



P.O. Box 1749
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3A5 Canada

Item No. 11.1.2
Halifax Regional Council
October 21 2014

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original signed by

SUBMITTED BY:

Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by

Mike Labrecque, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: September 3, 2014

SUBJECT: Off-leash dog-park to replace the Africville off-leash park

ORIGIN

June 24th 2014 Council Motion "Decommissioning of Africville Off-Leash Dog Park":

- I. Approve the off leash dog park within Africville Park to be decommissioned as soon as a new off-leash fenced park is commissioned
- II. Approve staff to undertake a review of the program and service levels for off leash facilities to assess requirements, management and programming costs including the establishment of fenced off-leash dog parks
- III. Approve staff to initiate the commissioning of a fenced off-leash dog park to the east of the Africville parking lot (in accordance with the strategy) and hold a community consultation prior to July 31, 2014 to receive feed-back from the public. The implementation of this new fenced off-leash dog park (based on community feedback, a staff report and approval by Regional Council) would occur in 2014.

NOTE: This report addresses part i and iii of the motion. Part ii of the motion will be addressed under a separate report.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

- By-Law A-300 Respecting Animals & Responsible Pet Ownership the "Animal By-Law" Section 7 (2) (d)
- By-Law P600 Respecting Municipal Parks
- Halifax Regional Municipality Off-Leash Parks Strategy 2007

RECOMMENDATION ON PAGE 2

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to undertake the public consultation and detailed examination necessary to enable staff to return to Regional Council in November 2014 with consideration of designating a dog park on the Mainland Common and the closure of the Africville off-leash area by the end of December 2014 as outlined in the contents of this report.

BACKGROUND

On June 24, 2014, Halifax Regional Council passed a motion to decommission the off-leash area at Africville Park as soon as a new off-leash (fenced) park is commissioned. Council also directed staff to proceed with public consultation and the commissioning process for a replacement site located to the east of the Africville parking lot for completion by the end of 2014. Both Africville Park and the proposed replacement site are owned by the Municipality.

In 1992 the former Africville community was designated the “Africville National Historic Site of Canada”. The designation is based generally on the area of the original Africville settlement including Africville Park (owned by the Municipality), abutting lands to the west owned by the Africville Heritage Trust, and a portion of the municipally-owned Seaview Look-Off Park. (Attachment 2). The Africville historic site is culturally significant because of its representation of black settlement in Nova Scotia “in its social organization and its geographical and metaphorical position on the periphery of white society” and its importance to “Black Canadians of the need for pride and vigilance in defense of their institutions and traditions”.¹

Much of the lands comprising the historic designation are important to the Africville Memorial Project and Museum and the future delivery of cultural programming.

Off-Leash Parks Strategy:

The HRM Off-Leash Parks Strategy adopted in 2007, is used to guide decision-making for the commissioning or de-commissioning of off-leash dog parks.

Guiding Principles:

1. **Accessibility:** looks at park land that is physically and socially accessible by considering things like parking amenities, terrain, maintenance, universal design solutions, and mitigation of conflicts for the user
2. **Affordability:** considers whether there would be excessive site alteration and facility development costs, and long-term operation and maintenance costs
3. **Balance:** the right balance and compatibility between off-leash use and other uses of the park with an objective to mitigate and manage conflicts by considering criteria such as the size of the park for adequate separation of uses
4. **Cleanliness:** considers the effective management of dog waste including responsible pet ownership and compliance with regulations under By-law A-300
5. **Environmental & Cultural Sustainability:** considers the importance of ecological and cultural resources and the protection of these assets against potential off-leash conflicts

¹ Africville National Historic Site, Statement of Significance Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, minutes, June 1996

6. **Natural Beauty:** considers sensitive planning and design of the park to ensure that the important natural character and aesthetic features of the land are protected

Designation Criteria

1. **Park Size:** minimum of 1 hectare (2.5 acres)
2. **Park Facilities:** (generally) no dog-related uses in playgrounds, wading pools, beaches, sports-fields (May 1st to Nov. 1st), sport courts, environmentally sensitive features, cultural heritage sites, historic monuments, horticultural displays and cemeteries
3. **Proximity:** not within 25 metres of residential areas, schools and community centres
4. **Cost:** extensive site alterations, operating and maintenance costs will (generally) not be considered and preference is given to existing parks with parking facilities and suitable space for off-leash use

The decommissioning of the off-leash area within Africville Park is consistent with the intent of the Off-Leash Parks Strategy and the guidelines for the protection of cultural sites and cultural resources within a municipal park. Dog-related uses are generally prohibited within cultural heritage and historic monument sites (unless it can be shown that impacts are minimal). Due to the cultural significance of Africville and its historical designation the Strategy supports the closure of the off-leash park. On-leash dogs will still be permitted in Africville Park.

