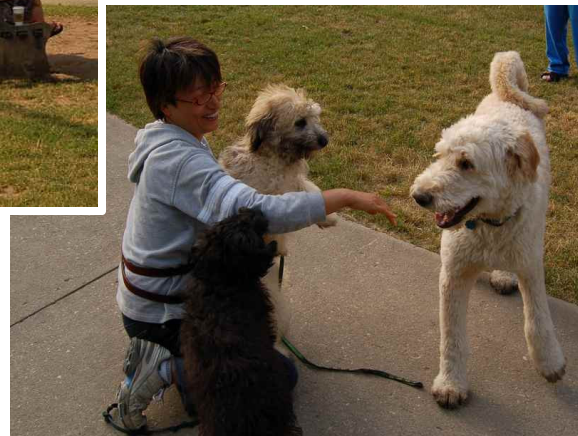


# RESPONSIBLE OFF-LEASH RECREATION IN TORONTO PARKS:

Four good reasons why



# To The Members of Toronto City Council:

June 2007

This document is offered as a reminder that any City policy must recognize that responsible dog exercise is a legitimate park use.

A vital amenity for dog owners, off-leash areas in neighbourhood parks also benefit the community at large by promoting:

- better behaved dogs,
- safer parks and neighbourhoods, and
- stronger bonds of community in our neighbourhoods.


The policy should recognize the responsibility of dog owners for their own conduct and for their own dogs, but it should not make them responsible for enforcing park rules against other dog owners.

In our view, the proposed collective permit system is unworkable, and unfair to dog owners.

## Signatures

(Name and first three letters of postal code)

(A-Cleveland)



316  
signatures  
as of July 4,  
2007

Jennifer Abramson M4E  
Gordon Adams M4E  
Roger Algie M4M  
Barbara Allan M4G  
Michelle Allard M3J  
Darla Anderson M5R  
Dana Andrews M4W  
Michael Audly M5R  
Anne Avery M5R  
Don Avery M4L  
Jane Avery M5M  
Joan Avery M4N  
Jane Aylin M4E  
Nicola Aylin M4E  
Lisa Bader M4Y

Bev Ball M6S  
Bill Ball M4V  
Marilyn Barefoot M4R  
Jennifer Bates M4R  
Jennifer Bell M5R  
Amir Benedikt M5R  
Sergio Benetti M5R  
Matthew Blecker M8Z  
Steven Bochenek M5R  
Hugh Bonney M4W  
Rob Bosomworth M5R  
Denis Bouchard M4W  
Raoul Boulakia M5R  
Valerie Bowness M5R  
Terry Buckham M5B

Jim Bunting M5R  
Sheryl Bunting M5R  
Jennifer Burns M1J  
Margaret Burtt M5R  
Lorraine Campbell M6C  
Pablo Carbajal M5R  
Lorraine Casaletto M8V  
Eugene Choi M4J  
Tracy Chong M4M  
Charles Chung M8V  
Bert Clark M5R  
Steven Clarke M4C  
Dayle Cleveland M1N

Continued, over

## Signatures (continued)

(Name and first three letters of postal code)

(Cockton – Kelly)

