



REQUEST FOR A DECISION

Livable Community Committee - open session – Aug 1, 2024

To: Councillor Ruth Breen, Chair, and Members of the Livable Community Committee
From: Meredith Cooper, Policy & Strategic Planning Manager, TRC
Date: September 12, 2024
Title: Off-Leash Dog Trail Pilot

ISSUE:

In September 2023, City Council adopted a resolution that directed staff to “identify areas in the City of Fredericton that may be designated as off leash for dog walkers”. Staff have identified options for off-leash dog trails and are seeking City Council direction on the possibility of introducing the concept of off-leash dog trails as a pilot project.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

A. Recommendation:

It is recommended that the following resolution be forwarded to City Council for consideration:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Council for the City of Fredericton hereby directs the Legal Division to prepare an amendment to By-law No. S-11, A By-law respecting Animal Control, to designate an off-leash area within the municipality, to establish rules associated with the use of such areas, to amend the definitions of dog, owner and running at large and to make such other amendments to give effect to the said changes. Sections relevant to the “Off-Leash Areas” are part of a pilot project which will be in effect between May 2025 and October 2025.)

B. Other options:

City Council may wish to give other direction staff.

SITUATION, BACKGROUND & DISCUSSION:

SITUATION:

- a. Current (extant) Direction: On September 14, 2023, City Council adopted the following resolution: “BE IT RESOLVED that the Livable Community Committee hereby directs the Chief Administrative Officer to identify areas in the City of Fredericton that may be designated as off leash for dog walkers”.
- b. Alignment: This matter aligns with People Focused objectives for “creating a safe and inclusive community that offers an abundance of diverse recreational and cultural experiences” as outlined on the City’s 2022-2026 Strategy Map.
- c. Link to CAO goal or inflight: This item is considered a CAO priority pursuant to the above noted City Council resolution and direction to staff.
- d. Why is this coming to Council and why now?: Staff have identified options for City Council’s review and consideration pursuant to Council’s direction to staff.

BACKGROUND:

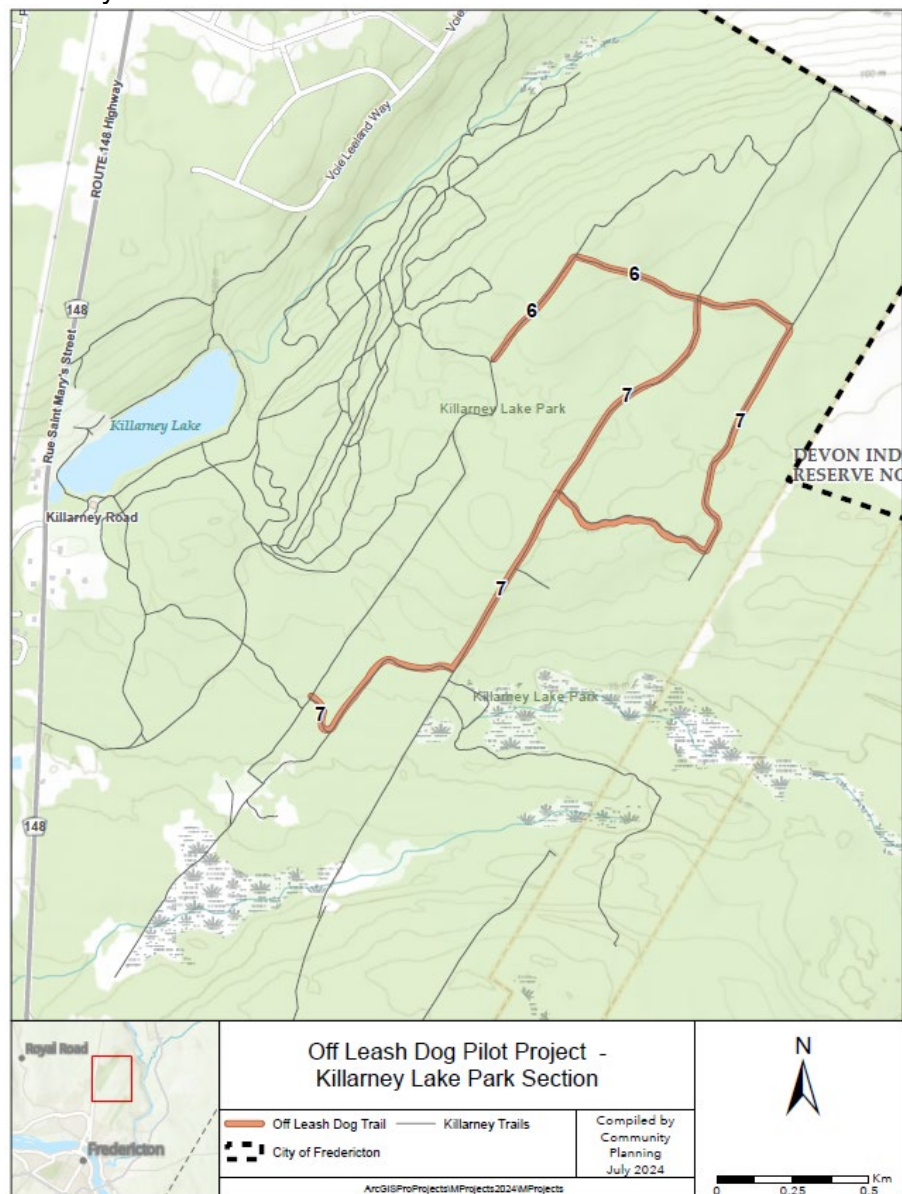
The City currently has fenced off-leash dog parks at the Grant-Harvey Centre and on Cityview Avenue. Installation of additional fenced dog park areas within the downtown are in progress. Additionally, as outlined in the above resolution, City Council has directed staff to identify opportunities for designating areas as off-leash for dog walkers.