Further background context includes a community petition which was submitted to Regional Council on June 24, 2014 asking that Council not decommission the off-leash area in Africville Park and that if Council does decide to decommission the park to ensure that a replacement site is operational before the Africville off-leash park is closed. Part i. of Council's motion passed on June 24th states Council's intention to keep the Africville Off-Leash Park open until the new off-leash fenced park is commissioned.

DISCUSSION

Following is discussion of staff's exploration of the alternative site for the Africville OLA as per Council's direction. At this point the alternative site was found to not meet user requirements as a replacement for the Africville OLA. Other suggestions for replacement sites have come forward and staff have done preliminary assessments for Council's benefit. Staff are bringing this information back to Council for direction as to the course of action to follow.

As directed by Council staff initiated the process to commission the proposed site as a fenced off-leash dog park in accordance with the guidelines under the HRM Off-Leash Parks Strategy. On July 23, 2014, a public meeting was held to consult with the community on the development of the replacement site as an off-leash dog park. The 95 people in attendance provided feedback to staff on the proposed site. The consultation results and staff evaluation forms the basis for this Council report.

The proposed site was presented at the public meeting and staff facilitated a workshop to get input on the issues, opportunities, and site improvements to be considered for the new off-leash park. The public meeting was followed by an evaluation undertaken by the HRM Interdepartmental Off-Leash Parks Committee in accordance with the Strategy.

Public Consultation:

The public meeting held on July 23, 2014 was attended by 95 residents from Halifax Peninsula, Bedford, Mainland Halifax, Dartmouth and Eastern Shore. The majority of people in attendance visit Africville Off-Leash Park on a regular or occasional basis and virtually all drive to the site. There were also residents attending to express support for the closure of the off-leash area at Africville Park. The meeting was productive and many thoughtful and constructive comments were received. (Attachment 3) The public

meeting input and additional comments received through e-mail are summarized in the table below.

Public Feedback – Africville Off-Leash Park Replacement Site		
Strategy Criteria	Public Response	Response Frequency
Park Location	1. <u>Proximity to Africville</u> – too close to respect the cultural sensitivity of the area. Concern that Africville programming may extend to the site in future. Might also create confusion with people taking dogs off-leash into Africville Park. Most want new park away from Africville Memorial site.	High
	2. <u>Service area</u> – people drive to Africville Park so the new site doesn't need to be in that vicinity or even on the Peninsula. Many support the idea of the Mainland Common or other central location. Seaview Look-Off Park was suggested multiple times. Staff clarified that much of Seaview Look-Off is located on historic Africville lands.	Medium
	3. <u>Proximity to Bridge</u> – site is too close to the bridge which could be un-safe during winter bridge maintenance.	Medium
Park Size & Facilities	1. <u>Area</u> : Majority felt strongly that the site is too small to support off-leash use and would not be comfortable for people or dogs. Many felt it was “unacceptable” to go from 5 acres to 1 acre for a destination/regional scale off-leash park. Could create conflict for dogs.	High
	2. <u>Fencing</u> : - a fully fenced, gated park is needed for safety and enjoyment. Not all off-leash parks need to be fenced but the Africville replacement (a regional park) should be.	High
	3. <u>Cost</u> – majority don't want a temporary or interim solution and feel it would not be a good investment on this site.	Medium
Site Features	1. <u>Accessibility</u> – the steep embankment and sloped landscape is problematic and limits the useable area. Winter use would be very difficult. People were disappointed that the site is not accessible for those with mobility issues. Many people specifically use Africville Park for its physical accessibility. There was concern that this would discriminate.	High
	2. <u>Noise</u> – truck traffic and bridge traffic is noisy and would not be pleasant for park users. There is no sound barrier.	Medium

In addition to the above community meeting feedback several general comments were received by the public regarding municipal off-leash parks and programming focusing on the following points:

1. The Off-Leash Parks Strategy needs to be reviewed and updated. There are more and more people living in urban communities increasing off-leash park needs.
2. Off-leash parks are good for dogs, for people, and for the larger community and help foster healthy active living. The community would like this better reflected in municipal policy and programming.

This feed-back will be advanced to the off-leash program and service review as directed by Council under part ii of the June 24, 2014 Council motion.

Replacement Site Evaluation Results:

Following the June 24th motion of Council the Interdepartmental Off-Leash Parks Committee initiated the commissioning process for the proposed replacement site including public feedback and consideration of

the guiding principles and criteria under the Off-Leash Strategy.

The results of this evaluation are summarized in the following table and are reflected in the recommendation to Council to initiate a new site selection process for the replacement off-leash dog park.