Allison Cockton M5R	Gwen Egan M5R	Linda Hamilton M5R
Freda Colbourne M6P	Luan Egan M4C	Peter Hamilton M5R
Allan Cole M6L	Rob Evans M2H	Diana Harding-Pretak M4S
Gabriele Cole M5R	Russell Evans M6G	Deborah Hardwick M4W
Judith Cole M5R	Jacqui Faclier M5R	Sabrina Hasham M5R
Mike Coleman M5R	Katharine Farris M5R	Brian Hawrysh M4C
Jim Collins M4L	Silvano Figaro M4X	Jan Hill M8V
Laird Comber M6S	Pam Franks M5R	Barbara Hinds M5R
Casey Conklin M4K	Jamie Gallop M6J	Ozzie Hinds M5R
Kate Corrin M5R	Jon Garland M5R	Cheryl Hines M1K
Matthew Corrin M5R	Gord Gates M4R	Jeremy Hole M5R
Lindsay Craik M5R	Bridget Gervais M5V	Ollando Hong M5T
Steven Creelman M4X	Sandra Gibson M5R	Karen Houle M5A
Rob Currie M5R	Laura Gilbert M5R	Julian Irwin M6H
Wayne Daniel M5R	Frank Goodrick M4E	Sara Irwin M4V
Ed Daniels M1L	Leslie Gorbett M8Y	Terri Irwin M6H
Brigitte D'Auzac M4Y	Cynthia Gordon M5M	Steven Jack M5R
Tom David M5R	Jennifer Gordon M5R	Michael Jackson M5R
Jean Davidson M4N	Shelagh Gordon M5M	Isabelle Jagdeo M5R
Robin Dawson M4V	Stuart Gordon M5R	Ron Jagdeo M5R
Elisabeth de Ruiters M5R	Joy Gough M5R	Jessica Jamieson M5A
Sandra deBlois M4Y	Shannon Greenwood M5A	Naomi Jardine M6J
Stephen Dembroski M5R	Michael Greggs M4Y	Sam Jephcott M5R
Dave Denbers M5R	Karen Gregory M4L	Douglas Johnson M4X
Giannina Descalzi M5R	Wendy Gross M5R	Andrew Jones M5R
Desmond Domingo M5R	Jorge Carlos Guerrero M4Y	Paul Jones M4M
Julia Dublin M5R	J Guspie M5A	David Joy M5R
Lisa Dunn M4M	Mark J.A. Hadbavny M9B	Stefania Joy M5R
Norma Dvorsky M4V	Doug Hadders M6J	Touria Karim M4S
Brittany Eccles M6G	Dougal Haggart M6H	Lori Kay M4V
Bob Edwards M5R	April Hall M6K	Jenifer Kaye M4V
Marie Edwin M4Y	Alissa Hamilton M5R	Gale Kelly M5A

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## Signatures (continued)

(Name and first three letters of postal code)

### (Kenjeev – Rutledge)

Alex Kenjeev M4Y	Vanessa Lobo M4M	Tom Muir M5V
Ann Kerr M5R	Jean-Paul Logiacco M5R	Ken Murton M5R
Erik Kerr M5R	Virginia Lowe M4M	Holly Myers M4V
Marilyn Kiewiet M4M	Kelly Lucas M6H	Gum Ng M5R
Beth Kingston M6G	Richard Lumb M4W	Cheryl Nix M5R
Tristan Kipaly M5R	Bruce MacDonald M4K	Michelle Olah M5G
Vanessa Kirk M5S	Virginia Macdonald M4M	Joshua Osborne M4R
Erin Kleinecke M5B	Maeve Maguire M8X	Claire Oswald M5R
James Kloepfer M2M	Mike Mancour M5R	Justine Pajkovic M5R
Camille Krupa M4L	Kelly Manis M4J	Anna Pascalau M4M
Glennis Krupa M4L	Sonia Marcoccia M9N	Honorie Pasika M5S
Leslie Krupa M4L	Dalia Margalit-Faircl M5R	Steven Pavlinek M4C
Grindl Kuchirka M5S	Julie Markham M5R	Rushad Pavri M2H
André La Prairie M4M	Andres Martinez M4M	Ross Peebles M5R
Maré Laende M5R	Georgie Mason M4Y	Jen Peters M4E
Graeme Laing M4T	Joe Matthews M4W	Cynthia Piccolo M4W
Michael Lam M5R	Joyce Matthews M5R	Mary Pine M6S
Alexandra Lane M5A	Shirley McAdam M5R	Susan Pollock M4M
Phil Lange M4J	Heather McAfee M4L	George Popper M5R
Larry Lavack M4P	Christine McCarthy M5A	Tom Radosevic M8Y
Natalie Lavine M5R	Andree McChesney M4P	Mary Ann Radovan M5R
Ian Lee M5R	Ian Melamud M5R	Jean Ralston M4Y
Martha Lee M5R	Taylor Meredith M4E	Tim Reilly M5R
Ted Leeb M5R	Gwen Merrick M5A	Krista Riko M5R
Sarah Lesser M5R	Ted Merrick M4L	Sigrid Riko M1N
Jennifer Levine M5R	Shirley Miller M4K	Dejan Ristic M5R
Bruce Lewis M5R	Alek Milovanovic M5R	Allison Roach M5R
Heidi Libesman M5R	Salomon Minkin M6G	Gary Thomas Roach M4R
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Eleanore Lindo M4L	Jeannie Moreland M1N	Rachel Ross M6P
Peggy Lindsay M4K	Alexandra Morin M5R	Jehred Ross M6P
Margaret Lloyd M5R	Joe Moro M6P	Robert Ruggiero M4M
Deborah Lobo M4M	Patricia Muir M5V	Margie Rutledge M4W

