



2023 "POP-UP" DOG OFF-LEASH AREA PILOT PROGRAM FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS April 2024



Bellevue Parks & Community Services launched a "Pop-up" Dog Off-Leash Area Pilot Program in 2023 in response to growing demand for accessible and safe spaces for pets and their owners to get exercise and enjoy the outdoors. Fenced off-leash areas were made available in parks and other city-owned properties on a temporary basis.

The objective of this program is to improve permanent access to off-leash areas throughout Bellevue. This report provides an overview of the initial group of "pop-up" off-leash area (OLA) sites tested starting in May/June 2023 and the criteria considered for successfully siting off-leash facilities. Recommendations for permanency and potential site improvements are based on site use, staff observations, public survey results and community feedback.

Overview of the “Pop-Up” Dog Off-Leash Area Pilot Program

Parks & Community Services department staff regularly receive requests for additional OLA facilities. It is also common to hear interest in OLA facilities through outreach as part of planning processes, such as the Parks & Open Space System Plan. Additional OLAs are needed as the city grows, particularly since nearly all growth is expected to be through multi-family residential development and most of those housing units have little or no private yard space. To provide additional capacity, more OLAs are recommended, distributed across the city. The 2022 Parks & Open Space System Plan identifies a near-term priority to locate at least one OLA near Downtown, with additional sites in underserved neighborhoods.

Bellevue Parks’ “pop-up” OLA pilot program began in the summer of 2023 with test sites located at Crossroads, Wilburton Hill, and Wildwood Parks, along with the City Hall campus. These sites provided opportunities to test demand in the Crossroads, Downtown, and Wilburton neighborhoods.

Sites were selected based upon general criteria for off-leash areas and practices learned from other cities. Ideal sites are those that:

- complement existing visual park character
- do not displace existing park recreational uses
- are compatible with existing park uses
- consider previous community-based planning processes
- provide generous residential buffers
- promote access, such as sufficient parking options, consideration of transit/bus routes, and ADA accessibility
- are not damaging to sensitive environments (slopes, wetlands etc.)
- are geographically dispersed and proximate to people/dogs
- have high visibility from outside the OLA
- can be easily maintained and serviced, including access for regular removal of dog waste and garbage collection

No site in the park system clearly meets all OLA siting criteria. That is not because the criteria are overly restrictive, rather Bellevue’s park system is mature and there isn’t a large supply of available, undeveloped, or unencumbered City-owned land.



In a mature park system, existing recreational uses need to be considered such that placement of a new use does not displace or negatively alter other existing desired park activities.

This pilot program provided the opportunity to test temporary OLA facilities. Community feedback helped inform staff if an OLA facility is working and supported, if adjustments may help a facility work better, and whether a temporary OLA should become permanent or be removed and the site refurbished.

Temporary Off-Leash Facility Improvements

Each of the temporary OLA facilities currently includes:

- Fully fenced areas with at least one double-entry gate.
- Garbage cans, dog waste bag dispensers and regular servicing.
- Signage including contact/feedback information as well as typical education and park rules.

Until a temporary off-leash facility is determined to become permanent, construction improvements such as water, shelters, benches, and some surface improvements will not be available.

If a site is determined to be unsuitable to support OLA facilities, temporary facilities will be removed, and the site fully restored.

Communication Plan

Critical to the success of this pilot program was hearing from the community as to whether the test OLA facilities are being used, of value to the community, and what should be changed to make this amenity work better.

Public outreach included:

- On-site signage with staff contacts information including:
 - How to submit comment/suggestions
 - QR code and links to website and survey opportunities
- Off-leash areas web site including:
 - A welcome to pups and their owners (on leash)
 - Rules and regulations and contact information



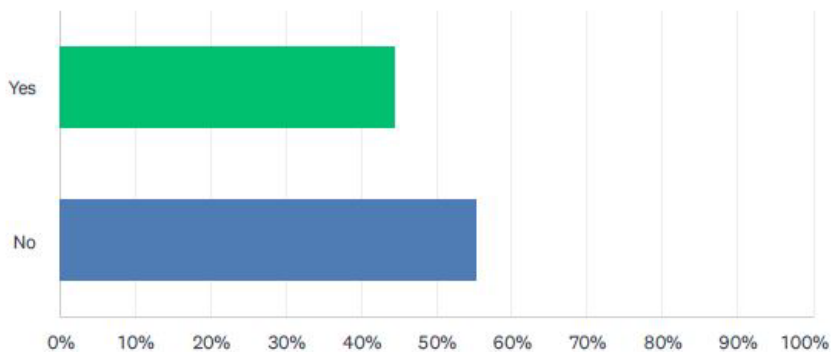
- Off-leash areas in the city
- Pilot program Information
- How to submit comment/suggestions
- An online survey
- Web alerts sign-up link
- Articles in Neighborhood News and It's Your City
- Social media (news release etc.)

Community Feedback

An on-line survey was conducted from June 2023 through November 2023. City staff additionally fielded numerous phone calls, emails and met with residents individually. Comments received reflect similar feedback to that of the survey. The survey received 894 responses. About 86% of responses came from dog owners or caretakers. A slight majority of participants do not have access to a backyard or other private area for their dog to go off-leash.

Q2 Do you have access to a backyard or other area your dog can go off-leash?

Answered: 707 Skipped: 187

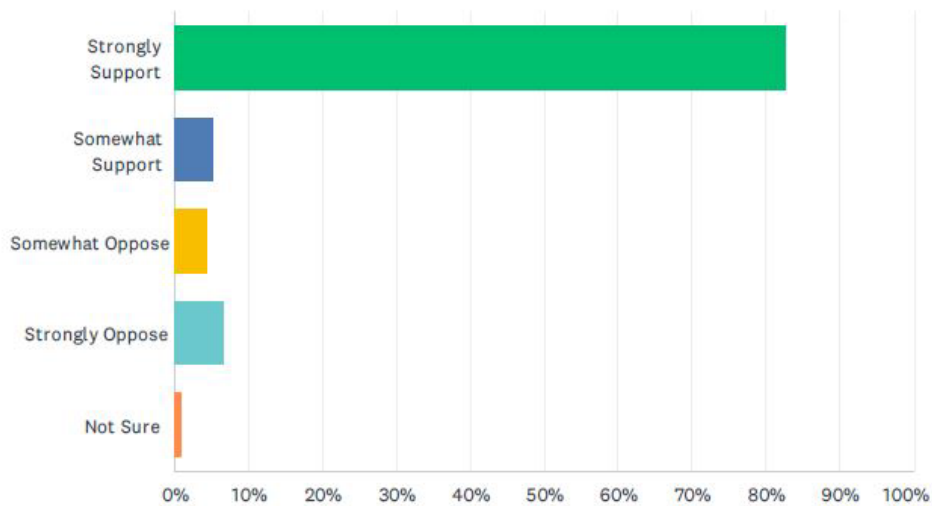




Survey data overwhelmingly showed community approval for OLAs with 82% of respondents strongly supporting expansion of facilities throughout Bellevue’s park and open space system. Results were nearly identical in support of the “Pop-Up” Dog OLA program.

Q6 Do you support expansion of off-leash facilities throughout Bellevue's park and open space system?