Replacement Site Evaluation – Off-Leash Area Adjacent to Africville Park		
Strategy Criteria	Considerations	Committee Findings
Accessibility	The Africville off-leash site is a destination now for people with disabilities and mobility issues	1. Accessibility of the site would be problematic for people with mobility issues. Establishing an accessible pathway might be possible but would not have winter maintenance and would increase the costs. 2. Access to the site and parking facilities is good.
Affordability	High probability that investment in the proposed site would be an interim solution	1. There are additional costs to providing fenced-in parks (not anticipated under the Strategy or current budget). 2. Additional improvements to bring the site to a higher standard for accessibility would increase cost implications.
Balance	The 2007 Strategy did not anticipate dedicated off-leash parks	1. This would be a dedicated park for off-leash use and due to its limited size it would not support other uses.
Cleanliness	Complaints to 311 regarding dog waste in Africville Park have been minimal	1. By-law regulations are in place and signage would be installed. Waste bag station can be installed. 2. Random patrols of the areas for enforcement would occur.
Environmental & Cultural Sustainability	Although the Africville Heritage Trust hasn't expressed cultural issues with the proposed site for off-leash use, public input highlights some concern around cultural sensitivity and the close proximity of the land to Africville	1. There is no formal cultural designation on the proposed replacement site, however, its proximity to Africville is sensitive and raises questions of the overall suitability of this location
Natural Beauty	The site's close proximity to the Africville National Historic Site should be considered with respect to how it might affect scenic views	1. Most aesthetic issues could be addressed through design and the use of building materials (ex: fencing). Buffering and naturalization of the site could help it blend into the landscape.
CRITERIA		
Park Size	If the off-leash park is to serve a more regional user base it should be sized accordingly	1. The reduction in size (compared to existing park) is a compromise. The one acre size of the site is below the minimum guideline of 2.5 acres and would not support a large volume of users. It could provide some opportunity for moderate use.

Replacement Site Evaluation – Off-Leash Area Adjacent to Africville Park		
Strategy Criteria	Considerations	Committee Findings
Park Facilities	The 2007 Strategy did not anticipate fenced dog parks. Some existing criteria do not adequately address dedicated off-leash park requirements	1. Full fencing of the perimeter would be required due to the steep embankment on the water side and vehicle traffic. 2. Tables and seating should be added, re-planting of young trees, and more trees and vegetation for buffering.
Proximity to other uses	Bridge Commission does not want activity under the bridge span due to safety and liability issues.	1. There would be no conflicts with adjacent residents, schools, or community centres 2. The proximity to the bridge could be problematic particularly in winter. Fencing would need to be located well before the bridge span to prevent people and dogs from going under the bridge. 3. There is some cultural sensitivity with respect to locating the replacement off-leash park next to Africville
Costs (development, operating & maintenance)	Additional budget resources and programming attention will be needed for fenced, dedicated off-leash facilities	1. Would be no winter maintenance. Grass-cutting and regular maintenance is required.

Although certain criteria under the Strategy (such as park size and facilities) were not meant to guide the development of dedicated or fenced off-leash dog parks, the guiding principles and commissioning process provide a sound framework for evaluating the proposed site. The evaluation has led staff to conclude that the proposed replacement site is not a suitable location for the new, fenced off-leash park.

Upon the failure of the proposed alternative off-leash site adjacent to Africville Park to satisfy the criteria, and in keeping with Council's direction to find an alternative site which would see Africville Park off-leash area decommissioned by the end of December 2014, staff did a preliminary scan of other opportunities. The Off-leash Strategy, feedback from the public meeting and Regional Council's timeline to find a suitable fenced site by the end of December 2014 were used as criteria. Over a dozen sites were considered. It should be noted that longer term opportunities may exist in conjunction with the Province of Nova Scotia, however owing to Council's timeline these sites would only be suitable for consideration as future solutions. Following are the short list of candidate HRM owned sites along with a high level summary of the suitability findings of the staff Off-leash Committee;

1. Mainland Common 1 (Passive park forested trail area) – Requires capital investment which could not meet December/14 timeline. Area reserved as forested passive park for the local district under the Mainland Common Masterplan. Possible future OLA opportunities exist as part of long term development of the multi-use passive park.
2. Mainland Common Site 2 (Hill between Canada Games Centre and Soccer Nova Scotia) – Available underutilized area. Cannot meet accessibility standards for physically challenged individuals owing to slopes. Requires fencing and landscaping which could not be achieved prior to spring 2016.
3. Mainland Common Site 3 (Area south of Artificial Fields and Westridge Ball Field) – Available underutilized area consisting of a fenced grass "warm-up area" and an adjacent forest stand. Forest area currently not used. Warm-up area is used more of a matter of opportunity than necessity. No other municipal artificial fields having separate warm-up areas. Creation of an OLA would require both the forest area and the fenced field area be utilized to achieve the final size and activities suitable for the replacement of a regional OLA facility. The fenced grassed area could be

