

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent  
Parks, Recreation & Cemeteries

Policy and Procedures

Development Policy for Dog Off-Leash Recreation Areas (DOLRA)	Policy # 07-07-09
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Final as amended May 29, 2023

Whereas By-law # 170-2021 respecting responsible animal ownership, and By-law # 19-2016 which governs the use of municipal parks and prohibits dogs running at large except as provided for in "Off-Leash" facilities, Staff has developed this policy to serve as a framework containing guidelines governing the development of a Dog Off-Leash Recreation Area (DOLRA) for the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.

This policy shall work in conjunction with the approved by-laws respecting the control and/or licensing of animals on public lands.

The information contained herein is categorized under the following headings:

1. Definition of Terms
2. Site Selection Criteria
3. Site Selection Process
4. Site Performance Evaluation
5. Development Costs
6. Annual Operating Costs
7. Rules and Regulations

1. Definition of Terms

- a) Amenities include such things as park benches, picnic tables, garbage receptacles, drinking fountains, light standards, parking facilities, public washroom facilities, telephones, site furnishings, etc.
- b) Development is restricted to the provision of regulatory and advisory signage, the installation of fencing and a gated entry system (where required for dog off-leash recreation areas) and the provision of any site preparatory works (including grading, repair of drainage problems, removal of landscaping obstructions, remediation of safety concerns etc.) on a one time basis.
- c) Dog Off-Leash Recreation Areas (DOLRA) are fenced facilities where residents have the opportunity to exercise dogs off-leash within a controlled environment without being in contravention of the municipal by-laws.
- d) Area of Natural Scientific Interest (ANSI) a site recognized by Ministry of Natural Resources that has important ecological or hydrological functions, contains rare plant or

- animal species, rare or unique topography or geologic features or designated as an area of natural interest or a provincially significant wetland)
- e) Free Running Areas designated areas within the parkland and open spaces infrastructure, which have been set aside for residents to exercise their dog off-leash without being in contravention of the municipal by-laws. These areas are sometimes governed by time restrictions and seasonal restrictions and are generally not fenced.
  - f) Equipment and Apparatus refers to such things as dog exercise equipment, plastic bag dispensers, bulletin boards, dog drinking fountains, dog wash stations, etc.
  - g) Park Signs are primarily posted at the entrance of the park and contain the name of the park. By-law regulatory signs are also posted within the park areas.
  - h) Primary Entrance Point is the main entrance to the park and is visually designated with the posting of the park sign.
  - i) Restorative/Remedial Works means any construction and/or ground work undertaken to restore or improve site conditions (following the creation of a dog off-leash recreation area) and would include but not be limited to resodding, soil amendments, soil rehabilitation, etc.
  - j) Sport Facilities include all outdoor athletic facilities (such as soccer, football, baseball, etc.) tracks and facilities of like nature or components.

## 2. Site Selection Criteria

The following criteria will be used to assess the appropriateness of a proposed site for a DOLRA and has been created to limit risk and avoid potential conflicts among park users.

### a) Mandatory Site Amenities

Mandatory design features to include the following:

- One to five acres in size
- Fencing
- Gates – pedestrian and maintenance
- Access to shade
- Adequate drainage
- Sufficient on-site parking provisions
- Grassed Area
- Garbage receptacles on site
- Benches
- Accessible (physically-challenged)
- Safety (for dogs and public)
- Able to be maintained year round (garbage collection, snow removal in parking lot)
- Signage (regulatory and advisory) must be posted
- Must be a minimum of 50 metres from any residential building or structure at the time of construction

### b) Optional Site Amenities:

- Shade covering (eg. pavilion)
- Plastic bag dispensers

- Drinking water source (eg. fountain)
- Access to natural water

Amenities such as plastic bag dispensers and watering systems for the park must be funded through independent efforts of the volunteer committees associated with the DOLRA through donations, sponsors, etc.

c) Site Location Evaluation:

Sites meeting the above criteria will be evaluated based on the following:

- i. Usage:  
The site does not currently provide structured or active recreational opportunities for individuals or groups.
- ii. Setting:
  - The site provides a variety of natural terrains
  - Open Space making it suitable for this type of usage
  - Sites are equally spaced across the Municipality
  - Not adjacent to school or daycare areas
  - Does not reasonably impact on residential area
- iii. Development status:  
The site is not expected to be developed within the next five years
- iv. Accessibility:
  - a) Public: easily accessed year round
  - b) Servicing: able to allow for service vehicles to access
- v. Environmental Impacts:
  - a) Natural: will not adversely impact the environment
  - b) Not in "Areas of Natural Scientific Interest" (ANSI)
- vi. Free Running Areas:
  - a) Will be considered if an open space area can be found that has no other competing uses and will be considered in new parkland development

### 3. Site Selection Process

#### Dog Off-Leash Recreation Areas

a) Initial Proposal Request

A "Request for a Dog Off-Leash Recreation Area (DOLRA), should be submitted to the Parks, Recreation & Cemeteries division of the Municipality.

b) Application

Before considering an application for the development of a DOLRA, a volunteer committee of a minimum of ten (10) members over 18 years of age must be coordinated. There must be a designated chairperson for the committee that is appointed by the group.

The volunteers must agree to:

- 1) Assume responsibility for all development and ongoing costs to maintain to DOLRA to acceptable standards established by the Municipality.
- 2) Organize, co-ordinate and implement a schedule for site clean-up and maintenance. Clean-ups are required at least twice per calendar week and maintenance/repairs must be performed on an as required basis.
- 3) Organize, co-ordinate and implement a schedule for fence inspections to occur at least twice per calendar week and must be signed by a volunteer performing the inspection.
- 4) Provide "Dog Watch" eyes and ears on the park to identify and help educate irresponsible pet owners and to advise the Municipality in writing with identifying information of any problems or issues that arise.
- 5) Monitor user activities and guidelines for code of conduct of owners and dogs.
- 6) Become involved in fundraising ventures to finance the purchase of desired amenities for DOLRAs.
- 7) Liaise with the Municipality on any pertinent issues that require attention.
- 8) Notify the Municipality if the original number of volunteer committee members drops below 10 members.
- 9) Sign an agreement to participate in overseeing operations at the DOLRA.

c) Site Evaluation

The Parks, Recreation & Cemeteries division will review the application against the set guidelines for development and consult with other departments affected as necessary. Administrative staff will advise the applicants of any deficiencies noted in proposed sites.

d) Community Input

- 1) The Parks, Recreation & Cemeteries division will review the application against the set guidelines for development and consult with other departments affected as necessary. Administrative staff will advise the applicants of any deficiencies. Residents within a 120 m radius must be notified of the pending application.
- 2) The proposed site locations will also be publicly posted and community input will inform administration's recommendations to Council.

e) Reporting

Administrative staff will submit a report to Council with recommendations. All potential DOLRAs must receive Council approval. Park development costs must be in place prior to the development of a DOLRA.

f) Implementation

Administrative staff will undertake to have all regulatory and advisory signage manufactured and installed in accordance with the availability of funding.

4. Site Performance Evaluation

All parks will be evaluated once within the first year of operation, and on an as-needed-basis thereafter to determine if further action is required to improve or remove the DOLRA designation. Where removal is preferred, administrative staff will report to Council with recommendations. Park closures and/or removals will be at the sole discretion of Council.

Sites will be evaluated on the following:

1. Number of complaints documented
2. Number and severity of risk management issues
3. Severity of degradation of area to include turf, shrub and flowerbed areas
4. Severity of public health concerns
5. Number of by-law infractions
6. Involvement of volunteer group or lack thereof
7. Deficiencies in site maintenance

5. Development Costs

All capital costs for the development of the DOLRA will be the responsibility of the volunteer committee. Administration must review and approve all site development and improvement plans prior to construction to ensure quality and compliance with this policy and other rules of the Municipality.

6. Annual Operating Costs

All ongoing operating costs to maintain the DOLRA to the standards established by the Municipality are the responsibility of the volunteer committee. Administration will determine any increased municipal service levels required to maintain the surrounding municipal area of the DOLRA as may be required due to the presence of the DOLRA (i.e. garbage removal in surrounding area, snow removal of parking, etc.) and shall bear these costs as approved by Council.

7. Rules and Regulations

Parks, Recreation & Cemeteries will publish DOLRA rules on the municipal website at [www.chatham-kent.ca](http://www.chatham-kent.ca) as amended from time to time. These rules will also be posted at the DOLRA site. The volunteer committee will assist administration in reporting DOLRA rules violations.