# PROJECT 2: WRITE A PROPOSAL Off-Leash Dog Park at 61520 Ave NW, Calgary 

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## Executive Summary

The City of Calgary has a stated mission to provide off-leash opportunities to citizens. The Calgary community of Mount Pleasant has two off-leash issues:

1. The 61020 Ave NW land parcel which is currently designated as greenspace is being used against city bylaws as an unofficial off-leash area; and
2. There are currently no dog parks within Mount Pleasant community borders.

Both these issues can be solved by making 61020 Ave NW an official off-leash area.
The City of Calgary states that off-leash areas have social, environmental and economic benefits, while a lack of off-leash areas leads to misuse and over-trafficking in parks.

The parcel of land located at 61020 Ave NW is owned by the City of Calgary and currently zoned as greenspace. It is almost exclusively used as an unofficial off-leash dog area, leading to safety issues and confusion amongst community members. Mount Pleasant is home to approximately 544 dogs and community members have demonstrated a clear need for off-leash spaces, through unofficial use of 610 20 Ave NW, attendance at dog-friendly events and a survey conducted by Calla Turnbull. Off-leash areas are available in surrounding neighborhoods but are already servicing a high volume of dogs.

The City of Calgary Off-leash Area Management Plan has clear evaluation process for the eligibility of land parcels to become off-leash areas. According to these criteria, 61020 Ave NW is an excellent candidate to become an off-leash area. There are no recurring costs and the one-time implementation cost is estimated at $\$ 567$. There are three key steps to implementing an off-leash area: screening, stakeholder engagement and implementation. The estimated time to completion for this project is 13 to 18 months.

Benefits of implementing an official off-leash area at 61020 Ave NW include:

- Promoting interaction between residents
- Building a sense of community
- Encourage residents to explore healthy outdoor pursuits
- Other parks and natural areas will not be misused
- Curbs unsafe current use of 61020 Ave NW as an unofficial off-leash area
- Builds reputation for City of Calgary, and Mount Pleasant community

Concerns regarding cost, stakeholder objection and land use are addressed through investigation and comparison to alternative solutions, including a multi-use site with $30 \%$ off-leash area, a temporary offleash area, a crack down on bylaw offenders and not taking any action. These solutions address the issues to varying degrees, but none of them benefit the community as thoroughly as implementing a permanent, official off-leash area at 61020 Ave NW.

## Definitions

Greenspace: Greenspace, as per the City of Calgary, is land which is undeveloped and open to the public, but not serviced the way a city park would be. Greenspace has no infrastructure, such as garbage services, playgrounds or other facilities (PTLU 2017).

On-leash Bylaws: City of Calgary bylaws state that dogs must be on a leash unless they are on their own property or in an area that is designated by signs as an off-leash area (City of Calgary 2010).

Off-leash Area: An area where dogs are allowed off-leash under full control of their owner (City of Calgary 2010).

Parcel: A portion of land designated by a city or township as being one "plot" or one section to be owned by a single owner and taxed individually.

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## 1 Introduction

The City of Calgary recognizes the benefits of off-leash areas and has stated a mission to provide offleash opportunities to citizens (City of Calgary 2010). The Calgary community of Mount Pleasant has two off-leash issues which will be addressed by this proposal:

1. The 61020 Ave NW land parcel which is currently designated as greenspace is being used against city bylaws as an unofficial off-leash area; and
2. There are currently no dog parks within Mount Pleasant community borders.

Both these issues can be solved by making 61020 Ave NW an official off-leash area. This solution is ideal based on the site background and an examination of community demographics, current off-leash use and surrounding off-leash availability. The site meets City of Calgary off-leash requirements and can be implemented for a minor cost and within a reasonable timeframe. Benefits, concerns and alternative solutions are all presented within this proposal.

## 2 Background

The issues surrounding a Mount Pleasant off-leash area can be better understood through a discussion of the City of Calgary's stance on off-leash areas, the current land use at 61020 Ave NW, Mount Pleasant community demographics and off-leash opportunities in surrounding neighborhoods.