put to use as a dedicated OLA by the December timeline set by Council. The forest area would take work and capital funding. Thus a phased approach would be required with a partial opening utilizing the grassed area by end of December 2014 and a second phase to improve, fence the adjoining the forested area in the spring of 2015, subject to Council budget approval. Site is well located as the Mainland Common is a regional destination, the area density is urban and currently the community does not enjoy a year round OLA. Use is congruent with the Mainland Common Masterplan. Area is currently maintained by municipal operations. An OLA at this site builds on existing municipal investment as electrical, parking and partial area lighting are already in place. Seasonal washroom is available in parking lot. Staff anticipates lower capital costs than is associated with other available sites. Portion of the site should be reserved for possible future artificial turf reconfiguration. Despite this, if the artificial field reconfiguration moves ahead, the forested area and turf area are of an adequate size for dedicated OLA (.9 hectares/2.2 acres). Netting will be required to prevent use conflicts between adjacent artificial field and OLA.

4. Former Halifax West High School Field. – Available and largely fenced. Small (.5 hectares/1.2 acres). Requires creation of driveway access and parking lot. Currently only accessible through local residential cul-de-sac which could lead to conflicts if promoted as a regional facility. Could be a future candidate consideration for a community level OLA.
5. Northcliffe Park – Improved portion of the site surplused and currently under sales agreement. Remainder of park designated for a community park. Good forested trails. Limited accessibility. Requires fencing of perimeter and creation of new parking area. Based on recent community feedback would only be available as off-leash area in concert with other passive users.

The opening of a new off-leash park requires a multi-month process of site selection, community consultation, Council approvals, site design, construction and commissioning. Staff are aware of the implications associated with required municipal processes and with respect to the desired timing for the closure of the Africville Off-Leash Park. Based on the scan by the Staff Off-leash Committee the leading candidate sites are 1) The Mainland Common 3 site, 2) Northcliffe and 3) Former Halifax West Field. Of these sites only the Mainland Common site offers Council the ability to meet its objective of finding an adequate fenced, regional replacement for the Africville OLA by end of December 2014. The Mainland Common site only meets the time requirement with the understanding that the fenced and grassed area at the Mainland Common 3 site could be made available, with minor operational adjustments, in December 2014 and a second phase to fence and improve the adjacent wooded area and any other required capital improvements would follow in the Spring of 2015. While a phased approach is perhaps not ideal, staff feel that they are putting a reasonable solution forward to achieve Regional Council's obligations to the Off-leash and Africville communities as well as the taxpayer while respecting required processes. Failing this the timelines for closure of the Africville OLA or the provision of a permanent alternative site will have to be extended. Notwithstanding the timing challenges, the Mainland Common 3 site is regarded as a good site for a fenced OLA.

With this understanding, staff are seeking the direction of Council to conduct the necessary public consultation under the 2007 Off-Leash Strategy to gather feedback from users and other stakeholders as to the suitability of the Mainland Common 3 site (Attachment 1) for a dedicated off-leash area for replacement of the Africville OLA and to conduct class D (probability of costs) estimates to be brought back to Regional Council for consideration.

It should be noted that this this solution does not limit the ability of Regional Council to direct staff to other service changes associated with off-leash which may fall from the Service Strategy review being currently conducted as per Council's motion II of June 24, 2014.

With the input of the public and pending Council's final approval of the Mainland Common site the proposed timeline is as follows:

1. Public Consultation to gather input for the preferred site - October 2014
 2. Report to Regional Council regarding the selected site and identifying park development and operating costs - November 2014
- Pending Council Approval**

3. Opening of Mainland Common Dog Park Phase I - December 2014
4. Africville Off-Leash Park Closure - December 2014
5. Detailed Design of Mainland Common OLA Phase II February 2015
6. Council Budget Approval for Phase II through the 2015 Capital Budget April 2015²
7. Tendering and Construction for Phase II of Mainland Common OLA Spring/Summer 2015
8. Opening of Phase II Mainland Common Dog Park. September 2015

If staff's detailed examination finds there are mid-year budget changes required a recommendation of the Audit and Finance Committee will be required to be added to the timeline.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report and no approved resources for the development of a replacement off-leash park in the current capital budget. The scan of existing opportunities indicate that no matter what the location a new fenced off-leash dog park will require new budget resources and approval of Regional Council through an increase to the current capital budget or through the 2015/16 capital budget cycle depending on implementation time-lines as directed by Council. Detailed cost implications and budget for the development and operation of a replacement site will be brought forward to Council as part of the off-leash park commissioning process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A public meeting was held on July 23, 2014, to consult with off-leash park users and the broader community on the proposed site for the new fenced off-leash park. Participants were also invited to e-mail further thoughts and comments to staff following the meeting. Twitter and the HRM web-site have been used to engage people outside of the formal public meeting process. A community petition was also submitted to Council on June 24, 2014. Staff are recommending a public engagement for the Mainland Common 3 site in keeping with the Off-leash Strategy and pending Council Approval of this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Council could choose to proceed with the proposed replacement site near Africville Park. This would enable short-term site development and the closure of Africville Off-Leash Park in 2014. However, due to the public opposition to this location and the safety concerns raised by the Halifax Dartmouth Bridge Commission there is a risk that its use would be limited and the costs to develop and maintain the park would not justify the expenditure.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Mainland Common 3 site
- Attachment 2: Africville National Historic Site of Canada Boundaries
- Attachment 3: Public Meeting Minutes July 23, 2014

² This would allow staff to complete detailed design, tendering, and contract award for May 2015.

