

What We Heard Report Temporary Off-Leash Pilot Program

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INTRODUCTION:

As part of the Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy (2016) and Implementation Plan (2017) to lead the direction of off-leash areas in Edmonton, the Temporary Off-Leash Pilot Program was created to investigate the methods of establishing off-leash areas to help meet neighbourhood demand, as well as to encourage the use of otherwise underused existing infrastructure.

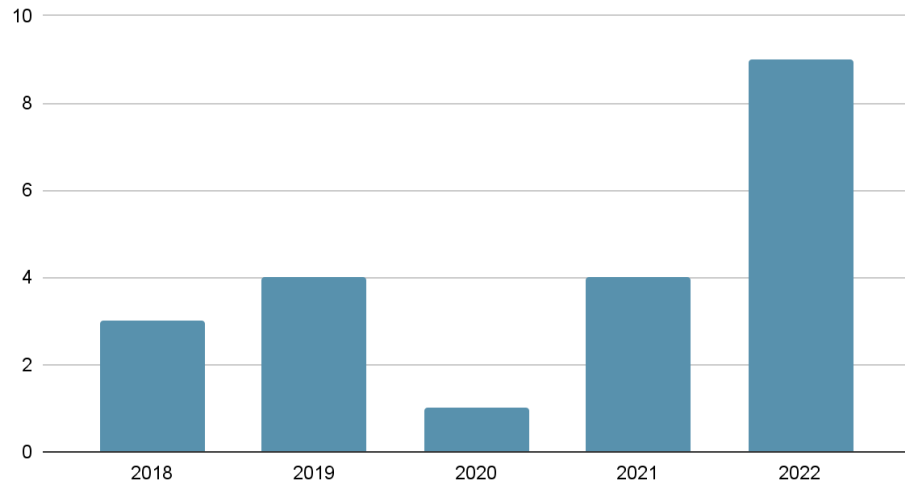
Through the Temporary Off-Leash Pilot Program, Community Leagues have been able to apply to designate their fully enclosed areas (tennis courts, rinks, etc.) for use as an off-leash area from May - September. The pilot program was launched in 2018 and based on the highly political nature of the off-leash areas in Edmonton, especially as it relates to budget, an evaluation of the program has been requested by City Council and directed by City Operations leadership to continue the program on an ongoing basis.

As equity and accessibility are key priorities for the City of Edmonton, GBA+ analysis is a critical consideration in moving this program into the future.



Program Participation

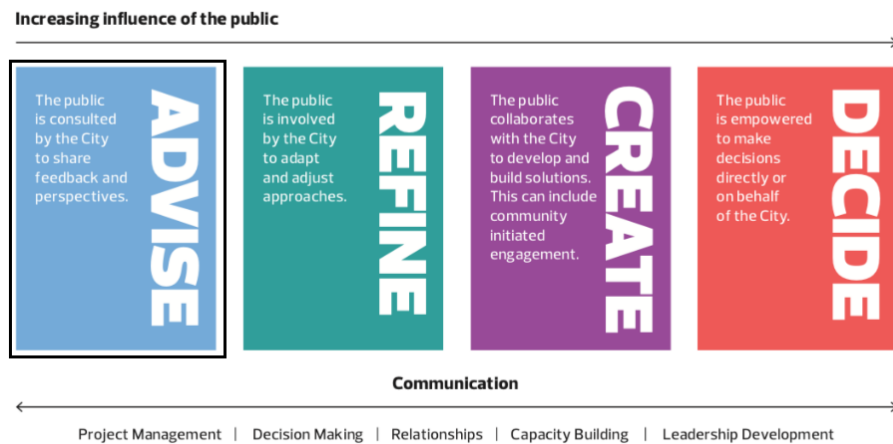
Temporary Off-Leash Pilot Program Participation by Year



Public Engagement Approach

The City’s public engagement spectrum defines the public’s level of influence in engagement processes. **The role of the stakeholders during this engagement was at the ADVISE level on the City of Edmonton’s Public Engagement Spectrum.** We invited stakeholders to share their feedback and perspectives during the pilot program review and evaluation.