### 2.1 City of Calgary Off-Leash Area Benefits

The City of Calgary is supportive of off-leash dog areas. In their own words, from the Off-leash Area Management Plan (2010), the benefits of local off-leash dog areas are trifold:

- Social: Off-leash areas enhance the well being of people and dogs;
- Environmental:

Management of multi-use off-leash areas maximises the enjoyment and safety for all users while minimizing negative impacts on the environment; and

- Economic:

A successful off-leash dog strategy contributes to Calgary's reputation as a desirable place to live and augments The City of Calgary's reputation as a leader in open space and responsible pet owner management.

Not having adequate off-leash areas available can lead to misuse of parks and over-trafficking of established areas. Dog owners who cannot access an off-leash area may allow their pets to run freely in on-leash parks, causing safety issues and damaging environmentally sensitive areas. Additionally, insufficient availability of off-leash areas may lead to over-use of existing off-leash parks, causing environmental damage and creating additional upkeep costs. Mount Pleasant is currently facing some of these challenges.

### 2.261020 Ave NW

There is a $3 \mathrm{~km}^{2}$ fenced-in parcel of land located at 61020 Ave NW, in central Mount Pleasant (see maps in Appendix A). This land is owned by the City of Calgary and currently zoned as greenspace, meaning residents are free to walk their dogs in the area but are expected to follow on-leash bylaws (PTLU 2017). However, it is widely known that this land parcel is almost exclusively used as an unofficial off-leash dog area (PTLU 2017). In 2015 a children's soccer program was planned for the space but was cancelled due to complaints of excessive dog excrement (PTLU 2017). In the time since, dog owners frequent the park and it is rarely used for other activities.

There are negative implications of this unofficial use. Lack of observance of on-leash bylaw regulations can lead to safety issues for community members and dogs. While the parcel is mostly fenced in, there are two ungated entrance points which dogs can easily escape from. Escaped dogs can engage in conflicts with bystanders or other animals, get lost or get hit by cars. With no gates or signage this is a serious safety issue for the entire community.

There is also confusion amongst community members about the ownership and land use designation of the park. An interview conducted by Calla Turnbull in Fall 2017 found that most residents who regularly use the park did not know who owned it or what the correct land use was (Appendix B). With no signage, many people assumed that it was an off-leash area based on their observations of current use. Interviewees expressed frustration with conflicting information about whom to contact regarding the space. This frustration damages public perception of the Community of Mount Pleasant and City of Calgary.

### 2.3 A Population in Need

Calgary is home to 135,000 dogs (Gradon 2016). This equates to roughly one dog for every 10 people. Thus Mount Pleasant, with a population of 5,442 people, has approximately 544 dogs (City of Calgary Community and Neighborhood Services, 2017).

Recent engagement in dog-friendly community events is evidence that there are many dog owners looking for opportunities to socialize their pets in the neighborhood. For example, on September 4, 2017 the Mount Pleasant Community Center Outdoor Pool hosted a "Doggie Paddle". The center's outdoor pool was open to dogs under the same bylaws as an off-leash area for a two-hour window. Over 150 dogs and their owners showed up in the first hour (as reported by a pool employee on that date). The participation of so many community members, who were willing to pay a \$5 entry fee for an off-leash space for their dog, demonstrates a clear need for a community off-leash area.

Interviews of resident dog owners were conducted by Calla Turnbull in Fall 2017. Of those surveyed, $100 \%$ were in favor of an off-leash park established in Mount Pleasant (Appendix B).

### 2.4 Surrounding Off-leash Areas

There are two off-leash areas near Mount Pleasant: Confederation Park and Elks Park, as shown in Table A and on the map in Appendix A.

