

Edmonton

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPER ESTABLISHMENT OF OFF-LEASH AREAS

City of Edmonton

CONTENTS

- 1 | 04 **BENEFITS OF OFF-LEASH AREAS**
- 2 | 05 **CHALLENGES OF OFF-LEASH AREAS**
- 3 | 06 **TYPES OF OFF-LEASH AREAS**
- 4 | 08 **DISTRIBUTION OF OFF-LEASH AREAS**
- 5 | 09 **PLANNING GUIDELINES**
- 6 | 12 **DESIGN GUIDELINES**
- 7 | 17 **REFERENCE MATERIALS**



BENEFITS OF OFF-LEASH AREAS

1.0

Approximately one out of every three households in Edmonton have a dog. In fact, there are now more dogs than children in Edmonton! Many dog owners consider their dogs to be a part of the family and want to provide safe and fun opportunities for both their dogs and themselves to exercise and interact with other members of their community. There are many benefits of having a community off-leash area.

Within the Off-Leash Area:

- + Provide a place for both dogs and their owners to interact and connect with other members of their community. Themed parties, social media pages, and dog playdate groups have been formed by many off-leash area visitors to increase the sense of community within the park.
- + The presence of off-leash areas can help to deter crime and other undesirable activities. Dogs need to be exercised every day, regardless of the weather and even on the coldest days, dogs and their owners will visit off-leash areas.

In the Community:

- + Most responsible dog owners would prefer to exercise their dogs in a safe place. Off-leash areas help to reduce instances of dogs being off-leash in parks, playgrounds, school yards, sports fields and sidewalks.
- + Dogs that are exercised appropriately usually show fewer undesirable behaviours while out on walks and at home. Off-leash areas can help to reduce unwanted behaviours such as barking and aggression towards other dogs or people.
- + The presence of dog owners within the off-leash area can be a deterrent for vandalism and other crime in the area.
- + Provide a place for dog owners in the community to form friendships. In many cases, these friendships extend beyond the off-leash area and help to build a sense of belonging and connectedness in the larger community.

CHALLENGES OF OFF-LEASH AREAS

2.0

There are a few challenges that come along with off-leash areas. These can be mitigated by working closely with the City and community members:

Within the Off-Leash Area

- ✦ The accumulation of dog waste either on the ground from dog owners not picking up their dogs waste or within waste bins can create issues with smells both within the off-leash area and to surrounding areas. Clear signage about expectations as well as a waste management plan can help to alleviate these concerns.
- ✦ Some dogs are not well suited to visit off-leash areas. Lack of early dog socialization, previous negative experiences with other dogs or a lack of clear rules and boundaries from the owner can increase the probability of the dog having negative reactions to other dogs and result in conflicts between owners. Providing signage about expectations and the opportunity for dog owners to learn about dog behaviour can reduce these challenges.

In the Community:

- ✦ Some dogs will bark while playing and this can create noise for nearby residents. Using vegetation, landforms or solid fencing to mitigate noise conflicts can help to reduce concerns from nearby residents.

Careful planning and design of off-leash areas are critical to ensure that the benefits far outweigh their challenges. The guidelines within this manual will provide best practices for planning and designing effective off-leash areas.

TYPES OF OFF-LEASH AREAS

3.0

Edmonton's [Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy](#) has created four categories of off-leash areas. District and River Valley / Ravine off-leash areas would typically be established by the City of Edmonton. However Neighbourhood and Neighbourhood Fenced off-leash areas can be the appropriate size and scale for many communities. The table below summarizes the various types of off-leash areas.



TYPES OF OFF-LEASH AREAS (CONT.)

	Neighbourhood Level Off-Leash Area		District Level Off-Leash Area	River Valley and Ravine Off-Leash Area
	Off-Leash Area	Fenced Dog Park		
General Description	Unfenced area that serves residential neighbourhoods within walking distance.	Fenced area that serves residential neighbourhoods within walking distance.	A destination off-leash area	Shared-use and relatively undeveloped with special measures to protect wildlife and river valley or ravine ecosystems.
Fencing/Boundary Strategy	Generally considered an unfenced area however selective fencing may be considered depending on site adjacencies and environmental considerations.	Fenced dog parks at sites with incompatible adjacencies such as high traffic, adjacent park uses such as playgrounds, environmental considerations or within demand for dedicated fenced areas.	Selectively fenced on a case-by-case basis.	Selectively fenced (wildlife friendly fencing) on a case-by-case basis.
Single/Shared Use	Shared Use	Priority off-leash use	Shared use	Shared use
Target Service Area	+/- 20 minute walk (1.67km)		+/- 20 minute drive (~16.67km)	No target
Amenities	Standard amenities	Standard amenities	Could contain special amenities	Standard amenities
Recommended Size	From 0.2 ha (0.5 acre) to 2 ha (5 acres)		From 2 ha (5 acres) to 4 ha (10 acres)	Sites based on River Valley planning objectives
Establishment Strategies	Developers and/or City of Edmonton	Developers and/or City of Edmonton	City of Edmonton	City of Edmonton
Examples of Existing Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Parkview + Cromdale + Fraser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Paisley + Manning Village + Alex Decoteau 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Lauderdale + Jackie Parker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Terwillegar + Hermitage + Buena Vista

DISTRIBUTION OF OFF-LEASH AREAS

4.0

During the creation of the [Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy](#), Edmontonians were engaged to provide their feedback on the appropriate distribution of off-leash areas. The majority of respondents were willing to walk 20 minutes, or approximately 1.67 km to reach an off-leash area.

An interactive map of current off-leash areas is available on edmonton.ca/offleash.



PLANNING GUIDELINES

5.0

Selecting the right location for an off-leash area is the most important consideration when establishing an off-leash area. Appropriate sites can help to connect community members together and serve as a recreational hub for the surrounding neighbourhood. Potential issues within the off-leash area can be mitigated by ensuring that uses of land adjacent to the off-leash areas are appropriate. The table below provides a summary of potential land use adjacencies and mitigation measures.

<i>Adjacent Land Use/ Activity</i>	<i>Recommended Minimum Setback or Mitigation Measures</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Residential Areas (to property line) + Cemeteries 	100m unless separated by solid fencing, landforms, landscaping or other mitigation measures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Arterial or Collector Roads + Golf Courses 	50m unless separated by fencing or other mitigation measures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Public areas that attract high concentrations of people ie. sites that host events or are tourist destinations 	50m unless separated by fencing or other mitigation measures such as temporary fencing during events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Shared-use trails, equestrian use 	25m unless separated by fencing. Fencing is strongly recommended.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + School grounds and associated walking routes + Playgrounds and associated walking routes + Pools and Splash Pads + Sports Fields + Designated Picnic Sites 	25m buffer zone from activities; off-leash area is to be partially or completely fenced if the site is within a shared-use park with any one of the activities. A band of shrub planting is recommended outside of the fenced area to deter children from coming up to the fence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Natural areas, wildlife corridors and environmentally sensitive areas 	Will be considered on a case-by-case basis. May include seasonal or time restrictions, wildlife friendly fencing or other mitigation measures.

PLANNING GUIDELINES (CONT.)

5.0

PARKING

Parking for off-leash area users is another important consideration. For Neighbourhood Level off-leash areas, off-street parking is not required, however, the implications of on-street parking should be considered. Off-leash areas that are established in areas without other nearby off-leash areas, should anticipate that dogs and their owners from areas outside of the 20 minute walking radius will drive to the off-leash area. It is recommended that nearby on-street parking that does not impede access to adjacent residences or businesses be present.

WINTER CONSIDERATIONS

Regardless of the weather, dogs and their owners will visit the off-leash area. Taking advantage of the wind blocking effects of any nearby buildings, trees or land forms and ensuring that the majority of the off-leash areas is outside of any building shadows would greatly increase usability throughout all seasons. The off-leash area should be designed to maximize exposure to sunlight during winter days to encourage year around use. Coniferous vegetation on the north and west sides of open outdoor spaces can help to protect areas from prevailing winter winds.

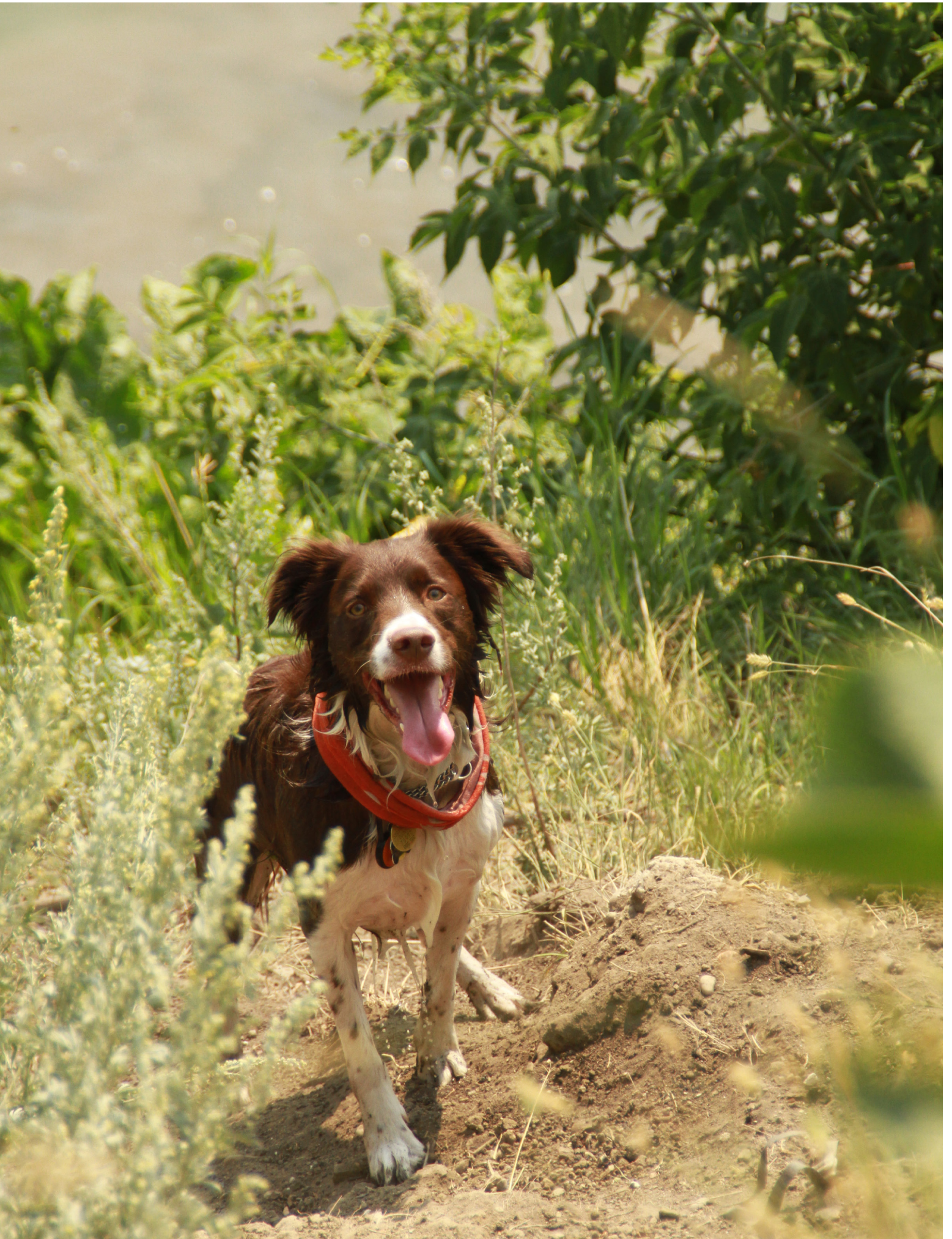
Locations for snow storage both from clearance of trails as well as the double gate entry system must be considered when designing the off-leash area.

FIT WITHIN PARK SITE

The City's [Green Network Strategy](#) establishes that open spaces should be multifunctional and integrated into the overall public/active transportation and trail system to enhance livability and preserve and sustain Edmonton's environment. This means that it might not be appropriate for smaller park spaces to be devoted to a single use such as an off-leash area. Off-leash areas might be more appropriate to be integrated within larger park sites. Concept planning for the entire park site and integration of the off-leash area into the function of the greater park space should be considered.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

It is expected that some level of public engagement is undertaken to demonstrate need and inform design, size, location, etc of the off-leash area. Public engagement should include consultation with existing residents. In new communities without residents, neighbouring communities, including established community groups such as community leagues must be consulted. Whenever possible, off-leash areas should be considered during the initial planning stage of communities.



DESIGN GUIDELINES

6.0

For the safety of both dogs and their owners, there are many considerations when designing an off-leash area. The City of Edmonton has a commitment to providing accessible recreation opportunities including within open spaces. The [Access Design Guide](#) provides recommendations to ensure universal access. Below are some important design factors and recommendations specific to off-leash areas.

AMENITIES

All off-leash areas must have at least a small amount of open space for dogs and their owners to interact with others. Neighbourhood level off-leash areas typically are predominantly open space. Protection from the sun and wind are important to ensure the safety of dogs and their owners in all seasons. Trees should be planted and maintained to ensure clear sightlines to all areas of the off-leash area at all times.

Standard Amenities

All off-leash areas must include a set of standard amenities. These include:

Waste Bins, these can be in-ground or above ground and located within the off-leash area on ground with no more than 1% slope, at least 3m away from any fencing.

Waste Bag Dispensers must be located at each entrance into the off-leash area. Larger off-leash areas may require additional waste bag dispensers within open space or on trails. Standard model for waste bag dispensers within the City of Edmonton is Practica, Item #201.

Signage must be present at all entrances into the off-leash area as well as on maintained trails. Current sign templates are available from the Dog Off-Leash Coordinator at offleash@edmonton.ca

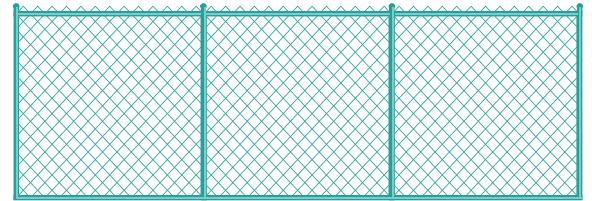
- ✦ Etiquette signs must be displayed at all entrances which includes a heads up map of the off-leash area clearly illustrating boundaries. The responsibilities of dog owners and a number for reporting enforcement or maintenance concerns must also be present on the sign. Etiquette signs must be 60cm x 75 cm. Shared use paths, bike routes, parking lots, washroom facilities, adjacent roads and 'you are here' icons should also be depicted on the map.
- ✦ Entering/leaving off-leash area signs must be displayed on all trails passing through unfenced off-leash areas. Leash Your Dog signage must also be present on all gates leaving fenced off-leash areas. Entering/leaving off-leash area signs must be at minimum 30 cm x 45 cm.
- ✦ If the off-leash area has a designated parking area, signage must be present at the entrance to the designated parking to indicate that dogs must be leashed in the parking area.

DESIGN GUIDELINES *(CONT.)*

Clear Boundaries are required for all off-leash areas, both for the safety of dogs and awareness of their owners. Boundaries can take three forms: hard, soft or mixed.

Hard Barrier

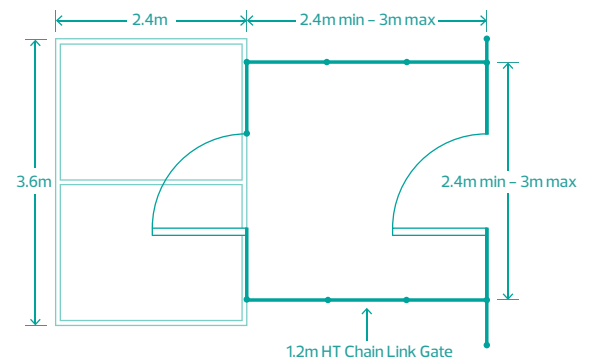
- + Provide a physical barrier that dogs cannot pass through. Generally, this means fencing.
- + Hard barriers should separate off-leash dogs from incompatible or sensitive adjacent land uses where setbacks or other mitigation strategies aren't feasible.
- + Hard barriers should be 1.2m (4') tall with double entry gates.
 - + All off-leash areas fully enclosed with hard barriers are required to have double gate systems for entryways to prevent the escape of off-leash dogs.
 - + Entrances should include a minimum 2.4m x 2.4m vestibule area with 1.2m double access gates. Vestibules should be no larger than 3m x 3m to prevent use of this area as a separate off-leash area. Storage of snow cleared from the double entry gate should be considered during design.
 - + The vestibule area must have concrete surfacing to ensure safe entry into the off-leash area.
 - + An additional area minimum 3.6m x 2.4m extending into the off-leash areas must have concrete surfacing to allow the safe entry of park users with mobility devices or strollers.
 - + Signage and other amenities such as notice boards or dog bag dispensers can be placed within or adjacent to entrance areas.



Hard Boundary (Fence)

Benefits: solid transparent physical boundary to prevent movement of dogs out of the off-leash area

Tradeoffs: limits access into the park to designated entryways



DESIGN GUIDELINES (CONT.)

- ✦ All fencing and gates must be 1.2m (4') chain link (9 gauge prior to black vinyl coating).
- ✦ Access for service vehicles through a 3m wide swing gate system must also be provided.
- ✦ Fencing surrounding the off-leash area should limit acute angles wherever possible as dogs can be pinned into these corners and react defensively.
- ✦ Gaps between fencing, gates and ground should not exceed 12cm (5") to prevent the escape of small dogs.

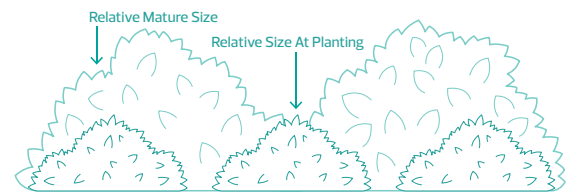
Soft Barrier

- ✦ Soft barriers form a visual boundary for both dogs and their owners but generally do not restrict the passage of dogs through the barrier.
- ✦ Soft boundaries are recommended where incompatible site adjacencies are not present and integrate the off-leash area into the surrounding site.
- ✦ Soft barriers can be created through the use of vegetation (hostile or otherwise), landforms such as berms, or other materials.

