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Item No. 11.1.8
Halifax Regional Council
December 2, 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: November 13, 2014

SUBJECT: Proposed Mainland Common Off-leash Dog Park

ORIGIN

June 24, 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: Part II of the motion will be addressed under a separate report.

October 21, 2014 Council Motion "Off-leash dog-park to replace the Africville off-leash park".

1. 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.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

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

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct staff to:

- 1) Proceed with the commissioning of a fenced off-leash dog park on the Halifax Mainland Common as per the contents of this report and according to the following:
 - a) the area to be commissioned as a fenced off-leash dog park shall be according to the boundaries and phasing shown on Attachment 2 of this report;
 - b) Phase I of the off-leash dog park will be according to the concept shown on Attachment 2 of this report and shall be operational by December 31, 2014; and
 - c) Phase 2 of the off-leash dog park will be according to the concept shown on Attachment 2 of this report.
- 2) Include capital and operating funding for the Mainland Common Off-leash Dog Park in the 2015/16 Budget for Regional Council's consideration, as outlined in the Financial Implications' section of this report; and
- 3) Close the Africville Park off-leash area as soon as Phase 1 of the Mainland Common off-leash park is operational and no later than December 31, 2014.

BACKGROUND

On June 24, 2014, Halifax Regional Council passed a motion to decommission the off-leash area (OLA) 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. An analysis of the site east of the Africville parking lot revealed that the site was not a suitable alternative for the existing regional OLA owing to size, accessibility and proximity to the national historic site.

Based on feedback from a July public meeting on the matter and the guidelines set out in the HRM Off-Leash Strategy (2007) staff conducted a scan further afield for potential sites to meet Council's December 31, 2014 closure of the Africville OLA. The evaluation of the site to the east of Africville and the findings of the scan for alternative sites was brought to Halifax Regional Council on October 21, 2014. Council directed staff to look in more detail at the potential for a site on the Mainland Common off Westridge Drive.

Staff, through the Interdepartmental Off-leash Parks Committee, has conducted an examination of the Mainland Common site using:

- 1) Principles and Guidelines set out in the HRM Off-Leash Parks Strategy.
- 2) Feedback from a public meeting held on October 30, 2014 and individual communications.
- 3) Estimated incremental capital and operating cost estimates for the site.
- 4) Other approved policies and objectives of Council, including the Mainland Common Master Plan and Council's December 31, 2014 closure target for the Africville OLA.

DISCUSSION

Halifax Off-Leash Parks Strategy Mainland Common Site Evaluation Results:

The Interdepartmental Off-Leash Parks Committee completed the evaluation of the Mainland Common site with the benefit of public feedback and preliminary cost estimates. The results of this evaluation are summarized in the following table and are reflected in staff's recommendation.

Africville OLA Replacement – Mainland Common Site Evaluation

Strategy Criteria	Considerations	Committee Findings
Accessibility	<p>The Africville Park OLA functions as a Regional Facility</p> <p>The Africville off-leash site is a destination now for people with disabilities and mobility issues</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Mainland Common is a Regional Park and Recreation Destination. 2. The grassed turf (Phase 1) component of the site offers similar levels of accessibility as Africville Park. New paths and activity areas within the wooded area would require improvements to meet accessibility standards. Winter maintenance levels would be similar to Africville Park. 3. Access to the site and parking facilities is good. 4. If developed as an OLA, it is not recommended that the fenced site be utilized for any other public purpose making this the municipality's first "dedicated dog park".
Affordability	<p>Seeking a low to reasonable cost solution</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The land is owned by the Municipality. 2. Some requirements are already in place, including good access, parking, and partial fencing and lighting allowing for "Phase I" to be opened for December with only a minimum amount of investment (requires signs, dog bag dispensers, changes to the existing gate, garbage cans, seating and tables, and a small concrete slab for improved grade and pedestrian access). 3. Phase 2 improvements are required to include the wooded area into the OLA including woodland clean-up, fencing and gating, additional lighting, construction of pathways and open areas, and a (non-piped) water source. This second phase is necessary to complete the site as a suitable replacement for the Africville OLA.
Balance	<p>The 2007 Strategy did not anticipate dedicated or fenced off-leash parks.</p> <p>The Mainland Common Master Plan (2009) anticipates the 75 acres south-west of the off-leash park to be directed towards passive use.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This would be a dedicated park for off-leash use, but is not displacing any other required existing or anticipated park uses. 2. Use of the site as an OLA is in keeping with the Mainland Common Master Plan and is a complimentary park use. It would also increase the use of already existing park infrastructure through clustering of assets. 3. Site monitoring, appropriate enforcement and public education would be needed to ensure that the "on-leash" rules within adjacent park areas (trails, parking lot(s), etc.) are followed by dog owners. 4. The adjacent ball field is currently a