Table A: Off-leash Areas Near Mount Pleasant

| Off-leash Area | Community | Distance from Farthest <br> Boundary of Mount Pleasant | Surface <br> Area |
| :--- | :--- | :---: | :---: |
| Confederation Park | Queens Park Village <br> Cambrian Heights | 7 km | $1.5 \mathrm{~km}^{2}$ |
| Elks Park | Mountview | 3.3 km | $2.5 \mathrm{~km}^{2}$ |
| Total |  | $4 \mathrm{~km}^{2}$ |  |

(City of Calgary Community and Neighborhood Services 2017)
The distance from the farthest boundary of Mount Pleasant has been selected as a measurement to show the farthest potential distance a resident may have to travel to access an off-leash area. As seen in Table A, the off-leash areas near Mount Pleasant serve an additional three other communities.
Demographics of these communities are shown in Table B.
Table B: Demographics of Mount Pleasant and Surrounding Communities

| Community | Location relative to Mount <br> Pleasant | Human Population | Estimated <br> Dog <br> Population |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :---: |
| Queens Park Village <br> Cambrian Heights | Northwest | 2,568 | 257 |
| Mountview | Southeast | 3,631 | 363 |
| Mount Pleasant | NA | 5,442 | 544 |
| Total |  | $\mathbf{1 , 1 6 4}$ |  |

(City of Calgary Community and Neighborhood Services 2017)
Queen's Park Village, Cambrian Heights, Mountview and Mount Pleasant have a total estimated population of 1,164 dogs and a total off-leash surface area of $4 \mathrm{~km}^{2}$. This is a high volume of dogs using a small surface area, demonstrating a need and demand for additional off-leash areas.

## 3 Proposal for 61020 Ave NW Off-Leash Area

There is a need for an off-leash area in Mount Pleasant, based on community demographics and existing interest in off-leash activities. The greenspace located at 61020 Ave NW is serving as a stop-gap for that need, and encouraging residents to disobey city on-leash bylaws. It is in the best interest of the city to make 61020 Ave NW an official Off-leash Area. This will provide social, environmental and economic benefits, as well as take pressure off surrounding Off-leash Areas.

There are a few factors which must be considered when establishing an off-leash area. The first is the City of Calgary off-leash requirements, a list of eligibility criteria for potential off-leash areas. In addition, the project cost, timeframe and projected results must be considered. These factors are discussed in depth below.

### 3.1 City of Calgary Requirements

The City of Calgary Off-leash Area Management Plan (2010) has a clear evaluation process for the eligibility of land parcels to become off-leash areas. According to these criteria, 61020 Ave NW is an excellent candidate to become an off-leash area. The Off-leash Area Establishment Checklist has been completed and is available in Appendix C. The only concern based on this checklist is that the proposed site does not currently occupy less than $30 \%$ of a regional/multi-use site.

The parcel is not currently a regional or multi-use site, however if the City of Calgary mandates this requirement, the area could be split into a multi-use park, with $30 \%$ allocated to an off-leash area and the other $70 \%$ to recreational activities. This alternative is discussed in Section 4.

Based on City of Calgary requirements and stakeholder response, the 61020 Ave NW parcel is an excellent candidate for an off-leash area.

### 3.2 Financing

The only recurring costs associated with operating an off-leash area at 61020 Ave NW parcel would be general site maintenance: landscaping, snow removal and garbage pick-up. Since the parcel is zoned as greenspace, it is already owned by the City and subject to regular landscaping and snow removal procedures which are adequate for the proposed off-leash area with no additional cost. Garbage pick-up is not currently available but can be implemented at no extra cost. The alley which separates the parcel from the residential homes immediately south has regular weekly garbage collection (Appendix A). The parcel could be assigned a garbage bin and added to this pre-existing service route.

There are a few one-time only costs associating with establishing an off-leash area. An estimation of the total cost is $\$ 567$. A cost item breakdown is provided in Table B.

Table C: Implementation Costs for Off-leash Area at 61020 Ave NW

| Item | Details | Individual <br> Cost (\$) * | Quantity | Total <br> Cost (\$) |
| :--- | :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Garbage bin | Provided by City of Calgary | $75^{1}$ | 1 | 75 |
| Signage | One sign at each of the two park entrances | $75^{2}$ | 2 | 150 |
| Gates | One at each of the two park entrances | $63^{3}$ | 2 | 126 |
| Gate Installation | Four hours for two Parks Maintenance Labourers | $27^{4}$ | 8 hours | 216 |
| Total |  |  |  |  |

*Estimates are roughly based on similar circumstances or products. If the City of Calgary entertains this proposal, access to contracted pricing and city service resources will provide a much more accurate total.
${ }^{1}$ (CTV Winnipeg 2015)
2 (Metz 2011)
${ }^{3}$ (Home Depot 2017)
${ }^{4}$ (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2014)

### 3.3 Timeline

There are three key steps to implementing an off-leash area: screening, stakeholder engagement and implementation. The estimated time to completion for this project is 13 to 18 months, as broken down in Figure 1.


Figure 1: Implementation Timeline
Screening is done by the Parks Manager and Parks Planning Project Managers, who consult with several city departments, negotiate land agreements (where necessary) and provide the final approval of the proposal. Given that 61020 Ave NW is already city-owned and zoned for recreational use, this stage should take a minimal amount of time. A 3- to 6-month period is anticipated for this step (PTLU 2017).

Stakeholder engagement is also carried out by the Parks Manager and Parks Planning Project Managers, who will consult with the local community association, residents directly adjacent to the property, community residents and dog walking groups. A stakeholder survey was conducted for the Off-leash Area Management Plan (2010) over a period of 3 months. The 6 -month period scheduled here is ample time for parks representatives to attend up to two community association meetings, organize and host a community round-table and conduct surveys.

Implementation includes the completion of paperwork and agreements between City of Calgary parks departments and installation of the recommended features from Section 3.2. This process is expected to take between 4 and 6 months.

### 3.4 Projected Results

Projected results of implementation are that residents continue to use the parcel as an off-leash area, but with proper safety measures and infrastructure in place. Socially, it will promote interaction between residents and build a sense of community, as well as encourage residents to explore healthy outdoor pursuits. Environmentally, providing a designated, regularly maintained space for dogs means that other parks and natural areas will not be misused. Economically, it builds a reputation for the City of Calgary, and the community of Mount Pleasant, as a desirable place to live.

In addition, the projected cost of this project is low for a public park, and the timeline relatively short. It has the potential to greatly improve community perception, and the lives of resident humans and their dogs.

## 4 Concerns and Alternative Solutions

There are a few key concerns and alternative solutions to the issue of land-use at 61020 Ave NW, presented here.

### 4.1 Concerns

Opponents to this proposal may find issue with cost to tax payers, opposition from surrounding landowners and potential alternative uses for this space. While these are valid points which apply to any change in land-use within a residential area, the following counters are offered:

1. The cost of implementation is very low for a public project and there are no recurring costs.
2. There is only one immediately adjacent landowner, who is already faced with unofficial off-leash activities and no complaints have been lodged to the community board (PTLU 2017). In addition, the City of Calgary process involves thorough vetting of the proposal through stakeholder engagement.
3. There are alternative land uses which could be implemented, however no alternative uses are as cost or time efficient, with equal potential to build community health, ties and perception, as identified in Section 3.4.

### 4.2 Multi-use Site: 30\% Off-leash Area

As per the City of Calgary Off-leash Area Management Plan, off-leash areas should take up 30\% of a regional or multi-use site (2010). Splitting the 61020 Ave NW parcel and designating $1 \mathrm{~km}(30 \%)$ as an off-leash area would accomplish this. It would address the community need for an off-leash area, curb bylaw infringements and provide the almost the same social, environmental and economic benefits as discussed in Section 3.4.

