

Subject: Dog Park in Abasand**APPROVALS:****Paul Thorkelsson**_____
Director_____
Chief Administrative Officer**Recommended Motion:**

THAT Administration continue exploring locations for the new off-leash dog park on the north side of Fort McMurray, specifically sites not adjacent to already developed lots, in preparation for the 2024 budget cycle.

Summary:

During the 2022 budget deliberations, Council directed Administration by resolution to undertake a feasibility study and subsequent public engagement for the potential construction of a dog park in Abasand Heights and present the findings back to Council by the end of the second quarter.

Currently, the Municipality has an above-average number of off-leash dog areas compared with similar communities. In the Parks Master Plan, respondents listed off-leash dog parks as the third most popular activity in the Municipality's parks. Additionally, the Parks Master Plan recommends exploring locations for an additional dog park in the north part of the city.

The public engagement for a dog park location in Abasand Heights was completed and residents' feedback collected which demonstrated general community interest in the new park, but at the same time, confirmed the strong individual opposition on each location due to the close proximity to homes.

Background:

Three most suitable locations for a dog park in the Abasand area were presented to the public. Responses were as follows:

- 719 online visits to Participate Wood Buffalo Project Page,
- 463 online survey respondents, and
- 25 in-person information session participants.

Of the 334 respondents, 73% wanted Abasand to have an off-leash dog park. The votes for each proposed site were very close. Site 1 had 136 votes, Site 2 had 157 and Site 3 had 135. Site 2 was ranked as the best option, primarily due to its location; however, both other locations were close (additional details in Attachment 1).

Alternatives:

Three options for consideration are:

1. Establish a second off-leash dog park on the north side of Fort McMurray and provide equal opportunities to users by evenly distributing the locations of the existing dog parks.
2. Complete direct public engagement/consultation with residents on Albion Drive (town houses) and if no opposition from residents, request construction budget of \$450,000 to move forward with the implementation of a new dog park.
3. Do not build any additional dog park facilities and just promote the existing sites.

Budget/Financial Implications:

The relatively high annual operational cost for the maintenance of dog parks should be considered in the final decision:

- Approximate construction costs of \$450,000;
- Additional consultation would be required with residents living adjacent to the selected site; and
- Yearly Public Works operating costs are approximately \$210,000.

Rationale for Recommendation:

Key findings from the 2019 Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Parks Master Plan identify that although we are higher than comparable communities for the supply of dog parks, 44% of respondents want more dog parks. It is the recommendation of the Parks Master Plan to establish an off-leash dog on the north side. This area is the most populated area of the urban service area neighborhoods but is only serviced by one dog park in the Thickwood. This is further supported by the most recent census data that identifies that 73% of the Urban Service Area Population resides north of the bridge.

Of the four off-leash dog parks in Fort McMurray, three are located on the south side and one on the north side. Timberlea, which is the most populated neighbourhood in the urban service area, does not have a dog park.

Abasand community has certain geographical limitations (depending on specific sites: steep slopes, crown land restrictions and dense residential areas) which limits site considerations for a new dog park within close proximity (50 to 80m range) of private

properties.

Several strong concerns were identified by Abasand residents through public engagement that included park hours of operation as a conflict with noise, lights, odours, 24-hour operation and potential after-hours noise.

The most preferred site in Abasand was Albion Drive (behind town houses) across from École Boréale on Abasand Drive. Considering the comments received from some residents, a more focused engagement would be required if it was decided to proceed with a dog park in Abasand.

Strategic Plan Values:

Fiscal Management

Attachments:

1. What We Heard About Abasand Dog Park Feasibility Study