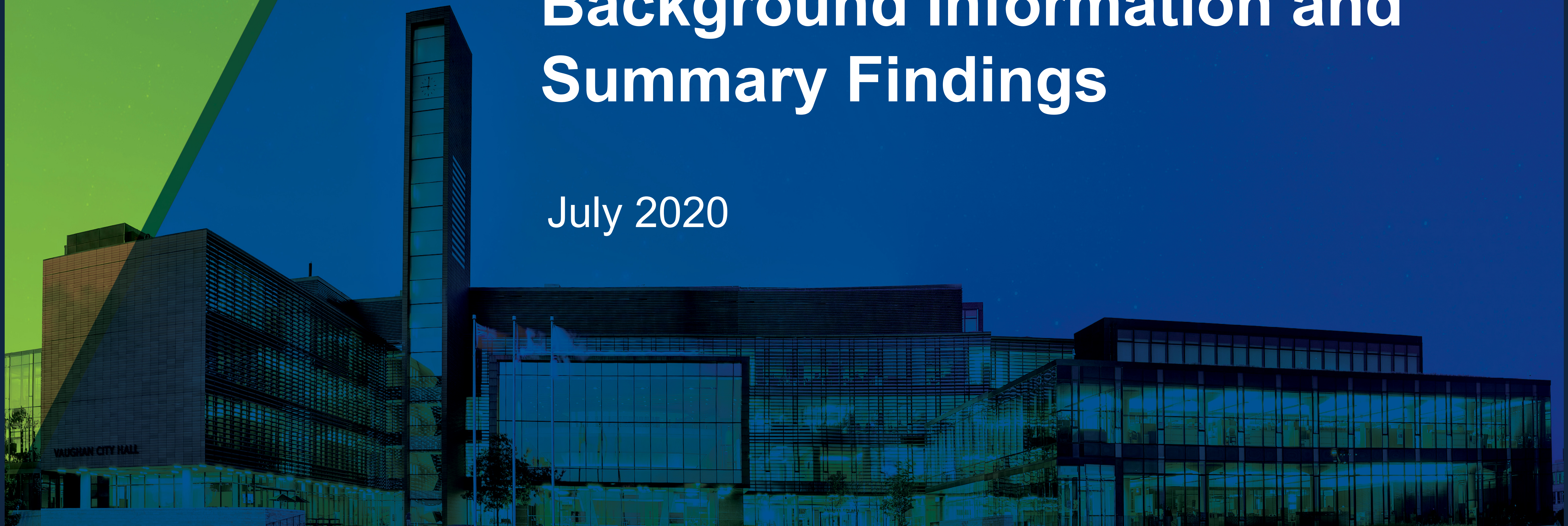




Local Off-Leash Dog Areas Strategy

Background Information and Summary Findings

July 2020



Local Off-Leash Dog Areas Strategy

In response to interest identified by the community, Vaughan started this study to define a process for developing local off-leash dog areas.

- In 2019, the City conducted research to identify best practices for local off-leash dog areas, workshops with City staff and community members to provide input on the study and community engagement activities, and launched an online survey
- In 2020, the City developed evaluation process and criteria informed by the research and engagement and completed evaluation of community-identified sites. **In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City changed the in-person public house engagement to this on-line presentation combined with an Online Self-Directed Workshop.**
- Remaining activities include gathering feedback through an online self-directed workshop, reviewing that feedback, updating the evaluation based on feedback received, and refining recommendations to be presented to City Council.



Local Off-Leash Dog Areas – Background

2009: First regional off-leash dog area opened at Concord / Thornhill Regional Park

2013: City's planning documents identify commitment for additional off-leash areas

2014: petition and resolution by City Council to identify potential locations the west of Highway 400

2016: Completed Primary Off-Leash Area selection the west of Highway 400 study

2018: Updated City planning documents identify commitment for additional off-leash dog areas (local and primary)

2019: Began working on the City-wide study and implementation plan for local off leash dog areas

Primary vs. Local Off-Leash Dog Areas

- Primary refers to areas that are larger with more amenities and may be considered a destination park that cannot be easily accessed by foot by the larger population.
- Local refers to areas located within neighbourhoods, often within existing community parks, and are typically smaller in size with fewer City amenities.



Concord / Thornhill Regional Park Primary Dog Area

Site Selection Process

- Potential locations reviewed by the City and filtered to potential locations.
- Assess potential locations against Tier 1 criteria to determine suitability, identify opportunities / advantages and challenges / disadvantages
- Advance those sites that meet the 75% threshold to the Tier 2 evaluation

- Prepare report of findings and final recommendations
- Submit report and present to Council



- Conduct research into Canadian, international and Ontario municipal best practices for establishment and operation of local off-leash dog parks
- Conduct workshops with City staff, ratepayers and dog-owners
- Develop a list of potential sites from community input (survey, open house, pop-up events, etc.)
- Develop list of evaluation criteria to assess the suitability of potential locations
- Develop and release a community survey

TIER 1 CRITERIA ASSESSMENT:

- Purpose
- Governance
- Location
- Accessibility
- Design

TIER 2 CRITERIA ASSESSMENT:

- Governance
- Accessibility
- Layout and amenities
- Cost
- Public input

- Assess short listed locations against Tier 2 criteria
- Conduct site visit to field verify evaluation
- Engage community on Recommended Local Off-Leash Dog Areas Pilot Locations
- Update evaluation based on community input



Background Research

Research looked at Canadian and International practices and innovations in developing and maintaining local off-leash dog areas.

Governance

- By-laws and policies are critical to establishing operational parameters and enforcement.
- Education is important to communicate regulations, set expectations regarding etiquette and address misinformation.
- Community involvement through volunteer groups is essential to the identification of locations and long-term operation and management of facilities.
- Well-being of people and dogs must be considered through the lens of safety and security.

Location

- Clearly defining setbacks and places of acceptable use is important to manage expectations.
- “People with and without dogs share park space more effectively in dog off-leash areas with clearly marked boundaries, since people know where off-leash dogs are allowed and to be expected.” (Source: Vancouver Park Board, 2017)



Background Research ... continued

Accessibility

- A common issue with off-leash dog areas is the ability for residents to access them. Most residents prefer the off-leash dog areas to be located within walking distances (max. 15-minute walk) to their homes or a short drive, which has become an increasing level of demand for municipalities.
- Connecting pathways to off-leash dog areas (sidewalks and rails) are important considerations.

Design

- For local off-leash dog areas the aspect of design considers parameters that fundamentally impact the design, such as size, microclimate, and drainage. The design must be inclusive, consider a wide variety of factors and suitable for dogs of all sizes. Design must also consider the carrying capacity of a site in order to create an area that will adequately serve the community.

Background Research ... continued

Layout & Amenities

- The aspects of layout and amenities for local off-leash dog parks considers fencing, gates and access, surface material, water, shade, lighting, waste management and benches. Research indicates that users typically socialize while their dogs play at the park. Adequate seating is required; considering movable chairs that can create a more comfortable atmosphere.

Cost

- The cost of developing, operating and maintain off-leash dog areas is an important consideration. Some municipalities use the licensing fees of dogs to fund the maintenance of the park and the enforcement of policies, and others require volunteer groups to raise half the funds in advance or raise funds for any non-standard features.



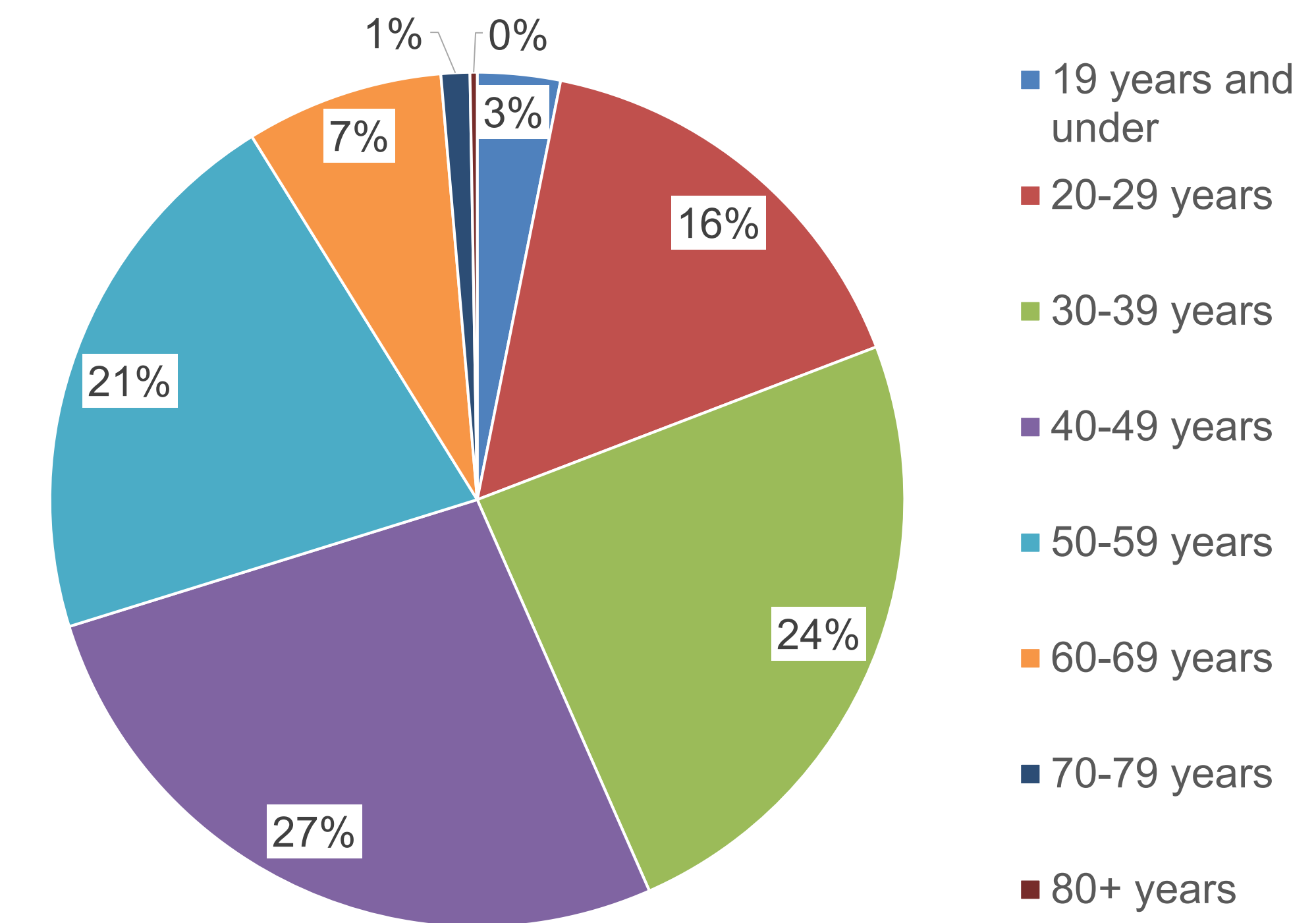
What the City Has Heard: Survey

Number of Survey Responses: **917** (As of July 14, 2020)

