

## PLANNING

### KEY TAKEAWAYS – COUNTYWIDE PLANNING

- FCPA should construct at least one new dog park by 2025 and use the list of master planned but unbuilt dog parks for potential locations. The selection of the dog park should be based on community support and prioritization utilizing the planning criteria established in this report and described below. This will satisfy the estimated service level need based on the projected population for 2025 as well as the substantial community interest expressed through the dog park study survey.
- Following the selection and construction of one planned dog park, establish a schedule for the construction of the remaining six dog parks that are master planned but not yet built, and identify funding sources for the construction of these parks. Construction of these parks should be prioritized utilizing the criteria established in this report and described below. Building and establishing these planned dog parks will exceed the number of dog parks required to satisfy the County's estimated service level need over the next 20+ years, close dog park gaps in planning districts and help better meet community demand as indicated by both licensed dogs and community survey.
- FCPA should explore options for planning a new dog park in the Baileys and Jefferson Planning Districts, as well as the Bull Run Planning District, and/or identify and convey information about the privately owned publicly accessible dog parks in these districts. These districts currently do not have existing or planned FCPA dog parks. These actions would help close these gaps.
- In the future, FCPA should employ the following planning criteria (in addition to Needs Assessment standards) when planning for new dog parks (beyond those that are master planned):
  - Geographic distribution – (Planning Districts)
  - The recommended access-based service areas for dog parks: 20-minute drive access (countywide) and consideration of 10-minute walk access in densely populated neighborhoods. Note that these access-based service areas were developed based on public input received from the dog park study survey
  - Density of licensed dogs in the County
- The total number and location of privately owned and publicly accessible dog parks in the county is currently unknown. FCPA should conduct an inventory of these facilities in the County and prioritize this effort in the Baileys and Jefferson Planning Districts as well as the more dense Special Planning Areas (as defined in Figure 18) where these types of dog parks are more likely to be constructed, to better understand how access and need is being met in these areas. These dog

parcs and dog runs located within private developments should continue to be encouraged through the development review process, where appropriate.

- FCPA should consider hosting additional dog-related events, building on what has been offered in the past, and following examples from other similar jurisdictions, to meet public need and interest.
- To provide more robust information about dog parks and dog park events, FCPA should consolidate all information related to dog parks, dog classes and events hosted by FCPA, dog park volunteer information, donation opportunities, and dog-owner related requirements (vaccination, rabies clinics, etc.) into a single webpage.

### ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

When planning for dog parks in Fairfax County, there were three main questions that this study was tasked with answering: how many dog parks does Fairfax County have, how many should it have, and how far should people travel to get to them?

The study sought to answer these questions to determine dog park need and to establish a baseline of where Fairfax County is today. By knowing where we are today, FCPA can better plan for dog parks in the future. This section presents the study’s findings to these questions.

### HOW MANY DOG PARKS DOES FAIRFAX COUNTY HAVE?

There are 11 public dog parks in Fairfax County that are owned and/or operated by FCPA. Also, there are two public dog parks owned and operated by other jurisdictions (the City of Fairfax, and the Town of Vienna) bringing the total number of publicly owned and publicly accessible dog parks in Fairfax County to 13, as detailed in the table (Figure 11).

#	FCPA Dog Park Name	Year Constructed
1	Blake Lane Dog Park	2000
2	Baron Cameron Dog Park	2001
3	South Run Dog Park	2001
4	Mason District Dog Park	2002
5	Chandon Dog Park	2003
6	Grist Mill Dog Park	2006
7	Rock Hill District Dog Park	2006
8	Westgrove Dog Park	2012
9	Lenclair/Blackjack Dog Park	2014
10	Dulles Station Community Dog Park	2017
11	Monticello Dog Park	2018
<b>Other publicly owned and accessible dog parks in Fairfax County (not owned or operated by FCPA)</b>		
12	Moorefield Dog Park Town of Vienna	2002
13	Westmore Dog Park City of Fairfax	2019

Figure 11: Publicly Owned Dog Parks in Fairfax County

**Data Sources** Personal Communication via e-mail between Town of Vienna Parks and Recreation and FCPA regarding the year of construction of the Moorefield dog park, August 28, 2019. Personal Communication via e-mail between City of Fairfax Parks and Recreation and FCPA regarding dog parks in the City of Fairfax, May 2, 2019.

Figures 12-14 below compare the number of public dog parks in Fairfax County to peer municipalities. In looking at these charts, it can be observed that Fairfax County is a leader among similarly sized (both square miles of land area and population) municipalities, as well as among municipalities in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. Fairfax County has the second highest amount of dog parks in all three comparison charts. However, in comparing to other municipalities in the Washington D.C. region, when the City of Alexandria's unfenced off-leash dog areas are accounted for, this puts Alexandria ahead of both Washington D.C. and Fairfax County in total number of public dog parks, with Fairfax County ranking third in this comparison.

### ***Dog Park Quantity Comparison by Similar Land Area***

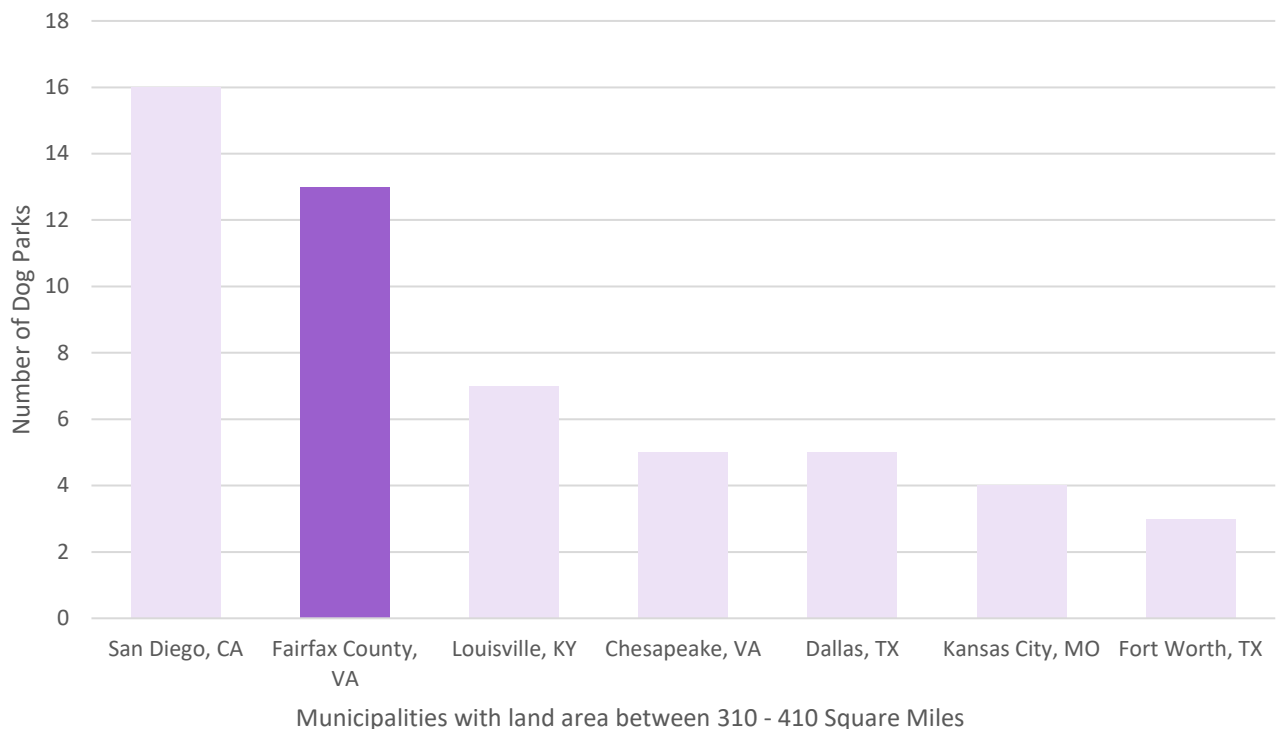


Figure 12: Dog park quantity comparison among similarly sized municipalities

**Notes:** Land area shown above is inclusive of water area measurements for each municipality. Municipalities shown above limited in part to data available from the Trust for Public Land's Dog Park Rankings for the 100 largest U.S. cities, 2019. Fairfax County dog park totals are inclusive of two publicly accessible non-FCPA owned dog parks (Moorefield Park and Westmore Dog Park). The total number shown above does not reflect planned (unbuilt) or privately owned dog parks.

#### **Data Sources**

U.S. Census Bureau. 2010 decennial Census. Table GCT-PH1. Population, Housing Units, Area, and Density: 2010 - United States -- Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Area, in Principal City, Not in Principal City, and County; and for Puerto Rico. American Fact Finder (now data.census.gov). Available at: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/TheTrustforPublicLand.2019.Dogparkrankingsforthe100largestU.S.cities,2019>. Available at: [https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/City%20Park%20Facts%20Dog%20Parks%202019\\_R5\\_0.pdf](https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/City%20Park%20Facts%20Dog%20Parks%202019_R5_0.pdf)

### Dog Park Quantity Comparison by Similar Population Size

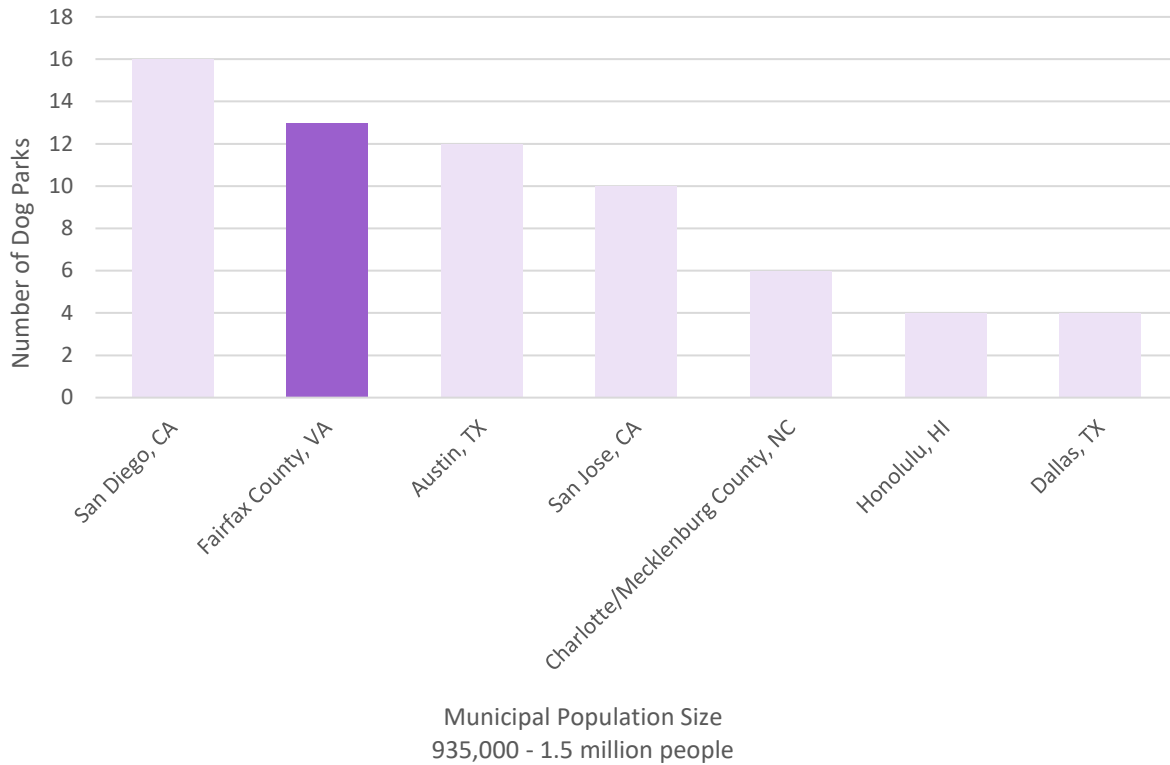


Figure 13: Dog park quantity comparison among municipalities with similar residential population sizes to Fairfax County

**Notes**

Population data for Fairfax County derived from Fairfax County Economic, Demographic and Statistical Research, 2019. Population data for all other municipalities obtained from the Trust for Public Land’s Dog Park Rankings for the 100 largest U.S. cities, 2019.

Municipalities shown above limited in part to data available from the Trust for Public Land’s Dog Park Rankings for the 100 largest U.S. cities, 2019.

Fairfax County dog park totals are inclusive of two publicly accessible non-FCPA owned dog parks (Moorefield Park and Westmore Dog Park). The total number shown above does not reflect planned or privately owned dog parks.

**Data Sources**

County of Fairfax, Virginia. Demographic Reports. 2019. Available at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/demographics/sites/demographics/files/assets/demographicreports/fullrpt2019.pdf>  
 The Trust for Public Land. 2018. Dog park rankings for the 100 largest U.S. cities, 2018. Available at: [https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/City%20Park%20Facts%20Dog%20Parks%202019\\_R5\\_0.pdf](https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/City%20Park%20Facts%20Dog%20Parks%202019_R5_0.pdf)

### Dog Park Quantity Comparison to Municipalities in the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Area

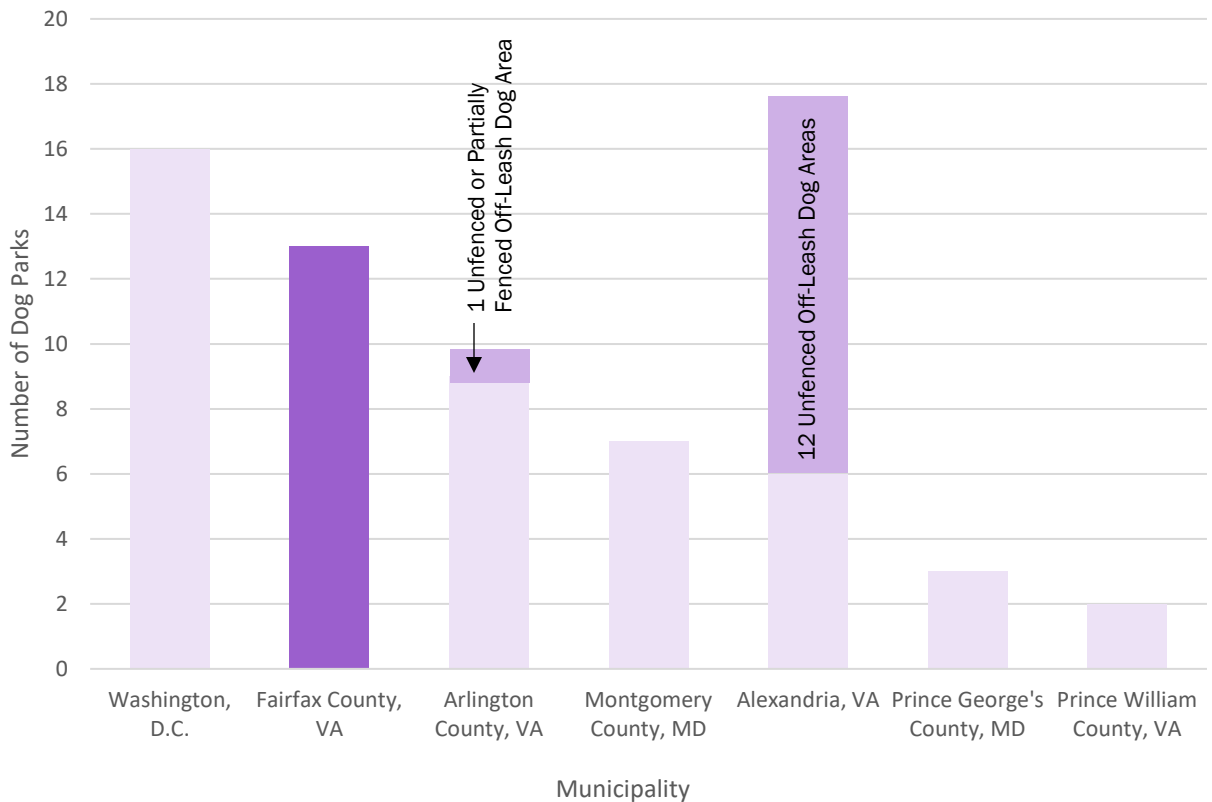


Figure 14: Dog park quantity comparison among other municipalities in the region.

**Notes**

Fairfax County dog park totals are inclusive of two publicly accessible non-FCPA owned dog parks (Moorefield Park and Westmore Dog Park). The number shown above does not reflect planned or privately owned dog parks. All dog parks are fenced unless otherwise noted.

Arlington County has a total of 10 dog parks when including the 1 dog park that is unfenced or partially fenced. The City of Alexandria has a total of 18 dog parks when including the 12 unfenced off leash dog areas. One dog park in Prince William County is temporarily closed due to construction. Data compiled in August 2019, updated in June 2021.