Strategy Criteria	Considerations	Committee Findings
		successful seasonal off-leash area. No changes to this status are anticipated. 5. Primary access would be from Westridge Drive which is a street built as a wide local collector, but never connected to the larger street grid. It functions as a residential street. The OLA would not require connection to Thomas Raddall Drive. This is congruent with principles of the Mainland Common Master Plan aimed at preventing traffic shortcutting. Secondary access would be from parking areas adjacent to the Soccer Nova Scotia facility.
Cleanliness	Cleanliness is important for dog health and other park users	1. By-law regulations are in place; signage and garbage cans would be installed. Waste bag stations would be installed. 2. Random patrols of the park for enforcement would occur. 3. The area is already well serviced as a municipal park.
Environmental & Cultural Sustainability	The site includes a small wooded area currently regenerating from the effects of Hurricane Juan.	1. Care needs to be taken in developing Phase 2 to maintain the wooded area as a regenerating tree stand and to maintain it as a buffer to the residential neighbours and trails users.
Natural Beauty	Located next to the 75 acres of woodland dedicated to passive walking trails, the OLA must blend aesthetically as a passive park function.	1. Most aesthetic issues could be addressed through design, use of materials already established on the Mainland Common and care in maintaining the treed buffer area. Careful placement of fences will be required to be consistent with the park entrance and adjacent Mainland North Linear Trail. Some new planting of trees and vegetation would also occur.
Location	The 2007 Off-Leash Parks Strategy did not address spatial distribution of OLA to meet service levels.	The Mainland Common site provides a regional facility in an urban area which is without a year round OLA. The adjacent Mainland North Linear Trail is heavily used for on-leash dogs and would be complimentary to the new off-leash park. The "on-leash" status of the trail would continue to be enforced.
CRITERIA		
Park Size	If the off-leash park is to serve a more regional user base it should be sized accordingly.	1. The proposed turf and wooded areas provide approximately 3 acres. Both areas must be included together as an OLA to create a suitable replacement for Africville Park.
Park Facilities	The 2007 OLP Strategy did not anticipate fenced dog parks. Some existing criteria do not adequately address dedicated off-leash park	1. Full fencing, in keeping with Council's June 2014 direction, would be highly beneficial owing to the proximity of parking areas and the concentration of

Strategy Criteria	Considerations	Committee Findings
	requirements	<p>other park uses.</p> <p>2. Tables, seating and shelter, pathways and landscaping should be added. Additional lighting would enhance safety and park use, especially for winter use when the adjacent sport field lights are not on. A water source for dogs is important and could be provided via an ecologically-friendly, low cost, rain barrel system.</p>
Proximity to other uses	<p>Adjacent neighbourhoods, schools, and other uses need to be considered.</p> <p>The adjacent Mainland Common Artificial Turf is a high value recreation facility and will require future additional space to be reconfigured</p>	<p>1. There are no anticipated conflicts with adjacent residents, schools, or recreation centres.</p> <p>2. The adjacent artificial turf will require some additional fencing to control errant balls.</p> <p>3. The fenced grassed area being contemplated as part of the OLA is a remnant from two ball fields which were formerly on the site. It is currently used occasionally as a convenient warm-up area for the artificial turf but is otherwise locked. No other artificial fields in the municipality have similar warm-up areas, as the end zones can be used for warm-up.</p> <p>4. Expansion of the northern most artificial field (into the top corner of the Phase I OLA) is required with plans for the proposed field surface refurbishment in 2015/16. This expansion will increase the use and efficiency of the current artificial fields. The contemplated changes will allow end zone sports like football and rugby to be conducted at the same time as soccer on the adjacent field. The expansion will require .35 acres of the current grassed area. Public feedback was not favorable towards any reduction in the size of the OLA. As a result, staff completed a preliminary layout plan and found that additional land could be added to the OLA to create a final dog park that will cover 3 acres after the requirements for sport field expansion are removed. The preliminary concept demonstrating the integration of both off-leash and sport field uses is found as Attachment 2 of this report.</p>
Costs (development, operating & maintenance)	Additional budget resources and programming attention will be needed for fenced, dedicated off-leash facilities	The fenced grass area (Phase 1) could be used as a suitable OLA by the end of December with minimal cost. The parking area would require Priority 3 winter maintenance in keeping with service levels at Africville Park.

Strategy Criteria	Considerations	Committee Findings
		Completion of the full Mainland Common OLA will require budget resources in 2015/16 as defined in the Financial Implications' section of this report.

Public Feedback:

The candidate site was presented at a public meeting at the Halifax Forum on October 30, 2014 to gather feedback on the Mainland Common as a replacement site for the Africville off-leash park. The discussion focused on the guiding principles and criteria under the Off-Leash Parks Strategy to assess the suitability of the Mainland Common site for off-leash park use.

The public meeting was attended by 43 people from Halifax Peninsula, Bedford, Mainland Halifax, and Dartmouth. Necessary feedback and input was received to complete the detailed examination of the Mainland Common site as an off-leash dog park and suitable replacement for the Africville off-leash park (Attachment 3).

In addition to the input from the public meeting, comments were received through e-mail submission. Findings are summarized in the table below.

**Public Consultation Results –
Mainland Common Site Suitability for Africville Off-Leash Park Replacement**

Off-Leash Parks Strategy Principles & Criteria	Findings of Public Input	Response Frequency
Park Location	<p>1. <u>Proximity to Africville</u> – The majority of off-leash users currently drive to Africville Park therefore the suitability of the new site is not dependent on a Peninsula Halifax location.</p> <p>2. <u>Proximity to other uses</u> – There are no major concerns with proximity to nearby uses. There is good separation between the OLA and the nearest residence (35 metres) and separated by the linear trail and forested buffer. Feedback indicated that the public was comfortable that, with design attention (trees, fencing, etc.), the off-leash park will be complimentary to other uses.</p> <p>3. <u>Balance of Park Uses</u> – Overall people feel the balance is good and that an off-leash park is appropriate for this site. Any minor conflicts (dogs and sports-field) can be addressed through design.</p> <p>4. <u>Service area</u> – The majority of residents support the Mainland Common site as a location for the Africville Park replacement. Its suitability does however depend on the park design and development criteria stated below.</p> <p>5. <u>Trails use</u> - Some concerns have been raised by trail users and group(s) regarding the potential impact of off-leash dogs on the trails system and the ecological sensitivity of the Mainland Common passive reserve area.</p> <p>Feedback indicated the majority of residents feel this is not a major concern and any potential conflicts can be addressed through enforcement and education.</p>	<p>High</p> <p>High</p> <p>High</p> <p>High</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>High</p>

