



## 2021 CHUGIAK-EAGLE RIVER DOG PARK STUDY: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Description:** The following questions were received from the public during a virtual open house meeting held on April 19, 2021. Questions are in bold followed by a response from the Municipality of Anchorage Parks Department planning team.

### ***How was demand for a dog park measured?***

This study measured demand for a dog park by gathering a variety of public feedback as part of a standard site selection process. The primary methods include: 1) a survey conducted in 2017 of 329 Chugiak-Eagle River residents, 2) open houses hosted by the Parks and Recreation department to gather public comments and feedback, and 3) public presentations made to Community Councils and the Chugiak-Eagle River Board of Supervisors. Since 2016, the Chugiak-Eagle River Parks Department has received requests from current pet owners for designated space for off-leash dogs in an enclosed area year-round, especially when Nordic ski trails are open to skiers only during a significant portion of the year.

In the Chugiak-Eagle River community, park management and maintenance teams have noted 1) the heavy use (and sometimes misuse) of existing parks by dog owners, 2) altercations between dog owners and other park users, and 3) conflicts surrounding the use of park amenities. These three situations reflect a strong need for designated dog parks in the Chugiak-Eagle River community. Dog parks allow dog owners a defined space and opportunity to socialize and exercise their pets without competing with other park uses.

Further, Chugiak-Eagle River Parks and Recreation balances the feedback from the community and cross-references the perceived need for new facilities with the *Level of Service Demand (LOS)* as established by the 2006 [Anchorage Bowl Park, Natural Resource, and Recreation Facility Plan](#) (referred to as the 2006 Park Plan). The Municipality's Level of Service Standard is identified as .26 dog park facilities per population of 10,000 people. In Chugiak-Eagle River, there are currently zero (0) dog park facilities for a population approximately 37,305 people. The recommended LOS would be just under 1 dog park for this community size.

The demand for dog parks is growing both in Alaska and nationally. National dog ownership is growing, and the Trust for Public Land shows that dog parks are among the fastest growing park amenities in the 100 largest U.S. cities. The American Veterinary Medical Association estimates that there are 65,000 dogs in the Municipality of Anchorage.<sup>1</sup> Dogs can be especially important companions for older adults and people with disabilities. Providing off-leash dog areas in urban and semi-urban areas helps prevent park user conflicts and protects natural

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<sup>1</sup> Formula provided by the American Veterinary Medical Association. Available at <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/reports-statistics/us-pet-ownership-statistics>

resources by directing dog owners to safe areas for their pet to use. Research also shows that dog parks improve the health of dog owners by providing space for walking, promoting a sense of community, and offering opportunities for social interaction between neighbors.<sup>2</sup>

### ***How will this affect traffic flow with the nearby elementary school?***

Based on knowledge of how dog parks and parks in general are utilized in Anchorage, the anticipated peak use patterns of the dog park are unlikely to coincide with regular peak hours at the elementary school. Traffic flow should not be heavily impacted. Community owners have expressed concern that pet owners currently frequent the school grounds with their dogs. Adding a dog park to the nearby Peters Creek Park will provide these pet owners an identified space to take their pets while avoiding conflict with the school.

### ***Was a traffic study or land survey conducted?***

A traffic study was not completed at this stage of the process. Necessary traffic studies are typically conducted after the site selection process is complete and the site has been approved for advancement into the design development phase. Land and property boundary surveys will also be conducted by a professional surveying consultant.

### ***Will dog waste affect the Peters Creek Watershed?***

One of the criteria for site selection for the dog park study is that is that the park would be compatible with the environment. The Municipality of Anchorage Watershed Management Specialist consulted about this project does *not* anticipate any impacts to water quality in Peters Creek or Little Peters Creek related to this dog park. Several reasons were provided for this conclusion, listed below:

- The potential impacts of dog parks to watersheds and wildlife can be mitigated by installing adequate fencing, locating dog parks away from waterbodies, and providing waste management (educational signage and dog waste stations). This proposed project incorporates all these elements.