**Fenced off-leash dog-park to
replace the Africville off-leash park
Council Report**

- 9 -

October 21, 2014

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.

Report Prepared by: Holly Richardson, Coordinator Public Lands Policy 490-6889
Peter Bigelow, Manager, Public Lands Planning, 490-4016

Financial Approval by: _____
Louis De Montbrun Acting for Greg Keefe, Director of Finance & ICT/CFO 490-6308

Report Approved by: _____
Jane Fraser, Director Planning & Infrastructure 490-7166

Report Approved by: _____
Brad Anguish, Director Community & Recreation Services 490-4933

Report Approved by: _____
Kathleen Llewellyn-Thomas, P. Eng., A/Director, Transportation & Public Works 490-4855

Attachment 1



Africville National Historic Site of Canada Boundaries

Attachment 2





**PROPOSED OFF-LEASH DOG PARK
REPLACEMENT FOR AFRICVILLE OFF-LEASH AREA
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES
JULY 23, 2014**

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Councillor Jennifer Watts, District 8
- Councillor Steve Craig, District 15
- Councillor Matt Whitman, District 13
- Councillor Linda Mosher, District 9
- Councillor Russell Walker, District 10
- Councillor Steve Adams, District 11
- Ms. Holly Richardson,
- Mr. Peter Bigelow
- Mr. John Charles
- Ms. Andrea MacDonald
- Ms. Anne Wambolt
- Mr. Rob Mullane
- Ms. Sylvia Paris
- Ms. Lori Scolaro
- Ms. Jane Crosby

PUBLIC PRESENT: Approximately 95

The following does not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings of this meeting.

The agenda, supporting documents, and information items circulated are available online:
<http://www.halifax.ca/property/olps/index.php>

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m., and adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

1. WELCOME

The meeting was called to Order at 7:05pm at the Halifax Forum, Maritime Hall.

Ms. Holly Richardson introduced herself and described her role with HRM. She also introduced other HRM Staff present at the meeting. Ms. Richardson explained a few housekeeping items. She then turned the meeting over to Councillor Watts for some introductory remarks.

Councillor Watts thanked the public for a wonderful turnout. She acknowledged the importance of the feedback on this issue. She noted the importance of a fenced off leash dog park for the community and for the health and wellness of animals. She recognized members of the Africville Heritage Trust and Africville community attending the meeting and acknowledged the Africville reunion that would be taking place on the weekend.

Councillor Watts explained that this evening's meeting would be an opportunity for HRM Staff to collect feedback and input from members of the community. She added that no decisions would be made at this meeting and that eventually a staff report recommendation would be presented to Regional Council, likely in the early fall. Councillor Watts also explained the lack of clarity and consistency around the Off-Leash policy. She noted the importance of reviewing the Off-Leash strategy. She then recognized the other Councillors in attendance including:

- Councillor Steve Craig, District 15
- Councillor Matt Whitman, District 13
- Councillor Linda Mosher, District 9
- Councillor Russell Walker, District 10

Councillor Watts turned the meeting back over to Ms. Richardson.

2. PRESENTATION

Ms. Richardson thanked Councillor Watts and noted some guidelines for the meeting. She then explained the agenda and the process for the meeting. She noted that the meeting would involve break-out sessions to allow everyone to have an opportunity to provide their input. The break-out groups could then report back to the meeting audience on their key issues. She explained that this is an opportunity for staff to hear from and consult with the community on the commissioning of the proposed off-leash park to replace the off-leash area at Africville Park. She noted that the feedback and input from the meeting would go to the interdepartmental off-leash committee which is made up of HRM Staff. She explained that this is the committee responsible for administering the off-leash strategy. Ms. Richardson added that Staff will report back to Council in the early fall and a new off-leash site would likely be in place by late fall. She added that the Africville Off-Leash site would be decommissioned by the end of 2014.

**Public Meeting – Proposed Off-Leash Dog Park
July 23, 2014**

A member of the public asked how HRM could possibly have a park in place by this time given the process that is before them. Ms. Richardson responded that she would like to run through the presentation and then during the question and answer session cover any items that were unclear.