Park Size & Facilities	<p>1. <u>Size</u> - The size is considered to be suitable, but not ideal. The reduction in size from the 5 acre mixed use Africville Park to the 3 acre Mainland Common dedicated dog park will create a different park experience but one that people are amenable to understanding that it is important for the Africville site to close.</p> <p>2. <u>Phasing</u> – There is concern among off-leash park users that Phase 2 will not happen. Some feel that both phases should happen simultaneously and that Africville should remain open until both phases are completed. The majority, however, feel that a solid commitment now to complete both phases promptly would ease some of the concern. If Phase 2 does not happen, there is little support for the Mainland Common site as a replacement for Africville.</p> <p>3. <u>Fencing</u> - A fully fenced, double-gated off-leash park is required for a good degree of safety, enjoyment, and separation of adjacent active recreation uses. Not all off-leash parks need to be fenced but as a suitable replacement to Africville Park this site must be fenced.</p> <p>Related to the concern above, many feel that the entire 3 acres should be fenced now (with permanent or temporary fencing) as part of Phase 1 to secure the area for off-leash use. Again, this relates to the worry that HRM will not proceed with Phase 2 once the first phase is completed.</p> <p>4. <u>Parking & other amenities</u> – Generally people feel there are good parking facilities and access to washrooms. Longer-term the parking lot should be paved as part of a larger Mainland Common Park upgrade and consideration given to extending sidewalks to Westridge Drive.</p>	<p>High</p> <p>High</p> <p>High</p> <p>High</p>
Affordability	<p>1. <u>Investment</u> – the majority of off-leash users do not want a temporary or interim solution and want upfront commitment to invest in the basic requirements and amenities for a fully-functional off-leash park with attention to the following priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - full and prompt fencing of the full 3 acres - good lighting throughout - screening between the sports-field and the off-leash field - accessible pathways and rest spots in the wooded area. - benches and tables for socialization and park enjoyment - well-placed garbage cans and bag dispensers - water source for dogs 	High
Accessibility	<p>1. <u>Access for mobility-challenged</u> – The majority feel the site's level of accessibility is good to the Phase 1 (field) with a few minor enhancements to ensure access from the parking lot to the gate(s). The wooded area will need some improvements to make it accessible. People feel strongly that this park must be useable by a full-range of people with varying levels of mobility. Generally people agree that the Mainland Common has a high degree of accessibility by car, transit, and by foot and other modes of active transportation making it a good location.</p>	High

Environmental Cultural Sustainability Natural Beauty	& &	1. There are no major concerns other than to pay attention to tree retention and the careful transition of the off-leash park with the passive recreation and nature reserve to the south-west.	High
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Incremental Capital and Operating Cost Estimates:

Following are estimated costs to achieve a dedicated dog park at the Mainland Common site based on public feedback and knowledge of the site. The costs are broken into phases consistent with staff's recommended approach for the facility.

Proposed Mainland Common Off-Leash Dog Park

Requirement	Capital Costs
<i>Phase 1</i>	
Gate and Transition Space	\$7000
<i>Phase 2</i>	
Removal of Existing Fence	\$4500
Fencing	\$22,000
Transition Space	\$7,000
Tree and Site Work	\$30,000
Visual Barrier to separate sports field	\$3,500
Pathways	\$10,000
Lighting	\$4,000
Shelter and Rain Barrel	\$12,000
Benches	\$5,000
Planting	\$6,000
SubTotal	\$111,000
Contingency of 10%	\$11,100
Subtotal	\$122,100
Net HST	\$5,233
Total	\$127,333

The Preliminary Conceptual Plan found in Attachment 2 illustrates a future parking lot configuration. Under the Mainland Common Master Plan this parking area is intended to serve the existing ball field and passive uses associated with this section of the Mainland Common. This would include the future 75 acre

natural park and, if approved, the Off-Leash Dog Park. There are benefits associated with paving and lining this lot. They include an estimated 30% increase in parking efficiency, easier winter maintenance, improved accessibility, improvements to the daily route to school to Halifax West and creation of a more formal public entrance to the Mainland Common. At this point, staff does not view the paving as a “must have” requirement for the creation of the dog park. The parking lot should be paved as part of future park development in response to increase in user demand.

Incremental operating costs for the full off-leash park would include waste bags, priority III snow plowing, additional garbage pickup and general maintenance. Estimates are \$4000 per year. This amount is with the understanding that there is already grass cutting and a level of general maintenance occurring on the site that would continue.

