

Off-leash dog park planned near Hallmark lands

With work already underway on a new baseball diamond complex on the Hallmark Lands near Vandorf Road and Industrial Parkway South, players might need to contend with a few barks in the decade ahead.

Council is set to earmark lands adjacent to the Hallmark lands for a new off-leash dog park.

Part of Aurora's 10-year capital plan, the new dog park would be built on the site of a municipal tree nursery on Engelhard that is close to trails and parking.

The Engelhard Tree Nursery was one of three options presented to Council at last week's General Committee meeting. Other potential locations included a tree nursery on Edward Street and a further plot on Industrial Parkway South adjacent to the Aurora Community Garden.

“The Engelhard Nursery location will provide a natural park experience for users and their pets with potential for multiple access points,” said Parks Manager Sara Tienkamp in a report to Council, noting the proposed parcel is just over 10 hectares. “The land includes varied terrain made up of grassland, woodlot, level plateau/slopes, therefore it is not the best use of land for a nursery. The potential off-leash park location would be left natural with mowed trails and woodchip footpath through the woodlot.

“While it cannot facilitate a parking lot, it can provide for multiple access points from Engelhard Drive, Vandorf Sideroad, and potential access through new trail development to Sheppard's Bush/Tim Jones Trails. The Engelhard Access point is very close (150m) to the Hallmark Lands and the new parking lot for the park, which would allow for parking.”

On Council's first sweep of the proposal, the Engelhard location was the one that rose to the top. But its proximity to trails was seen as both a positive and negative for lawmakers, with a firm drawback being a lack of on-site parking.

“I certainly see the value with regards to the first one and its association to woodlot and trails, but for myself I am not necessarily sold that access to the trail is a positive thing,” said Councillor Michael Thompson, stating he preferred the two other options.

Offering the opposing viewpoint was Councillor Rachel Gilliland.

“It makes total sense to me,” she said. “I love that there is a trail that can be integrated, multiple ways you can enter it, a trail component, the terrain is a little bit different and it is nice to walk on without it being a boring square, for lack of a better term. It is not in a residential area, where we're getting a lot of push-back [on other off-leash proposals]. You guys had some limited options to present and I think this is great. It is a nice green space area that people can enjoy walking in safely and gives the service [that people need].”

Councillor Harold Kim also stated he was in favour of the Engelhard location because it is land that would not otherwise be used for commercial or employment purposes.

But a note of caution was put on the table from Mayor Tom Mrakas who said that nearby residents and businesses should be consulted on potential traffic impacts.

“We have a whole subdivision there that used to be the Timberlane Athletic Club and that whole subdivision is there now on the south side,” he said. “If we reached out to them to let them know? to see if there is any feedback to those residents. I do foresee some issues along Vandorf and that is my only concern. I see a lot of people coming and parking on Vandorf and just leaving their car there, getting out and going to the gate that is the most easily accessible one and I can see that happening down the road. I think we need to be cautious of that.

?I think it is the best setting but I think there are some flaws to it that could cause some issues and some problems down the road. I think we need to be mindful of those issues and see if there is anything we can do to rectify those issues as we continue to move forward through this process. Let's get as many people as engaged as possible in the area so we can have a full understanding when this comes to budget and we decide to move forward at a quicker speed at that time.?

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