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**REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2017**

SUBJECT **Dog Regulations and Permits**

ISSUE

Enforcement issues related to dogs in regional parks and commercial dog-walking operations.

BACKGROUND

A report about dogs in regional parks was considered by the Regional Parks Committee on April 19, 2017. Subsequently, a motion was approved by the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board on May 10, 2017 that “staff be directed to investigate and report back on enforcement issues related to the number of dogs per person in parks and commercial dog walking operations.”

ALTERNATIVES

That the Regional Parks Committee recommend to the CRD Board:

Alternative 1

1. That the maximum number of dogs allowed per person is three, either on or off-leash, and amendments to that effect, with a proposed effective date of May 1, 2018, be included in updates to Regional Parks Bylaw No. 3682, Section 8, Animals in Regional Parks, and brought before the Committee in March 2018 for consideration;
2. That the maximum number of dogs allowed per commercial dog walker is eight, either on or off-leash, that commercial dog-walking operations be required to obtain a permit and pay the annual commercial service fee of \$320 and that staff work with commercial dog-walking operations to develop permit conditions such as areas to use, times of day and codes of conduct; and
3. That the Capital Regional District Regional Parks Services and Facilities Fees and Charges Bylaw No. 3675 be amended to add a new category for commercial dog-walking operations, with an effective date of May 1, 2018, and brought before the Committee in March 2018 for consideration.

Alternative 2

1. That no limit be put on the number of dogs per person, and that the focus for the next two years be on visitor education and on improving enforcement of current regulations and monitoring levels of compliance, changes in behaviour and volume of complaints; if, after that time period, improvements in compliance are negligible, that consideration be given to restricting the number of dogs per person;
2. That the maximum number of dogs allowed per commercial dog walker is eight, either on or off-leash, that commercial dog-walking operations be required to obtain a permit and pay the annual commercial service fee of \$320, and that staff work with commercial dog-walking operations to develop permit conditions such as areas to use, times of day and codes of conduct; and

3. That the Capital Regional District Regional Parks Services and Facilities Fees and Charges Bylaw No. 3675 be amended to add a new category for commercial dog operations, with an effective date of May 1, 2018, and brought before the Committee in March 2018 for consideration.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Visitation to regional parks is increasing every year. Local media coverage in 2017 about dogs in parks has resulted in e-mails from individuals about their opinions and experiences. Many long-time visitors comment on how many more dogs are in the parks these days, and how some owners have many dogs off-leash at a time. Some people regard this as a problem. Others welcome dogs and state that there is no problem. What remains unknown is the number of people who do not visit parks because of the potential for negative dog encounters.

Section 8 of CRD Bylaw No. 3682 (as amended by Bylaw No. 3879) for Regional Parks includes direction to have the animal under control at all times, to not allow the animal to injure, disturb or molest any person, domestic animal or wildlife, to have a leash and collar for each dog at all times and to remove dog waste.

Enforcement issues are mainly related to dog owners who do not adhere to regulations. The three main categories of complaints received by the CRD about dog management are that dogs are not being effectively controlled, owners are not picking up after their dogs, and seasonal restrictions are being ignored.

CRD Bylaw Enforcement staff patrol the parks to enforce regulations. Statistics are not kept on the number of dog owners that are observed to be complying with dog regulations and other park regulations. Statistics are kept on the number of park violations that are handled by bylaw officers and those violations that are observed and recorded by staff and volunteer park stewards. In 2016, of the 3,844 violations that were recorded, 37% were dog-related, 24% were alcohol-related, 14% were smoking-related and the other 25% were all other violations such as noise and illegal camping.