Continued, over

## Signatures (continued)

(Name and first three letters of postal code)

### (Ryan-Z)

Tim Ryan M6G	Lana Stermac M5R	Jullian Watkins M5R
Joy Rychlik M5R	Phil Stevens M4E	Julia Weinstein M4V
Bruce Ryder M5R	Susan Stock M4T	Philip Weinstein M5R
Peter Ryley M4E	Dana Storms M6J	Mike Wiatzka M4W
George Salac M4Y	Richard Storms M6J	Jessica Widdifield M5R
Monique Sanjari M4X	Lin Stranberg M5R	Laura William M5R
Jonathan Schwartz M5R	Holger Syme M5R	Patrick Williams M6P
Harry Sems M5R	Amar Taufique M4Y	John Wimbs M5R
Parvaneh Shademanpour M5R	Joanne Taylor M4E	Jill Witte M8Y
Alan Shapiro M5R	Paul Taylor M5R	Ellen Woodger M5R
John Shenstone M4G	Teresa Tedesco M4W	Deanne Wright M6L
Barb Sheperd M5R	Lara Teoli M5R	Sheilagh Wright M4N
Diana Shepherd M4M	Wayne Terry M5R	Katharine Wywial M5R
Dorothy Shepherd M9P	Rebecca Thomas M4N	Eri Yam M5R
Dagmar Siilats M4C	Ryan Thomas M3H	Richard Yerema M5R
France Simard M5R	Su Thomas M3H	Jessica Yong M5R
Ross Skoggard M4W	Dale Thompson M5R	Ruth Young M5R
Adam Smith M5R	Anna Tikhomirova M5R	Marie Zernask M6H
Paul Smith M4J	Doco Tomic M5R	Ted Zummach M5R
Robert Smith M4S	Tamiyo Tomihiro M5V	
Sora Smith M5R	Emily Totton M5R	<b>Total: 316</b>
Andrew Smyth M8V	Ron Totton M5R	
Nick Speke M5R	Victor Tovey M6P	
Susan Speke M5R	Christine Tyson M4E	
John Spratley M5R	Liz Upham M6C	
Suzana Spratley M5R	David Urbonas M5R	
Dorothea Stecklor M5R	John Vincett M5R	
William Stelpstra M8V	Francoise Vulpe M4M	
Simon Stengs M8V	Lynne Walker M4W	
	Leslie Wasserman M5R	

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Reason No. 1:

# Calmer, better socialized dogs

*“Dogs that exercise and are allowed to run freely are not as aggressive towards people as dogs that are under-exercised.”*

Humane Society of PEI

*“Over 20 years [NYC’s off-leash policy] has reduced the number of dog bites.”*

New York City  
Parks Dept.  
Press Release,  
May 10, 2007

Exercise is essential for the adequate socialization of Toronto’s 250,000 dogs. Regular walks are necessary, but for many dogs not sufficient exercise.

But it’s not just about burning off energy. Off-leash areas in each neighbourhood are also needed so that, through play, dogs can learn to interact peacefully with one another. Dog owners also learn and internalize responsible behaviour by meeting and observing other owners at the park.

**Off-leash areas lead to better behaved dogs, which is good for everyone.**

Reason No. 2:

# Fairness for dog owners

36% of Ontario households  
own a dog.

Angus Reid Poll,  
Apr. 9, 2007

Thousands upon thousands of dog-owning individuals and families live in Toronto. No less than other individuals and families, they are entitled to fair access to their city's parks for legitimate recreational activities.

Throwing a ball or frisbee to one's dog, and letting him or her play with other dogs, is a legitimate park use.