However, there are some downsides to this solution. There would be a greater cost to the City, as additional signage and fencing to separate the off-leash area would need to be installed. Also, the 610 20 Ave NW parcel is currently a multi-use site and is available for other recreational activities. It is rarely
used other than as an off-leash area, and there are several parks and community centers in the area which serve other recreational activities, such as playgrounds, sports leagues or casual use. There does not seem to be a community interest or need in expanding the usage of this greenspace beyond an offleash area.

### 4.3 Temporary Park

The City of Calgary has the option to make 61020 Ave NW a temporary dog park in the interim before finding another appropriate land use. The benefits discussed in Section 3.4 would all apply, however only for the duration of the temporary park. Additionally, the cost would stay the same despite the potential of having to eventually remove the infrastructure (gates, signage, garbage can). The risk of this alternative is damaging the public's perception of the City if they become accustomed to having a neighborhood dog park and then it is removed.

### 4.4 Crack Down on Bylaw Offenders

The City could police the park regularly to discourage on-leash bylaw infringements. This would encourage safe and proper use according to current land designation. This solution only addresses one aspect of the current problem; it does not provide an off-leash area for the community. In addition, it would likely be costly to have bylaw officers visit the site regularly, and does not provide any of the benefits discussed in Section 3.4.

### 4.5 Do Nothing

If the space is not designated as an off-leash area, and no alternative solutions are implemented community members will likely continue to use the space as an unofficial dog park. This has negative implications for the City, as follows:

- Lack of observance of the on-leash bylaw regulations is problematic and can lead to safety issues for community members and dogs. With the proper off-leash signage and gating this can be avoided.
- Confusion amongst the community members about the ownership and land use designation of the park leads to a negative public impression. Interviewees expressed frustration with conflicting information about whom to contact regarding the space (Appendix B).
- Increased traffic to surrounding parks and off-leash areas can cause potential environmental problems and discourage use. An off-leash at 61020 Ave NW takes pressure off these spaces.


## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The City of Calgary is very supportive of off-leash areas. The Calgary community of Mount Pleasant has two off-leash issues:

1. The 61020 Ave NW land parcel which is currently designated as greenspace is being used against city bylaws as an unofficial off-leash area; and
2. There are currently no dog parks within Mount Pleasant community borders.

Both these issues can be solved by making 61020 Ave NW an official off-leash area. This solution is ideal based on the site background and an examination of community demographics, current off-leash use and surrounding off-leash availability. The site meets City of Calgary off-leash requirements and can be implemented for a cost of $\$ 567$ and within a timeframe of 13 to 18 months.

Benefits of implementing an official off-leash area at 61020 Ave NW include:

- Promoting interaction between residents
- Building a sense of community
- Encourage residents to explore healthy outdoor pursuits
- Other parks and natural areas will not be misused
- Curbs unsafe current use of 61020 Ave NW as an unofficial off-leash area
- Builds reputation for City of Calgary, and Mount Pleasant community

Concerns regarding cost, stakeholder objection and land use are addressed through investigation and comparison to alternative solutions, including a multi-use site with $30 \%$ off-leash area, a temporary offleash area, a crack down on bylaw offenders and not taking any action. These solutions address the issues to varying degrees, but none of them benefit the community as thoroughly as implementing a permanent, official off-leash area at 61020 Ave NW.

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Figures


Figure 1: $\mathbf{6 1 0} 20$ Ave NW Location and Surrounding Off-Leash Areas


LEGEND


Mount Pleasant Community Boundary
Proposed Off Leash Dog Area (615 20 Ave NW)
Existing Off Leash Dog Area

Figure 2: $610 \mathbf{2 0}$ Ave NW Features


Appendix B Interviews


## Interviews

The following questions were asked to dog owners allowing their dogs off-leash at the 61020 Ave NW greenspace, between September and November 2017:

1. How often do you visit this park?
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as?
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park?