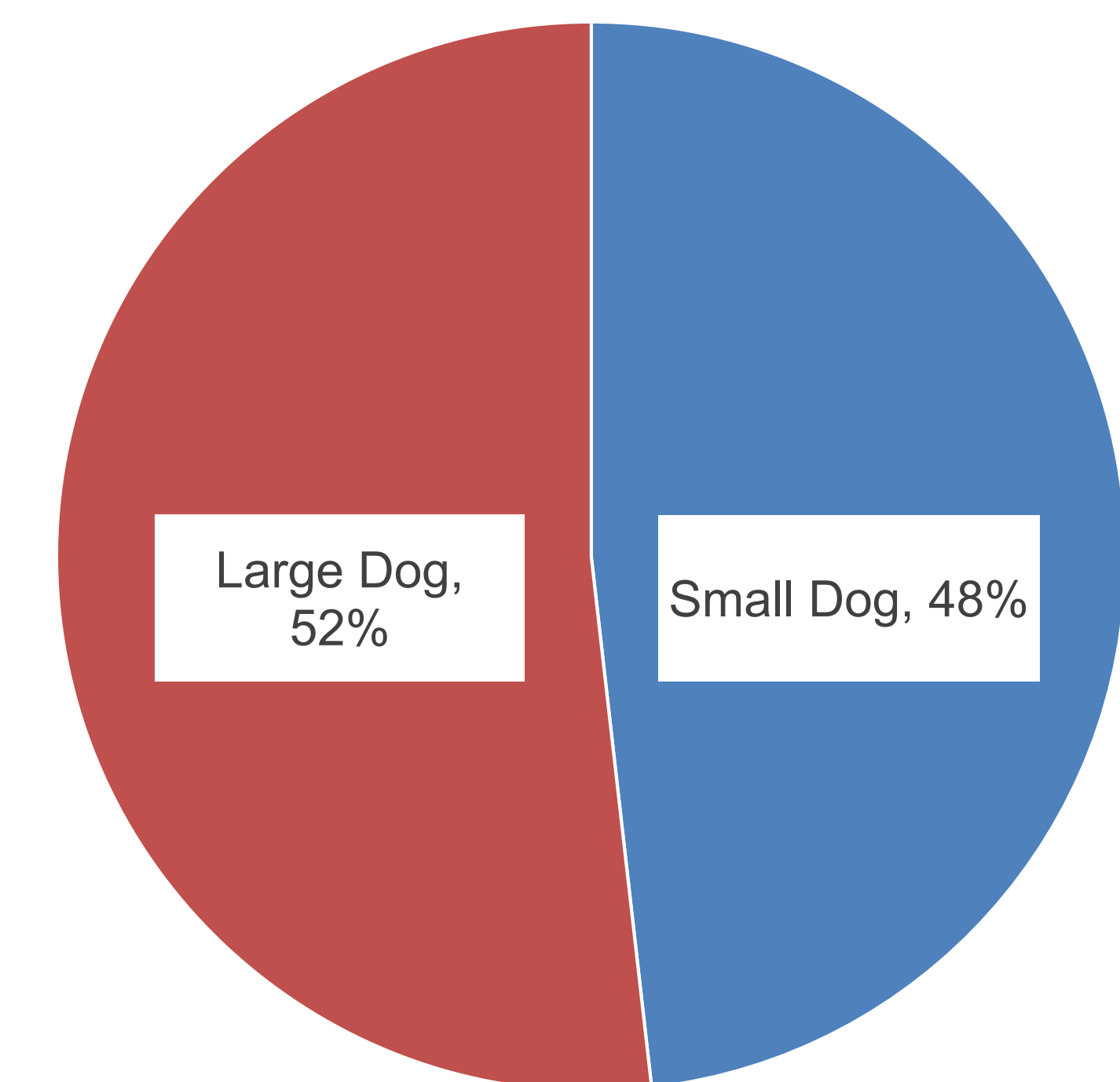
Key Feedback

- Dog owners like off-leash areas because they allow dogs to exercise, roam freely, and socialize with others within a safe, confined space.
- Areas that are nearby (or walking distance to) many potential users would be a benefit.
- Efficient by-law enforcement (aggressive dogs, inappropriate use, poop & scoop waste collection).
- The area should be maintained, and the rules enforced as much as possible
- Beneficial to have separate areas for small and large dogs.
- The area should be relatively the weatherproof and could withstand various the weather conditions (rain, snow, sun, wind).
- The area should be located away from children’s playgrounds and provide amenities for visitors to use such as water, waste bins, two-gated entry, etc.).
- Different types of off-leash areas (open space, trails, etc.) would be beneficial.

Age of Respondents



Size of Dogs Owned by Respondents

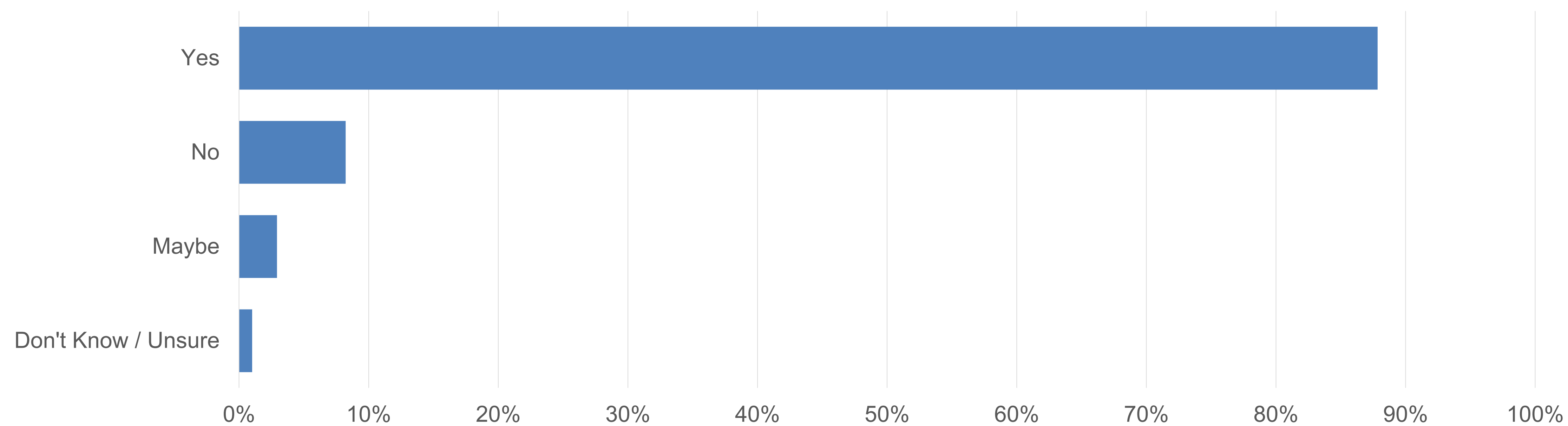


What the City Has Heard: Survey ... continued

Key Takeaway

Close to 90% of respondents support an off-leash dog area within their neighbourhood.

Would you support a local off-leash dog area in your neighbourhood?

