

Proposed Amendments to Animal Bylaws and Commercial Dog Walking Permit Process

ISSUE

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the proposed maximum of four dogs per owner at off-leash areas and a permit process option that would allow commercial dog walkers to walk up to eight dogs at Hampton, Southwest, Sutherland Beach and Chief Whitecap off-leash areas (approved Off-Leash Areas).

BACKGROUND

History

At its February 24, 2020 meeting, City Council approved a report from the General Manager, Community Services Department, recommending approval of amendments to Bylaw No. 7860, Animal Control Bylaw, 1999 (Animal Control Bylaw) and Bylaw No. 8176, Dangerous Animals Bylaw, 2003, (Dangerous Animals Bylaw) with the exception of the addition of a four-dog limit per owner at off-leash areas. City Council requested that Administration report back on options, including additional levels of licensing, that would allow commercial dog walkers to be exempt from the four-dog restriction at off-leash areas, to allow one or more off-leash areas to be exempt from the restriction and to include commercial dog walkers in their community consultation.

At its June 29, 2020 meeting, City Council approved Bylaw No. 9710, Animal Control Amendment Bylaw, 2020 and Bylaw No. 9711, Dangerous Animals Amendment Bylaw, 2020.

Current Status

The City of Saskatoon's (City) off-leash areas are designed to be welcoming to licensed, well-behaved dogs. Currently there are no limits to the number of dogs an individual may walk at any of the City's off-leash areas and there are no formal processes specific to commercial dog walkers.

Public Engagement

In 2018, the City contracted Inshtrix Research Inc. to conduct an Animal Services Customer Satisfaction Survey to better understand dog owner use of and satisfaction with the off-leash areas operated by the City. In total, 606 Saskatoon dog owners completed the survey (332 who use the off-leash areas and 274 who do not). Within this study it was highlighted that those who do not use the City's off-leash areas most commonly state behavioural concerns with dogs in general as the primary reason for non-use.

Administration and Saskatoon Animal Control Agency (Animal Control) have received feedback both for and against a four-dog limit. The consistent message received from everyone is the support to promote safety in all situations at off-leash areas.

Administration has reviewed the proposed changes included in the recommended option for commercial dog walkers with the Animal Services Working Group and they unanimously supported the proposed changes. This group of animal experts and citizen representatives provide consultative and collaborative feedback to help guide the Administration. They support the proposed four-dog limit in off-leash areas and the creation of a Commercial Dog Walking Permit.

An outline of the proposed changes was shared with all commercial dog walkers in the city who hold a valid business license. Those walking four or fewer dogs at a time would experience no change, while those walking five to eight dogs would need to apply and be approved for the new Commercial Dog Walking Permit.

Emails requesting feedback were sent to the 20 commercial dog walking operators with registered business licenses within the city. Of these, Administration received 5 replies. Responses were provided to all replies with an invitation for further communication and feedback was considered in the development of the proposed permitting system.

Current Approach

Commercial dog walkers operating a business in Saskatoon are required to annually purchase a business license through the City. At the time of purchase, the business name and description, along with the business owner's name, mailing address and email are requested. The current cost of a business license is initially \$125, while annual renewal is \$85. No liability insurance or credentials are required in order to obtain a business license.

Currently, there is no limit on the number of dogs that may be walked by any individual, including commercial dog walkers, in off-leash areas. All off-leash area users have the responsibility of adhering to the Animal Control Bylaw and the Dangerous Animals Bylaw which are enforced by Animal Control.

Approaches in Other Jurisdictions

Approaches across the country vary (see Appendix 1). Other municipalities have:

- 1) limits to the number of dogs one is allowed to own;
- 2) differing off-leash limits set through signage at individual parks;
- 3) commercial dog walking permit systems allowing higher limits for those operating businesses; and
- 4) no limits set in place but have explored a permit system and meanwhile make efforts to control behaviour at dog parks through bylaw enforcement.

OPTIONS

Animal Services manages the eleven dog parks supporting licensed dog owners in Saskatoon. In an effort to improve the experience at off-leash areas, concerns over dog behaviour need to be considered and addressed by way of bylaw amendments and improvements to operational processes.

Limits to the number of dogs per owner at off-leash areas improves the ability for the owner to identify and clean up feces, respond to nuisance behaviours and maintain voice and sight command with each dog.

Through annual patron counts, it has been identified that usage at each off-leash area varies (see Appendix 2). Patron counts, total usable space, as well as types of usage affect the ability to more easily support larger groups of dogs. Some areas simply do not support larger groups of dogs due to mixed usage challenges, park design and sightlines.

