

Draft Dog Off Leash Guidelines

City of Port Phillip

March 2024



Purpose

This guideline provides clear principles for how the City of Port Phillip will make provision for dogs to be off-leash in public open spaces, while ensuring everyone, no matter their age, gender, ability or background, feels welcome in these spaces.

Background

Our public open spaces are designed with all people and their needs in mind. Everyone, no matter their age, gender, ability or background, should feel welcome in our public spaces. Our spaces host a variety of uses including active, informal and passive recreation for everyone to enjoy. Many of our public spaces and beaches provide space for dogs to be off-leash to exercise and socialise with other dogs.

With limited opportunities to provide new public space and increasing demand for usage, Council needs to ensure that our public spaces are designed and managed to be shared for multiple uses and user groups. Council needs to balance the views of the community to provide a mix of dog on and off-leash areas, as well as some public spaces that are dog free.



Scope

This guideline provides direction on the future of dog off-leash areas (DOLAs) in our City. It provides guidance on the:



Planning, design and management of DOLAs including unfenced, partially fenced and fully fenced.



Areas from which dogs may be excluded, including daytime or seasonal restrictions.



Type and level of provision that Council will consider at off-leash areas in line with the planning of other open space assets.



Process to assess the suitability of existing and planned future DOLAs within the municipality.

Guiding Principles

The following principles guide how Council makes decisions on the location of DOLAs in the municipality.

Principle 1. Shared Responsibility

Education communication programs and enforcement will be used to promote accountability and respect between all users of dog off-leash areas.



To ensure that dog owners in the City understand and comply with dog control regulations relating to:

- Leashing of dogs.
- Preventing dogs making unwanted approaches to other dogs and people.
- 'Effective control' of dogs in line with State Government and Council dog control legislation.
- Collection of dog litter.



Education programs will look to educate members of the community who do not usually interact with dogs to improve their understanding and safety.



Council will investigate and implement strategies that are recognised to be effective in achieving compliance with dog control regulations, and respect between all users of public open space.



Enforcement will be part of Council's approach to non-compliance with dog regulations.



Principle 2. Safe

/// The safety of people and dogs will be prioritised when planning, designing, and managing dog off-leash areas. ///



Council has a responsibility to balance the needs all users of public open space.



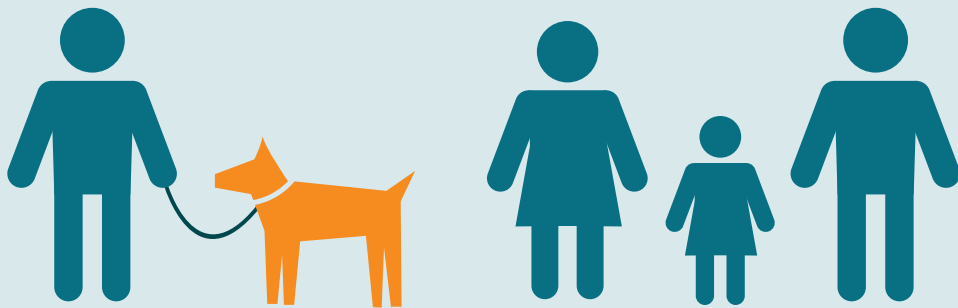
All people have a right to be and feel safe in our public open spaces.



Council will consider criteria relating to the safety of dogs and people when reviewing the suitability of sites as DOLAs.



Owners are responsible for the physical wellbeing of their dog and for ensuring their dog remains under 'effective control' and is following all regulations.



Principle 3. Diverse

/// A range of experiences will be provided for our dog community through our network of diverse public spaces. ///



To recognise that dogs can access a diverse range of environments in the City on-leash, including footpaths and foreshore promenade.



A variety of off-leash environments across the City will offer different experiences for dogs, including areas for owners with restricted or limited mobility.

Principle 4. Quality

“ Dog off-leash areas will consider all users of the space, providing spaces for dogs which are well designed, well managed and fit for purpose and ensuring grounds with other primary uses are not impacted by dog usage. ”



Good dog parks should be good parks for everyone.



Some sites, including sports grounds and playgrounds, have other primary uses and dog usage of these areas will be restricted to ensure the site quality remains safe and fit for usage.



When reviewing DOLAs, Council will look to better utilise and engage with spaces currently in use.



Designing new or upgrades to, DOLAs will consider a variety of experiences.



Principle 5. Environment and Heritage

“ Dog off-leash areas cannot impact on areas of historical value and environmental significance. ”



Some environments have a primary role to protect and enhance flora, fauna habitat and/or heritage values which makes them incompatible with dogs and dog related infrastructure.



