

Report on Public Consultation on dogs in High Park

A brief history of the off-leash area

The current off-leash area was established in 1996 in part to shift off-leash activity from the west side of the park into an area that would benefit from increased user presence. With the exception of fencing to control expansion of nature trails, there has been little attempt at controlling the effects of off-leash activity. Increased use in recent years has led to increased conflict between dog-owners, expanding restoration efforts and park programs.

Public Opinion Survey (530 surveys in total: online, email and paper surveys)

The typical park user is a resident of Toronto, between the ages of 35-49, and lives within 15 minutes of the park. They arrive in the park by car or by foot and spend roughly 1 to 2 hours in the park. On average dog-owners use the park daily, or several times a week, whereas other park users tend to use the park weekly or several times a month. For the latter, exercise and relaxation is the major reason for their visit, followed shortly by enjoyment of nature.

The response of dog-owners was strongly in favour for most dog-related questions with slightly less support for the notion that professional dog-walkers are identifiable. Problem areas include not knowing where to report problems, a lack of signage and information about the off-leash area. Dog-owners don't feel dogs have an impact on the natural environment or facilities and have positively impacted other park users and safety. Comments from dog-owners tended to strongly support High Park and highlight the benefit to owners, dogs and the community as a whole of the off-leash area and dogs in the park.

The response of other park users was positive toward the off-leash area but negative towards dogs in the park on the whole as well as the ability of dog-owners to follow the off-leash rules. Other park users know where the off-leash area is, feel it is the right size but would like more fencing and definitely more enforcement. These users don't know where to report problems and feel dogs negatively impact all aspects of the park (natural environment, facilities, park users and safety). Comments from other park users highlighted the significant problem of off-leash activity outside of designated areas, the lack of control by some dog-owner and inadequate enforcement.

Overall the comments section of the survey highlights the polarized views of park users regarding dogs with comments equally condemning and supporting off-leash dog activities. Common comments by both groups included the added value of the off-leash area to the park, increased safety of dogs, the feeling of community, inadequate signage, problem cyclists and a need for increased commitment from the City.

Observational Surveys (counts of park users and dog activity)

Based on limited observational counts, dog-owners represent ~25% of all park users with overall rate of non-compliance of 19%. Non-compliance varies significantly depending upon the area of observation from as high as 39% (TTC loop) to close to 0% (Grenadier parking lot). Additional observation at different locations throughout the year will increase the usefulness of this data and allow for targeted education and enforcement.

Impact Statements for HPCAC Stakeholders.

The impact of dogs on HPCAC stakeholders is as varied as the opinions of park users, from little impact for park programs to severe impact for the natural environment groups. Common suggestions include increased signage, enforcement and education of park users about off-leash area and the natural environment. Park programs tend to have problems with uninformed and/or problem dog-owners rather than off-leash area; whereas natural environment groups tend to support limiting the size and location of the off-leash area to alleviate damage. The K9 committee provided several potential solutions to mitigate damage by off-leash dogs and conflict with park users. Overall there is agreement for the need to balance recreational use and environmental sustainability for all groups.

Update on City of Toronto Policy's dealing with Dogs and City Parks**City of Toronto – People, Dogs and Parks policy (passed by City council in July, 2007)**

The People, Dogs and Parks policy establishes criteria for dog off-leash areas in City-owned parks, green spaces, waterfront areas and alternative sites. The policy outlines a protocol for the establishment of off-leash areas, the responsibilities of off-leash committees, exclusion areas as well as a monitoring and dispute resolution process. The document is strongly worded towards protection of natural habitats, responsible dog-ownership and achieving community consensus. Dog-owner must form an association and provide a proposal for the establishment of an off-leash area, which will be reviewed by PFR staff. Each off-leash area will have to abide by conditions of use established in consultation with dog-owners, PFR staff and the community, with a PFR-backed dispute resolution and monitoring process to handle conflicts. Additional training for Bylaw enforcement officers and additional staff were originally called for in this policy, subject to City's current budgetary approval. Implementation of the policy is expected in early October, 2007.