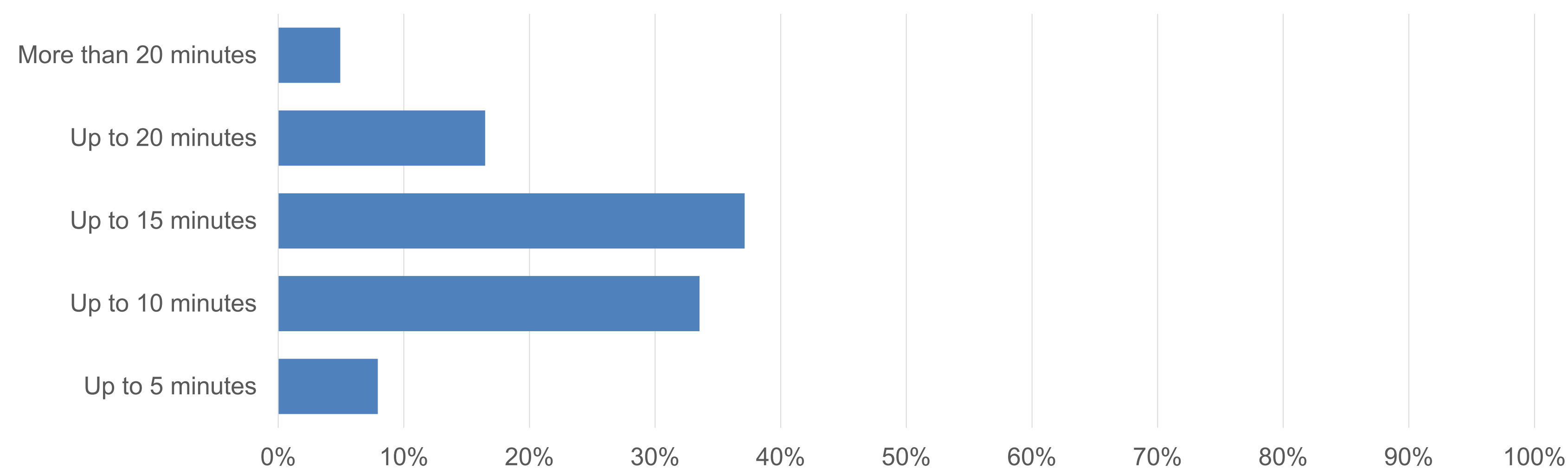


What the City Has Heard: Survey ... continued

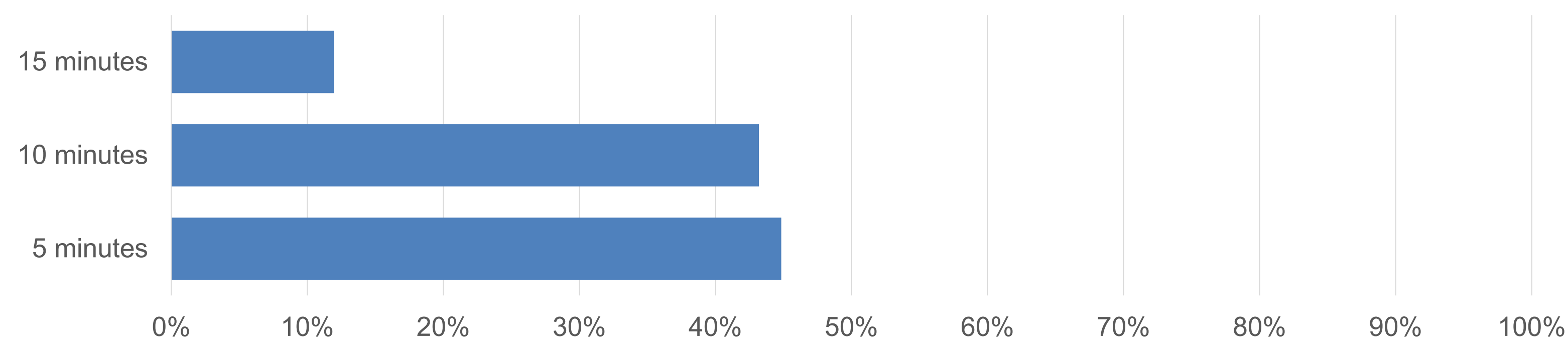
Key Takeaways

- Most people are willing to drive 5 to 10 minutes
- Most people are willing to walk up to 15 minutes
- Most people would visit in the later afternoon into the evening

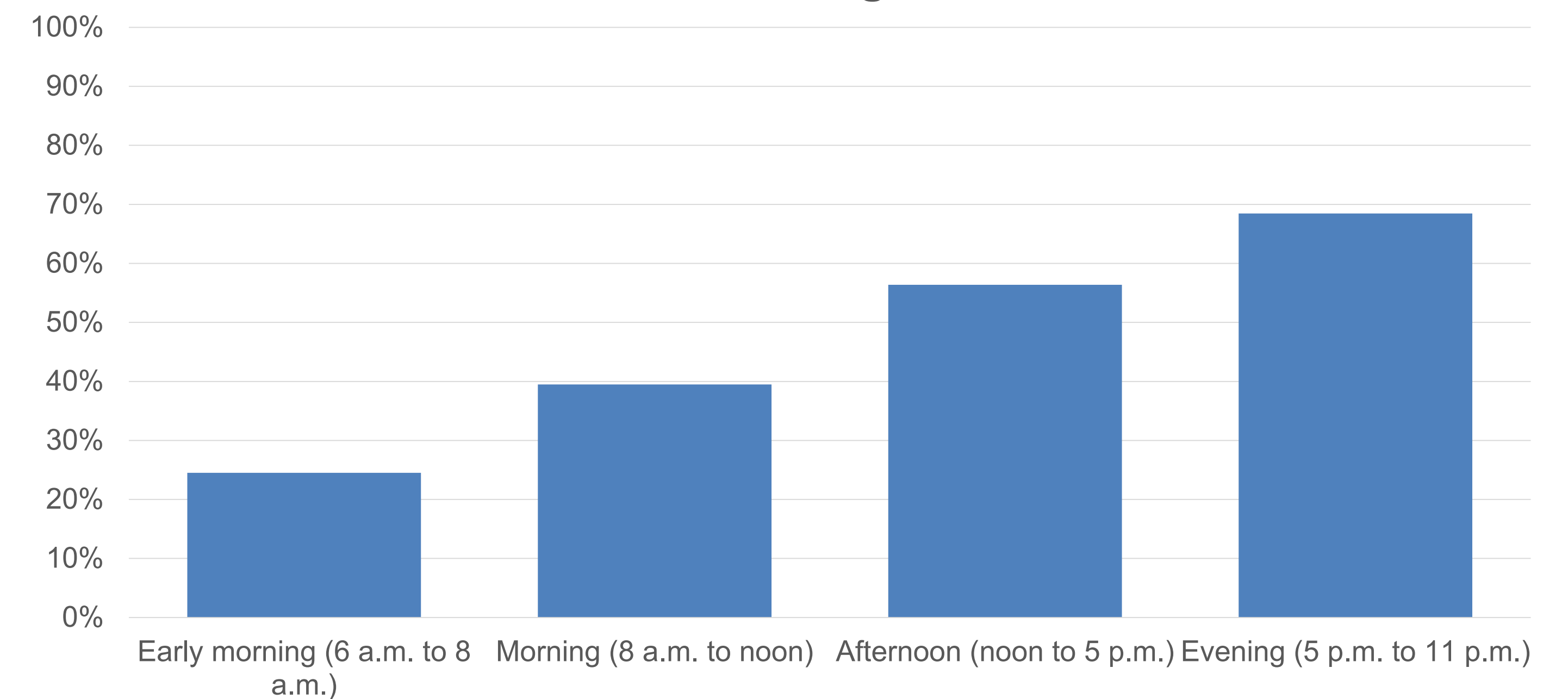
Time Respondents Would Spend Walking to Park