DISCUSSION:

The City is growing and densifying, and the number of dogs in the City is increasing. Additional amenities may be needed that enable dog owners to exercise their dogs. Existing off-leash dog parks are heavily used and may not be a good fit for some dogs. The concept of unfenced off-leash dog trails exists in many communities including Hanwell, Saint John, and Halifax. Where permitted, off-leash dog trails are typically located within municipal parks in a designated area that is clearly signed so users are aware they are entering and exiting an ‘off-leash dog area’. Preliminary research indicates that off-leash dog trails are highly desired by dog owners and can work well when all users are properly informed.

Staff have met with the Fredericton Trails Coalition which recommended locations for off-leash dog trails. These recommendations include portions of Trails #6 and #7 at Killarney Lake Park as shown in the map below. Staff feel this location is well suited as an initial location for off-leash dog trails given their separation from busier trails closer to the lake. Should City Council wish to provide off-leash dog trails, staff suggest initially introducing the concept as a pilot project which will allow staff and Council to assess the operational feasibility and public response to off-leash dog trails. Staff, in collaboration with the Fredericton Trails Coalition and other stakeholders, are continuing to assess other off-leash trails areas for Council’s consideration pending the outcome of the Killarney pilot, including possible options for a larger fenced, wooded off-leash area.

Killarney Off-Leash Trail Section:



If approved by Council, the pilot project would run from May 2025 to October 2025 on the above trails. Information about the pilot project would be shared with the public through various forms of social media and with signage. Best practices identified through a preliminary jurisdictional scan would be employed including: 1) posted informational signage that denotes where users are entering/exiting a shared, off-leash area; and, 2) 'rules' signage aimed at ensuring the safety of all trail users (e.g. only allowing dogs off leash that have strong recall behaviour, dogs with dangerous behaviour history are prohibited, picking up after your dog, ensure dogs are licensed and vaccinated, carry a leash and use it when needed, don't approach off-leash dogs, etc.).

In addition to the Fredericton Trails Coalition, staff have had preliminary discussions with the Wostawea Ski Club regarding the pilot project. Wostawea expressed concern related to the potential for conflicts between skiers and dogs. Staff note that the pilot concept is designed for non-winter months to ensure these concerns are mitigated. Additionally, any year-round solutions considered following the pilot will seek to avoid these potential conflicts. Upon completion of the

pilot, staff would undertake a public consultation process to assess resident feedback that will help inform next steps. Staff also continue to assess other off-leash trails areas for Council's consideration pending the outcome of the Killarney pilot, including possible options for a larger fenced, wooded off-leash area.

It is noted that it is difficult to suggest trail options that are away from people, residences, and nature. Therefore, for City Council's awareness, staff note that 'off-leash' means dogs will travel in and through natural areas adjacent to the pilot trail sections. This can cause damage to the natural environment and disturb wildlife. Additionally, while the pilot will be monitored, the pilot is not proposed to include dedicated enforcement. Any issues or complaints will be reviewed and addressed as required.

Pending City Council's direction, staff will prepare by-law amendments, signage and a communications plan during the winter months to facilitate a pilot launch in early May.

At this time, staff are seeking City Council's direction regarding the introduction of off-leash dog trails in the City in the form of a pilot project as outlined above.

- **FINANCIAL:** Costs associated with this pilot would be limited to communications and signage, and covered through the current operating budget.
- **LEGAL:** To ensure proper enforcement, amendments to the by-law are required. The Legal division will work with the Recreation & Culture division and other divisions as required to prepare by-law amendments for City Council's review and consideration. While acknowledging that municipalities across the country have developed off-leash dog trails, the City's insurance provider has advised that the City proceed with caution on this matter. It was noted that consideration should be given to proximity to public facilities including schools, playgrounds, and sports fields, and that risk management best practices be employed including signage that makes users aware they are entering an off-leash area and which identifies rules for all users.
- **COMMUNICATIONS:** The Recreation & Culture division will work with Corporate Communications and other divisions as required for educating and informing the public about the pilot, and engaging the public for feedback following the completion of the pilot.

Does this proposal move the City of Fredericton closer to its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction targets of 50% reduction by 2030 and net-zero by 2050 in line with the City's Corporate Energy & Emissions Plan and/or Community Energy Emission Plan?

- ☐ Moves us towards GHG reduction targets
- ☒ No change in GHG emissions
- ☐ Moves us away from GHG targets but there are trade-offs with other Council or Municipal Plan priorities (*identify which priorities*)

Does this proposal improve the City of Fredericton's resilience to the impacts of climate change in line with our Climate Change Adaptation Plan?

- ☐ Moves us towards climate resilience
- ☒ No change in resilience
- ☐ Moves us away from climate resilience but there are trade-offs with other Council or Municipal Plan priorities (*identify which priorities*)

SPOKESPERSON: Meredith Cooper, Manager, Policy & Strategic Planning

Prepared by: *Meredith Cooper, Manager, Policy & Strategic Planning*

Approved by: *Dave Seabrook, Director, RTC*

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Admin Report_Off-Leash Dog Trails Pilot.docx
Attachments:	- Off-Leash Dog Trails Pilot_Final Sept 17-24.pptx
Final Approval Date:	Sep 19, 2024

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Seabrook, David

Hart, Steven