

## **Dog parks: making sure we bark up the right tree**

By Doug Holmes

Dog ownership has surged since the pandemic and with more dogs comes greater demand for pet-related amenities and public spaces.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to creating a dog-friendly community. Some dog owners never let their dogs off a leash, others are content to let theirs run loose through the bush, and there's a range of comfort levels in between. Much depends on a dog's size, age, breed, temperament, and training.

Each type of dog has different needs and, like in other communities, Summerland has good amenities for some types while improvements are needed for others.

As a place for dogs to run and swim, Sun-Oka Beach Provincial Park is the envy of the Okanagan. The dog beach at Peach Orchard Beach is also popular amongst locals.

Municipal regulations permit dogs on-leash year-round, and off-leash from Oct. 1 to May 1 in most local parks.

However, a dog running off leash in a public park can create conflicts with other park users, other dogs, and wildlife. Many people agree it's best to have an off-leash zone for dogs that's fenced off from other areas of a public park.

In 2021, a small dog park with temporary fencing was piloted at Dale Meadows. Feedback was positive and this year it will be made into a permanent year-round off-leash dog park with proper fencing.

There remains a demand for a fenced park for larger dogs. Council has been searching for at least five years for a suitable location for a one-acre dog park that doesn't displace other user groups, especially youth. Several proposed locations on municipal lands were dismissed for various reasons following objections from dog owners or neighbours or others.

We then approached owners of under-used lands held by other organizations and individuals but unfortunately none were interested in hosting a dog park.

So Council circled back to the previously considered permanent locations and decided to repeat the approach of establishing a temporary park as a pilot.

A fully enclosed pop-up dog park is now open for a trial period at the north end of Peach Orchard Beach Park. We will collate public comments throughout the summer and evaluate in the fall. (Feedback can be sent to: [recreation@summerland.ca](mailto:recreation@summerland.ca).)

We know there are concerns about the suitability of the turf, scarcity of parking, impacts on other park uses, and disturbances to nearby residents.

This is why it is being run as a trial. The purpose is to test the viability of the location, not to deliver an already agreed upon outcome. It's the latest stage of a lingering public engagement process that will continue until a permanent location for a large dog park is found.

If required, we can try out different locations to determine what will ultimately be the best fit. However, it should be emphasized the District only has a limited amount of suitable land, and demands on park space are much more varied and intense than in the past.

It will remain an on-going challenge for Council to find ways for more people to enjoy our parks and share them collaboratively and respectfully to accommodate a range of activities.

*Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland*