

WHAT WE HEARD

Giovanni Caboto Local Off-leash Dog Area

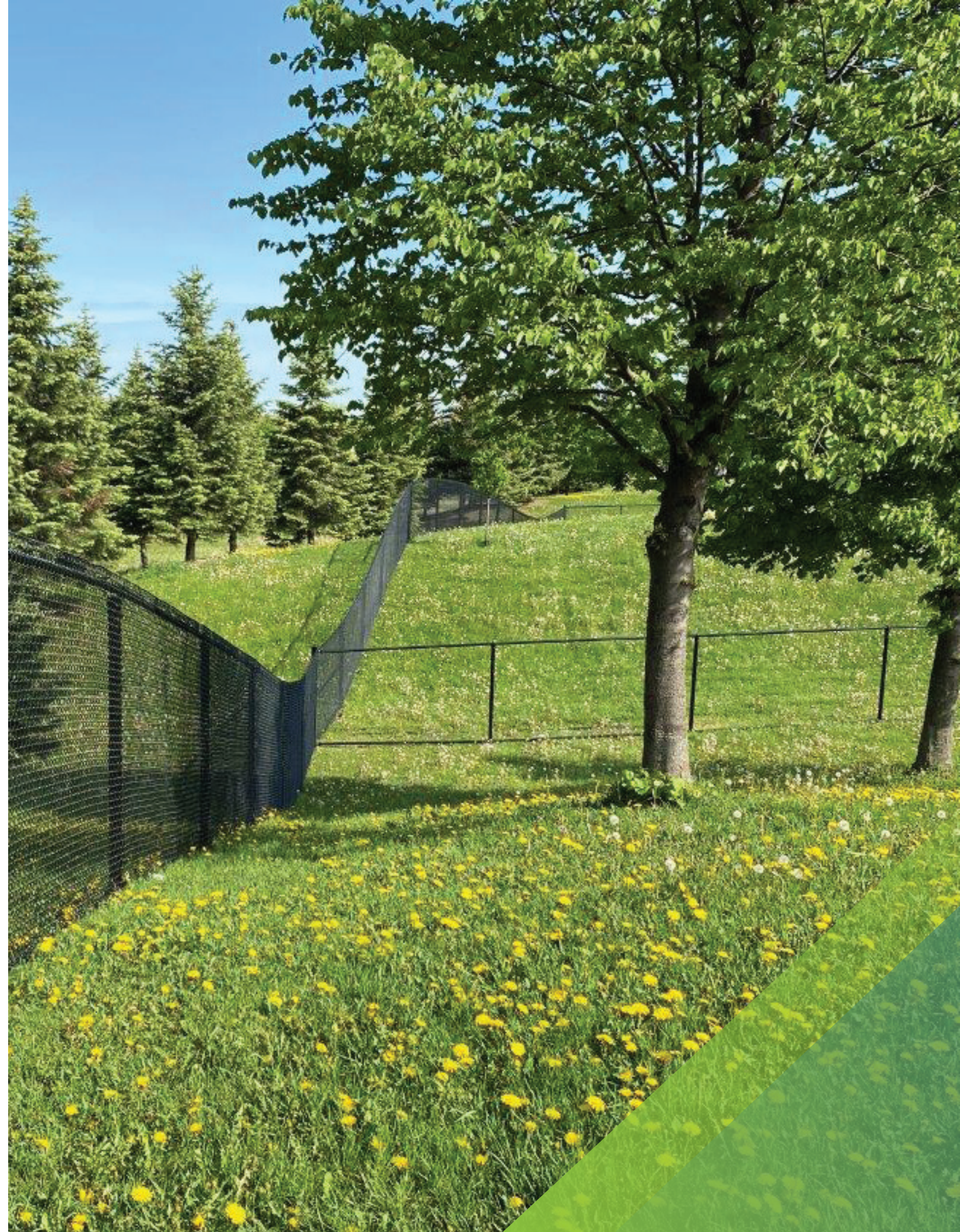
ENGAGEMENT REPORT



Summer 2023

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Project overview

About this report

This report summarizes what the City of Vaughan heard through community engagement on the proposed location and preliminary design of a new local off-leash dog area at Giovanni Caboto Park (75 Matthew Dr.).

In winter 2023, the City hosted an online survey to collect community input on three site design options for the proposed fenced-in off-leash dog area within the park.

In total, the City heard from 146 people, 142 of which completed the online survey.

The majority of survey respondents expressed their support and excitement for the proposed off-leash dog area within the park. Some participants expressed slight hesitation, sharing concerns about enforcement and education. Others opposed the off-leash area, raising concerns regarding unsanctioned off-leash activity currently occurring in the park, available parking and community safety.

Option A (Figure 1) was the preferred site design option. This option places the large-dog area in the centre of the park and the small-dog area to the east of Matthew Drive, adjacent to the large-dog area. The survey results also demonstrated a preference for planting trees in the landscape buffer between the fenced area and the playground to the east.

Following the engagement period, City staff conducted further site and technical analysis and revised the off-leash area configuration to accommodate drainage and other site features. Consultation with the City's Parks Delivery, Animal Services and Park Operations staff provided critical input on design, feasibility and associated by-laws. Figure 2 shows the final configuration and design of the off-leash dog area, reflecting community input, technical analysis and the input received from relevant City departments.



Figure 1: Site design options



Figure 2: Final off-leash site configuration





About the Local Off-leash Dog Area Strategy

Local off-leash dog areas are secure, fenced-in spaces for pets to safely exercise, socialize and roam free.

Recognizing the importance of off-leash areas to dogs and their families, Vaughan Council endorsed the [Local Off-Leash Dog Area Strategy](#) (PDF) in June 2021. Developed through extensive consultation with City staff, residents and stakeholders, the strategy includes criteria for site selection of future parks. The criteria used to evaluate potential sites for off-leash areas include:

- **Governance** – including existing by-laws, policies and regulations, potential for community stewardship, safety and security, and community input.
- **Accessibility** – including available parking, number of residents served and proximity to sidewalks and trails.
- **Location** – including available land owned by the City, as well as proximity to residential areas, children’s play spaces, outdoor sports fields and courts and environmentally sensitive areas.
- **Design** – including size of the area and site characteristics (e.g. drainage, grading, vegetation, microclimate).

To be considered a potential site, a location must score a minimum of 75 per cent on the above criteria. If a location meets this minimum score, it is evaluated based on community feedback, cost and the potential for external funding, layout and availability of amenities.

Following the evaluation process and informed by the input received through public consultation, six locations for new local-off leash facilities were identified and approved within the Local Off-leash Dog Area Strategy. As of September 2022, four are open for use:

- Mackenzie Glen District Park (Ward 1)
- Legion Park (Ward 2)
- Matthew Park (Ward 3)
- Sugarbush Heritage Park (Ward 4)

An additional primary off-leash area is located at Concord/Thornhill Regional Park (299 Racco Pkwy.).

Why Giovanni Caboto Park?

One of the locations identified in the Local Off-leash Area Strategy for a new facility was Chancellor District Park in Ward 3, with construction scheduled to begin in the summer of 2022. However, in August 2022, additional consultation with residents adjacent to the park was conducted. As a result, in September 2022, Vaughan Council passed a [Member’s Resolution](#) (PDF) to review alternative locations for a local off-leash dog area in Ward 3, which included Giovanni Caboto Park.

Giovanni Caboto Park was previously shortlisted as a potential off-leash dog area location using the evaluation criteria established through the Local Off-leash Dog Area Strategy. Giovanni Caboto Park scored 76 per cent when assessed through the evaluation criteria mentioned above.

Following Council’s direction, City staff reviewed and re-evaluated the Giovanni Caboto Park as a potential location and determined it warranted community consultation and input.



How we engaged

From Jan. 17 to Feb. 7, 2023, the City invited the community to review three site design options for the proposed off-leash dog area at Giovanni Caboto Park, weigh in on trade-offs and share their thoughts.

Community input was collected through a survey hosted on the City’s online engagement platform, Have Your Say, Vaughan. Survey participants were asked to:

- weigh in on several design trade-offs, indicating the relative importance of each (e.g. proximity to the existing playground, proximity to homes and size of the off-leash area).
- rank the three proposed site configurations from most to least preferred.
- indicate their preferred landscape buffer treatment (e.g. trees, shrubs and tall grasses or mowed grass), which would be situated between the off-leash dog area and existing playground along the eastern edge of the space.
- identify how they travel to the park (e.g. walk, bike, public transit or drive).
- identify how frequently they expect to use the off-leash dog area if constructed (e.g. daily, often, sometimes, never, rarely).
- confirm personal dog ownership (e.g. small or large breed, how many).
- identify their current use of existing dog parks in Vaughan.
- provide comments, if any.