Other Approved Policies and Council Objectives

Mainland Common Master Plan

The Mainland Common Master Plan was adopted by Halifax Council in 1992. It was updated by Halifax Regional Council in 2008 to reflect changing requirements of the Municipality and the pace of development in the immediate area. The Mainland Common is identified as an optimal location for facilities which serve this part of the Region. This has led to the location of the Keshan Goodman Library, Halifax West High School, Mainland Common Artificial Fields, Canada Games Centre, Lacewood Transit Hub and Soccer Nova Scotia Centre on the site. The Mainland North Regional Trail Way runs through the park.

On the less active side the Mainland Common Master Plan provides for a 75 acre passive park area similar in nature to Point Pleasant, Hemlock Ravine and Shubie Park. Westridge Drive, where the off-leash area is proposed, is one of four access points into the passive parkland. It was built as a minor collector (90 ft right of way) anticipating residential development on lands subsequently purchased for the Mainland Common. Today Westridge functions as a residential street. The Master Plan restricts creation of a road connection through the Mainland Common in order to prevent vehicular short cutting but requires a gated emergency access and egress from Westridge through the Mainland Common. The proposed Mainland Common off-leash park does nothing to affect these requirements. The proposed off-leash park is an added use to the Mainland Common and is located in an under-utilized area that does not displace any other intended use. It is not within any identified environmentally sensitive areas although the wooded area should be left as a buffer. Locating a regional dog park at the Mainland Common continues to centralize facilities in the area and provides an off-leash facility in a high density area where no year round facility exists.

Conclusion

To date the process to find a replacement site for Africville off-leash park has included multiple candidate site selection, detailed site examination(s), community consultation, Council approval(s), preliminary site design(s), costing and project planning. The recommendation to commission the Mainland Common site as a suitable replacement for the Africville Off-Leash Park is based on the following conclusions:

1. The Mainland Common site offers Council the ability to meet its objective of finding a suitable fenced alternative to the Africville OLA.
2. The site offers an opportunity to create a well located public facility which benefits from co-location with other recreation facilities and previous public investment.
3. While public feedback from dog owners indicated that they were opposed to “the loss of any of the grassed area” which they would have access to in Phase I, staff’s analysis and preliminary concept plan finds that the functionality of the dog park is not jeopardized by the field expansion due to the ability to expand to additional lands in Phase 2. The two projects will have to be closely coordinated and sequenced if they both proceed in 2015/16 in order to limit disruption to both sport field and dog park

users. This has been factored into the proposed timeline indicated below. Staff feels that this represents a balance between two regional facilities which represent a substantial municipal service and investment to two very different user groups. The conceptual plan found as Attachment 2 illustrates this balance.

4. With limitations imposed by winter landscape construction and Council's desire to decommission the Africville OLA by the end of 2014, only the turf area can be made ready for users by December 31, 2014. Therefore staff is proposing a phased approach with Phase 1 opening in December and Phase 2 opening at the end of May of 2015.

5. The proposed solution for funding and implementation (see timelines and financial implications below) offers Council the means to commit to and deliver the full facility within a reasonable timeframe and within required municipal processes.

6. Phase 1 and 2 of the Mainland Common site provides a reasonable, publicly supported solution to achieve Regional Council's obligations to the Off-leash and Africville communities as well as the broader community while respecting required processes.

7. The Plan for the Mainland Common has a 50 year time horizon commencing in 1992. Other future improvements will follow on the Mainland Common that will benefit the regional dog park users as the Common continues to be developed over time. These include more accessible washrooms, other trails, paved/expanded parking and formal park entrances and connections to new neighbourhoods. Staff will continue to monitor the function and needs associated with the dog park and other uses on the Mainland Common.

With Council's approval of the Mainland Common site the proposed timeline is as follows:

1. Regional Council Approval designating the selected site as an Off-Leash Park and identifying park capital and operating sources - December 2, 2014.
2. Alterations to Grass Area to prepare the Phase 1 for use – December 2014.
3. Opening of Mainland Common Dog Park Phase 1 - December 2014.
4. Africville Off-Leash Park Closure – no later than December 31, 2014.
5. Detailed Design and Tendering of Mainland Common OLA Phase 2 - February-March 2015.
6. Construction of Phase 2 of Mainland Common OLA - Spring 2015.
7. Opening of Phase 2 Mainland Common Dog Park - May 31/ 2015.
8. Closure of portion of turf area required for Mainland Common Artificial Field Expansion - June 2015.
9. Construction of Artificial Field Expansion – June/July 2015.
10. Opening of Expanded Artificial Turf Fields - August 15, 2015.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Phase 1 Capital Funding - \$7000

The \$7,000 in funds required to complete Phase 1 is available within the 2014/15 approved Capital Budget account CPX01329 Reservation 1746.18 Park Upgrade Contingency. There is currently \$76,622 available in the contingency reservation under CPX01329.

Phase 2 Capital Funding - \$120,000

The delivery of Phase 2, to meet the proposed timeline, will require funding from the 2015/16 Capital Budget. If the Mainland Common site is approved, staff would include \$120,000 in the proposed 2015/16 CP000004 (Parks, Sports Courts & Fields – Service Improvement) Capital Budget for the consideration by Regional Council.

Operating funds for Phase 1 until the end of the 2014/15 fiscal year will be absorbed within existing budgets. Approximately \$4000 will be required through Operating Cost of Capital from the 2015/16 Operating budget.