Daily and/or seasonal restrictions will apply to some off-leash areas to balance the needs of different users of open space (this will particularly apply to foreshore areas and sporting grounds).



There are some areas in the City where it is not be possible to provide the desired type and level of off-leash provision for owners and their dog.

Dog on and off-leash areas in the City

On and off-leash areas are designated by Council under the Local Law. In these designated areas, dogs may be off-leash and owners are responsible for:



keeping their dogs under effective voice and/or hand control and within constant sight



ensuring they are capable of promptly bringing the dog under effective control



ensuring that their dog/s do not worry or threaten any person or animal, or attack or bite any person or animal



removing and dispose of all faeces deposited by their dogs in public space



being considerate of other users of the site



keeping dogs within the designated boundaries of the DOLA



returning their dog to a lead outside of the DOLA



abiding by all relevant regulations and Local Laws.

Council's designated DOLAs can be found on Council's website - <https://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/explore-the-city/beaches-parks-and-playgrounds/dog-parks-and-beaches>



FAQs

Which beaches can I take my dog to?

The Foreshore is highly valued for use as a DOLA as the beaches provide an opportunity for dogs to access water and provide large spaces for dogs to run. During the warmer months of the year our beaches experience a high level of demand by residents and visitors to the City. This means access for dogs is reduced during these times to minimise conflict and maximise safety and enjoyment. During these months dog owners can still access most beaches during the off-peak times of the day and evening. For the most up to date restrictions, visit Council's website https://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/media/tvjmzg5n/2020-copp_dog-off-leash-map_beach_1120.pdf

Where can my dog be off-leash at any time during the day?

There are a number of DOLAs that are shared-use areas where owners can let their dogs off the leash 24 hours a day. There are no time or seasonal restrictions associated with the use of these spaces.

These spaces allow any number of different uses and users at the same time, including owners and their dogs, and are not fully fenced. Partial fencing or buffer landscaping may be incorporated to create separation between different areas in the parkland and minimise dogs being attracted to activity and environments outside the designated off-leash area.

Which sports fields can I exercise my dog on?

Sports fields are popular spaces to be used as DOLAs due to their size, however the primary use of these spaces is for organised sport. This means that priority is provided for sport and the sites need to be maintained to ensure they are fit for purpose, in line with sporting association requirements.

Council's Local Law restricts access for dogs on all sports fields to those times when training or competition sport is not being played. During a sporting event or training session, dogs must be on-lead within 20 metres to minimise disruption to participants.

Additionally, dogs are prohibited at all times, both on or off-leash, from entering specialised sports fields (those sporting reserves that include synthetic pitches or premier level grass playing surfaces).

Will Council provide more fenced dog off-leash areas?

Fenced DOLAs are fully fenced and provide safe experiences for dogs through both landscape and infrastructure inclusions. These areas are optimised to provide for the expected type and level of use and have the capacity to cater for significant numbers of dogs especially at peak times, which include outside of business hours and on weekends.

Fully fencing a DOLA will only be considered when there are risk management issues (i.e., proximity to a road or commuter cycle path) or environmental protection issues.

Fenced DOLAs in the City of Port Phillip are for dogs of all sizes. Council will not provide separate areas based on dog size.

Where is my closest fully fenced dog off-leash area?

There are two fenced dog off-leash areas in the City at Eastern Reserve North in South Melbourne and MO Moran Reserve in St Kilda.

Is there anywhere that I can go that is a dog-free zone?

Under the Local Law, dogs are prohibited, both on and off-leash, from:

- Areas within five metres of any children's playground, public barbecue or exercise equipment areas
- Any ground, playing surface or training space whilst an organised sporting event or training is taking place (and must be on lead within 20 metres of these spaces)
- Frank and Mary Crean Reserve in Middle Park
- The environmentally sensitive areas of Perce White Reserve and the sand dune area on West Beach in St Kilda.

We are also considering providing a number of dog free public open spaces across the City, subject to community consultation feedback.



1.

Demand analysis – The first step is to undertake a demand analysis to determine the need for a DOLA. This will include looking at the:

- Principles
- Availability of public open space and existing DOLAs
- Accessibility
- Population growth
- Infrastructure requirements
- Potential impacts/benefits, including any alternate locations.

2.

Site analysis – The second step is to undertake an analysis of the appropriateness of the site as an existing or proposed DOLA. This will include making sure that a DOLA has:

- Easy access
- Good visibility
- Vegetation and trees for shade
- Good drainage
- Room for dogs to run and/or areas of interest for dog activity
- Buffers from residential properties, exclusion zones or high risk areas
- The ability to support shared use.

3.

Site assessment – The third step is to undertake an evaluation against a range of criteria, which will include:

- Size
- Environment
- Heritage and culture
- Noise.