## Owner: Cas

Dog: Sadie

1. How often do you visit this park: at least twice a week
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as: No, has heard a few different things from other people in the park
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park: I'd sign that petition! It would be great to have an off leash dog park in the neighborhood, if we didn't have this space I'd have to drive to a park

## Owner: Anna

Dog: Freya

1. How often do you visit this park: Daily, sometimes twice a day
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as: called the city's 311 number, they told her it was owned by the church next door
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park: it would be much better, especially if they installed gates on the fences. Always worried about her dog running out onto the road.
Also enjoys meeting community members here

## Owner: Jim <br> Dog: Pika

1. How often do you visit this park: Once a week or so
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as: Not really, thought it was privately owned
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park: It probably wouldn't change how often they go, but would hate to see the park turned into something else

## Owner: Lisa

## Dog: Jake

1. How often do you visit this park: almost every day
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as: Not really, no. Just saw other dog owners here
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park: it would be great. The next closest dog park is one you have to drive to and it inn't fenced in. Jake loves to play with other dogs

## Owner: Mike

## Dog: Winston

1. How often do you visit this park: 3-4 times a week
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as: Heard it belonged to the church
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park: it would be great

## Owner: Katie

## Dog: Wyatt

1. How often do you visit this park: Not very often, every couple of weeks
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as: thought it was a city dog park
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park: would support it

## Owner: Scott

## Dog: Luna and Bowser

1. How often do you visit this park: a couple times a week
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as: Thought it belonged to the church, not sure
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park: it would be good

## Owner: Katie

Dog: Brewster

1. How often do you visit this park: almost every day
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as: it's a city park, but doesn't think dogs are actually allowed off leash
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park: Would support it

## Owner: Magda

Dog: Luna

1. How often do you visit this park: Every few days
2. Do you know what this land is zoned as: City park
3. How would you feel about making this an official dog park: thinks it's a great idea and loves meeting community members here

Appendix C
City of Calgary Off-leash Area Management Plan 2010
Off-leash Area Establishment Checklist

## Off-leash Area <br> Management Plan 2010

## OFF-LEASH AREA ESTABLISHMENT CHECKLIST

Answers should be yes: exceptions to be explained and/or strategies implemented.
Mitigate concerns before moving forward in the process.

| Question | $\begin{aligned} & \text { Yes/No/ } \\ & \text { NA } \end{aligned}$ | Explanation/Mitigation Strategy |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| - Is the land in the Parks inventory or is there an opportunity to lease the land? | Yes |  |
| - Does it fill a gap in service area? | Yes | See Section 2.4 |
| - Is it at least .5 hectares in size | Yes | 300 hectares |
| - Does it occupy less than 30\% of a regional/multi-use site | No | Off-leash area could be adapted to take up $30 \%$ of parcel |
| - Is it safe for people and dogs | Yes |  |
| - Can effective strategies be implemented to mitigate potential safety concerns and/or conflict between users if the site was adjacent to: No Dog Areas; pathways; residents; major roadways? | Yes | Fencing currently in place, signage and gates required (Section 3.2) |
| - Are stakeholders likely to support the site? (Proximity to adjacent residents, natural areas, already used informally as off-leash?) | Yes | Already used informally, only one residential property is adjacent to the site |
| - Is there adequate parking and/or space to provide parking? | Yes | There is plenty of free street parking available |
| - Is the site easily accessible by the public and service vehicles? | Yes | No accessibility obstacles |
| - Can boundaries be clearly delineated? | Yes | Boundaries are fenced |
| - Is the terrain/topography suitable for off-leash and not susceptible to erosion? | Yes | Already used informally |
| - Is the site currently used for passive unstructured activity? | Yes |  |
| - Where a section of the park is considered, can a peripheral area be designated rather than a central area? | Yes | Potential to split parcel into multi-use site |
| - Is it a permanent site of a site not expected for development in the next 10-20 years? | Yes | No upcoming development planned |
| - Is the cost to implement reasonable in relation to the length of term of a temporary site | NA |  |
| - Can it be demonstrated that the site is in accordance with natural habitat goals when adjacent to or within a: Special Protection Natural Environment Park; Major Natural Environment Park: Environmentally Significant Area? | NA |  |