Under the current policy, although High Park would be grand-fathered it would still be subject to review by PFR staff. Staff will work with the HPCAC and community to make adjustments to the area in order to improve overall functionality, including fencing, seasonal adjustments and alternate locations. The new policy and the existing High Park off-leash area conflict in several areas, include Spring Road, portions of nature trails and Dog Hill. High Park would likely be considered a low priority site for immediate assessment, given the well established and organized nature of the HPCAC which is seen as an excellent vehicle for dealing with problems.

City of Toronto – Dog Walker Permit Policy (passed by City council in July 2007)

The commercial dog walker permit policy establishes regulations regarding commercial dog walkers, including permit requirements, a visible license system, and increased responsibility on dog-walkers. The policy is currently delayed during implementation as the City waits for a response from the province about changes to the Bylaw. Under the proposed policy, dog-walker would be required to wear a visible permit number when walking more than 3 dogs (maximum of 6), ensure all their dogs are licensed with the City as well as be capable of demonstrating to Bylaw officers, that all dogs are under their control (ie. recall/control following two opportunities). Commercial dog-walkers will be required to obtain \$1,000,000 in liability insurance, pay a fee of \$200 and are subject to a list of exclusionary regions and fines similar to the People, Dogs and Parks policy. This policy is expected to address some of the problems High Park has experienced with dog-walkers in the past.

Please email k9@highpark.org for full copies of the survey reports and impact statements

Summary of Park Users opinions on the High Park off-leash area

Majority Response

Size of the off-leash area	All park users	Just Right
	Other park users	Just Right
	Dog owners	Just Right

Amount of Fencing

All park users	Just Right
Other park users	Just Right/Not Enough
Dog owners	Just Right

Information and signs

All park users	Not enough
Other park users	Not enough
Dog owners	Not enough/just right

Enforcement

All park users	Just Right/not enough
Other park users	Not enough
Dog owners	Just Right

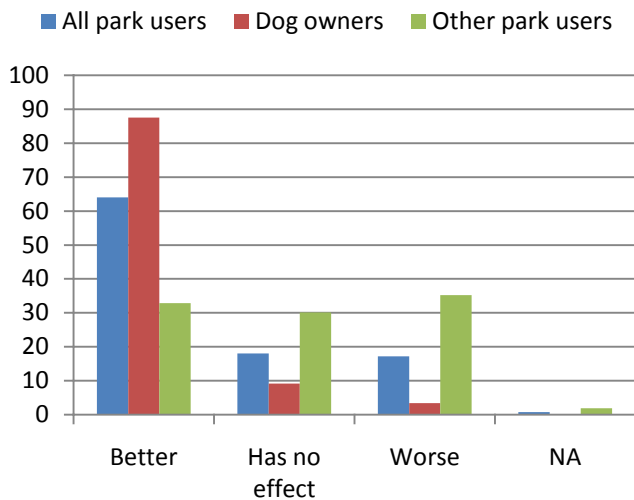
Having off-leash area make me want to visit the park

All park users	More often
Other park users	No effect/less often
Dog owners	More often

