

DATE:

31 March 2022

TO:

Mayor and Council, Thomas Soulliere, Michael Hill, Aida Mas, Silvia Mangué
CC: NPNA Board of directors, Hillside Quadra, Fernwood, Downtown
Residents Association

Dear Mayor and Council,

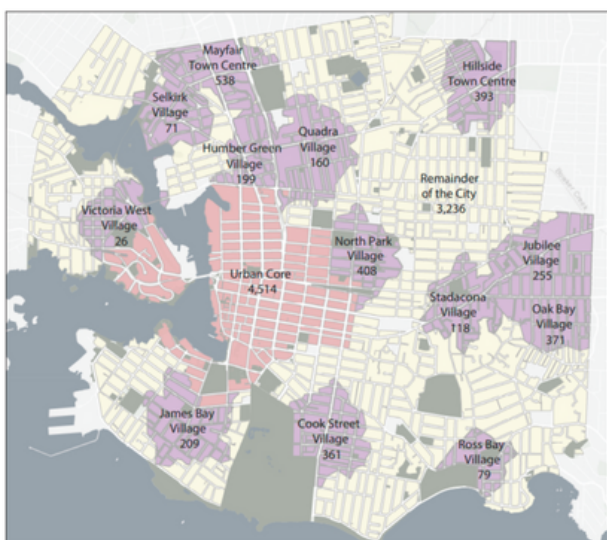
The North Park Neighbourhood Association supports the motion brought forward by Councillor Potts to direct staff to implement an off-leash dog park at Royal Athletic Park on a pilot basis.



As shown here by the map of off-leash dog parks in Victoria, there are no off-leash dog areas serving residents of North Park, Downtown, or parts of Fernwood and Hillside Quadra.

As a result, residents with dogs walk long distances, or more frequently, drive to dog parks in other neighbourhoods. Some dog owners also make use of existing parks that are not designated for dogs, creating opportunities for conflict with other park users, and leading to unrealistic expectations that one park can accommodate an entire community's green space needs (ie. Central Park).

Leash-Optional Parks in Victoria



Victoria's Housing Future

The need for a centrally-located off-leash area has been acknowledged for years and is referenced in the 2017 Parks & Open Spaces Master Plan.

The need grows more acute as the population in downtown, North Park, and surrounding neighbourhoods continue to expand. According to the City's Housing Futures document, 70% of new growth in the City of Victoria will be taking place in the downtown urban core and the areas immediately surrounding urban villages (such as North Park Village). When compared to the map above, it clearly demonstrates that the areas of new growth are the same areas without access to off-leash dog parks.

Royal Athletic Park is an ideal option for the rapid provision of off-leash space in close proximity to the city core. The property is already fully fenced and gated, with large open spaces and many waste receptacles available on site. We propose that the off-leash area occupies the area beyond the outfield fence, which is not used by any spectators or players when set up for baseball. Off-leash uses would need to be suspended temporarily for major events at the park (e.g. Rifflandia).