Ms. Richardson reviewed the context of the issue. She explained that the recommendation for the closure of the off-leash area at Africville Park is based on the request from the Africville Heritage Trust Society, the cultural and commemorative value of the site, and also the historical settlement achieved in 2010. Part of that settlement includes continuing to work together with the African Nova Scotia community and includes the ability for the Africville Heritage Trust and their community to be able to share their story through different events and programming in the Park. This settlement will also include enhanced maintenance in the park. Ms. Richardson explained that part of that maintenance includes moving the Off-leash Park into another area.

She then noted the Council Motions from the June 24, 2014 Regional Council:

Council Motion Part 1:

Approve the off leash dog park within Africville Park to be decommissioned as soon as new off leash fenced park is commissioned.

Council Motion Part 2:

Approve staff to initiate the commissioning of a fenced off- leash dog park to the east of the Africville parking lot (in accordance with the strategy) and hold a community consultation prior to July 31, 2014 to receive feedback from the public. The implementation of this new fenced off leash dog park (based on community feedback, a staff report and approval by Regional Council) would occur in 2014.

Council Motion Part 3:

Approve staff to undertake a review of the program and service levels for off-leash facilities to assess requirement, management and programming costs including the establishment of fenced off leash dog parks.

Ms. Richardson explained that they are at step 1 by engaging in this community consultation. She also explained that the off-leash strategy has not been updated since 2007. She indicated that this would be step 2 of the process and that information on that step would be coming forward in the coming weeks. Ms. Richardson explained that HRM currently administers parks and programming based on the 2007 strategy. She indicated that there are 7 year round off leash parks and 35 seasonal areas. Africville Park was commissioned as an off-leash area prior to 2007.

Public Meeting – Proposed Off-Leash Dog Park
July 23, 2014

Ms. Richardson then presented the guiding principles of the off-leash parks strategy that include:

1. Accessibility – for all park users
2. Affordability – site alteration & facilities
3. Balance – between off-leash use and other park uses
4. Cleanliness – effective management of dog waste
5. Environmental & Cultural Sustainability – protection of ecological and cultural resources
6. Natural Beauty – sensitive planning and design.

She explained that the strategy is based on the concept of mixed-use parks; the idea is not to just have parks dedicated for specific uses. She added that off-leash areas are not able to be in cemeteries, playgrounds, beaches and wading pools. Ms. Richardson then explained the designation criteria centered on the guiding principles:

- Park size – to minimize user conflict and other impacts
- Park facilities – compatibility of use and protection of cultural and environmental assets
- Proximity – to homes, school and community centers
- Costs – to develop operate and maintain (avoiding extensive site alterations and operating costs)
- Community input – is off-leash use suitable for the proposed park

Ms. Richardson turned the meeting over to Mr. Peter Bigelow, Manager of Public Lands and Planning with HRM. He explained that there are some off-leash areas located in natural setting, such as Point Pleasant and some located in civic settings. He added that there is also a service dog area that is fenced.

Mr. Bigelow presented the specifics of the proposed site. He addressed the reasoning of the off-leash site being moved to the right of the site and why it is different to keeping it to the left. An aerial photograph of the site was shown and Mr. Bigelow described the existing state of the park. He then presented an aerial photograph of Africville prior to its clearances in 1964. The two aerial photographs were over-laid and Mr. Bigelow explained that the area to the right is mostly fill. He explained the members of the Africville Heritage Trust never really saw this area as Africville.

Mr. Bigelow provided a brief history of Africville as a historic site. He indicated that, as a community, we now need to discuss the proposed area as an off-leash site. Mr. Bigelow then described this site noting the difference in size, the rise and the safety buffer that would be required due to operations on the bridge. He indicated that the area would require some fencing, and noted that some areas are not grassed and some of the changes that would be required to bring the site to standard.

Mr. Bigelow then handed the presentation back over to Ms. Richardson. Ms. Richardson led the question and answer portion of the meeting.

3. Q & A - GENERAL

Ms. Richardson explained that they would be accepting some general questions. She noted some of the frustration around the issue but encouraged attendants to keep focused on the task in a positive manner. She added that this location may be seen as an interim solution and reminded the audience that a decision has not yet been made.

An audience participant commented that he heard on the news that the Africville Heritage Trust wanted both locations for their use. He added that HRM should look elsewhere to develop an off-leash park.

Ms. Marsha Stagg, Sheet Harbour: Indicated that she has two dogs and travels all over North America and has visited many other off-leash sites. She indicated that dog-owners deserve a fully fenced off-leash site. She noted that she opposes any off-leash site in Africville Park, Seaview Park and Seaview look-off. These are culturally sensitive areas that should be treated with respect and dignity. Ms. Stagg indicated that she has handouts noting a number of possible new locations within HRM. She added that a site in Africville should not be considered at all. (<http://www.halifax.ca/property/olps/index.php>)

A resident of the Bedford area: She noted that the off-leash dog park in Bedford is not accessible to her due to her age. She explained that the current proposed site is simply not big enough. She added that former residents of Africville own dogs and use that site. She believes that the current site should remain open. She explained that at Fort Needham there was a drug and prostitution problem before dogs were walked and exercised there. She doesn't know how they are going to keep the Africville site free from those criminal problems if residents are not walking dogs there.