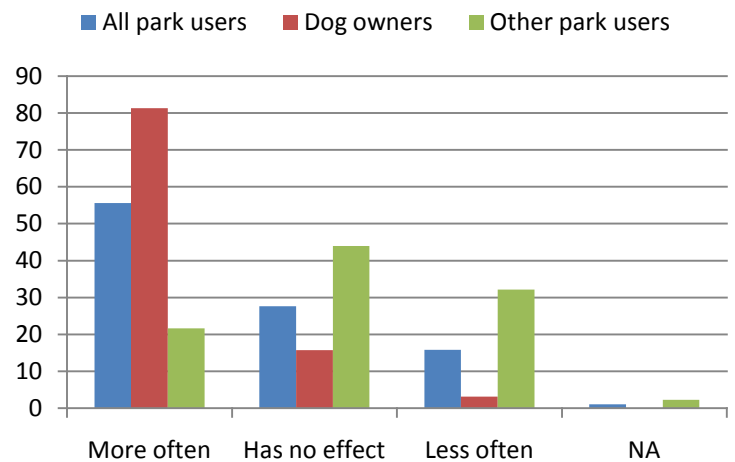
Off-leash area makes my park experience

All park users	Better
Other park users	Better/worse
Dog owners	Better

Dogs off-leash makes my park experience

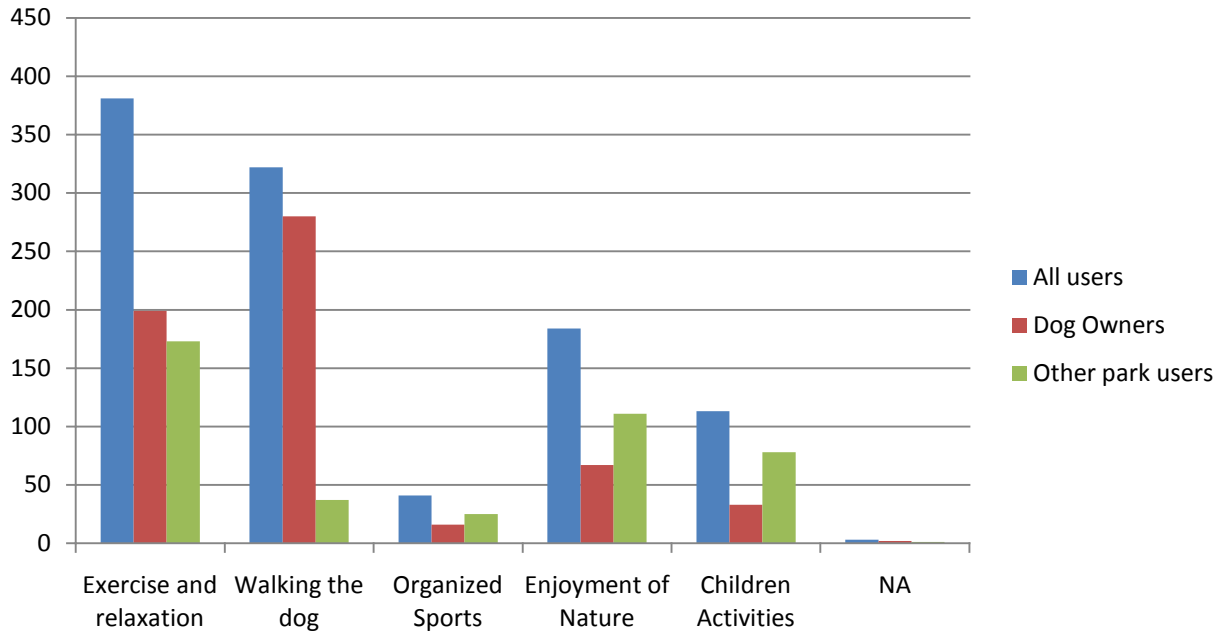


Having dogs off-leash makes me want to visit the park



Park Usage and Impact

Purpose of park visit

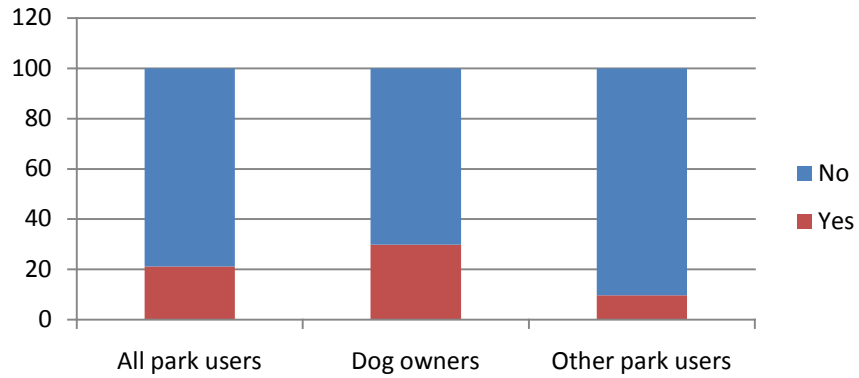