@WeAreNorthPark

www.npna.ca



North Park Neighbourhood Association

PO Box 661, #185-911 Yates Street,

Victoria, BC, V8V 4Y9

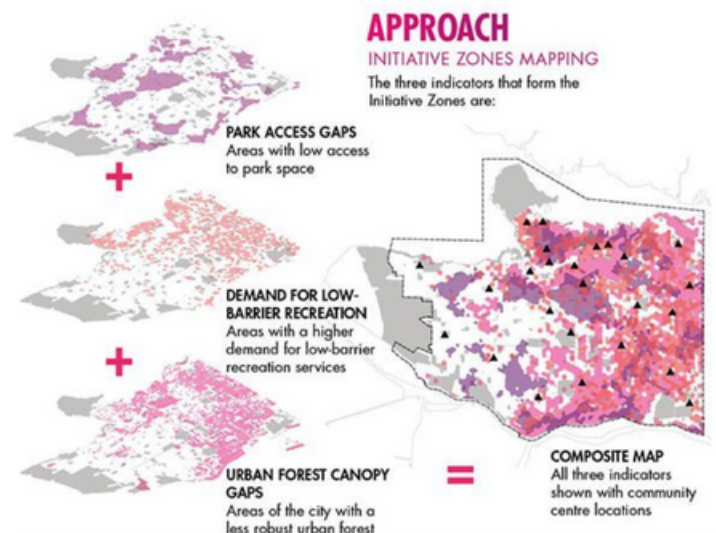


In recent months there have been two examples of Council recognizing that additional off-leash dog parks would produce social benefits and are strongly desired by city residents (Brooke Park and Harris Green). There is also precedent for off-leash pilot projects and they currently operate at three city parks: Oaklands, Barnard, and Fisherman's Wharf. The North Park Neighbourhood Association requests that City Council take an equity approach to considering improvements to park access and amenities. This is being undertaken in other cities, for example in Vancouver.

The City of Vancouver has started to employ the use of initiative zones in an effort to "act to redress historical imbalance in the delivery of resources, by focusing our future efforts geographically and bringing equity to the forefront of decision making."

The initiative zones are determined through analyzing three main indicators:

- **Park provision:** showing areas of the city with low amounts of park space per person (less than 0.55 hectares / 1000 residents)
- **Demand for low barrier recreation:** showing areas of the city where there is an existing high demand for recreation amenities and programs with reduced barriers.
- **Access to nature:** low canopy cover from street trees, park trees, and green private open space. Measured as areas with less than 5% canopy cover.



[City of Vancouver website](#)

A 2020 study of four Canadian cities found that equity deserving neighbourhoods have less access to green space than more affluent neighbourhoods. We see this in action right here in North Park - an equity deserving neighbourhood. 31% of North Park residents live in subsidized housing, 20% of residents identify as a visible minority, over half of residents are in core housing need, and 79% of North Park residents are renters.

Despite being classified as a municipal green space, access to Royal Athletic Park requires community members to purchase a ticket to a sporting game, event, or performance. Even with clear and well documented need for increased access to green spaces and free recreation opportunities, North Park remains a green space deficient neighbourhood with half of its green space inaccessible to its residents.

Royal Athletic Park is a City-owned green space sitting often unused and off-limits to residents and taxpayers for the majority of the year. Despite being unofficially privatized, revenue from private sector beneficiaries with exclusive access to the space are inadequate to cover direct costs to maintain and operate the facility. This leaves taxpayers (many of whom have never been to RAP) to shoulder the burden and subsidize the prioritized access these private companies have been granted. Royal Athletic Park is not the only City-owned sport and performance venue that



@WeAreNorthPark

www.npna.ca



North Park Neighbourhood Association

PO Box 661, #185-911 Yates Street,

Victoria, BC, V8V 4Y9



prioritizes and benefits private companies and the region over Victoria taxpayers and North Park residents. Other examples the Save on Foods Memorial Arena, and the Crystal Pool's aquatic facility which prioritizes and subsidizes lane rental by regional swim clubs.

In many of these sports and recreation facilities, the City has further relinquished its decision making authority while retaining the financial risks and costs. Finally, in all of these venues, Victoria's taxpayers and the North Park neighbours to these venues are being marginalized by

1. being excluded from consultation and transparency in City negotiations with the private sector,
2. being under-prioritized and under-served by programming that is inaccessible to them and/or not valued or delivering on their needs and priorities, and
3. being burdened by:
 - a. the financial costs to uphold the operating and capital costs of these facilities and subsidize private programming, and
 - b. the direct negative impacts of invite-only parties for the region involving overhead amplified sound systems, lights, etc.

An off-leash dog park at Royal Athletic Park is one community building step towards balancing the multiple burdens carried by the 'humans (and dogs!) of North Park, with some neighbourhood benefits that begin to dismantle the fences which deny North Park of equitable opportunity to individual and community wellbeing.

Sincerely,

Sarah Murray

Executive Director



613-888-2106



executivedirector@npna.ca