The proposed expansion of the Mainland Common Artificial Turf will be considered by Regional Council under the proposed 2015/16 Capital Budget under account # CP110001 Mainland Common Artificial Turf Renewal.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A public meeting was held on October 30, 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

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Environmental implications associated with Phase 2 of the off-leash park have been minimized through concept plan.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Council could choose to delay the closure of the Africville OLA until all phases of the proposed Mainland Common OLA can be completed.
2. Council could choose to close the Africville OLA without a replacement site thereby relocating present users to other OLAs currently provided within the Municipality.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Mainland Common site
Attachment 2: Mainland Common Off-Leash Area Preliminary Conceptual Plan
Attachment 3: Public Meeting Minutes October 30, 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.

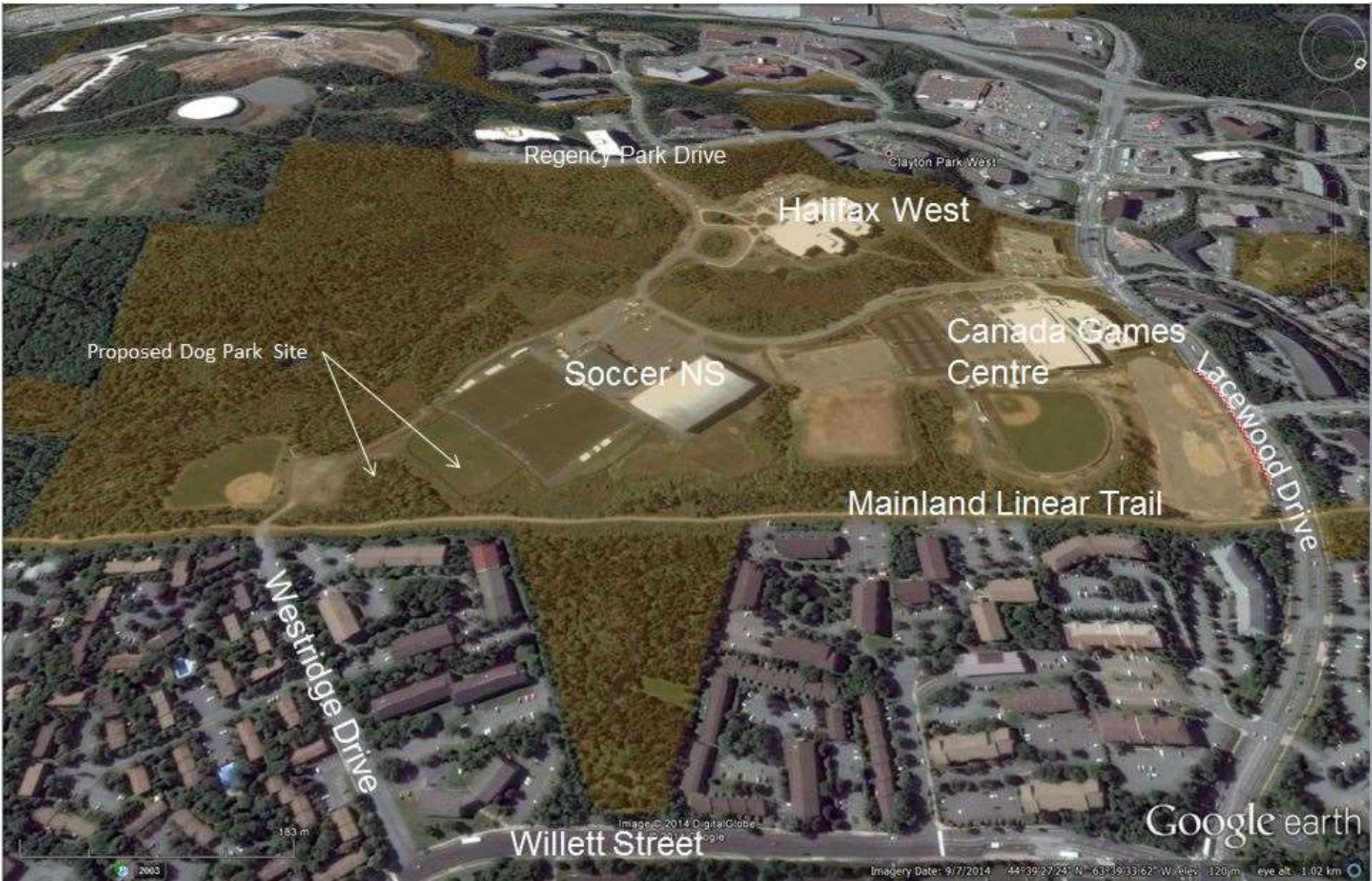
Report Prepared by: Holly Richardson, Coordinator Parks Policy, 490-6889
Peter Bigelow, Manager, Parks Planning, 490-4016

Financial Approval by: _____
Greg Keefe, Director of Finance & ICT/CFO, 490-6308

Report Approved by: _____
Jane Fraser, Director, Operations Support, 490-7166

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

Attachment 1 – Mainland Common Site Location



Attachment 2 – Preliminary Concept Plan Off-Leash Dog Park





**PROPOSED OFF-LEASH DOG PARK
REPLACEMENT FOR AFRICVILLE OFF-LEASH AREA
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 30, 2014**

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Jennifer Watts, District 8
Councillor Matt Whitman, District 13
Councillor Russell Walker, District 10
Councilor Reg Rankin, District 12
Ms. Holly Richardson
Mr. Peter Bigelow
Mr. Rudy Vodicka
Mr. Rob Mullane
Ms. Melissa Eavis

PUBLIC PRESENT: Approximately 43

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

**Public Meeting – Proposed Off-Leash Dog Park
October 30, 2014**

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m., and adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

1. WELCOME

The meeting was called to Order at 6:05pm at the Halifax Forum, Maritime Hall.

