

## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE - JANUARY 22, 2007**

### **OFF LEASH AREA**

#### **Recommendation**

The Commissioner of Community Services in consultation with the Director of Parks Development recommend:

1. That the proposed location of an off leash area in the vicinity of Highway #7 and #27 within the hydro corridor not be pursued; and,
2. That Council directs staff to establish an Off Leash Area Working Committee that will provide assistance in the development of an off leash area; and,
3. That the Off Leash Area Working Committee be comprised of City of Vaughan residents as outlined in the Background section of this report; and,
4. That the Budget Committee considers a request for funding in the 2007 budget for \$80,000.00 for the establishment of an off leash area located centrally in the City of Vaughan.

#### **Economic Impact**

There will be an impact of approximately \$80,000.00 on the capital budget (taxation) should Council approve the capital funding request as part of the 2007 budget. Financial sponsorships secured by the Off Leash Area Working Committee may reduce this impact. If approved during the 2007 capital budget, an annual operating cost of \$5,000.00 will be required in the operating budget.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a synopsis of comments resulting from the public consultation meeting on the implementation of an off leash dog area pilot project that was held January 10, 2007 at Woodbridge Memorial Arena and to seek approval to establish an Off Leash Area Working Committee.

#### **Background - Analysis and Options**

At its May 23, 2006 meeting Council approved a recommendation by the Councillor of Ward 2, to direct staff to investigate all issues relating to the development of an off leash area in Ward 2 as a pilot project.

At its meeting of June 26, 2006, Council adopted a recommendation that staff be authorized to enter into discussions with Hydro regarding the development of an off leash area in the hydro corridor in the vicinity of Highway #7 in Ward 2 of the City of Vaughan.

At its meeting of December 18, 2006, Council deferred Clause 3 of Report No. 46, Item 3

“That pending Council approval of the Capital budget request, staff be authorized to enter into a lease agreement with Hydro One regarding developing a leash-free area within the Hydro corridor in the vicinity of Highway #7 & 27, in Ward 2 of the City of Vaughan”.

and directed staff to report back following a public consultation meeting regarding the implementation of an off leash dog area in Ward 2 within the Hydro corridor in the vicinity of Highway #7 and #27.

The public consultation meeting was held January 10, 2007 at Woodbridge Memorial Arena and approximately 100 residents attended the meeting. In addition to the attendees, "Vaughan Unleashed", a local dog advocacy group submitted a letter of support with 370 names of residents in favour of an off leash area in Vaughan. The input and comments from the residents that attended the meeting varied, however, it was evident that the off leash dog area initiative is widely supported in principle within the City of Vaughan and the residents in attendance did not support the proposed location.

A summary of the comments follows:

#### Comments in Support of Off Leash Area

- residents can safely exercise and socialize their dogs locally
- safe fenced area
- costs for the implementation are reasonable with potential for corporate sponsorship
- reduced travel times to this location over neighbouring municipalities
- improve public safety, lowering potential conflict
- opportunity for education of Vaughan Dog owners by their peers
- sharing of knowledge and teaching of responsible dog ownership
- safe place for the elderly and disabled to let their dogs/companions run and exercise freely.
- social opportunity for owners
- addresses the needs of Vaughan dog owners
- good use for underutilized land
- equalize Vaughan with other GTA municipalities by providing off leash areas
- start changing opinions and behaviours about off leash areas
- implement user fees to assist in operational costs

#### Comments Not In Support of Off Leash Area

- hydro wires a perceived health and safety concern
- safety of children an perceived problem
- access and egress on Highway #7 will be difficult
- not part of multi-function park
- isolated location
- industrial site may have environmental issues
- not attractive park setting
- not located centrally in Vaughan
- not lit for evening use (security concern)
- costs are high and should be used for more important City initiatives (garbage in parks)
- ongoing lease costs

Based on the comments, staff recommends that an "Off Leash Area Working Committee" be established to provide assistance in the development of an off leash area located within the City of Vaughan. The mandate of the committee may include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- liaison with City of Vaughan staff, local Ratepayer Associations and land owners to identify and assess potential sites,
- undertake feasibility studies,
- raise funding and in-kind donations from public and private entities, and,
- provide assistance in the development of an off leash area within the City of Vaughan

It is suggested that the Committee be comprised of the following representatives:

- City of Vaughan Council representatives (2)
- Members representing established dog owners groups (3)
- Community Representatives (5 total – 1 from each Ward). Individuals having expertise or background in the area of off leash area design/development, dog training/handling, animal health, or marketing/fundraising
- City of Vaughan staff (2) – One Parks / One By-Law

### **Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2007**

The provision of an off leash area is consistent with Vaughan Vision as it acts to serve our citizens through the promotion of community safety, health, and wellness.

### **Conclusion**

That the proposed location of an off leash area in the vicinity of Highway #7 and #27 within the hydro corridor not be pursued and that Council approve the formation of an Off Leash Area Working Committee to provide assistance in the development of an off leash area located within the City of Vaughan. The Committee will liaise with the City of Vaughan, local Ratepayer Associations and land owners to identify, assess and raise funding.

### **Attachments**

- A. Correspondence from Vaughan Unleashed (Vaughan Dog Owners Group)

### **Report prepared by:**

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Respectfully submitted,

Marlon Kallideen  
Commissioner of Community Services

## Attachment 'A'



The Vaughan Dog Owners Group (VDOG) was conceived as a response to the need for off-leash areas within the City of Vaughan where dog owners and their pets can play and socialize with like-minded people and canines. Our immediate goal is to work with the City of Vaughan to create a recreational off-leash area within the city limits. In order to achieve this goal, we will also aim to build and maintain good relationships with related organizations and the community at large.

VDOG created and circulated a petition which asks the members of the Vaughan City Council to identify and re-zone a parcel of land for use as a leash-free park for dog owning residents and their pets. The petition has generated a list of over 370 names of supporters. VDOG respectfully requests that this initiative goes forward.

Based on the needs and concerns expressed at the meeting there is a need for a joint committee with rate payers associations, government and dog owners. The role of this committee would be to do feasibility studies of other potential park sites, provide oversight, fund raising, deal with complaints and liaise with other city's dog groups.

Individuals came forward after the meeting to offer their help with this initiative. One particular area of interest is corporate sponsorship. Businesses involved with dog owners are looking to help establish a leash-free park whether it is to provide funding for fencing, a bench or bags for clean-up. It was also suggested that user fees be introduced for those that want a leash-free park. This idea was well supported by attendees.

Susan Tam  
Co-founder  
Vaughan Dog Owners Group