After the online survey closed on Feb. 7, 2023, the City received four inquiries via email and phone. Parks and Open Space Planning staff responded to each inquiry and collected the residents’ comments. Each inquiry was noted as part of the formal record and added to the final survey results presented in this report.

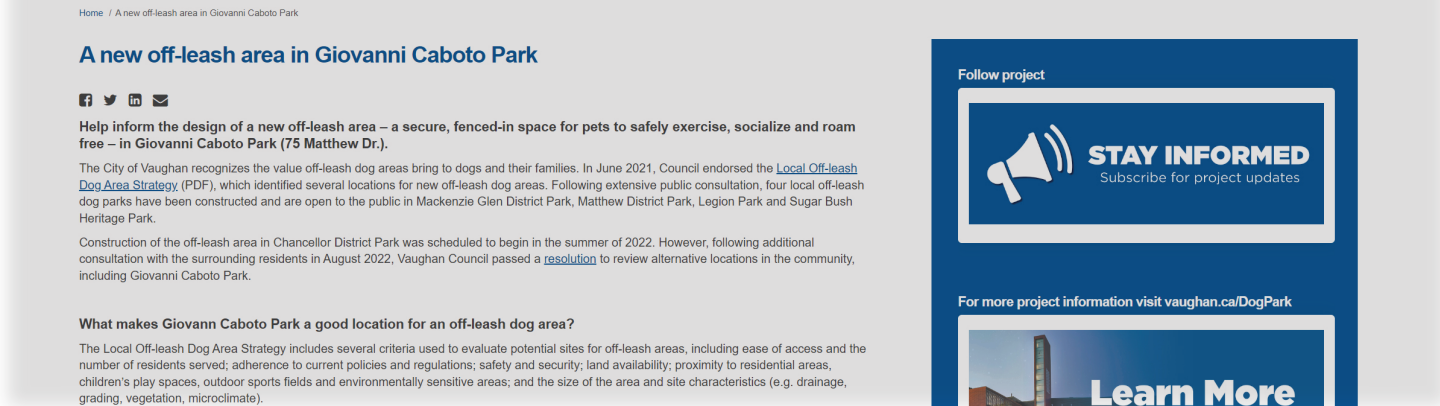


Figure 3. Giovanni Caboto Park Off-leash Dog Area page on the City’s engagement platform Have Your Say, Vaughan

How we reached the community

Promotion of the survey was multi-faceted and included a combination of far-reaching and targeted communications tactics.

Project notice to nearby residents

A project notice with information about the proposed off-leash dog area and online survey was mailed to 585 homes within 250 metres of Giovanni Caboto Park (Figure 9). Additionally, this information was emailed to 39 people who were previously involved in the Chancellor District Park off-leash area community engagement, as well as individuals who previously expressed interest in updates about off-leash areas in Vaughan. York Region District School Board also received a project notice in the mail, and the Pine Valley Village Community Association was informed through email.

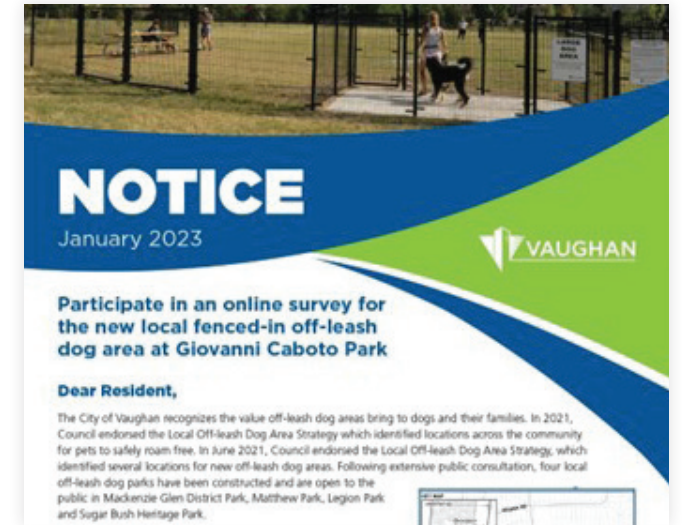


Figure 4. Project notice sent to residents within 250 metres of Giovanni Caboto Park

Public service announcement

A public service announcement was released on Jan. 17, 2023 to local, Greater Toronto Area, national and cultural media outlets. It was also issued to those who subscribe to Vaughan News, the City’s eNewsletter.



Figure 5. Social media graphic

Social media

Over three weeks, the City shared 25 posts across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn to promote the survey and encourage the community to learn more by visiting the project website.



Community signage

The City installed temporary signage within Giovanni Caboto Park and the surrounding area to inform residents about the online survey. Six roadside signs were placed in high-traffic areas within the community:

- Northwest corner of Gregory Gate and Weston Road
- Northwest corner of Embassy Drive and Aberdeen Avenue
- Southeast corner of Blue Willow Drive and Michelle Drive
- In front of Chancellor Community Centre on Chancellor Drive
- On the north side of Chancellor Drive, east of Belview Drive
- In front of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School on Aberdeen Avenue.



Figure 6. Roadside sign located in the community to promote the online survey

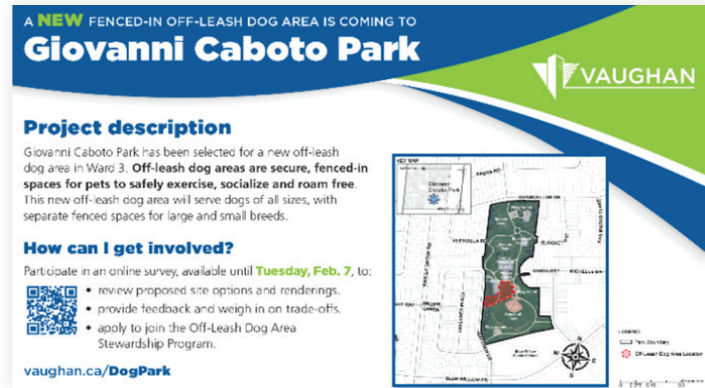


Figure 7. Temporary signage posted in Giovanni Caboto Park

Local off-leash dog area video

An educational video was promoted alongside the online survey to increase awareness of how off-leash areas operate in Vaughan, including proper use and etiquette, and the value they bring to dogs and their families.

Vaughan Engagement eNewsletter

The Giovanni Caboto Park Off-leash Dog Area survey was promoted to 1,399 people through the January edition of the Vaughan Engagement eNewsletter.

Outreach through Members of Council

Information about the survey was distributed to all members of Vaughan Council to share with their constituents. The Giovanni Caboto Park off-leash Dog Area engagement survey was featured in several Councillors eNewsletters.



