



homepage > park authority > off-leash dog area:

Guidance to Groups Interested in Establishing an Off-Leash Dog Area

If you, or a group you are representing, are interested in establishing a new off-leash dog area (commonly known as a dog park or OLDA) at a park in your community, the following process is used to establish such a facility.

1. **Establish a dog owners sponsor organization to help fund the facility, development, and operate the OLDA.** An established dog owners group must be in place to sponsor a new OLDA before the facility can be established. All OLDAs in Fairfax County Parks are public/private partnerships, developed in cooperation with sponsoring organizations of dog owners. The sponsors are the agency's liaison between users, local residents, Animal Control, and the Police Department. They monitor, clean the facilities, publicize OLDA regulations, and report maintenance needs to the Park Authority.

This sponsoring organization is also responsible for funding the development, and some of the recurring operational costs. The most recent OLDAs cost around \$40,000 to construct (not including an entrance roadway and parking), with a significant portion of the funding coming from the sponsor group. The cost will vary depending upon the size of the facility and condition of the area where it is proposed to be developed. The addition of a park entrance and/or parking is a substantial investment if they do not already exist at the park. A Mastenbrook Grant may be available from the Park Authority to help meet the required funds.

2. **Identify an appropriate site.** An appropriate location needs to be identified for the OLDA that is not within the service area of an existing OLDA. View a list of OLDAs in Fairfax County parks.
 - o OLDAs cannot be placed within Resource Protection Areas (RPAs), Flood Plains, Environmental Quality Corridors (EQCs), on cultural resource sites, or within most easements.
 - o Consider proximity of the potential OLDA location to nearby neighbors.
 - o The minimum size for an OLDA is 100 feet by 100 feet, which equals 10,000 square feet, or slightly less than 1/4 acre. The preferred size is at least 27,780 square feet, or about 1/2 an acre. An OLDA can have one large area or two sections, one for small dogs and one for big dogs. The size of the OLDA requires Fairfax County Park Authority Board approval.
 - o OLDA capacity is one dog for every 700 square feet within the OLDA fence. Each OLDA will post the carrying capacity.
 - o A safe vehicular entrance and 10 to 20 space parking lot, including ADA spaces, depending upon the size of the OLDA.
 - o The OLDA is to be enclosed in black vinyl coated double knuckled 9 gauge 5' fencing with a top rail and double gated portal entrance. A 12' maintenance access gate is required as well. The fence fabric is to be installed a little below finish grade and will be buried to limit dogs from getting under the fencing.
 - o Surface is at least 4" of stone dust.
 - o Trees should be included within the off-leash area for shade when possible.
 - o An information kiosk with dog area rules, contact information, and other pertinent information.
 - o A minimum of 2 benches
 - o A trash can or two.
 - o Medium to large doggy bag dispenser box (routine provision of doggy bags is the responsibility of the sponsoring organization).
 - o ADA compliant trail or sidewalk connecting the parking lot to the OLDA, and street if applicable. While we work to try to connect park trails and facilitate pedestrians in parks, public street routes are under the domain of the Department of Transportation Pedestrian. For more information, please visit their website. There is additional contact information for DOT at that page as well.
3. **Send a Letter of Intent.** A Letter of Intent will communicate to the Park Authority Director and the Park Authority Board the group's desire to sponsor an OLDA in accordance with the guidance provided here. Once a "Letter of Intent" (see sample letter) is received from the sponsoring organization, the Park Authority will perform the necessary planning activities.
4. **Create or Revise Park Master Plan.** Once an appropriate park site has been identified for an OLDA, check the park master plan, if there is one, to see if any uses or facilities are planned for the desired area. If the park has an existing master plan but no OLDA planned, then it must be revised to include the OLDA facility. If there is no park master plan, one must be created to include a planned OLDA feature within the park. This Park Master Planning process can take 8 to 12 months. Master Plans are processed by Park Planning staff with public input, and approved by the Park Authority Board. Master Plan assignments are made by the Park Authority Board in the Planning and Development Division's annual work plan. More information on the Park Master Planning process can be found online.
5. **Obtain a Public Use Determination.** In addition to approving the OLDA use in a park master plan, a Public Use Determination must be completed to ensure that the planned public use conforms to the County Comprehensive Plan in accordance with the State Code 15.2-2232. This process, also called a "2232 Determination" can take approximately 6 to 8 months. The 2232 determination application is prepared and processed by staff and is approved by the County Planning Commission. More information on the 2232 process can be found on the Department of Planning and Zoning website.
6. **Enter a Memorandum of Understanding.** Before the OLDA can be constructed, the sponsoring organization must sign the "Memorandum of Understanding" (sample memorandum) and provide the necessary funding.
7. **Design and Approvals.** After all of the necessary funding has been provided, the site design and approval process can begin. All facility design drawings and specifications are required to have Park Authority approval, as well as the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services if applicable, prior to construction work beginning. This process usually takes 3 months to a year to complete and is facilitated with Park Authority staff.