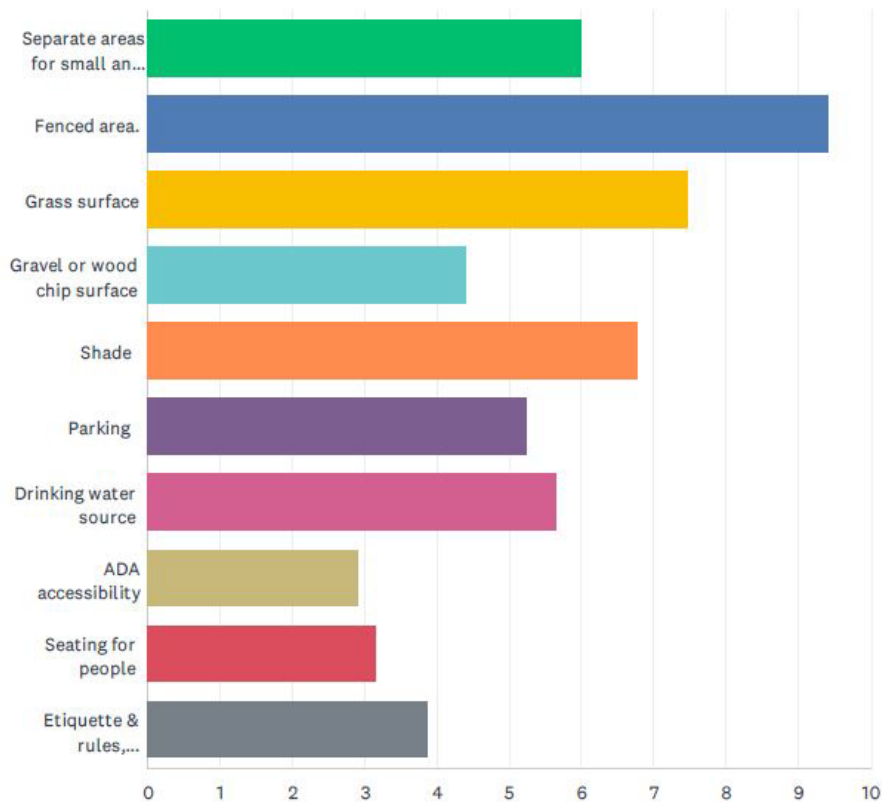
Answered: 746 Skipped: 148



Dog owners have consistently noted how few facilities are available for off-leash activities, especially in the growing Downtown area. There were many comments expressing interest in new infrastructure to support OLAs, such as water, as well as shade and grass surfacing where it can be maintained.

Q4 What amenities do you think are most important for an off-leash area?
Please sort this list in ranked order of importance.

Answered: 706 Skipped: 188



Some negative feedback was received concerning both the Crossroads and Wildwood Park sites, mainly from park neighbors. Concerns, in large part, referenced the proximity of these facilities to neighboring residences and dogs barking, including afterhours activity. Some respondents were concerned about maintaining space for humans and protecting natural resources. Fencing adjustments could help mitigate proximity and use conflicts, as recommended in the next section. While most respondents indicated that OLAs are welcomed, some respondents raised concerns that an OLA is not appropriate in the chosen locations.

Recommendations for Permanency & Site Improvements

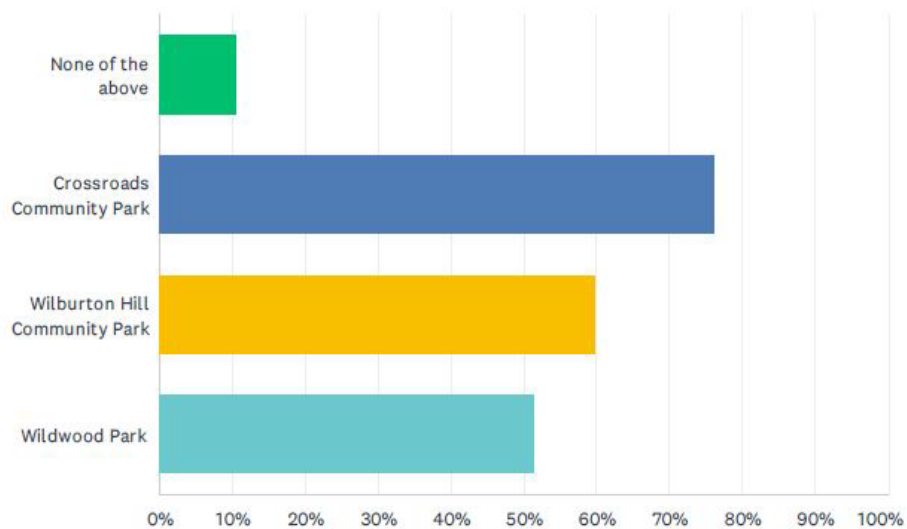
The objective of this program is to transition from temporary OLA facilities to permanent OLA facilities, where appropriate, to best serve the community. The recommendation to transition to permanent OLA facilities is based on:

- Community support, use and feedback
- Property agreements allowing continued OLA use
- Environmental, operation and maintenance impacts
- Capital improvement costs (water, power etc.)

The community survey asked respondents to indicate which temporary OLAs they support making permanent.

Q10 I support temporary off-leash facilities becoming permanent at? (Mark all that apply)

Answered: 742 Skipped: 152



Parks & Community Services' operations, rangers, and planning staff further evaluated each site for permanency, including improvements necessary and/or adjustments to consider.



1. Crossroads Park

Recommendation: Permanent Facility

Improvements: Benches, Shelter, Picnic Tables, Wash Station, Fenceline Adjustment, and small/shy dog area.

Access to this one-acre area includes a pedestrian pathway system which runs the length of the 35-acre park and serves a nearby multi-family housing community. The park offers four parking lots that can support the OLA. The OLA program does not offset other programmed park uses. Environmental impacts have been minimal. Staff will continue to monitor the health of the well-established trees in the OLA. The site has become very popular as a walk-to site for the many surrounding multi-family residents in the Crossroads area. Recommended improvements include adding benches, a covered shelter, and dog wash station. In response to community feedback, the fence lines to the south and east will be adjusted to increase the distance between the facility and the Crossroads Community Gardens and nearby new multi-family housing development.

2. Wilburton Hill Park

Recommendation: Permanent Facility

Improvements: Benches, Picnic Tables, Resurfacing, Wash Station, OLA Expansion (TBD) and Shelter if property easements allow.

This site has excellent access for pedestrians in the nearby Wilburton neighborhood and is located under powerlines along the Lake to Lake Trail. The park provides a large capacity parking lot that can support the OLA. The site is level and comfortable for use and does not compete or offset other park programmed uses. Recommended site improvements include a water station, benches, and picnic tables. Only minimal structural improvements will be allowed because of its location under PSE power lines. The current temporary OLA is approximately 0.25-0.3 acres. Additional space in this area allows for expansion to the south. The grass will be transitioned to chips for a more durable all-season surface.



3. Wildwood Park

Recommendation: Permanent Facility

Improvements: Benches, Fenceline adjustments

This OLA services the high-density commercial and residential Downtown neighborhood. The park has good pedestrian access. Parking is limited to street parking only. OLA facilities share a level lawn area with other park users. The site has reasonable access for servicing and the OLA is estimated at 0.25 to 0.3 acres. Responsive to community feedback, fence line adjustments will be made to increase the amount of grass area for general public use outside the OLA. We will also explore other locations within the park to add picnic/public access gathering space outside the OLA. Adding benches to the OLA is only recommended improvement for within this small area.

4. City Hall Campus

Recommendation: Continued Temporary Use

Improvements: Re-surfacing as needed

The City Hall site, which is approximately 0.5 acre will remain available for use until re-development of the site occurs or other sites are developed nearby that provide sufficient OLA facilities in the area. This is a walk-to only site with no public parking available. Benches were added, and there are no further improvements recommended, except for reseeding or resurfacing as conditions dictate.

Next Steps

As temporary sites are approved as permanent facilities, staff will begin recommended improvements. Some improvements such as water and site expansion will require permitting. Other improvements will be integrated immediately. Staff will also begin evaluating parks and park-owned properties in other unserved areas of Bellevue for a second round of "pop-up" sites in 2025.