Figure 8. Local off-leash dog area video

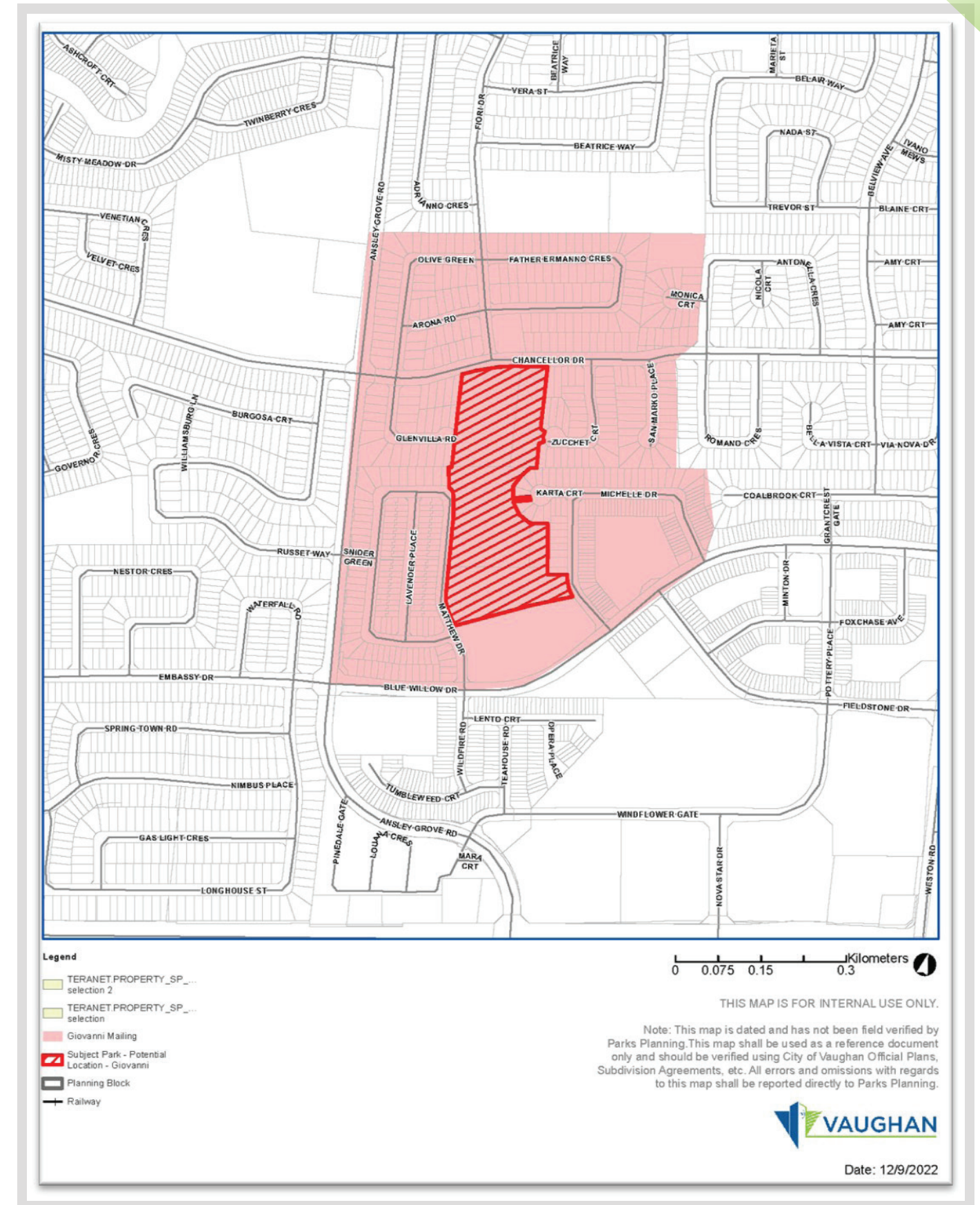


Figure 9: Map of residents who received a project notice in the mail



Who we heard from

In total, 142 people completed the survey.

The survey included several questions to help the City better understand who responded, including their age, where they live and whether they own a dog.

Age of survey respondents

Feedback was collected from respondents representing a wide age range. The majority of respondents were 25 to 64 years of age, with an even proportion of the following age groups: 25 to 34 years (23 per cent), 35 to 44 years (21 per cent), 45 to 54 years (22 per cent) and 55 to 64 years (18 per cent). Only a small percentage of respondents were 18 to 24 years old (six per cent) or over 65 years of age (five per cent).

What is your age?

The letter 'n' refers to the sample size.

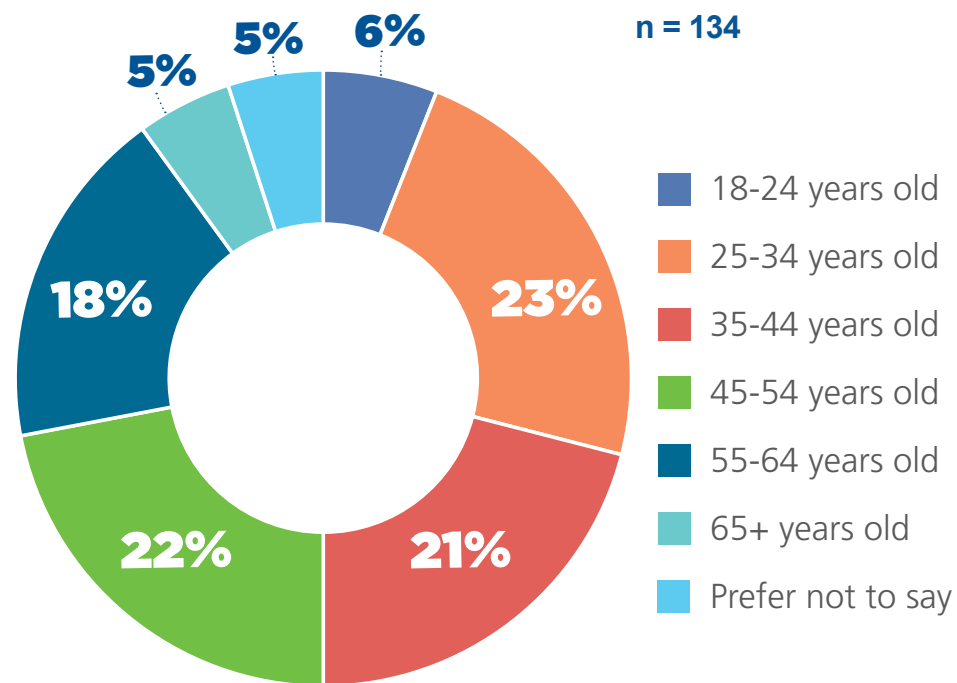


Figure 10: Survey responses to "What is your age?"

Proximity to Giovanni Caboto Park

The majority of participants indicated they do not live on streets adjacent to the park (64 per cent). Several respondents indicated they live on Blue Willow Drive (10 per cent), Matthew Drive (seven per cent) and Michelle Drive (seven per cent). Only a few respondents indicated they live on Zucchet Court (four per cent), Lavender Place (four per cent) and Karta Court (three per cent). None of the survey respondents live on Glenvilla Road.

Do you live on one of the following streets in the area surrounding Giovanni Caboto Park?

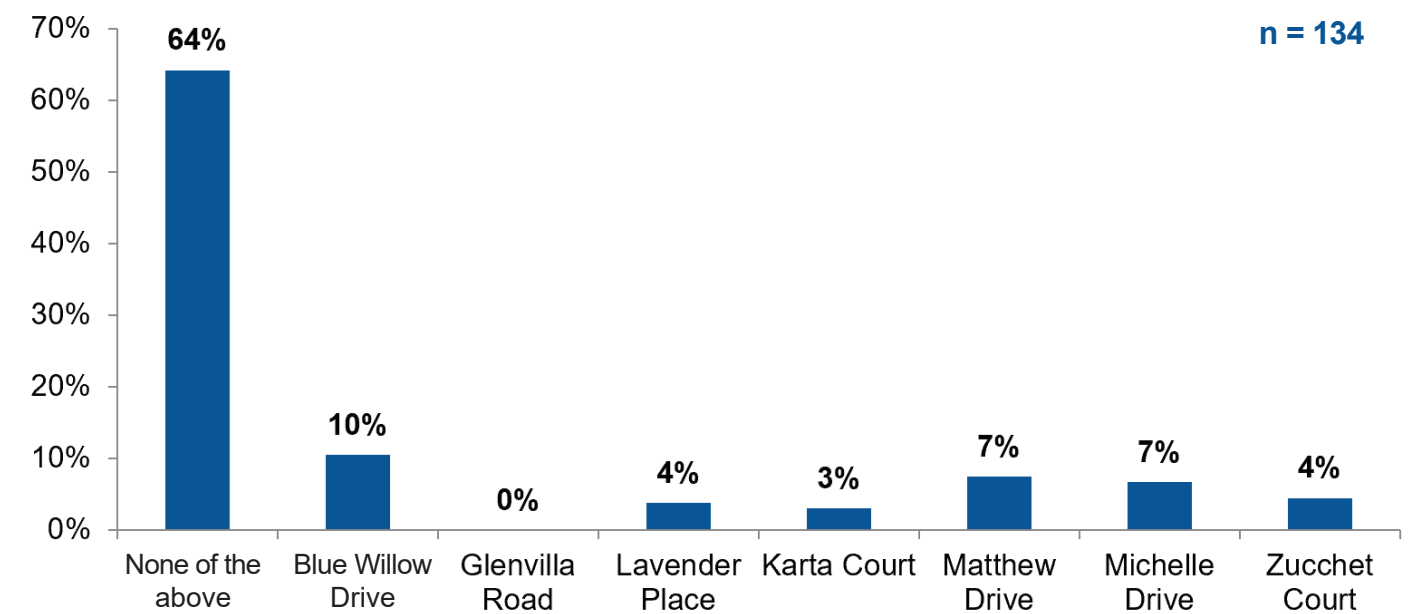


Figure 11: Survey responses to "Do you live on one of the following streets in the area surrounding Giovanni Caboto Park?"