**Data Sources**

- <https://dpr.dc.gov/page/dog-parks-00>
- <https://parks.arlingtonva.us/parksfacilities/dog-parks/>
- <https://www.montgomeryparks.org/about/rules-and-regulations/dog-parks/>
- <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Dogs>
- <https://www.mncppc.org/4496/Dog-Parks>
- <https://www.pwcva.gov/department/parks-recreation-tourism/dog-park>
- <https://www.pwcva.gov/department/animal-control/dog-park>

In addition to the 13 dog parks that are on the ground today, there are planned, but unbuilt dog parks included in the master plans for seven existing FCPA-owned parks. Combining the number of both existing and planned dog parks brings the total number of dog parks in Fairfax County to 20, exceeding all the peer municipalities examined above. The FCPA parks where dog parks are master planned but not yet built are listed below and shown in Figure 15: Existing and Planned FCPA Dog Parks .

- Franconia Park
- Lake Fairfax Park
- McLean Central Park
- Bryn Mawr Park
- Bren Mar Park
- Olander and Margaret Banks Sr. Park
- Laurel Hill Park

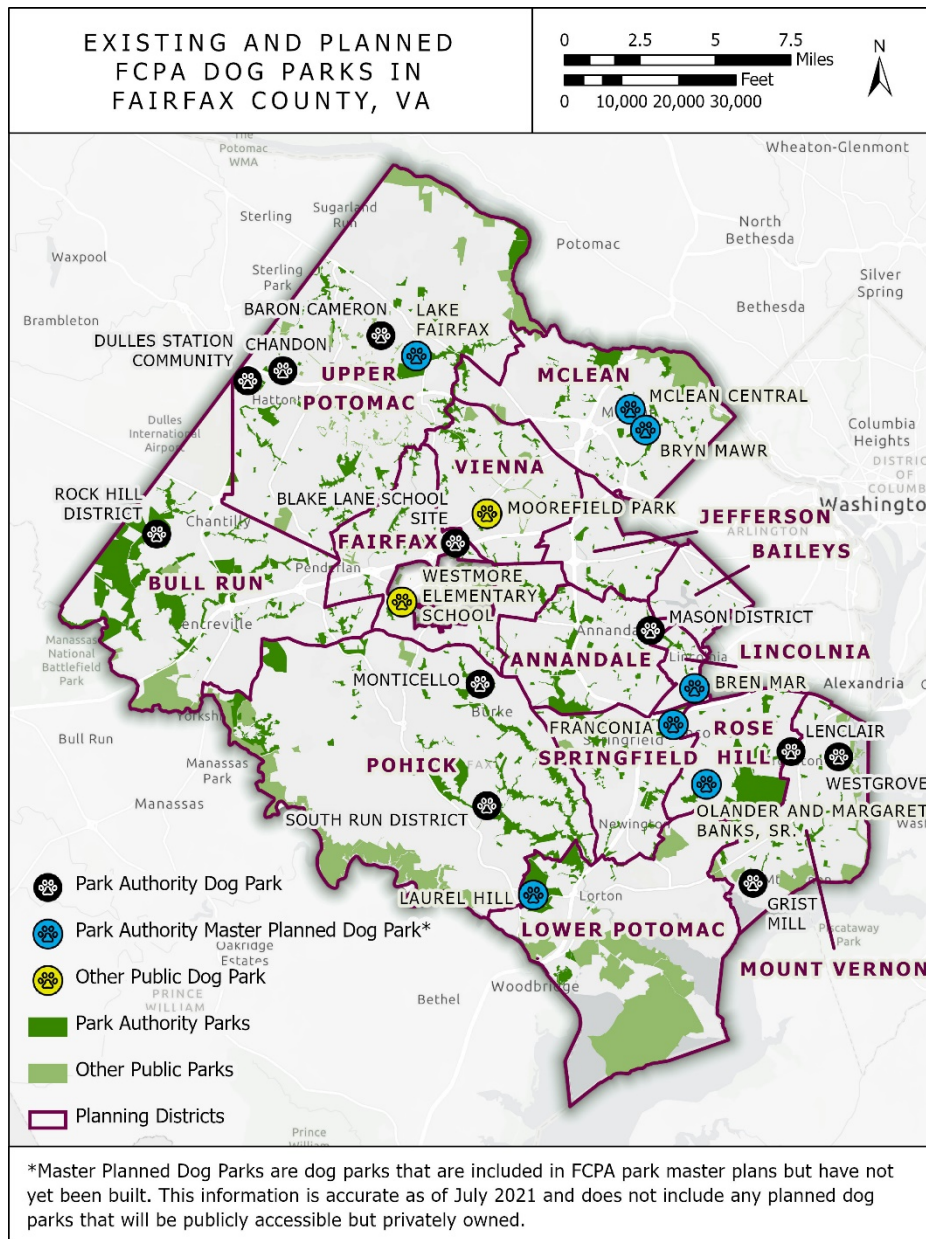


Figure 15: Existing and Planned FCPA Dog Parks Map



Beyond the 13 existing FCPA dog parks and seven that are planned, there are additional, publicly accessible but privately owned dog parks and dog runs<sup>7</sup> in the County, such as The Mile Dog Park in Tysons Corner, which are typically constructed by private developers. The Mile Dog Park is a 0.5-acre dog park located in Tysons Urban Center and is nestled amongst mixed-use residential development, and part of a planned urban neighborhood. It features artificial turf for surfacing, a variety of benches, shade trees, and a water fountain for visitors and their dogs. These privately developed dog parks and runs play an important role in filling the County need for dog parks, particularly in densely populated settings, such as Tysons Urban Center. The total number and location of these types of facilities at this time is not known<sup>8</sup>.

## HOW MANY DOG PARKS SHOULD FAIRFAX COUNTY HAVE, AND HOW FAR SHOULD RESIDENTS TRAVEL TO GET TO THEM?

This study examined four main criteria when answering this question:

- Service level analysis - Needs Assessment standards
- Geographic distribution – Planning Districts
- Walk and drive access
- Density of licensed dogs in the County

These criteria help to determine the County’s need for dog parks. In addition, the study drew from public input and, as a best practice, the study undertook research to better understand how other localities have answered these questions as well when planning their dog parks.

### Needs Assessment Standards

One of the tools that FCPA utilizes for park planning are service level standards, which are generated by FCPA’s decennial Needs Assessment and are published in FCPA’s Comprehensive Park System Plan, *Great Parks Great Communities 2010-2020* (2011). These population-based standards are also published in the Parks and Recreation section in the Policy element of the County’s Comprehensive Plan (2017).

The adopted service level standard for neighborhood dog parks (which are typically less than three acres)<sup>9</sup> is one dog park per 86,000 residents. According to the 2011 Comprehensive Park System plan, the number of neighborhood dog parks needed in 2020 to meet this standard is 13 (Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, Policy Plan, Parks

<sup>7</sup> Runs are often less than 0.25 acres, and may have less amenities

<sup>8</sup> This report focused on publicly owned and accessible dog parks. More data on privately owned publicly accessible dog parks is needed in order to conduct a complete analysis, thus, the Mile Dog Park located in the Tysons Urban Center was not included in this report’s evaluations. Upon the compilation of a more complete inventory, The Mile Dog Park, and other dog parks like it, should be considered and incorporated into future analyses.

<sup>9</sup> All 13 of Fairfax County’s existing dog parks are less than two acres and are all considered neighborhood dog parks. For the purposes of this report, all references to dog parks, unless otherwise noted, are considered neighborhood dog parks.

and Recreation, 2017, p. 22; Great Parks Great Communities 2010-2020 Park System Plan, 2011, Countywide Chapter, p. 23). Currently, Fairfax County is meeting the need for neighborhood dog parks.

The most recent Needs Assessment study (2016) also recommended that the service level standard for a countywide dog park be removed. Note that a countywide dog park (also referred to as a regional dog park) is distinct from a neighborhood dog park; a countywide dog park is typically greater than eight acres and has special amenities and event features (Fairfax County Comprehensive Plan, Parks and Recreation, 2017, p. 22). Because a countywide dog park would likely need to be established through corporate sponsorship and/or a public-private partnership and would require market feasibility research, through the Needs Assessment it was determined that the population-based standard was not the appropriate planning tool for this type of dog park. Note that the removal of the population-based service level standard for a countywide dog park does not preclude the construction of one in the County, rather, this administrative change informs how this type of dog park should be planned for in the future. Currently, there are no countywide dog parks in Fairfax County.