An audience participant expressed concern regarding the proposed location of the park. He noted that since Africville oversees that site, it may be taken away in the future. He is concerned about how long that site would be an off-leash area. He also added that the proposed site is much too small; it is not a suitable site.

Mr. Bigelow responded with regards to the suitability of the site. He explained that there are dog parks all over North America that are the same size. He explained that he understands that the current site is quite large compared to the proposed site. He added that HRM is here to gain information and feedback from residents, such as comments and concerns over size.

An audience participant expressed concern over some of the other proposed off-leash sites within HRM. He explained that he cannot understand why they can't have Seaview Park as a site. He believes the proposed site is unacceptable.

An audience participant asked about the internal HRM Staff committee that looks at off-leash policy. She expressed that public input is needed on that committee, specifically dog-owners. She noted that it seems that the current committee is not aware of a dog's needs given the new proposed site. She expressed that members of the public should be on that committee.

Mr. Bigelow responded that it is an operational committee made up of HRM Staff that holds public consultation. He indicated that the strategy was developed with much public consultation and that experts were brought in from Calgary who have one of the best systems going. Mr. Bigelow added that HRM's model is based on Calgary's.

Ms. Karen Pitt, Halifax: Ms. Pitt explained that she is disabled and walks her 3 dogs at the Africville Park. She has the dogs because they enable her to get out and about. She generally has someone go with her to help her clean up after her dogs. She has looked at the proposed new site and if HRM were to move the off-leash site there she would have an extremely difficult time accessing it due to her disability. She noted that she would likely not be able to use it and she suspects the same would go for anyone with a mobility or walking related disability. She explained that HRM is replacing one attempt to correct past discrimination with another form of discrimination. She asks that HRM seriously consider this.

An audience participant expressed that he respects the former Africville residents and their wishes. He believes that a lot of the focus has been on the dogs and the space being used for the dogs to relieve themselves. He expressed that this is not the case for him and many other dog owners who use the park. He explained that this is a place for dogs and their owners to get physical and mental exercise. He described his own personal struggle with depression as a young working professional and the positive impact this site has had on him. He explained that this site allowed him to get out of the house every day, get back to work more quickly and create relationships with many other people. He added that this is one of the few places in the city that represents a true cross section of the population. He fully understands the reasoning for removing the programming from the Africville lands, but believes the proposed site is completely inadequate. He believes that there should be a focus on the people who are tax payers and not just the dogs.

Ms. Allison Sparling, Halifax: Ms. Sparling explained that she understands the need to move the site. She expressed that she is upset with the placement of the proposed site and that it is disrespectful to the former residents of Africville. She expressed disappointment with the city and feels that the historic context of the site was not considered. She believes this is an opportunity to take something that was very wrong and make it right.

An audience participant inquired about maintenance in the park. She expressed that the park is currently not maintained throughout the winter. She asked about the maintenance and what it would involve for Africville Heritage Trust programming.

Mr. Bigelow responded that this is part of the settlement agreement and this is an item that would go to Council. He explained that staff would be recommending that they enter into a partnership with the Africville Heritage Trust to work together on maintenance.

Mr. Bigelow concluded the question and answer session and turned the meeting over to Ms. Richardson.

4. ROUNDTABLE WORKSHOP

Ms. Richardson explained the workshop portion of the meeting and noted the two questions the HRM is looking for feedback and input on:

1. What are the key issues and opportunities to be considered when looking at this site as an off-leash park?
2. What site improvements could be made to develop the property as a useable off-leash park?

Ms. Richardson cited some examples of responses to the questions. She reassured the audience that a decision has not been made on the location. She explained that staff would be assisting with the workshop. The meeting attendants entered into their workshops at 7:54 pm and began their discussions. Staff circulated amongst the tables and facilitated the workshop session.

Ms. Richardson concluded the workshop at 8:16pm

5. PLENARY DISCUSSION –WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS

Ms. Richardson explained that this is an opportunity to bring forth key messages from the workshop session. She added that all items written down would be collected and reported. (<http://www.halifax.ca/property/olps/index.php>)

Table 1

Ms. Loraine Hittings presented for her table and explained that the space is simply too small; a dog can run 100 metres really quickly. She believes this is a feeling that a lot of the break-out groups have. They believe it is too close to the Africville site. It is also too close to the bridge which is not only a safety issue but also a noise issue. They also believe that there is an accessibility issue here. It is difficult enough in the summer to get to the site, so the winter would be even more of an issue. They indicated that there is a steep bank on the site which is a safety concern, as are the wires holding up the trees. They also reported that, aesthetically, the site is not pleasing. Ms. Hitting's reported that her table is simply not comfortable with a short term solution to the problem and the proposed site would require a massive overhaul to be even slightly suitable. They want a great space with decent lighting and enough space for owners and their dogs to be comfortable.

