

**STATEMENT OF POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR OFF-LEASH DOG PARK  
SERVICE AREA STANDARDS WITHIN THE MADISON PARK SYSTEM**

**AUTHORIZATION**

The Madison Board of Park Commissioners is the approving authority for policies governing the Madison Park system. This policy is intended to guide the Parks Division in two ways: first, to guide planning for new off-leash dog park (exercise) areas; and second, to set standards for responding to requests for the creation of off-leash dog park (exercise) areas in the Madison Park system.

This policy is intended to achieve the following:

- Provide for a system of off-leash dog exercise areas in the Madison Park system which balances the needs of other park users and management goals.
- Provide off-leash dog exercise areas that generate revenue sufficient to cover their operating costs, including among other things the costs of ranger enforcement.
- Promote the development of off-leash dog exercise areas having sufficient size and variety to provide healthy exercise for dog owners as well as for dogs.
- 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.
- Assure that the use of City parks by dog owners respects park use by non-dog owners.

Background information used in the development of this policy is shown in Attachment A.

**GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING OFF-LEASH DOG EXERCISE AREAS**

1. Priority will be given to potential fenced off-leash dog exercise area locations:
  - a. Where there are permit and license holders lacking access to fenced off-leash dog exercise areas,
  - b. Where at least two acres of open space are available for this use,
  - c. Where multi-family housing exists or is anticipated, and
  - d. Where there is currently no fenced off-leash dog exercise area within one mile.
2. Fenced off-leash dog exercise areas will generally be located:
  - a. Where they do not interfere with established or planned park uses,
  - b. Where parking is available, either on street or off-street, and
  - c. Where impacts on the visual character of the park can be minimized.
3. If a location for a fenced off-leash dog exercise area can't be identified using the criteria above, consideration will be given to designating a community or neighborhood park as an unfenced off-leash dog exercise area during limited hours, where appropriate and as determined by the Parks Superintendent, taking into account the guidelines set forth in this policy. A "friends" organization, as described below, is required for such unfenced off-leash dog exercise areas. Such use requires approval by the Board of Park Commissioners as well as the Common Council.

4. In coordination with Dane County Parks and other Dane County municipalities, identify opportunities for larger off-leash dog exercise areas that would be attractive and challenging to hikers and walkers.
5. Once a potential fenced off-leash dog exercise area is identified, the location will require approval by the Board of Park Commissioners in accordance with the **Parks Master Plan Process** described in the ***Statement of Policy and Guidelines for Master Plan Activities Within the Madison Park System.***

#### **“FRIENDS” ORGANIZATIONS**

The creation of a “Friends” group (either independently or within the local neighborhood association) is encouraged where a fenced off-leash dog exercise area is contemplated and required where an unfenced off-leash exercise area is contemplated. The Friends group will help to educate dog owners and other members of the public about the rules regarding use, to raise funds for amenities (e.g., landscaping, benches), to police clean-up regularly and with annual events, and generally to build community and local leadership in the context of dog ownership and use of the exercise areas.

# ATTACHMENT A

## BACKGROUND

Demographics. City of Madison residents purchased over 11,000 dog licenses in 2015. The estimated population of the City of Madison as of July 1, 2014, was 245,691. U.S. Census Quick Facts, [www.census.gov/en.html](http://www.census.gov/en.html), visited April 21, 2016.

Summary of current law. Dogs are not allowed to run at large in the City of Madison. MGO Sec. 23.32(1). Madison ordinances further specify that dogs may not enter or remain in City parks. MGO Sec. 8.19(1).

There are two exceptions to these rules—specifically, leashed dogs may be walked on pathways in thirteen designated City parks, MGO Sec. 8.19(1)(a)3, and dogs may run off leash in the posted areas of nine other City parks. MGO Secs. 8.19(1)(a)4 and 23.32(2). The nine designated “dog exercise areas” are all fenced, with the exception of Lucia Crest Park; dogs may run off leash at large in Lucia Crest Park between 5 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. MGO 23.32(2)(a)3.

As of April 2016, violators of the City ordinance that governs dogs running at large (off leash) are subject to fines and court fees amounting to \$124.00. As of April 2016, violators of the City ordinances that governs dog park permits in parks designated for dogs are subject to fines of \$40 for lacking dog park permits.

Description of fenced dog parks. As of April 2016, there are eight off-leash dog parks within the City of Madison, or roughly one park per 30,700 residents:

Brittingham Park	0.37 acres	Walnut Grove Park	1.2 acres
McCormick Park	0.38 acres	Warner Park	8.2 acres
Demetral Park	0.72 acres	Sycamore Park	20.2 acres
Odana School Park	0.9 acres	Quann Park	36.8 acres

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).

Permit requirements; permit revenue. A permit is required both to use the fenced off-leash dog parks and to walk a leashed dog on the pathways in the thirteen designated City parks. MGO Secs. 8.19(1)(a)3.e and 23.32(2)(b)5. 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. 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. As of April 2016, the annual permit fee is \$30, with certain exceptions, such as for seniors and disabled individuals.

As of July 2015, a mapped dataset of permit holders shows that alder districts 11, 16 and 20 have the greatest number of City of Madison permit holders that are not within 1 mile of an off leash dog exercise area.

As of July 2015, a mapped dataset of license holders shows that alder districts 3, 11, 16 and 20 have the greatest number of City of Madison license holders that are not within 1 mile of an off leash dog exercise area.