### Geographic Distribution – Planning Districts

The study examined geographic distribution of dog parks by planning district<sup>10</sup>; as shown in *Figure 15* and detailed below, there are seven planning districts that do not have a dog park<sup>11</sup>:

- Baileys\*
- Jefferson\*
- Rose Hill
- Springfield
- McLean
- Lincolnia
- Lower Potomac

Except for the Baileys and Jefferson planning districts (\*), planning districts listed above have unbuilt master planned dog parks, as shown in *Figure 15* above. This gap is addressed in the Recommendations section below.

### Walk and Drive Access

In the dog park survey, FCPA asked the public how far (in terms of time, i.e., minutes) they are willing to travel to dog parks by different travel modes. Walking a maximum distance of 6-10 minutes to a dog park was the most popular selection among respondents who were willing to walk to a dog park and driving a maximum distance between 11-20 minutes was the most popular selection among respondents who were willing to drive to a dog park, as shown in *Figures 16* and *17*.

<sup>10</sup> The early planning of Fairfax County's first dog parks sought to establish one dog park for each of the nine Supervisory districts, which was successfully accomplished. As part of this study however, FCPA has employed the lens of the county planning districts as a means for evaluation, to align with the Comprehensive Plan and other county planning efforts.

<sup>11</sup> Publicly owned, publicly accessible dog park (e.g., an FCPA dog park). Note that there may be privately owned dog parks in these districts.



**How far are you willing to walk to go to a dog park? (Respondents willing to walk)**

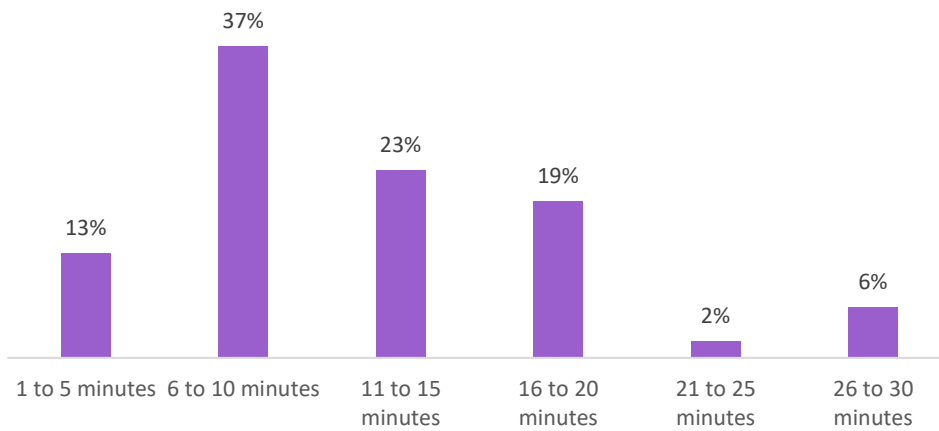


Figure 16: How far are you willing to walk to go to a dog park?  
 Note: Those who were not willing to walk excluded from above chart.

**How far are you willing to drive to go to a dog park? (Respondents willing to drive)**

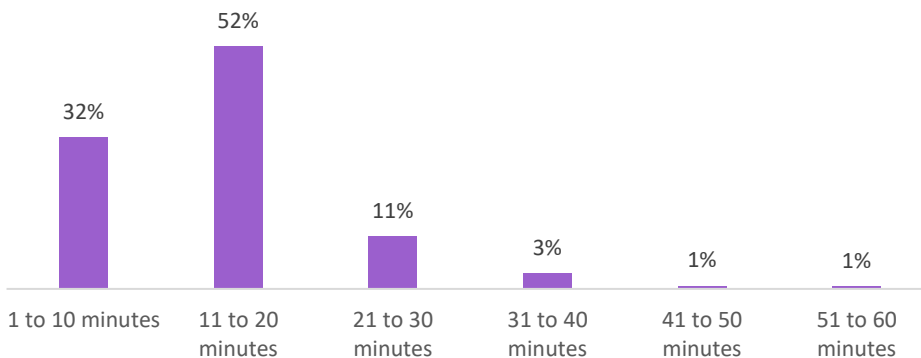


Figure 17: How far are you willing to drive to go to a dog park?  
 Note: Those who were not willing to drive excluded from above chart.

Approximately 90% of dog owners and walkers indicated they are willing to walk some distance to dog parks, and approximately 94% of dog owners and walkers indicated they are willing to drive some distance to dog parks. In addition, 87% of dog owners and walkers indicated they are willing to both walk and drive to dog parks.

This information was used to establish recommended access-based dog park service areas for consideration in the planning of future dog parks which is presented here and included in the Recommendations section below.

Acknowledging the largely suburban landscape of Fairfax County and the willingness of residents to drive to dog parks as indicated in the survey, it is recommended that at a

minimum, Fairfax County aim to provide access to a dog park that is within a 20-minute drive of most residents<sup>12</sup>. This can be referred to as the countywide service area standard. It is also recommended that in the future where practicable, in the densely populated areas of the County, access to a dog park or dog run that is within a 10-minute walk for residents be considered.

The densely populated areas of the County are shown below in Figure 18 and are representative of several of the County's Special Planning Areas, which are designated by the Comprehensive Plan. Special Planning Areas are areas in the County where walkable, mixed use neighborhood planning is especially encouraged and emphasized, and access to open space and automobiles is likely to be lower when compared to the county at large. Dog parks and dog runs in these areas are also more likely to be established through new construction, where they are integrated into new residential and mixed-use developments<sup>13</sup>. These dog parks and dog runs located within private developments should continue to be encouraged through the development review process, where appropriate.

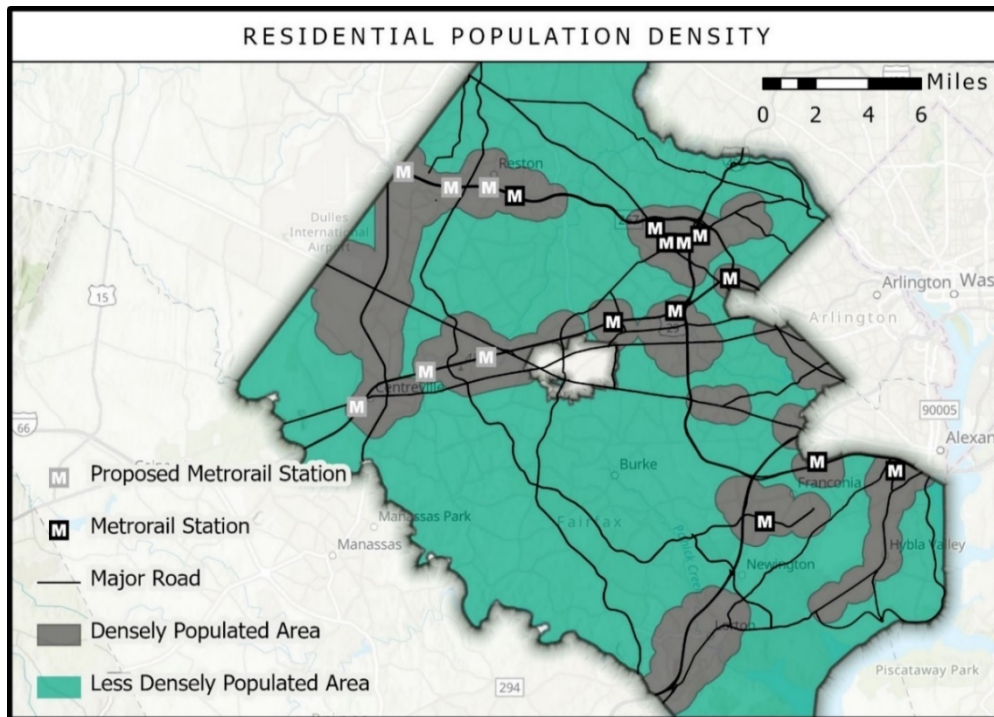


Figure 18: Residential Population Density in Fairfax County

Note: Several Special Planning Areas as defined in the County Comprehensive Plan (2017) were used as a proxy for population density. The densely populated areas shown above are reflective of select Special Planning Areas in Fairfax County and include a half mile buffer around these areas. The Special Planning Areas included are: Urban Centers, Suburban Centers, Community Business Centers, and Transit Station Areas. Industrial Areas and Large Institutional Land Areas were excluded.

<sup>12</sup> After careful consideration, the countywide drive access standard to dog parks was determined to be the most appropriate and feasible at this time.

<sup>13</sup> Because FCPA does not have complete data on privately-owned, publicly accessible dog parks, and because this report focused on publicly owned and accessible dog parks, a complete walk analysis in the more dense areas of the county was not conducted. Once all data is readily available, it is recommended that a walk analysis in these areas be conducted.