Staff met with representatives of commercial dog-walking operations on September 13, 2017 to share information and discuss the prospect of permitting this business within the park system. It is estimated that there are 20 commercial dog walking companies in the region. Dog-walking companies come to regional parks because their service offer for their clients' pets is a 1 to 2 hour off-leash experience in a park setting. Regional parks are ideal locations for them because there are many trail options and dogs are allowed to be off-leash. These companies obtain business licenses and insurance coverage, have first-aid training, and set standards for handling dogs in a professional manner. The representatives were not averse to implementation of permit fees and conditions for commercial dog-walking within CRD parks and expressed a willingness to discuss permit conditions with staff. Regarding the number of dogs per person for commercial operations, Canadian insurance companies typically allow one person to be in care and control of eight to ten dogs, off or on-leash.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Some park agencies enforce a dogs-on-leash or no dogs rule, based on research showing that barking and potential pursuit by dogs are stressors to wildlife, that digging and trampling vegetation can be harmful to wildlife habitat, and that dog waste can be a source of pathogens that can adversely affect the health of dogs, wildlife and people. Other agencies focus on educating visitors about the environmental and health impacts that off-leash dogs can have by using signs, brochures and social media. In 2018, staff will expand the visitor education program and enhance data collection methods to document compliance with park regulations by dog owners and record the expected improvements in dog behaviour. A report on dog management and outstanding issues, including potential areas for on-leash restrictions, will be prepared in 2019.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

A persistent presence of enforcement staff to educate, warn and fine dog owners can be an effective way to influence park visitors to train their dogs and practice more responsible dog ownership.

In 2016, the Regional Parks Bylaw Enforcement Budget was \$109,660. The 2018 update to the Regional Parks Service Plan includes a request for an ongoing budget increase of \$100,000/year. This amount, combined with that already dedicated to domestic animal enforcement, would allow one 4-hour patrol per day, circulating to parks year-round, for an annual total of 1,400 patrol hours. In addition to educating dog owners about appropriate behaviour and, if necessary, issuing warnings and fines, enforcement officers will spend extra time at Thetis Lake Regional Park during peak periods in the summer to educate visitors about swimming and cliff-jumping hazards.

CRD Bylaw No. 3675 outlines fees and charges for use of Regional Parks services and facilities. The commercial service or activity fee is \$320 per year, which is aligned with other park permit fees for commercial businesses operating in parks. Permit fees offset bylaw enforcement costs and court expenses for cases in which the fines are challenged. The annual fees charged by other park agencies for commercial dog walking range from \$116 to \$750, depending on the jurisdiction.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Dogs must be on-leash on CRD Regional Trails (Lochside, Galloping Goose, E&N Rail Trail-Humpback Connector) and in Sea to Sea and Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Parks.

Dogs must be on-leash in national parks. In BC provincial parks, dogs must be on-leash at all times, except in some parks that have off-leash areas and designated swimming areas.

Municipalities and electoral areas in the capital region have a variety of regulations. In general, dogs must be under effective control. Some areas and beaches are off limits to dogs or require them to be on-leash. The number of dogs a person can walk at any one time is not specified.

Staff conducted a scan of ten municipalities in the Greater Vancouver Area, other parts of Canada and California. Regarding the number of dogs a person can walk at one time, four municipalities do not specify a number, four stated three, and two stated two. Depending on the park or area, the dogs can be off-leash or must be leashed.

The scan included regulations related to commercial dog-walking operations. There are various regulations in place, such as specific areas where dog-walking operations may go, restricted times of day they may be in an area, restricted numbers of permits issued per park or municipality and requirements for identification tags for the dogs and identification vests for the commercial dog walkers. The number of dogs per person for commercial dog walking off-leash is four, six or eight, depending on the municipality.

CONCLUSION

A targeted education program and enforcement presence in parks can be an effective way to raise awareness and influence dog owners to be more responsible about having care and control of their dogs. Some municipalities have established limits on numbers of dogs a person can walk at any one time. Many park agencies issue permits and charge fees for commercial dog-walking operations.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Regional Parks Committee recommend to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That the maximum number of dogs allowed per person is three, either on or off-leash, and amendments to that effect, with a proposed effective date of May 1, 2018, be included in updates to Regional Parks Bylaw No. 3682, Section 8, Animals in Regional Parks, and brought before the Committee in March 2018 for consideration;
2. That the maximum number of dogs allowed per commercial dog walker is eight, either on or off-leash, that commercial dog-walking operations be required to obtain a permit and pay the annual commercial service fee of \$320 and that staff work with commercial dog-walking operations to develop permit conditions such as areas to use, times of day and codes of conduct; and
3. That the Capital Regional District Regional Parks Services and Facilities Fees and Charges Bylaw No. 3675 be amended to add a new category for commercial dog-walking operations, with an effective date of May 1, 2018, and brought before the Committee in March 2018 for consideration.

Submitted by:	Mike Walton, PhD, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

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