Dog ownership

As part of the survey, participants were asked to indicate whether they currently own a dog or plan to own one in the future. The majority of respondents were dog owners (72 per cent) or indicated they plan to own a dog in the future (nine per cent). The remainder (19 per cent) indicated they do not own a dog. Of those that own dogs, 60 per cent were supportive of an off-leash area, six per cent were opposed and three per cent were neutral.

Are you currently a dog owner?

n = 140

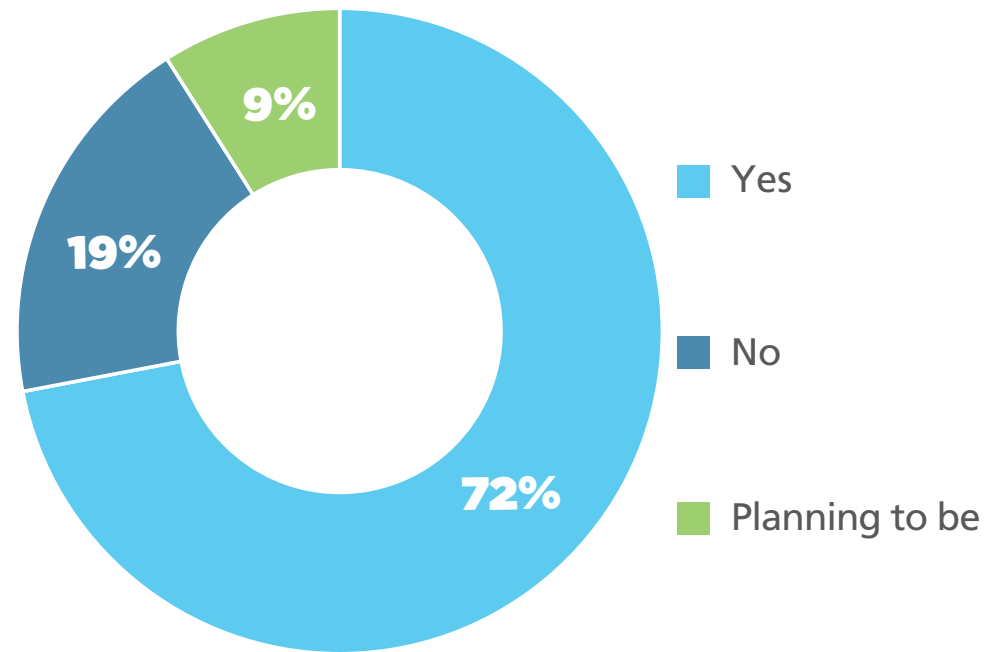


Figure 12: Survey responses to "Are you currently a dog owner?"

Support for the proposed off-leash dog area versus dog ownership

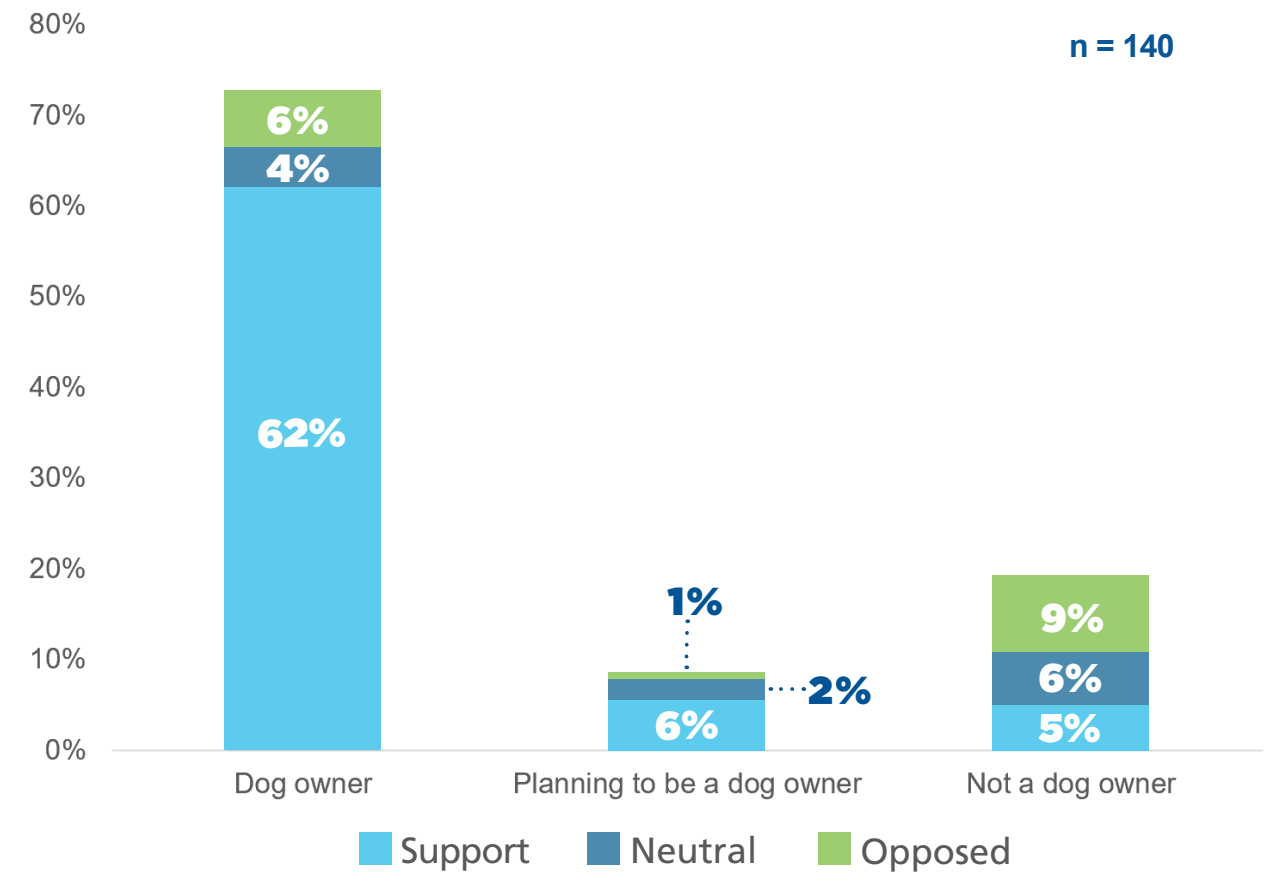


Figure 13: Support for the proposed off-leash dog area versus dog ownership



When asked to provide the number of dogs they own and their size (e.g. over or under 35 pounds), the majority of respondents indicated they own one large dog (73 per cent), and 67 per cent indicated they own one small dog. Few respondents indicated they own two or more dogs.

Please provide the number of dogs you have and their size:

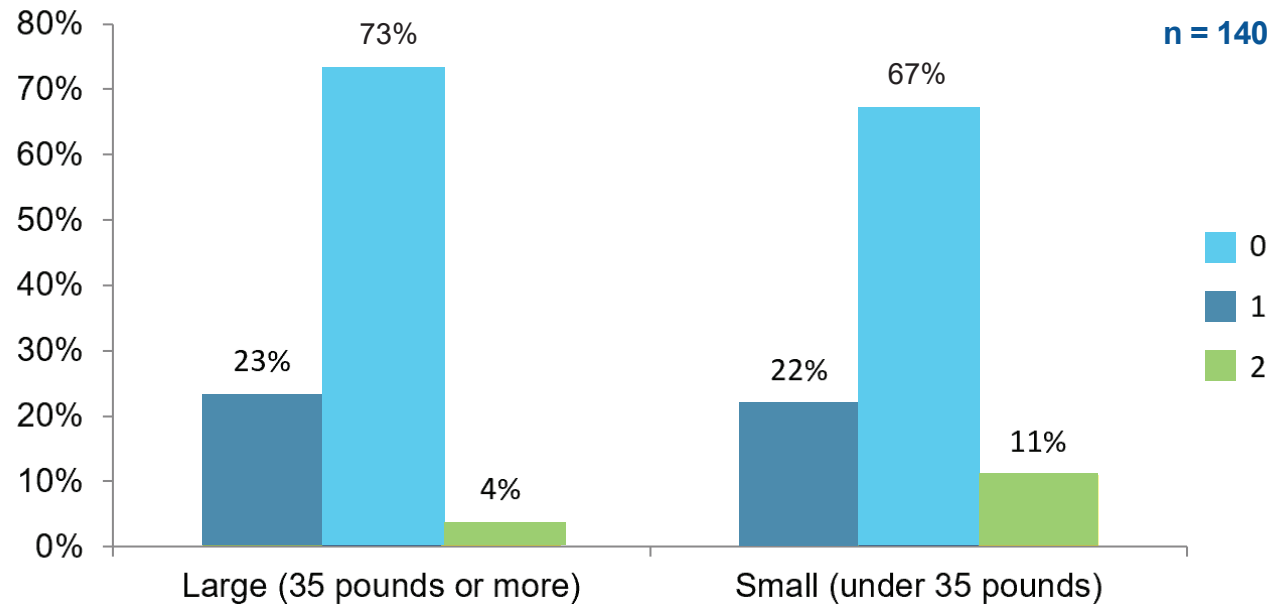


Figure 14: Survey responses to “Please provide the number of dogs you have and their size”