Mixed Barrier

- ✦ Mixed barriers can be used where there is need to prevent the free movement of dogs into a particular site adjacency but not all land adjacent to the off-leash area.
- ✦ Typically mixed barriers consist of sections of fencing with areas of soft barriers

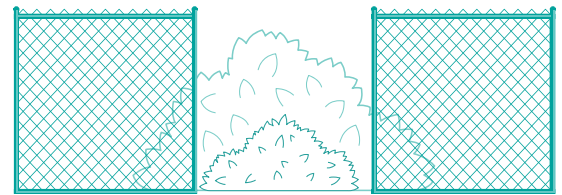
Benches should be provided adjacent to all off-leash areas. Benches should be ergonomic to allow comfortable seating and be anchored to the ground to avoid overturning ([Access Design Guide p.28](#), [Landscape and Design Standards Vol.5 pg. 142](#))



Soft Boundary (Planting)

Benefits: plant material is a natural barrier that can contribute to the biodiversity of the park

Tradeoffs: will potentially still allow dogs to move outside of the designated off-leash area into the alley to the west, especially when plant material is establishing, and can restrict sightlines to and from the park.



Mixed Boundary (Fence and Planting)

DESIGN GUIDELINES *(CONT.)*

Enhanced Amenities

Off-leash areas can include various design elements to provide added amenities or activities for off-leash area visitors.

- ✦ Enhanced amenities are funded and maintained by development partners and could include: washrooms, seating areas, drinking water and/or dog fountain, natural agility equipment, art installations, dog wash station, notice boards, mix of conditions (forest, field, etc), a separate area for small dogs, or shelter structures.
- ✦ Lighting should be strongly considered for extending use of the off-leash areas to winter and evenings. Solar lighting could be considered.
- ✦ Some enhanced amenities may require maintenance agreements with the City of Edmonton when enhancements are outside of the ability of the City of Edmonton to maintain

Accessibility Considerations

Circulation

- ✦ Off-leash areas, especially entrances, can be overwhelming for some dogs and their owners. Ensuring that the off-leash area is designed to draw dogs and their owners away from entrances is essential to reduce the potential for conflict.
- ✦ Sightlines should be preserved wherever possible. Off-leash areas should not include large hills or valleys where dogs can be out of their human's sight for extended periods of time.
- ✦ Trees must be maintained to have branches no lower than 1.2m (4') from the ground. Shrubs should not exceed a height of 1.2m (4').
- ✦ Primary trails within off-leash areas should be universally accessible, with a minimum width of 1800mm and a maximum slope of 1:20. In smaller off-leash areas, a trail may not be feasible.

DESIGN GUIDELINES *(CONT.)*

- ✦ All trails shall be designed with a maximum 2% crossfall, to avoid puddles and ice build-up.
- ✦ Surfacing of trails should be proportional to their intensity of use and operational requirements.

Surface Materials

- ✦ The selection of surface materials should be guided by intensity of use, site drainage, maintenance demands, and topography.
- ✦ Small Neighborhood Level fenced off-leash areas (less than 0.2ha) must be surfaced with a surface profile of 100 mm of road crush topped by 50mm 10mm- tumbled crush.
- ✦ Minimum slope of 1% should be present throughout the off-leash area. Areas that are likely to have water pooling should be avoided.
- ✦ Off-leash areas should not be established where there is a high likelihood of large scale erosion.

Vegetation

- ✦ Shrub beds must not be located within off-leash areas. Trees planted within the off-leash areas must be staked and hoarded until fully established.
- ✦ For Recommended Tree and Shrub Species, see Approved Species List- [Design and Construction Standards Landscaping Vol. Appendix E](#).
- ✦ Fruiting trees, including horse chestnut must not be planted within off-leash areas or where the fruit/nuts are able to fall into off-leash areas.
- ✦ Naturalized areas can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Contact Information:

For more information about design and planning of off-leash areas, please contact the Dog Off-Leash Coordinator at offleash@edmonton.ca

REFERENCE MATERIALS

7.0

[Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy](#)

[Design and Construction Standards Vol. 5 Landscaping](#)

[Access Design Guide](#)

[Winter Design Guidelines](#)

[Complete Streets](#)

[Breathe, Edmonton's Green Network Strategy](#)

[Urban Parks Management Plan](#)

[Animal Control and Licencing Bylaw 13145](#)