In applying the recommended countywide service area standard (20-minute drive), as *Figure 19* demonstrates, most of the County has suitable driving access to Fairfax County's 13 dog parks (approximately 98.4% of County residents). However, there are some gaps in dog park access based on the driving access threshold; as can be seen in *Figure 19*, a portion of the McLean Planning District does not have complete access. As shown in *Figure 20*, construction of either of the master planned dog parks in this planning district would close these access gaps, thereby providing 20-minute driving access to an estimated additional 1.3%<sup>14</sup> of County residents. This gap is addressed in the Recommendations section below.

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<sup>14</sup> Approximately 15,371-15,635 residents, depending on which park.

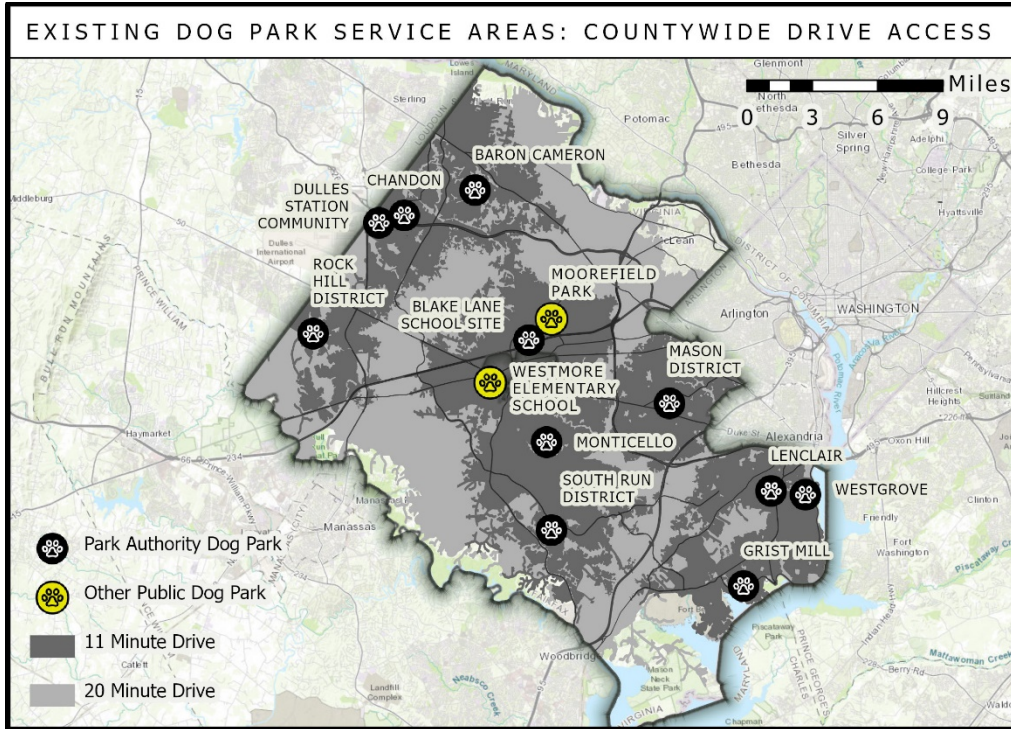


Figure 19: Application of countywide service area (20-minute drive) to existing dog parks in Fairfax County.

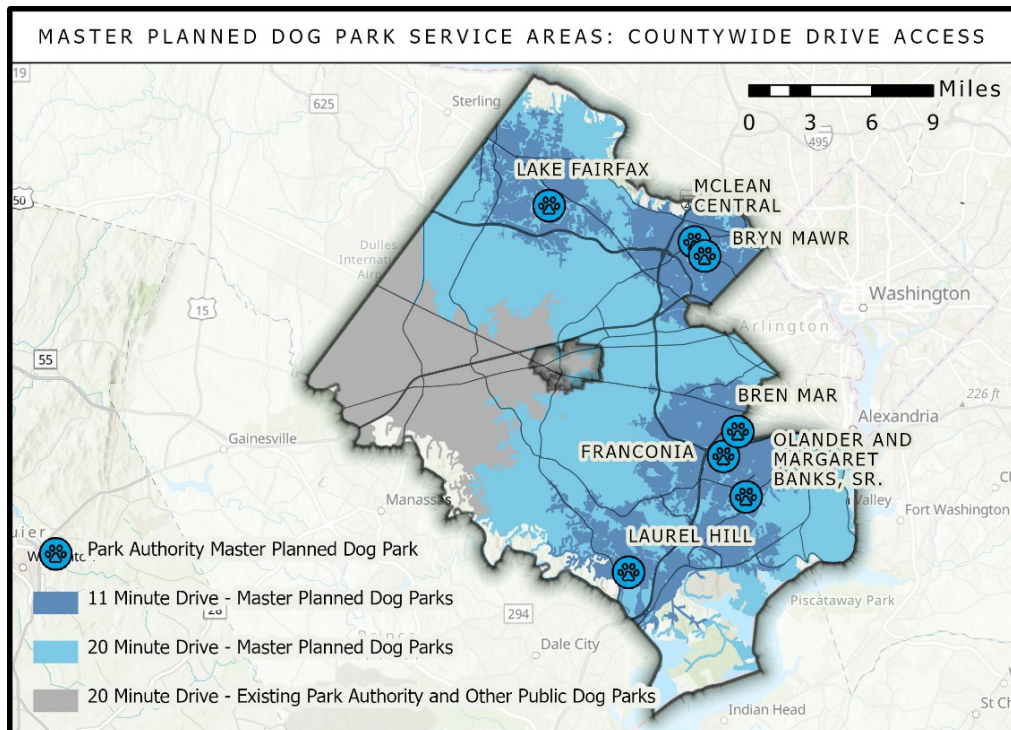


Figure 20: Application of countywide service area (20-minute drive) to master planned dog parks.

Note: For both figures, drive times have been generated using ArcGIS Business Analyst. This models the movement of cars and other similar small automobiles, such as pickup trucks, and finds solutions that optimize travel time. Travel obeys one-way roads, avoids illegal turns, and follows other rules that are specific to cars. Dynamic travel speeds based on traffic are used where it is available. A 5:00pm start time was included to account for rush-hour traffic.



### Density of Licensed Dogs in the County

Using dog license registration data from 2019, FCPA generated a map, shown below in Figure 21 which indicates the density of the registered dog population in Fairfax County. This datapoint helps to further illustrate demand and can be used to inform future planning of dog parks.

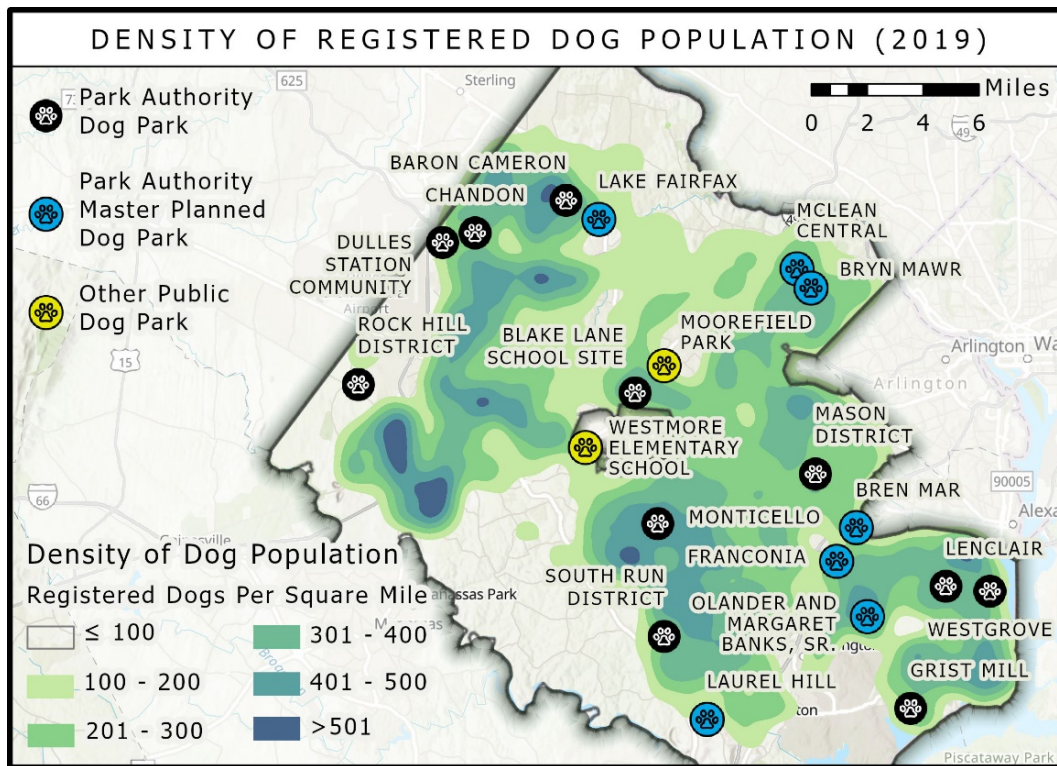


Figure 21: Density of Registered Dog Population (2019) Map

Note: This data is from the Fairfax County Department of Tax Administration. The total number of registered dogs in Fairfax County in 2019 was 81,007.