Visit edmonton.ca/publicengagement for more information on the City’s engagement processes.



Who We Engaged

Seventeen Community Leagues who have participated in the program and those who have indicated an interest in the program, were invited to provide feedback as were representatives from Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues.

Internal City of Edmonton stakeholders including those from Community Standards, Neighbourhoods Recreation Coordinators, City Operations and representatives from Legal Services, were also engaged to ensure that barriers, challenges and opportunities were documented.

How We Engaged

Community Leagues had the opportunity to provide feedback through a virtual group discussion, anonymously via an interactive virtual whiteboard and directly to the Dogs Off-Leash program through email or phone.

Internal stakeholders were engaged through focused meetings, an interactive virtual whiteboard and an online survey.

What We Presented and Asked

Stakeholder engagement sessions focused on the following:

- Providing background on the history and purpose of the Temporary Off-Leash Pilot Program, including the participation rate and feedback from citizens and stakeholders since 2018.
- Informing stakeholders of the evaluation plan and timelines for the next steps with the program.
- Obtaining stakeholder feedback on their experience with the Temporary Off-Leash Pilot program and their suggestions for modifications to increase participation and better meet community needs.

We asked participants the following questions:

"The off-leash space has changed our neighbourhood for the better. Built relationships and community, made a healthier [neighbourhood]. It's been really amazing."

Representative from participating Community League

"Residents wanted it from the beginning, and further engagement has been super positive, they're taking really good care of the space. It's a real hub in the neighbourhood."

Representative from participating Community League

- What was the overall experience with the Temporary Off-Leash Pilot Program, including requirements, cost and community buy-in?
- Were any challenges, gaps or barriers the program had in place that prevented it from meeting the Community Leagues' needs?
- What made Community Leagues excited/motivated about this program?
- What parts of the program can be maintained/extended?
- What are suggestions for modifications or improvements to the program to eliminate barriers and/or better meet League/public needs?

What We Heard

The majority of stakeholders engaged supported the Temporary Off-Leash Pilot program **transitioning into an ongoing program** and recognized the value that this program provides to neighbourhoods. All Community Leagues that provided feedback were strongly in favor of the program continuing.

Positive impacts of the program were identified as follows:

- Allows Community League to provide inclusive programming for dog owners, a demographic they might not otherwise be able to include in their programming.
- Reduces illegal use of school and sports fields.
- Decreases conflict between community members over illegal off-leash use.
- Encourages off-season use of underutilized infrastructure (i.e. community rinks).
- Provides many opportunities for better/optimal use of the community-owned infrastructure.
- Safe and enclosed space for dogs and their owners within proximity of their neighbourhood to exercise and interact.

Barriers and opportunities for improvement were also identified:

- The program relies on an active and engaged Community League which has both organizational capacity and the physical infrastructure (or funds to set up temporary infrastructure) to participate. Neighbourhoods without these community resources cannot participate in the program, creating barriers in equity.

- Accessibility of temporary off-leash areas poses a significant challenge for many Community Leagues, knowing how to make spaces accessible.

Stakeholders also suggested modifications to the program:

- Provision of education and awareness resources surrounding accessibility and pet licencing.
- Provision of temporary infrastructure in the form of ramps and fencing to support accessibility.
- Expansion to a year-round program, not restricted to summer only.
- Expansion of spaces able to be used for off-leash such as temporary fenced areas.
- Timed use of off-leash space to allow Community Leagues to balance the use of the space for other activities and events.
- Rentals and subletting of off-leash space to raise funds for Community League projects and allow citizens who have dogs that require private use of the space, to be able to be included.

What Happens Next?

- Feedback from internal and external stakeholders will be incorporated into the final program, where feasible, and help guide the options and recommendations to move the program forward.
- Follow-up with stakeholders we engaged with to inform them how their feedback was used.
- As equity and accessibility are key priorities for the City of Edmonton, GBA+ analysis is a critical consideration in moving this program into the future.