

DRAFT – MARCH 16, 2016

STATEMENT OF POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR SITING OFF-LEASH DOG EXERCISE
AREAS WITHIN THE MADISON PARK SYSTEM

AUTHORIZATION

The Madison Board of Park Commissioners is the approving authority for policies governing the Madison Park System.

In January 2015, the Board of Park Commissioners directed the Long Range Planning Subcommittee to develop standards for siting off-leash dog parks in Madison parks. This Statement of Policy and Guidelines is the product of that standard-setting process.

BACKGROUND

Madison General Ordinances Sec. 8.19(1) currently prevents dogs from entering and remaining in city parks, with two exceptions—specifically, leashed dogs may be walked in thirteen parks, MGO Sec. 8.19(1)(a)(3), and dogs may run off leash in nine other parks. MGO Sec. 23.32(2).

The City’s off-leash dog parks range in size from 0.37 acres (Brittingham Park) to 36.8 acres (Quann Park). Dane County and the Cities of Middleton and Sun Prairie also have off-leash dog parks that are available to permit-holding Madison residents. Those range in size from three acres (Quisling Park, in Middleton) to 150.6 acres (Prairie Moraine Park, in Verona).

Dog owners must have a permit in order to use the off-leash dog parks in Madison or Dane County. Revenue from the permit fee must, by ordinance, be maintained in a segregated fund to be used in the establishment and maintenance of off-leash dog parks (called “dog exercise areas”). MGO Sec. 23.32(2)(b)5. Madison residents can purchase the permit from the City of Madison, Dane County Parks, certain other local municipalities, and a number of pet stores. The municipality that collects the permit fees can use the proceeds for its own dog parks. Currently, with certain exceptions, such as for seniors and disabled individuals, the annual permit fee is \$30.

This Policy is intended to achieve the following:

- Provide for a financially sustainable system of off-leash dog exercise areas that can accommodate the needs of present and future Madison dog owners, particularly those without yards.
- Promote the development of off-leash dog exercise areas having sufficient size and variety to provide healthy exercise for dogs and for their owners.

- Establish criteria to guide the Parks Division in siting off-leash dog exercise areas, taking into account the needs of the park system as a whole.
- Promote regional planning within Dane County to maximize the variety of off-leash dog-exercise-area options as to size, location, topography, and other relevant characteristics.

GUIDELINES FOR SITING OFF-LEASH DOG EXERCISE AREAS

1. Siting Off-Leash Dog Exercise Areas in Existing Parks.

Place highest priority on areas where dog owners live (based on license and permit sales) and where there is not another off-leash dog exercise area within walking distance or an easy drive. Give priority to areas where multi-family housing is common.

Generally avoid sites of fewer than three acres unless the location will serve retirement or elderly housing; in such cases proximity and access may be considered more important than size.

Off-leash dog exercise areas should not be located in conservation parks, at public beaches, athletic fields, or children’s play areas.

Where fencing would be undesirable, consider allowing off-leash access to specific parks in the early morning (e.g., 6 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.), or in the winter in park areas not used in that season (e.g., the disc golf course at Hiestand Park), on the following conditions:

- Siting is limited to neighborhood or community parks,
- Where a minimum of three acres is available and suitable, and
- With prior approval of the local neighborhood association, the alder, and the Park Commission.

Support off-leash access with signage, education regarding removal of feces and the necessity of dog control, and substantial fines for non-compliance.

Once a site is identified, whether by a request from the public, an alder, or the Parks Division, follow the Parks Master Plan Process.

Where an off-leash dog exercise area is contemplated, encourage the formation of a “Friends” group (either independently or within the local neighborhood association) to raise funds for amenities (e.g., landscaping, benches) and to police clean-up regularly and with annual events.

2. “Destination” Off-Leash Dog Exercise Areas.

In coordination with Dane County Parks and other Dane County municipalities, identify opportunities for sizeable off-leash dog exercise areas that would be attractive and challenging to hikers and walkers.