What we heard

A total of 103 open-ended comments were collected through the survey. Each comment was reviewed and coded as supportive, unsupportive or neutral towards the proposed off-leash dog area. In summarizing the feedback collected, the following words are used to describe the relative number of people who shared a perspective, idea or concern:

- “Most” or “a majority” represents at least 73 responses (more than 50 per cent of the open-ended comments)
- “Many” represents 40 to 72 responses
- “Some” represents 16 to 39 responses
- “Several” reflects six to 15 responses
- “Few” means one to five responses

General perceptions towards off-leash dog areas

Those who took the survey were largely supportive of off-leash dog areas. The majority of survey respondents expressed their support for the off-leash dog area (70 per cent), with many expressing excitement and sharing the benefits these areas provide. However, some (18 per cent) expressed concern, raising issues such as current unsanctioned off-leash activity in the park, lack of parking availability and safety. The remaining comments (12 per cent) were neutral to the proposed off-leash area, expressing only slight hesitation or concern – largely around the need for improved enforcement and education on proper off-leash etiquette.

Summary of community feedback

- **Dog area long overdue within the community:** Many respondents noted an off-leash dog area in their neighbourhood was long overdue. They were eager to construct the off-leash dog area in Giovanni Caboto Park.
- **Desired features within off-leash area:** The majority of respondents who were excited about the off-leash area also provided suggestions for additional amenities within the off-leash area, including a water fountain, shade for the hot summer months, proper lighting and seating for dog owners. A few survey participants highlighted the importance of choosing the right surface material for dogs and their paws, suggesting the City consider using woodchips.
- **Concerns about irresponsible dog owners:** Several respondents expressed concern that an off-leash dog area would increase the amount of dog waste in the park. Additionally, they cited concern that there would be no enforcement when dog owners do not pick up their dog’s waste.
- **Potential for conflicts between off-leash dogs and park users:** Several respondents cited concern that the introduction of the off-leash area posed safety risks to park users such as children. While most respondents supported the off-leash dog area, others indicated that the proposed area would conflict with existing programming such as baseball, the playground and children walking to school, noting the park is very busy during summer months.

I think this is a great idea. There are quite a few dog owners in the area and I know it would be nice to have a dog area close to home.

Thank you, thank you, thank you! We are beyond excited that a dog park is coming to our local community!

I anticipate more dog owners coming to the area not respecting the rules of the park and cleaning up after their dogs.

I think this is a bad area to have a dog park. There are huge safety concerns because of its proximity to playgrounds, sidewalks and the school. There is an assumption that the dog owners will be responsible and I can assure you that many in this area are not.

Site design options

In the survey, respondents were asked to rank the relative importance of the following considerations when reviewing site options:

- **Proximity to the playground:** While all three options included a landscape buffer between the fenced area and existing playground to the east, the size of the buffer varied.
- **Proximity to the homes on Matthew Drive:** By placing the proposed off-leash area in the centre of the park, none of the options were directly adjacent to any residences. However, some of the options proposed locating a portion of the off-leash area across the street from homes on Matthew Drive.
- **Size of the off-leash area:** The City strives to construct off-leash areas that are approximately 2,500 square metres (0.6 acres). This is the recommended amount of space needed for dogs to exercise, socialize and play. However, only Option A met this recommendation. Options B and C were less than 0.4 acres in size.

Size of the off-leash area was ranked as the most important design consideration, receiving a weighted score of 2.39 out of three. Proximity to the playground/size of the landscape buffer ranked second (1.89), with proximity to homes on Matthew Drive ranking third (1.73).



Please rank the relative importance of each planning consideration

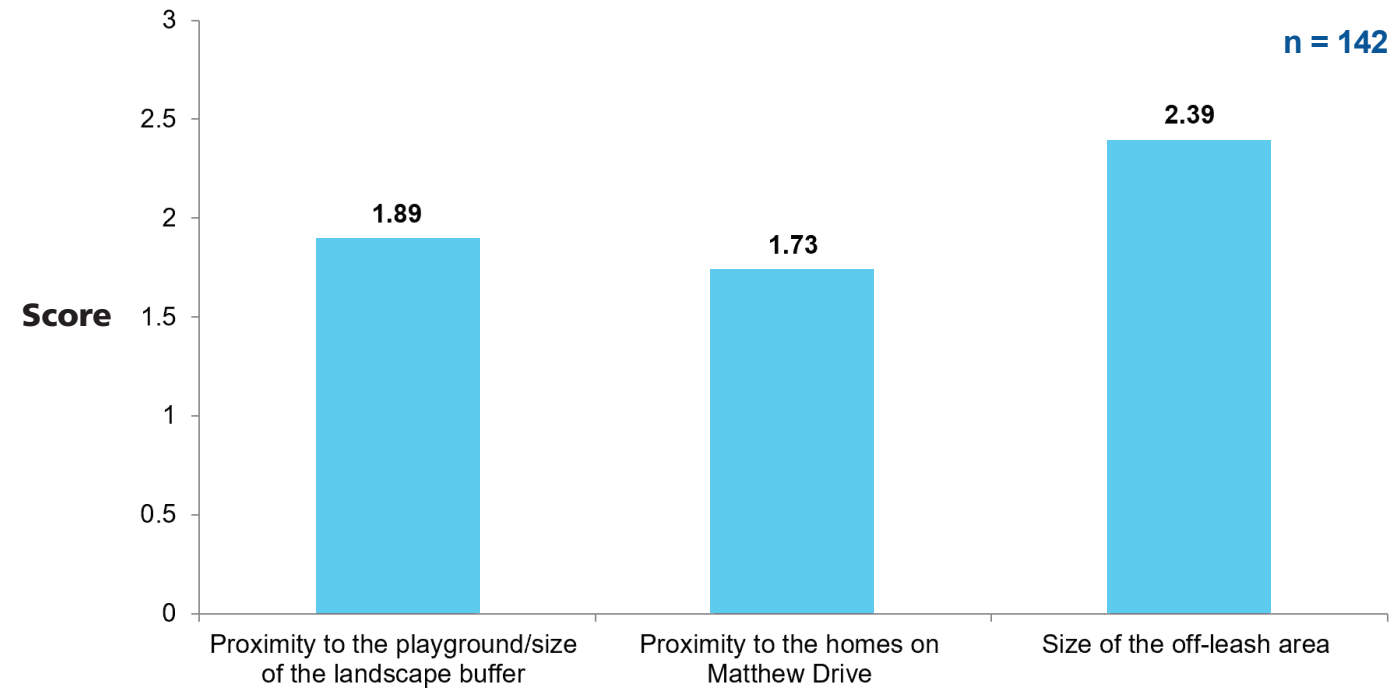


Figure 15: Survey responses to “Please rank the relative importance of each planning

Which site option do you prefer?

