


Item No. 11.1.16
Halifax Regional Council
June 24, 2014

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original signed by 

SUBMITTED BY: _____
Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by Director

Jane Fraser, Director Planning & Infrastructure

DATE: June 3, 2014

SUBJECT: Decommissioning of Africville off Leash Dog Park

ORIGIN

June 10, 2013 Halifax & West Community Council Motion to “request that the Interdepartmental off Leash Dog Strategy Committee consider the decommissioning of the off leash dog park at Africville Park and develop potential options for alternative off leash dog parks”.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

By-Law A-300 Respecting Animals & Responsible Pet Ownership the “Animal By-Law” Section 7 (2) (d).

Halifax Regional Municipality Off Leash Parks Strategy adopted 2007.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

1. Approve the off leash dog park within Africville Park to be decommissioned for closure by July 18 2014, and
2. Approve staff to undertake a review of the program and service levels for off leash facilities to assess requirements, management and programming costs.

BACKGROUND

In 1985 Seaview Memorial Park was developed on part of the former Africville community. The Park was commemorated with a monument marking the first families to settle the area. The 7.2 hectare site is located along the shores of the Bedford Basin at the northern end of the Halifax Peninsula. (Attachment 1) Its main access is from Barrington Street which connects to Africville Road and the Fairview Container Terminal. The new Africville Museum and Seaview United Baptist Church replica is located to the immediate west of the Park. Although the Park remains as an HRM-owned asset the site itself comprises a large portion of the original settlement area of Africville and National Heritage Site.

The Africville National Historic Site was designated in 1992 by Heritage Canada. The Park sits within this designation and provides much of the context for the Africville Memorial Project. The designation is based on Africville's representation of black settlement in Nova Scotia. The site is as important for the history of the Africville settlement as it is for the events leading to its removal. Although the built heritage is gone the site is an important cultural landscape.

In 2011 Seaview Memorial Park in Halifax's North-End was officially re-named "Africville". This fulfills part of a settlement reached in 2010 between Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and the Africville Genealogy Society (AGS) for the expropriation of Africville lands by the former City of Halifax in the 1960's. The settlement along with a National Historic Designation placed on Africville lands in 1992 provides the fundamental context for the Park and sets the direction for its future. With the settlement and strategic direction for Africville firmly in place through the Africville Memorial Project, steps must be taken to ensure that the Park is well aligned and fosters a sense of place and pride for the entire HRM community. A final term to be implemented under the settlement is the development of a joint park maintenance agreement to help facilitate program delivery and enhanced daily use of the Park. This agreement is meant to address issues largely before they arise and ensure a Park that is clean, safe, and comfortable for all visitors. The success of future maintenance will depend on programming and management efforts that strike an appropriate balance between park use and cultural conservation.

Current park programming includes passive trails, seating, grassed picnic areas, a children's playground, and off-leash dog use (throughout the park and within a separate fenced-in area). The site is characterized by its scenic views over the Bedford Basin and Halifax Harbour. Its natural setting and historic significance make it a regionally important public open space and cultural landscape. It is also a popular local and city-wide destination for dog owners who enjoy the park for its off-leash area including a fenced-in enclosure. Africville Park and Point Pleasant Park are two of the largest off-leash parks in HRM and both see heavy use year-round.

The Africville Heritage Trust (AHT) has raised concerns relating to programming conflicts between off-leash (and some on-leash) dog use and cultural programming as well as the presence of dogs within a commemorative and nationally significant heritage site. Concerns relate to dog waste left in the park, dogs being walked and relieving themselves on the museum site (former Seaview United Baptist Church), and some museum visitors fearing going into the park because of off-leash dogs. This has created difficulty for the AHT in delivering cultural programming and

has raised questions within the Africville community around the appropriateness of off-leash dogs within the National Historic Site. The AHT has asked HRM to decommission the off-leash use within the park.

DISCUSSION

Under the off leash strategy approved by Regional Council the authority to decommission a regional asset resides with Regional Council.

The AHT is focused on planning and developing resources for the Africville Interpretive Centre including interpretive markers, heritage trails, and memorial gardens within the Park. User groups for cultural programming in the Park will include school groups, tourists, and HRM residents. The Africville Reunion is held every July in the Park bringing people from the Africville community together to celebrate their heritage and reunite with friends and family. The off-leash dog park is closed for this event; however the request from the AGS is to have the off-leash park permanently decommissioned.

The HRM Off-Leash Parks Strategy adopted in 2007 allows for the consideration and development of off-leash dog areas in municipal parks. Decision-making must however, weigh cultural and environmental values against recreational values. The Strategy states that due to the potential for user conflicts and the need to protect environmental and cultural assets HRM will generally prohibit dogs in cultural heritage sites, monuments, cemeteries and environmentally sensitive areas, unless it can be shown that impacts are minimal. HRM does not permit dogs in the Public Gardens National Historic site or in cemeteries due to likely user conflicts and the cultural value of the lands.

The HRM Interdepartmental Off-Leash Parks Committee has reviewed the site and based on decision-making criteria under the Off Leash Parks Strategy has determined that Africville Park is not an appropriate location for off-leash dog use. The reasons supporting the decommissioning are provided below:

- The Park is a designated National Heritage Site with significant cultural and commemorative value;
- HRM through the Settlement Agreement is committed to developing a joint agreement with the AHT to help facilitate cultural programing; and
- Off-leash dog use in the Park is not in keeping with the objectives and higher standard of care under the proposed maintenance agreement.

There are 3 off-leash areas (see map) within a 4 km radius of Africville Park and while it is feasible that programming needs could be met through other sites an assessment of existing capacity should be considered. There exists HRM Open Space to the east of Africville Park which were not part of the Africville community and that could be considered for an additional off leash area however those lands are not being brought forward as a recommendation at this time because;

- Investments would be required to improve the lands to make them suitable. This is currently an unfunded capital expense.
- Timing is a challenge as creating a new public off-leash area requires public consultation and, as this is not currently an approved capital item, the timelines for approvals of a mid-year budget change to enable design, construction and commissioning would not be coincident with the plans to close the existing off-leash area this summer.
- The existing park and lands to the east would share the same parking area. There is a concern that this would create confusion and off-leash users would inadvertently continue to use Africville Park.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no new financial resources associated with the recommendation. Any costs associated with the decommissioning of the off leash park can be absorbed by the current operating budget including minor park improvements and associated signage and communications. Any costs that might be associated with future Africville Park planning, programming and service delivery would be presented to Regional Council during the annual budget cycle

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Africville settlement process involved participation from all three levels of government and the community including a tri-partite committee that worked toward building a fitting memorial and legacy for Africville. A Feasibility Study for the Seaview Church and Interpretive Centre project involved extensive consultations with the community and key stakeholders and established broad support in moving forward with the legacy project.

The HRM off Leash Parks Strategy included consultation with the general public and dog owners to develop a strategy for off leash dog use in HRM parks. The guiding principles and decision-making criteria were formulated using community input and best practices.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications associated with this report

ALTERNATIVES

There are no Alternatives presented

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Africville Park Location Map
Attachment 2: Off-Leash Dog Park Locations

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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