Time Respondents Would Spend Driving to Park



Time of Day Respondents are Most Likely to Visit an Off-Leash Dog Park

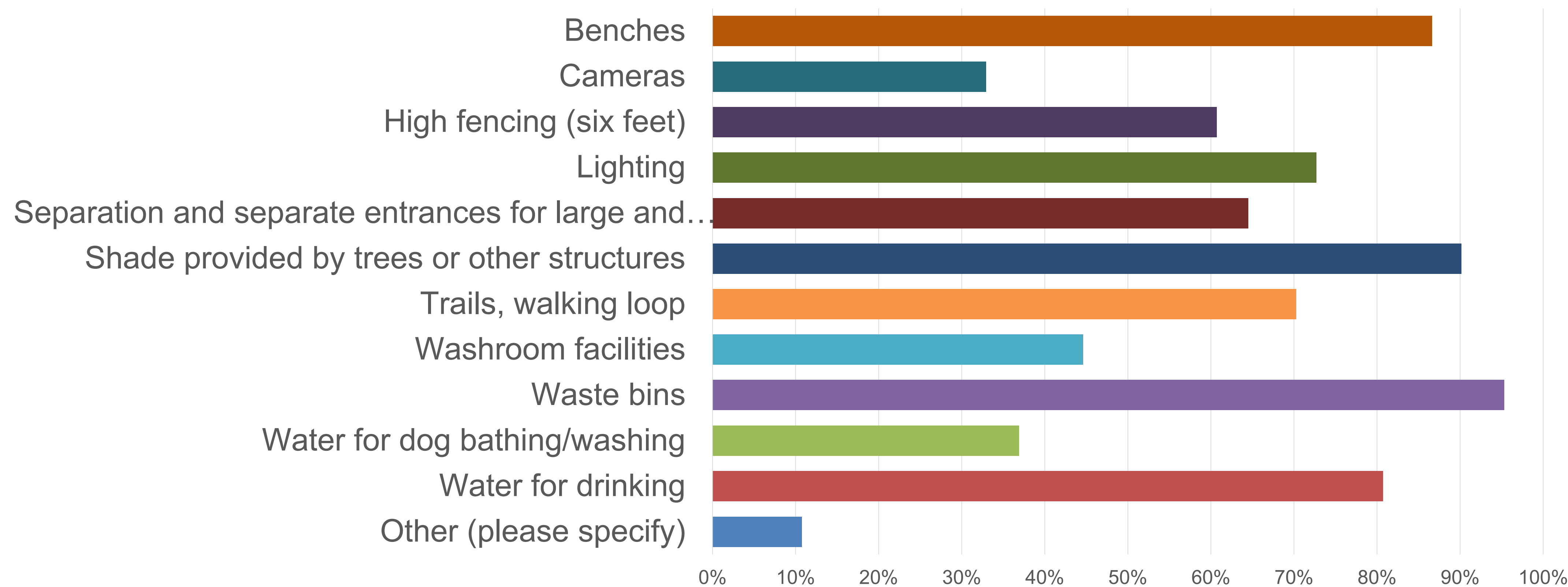


What the City Has Heard: Survey ... continued

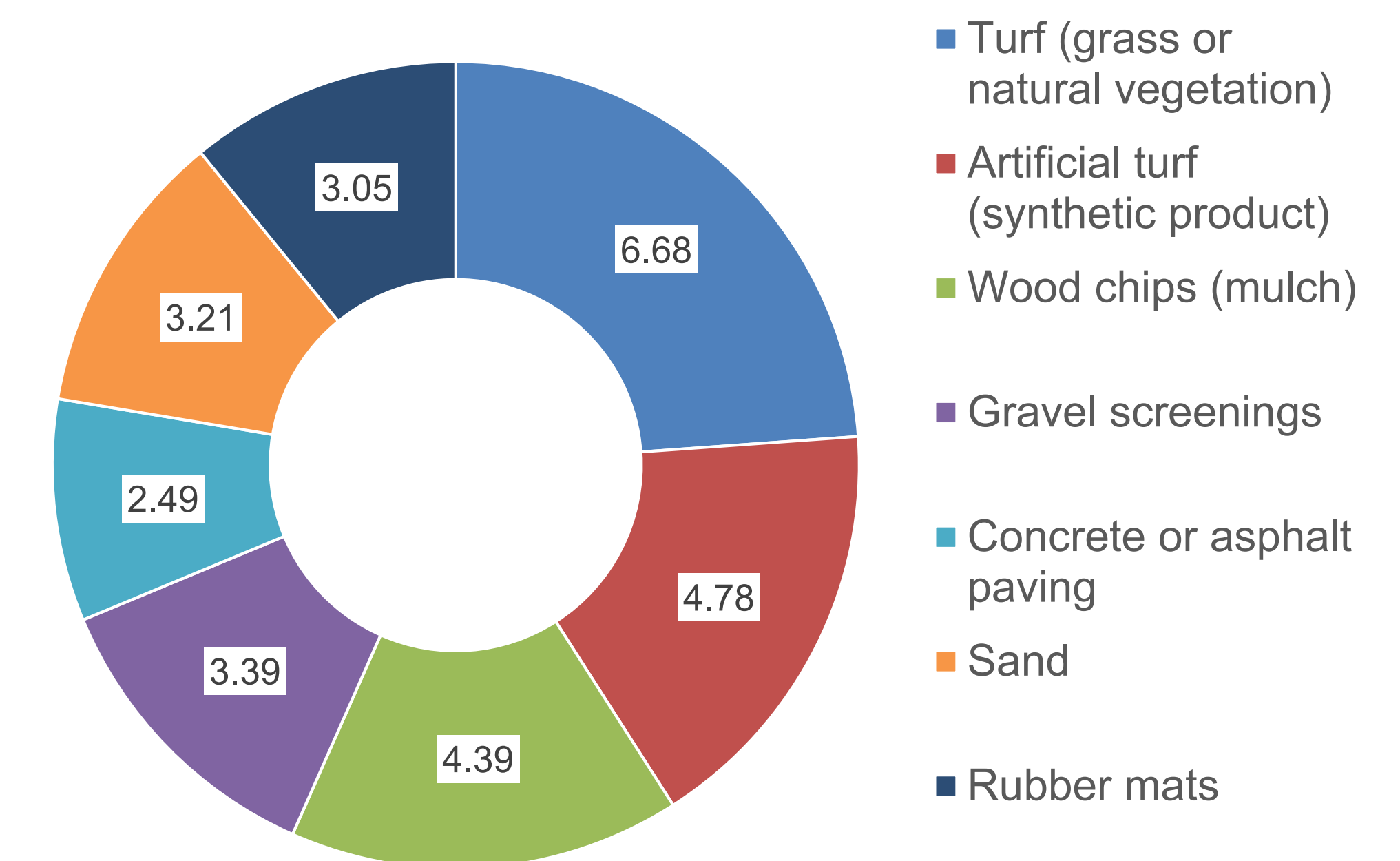
Identified Concerns

- Need for consistent and responsive maintenance
- Need for consistent by-law regulations & enforcement
- Safety of dogs of different sizes within the area and protection from outside threats (coyotes, harmful plant species, etc.)
- Ensure there is ample education on expected behaviour and rules of the area
- Need for area to be apart from playgrounds or sports fields
- Preference for surfaces of turf and artificial turf in off-leash areas

Respondents Ratings of Amenities



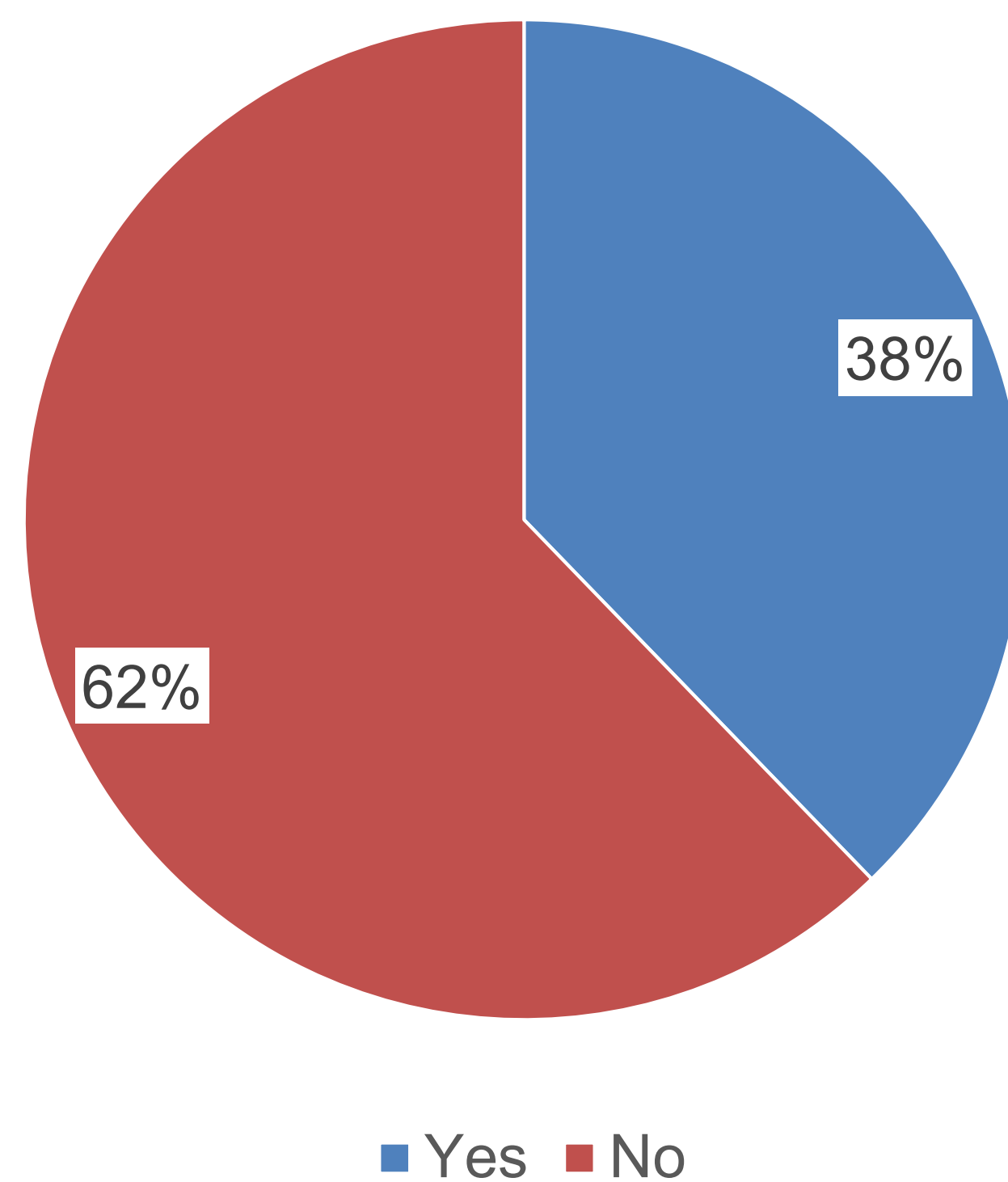
Respondents Rating of Surface Material



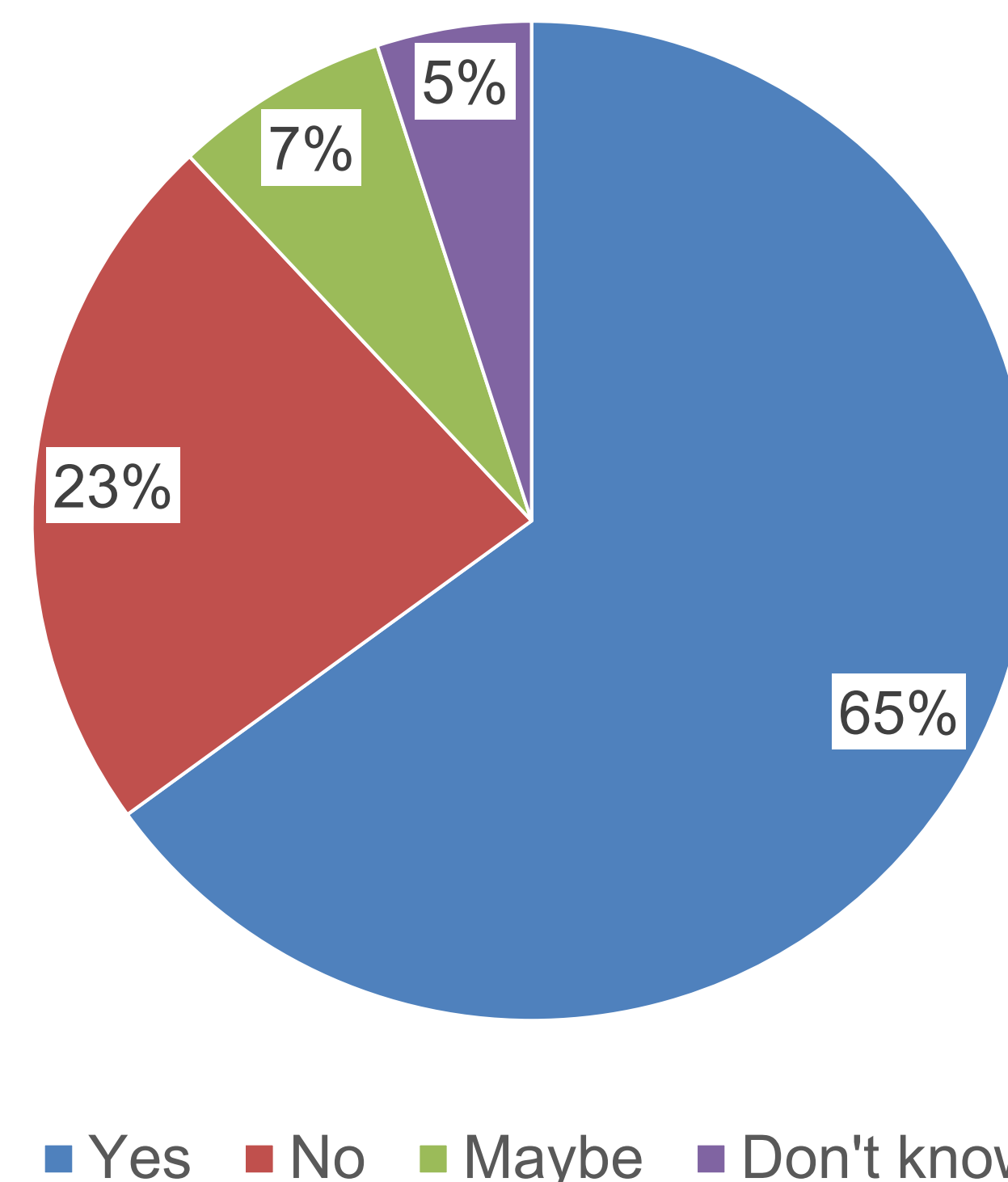
What the City Has Heard: Short Survey

Between March 9 and 22, 2020, 100 community members provided input through a short telephone-based survey through an Access Vaughan.

