

RE: Letter to Salt Spring Parks and Rec Commission and LCC Regarding Off-Leash Dog Park Concerns

From: Gulf Island Early Learning Society

Date: June 23, 2025

To the Salt Spring Parks and Recreation Commission and Local Community Commission (LCC),

We are writing on behalf of the Gulf Island Early Learning Society regarding recent concerns that have arisen due to the proximity of the off-leash, fenced dog park adjacent to the entrance and outdoor yard of Little Rainbows.

Over the past month, the presence of one particular dog owner, who regularly attends with approximately nine dogs and spends a significant amount of time within the park, has created a number of challenges for our program, families, and most importantly the children. We have observed repeated incidents of dogs fighting within the enclosure, and on several occasions, dogs have escaped from the fenced pen and entered the area directly outside Little Rainbows fenced play yard. We have noted that in the last week, the individual has not been seen on site. However, as we are unsure if this is fully resolved we wanted to ensure our concerns were noted for the long-term planning of this off leash dog park.

These events have impacted our ability to safely facilitate outdoor activities for the children. Families have experienced disruptions and concerns during pick-up and drop-off times, and we have witnessed a shift in some children's attitudes toward dogs: while many of our children have previously been comfortable around dogs, several have now developed fears after observing these particular incidents. The increased anxiety and uncertainty caused by the fighting and escaping dogs has required us to adapt our routines, limit outdoor play, and dedicate additional resources to supervision and support for the children.

We understand and appreciate that Little Rainbows is situated near the Aquatic Centre and several other community facilities, and we fully expect to interact with a diverse group of patrons, including dog owners and their pets. However, the current situation with this grouping of dogs has gone beyond the normal interactions we have anticipated and prepared for as a program. The frequency and severity of the incidents in question are directly impacting our daily operations and, more importantly, the wellbeing of the children in our care. The group in our care are infants and toddlers up to the age of 3, and we are increasingly concerned of what a worst case scenario interaction involving the children and dogs may look like if no changes are implemented.

We respectfully request that the Salt Spring Parks and Recreation Commission and LCC review the operation and management of the adjacent dog park. We acknowledge that the Aquatic Center housing Little Rainbows has undergone changes, and originally there were no children adjacent to the off-leash dog park. The future site design does not include an off-leash dog park. It is atypical to have an off-leash dog park in close proximity to a children's facility. Therefore, we request the closure of the off-leash park to ensure the safety of the children attending daycare.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Jessie Toynbee

Co-Chair, Gulf Island Early Learning Society