



STARR FARM DOG PARK

OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES & COMMUNITY INPUT

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SITE INTRODUCTION

Starr Farm Dog Park is a nearly three-acre amenity found in the City of Burlington's Starr Farm Park, one of over 35 parks incorporated into the City's parks system. It is situated in the North End just on the northern periphery of Appletree Point, accessible via Starr Farm Rd as well as the popular Burlington Greenway. Its extent is presently that portion of Starr Farm Park that is bounded on the east by the Burlington Greenway and bounded on the west by that part of the Park that is set aside for the Starr Farm Community Gardens; it is a short distance across the Burlington Greenway from a playground and two playing fields, also amenities of Starr Farm Park. Both car parking and bicycle parking are available adjacent to the dog park area. Special hours of operation for the dog park area are 8am-8pm, or 8am-dusk for those days of the year at which dusk occurs prior to 8pm; gates are expected to be unlocked and locked daily by local volunteers. Obstacle course equipment, benches, lawn chairs, a few shade-giving trees, and a small shed with space for a community-use bulletin and blackboard can be found within the dog park area's fenced bounds.

BRIEF SITE HISTORY & CONTEXT

In 1998, an Off-Leash Work Group (OLWG) initiated an off-leash pilot program that resulted in two operational, fenced dog runs for the City of Burlington: Starr Farm Dog Park, and Waterfront Dog Park at the Urban Reserve.¹ Starr Farm Dog Park first opened in 2001, slated as a one-year pilot. Despite further recommendations that have come from the OLWG for Starr Farm Dog Park to become permanent, it still lacks official zoning and status. (The OLWG moreover recommends that Waterfront Dog Park remains operational but temporary.) BPRW's Master Plan, produced in October 2015, outlines that BPRW intends to take responsibility for the design and formalization of Starr Farm Dog Park, the design and rehabilitation of the interim Urban Reserve Dog Park, and also the formalization of BPRW's off-leash policy.² In 2016 at Waterfront Dog Park, fencing and simplified access to the waterfront commenced accordingly. During 2018-2020, attention is shifting to Starr Farm Dog Park, involving novel plans for fencing, signage, and bike path wayfinding improvements that will support park users and neighbors alike. Considering that Starr Farm Dog Park has never been completely, officially integrated into the City's parks system before, there is a great deal of flexibility in its design – including possibilities that could alter its shape, size, and overall placement in Starr Farm Park – and its management strategy (unsupervised vs. supervised).

OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES & SURVEYING SCOPE

To gauge patterns of user behavior in Starr Farm Dog Park and greater Starr Farm Park, and to most comprehensively gather public input on the site during its official planning phase, BPRW has chosen to conduct a combination of observational studies and surveys. In August 2018, disguised naturalistic observations were conducted on-site at 30-minute and 1-hour intervals for four hours over the course of four unique days, exclusively in Starr Farm Dog Park. During September-October 2018, a formal survey was administered to residents surrounding Starr

Farm Park that encompassed questions about all aspects of the Park, including the dog park area. These two actions returned feedback from 79 and 56 park users (or neighbors and potential users), respectively, that is directly relevant to current planning concerns for Starr Farm Dog Park; these data have been cleaned and reviewed by Parks Staff (see Attachment A - *2018 Survey Data and Observations*).

New to this report, during June-July 2019, a mixed method approach combining disguised naturalistic observation (where a staff member took counts of park users solely for statistical purposes) and undisguised participant observation (where users were directly approached and asked questions) was employed on-site in one-hour interval sessions for 20 hours over the course of 12 unique days, principally in Starr Farm Dog Park and also in other areas of Starr Farm Park. These sessions followed SOPARC (System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities) protocols, as did the 2018 observational studies and survey.³ Notably, no two sessions were conducted within fewer than two hours of one another, and days of the week and times of day were randomly distributed but limited to observer availability. Each session was systematically recorded in an electronic Google Sheet using an iPad, expanding upon a data collection template used in the 2018 observational studies.⁴ Overall, the data collected in 2019 through this mixed method approach should be considered in conjunction with all historic data from 2018 to offer a robust representation of community demand and perceptions around Starr Farm Dog Park throughout the amenity's planning, renovations, and management.

2019 MIXED-METHOD DATA COLLECTION

During each session conducted in 2019, every user seen in Starr Farm Dog Park was first identified and recorded under disguised naturalistic observation. General demographic and activity data were considered; all demographic data were approximated. Users belonging to discernible user parties (e.g. family units, groups of friends) were individually accounted for but ultimately recorded together on a single line.

