

Dogs on Leashes in Riverbank Parks and Along Meewasin Trail

ISSUE

Administration is providing a report on the feasibility of allowing dogs on leashes in Kiwanis Park and along Meewasin Trail.

RECOMMENDATION

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

1. That the proposed amendment to Bylaw No. 7860, Animal Control Bylaw, 1999 to permit pets on-leash in Kiwanis Memorial Park, be approved; and
2. That the City Solicitor be requested to make the necessary amendments to Bylaw No. 7860, Animal Control Bylaw, 1999.

BACKGROUND

Kiwanis Memorial Park (both north and south of the Delta Bessborough Hotel – which stretches from University Bridge to Broadway Bridge) is one of four areas in Saskatoon which prohibits pets on-leash and off-leash; the other three areas being Kinsmen Park, the Saskatoon Forestry Farm Park and Zoo, and the North Swale. Kiwanis Memorial Park has been designed and maintained as a pet-prohibited park since 1982 and is currently the only riverbank park or park along the Meewasin Trail where pets are not permitted.

On March 10, 2010, Administration provided a report to the Administration and Finance Committee in response to an inquiry around pets in riverbank parks. A review of pet prohibited parks, specifically along the riverbank, was conducted through public consultation centered on gathering input through public forums and meetings with stakeholder groups. Of the 142 residents engaged in 2010, 96 (68%) were supportive of changing the bylaw to allow pets in downtown parks; however 70% of those residents were pet owners. At the time, three options were presented and City Council approved to amend Bylaw No.7860, Animal Control Bylaw, 1999 with the recommendation to remove Rotary Park and Friendship Park from the pet-prohibited list, but to retain Kiwanis Memorial Park as a pet-prohibited park.

At the August 26, 2019 City Council meeting, the Executive Director of Downtown YXE, the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID), made a request to consider amending the current bylaw prohibiting pets in Kiwanis Memorial Park. The amendment to the bylaw was noted as an opportunity to provide downtown residents/pet owners access to their neighbourhood green space and potentially attract pet owners to live downtown. Therefore, City Council directed Administration to report on the feasibility of allowing pets on leashes in all riverbank parks along the Meewasin Trail, including the

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possible impacts, both positive and negative, of amending Bylaw No. 7860, Animal Control Bylaw, 1999.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Public Engagement

Administration from Recreation and Community Development began the review in the fall of 2019, and engagement began in November 2019. This review continued into April 2020, with both internal and external stakeholders such as Parks Department, Meewasin, Saskatoon Animal Control Agency, Downtown Saskatoon Business Improvement District, Animal Services Working Group and special event organizers.

Through the balance of 2020 and early 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many public engagement activities were put on hold, recognizing that numerous stakeholders and residents would be unable to participate in the engagement process.

Administration then undertook to re-engage internal and external stakeholder as well as the community from July 2021 to September 2021 on whether on-leash pets should be allowed in Kiwanis Memorial Park (see Appendix 1).

Stakeholder Feedback

Feedback received from internal and external stakeholders showed support for permitting pets in Kiwanis Memorial Park indicating there were opportunities: for downtown residents, who own pets, to access their neighbourhood green space; to attract people with pets to downtown; to allow access for pet owners to utilize all segments of the Meewasin Trail and to improve the quality of life for residents who are pet owners.

Concerns raised by the Parks Department were related to overall cleanliness of the Kiwanis Memorial Park and adjacent trail should the owners not consistently pick up their pet's waste, and the potential for conflict with the number of special events within Kiwanis Memorial Park. Meewasin indicated they do not oppose pets on leash with the exception being that pets should not be permitted at the Meewasin Rink area and building throughout the rink operating season. Special event organizers requested temporary restrictions be possible if event organizers choose to have a pet-prohibited event. The Saskatoon Heritage Society and the Kiwanis Club of Saskatoon requested that pets should not be permitted on Vimy Memorial Bandshell due to its significance as a heritage monument, regardless if there is an event or not.

Community Engagement Survey Summary

A community survey was available from August 4 to August 27, 2021 to collect feedback. A total of 2,244 individuals participated in the community survey, with 83% of respondents being pet owners. The majority of respondents identified as residents of Saskatoon (98%). Of the 98% of respondents that were residents, 10% are business owners, 4% are property managers, 4% are involved in the tourism or hospitality industry, and 3% are event organizers.

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Downtown residents made up 9% of the responses; and 32% of respondents identified themselves as working downtown. All of Saskatoon's identified neighbourhoods were represented with the greatest number of responses coming from the Nutana, City Park Stonebridge and downtown neighbourhoods.

Also, 87% of respondents stated they regularly use or visit Kiwanis Memorial Park, with visitation being the highest and most frequent in the summer season. Of the types of activities provided, respondents stated their primary use of the site was for walking/running/cycling at 91%.

Respondents also identified some benefits to allowing pets in Kiwanis Memorial Park as it supports including pets in family outings (79%), improves the quality of life for downtown residents and visitors who own pets (73%), and connects the trails so users can continue along the Meewasin trail (72%). Respondents also identified concerns such as cleanliness of the site and owners not picking up their pet's waste (55%), nuisance/dangerous pets (32%), and mixed-use challenges with others using the park (21%).

The majority of respondents stated they strongly supported (72%) or supported (10%), allowing on-leash pets full access to the park at all times (including all trails and green spaces), which was followed by those strongly not supporting (13%) or not supporting (4%).

With the feedback received from residents and the local business community, the Administration is recommending the Bylaw be amended to permit on-leash pets in Kiwanis Memorial Park.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Subject to approval of the recommendations, the Parks Department would need to complete an assessment to determine if additional garbage receptacles would be required along the lower riverbank trail. Based on this assessment, installation of garbage receptacles would be \$2,500 per unit. If additional garbage receptacles were required, current operating costs would need to be evaluated to determine the increase to operating costs to provide increased level of service based on the additional or increased frequency of emptying the garbage receptacles.

In addition, new 'responsible pet' signage would be installed in Kiwanis Memorial Park. Existing sign inventory would be utilized and the cost for installation, approximately \$500, will be covered inside the Animal Services Operating budget. The current signage indicating No Dogs Allowed would be replaced with a Be Responsible, Bylaw No. 7860 signs.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Due to the majority of large-scale special events hosted in Kiwanis Memorial Park being fenced, Administration can permit these types of large-scale special event organizers to create temporary restrictions to making the special event area a pet-prohibited area through Bylaw No. 7860, Animal Control Bylaw, 1999, Section 11(2)(c). This clause can

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also be applied to prohibiting pets from accessing the Meewasin Rink area and building during its operating season and the Vimy Memorial Bandshell.

NEXT STEPS

Pending approval by City Council of the proposed amendment, the City Solicitor's Office will attend to amending the Bylaw, including miscellaneous housekeeping amendments to update items such as references to Schedule No. 3: Prohibited Areas for Cats and Dogs.

To promote public awareness of these amendments, they would be highlighted and referenced on the Animal Services webpage. A reference link to the revised Animal Control Bylaw would be provided. Animal Services would also replace all signage indicating No Dogs Allowed with a Be Responsible, Bylaw No. 7860 sign in Kiwanis Memorial Park.

APPENDICES

1. Pets in Kiwanis Memorial Park - Final Comprehensive Engagement Report

REPORT APPROVAL

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Reviewed by: Brad Babyak, Recreation Services Manager

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Approved by: Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, Community Services

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