



## MEMORANDUM

Date: February 25, 2016  
To: Board of Park Commissioners  
From: Holly Miller, Senior Policy Advisor  
Subject: Off-Leash Area Plan

### **Requested Board Action**

In January, 2016, the Park Board was asked to provide preliminary guidance on key policy issues related to the Off-Leash Area (OLA) Plan. That guidance was reported to Mayor Murray in a policy briefing following the Park Board input.

This update will describe the Superintendent's preliminary decisions to date in the development of the Off-Leash Area Plan. No action from the Board is requested at this time. The draft plan will be released for public review and comment in March. A public meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 14 as part of a citywide discussion about "livability" in Seattle. Thereafter, the Plan will be finalized along with a final consultation with the Park Board and transmitted to the City Council. We welcome any additional advice or comments from the Park Board.

### **Project Background**

The 2014 Adopted Budget included a City Council Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI, 69-1-B-1) regarding off leash areas (OLAs). Specifically, the SLI requested Seattle Parks and Recreation work in conjunction with the Citizens for Off Leash Areas (COLA) and other stakeholders to create a dog off leash area (OLA) master plan. The purpose of the OLA master plan is to identify a long term plan for the City's existing 14 OLAs, as well as for maintenance, acquisition, and expansion of OLA projects. In May of 2014, Parks submitted a request to wait until the Park District was approved so that funding included in the District (about \$100,000 annually) could be used to fund the master plan efforts.

### **Public Involvement Process**

In July 2015, Seattle Parks and Recreation invited Seattle dog owners to complete an online survey to understand their behaviors and needs. A link to the survey was made available through the Off-Leash Area (OLA) Strategic Plan page of the SPR website and publicized by local organizations, such as COLA, and various local media outlets. Approximately 3,900 responses were received.

In addition, Parks and Recreation held seven focus groups to hear from people interested in off-leash areas. Through a selection process to ensure representation of a variety of viewpoints, the focus groups included people who self-identified as off-leash area users, individuals opposed to dogs

off-leash in parks, and representatives of environmental interests. A facilitator led the focus group discussions aimed at:

- Learning how members of the public perceive off-leash issues;
- Exploring potential alternative designs used in other cities (e.g., hours, off-leash without a fence, using the corner of a regional park, whether we need more fenced areas);
- Identifying potential solutions/options with broad community support;
- Informing development of a set of guiding principles to assist Seattle Parks and Recreation decisions; and
- Understanding priorities for Park District funding.

Input received from the survey, focus groups, on-line comments, and emails will help inform recommendations in the draft Off-Leash Area Plan. Additional public review will occur when the draft plan is completed, currently estimated for late February.

### **Issues for Discussion**

The purpose of the February 25 Park Board discussion is to present the Superintendent's preliminary recommendations on issues related to the Off-Leash Area Plan and to receive any additional advice or comments the Park Board may wish to offer.

1. Should we allow/encourage sponsorships and advertising? It is likely additional funds for off-leash area maintenance and amenities could be raised through sponsorships and advertising at the off-leash areas. Advertising could be in the form of inward-facing signs on off-leash fences. While this type of advertising is consistent with Parks and Recreation's sponsorship policy, it would be a departure from current practice.

**At the January 28 Park Board Meeting, Board Members expressed concerns about commercialization implied by the potential posting of signs in OLA's representing donor organizations. The Superintendent conveyed those concerns to the Mayor and both the Mayor and the Superintendent will take the Park Board's concerns under advisement.**

2. Should we have unfenced, hours-only off-leash areas? Some cities have unfenced park areas which are used as off-leash areas during specified hours of the day. In these cities, hours-only off-leash areas are very popular with dog owners. Staff heard the following concerns from parks and recreation staff in other cities: 1) Because these areas are unfenced, dogs go beyond the designated off-leash areas; 2) Dog owners do not abide by the specified off-leash hours and the "hours-only" areas become all-day, unfenced off-leash areas.

**While there was some support expressed at the January 28 Board meeting for a pilot unfenced area, staff also heard concerns about conflicts between dogs and people if off-leash areas are unfenced. Based on these concerns and limited animal control enforcement in Seattle, the Superintendent is recommending against establishing unfenced, hours-only off-leash areas at this time.**

3. How should new OLAs be added to the system? One approach to create new OLAs would be similar to the approach used for other park uses, such as children's play area, p-patches and athletic facilities. This would allow for new OLAs to be added to the system through public involvement processes around new park development and/or existing park redevelopment. Another approach would be for Parks and Recreation to identify gaps in the City and pursue locating off-leash areas in these neighborhoods. No funding is available for creation of new OLA's: Park District funding will be available for increased maintenance and rehabilitation of existing OLA's.

**Consistent with the discussion at the January 28 Board meeting, the Superintendent is recommending new OLA's be added through regular new park development and/or existing park redevelopment processes. Community engagement in such processes is robust and allows community members to weigh in on specific community needs and trade-offs. Parks and Recreation can also highlight geographic dispersion issues during the planning process. Typically, when new features are added in park development/redevelopment, Parks and Recreation requests or allocates funding for maintenance in a systematic manner, thus helping to prevent further dilution of maintenance of the OLA's.**

**Also, in response to the Board's discussion about dogs being a City issue and not just a Parks and Recreation issue, the Plan will recommend exploring locating off-leash areas on non-Parks and Recreation property.**

4. Should there be a restriction on the number of dogs an individual can bring to an off-leash area? Parks staff have seen professional dog walkers bring as many as ten dogs to an off-leash area. Currently people in Seattle are limited to three dogs per household. Should this limit carry over to how many dogs a person can bring to an OLA?

Marymoor Park in King County has a large off-leash area with a three dog per person limit, plus a permit which allows professional dog walkers to bring more dogs. Should Seattle investigate/institute a professional dog walkers' permit?