Ms. Holly Richardson welcomed members of the public and introduced herself. She introduced other HRM Staff present at the meeting and recognized Councillors in attendance including:

- Councilor Reg Rankin, District 12
- Councilor Matt Whitman, District 13
- Councilor Jennifer Watts, District 8
- Councilor Russell Walker, District 10

2. PRESENTATION

Ms. Richardson outlined the agenda for the evening and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to gain public input on the proposed off-leash dog park site at Halifax Mainland Common. Ms. Richardson stated that this meeting would be different from the previous public consultation in July as there would be more group discussion. During the course of the meeting, those in attendance would be asked to discuss questions within small break-out groups and bring their key findings and highlights back to the larger group.

Ms. Richardson provided a brief overview of what has happened with this issue to date. She outlined Regional Council's decision in June, 2014 to decommission the Africville off-leash park, to begin the process of commissioning a replacement park, and to begin the process of reviewing the Off-Leash Strategy. She also discussed the previous sites that had been considered and stated that the goal of the evening was to get feedback on the proposed Halifax Mainland Common site as a part of the site examination and selection process. She added that no decisions would be made at this meeting.

Ms. Richardson outlined the decision-making elements considered by Council which included:

1. Off-leash Parks Strategy
2. Plans & Policies
3. Budget Implications
4. Public Input

She then expanded on each of these elements. She discussed the 2007 Off Leash Parks Strategy and how it guides site selection and park design. She provided an overview of the existing plans and policies that currently guide park development and she discussed the applicable budget implications that would be considered including the cost to build, operate, and maintain the proposed park as well as the available capital and existing priorities.

**Public Meeting – Proposed Off-Leash Dog Park
October 30, 2014**

Ms. Richardson explained that this meeting would be a part of the Public Input portion of the process. She reiterated that those in attendance would be asked to discuss the following two questions at their tables and report back with their results.

- 1) Does it meet guiding principles & criteria?
- 2) How could an off-leash dog park here be designed & developed?
 - Tier 1 priorities?
 - Tier 2 priorities?

Ms. Richardson turned the meeting over to Mr. Peter Bigelow, Manager of Parks Planning with HRM. Mr. Bigelow outlined the current inventory of off-leash parks and stated that staff has been asked by Council to establish a dedicated off-leash dog park within HRM. Since the failure of the bridge site, staff has considered twelve (12) alternative sites based on Council's direction.

A member of the audience asked whether Council required an operational park by the end of 2014 or only plans. Mr. Bigelow clarified that the park had to be operational by the end of 2014 so there would not be a disruption in service.

Mr. Bigelow continued, stating that the chosen site had to be accessible and appropriately sized and that it had to be a regionally accessible location. Cost would also be a consideration and the site would need to comply with the off-leash parks strategy. With these criteria, many of the twelve preliminary sites were eliminated. After eliminating unsuitable sites, staff considered three sites on the Mainland Common which Mr. Bigelow further described. The Mainland Common 1 site was eliminated based on topography, lack of fencing and because it was slated to become a parking lot. Mainland Common 2 site was eliminated because of its status as a nature reserve and introducing fencing would not be appropriate. He stated that Mainland Common 3 was considered to be the most suitable site and he went on to describe its location, size, site characteristics including existing parking, a fenced area and natural buffers. It is currently a semi-active area and the master plan has not articulated a use for the space. He also noted that the adjacent soccer field will eventually be undergoing an expansion which would reduce the size of the fenced area but the site would still meet the size requirement for an off-leash park. Netting would be needed to separate the sports field from the park and prevent balls from escaping into the off-leash area. The site has existing lighting and the opportunity to add more if needed.

Mr. Bigelow explained that this site would require a phased approach. The existing fenced area is ready to use with some minor changes (Phase 1) but the expansion into the wooded area (Phase 2) would wait until spring. He went on to describe the surrounding road network and neighborhood characteristics. He noted that the community does not want a connection from Westridge Drive to Lacewood Drive or any other thoroughfares and this proposal would honor that agreement. He concluded that there was some damage during Juan which created openings in the tree canopy and multiple access points. Mr. Bigelow then turned the meeting back over to Ms. Richardson.

3. ROUNDTABLE WORKSHOP

Ms. Richardson introduced the Roundtable Workshop portion of the meeting. She asked the audience to discuss the following question: Does the proposed site meet guiding principles & criteria?

She reviewed the Off-Leash Parks Strategy guiding principles & criteria list which included the following items:

1. Accessibility – for all park users
2. Affordability – site alteration & facilities
3. Balance – between off-leash use & 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 & design
7. Proximity to residential uses - not less than 25 meters
8. Park size s/b a minimum of 1 hectare (2.4 acres)

She instructed the audience to discuss the question for twenty (20) minutes. The groups would then reconvene and someone from each group would report key messages and highlights that resulted from the discussion. An audience member questioned the potential expansion of the soccer field and Mr. Bigelow clarified that this is an HRM owned field. He encouraged the participants to discuss alternatives within their groups.

The meeting attendants entered into their workshops and began their discussions. Staff circulated amongst the tables and facilitated the workshop session.