Rating the impact of Dogs

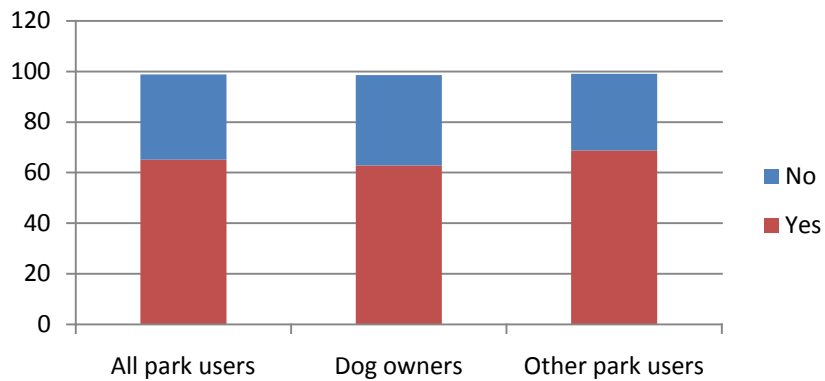


Communication

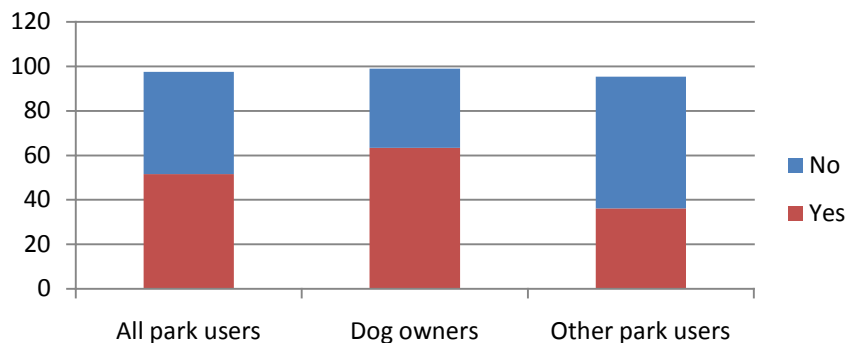
I know where to report problems



Have you heard of HPCAC?

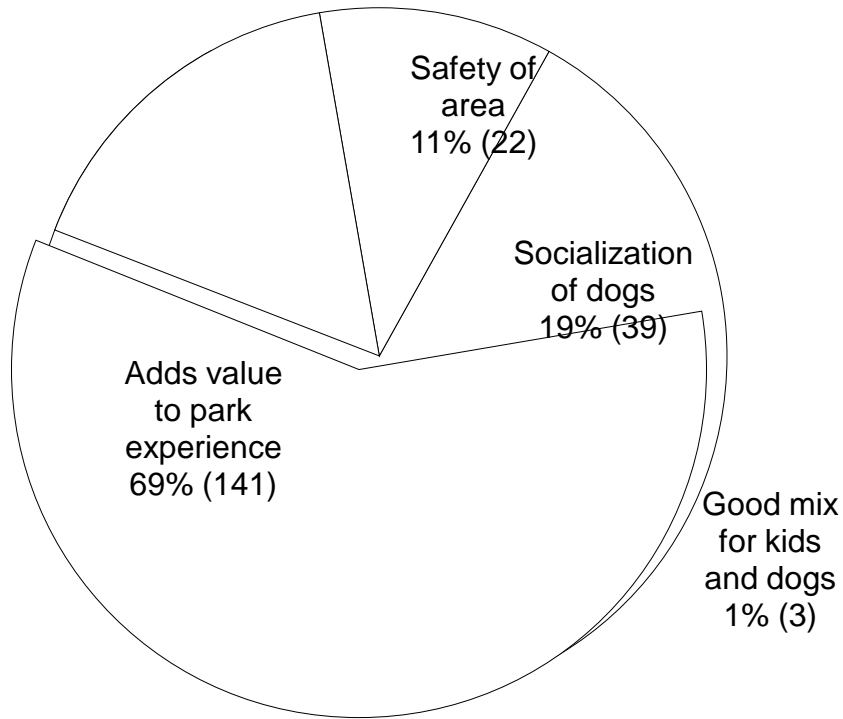


Are you aware of the K9 committee?



Summary of comments section of survey

Positive aspects about dogs in the park



Negative aspects about dogs in the park