**The Superintendent recommends limiting the number of dogs one person can bring at one time into an OLA to 3, the same cap the City has on the number of dogs per household. The Superintendent also recommends implementing a professional dog walker permit process, modeled on the Marymoor Park permit, with a permit fee. Seattle may want to decrease the maximum number of dogs permitted per dog walker from Marymoor's maximum of 10. Staff are consulting with COLA and professional dog walkers to recommend a Seattle maximum, bearing in mind this is a business for many individuals.**

**Additional Update**  
**Enforcement**

Beginning this month, there will be a two-person team, one Animal Control staff and one Parks and Recreation staff, patrolling parks with the sole purpose of enforcing leash and scoop laws. Funding for the team comes from the Park District's Make Parks Safer Initiative and addressed the number one complaint received by Parks: off-leash dogs in parks.

#### Budget

The Off-Leash Area Plan will review maintenance needs at the existing 14 OLAs. Funding for the maintenance improvements will be from the \$106,000 provided in the Park District's Improve Dog Off-Leash Areas initiative.

#### Next Steps

##### **February**

- Review Superintendent's recommendations with Park Board on February 25.
- Notify City Council of delay in delivery of proposed plan in response to SLI (the SLI is due Feb.29.)

##### **March**

- Release draft People, Dogs and Parks Plan
- Brief City Councilmembers on draft plan

##### **April/May**

- Conduct public meeting(s)
- Finalize plan incorporating public feedback
- Brief Park Board on final plan
- Brief Mayor on final plan
- Brief City Councilmembers on final plan

##### **June**

- Submit final plan to City Council

**Attachment:** Off-Leash Area Map

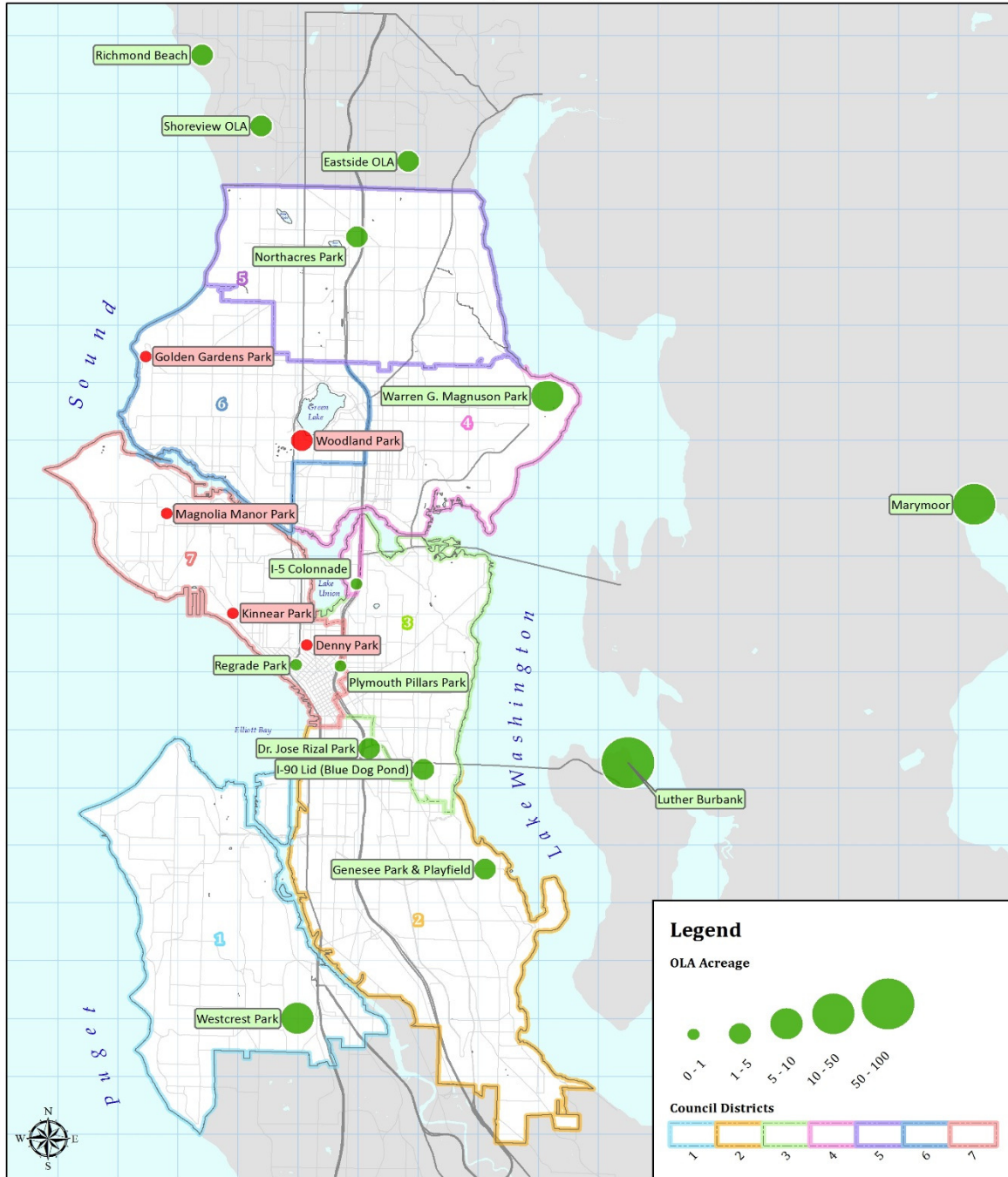
#### **Additional Information**

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<http://www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/offleash/>

Attachment 1: Off-Leash Area Map

Off Leash Area Peak/Capacity Analysis Map



1:130,000 Miles

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