Ms. Richardson concluded the workshop and the groups reconvened to discuss their findings.

4. PLENARY DISCUSSION –WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS

Ms. Richardson reconvened the meeting and asked the groups to report their findings.

Group 1

The group spokesperson stated that the group considered the eight principles for this specific park and for the most part they were comfortable with the size and location. A specific concern was voiced regarding the size of the parking lot in terms of accessibility and that it may not provide enough parking space during weekends and through the busy summer season. This would be especially true if the parking lot is to be used by everyone in the area including the Off-leash park users, Soccer Nova Scotia, trail users, and those using the Mainland Common. Consideration should be given to parking lot organization. Also, wheelchair users can have a difficult time moving around the site and a paved sidewalk should be provided for those individuals. In terms of affordability, the group understood that maintaining and growing grass is expensive but they did not know the budget for this. The participant noted that in terms of

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cleanliness, most dog owners are respectful and there are very few occasions of owners not picking up waste. However, he stated that there is a major issue with litter along Dunbrack Street and the Mainland trails. There are a number of “pickers” who pick up garbage along the trails and the parking lots but indicated that there is major concern in regards to litter and illegal dumping. In terms of Environmental & Cultural Sustainability, the group did not feel that this proposed site posed a conflict with environmentally sensitive areas. They also felt that as many trees as possible should be maintained as these would provide a buffer. The group noted a proximity to schools and houses and suggested that the proposed buffer may not be adequate. They concluded that the parking lot situation needed to be addressed and cleanliness should be emphasized.

Group 2

The spokesperson for Group 2 stated that their table had a mix of dog owners and those who do not own a dog. The person stated that the group was not sure about accessibility and that they support the previous concerns about the parking lot and wheelchair accessibility. They also noted that Phase 2 is sloped which would further reduce wheelchair accessibility. In terms of affordability, the group felt that there was no communication as to what this project would cost or what would need to be done. They also expressed concern for the size and because there was a lot of use at the Africville site, there could be even more people at this one. Phase 1 is not enough space. The group felt that if the off-leash park is fenced, there would not be an issue with balance. Dogs aren't terribly noisy but when barking occurs it should not pose an issue. Cleanliness is the dog owner's responsibility and the users are generally good about it but the group felt that the city also has a role to play in this issue. There needs to be garbage cans year round. In Africville they are taken out and relocated to the entrance during winter months which was not adequate. The city could also place staff down there to enforce waste pickup. The group stated that they support previous comments in terms of environmental issues. They do not want to see the trees cut down but have no other major concerns. The group felt that there was limited natural beauty in the area and it is more of a functional space. They stated that the proximity meets the guidelines. In terms of size, the group stated that they need to know the actual measurements for the current site and for the Africville site. As presented, it looks like Phase 1 and Phase 2 is slightly less than half of the Africville site and there is potential for Phase 1 to be further reduced. The group noted that the location makes sense but size and time constraints present definite concerns.

Group 3

This group spokesperson stated that they had similar concerns to what has been previously mentioned. In terms of accessibility, there are issues with the parking lot and with wheelchair access. There were also concerns with accessibility during the winter months. Increased accessibility to washrooms was also suggested as they tend to be locked during certain hours. The group felt that more benches, garbage cans, shelter, and various forms of lighting would also be beneficial and they suggested staff consider solar lighting options. In terms of balance, the group asked if it was to be called a dedicated dog park and then allow other uses. If so, they want to see it restricted so that it is a dog park only as it has to be safe for dogs with rules that are specific to an off leash dog park. The group also noted that the proposed site abuts a sports field and litter may be an issue. They suggested a buffer between the uses to help with separation and noise. They reiterated earlier comments regarding litter and suggested that placing garbage cans

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farther away from the fence would be beneficial. The participant stated that the group did not have much comment on the environmental aspect but that major reconstruction of the site should be avoided. They noted that there was some natural beauty and that 35m is a sufficient distance. The biggest contention that the group had was with the size. They felt that the fenced in area was too small and adding in the wooded area might work but taking away a portion of the fenced area with the soccer field expansion was a deal breaker. The group felt very strongly that reducing the size of the fenced in area was not acceptable and further options for relocating the goal post should be considered. Also, Phase 2 would need to be implemented before any reduction of Phase 1 could be considered. The spokesperson stated that this was the biggest concern that the group had.

An audience member asked whether the parking lot and entrance are plowed. Staff confirmed that they were.

Group 4

A member of Group 4 explained that they felt park size was a major issue. The requirement is 1 hectare and the grassed area of phase one is 1.2 acres which would be reduced by the soccer field expansion. They felt that the city needs to give them land they can use honorably. The park users were promised a suitable replacement and the phased approach is worrisome. The group expressed concern that in the future, Phase 2 could be cancelled. They felt that the current proposal was not a suitable replacement and accessibility would be an issue in the wooded area. In order for the current proposal to be a suitable replacement it would have to be implemented all at once with fencing around the entire site. This group stated that the entire area should be implemented at one time.