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<sup>2</sup> A.M. Toohey, G.R. McCormack, P.K. Doyle-Baker, C.L. Adams, M.J. Rock, Dog-walking and sense of community in neighborhoods: Implications for promoting regular physical activity in adults 50 years and older, *Health & Place*, Volume 22, 2013, Pages 75-81, ISSN 1353-8292, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2013.03.007>.

Solomon, Olga. "What a dog can do: Children with autism and therapy dogs in social interaction." *Ethos* 38.1 (2010): 143-166. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2010.01085.x>

Rahim, T., Barrios, P.R., McKee, G. et al. Public Health Considerations Associated with the Location and Operation of Off-Leash Dog Parks. *J Community Health* 43, 433-440 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-017-0428-2>

- Another consideration was that some pet owners currently allow their dogs to run off-leash around the open area across Peters Creek in the central section of Peters Creek Park. Dogs in this area may pose a risk to waterfowl and the creek, as that area is not fenced in. The proposed fenced site in the south section of the park property offers a designated off-leash area further away from the creek and may reduce an existing source of potential contamination.

***Will the dog park affect well systems that nearby residents use?***

Public wells in the area have been mapped and none are affected by this proposal. According to consultation with watershed management, there is no anticipated impact on water quality from the dog park. The neighboring properties along the Peters Creek Park southern boundary (across the 25 – 50' vegetative buffer) are higher in grade elevation than the potential dog park's usable area, indicating how water may flow through the area. There is one property located to the southeast of the proposed dog park site, however it is located over 400 feet away from the potential fence line of the proposed dog park. While the planning team does not anticipate any impacts to nearby residents based on these appropriate buffer zones, the civil engineer on the project will further evaluate once the project moves into site design.

***How will trash dumping be prevented?***

As is standard across all municipal park properties, a maintenance gate and parking area is provided to allow for daily staff presence. User awareness and support from the community also alerts Parks and Recreation to potential issues as they arise. With proper design, signage, and positive use from the community, dumping can be prevented or quickly mitigated.

On this property, there is existing evidence of household trash and grass clippings currently being dumped over the Lace Road embankment directly above Peters Creek, which is of key concern to park management at this time. Adding a permitted use to this area will reduce misuse of park property.

***Does this relate to the changes to the dog leash ordinance (Municipal Ordinance Title 17)?***

Not directly. The ordinance is being revised to require physical leashes (as opposed to voice command or an e-collar) on dogs in most public spaces. Providing a new dog park will increase the available designated park property where dog owners can recreate with their pet off-leash.

The Municipality of Anchorage has 7 dog parks and 1 off-leash trail, none of which are in Chugiak-Eagle River. With the new ordinance in place, this park would add approximately 3 acres of designated off-leash open space and trails in a location that residents of Chugiak-Eagle River can access on a regular basis. Additionally, by directing pet owners to a designated location for off-leash pets, there will be a reduction in conflict on ski-only trails, permitted sports fields, schools, and family-friendly play areas.

<b><i>Existing Municipal Dog Parks</i></b>	<b><i>Size</i></b>	<b><i>Metric</i></b>	<b><i>Type</i></b>
Arctic Benson Park	0.88	acres	Fenced dog park
South Anchorage Sports Park	16	acres	Off-leash dog area
	0.8	acres	Fenced dog park
Valley of the Moon	0.71	acres	Fenced dog park
Whisper Faith Kovach Park	1.52	acres	Fenced dog park
Russian Jack Springs Park	20.4	acres	Off-leash dog area
Connors Bog	44	acres	Off-leash dog area (year-round)
	209.2	acres	Multi-use dog area (dogs on leash if groomed)
University Lake Park Trail	1.1	miles	Off-leash dog trail
North Gasline Trail (Far North Bicentennial Park)	2.32	miles	Off-leash dog trail

***Are there any studies on the economic impacts of dog parks?***

Yes. Many studies show that parks generally are beneficial for local economies and individual property value because homeowners desire proximity to parks, recreation opportunities, and greenspace. More than 30 studies demonstrate how parks have a positive impact on nearby property value, especially parks with natural and scenic qualities. Research across the nation suggests that property value may increase 5% or more when located near a park.<sup>3</sup>

Dog parks are one component of a well-established park system by providing amenities for a common user group, much like a Nordic ski trail system, a sports park, or a playground. The Trust for Public Land releases an annual report about the per-capita density of dog parks in cities. The top 10 cities named in this report also have some of the nation’s most dynamic housing markets, meaning they show higher increases in home-price and home-price appreciation rates above the national average.<sup>4</sup>

***Will the dog park affect wildlife?***

Bears, moose, and other wildlife are present throughout the Municipality of Anchorage park system, which is one of the unique parts of living in urban Alaska. Avoiding significant wildlife habitat was one of the selection criteria in this study. There is no anticipated impact to wildlife in

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<sup>3</sup> Report: *Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System*. The Trust for Public Land (2009). Available at <https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe-econvalueparks-rpt.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Report: *Dog park rankings for the 100 largest U. S. cities, 2019*. The Trust for Public Land (2019). Available at [https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/City%20Park%20Facts%20Dog%20Parks%202019\\_R5\\_0.pdf](https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/City%20Park%20Facts%20Dog%20Parks%202019_R5_0.pdf)

the area. If concerns arise, careful and safe consideration in the design process can mitigate risk to dogs, people, and wildlife.

**Why are the lack of sidewalks an issue at Fire House Lane Park, but not Peters Creek Park?**

Pedestrian access was one of the site selection criteria for all 5 of the original site options. Specifically, any proposed park site within the Eagle River Core (the downtown area) should be accessible by separated pathways or sidewalks from surrounding residential neighborhoods within one mile of the park. Existing conditions at Fire House Lane Park did not meet this criterion.

Peters Creek Park does have an existing paved trail on the east side of the Old Glenn Hwy. leading up from the disc golf parking lot to Lace Rd. that could be used as access to the park. Additionally, Peters Creek Park is outside of the Eagle River Core, and more people are expected to drive to this location rather than walk. By providing a new parking lot with approximately 14 parking spaces, visitors will also be able to drive directly to the park.

**What about noise and barking dogs?**

Noise conflicts have not been reported regarding existing dog parks in the municipality. This design incorporates topographic and vegetative buffers that will reduce any potential noise impacts. To verify noise levels in existing dog parks, the planning team measured decibel levels at three off-leash locations in the municipality using iOS app *Decibel X*. Measurements between 13 and 16 minutes were taken at the source of the noise (on the park property) with park users and dogs present. All three measurements were taken on sunny days when park use would be expected to be near maximum level. Two of these parks were off-leash trail areas and one was a fenced off-leash park. The average noise level recorded during these site visits did not exceed municipal code for residential areas.

Park	Type	Date	Time	Location	Duration	Approximate # of dogs present	Average noise level (dB)	MOA residential noise standards 7am-10pm
Connors Bog	Off-leash trail	5/17	Between noon - 12:30pm	Trail walk	0h 13m	15	58.5	60 dB
University Lake	Off-leash trail	5/13	Between 4 - 4:30 pm	Trail walk	0h 16m	25	54.6	
Valley of the Moon	Fenced off-leash park	5/13	Between 4:30 - 5pm	Near fenced gate entrance	0h 14m	5	55.4	

Figure 1: Municipal dog park noise assessment

***What about erosion on the bluff above Lace Road?***

This design intends to draw users away from any erosion risk area. A proposed soft surface trail and viewpoint would follow existing contours of the site.

***Is the site big enough for this to be a destination dog park?***

The proposed fenced area is within best practice guidelines for off-leash areas (minimum 1 acre).

***The proposed site is an old gravel borrow pit –does that affect this location?***

This park's historical use as a campground and gravel road/borrow pit make it a good candidate for development on stable surface. There are no anticipated conflicts.

***Will drug use and vandalism be a concern?***

Dog parks have not been typical locations for drug use or vandalism as they are generally well-loved amenities. Adding a permitted use to the park will increase visibility (eyes on the park) and attract positive use of the space.