared resources and that appropriate, responsible, and cooperative behavior is expected from users at all times.

Because dog parks are unstaffed facilities, dog park volunteers play an important role when it comes to supporting rule enforcement and visitor etiquette. While volunteers do not take specific enforcement actions, as monitors, they serve as the eyes and ears of the dog park and can help expedite and relay information about violations and unsafe or unappealing situations to FCPA.

FCPA expects that by reinvigorating volunteering in dog parks and helping to establish volunteer teams and/or Friends Groups in FCPA's existing dog parks, a direct and positive impact on rule enforcement will result. Recommendations on how volunteers can best support FCPA in dog park rule enforcement are detailed further in the Volunteer section of this report.

### **WHAT WE ALSO HEARD**

Rule enforcement was on the top six list of subjects that commenters in the dog park survey cited as the one thing that would most improve the dog park they primarily visited. Concerns relating to rule enforcement included the following:

- Aggressive dogs
- Unvaccinated dogs
- Inattentive owners
- Dog waste pickup by owners
- Clearly displayed rules
- Clearly displayed reporting procedures for violators
- Dog park etiquette/behavior educational signage

The survey results showed that the majority of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed (67%) with the existing FCPA rule of handlers being limited to a maximum of two dogs, as shown in Figure 34 below.

***Currently, handlers may not bring more than 2 dogs into a Park Authority dog park at one time. How much do you agree or disagree with this rule?***

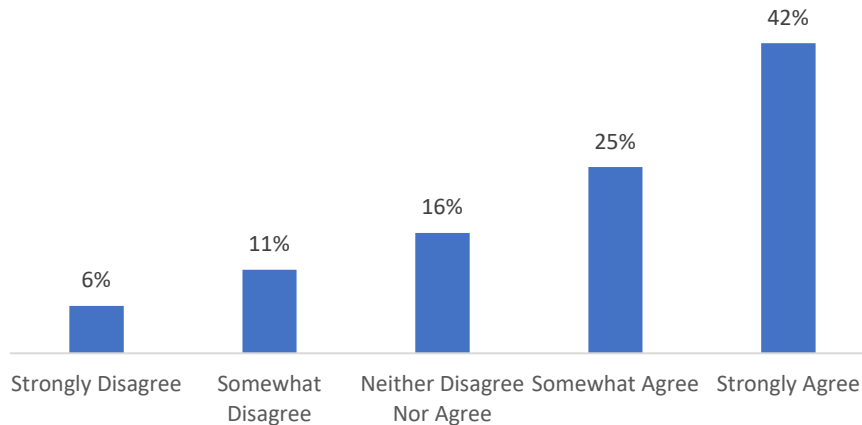


Figure 34: Percent that agree or disagree with 2 dogs per handler FCPA dog park rule

## RECOMMENDATIONS

No changes to FCPA's existing dog park rules or operating hours are recommended. The survey results, paired with staff observations, determined that most issues related to rules within FCPA dog parks is due to a need for additional enforcement, as opposed to the rules themselves. The study puts forth the following recommendations for reducing issues related to rules and enforcement:

- 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, and operating hours are prominently displayed. Other County dog-related webpages should be reviewed to ensure that there is a link to FCPA's current dog park page.
- 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.”

- Encourage and publicize information about dog park volunteering opportunities. The assistance of these volunteers is needed for monitoring and reporting any misconduct issues. The monitoring checklist and reporting procedures provided as part of this study will support these efforts.
- Staff should be resourced to provide a single point coordination for all dog park-related matters across the agency. Such responsibilities include managing volunteers, advocating for additional amenities, and liaising between volunteers and maintenance staff to address issues at specific locations.
- FCPA should develop a dog handling and behavior brochure to further promote safe and enjoyable use of dog parks for all.