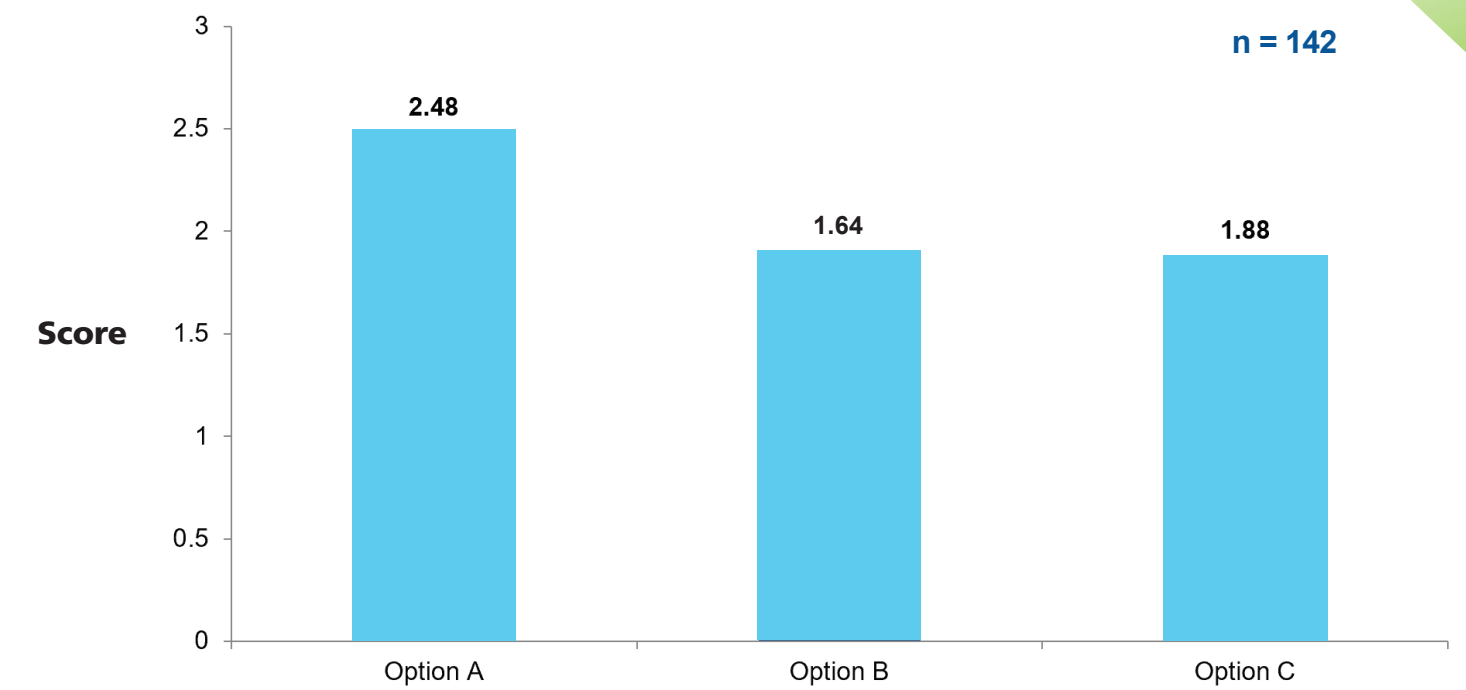


Figure 17: Survey responses to “Which site option do you prefer?”

Next, participants were presented with the three off-leash area configurations (Figure 17) and asked to indicate their preferred option.

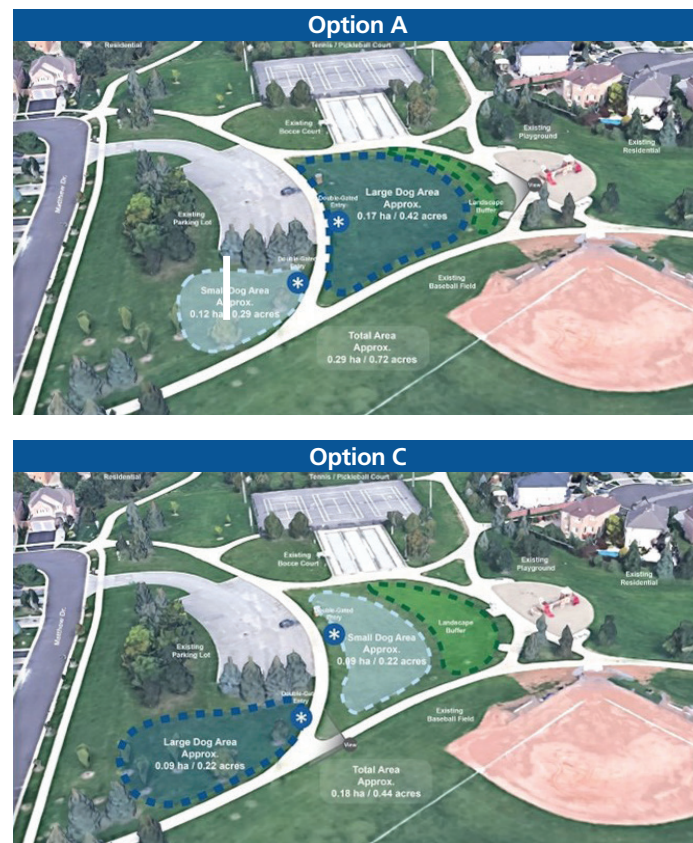


Figure 16: Site design options

Summary of community feedback

- **Size of the off-leash area:** When compared to Options B and C, many survey respondents reiterated their preference for Option A due to the size of the large dog area, noting many dog owners have large-breed dogs which require more space to exercise. However, for those participants who indicated they did not want a dog park, they preferred to minimize the off-leash area as much as possible.
- **Sufficient buffer between the off-leash area and playground:** For those who expressed support for a larger dog area, many noted the location of the off-leash area was not a concern for them and the landscape buffer provided a safe distance from the playground. Others noted the need for a larger buffer between the fence and the playground.
- **Proximity to the playground and homes:** Several survey respondents raised concerns about the safety of children walking to and from school and suggested relocating the off-leash dog area to a different park. A few participants noted some residents and/or children might be fearful of dogs when using the playground or may have allergies to dogs, thereby restricting their access to the park.

Prefer the options that provide greater off-leash area. It's also important that dog areas (larger and small dogs) are separated. It would be nice to have some shaded areas (roof or vegetation).

Larger the dog park the better for the pet's health.

I don't think the playground buffer is all that important as the dogs are fenced away from the children, so not a safety issue for children. Big dogs do well with a bigger space to run so bigger square area is important. And the dog parks I have been to I find the small dog area not used as much as the big dog area so Option A with the small dog area should not be too much of a concern for the homes on Matthew Dr.

I am not supportive of having an off-leash area in this park as this park is very close to kids and residential areas. The smallest choice is preferred.

[Option] B smallest area for dogs, parks are for people. Would like to see tree planting beautification efforts, flowering/community gardens more.

Landscape buffer

Participants were asked to choose what they would like planted in the landscape buffer between the fenced-in off-leash area and the existing playground to the east (e.g. trees, shrubs and tall grasses or mowed grass) (Figure 18).

The option to plant trees in the landscape buffer was the preferred treatment, receiving a weighted score of 2.59 out of three. Planting the buffer with shrubs and tall grasses ranked second (2.01) and leaving the buffer as mowed grass was the least preferred (1.4).

Which treatment of the landscape buffer do you prefer?

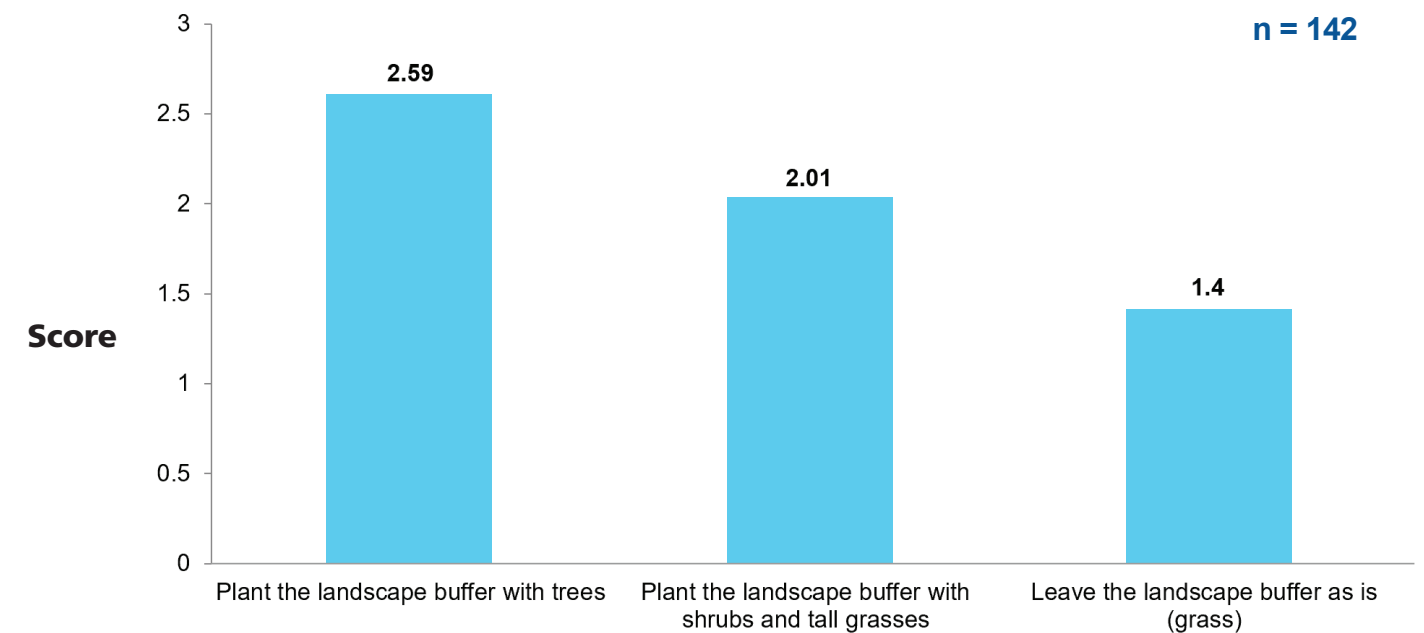


Figure 18: Survey responses to "Which treatment of the landscape buffer do you prefer?"