Dog owners, like all other park users, must act responsibly. Responsible dog owners respect park rules and are considerate of other users.

**All citizens of Toronto, including dog owners, must have the same right to enjoy the park.**

Reason No. 3:

# Safer parks and neighbourhoods

*“Allowing responsible dog owners to exercise their dogs is good for the community. Dog owners are community members who regularly visit parks and have a vested interest in keeping parks clean and safe. A constant presence, especially at night when parks are less crowded, helps keep parks and the surrounding neighborhoods safe.”*

New York City Parks Dept.  
Press Release, May 10, 2007

*“Cities with dog-friendly parks have experienced a decrease in crime in parks and their surrounding areas.”*

City of Regina Parks &  
Recreation

Dog owners are among the most dedicated users of Toronto’s parks. Morning and evening, 365 days per year, in all weather, dog owners congregate in the park to exercise their dogs.

Sometimes, dog owners are the only people in the park. At other times, they share the park with the occasional jogger, walker, tennis player, or commuter taking a shortcut. Either way, all users and neighbours of the park are safer because dog owners are in the park.

**Park and neighbourhood safety is another way in which off-leash areas benefit everyone.**

Reason No. 4:

# Stronger bonds between neighbours

*“Dog-friendly parks provide opportunities for neighbours to meet and socialize. Communities with dog-friendly parks often experience increased attendance in community events and participation among residents.”*

City of Regina Parks and Recreation

*“Dogs ... are an antidote for the human anonymity of the public places of our contemporary society. Dogs facilitate contact, confidence, conversation and confederation among previously unacquainted persons who might otherwise remain that way.”*

Robins, Sanders and Cahill study, in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography (1991)

Study after study has shown that dogs and other animals can be an extremely important source of companionship to people, but dogs also benefit society at large by facilitating interaction among people who would otherwise be strangers.

Dog ownership cuts across ethnic, religious and socio-economic lines. It eases social interaction for the shy and the isolated. When dog owners meet in the park to exercise their dogs together, they break down barriers, and build neighbourly bonds that strengthen the social fabric.

**Dog exercise in neighbourhood parks strengthens the community, which benefits everyone.**

# The City's draft policy: what's good and what's bad

## **What's good:**

- The policy recognizes the need for additional off-leash areas throughout the City. (p. 5)

Toronto needs more off-leash areas. By way of comparison, the City of Toronto has 33 off-leash areas for 2,500,000 residents, compared with Vancouver's 31 off-leash areas for 600,000 residents.

## **What's bad:**

- The policy reveals little or no awareness of the social value of off-leash dog exercise in neighbourhood parks. This is especially problematic in light of the vagueness of the suitability criteria (pp. 10, 14-15), and the proposal to apply these criteria to the reexamination of existing off-leash areas.
- The policy would make dog owners organize into groups and apply for a collective off-leash permit. The permit would be conditional on the group's effective enforcement of the park rules against any irresponsible users. (pp. 14-16)

### **The collective permit system is unfair.**

Dog owners should be responsible for their own conduct, not for enforcing the rules against others.

### **The proposed process is unworkable.**

If community consensus has been elusive to date, it will be no less elusive in the context of dozens, if not hundreds, of applications for collective off-leash permits, let alone the proposed reexamination of the 33 existing areas. The proposed process is a recipe for prolonged neighbourhood acrimony.

## References

Humane Society of Prince Edward Island: <http://www.peihumanesociety.com/park.htm>

City of Regina Parks & Recreation:  
[http://www.regina.ca/content/parks\\_and\\_rec/dogpark/index.shtml](http://www.regina.ca/content/parks_and_rec/dogpark/index.shtml)

Angus Reid:  
<http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/uploads/pages/pdfs/2007.04.09%20Pet%20Food%20Press%20Release.pdf>

New York City Parks Department Press Release: [http://nycgovparks.org/sub\\_newsroom/press\\_releases/press\\_releases.php?id=19895](http://nycgovparks.org/sub_newsroom/press_releases/press_releases.php?id=19895)

Douglas Robins, Clinton Sanders and Spencer Cahill, "Dogs and Their People: Pet-Facilitated Interaction in a Public Setting" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 20 (1991): 3-25