Group 5

Mr. Rudy Vodicka, Coordinator Real Property Policy, spoke on behalf of the group and stated that there were both dog owners and members of the Trail Association at the table. In terms of accessibility, the group noted that there were no sidewalks from Westridge and grades are a concern. The parking lot is also unpaved which is problematic. In terms of affordability, a double gate would be useful. The group also stated that the site needs some additional features including more lighting and sidewalks. There were comments from the group regarding the conflict between sports field users and park users but otherwise they felt that balance would not be an issue. The group stated that there is currently a “park closed” sign indicating that the park would be unavailable during certain hours and this would need to be addressed. It was felt that garbage cans were an important park feature and should be emptied regularly but otherwise off-leash areas are typically well policed by users. Another concern was the current state of the parking lot and that users do not utilize the porta potties that are onsite. The group felt that the existing bog should be preserved and off limits to the dogs and that trees should not be removed. Also, the Mainland Master Plan needs to be revisited due to recent changes. There were not many comments on the natural beauty of the site only that the off-leash dog area would make it nicer. Barking was not considered to be a major issue and the larger the park can be the better. The group also added safety as a concern because cars coming from Westridge are crossing the gravel road without stopping. The group felt that speed bumps and stop signs might help this situation. A CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) audit is needed around the entire area and the parking lot is quite dark.

Group 6

The spokesperson for this group stated that there was a good mix of dog owners and those who do not own dogs at the table. She stated that none of the group members were familiar with the site and that they echoed the previous comments made by other groups. This group stated that they would like to see a firm commitment from HRM that Phase 2 would happen and if it could happen immediately that would be ideal. In terms of cleanliness, they felt that appropriate garbage cans and bags would be useful. Also, as many trees as possible should be retained. They expressed concern for the washroom situation and felt that there should be running water for the dogs to cool off in and drink. This group also felt that a commitment to the December 31st, 2014 date to decommission the Africville Park is important and they would rather see an interruption in service then to see that deadline extended.

A resident from another table stated that the impression they were left with in June was that the Africville Park would not be closed until a suitable replacement had been found. Ms. Richardson clarified that decommissioning the park this year was a part of the original motion.

Group 7

A participant stated that this group was formed of Africville Park users and they supported many of the comments heard from previous groups. They felt that more than one gate was needed for access as the single gate at Africville was problematic. The group also felt that sponsorship from pet stores and doggy day cares could be beneficial in terms of funding the park. In terms of accessibility, the group noted that the area is quite flat and pathways for wheelchair users should be implemented. They felt that the soccer field did not have much natural beauty. The idea of a phased development was not supported and the group felt it would be best to implement a permanent fence now rather than in the spring. Also, the size of Phase 1 is not sufficient and the whole space would be needed immediately. The group noted the proximity was not an issue as there is only one high school in the area. They felt the area needed more garbage cans and they should be cleaned regularly. Dog waste bags should also be provided and the parking lot should be paved with a dedicated handicapped parking area.

5. GROUP DISCUSSION AND CLOSING REMARKS

Ms. Richardson then asked the audience how they would prefer to proceed in answering the second question. It was decided by a show of hands that a group discussion would be appropriate. Members of the audience were asked to raise their hands if they had questions, comments or concerns.

An audience participant asked whether people would be willing to add money to their dog licences to offset the cost of the park. The person also agreed that there are many dog businesses in the city and sponsorship may be an option. If sponsorship was pursued, then the city would not have to offer this “scrap” of land. Also, further reducing the size of the park by expanding the soccer field is a deal breaker and many people feel the same way. People with accessibility issues won’t be able to go there. We should get city staff to use sponsorship to fund the park to offset the costs of the park.

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An audience participant noted that although there are a lot of pet businesses, there are not many who can afford to support a park.

An audience participant stated that it would be beneficial for the audience to agree on four or five points that speak to what the public agrees with and what they disagree with.

Ms. Richardson stated that this would certainly be an opportunity and the top points she heard were the following:

- 1) Accessibility: improvements to the parking lot and sidewalks especially for those with mobility challenges
- 2) Phasing: there is worry about commitment to Phase 2 and whether it will actually happen. There could be an opportunity for temporary fencing for the entire site immediately.
- 3) Size: the size of Phase 1 was a concern and the 25% reduction for the soccer field expansion was not acceptable.
- 4) Balance: no major issues but there may be some issues with the close proximity to the sports field
- 5) Environment: people felt strongly that the trees should be maintained as much as possible
- 6) Cleanliness: there are issues with litter from other users of the park and there should be a sufficient number of garbage cans which are changed/cleaned regularly
- 7) Sponsorship: determine if there is financial support from the private sector

An audience participant stated that Africville should be decommissioned however, the date as to when Council felt this should happen is unclear.

Ms. Richardson clarified for members of the audience that the motion stated the park had to be decommissioned by the end of 2014.

An audience participant stated that there are a number of key points staff can take away from this meeting. Size is an issue and reducing the park by 25% is a deal breaker. Phased development is not acceptable. Accessibility and parking are an issue. Maintenance, cleanliness and upkeep are very important.

An audience participant felt that a phased approach was not appropriate and that the community would have to live with this decision forever. A mishmashed mediocre project is not desirable and the date should be taken off the table and the project should be done right. Also, there are only a few esthetically valuable trees in the area. The participant also stated that the impact of the dog owners on this area would be significant and that the trail would be devastated with ten times as many people and dogs using it.

Mr. Bigelow clarified that this is a decision of Council and the information gathered tonight would be presented to them and they would make the final decision. He also reiterated that Council moved to decommission Africville Park by the end of 2014. An audience member asked about the survey results and Mr. Bigelow stated that these are being tabulated.

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Ms. Richardson concluded the meeting discussion 8:25 pm.

Melissa Eavis
Legislative Support