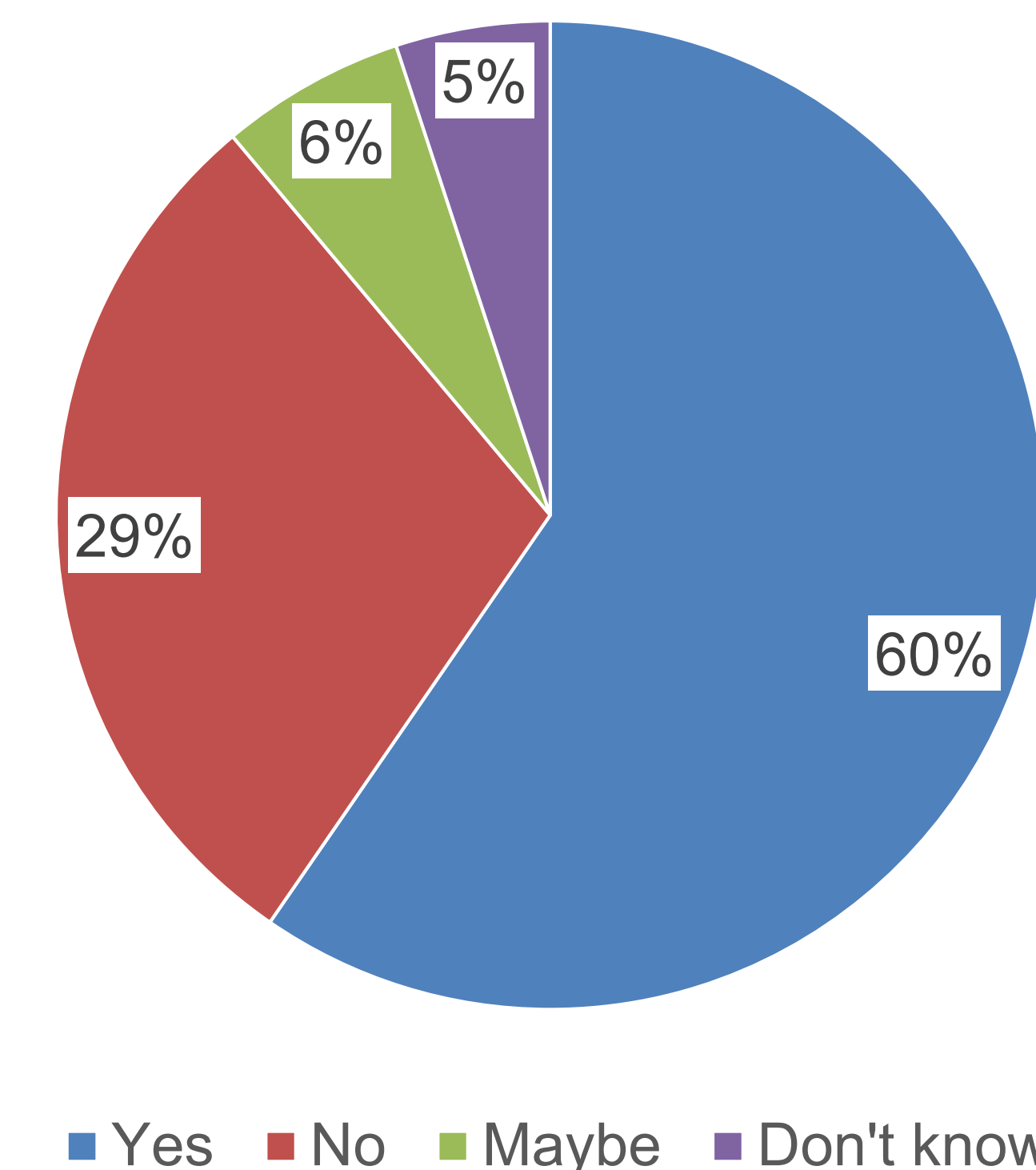
Identified as a Dog Owner



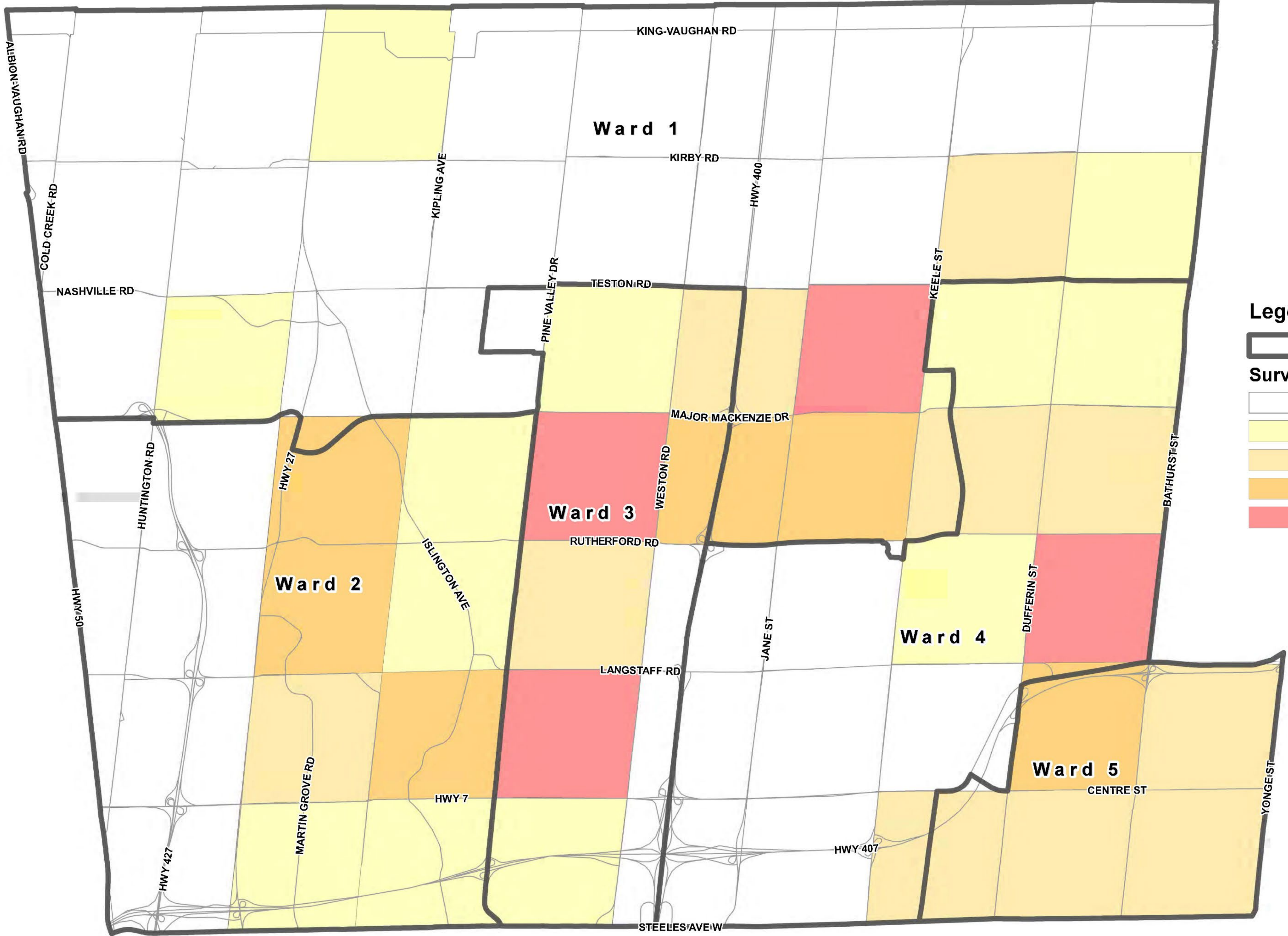
Identified Local Off-Leash Dog Areas as Beneficial