Mr. Chris Reed, Halifax: Mr. Reed made a general comment that the Halifax Mainland Common should be considered as a site.

Table 2

Ms. Terry Downey explained that the focus should be on what people are saying. The table reported back that this site is unacceptable. One of the main reasons this is unacceptable is that

this site is not accessible. If it is not accessible it is violating human rights; you are offending the dignity and the rights of people and this is not something you can do. Ms. Downey reported on the items that the site does need. They noted that a timely decision for relocation is required, a larger park that is accessible and that does not violate anyone's rights. They indicated that the area should be gated and fenced. Ms. Downey indicated that the Mainland Commons is an example of a good site. She added that they want some options that are actually feasible, and for this conflict to end, so viable options are necessary. Ms. Downey then explained some of the features they would like on a new site such as washrooms, garbage and doggy clean-up bags, water access, parking, tables, and seats or benches. She explained that they want this to be a place where people can socialize and engage as a community.

Table 3

The workshop participant explained that many of their table's views are in-line with what others have said. She explained that she personally uses the park 360 days of the year. She noted that this isn't just about the dogs, it's about the people. She explained that her table believes that the proposed site is just not large enough. The steep hill and rocky slope are potential liabilities which is not good for the park user or the city. She also noted that they discussed senior dogs and their ability to access a site such as the one proposed. They also noted the ship building contract and how it would bring many new residents into Halifax who could potentially be dog owners. Those new residents would also require a space. They expressed that lighting and washrooms would be required on a new site. She added that a trail is not necessarily required for an off-leash space, but an ample size area is so the dogs can run freely.

Table 4

Ms. Cynthia Fox noted that their group was small, but they all agreed that this proposed site is simply too small. You cannot go from 5 acres to 1 acre. They are fearful that this will be a permanent location. It will drive the current dog owners to other parks, as it is with the case of Long Lake. They believe the current strategy must be revisited and updated. The parks should be accessible to all residents and dogs at any time of year, in any weather. They expressed that dog owners spend many dollars a year on taxes. Ms. Fox explained that pet and pet owner related businesses are the number one growing business in North America and that they generate a lot of tax revenue. Ms. Fox explained some of the features that would be required in a new site including lighting, shade, washrooms and water for the dogs. She added that they appreciate the public meeting being held.

Table 5

The workshop participant noted that many of their comments echo those of the other tables. He added that it is important to respect the Africville community and lands. They believe the proposed space has cultural concerns and the city should not use it as a site. They believe it goes against the current off-leash strategy. It is also unsafe and not accessible. They expressed that the residents who are likely to live downtown are the same people who would likely own a dog, so having a small park goes against the city's strategy to get people living in the downtown core. It was noted that having a bunch of smaller dog parks may work, but it would be preferable to have a much larger space. A larger space would likely have more people using the park and would provide a safety benefit in this way. You could use the park later at night and likely find

someone else there. They also reported back that having lighting and seating would be very important. They noted that this would be a positive investment for the city and best practices from other cities should be explored.

Table 6

They echoed many of the same ideas as the other groups and indicated that this proposed site is unacceptable. They expressed that one idea may be to have several smaller parks on the peninsula and one large park off the peninsula, such as the mainland common. These sites would all have to be fenced in, accessible, lighted and pockets of spaces for “playgroups”.

Table 7

They reported that they share many of the views of the other tables. They noted that there are over 50,000 dogs in HRM and that these owners contribute greatly to the tax base. They believe the proposed site is simply too small.

Ms. Richardson asked if the two remaining tables had some comments or feedback to contribute. Both tables indicated that their feedback was similar and had nothing further to add. An audience participant commented on the importance of sightlines for safety at any park.

6. CLOSING REMARKS

Ms. Richardson commented that the meeting was very productive. She indicated that her contact information was available on the handouts. Mr. Bigelow asked participants for a show of hands of the interest in a park that is on the Mainland such as the Halifax Mainland Common or Exhibition Park lands. Approximately half of the participants indicated that this is something that would interest them.

Councillor Watts shared some closing remarks. She indicated that the feedback has been thoughtful and the discussion has been respectful. She noted that feedback would be appreciated and should be submitted in the next two weeks. She thanked all participants for coming.

The meeting adjourned at 8:54pm.

Jane Crosby
Legislative Support

INFORMATION ITEMS

~None~