Figure 19: Landscape buffer treatment options

Summary of community feedback

The need for trees: Many respondents commented on the need for shade, specifically via trees, in the off-leash area and throughout the park – especially during summer months. Respondents also noted trees would provide a visual and noise buffer for surrounding park users.

Maintenance: Many respondents noted trees require little maintenance compared to other options. For example, some respondents felt garbage would accumulate around shrubs, increasing the need for maintenance.

More vegetation: Many respondents commented on their preference for more vegetation in the park, noting the park currently lacks shrubs and flowers. A few commented on their preference for beautification in the park rather than constructing a dog park.



Trees will provide shade. Period. The animals will need a break in the shade for nearly half the year on hot days. The shrubs are also lovely but will not provide as much shade in the off-leash area.

I feel the shrubs will be neglected and garbage will build up within them. Whereas trees or just grass is easier to maintain.

Trees are best and low maintenance, with grass a close second. Once the shrubs are planted, it's high maintenance to keep it looking neat and tidy with weeding, pruning, etc.

I think the park is in need of more trees or plants. It's a very open area and greenery would help provide more shade.

Use of existing off-leash dog areas in Vaughan

To better understand whether residents use off-leash dog areas in Vaughan, survey respondents were asked which of the five existing off-leash areas they currently visit with their dogs.

Over half of the survey respondents (54 per cent) indicated they do not travel to other off-leash locations in Vaughan. Of those who do use other off-leash dog areas, the most-used location was Concord/Thornhill Regional Park (28 per cent), followed by Legion Park (13 per cent), Mackenzie Glen District Park (12 per cent), Matthew Park (nine per cent) and Sugar Bush Heritage Park (one per cent).

Do you currently utilize other fenced-in, designated off-leash dog areas in Vaughan? If so, which one(s)? Select all that apply.

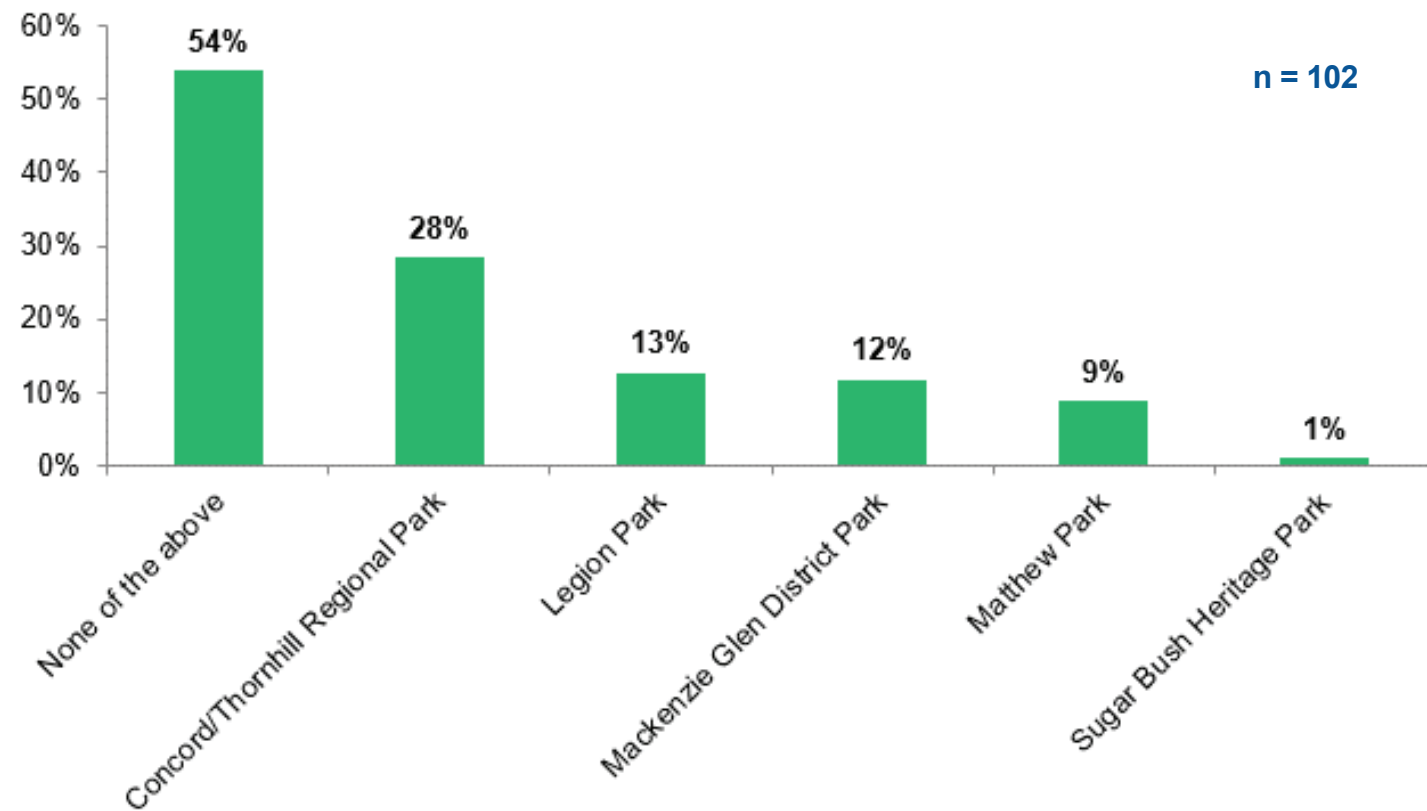


Figure 20: Survey responses to “Do you currently utilize other fenced-in, designated off-leash dog areas in Vaughan? If so, which one(s)? Select all that apply.”

Anticipated use of the proposed off-leash dog area

Over half of the survey participants (55 per cent) indicated that if the off-leash park is constructed, they would use the facility daily. An additional 25 per cent said they would visit often – once or more a week. Eight per cent said they would visit sometimes (once or more a month) and two per cent said rarely (once or more a year). Eleven per cent indicated they do not plan to use the future off-leash dog area in Giovanni Caboto Park.

Once constructed, how often do you anticipate you will use the designated off-leash dog area in Giovanni Caboto Park?