Option 1 - Maximum of Four Dogs in Off-Leash Areas and Implementation of a Commercial Dog Walker Permit process Allowing up to Eight Dogs at Approved Off-Leash Areas

Administration has determined that in order to support safety and behavioural improvements at off-leash areas, limits to the number of dogs and the dog park locations will be dependent on whether the owner has successfully obtained the new Commercial Dog Walker Permit described in this report. This option allows owners to bring up to four dogs to an off-leash area. Commercial dog walkers who want to walk up to a maximum of eight dogs may be permitted to do so at approved Off-Leash Areas by obtaining a Commercial Dog Walker Permit.

All users including commercial dog walkers bringing a maximum of four dogs would be permitted at all off-leash areas. Those bringing five to eight dogs with a Commercial Dog Walker Permit would be permitted at Hampton, Southwest, Sutherland Beach and Chief Whitecap off-leash areas.

Advantages:

- 1) supports behavioural concerns including response time and control;
- 2) supports usage needs based on designs and capacity at specific locations;
- 3) provides a direct relationship with Animal Services, Animal Control and commercial dog walkers;
- 4) supports the citizens of Saskatoon in choosing qualified dog walkers;
- 5) provides safer limits for those using commercial dog walkers;
- 6) provides for clear photo identification of commercial dog walkers to support Animal Control in bylaw enforcement; and
- 7) supports the need for a minimum of \$2,000,000 in liability insurance, naming the City as an additional insured party.

Disadvantages:

- 1) extra financial costs for a commercial dog walkers to obtain the permit;
- 2) additional administrative, Animal Control and commercial dog walker time required;
- 3) limits options on which off-leash areas commercial dog walkers can use when they have more than four dogs; and

- 4) limits revenue potential of commercial dog walkers since they can no longer walk as many dogs at one time.

Option 2 - Maximum of Four Dogs in Off-Leash Areas

All users including commercial dog walkers would be allowed a maximum of four dogs at all off-leash areas.

Advantages:

- 1) supports behavioural concerns including response time and control;
- 2) supports usage needs based on designs and capacity at specific locations; and
- 3) provides safer limits for those using commercial dog walkers.

Disadvantages:

- 1) provides no level of identification for commercial dog walkers;
- 2) limited working relationship between Administration and commercial dog walkers; and
- 3) limits revenue potential of commercial dog walkers since they can no longer walk as many dogs at one time.

Option 3 - Status Quo, No Limits to the Number of Dogs per Owner at Off-Leash Areas and No Limits to Which Off-Leash Areas Can be Used

Maintaining the status quo at off-leash areas would leave current practises as they are with no limit to the number of dogs or to which off-leash area could be used. Outside of the required business license, there would be no further requirements placed on commercial dog walkers.

Advantages:

- 1) allows users to continue walking as many dogs as they would like while using the most convenient off-leash area;
- 2) has no impact on financial income to commercial dog walkers and their clients; and
- 3) no additional administrative or communication time required.

Disadvantages:

- 1) does not support improvement of safety and behavioural challenges;
- 2) provides no level of identification for commercial dog walkers; and
- 3) limited required communication and working relationship between Administration and commercial dog walkers.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services recommend to City Council:

1. That proposed amendments to Bylaw No. 7860, Animal Control Bylaw, 1999, as outlined in Option 1- Maximum of Four Dogs in Off-Leash Areas and Implementation of a Commercial Dog Walker Permit Process Allowing up to Eight Dogs at Approved Off-Leash Areas, and the implementation of a Commercial Dog Walking Permit process be approved; and
2. That the City Solicitor be requested to make the necessary amendments to Bylaw No. 7860, Animal Control Bylaw, 1999.

RATIONALE

Off-leash areas contribute to a sense of community, while supporting quality of life benefits for both dogs and owners. Positive experiences at off-leash areas can only be maintained if safety remains the number one priority.

A limit of four dogs per owner is proposed as it supports the ability to respond in a timely fashion. The owner can maintain control over their dogs from the point of leaving the vehicle to the point of safely departing. It has been noted by some commercial dog walkers, the Animal Services Working Group, Dog Park Ambassadors and the Saskatoon SPCA Certified Canine Behavior Consultant (Canine Consultant), having more than four dogs per owner negatively affects response time, and can be dangerous. As provided, some other cities have limits of two or three dogs off-leash per owner and therefore the four dog limit being recommended compares favorably.