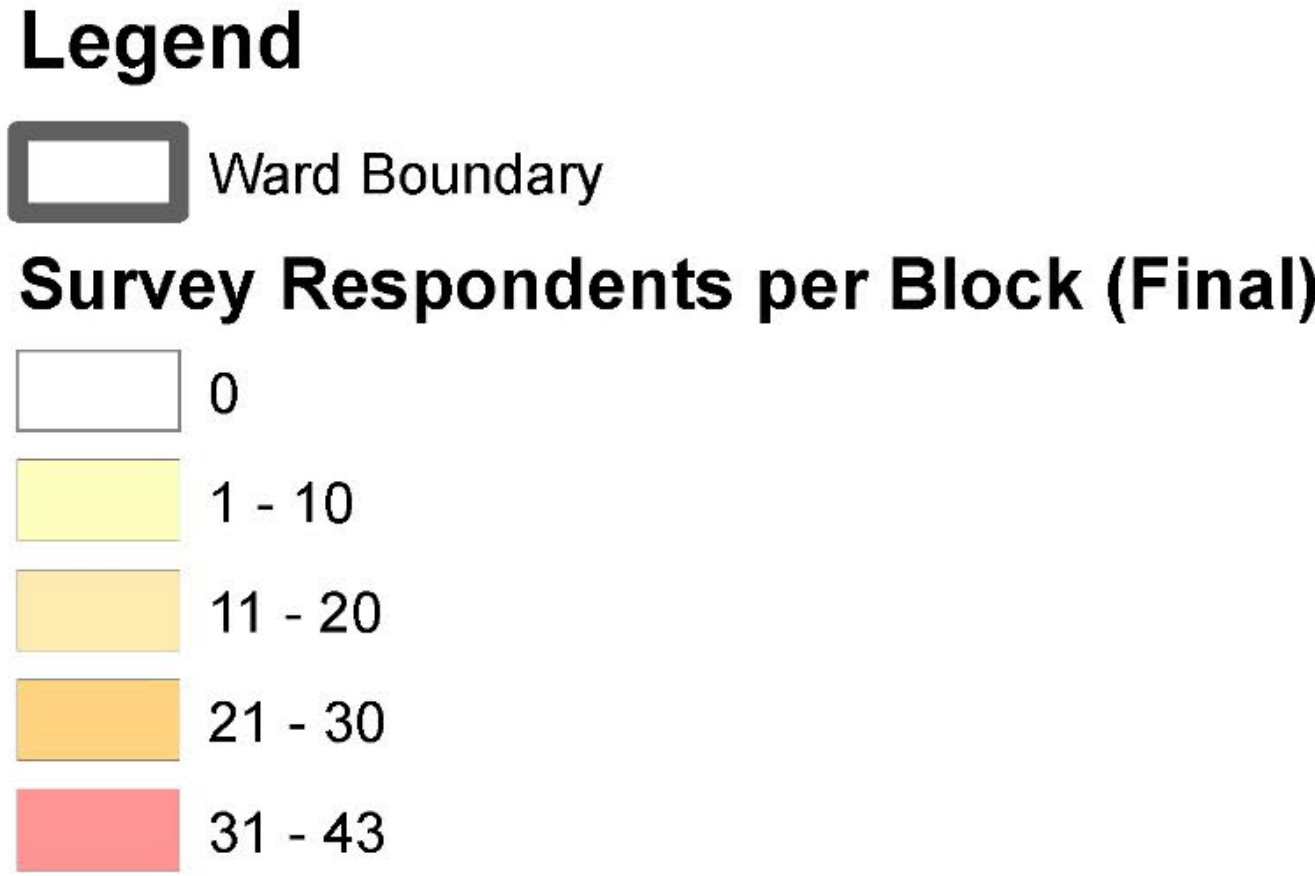
Support Off-Leash Dog Areas in Their Neighbourhood



What the City Has Heard So Far: Location of Survey Respondents



Location of survey respondents by planning block as of July 14, 2020*



* Based on 513 respondents who shared valid Postal Codes with the City of Vaughan

What the City Has Heard So Far: Community Workshops

Three workshops were conducted with City staff, dog-owners and ratepayers.
The key findings include:

- Animal Services will need additional funds to support enforcement.
- Concerns regarding lack of owners with licensed dogs, not properly watching over their dog and their actions.
- Some parks are 'hot spots' of complaints and concern that should not be considered for off-leash dog areas.
- Need to consider amenities such as water features, lighting, entrances etc. as well as area accessibility for intensifying neighbourhoods.
- Education and communication activities the City identified as being important to provide community-wide about good dog care, responsibilities of dog-owners, and how dog owners can care for their dogs in relation to using local off-leash dog areas.

What the City Has Heard So Far: Community Workshops ... continued

- The need for lighting to allow for evening visits and microclimate features that provides for adequate drainage for rain and either natural or constructed shade features
- A variety of funding options (creating a user fee or annual membership, encouraging increased dog licensing, and private sector sponsorship) and a variety of methods for governance (volunteers, dog-owners association collaborating with the City, etc.) exist.
- There are several educational communication and outreach strategies such as making use of the existing City communication channels, local posters in parks, engaging with schools and community centers and local newspapers.
- Additional features such as a poster board area for residents who may have lost a dog could post a picture at the site to share information would be beneficial.

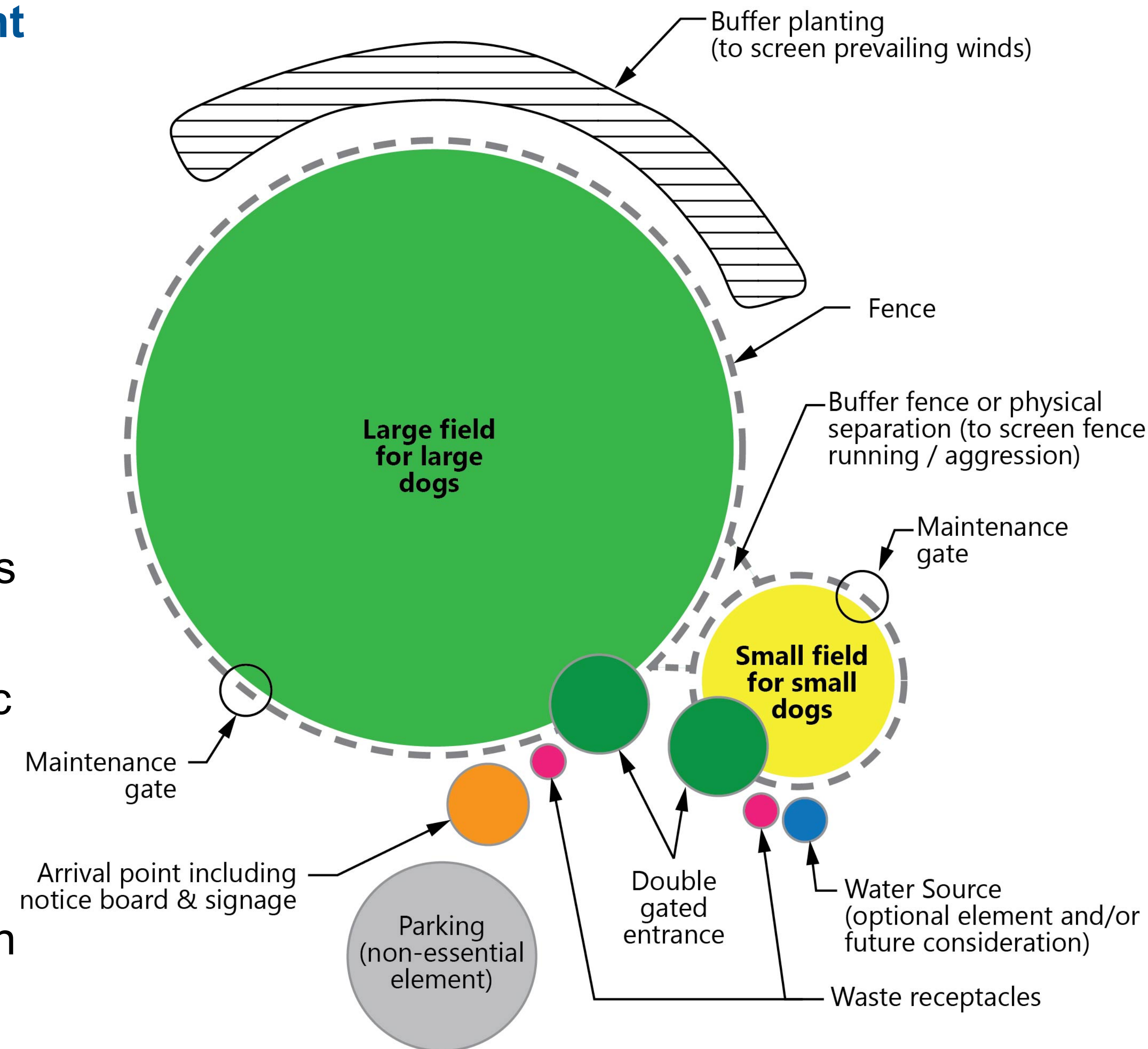
What Makes a 'Good' Local Off-Leash Dog Area?

Sound Planning and Management

- Governance / Stewardship
- Education and Awareness
- Effective Guidelines for Design, Operation, and Use
- Effective and Responsive Maintenance

Features and Facilities

- Separate enclosure for small dogs
- Shade trees and structures
- Outdoor furniture (benches, picnic tables)
- Perimeter fencing and double gates
- Surfaces that are easy to maintain
- Waste receptacles
- Clear signage
- Accessibility (transit, sidewalk, trails, parking option)



Note: Placement of off-leash infrastructure may vary depending on site-specific conditions.

Characteristics

- Appropriate size
- Close proximity to enable walking
- Access to transit and parking
- Safe, secure, and accessible
- Social space
- Part of the community
- Accessible to maintenance equipment
- Practical to monitor
- Screened to limit nuisance

Limitations for Local Scale

- Size
- Proximity to residential areas
- Proximity to school yards, play areas, athletic fields, and environmental areas
- Existing protection from the elements
- Available infrastructure (water, lighting, washrooms)

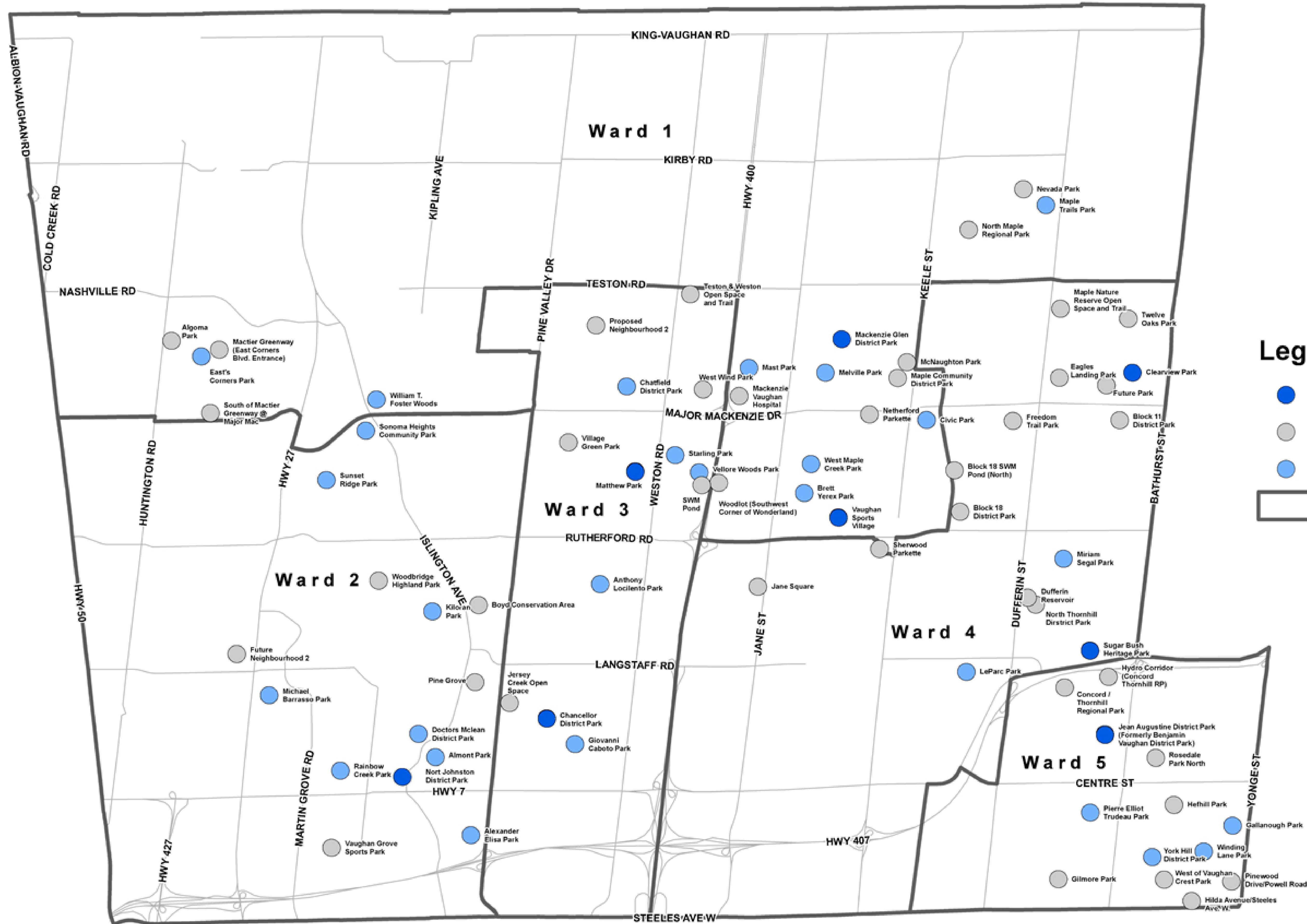
Local Off–Leash Dog Area Etiquette

Rules and Regulations (Animal By-Law 53-2002)

- Licensing of Dogs
 - All dogs are to be licensed with each dog having a valid tag and rabies certificate
 - Licenses are to be purchased within 30 days of acquiring a dog, and must be renewed annually
 - All dogs must always wear a license (numbered metal tag)
- Running at Large (Unleashed)
 - Dogs must be leashed in public parks, if this is not the case then the animal may be impounded by Animal Control
 - Pet owners must not let their pet trespass on public or private property
- Animal Waste
 - Pet owners must always clean up and dispose of their pet's waste on public or private property
- Off-Leash Zone Rules
 - No dog under the age of four months is permitted
 - Dogs must be spayed or neutered
 - Dogs must not be left unattended
 - Dog owners must carry a leash for each dog
 - Dog owners may bring up to three dogs per visit into an off-leash area
 - Dog owners must not bring any biting or menacing dog or pit bull

**Dog Owners are expected to:
Abide by Ontario's Dog Owner's
Liability Act (R.S.O. 1990) which
includes Municipal by-laws, a list
of offences, and other regulations**

Local Off-Leash Dog Areas: Potential Locations Reviewed by City



Note: This map is dated and has not been field verified by Parks Planning. This map shall be used as a reference document only and should be verified using City of Vaughan Official Plans, Subdivision Agreements, etc. All errors and omissions with regards to this map shall be reported directly to Parks Planning.

Date: 7/31/2020

Selecting the Locations: Tier 1 Evaluation Matrix and Criteria

Criteria	Criteria Description	Criteria Scoring	Weighting
A. Purpose			
Purpose	Proposed location is intended to use existing City-owned, designated park areas as a local-scale off-leash dog area for socialization and exercising dogs within the City's by-laws and policies.	1: No 5: Yes	10
B. Governance			
By-laws, Policies & Regulations	Potential site would easily comply with existing by-laws, policies, and land regulators (E.g. TRCA)	1: No, changes are required 5: Yes, no changes are required	10
Education	Potential site would require educational efforts for neighbouring residents and park users.	1: Yes 5: No	5
Park Stewardship	Proposed location has potential to foster stewardship amongst neighbouring residents and park users (Adopt-a-Park, ratepayers association, etc.)	1: Limited Potential, low probability of volunteers 3: Potential, moderate probability of volunteers 5: Good Potential, volunteers have been identified	5
Safety and Security	Potential site considers users and non-users safety and security (easily visible, electricity for lighting). CPTED principles to be applied.	1: Poor 3: Average 5: Good	10
Public Opinion	What is the general public opinion of the proposed location? Has the location been recommended by residents? (Workshop and pop-up events)	1: Opposition 3: Neutral 5: Supported	10
C. Location			
Ownership / Designated Park	Potential site must be City-owned, designated park.	1: Not City-owned, undesignated park 3: City-owned, undesignated park / Owned by others, designated park 5: City owned, designated	10
Proximity to residential areas	Potential site within residential area but distance away from residences (including visual, odour and noise buffers), with greater distance preference.	1: < 15 m (49 ft.) 3: 15 m to 30 m (59 ft. to 98 ft.) 5: > 30 m (98 ft.) (or if adjacent to high-rise residential)	10
Proximity to Play Areas and School Yards	Potential site considers proximity from fence to play areas and school yards with greater distance preferred.	1: < 15 m (49 ft.) 3: 15 m to 30 m (59 ft. to 98 ft.) 5: > 30 m (98 ft.)	10
Proximity to Athletic Fields or Courts	Potential site considers proximity from fence to athletic fields and courts with greater distance preferred.	1: < 15 m (49 ft.) 5: > 15 m (98 ft.)	5
Proximity to Environmental Areas	Potential site cannot result in negative environmental effects. Distance away from Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI), with greater distance preferred. (Reference Natural Heritage Network Core)	1: < 5 m (16 ft.) 3: 5 m to 15 m (16ft. to 59 ft.) 5: > 15 m (59 ft.)	5
D. Accessibility			
Parking	Potential site has access to dedicated parking facilities.	3: No Dedicated Parking Facility (On-Street Only) 5: Dedicated Parking Facility	10
Service Area Catchment	Density of of residents within a 500-m service radius of the potential site.	0: No Residential 1: Low Density 3: Medium Density 5: High Density	10
Sidewalks (Including park walkways)	Potential site is accessible by sidewalks.	1: None 3: One 5: More than one	10
Trails	Potential site is accessible by trails (within 100m)	1: None 5: One or More	5
E. Design			
Size	Potential site must be large enough to accommodate required facility design.	1: < 0.25 ha (0.6 acres) 3: 0.25 - 0.5 ha (0.6 to 1.2 acres) 5: > 0.5 ha (1.2 acres)	15
Microclimate	Potential site considers exposure to the Cityather elements (sun, wind, snow, rain) and other environmental factors such as natural shade	1: Full exposure 3: Average exposure 5: Limited exposure/protected	5
General Grading	Potential site should be the Cityll drained. Max slope 10%	1: Poor, additional grading required 3: Average, minor additional grading may be required 5: Good, no additional grading required	10