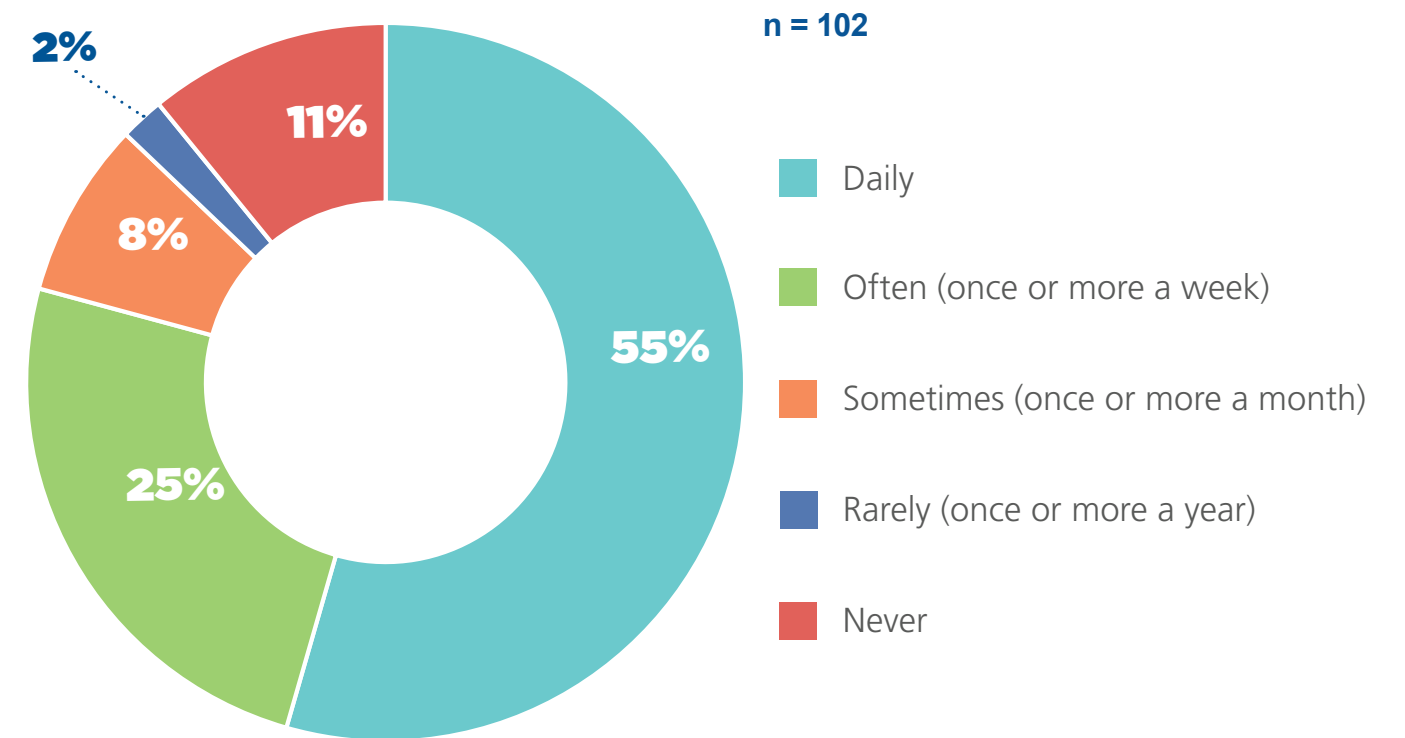
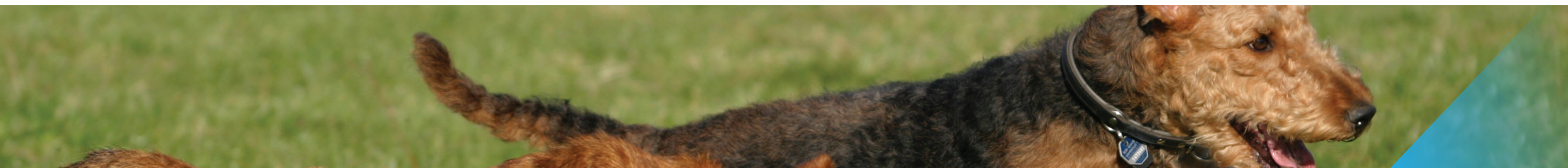


Figure 21: Survey responses to, “Once constructed, how often do you anticipate you will use the designated off-leash dog area in Giovanni Caboto Park?”



Travel options

When asked to identify how they would travel to Giovanni Caboto Park, most respondents (82 per cent) reported they would walk. Driving was the second most popular travel method at 32 per cent, followed by biking (11 per cent) and public transit (one per cent). Five per cent indicated they would not travel to this location.

How would you travel to the designated off-leash dog area in Giovanni Caboto Park? Please select all that apply.

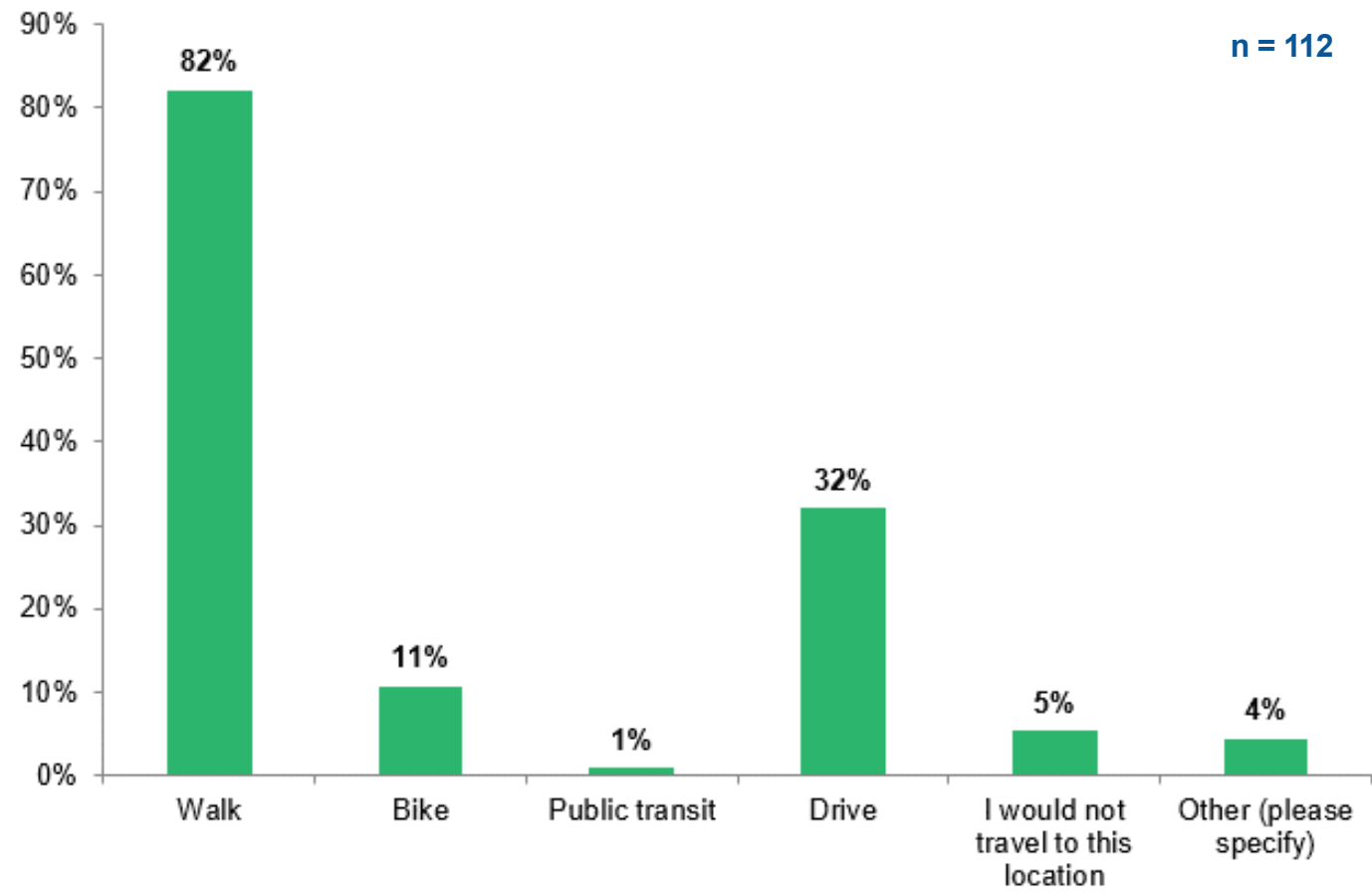


Figure 22: Survey responses to “How would you travel to the designated off-leash dog area in Giovanni Caboto Park? Please select all that apply.”



Next steps

Thank you to all who took the time to participate in the survey and share their views!

The survey results demonstrated general support and excitement for the proposed off-leash dog area within Giovanni Caboto Park. Respondents indicated they prefer a site configuration that places the large-dog area in the centre of the park and the small-dog area to the west, closer to Matthew Drive, as this provides the largest area for dogs to exercise and socialize. The survey results also demonstrated a preference for planting trees in the landscape buffer, as they will provide both a physical barrier and much-needed shade.

In response to the community support heard through this survey, the off-leash dog area was constructed in spring 2023. Figure 23 shows the final site configuration of the large- and small-dog off-leash areas used to guide construction in the park.

For information on off-leash dog areas in Vaughan, please visit vaughan.ca/DogPark.



Figure 23: Final off-leash area site configuration in Giovanni Caboto Park



A photograph of two dogs, likely Weimaraners, lying on a grassy field. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The dog on the left is looking towards the left, and the dog on the right is looking towards the right. Both dogs are wearing collars.

**Parks and Open Space Planning
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