To support an understanding of proposed limits being recommended in this report for commercial dog walkers, on May 26, 2020, both Animal Services and Animal Control joined an experienced commercial dog walker for a walk with 9 dogs. While mostly well controlled, Animal Control Bylaw violations also occurred. The dog walker admittedly was unable to maintain control when entering the off-leash area and was unable to pick up feces from each of the dogs, although efforts were made to pick up an equivalent amount of feces from other dogs throughout the walk.

Walking a large number of dogs requires a higher level of responsibility, takes pre-planning and experience and tests one's ability to respond in a timely fashion. To keep safety and the ability to respond to unforeseen circumstances at the forefront, the establishment of an upper limit is required. Through evaluation of the upper limits across other cities, a maximum of eight dogs in off-leash areas for commercial dog walkers is being recommended.

Allowing commercial dog walkers to have up to eight dogs at four of the five largest off-leash areas (Hampton, Southwest, Sutherland Beach and Chief Whitecap Off-Leash Areas) not only provides several location opportunities but also supports safe usage. These areas were found to be the most conducive sites based on usable space, other park uses and sightlines. Other larger off-leash areas, such as the Avalon and

Silverwood Off-leash Areas were reviewed and found unsuitable due to high patron counts in relation to usable space, site lines and mixed usage concerns.

ADDITIONAL IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

Allowing commercial dog walkers to walk up to eight dogs at approved off-leash areas creates the potential for higher usage amongst this group; however, based on past practise, these groups already predominantly use these noted areas and therefore, these guidelines should result in little change. To coincide with this, Option 1 creates a sense of comfort for off-leash area users who have expressed concerns with larger groups of dogs.

Commercial Dog Walker Application Process

As it is more challenging for a commercial dog walker to manage up to eight dogs, there is added value in ensuring they are aware of the Animal Control Bylaw and Dangerous Animals Bylaw, have proven ability to manage up to eight dogs, and have liability insurance coverage. With the support of Animal Services Working Group, the Canine Consultant and some commercial dog walkers, the recommended permit system provides a direct relationship with Animal Services and Animal Control, proof of liability insurance and a proven understanding of the Bylaws, which adds to the legitimacy and safety of a commercial dog walker operation.

In order to obtain a Commercial Dog Walker's Permit, a commercial dog walker will be required to book an appointment with Animal Control. The commercial dog walker will be evaluated on a pre-set rubric with criteria focused on safety and bylaw compliance. Those who are unable to display competency will be permitted to reapply. Those who receive bylaw violations on two or more separate occasions, while working as a commercial dog walker may have their privileges to walk five to eight dogs revoked by Administration. In order to obtain a permit, a commercial dog walker will have to provide proof of liability insurance, including a minimum of \$2,000,000 in coverage, naming the City as an additional insured party.

Proof of an active City business license, as well as payment of the application fee will be required prior to their application approval. Administration will set the application fee at an annual rate designed to recover all costs associated with administrative procedures, as well as additional time spent with Animal Control.

To support a fluid continuation of business for commercial dog walkers, it is proposed the Commercial Dog Walking Permit be a requirement starting January 1, 2021, or once the Animal Control and Dangerous Animal bylaw amendments are approved. This would allow time for commercial dog walkers to apply for and obtain a permit.

Personal information from the Commercial Dog Walkers Application will be collected, used and stored in accordance with the City's privacy, policy and confidentiality obligations.

NEXT STEPS

Subject to City Council approval of the proposed amendments, the City Solicitor's Office will attend to amending the Animal Control Bylaw and the Administration will implement the application process for a Commercial Dog Walking Permit to be available by January 1, 2021.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Depending on City Council's decision, Administration will develop a communication plan for all off-leash area users, including commercial dog walkers and Dog Park Ambassadors.

Commercial dog walkers will get a letter explaining the new process along with an application package for the new Commercial Dog Walking Permit. This application will also be uploaded to Animal Services Dog Park webpage and referenced on posters at each of the off-leash areas.

To promote general public awareness, the limits would be highlighted and referenced on the Animal Services webpage and on signage at each of the off-leash areas. Information regarding the amended Animal Control Bylaw, 1999 will be provided at all events conducted by Animal Services.

APPENDICES

1. Approaches in Other Jurisdictions
2. Off-Leash Area Volumes

REPORT APPROVAL

Written by: Jeremy Probe, Open Space Consultant, Recreation and Community Development
Reviewed by: Brad Babyak, Recreation Services Manager, Recreation and Community Development
Reviewed by: Andrew Roberts, Director of Recreation and Community Development
Approved by: Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, Community Services Department

SP/2020/RCD/PDCS/Proposed Amendments to Animal Bylaws and Commercial Dog Walking Permit Process/gs