The dog license registration data from 2019 indicates that existing and master planned dog parks generally provide sufficient coverage to these pockets of demand. However, there may be potential gaps in the western portion of the County (Bull Run Planning District). This gap is addressed in the Recommendations section below.

### What We Also Heard

Several respondents inquired through the survey about the maintenance and ownership status of a dog park located within a private development located along Archstone Way, in the Alexandria area of Fairfax County. This dog park is part of a recreation area that also includes a small field and a tot lot. This recreation area, inclusive of the dog park, is owned by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors (BOS) and is both privately and publicly maintained; public maintenance is provided by Fairfax County's Facilities Management Department (FMD). This park (and dog park) is not owned, operated, or maintained by FCPA. Due to its unique ownership, maintenance arrangement, and siting location, this dog park was excluded from the analyses in this report.

In the survey, FCPA asked the public where in the County a new dog park is most needed. As shown in Figure 22, Upper Potomac and Bull Run were the top two most voted planning districts.

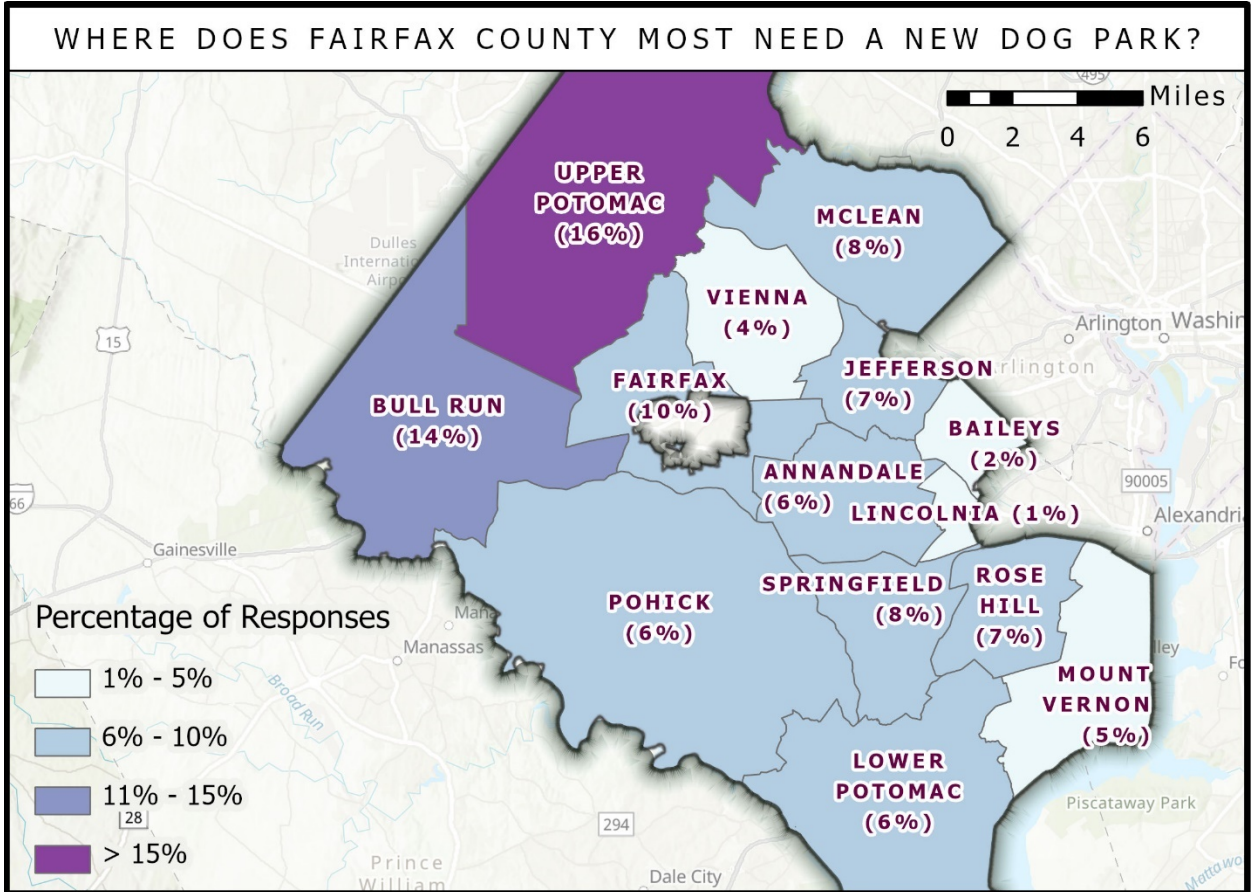


Figure 22: Where Does Fairfax County Most Need a New Dog Park? Survey Map

In addition, in the open comment portion of the public survey, commenters expressed high interest in accessing other FCPA parks (non-dog parks) and/or trails with their dogs off-leash, and suggested scheduling certain times of the year when visitors would be permitted to do so. Commenters also shared that they really enjoy special dog events, such as the annual Dog Days of Summer event, and suggested that FCPA host more of these types of events and other classes and activities.

Commenters shared that they would like to see additional and improved public information about dog parks and dog related events. Commenters also shared that some of the Google Map listings of FCPA’s dog parks (e.g., names of dog parks) are inconsistent with the information shown on FCPA’s dog park webpage.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### FUTURE DOG PARK CONSTRUCTION

- Construct at least one new dog park by 2025. This will satisfy the estimated service level need based on the projected population for 2025. Please see Figure 23 below.

Year	Projected population	Total number of dog parks needed (1/86,000)
2025	1,207,752	14.04
2035	1,311,996	15.25
2045	1,405,920	16.34

*Figure 23: Estimated total number of dog parks needed in Fairfax County to satisfy FCPA's service level standard. Fairfax County General Overview. 2020. Fairfax County VA Overview: Demographic Characteristics. Population data retrieved from <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/demographics/fairfax-county-general-overview>*

- Utilize the list of master planned but unbuilt dog parks for selection of the next dog park and prioritize based on community support and the following planning criteria:
  - Geographic Distribution (planning districts),
  - Dog Park Access (20-minute drive access), and
  - Density of dogs in the County
- Construction of either of the dog parks that are master planned in McLean (Bryn Mawr or McLean Central) would provide residents in this area 20-minute drive access to a dog park, closing driving access gaps in the county. It would also provide a dog park for this planning district, where there is currently none. Construction of the dog park that is master planned at Lake Fairfax would satisfy the high interest expressed by residents in the Upper Potomac Planning District (the survey's most-voted area for a dog park) and address demand indicated by the high concentration of dogs in this area of the County. It should be emphasized that continued community support and funding would be needed prior to developing any of the master planned but unbuilt dog parks where a significant amount of time has passed since the master plan's adoption.
- Following the selection and construction of one planned dog park, establish a schedule for the construction of the remaining six dog parks that are master planned but not yet built, and identify funding sources for the construction of these parks. Construction of these parks should be prioritized utilizing the criteria described above. Building and establishing these planned dog parks will exceed the number of dog parks required to satisfy the County's estimated service level need over the next 20+ years, close dog park gaps in planning districts and help better meet community demand as indicated by both licensed dogs and community survey.

- Explore options for planning a new dog park in the Baileys and Jefferson Planning Districts and/or identify and convey information about the privately owned publicly accessible dog parks in these districts, both of which currently do not have any existing or planned FCPA dog parks. These actions would help close these gaps.
- Explore options for planning another dog park in the Bull Run Planning District and/or identify and convey information about the privately owned publicly accessible dog parks in this district to better address demand in this area. There is a high concentration of licensed dogs in this area of the County and Bull Run was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most voted area for where respondents felt that Fairfax County most needs a dog park.

### FUTURE DOG PARK PLANNING

- In the future, prioritize the development of new dog parks (beyond those that are master planned) based on:
  - Expressed community interest
  - Planning criteria:
    - Needs Assessment Standards
    - Geographic distribution - Planning Districts
    - Dog park access-based service areas; 20-minute drive access (countywide) and consideration of 10-minute walk access in more densely populated neighborhoods
    - Density of licensed dogs in the County
  - Suitability of prospective sites based on siting criteria described in the Site Planning section below
- Conduct an inventory of all privately owned, publicly accessible dog parks in the County. Prioritize this effort in the Baileys and Jefferson Districts as well as the more dense areas in the County (*Figure 18 Residential Population Density*) where these types of dog parks are more likely to be constructed, to better understand how access and need is being met in these areas. This effort could be incorporated into a future comprehensive countywide park planning effort.
- Due to its unique ownership, maintenance arrangement, and siting location, evaluate the dog park located on Archstone Way when conducting the future inventory of privately owned, publicly accessible dog parks discussed above and identify how to best characterize this dog park going forward.
- Per the recommendation of the 2016 Needs Assessment, eliminate the service level standards for a countywide dog park from the County Comprehensive Plan Parks and Recreation section in the Policy Plan (2017), and in the next update to FCPA's Comprehensive Park System Plan. Note that the removal of the population-

based service level standard of this park type does not preclude the construction of one in the County, rather, this administrative change more accurately reflects how this type of park should be planned for (e.g., market feasibility research and exploration of a public-private partnership).

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider hosting additional dog-related events, building on what has been offered in the past, and following examples from other similar jurisdictions, to meet public need and interest.
- In the future, work with the Fairfax County Department of Planning and Development to establish suggested siting and design guidelines for dog runs for use by the development community.
- Consolidate all information related to dog parks, dog classes and events hosted by FCPA, dog park volunteer information, donation opportunities, and dog-owner related requirements (vaccination, rabies clinics, etc.) into a single webpage. This will greatly enhance FCPA's dog park webpage and will aid in providing more robust information about dog parks and dog park events, as requested by the public. In addition, on the dog park webpage, improve FCPA's existing dog park map to be more user-friendly. As part of this effort, the Google Map listings of dog parks should be corrected to ensure listings of FCPA's dog parks (e.g., names of dog parks) are accurate.
- FCPA has historically referred to publicly accessible fenced recreational facilities for dogs as Off Leash Dog Exercise Areas or Off-Leash Dog Areas (OLDAs). However, the term "dog park" is commonly used by other jurisdictions in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, as well as elsewhere within the County, such as on local dog advocacy websites, to describe these facilities. This study recommends that FCPA adopt an informal reference to OLDA facilities as "dog parks" which can be utilized in FCPA's communication and planning materials, with the understanding that the rules surrounding how these facilities are regulated will remain as Off Leash Dog Exercise Areas or Off-Leash Dog Areas according to Fairfax County Code. The adoption of the term "dog park" for communication purposes would allow for consistency with language used by other jurisdictions, minimize confusion when searching for these facilities, enhance marketing, programming, and planning materials, and overall make reference to these facilities more clear.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS – SITE PLANNING

- FCPA should adopt the newly revised dog park siting criteria, which were developed as part of this study to better accommodate the evolving County landscape.
- Going forward, FCPA should utilize the newly prepared dog park siting tools included in this report. These siting tools factor in the revised siting criteria as well as feedback received from the public on dog park preferences. These tools will standardize, streamline, and enhance the dog park site planning process.
- FCPA should adopt the updated process for establishing a new dog park developed as part of this study, which more fully captures current planning procedures and the public participation process.
- In the future, FCPA should continue to coordinate with the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) stormwater department on annual dog park inspections so that FCPA can readily address any areas in need of improvement.

## ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

In addition to examining countywide planning, the study also took a deeper dive into researching site planning for dog parks. The study was tasked with answering: how should dog parks in the County be sited?

The study sought to answer this question to establish updated dog park site planning criteria, as well as to provide updated and clarifying language on the required process for establishing a new dog park. Updated and clear criteria and information about this process will better equip the County and the community in the future when considering establishing a new dog park. This section presents the study's finding to this question.

### HOW SHOULD DOG PARKS IN THE COUNTY BE SITED?

While there are seven dog parks that are master planned but unbuilt (e.g., sites have already been selected through previous master planning processes), siting criteria is needed for the future siting and development of dog parks outside of those seven locations. The siting criteria can also be applied on a site-level basis to determine the portions within the site that are most optimal for dog park development.

As part of this study, FCPA planners reviewed FCPA's existing siting criteria, reviewed previous studies, county ordinances and policies, examined peer localities and best management practices, and met with DPWES. Drawing from the key findings detailed below, in combination with public feedback and additional research, FCPA compiled revised and updated dog park siting criteria and developed siting analysis tools. The criteria and tools are detailed in the Recommendations section below.

Examination of site planning for dog parks yielded the following findings:

- More specific siting criteria is needed to accommodate the evolving County landscape. For example, FCPA's previous siting criteria did not provide a specified distance for siting dog parks away from floodplains, employ a population density framework for the size of dog parks, or specify how far a new dog park should be from an existing one. The need for revised criteria to address these aspects of site planning was recommended in a previous FCPA dog park study (2011) but was not formally adopted.
- FCPA does not have consolidated guidance on dog park siting in a digital or hard copy document that is readily available to the public. Previous siting criteria (1999 OLDA Standards and 2015 OLDA Locational Criteria) had been published in the form of digital memos and/or webpages, which have since been retired. Currently, this information is not posted online. In addition, a previous FCPA dog park study (2011) recommended that FCPA consolidate all dog park related guidelines, siting criteria, and rules in one easy to find place. It is crucial that this information be readily available for FCPA staff and the public.
- As staff reviewed site planning criteria, a need to document the process for establishing a new dog park was identified. While the process to establish a new dog park is the same as it is for any desired park use or feature, due to the many inquiries FCPA received related to dog parks, staff found that documentation and publication of this process was necessary. In addition, staff identified that the documentation needed to be updated to reflect current planning procedures, and, similar to the siting guidance described above, staff determined that information about this process should be made available online.
- The Fairfax County DPWES conducts dog park site inspections annually to satisfy MS4<sup>15</sup> permit compliance. To date, these site inspections, which are primarily concerned with runoff and impacts to stormwater, have been satisfactory. Continued coordination with DPWES on these inspections at existing dog parks will strengthen County partnerships and compliance. Also, additional stormwater best management practices undertaken by FCPA in the siting and design of new dog parks will further enhance environmental stewardship. Staff has recommended these additional stormwater best management practices in the revised dog park siting criteria detailed in this section.

## WHAT WE ALSO HEARD

In the dog park survey and as described elsewhere in this report, respondents shared that shade and drinking fountains for visitors and dogs were among some of the most important features to be included within a dog park. Commenters also shared their preference for designated areas for large and small dogs within a dog park.

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<sup>15</sup> Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The top recommendation related to dog park site planning is to adopt the proposed revised dog park siting criteria presented in this report. The revisions represent minor updates to FCPA's existing dog park siting criteria. Key additions to the dog park siting criteria include:

- Where appropriate, specified distances, such as proximity from residential dwellings, floodplains, and other dog parks, were provided
- Population density considerations were incorporated
- Consideration of marine clay soils and park/visitor use conflicts were accounted for
- Stormwater best management practices have been added
- Dog park carrying capacity was modified to allow for more flexibility and consistency with peer jurisdictions

As described above, these revised criteria are based on research, combined with an examination of peer localities and best management practices, a review of the County's Zoning Ordinance, as well as a review of relevant policies put forth by the County and/or FCPA. The siting criteria can be considered the minimum requirements a site must meet for a future dog park to be considered at that site. The revised recommended siting criteria for the construction of future dog parks on FCPA property is presented below on the following page.

The study also developed several tools to accompany the recommended revised siting criteria, to be used in the siting and planning process of future dog parks. The tools developed incorporate the feedback FCPA heard from the public survey about desired features in a dog park. These tools are also detailed in this section.

The second key recommendation is for FCPA to adopt the proposed updated process for establishing a new dog park, prepared as part of this study. This process has been revised to reflect current FCPA practices and provides updated and clarifying language. An infographic of the process is detailed below, and the updated language can be found in Appendix 1.

In addition, heeding recommendations from a previous dog park study, the revised siting criteria, along with siting tools, the revised process for establishing a new dog park, and other relevant reference material (e.g., design guidelines, maintenance standards, etc.) has been compiled into one cohesive document. That compiled document is Appendix 1 of this report and is made available online on FCPA's dog park webpage.

Finally, it is recommended that FCPA continue to coordinate with the DPWES stormwater department on annual dog park inspections for site compliance so that FCPA can readily address any areas in need of improvement.



**RECOMMENDED SITING CRITERIA<sup>16</sup>**

- 1. Location.** The establishment of new FCPA dog parks requires review by the FCPA Planning and Development Division, and approval from the Park Authority Board. A Public Use Determination also must be approved by the Planning Commission (this process is often referred to as a 2232 Review). The feasibility of establishing a new dog park within a FCPA park should be evaluated and vetted during the park master planning phase along with any other potential new facilities, with input from the public. The siting of a new dog park is also subject to the County site plan provisions as administered by Fairfax County Land Development Services (LDS). FCPA will evaluate all prospective locations within the park against established criteria and will use the GIS dog park siting model and site criteria checklist. If the location is deemed suitable, funding sources for construction would need to be identified and a public engagement process would be required. A maintenance plan would also need to be established. Similarly, if the location of a planned but unbuilt dog park is revisited, a public engagement process would ensue if a significant period of time has passed since the master plan was approved, and funding sources would need to be identified and a maintenance plan established.
- 2. Size.** The size of an FCPA dog park is dependent on the population density of the area. In more densely populated areas, the minimum size for a dog park is  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre. In less densely populated areas, the minimum size for a dog park is  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre. Note that these criteria apply to dog parks, not dog runs, which are typically sited in more dense areas and are often smaller than  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre and may be privately owned and operated. A dog park should have separate areas for large dogs and small dogs when the size of the dog park permits. Dog park carrying capacity, or dog park maximum occupancy, is the total number of dogs a fenced-in dog area can safely accommodate. The carrying capacity for FCPA dog parks should be determined using a metric of between 500 to 700 square feet per dog within fenced-in dog areas. The dog park carrying capacity will be determined during the master planning or site design phase and will be responsive to the specific site conditions of the park. Signs should be posted at or near the respective entrances for each designated dog area stating the carrying capacity.
- 3. Buffer from residential areas.** Consider proximity of the potential dog park location to nearby neighbors. It is recommended that dog parks be sited at a minimum distance of 100 feet from the exterior of nearby existing residential dwellings. When siting a dog park near a residential area, screening (e.g., engineered barrier, vegetation) should be considered. The need for screening will be identified during the park master planning phase, and screening specifications will be determined at the time of site plan review.
- 4. Land suitability.** A new dog park should be constructed on well-drained soils. The site should be relatively flat (between 1.5%-4.5% slope); excessive slopes and marine clay

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<sup>16</sup> The general framework of the siting criteria was modeled after the City of Ann Arbor's Recommendations and Guidelines for Dog Park Site Selection, Design, Operations and Maintenance. Retrieved from: <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/play/Documents/Recommendations%20and%20Guidelines%20for%20Dog%20Park%20Site%20Selection%20updated%204-10-15.pdf>

soils should be avoided. If a desirable site has excessive slopes, it should be designed such that erosion does not become an issue. Additional health and safety protocols will be required should construction occur in soils containing naturally occurring asbestos.

5. **Natural and cultural resource protection.** Dog parks cannot be placed in locations where there is abundant native vegetation, nor within Resource Protection Areas (RPAs), Floodplains, Environmental Quality Corridors (EQCs), on sites with cultural resources, or within most easements. New dog parks should be sited at least 50 feet from floodplains<sup>17</sup>. In addition, park design should consider utilizing the following best practices to minimize the impacts of dog parks to stormwater and waterways:
  - Install a curb around the outside perimeter of the dog park to contain surface runoff, or a vegetated buffer to minimize runoff; and
  - Install pet waste stations/bags near dog park entrances, at intersections of walking paths, and near parking lots that serve the dog park
6. **Park/visitor use conflicts.** A new dog park should not conflict with or displace other desired recreation activities in the park. The location of the proposed dog park should work in harmony with the overall park design and adjacent facilities. Planning a dog park in concert with other park facilities adds to the potential for shared amenities, such as a water supply or shade opportunities. Locations directly adjacent to sport fields and other high use areas should be avoided.
7. **Proximity to other dog parks.** Consider the proximity of a potential site to existing dog parks. In less dense areas of the County, consider 20-minute drive access and in more dense areas of the County, consider 10-minute walk access (10-minute walk = ½ mile).
8. **Pedestrian connectivity and parking.** Connections to nearby trails and footpaths should be considered and the site should be evaluated for its ability to support safe, comfortable, and convenient pedestrian connectivity. If the site is in a less densely populated area, the site should provide sufficient parking (a minimum of 10-20 spaces). In more densely populated areas, a dedicated parking lot may not be necessary. Regardless of setting (e.g., more/less dense areas in the county), all parking provided should be convenient and designed to minimize impacts to the surrounding neighborhood.

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<sup>17</sup> The Fairfax County RPA is defined as 100 feet distant from any perennial stream unless a detailed analysis trumps its delineation. The floodplain refers to, “those land areas in and adjacent to streams and watercourses subject to continuous or periodic inundation from flood events with a one (1) percent chance of occurrence in any given year (i.e., the 100-year flood frequency event also known as the base flood) and having a drainage area greater than seventy (70) acres, and include all areas of the County which are designated as a floodplain by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), by the United States Geological Survey, or by Fairfax County.” (ZO 20-300). The Fairfax County EQC is typically designated during a zoning application and contained within a resource-based park. EQCs “include 100-year floodplains, areas of 15% or greater slope adjacent to floodplains, or 50 feet from all streams, all wetlands connected to stream valleys, and all and measured from the stream bank 50 feet plus four feet per percent slope.”

### RECOMMENDED SITING CRITERIA TOOLS

The study developed two primary tools to assist in siting future dog parks. The first tool developed was a checklist, which factors in the minimum siting criteria detailed above, as well as dog park visitor preferences for shade, water, and designated areas for dogs. The second tool developed was a GIS model to help screen for suitable sites using siting criteria that have a spatial component. The checklist is shown in Figure 24.

Preliminary Dog Park Site Feasibility Checklist <sup>1</sup>		
Required Criteria		
Criteria	YES	NO
<b>Size</b> Less densely populated area – site is a minimum of 0.50 acres More densely populated area – site is a minimum of 0.25 acres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Residential Buffer</b> Site is at least 100 feet from nearby residential dwellings. Screening and/or a vegetated buffer is strongly preferred.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Land Suitability</b> Site is located on well-drained soils and can support drainage design that minimizes erosion potential; site is between 1.5-4.5% slope; proposed space within the site does not contain an existing facility.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Natural and Cultural Resource Protection</b> Site is not located in an RPA, Floodplain, EQC, on a site with cultural resources, a location where there is heavy native vegetation, or within an easement, and is at least 50' from adjacent floodplains.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Park/Visitor Use Conflicts</b> Site does not conflict with nor displace other desired park uses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Proximity to other dog parks</b> The proximity of existing, nearby dog parks has been considered (20-minute drive access in less dense areas and 10-minute walk or half mile in more dense areas).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Pedestrian Connectivity and Parking</b> The site can support safe, comfortable, and convenient pedestrian connectivity and connections to nearby trails have been considered. If the site is in a less densely populated area, the site can support 10-20 spaces. If the site is in a more densely populated area, dedicated parking may not be necessary. Where applicable, parking that is convenient, with minimal impact on the surrounding neighborhood, can be supported.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Preferred criteria, but not required.</b> If a site does not have these elements, they should be considered as part of the dog park's design.		
<b>Designated Areas – strongly preferred</b> Site can support separate areas for small and large dogs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Shade- strongly preferred</b> Site has mature trees and a good mix of shade and open space.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Water- strongly preferred</b> Site has a water line connection that can support a drinking fountain for visitors and a water source for dogs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**About this checklist.**  
This checklist was created to establish a standardized site evaluation process for prospective dog parks within existing FCPA parks. All required criteria need to be met for a site to be considered.

This checklist should be used by FCPA Park Planning staff to gauge the feasibility of a site for a prospective FCPA dog park and should be used in conjunction with the GIS dog-park site feasibility model, which was also completed as part of the 2019-2020 dog park study. The checklist can be used to assess one site as part of the master planning process, or to compare the feasibility of multiple prospective sites. Some of the required criteria are directly tied to physical site constraints, other criteria require consideration.

<sup>1</sup> The general framework of the above siting criteria was modeled after Ann Arbor's Recommendations and Guidelines for Dog Park Site Selection, Design, Operations and Maintenance. Retrieved from: <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/play/Documents/Recommendations%20and%20Guidelines%20for%20Dog%20Park%20Site%20Selection%20updated%204-10-15.pdf>

Figure 24: Preliminary Dog Park Site Feasibility Checklist

## RECOMMENDED DOG PARK ESTABLISHMENT PROCESS

The study revised and streamlined the process for parties interested in taking the steps to initiate the development of a new FCPA dog park in the county.