Selecting the Locations: Tier 2 Evaluation Matrix and Criteria

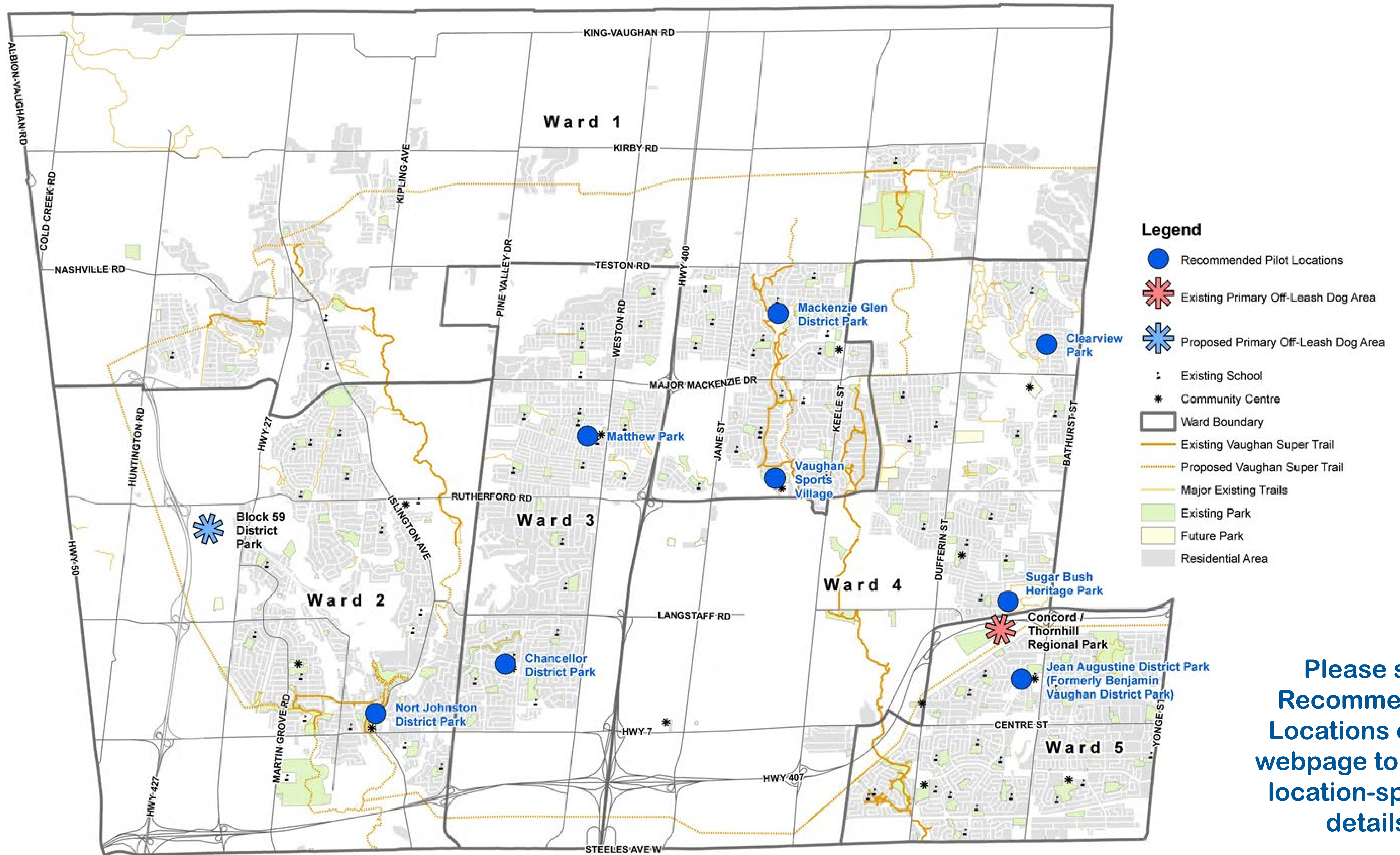
Criteria	Criteria Description	Criteria Rankings	Weighting
F. Governance			
Online Self-Directed Workshop	Comments from the Online Self-Directed Workshop	1: Opposition 3: Neutral 5: Supported	10
G. Accessibility			
Transit	Potential site provides access to public transit. Consider as bonus	1: Poor 3: Average 5: Good	5
Catchment	Potential site catchment service population	1: Low density 3: Moderate density 5: High density	10
Parking	Potential site has available parking. Consider as bonus	1: None 3: On street 5: Parking lot	5
H. Layout & Amenities			
Fencing	Potential site will require fencing or has existing fencing that can be used.	1: No existing fencing and fencing will require additional construction efforts 3: No existing fencing but can be fenced 5: Existing fencing that can be reused	7
Lighting (Enhanced Service)	Potential site has existing lighting that meets visibility needs during operating hours	1: No available power source 3: Power source available 5: Existing lighting	7
Water (Enhanced Service)	Potential site has access to water supply.	1: No water connection exists 3: Water connection available but requires connection 5: Water connection available	7
Surface material	Potential site considers most appropriate types of surface material to reduce costs.	1: Existing surface material requires replacement 3: Existing surface material can be used but will need to be replaced within 1 year operation 5: Existing surface materials can be used beyond 1 year operation	7
Shade	Potential site has shade features (natural or built).	1: No space for shade features 3: Required shade features 5: Existing shade features	7
Waste management	Potential site will require dog waste receptacles.	1: No space for receptacles 3: Dog waste receptacles required 5: Existing waste receptacles available	7
Benches	Potential site will require benches.	1: No space for benches 3: Space for benches 5: Existing benches nearby	5
I. Cost			
Cost - Construction	Potential site considers constructability.	1: \$\$\$ 3: \$\$ 5: \$	10
Cost - Operation & Maintenance	Potential site considers ongoing operation and maintenance efforts.	1: \$\$\$ 3: \$\$ 5: \$	10
Cost - External Funding Sources	Potential site has confirmed, known / potential or unknown external funding sources.	1: Unknown 3: Known / Potential 5: Confirmed	10

Local Off-Leash Dog Areas: 8 Recommended Locations

1. Jean Augustine District Park (Formerly Benjamin Vaughan District Park)
2. Sugar Bush Heritage Park
3. Clearview Park
4. Vaughan Sports Village
5. Mackenzie Glen District Park
6. Matthew District Park
7. Chancellor District Park
8. Nort Johnston District Park

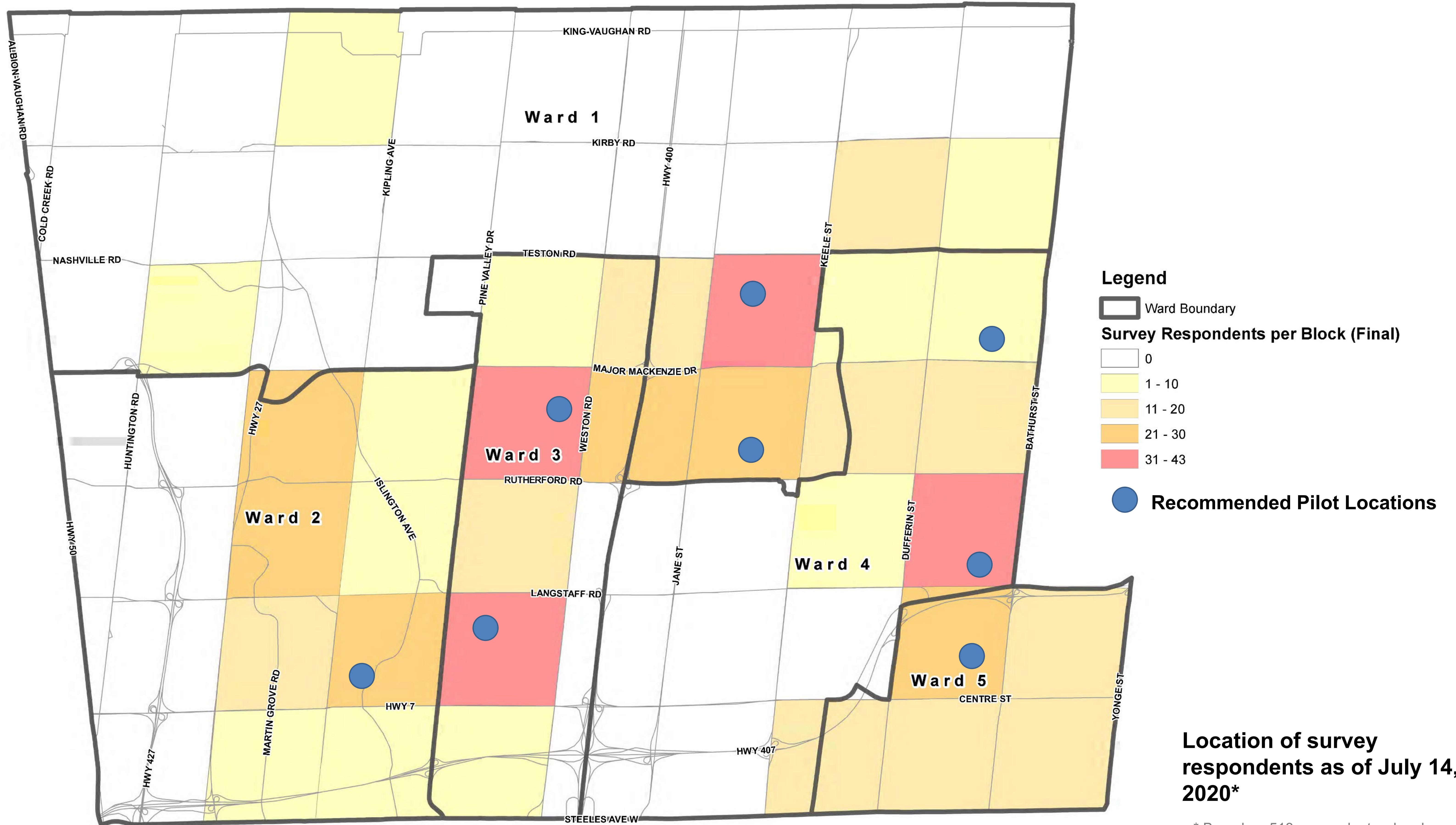


Local Off-Leash Dog Areas: 8 Recommended Locations ... continued



Please see Recommended Locations on the webpage to review location-specific details.

Recommended Pilot Locations & Survey Respondents Overlay



Pilot Study Approach

The City is considering implementing multiple locations recommended from this Study as pilot sites

Each location considered for the pilot study must include

- Stewardship group (min. 3 volunteers)
- Evaluation of usage, complaints, operation and maintenance
- Consideration of costs

Each pilot site will require bi-monthly reporting and annual review to determine if:


- The stewardship group has remained active
- That no significant evaluation issues the City identified
- That costs fall within existing operating expenditures
- that the pilot site will be developed as a formal location

If annual review identifies concerns in stewardship or evaluation, City staff will either remove the location from the pilot study or work with community to mitigate concerns as appropriate.

Local Off-Leash Dog Area Stewardship Program

Responsibility of Stewards

- Foster a positive social environment for dogs and people
- Educate others on off-leash dog area regulations and etiquette
- Communicate any safety concerns to City
- Share feedback about operations and maintenance
- Collaborate with City on pilot studies, sharing feedback (good, bad and opportunities for improvement and enhancement)



Contact us about
becoming a
volunteer!

Stewardship Group Proposed Structure:

- Minimum 3 residents from the local neighbourhood
- City staff (Parks and Animal Control)

Terms of Reference and meetings to be determined

Project Next Steps

1. Reviewing Your Feedback

The City will review the feedback from the online self-directed workshop to finalize recommended local off-leash dog areas to pilot. The feedback deadline is August 31, 2020.

2. Presenting Final Recommendations to City Council

City staff will prepare and present the final recommended pilot locations to City Council (anticipated in late 2020).

3. Stay engaged in the conversation!

Visit [Vaughan.ca/DogPark](https://vaughan.ca/DogPark) to stay up to date on this project!

You can also contact us directly at:

Michael Habib

City of Vaughan, 2141 Major Mackenzie Dr.

Vaughan, ON L6A 1T1

Email: Michael.habib@vaughan.ca

Telephone: 905.303.2069 ext. 8092

Join the Conversation!

Participate in the [online self-direct workshop](#) until August 31, 2020



The workshop only takes 15 minutes to complete!

- Learn more about the Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy and key findings to-date
- Review and provide feedback on the eight recommended pilot locations
- Let us know if you are interested in becoming an Off-Leash Dog Area Steward