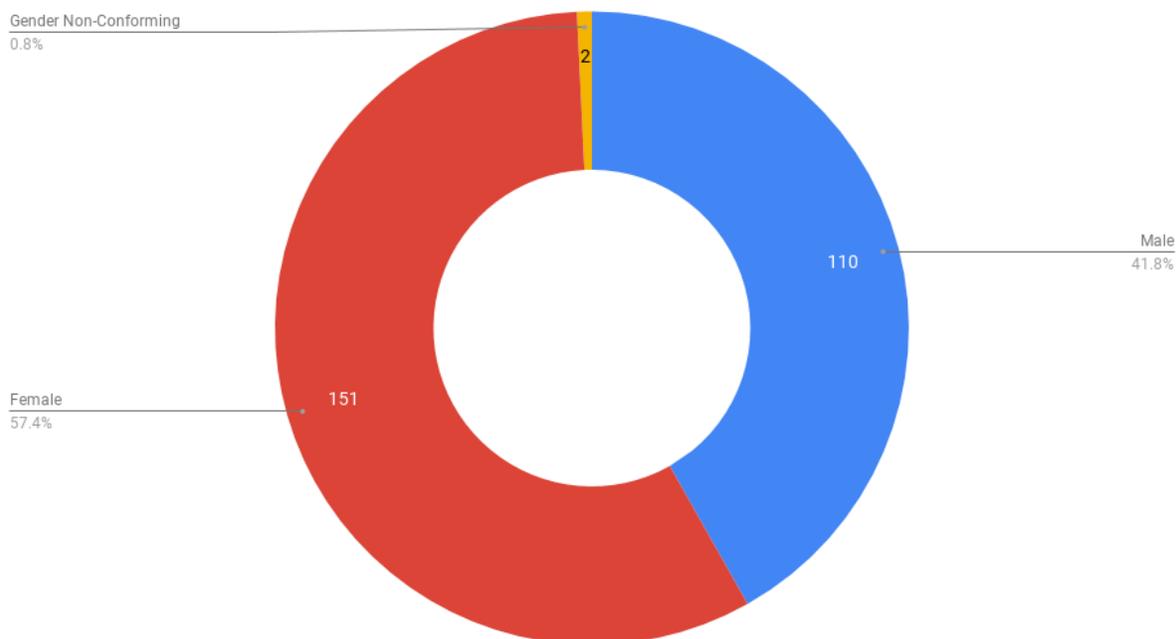
Many users were deemed preoccupied by their activity (e.g. talking on a cell phone, wearing headphones, deeply engaged in a game or strenuous exercise) (n=92). Only those users not preoccupied were subsequently approached and verbally asked a series of six standardized questions through informal conversation. Explicit demographic questions concluded each conversation to help crosscheck all earlier approximated observations and recorded responses were updated as necessary. Users selected for verbal questioning could choose to pass on any question(s) they wished to, including full refusal of survey participation (n=12). Often, users belonging to user parties came to a consensus in their question responses; in these cases, one answer was recorded and attributed to all party members.

During “lull periods” within each session – times where no new users entered the dog park area – all users seen in other areas of Starr Farm Park were identified and recorded in a similar manner. However, given that several questions in the standardized series targeted the dog park area, greater emphasis and more time was granted in these cases to open-ended feedback responses about Starr Farm Park as a whole. *Considering that only one observer was on duty during each session, it is most likely that a considerable number of users located outside of the dog park area were missed. If any users were seen leaving and re-entering any part of the park within a session, they were only recorded once based on where they were first seen, unless they eventually entered the dog park area, in which case they were considered seen in the dog park area.*

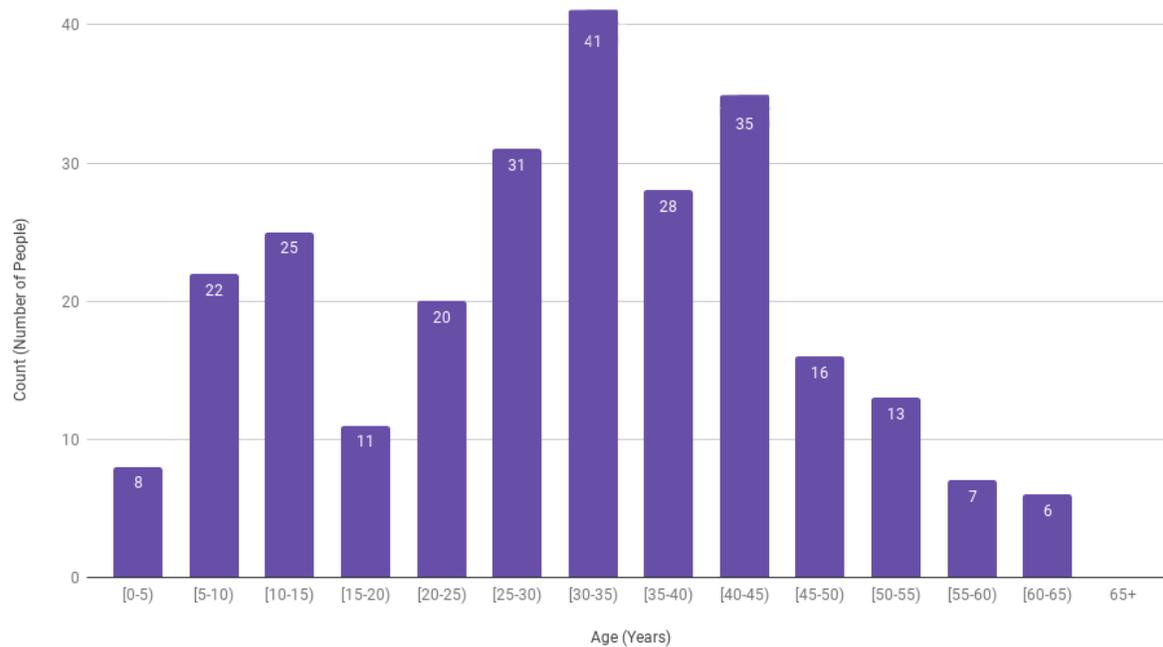
2019 DATA SUMMARY

Note: These data refer only to those human users observed and surveyed throughout all of Starr Farm Park (total n=263). 104 dogs were additionally observed.

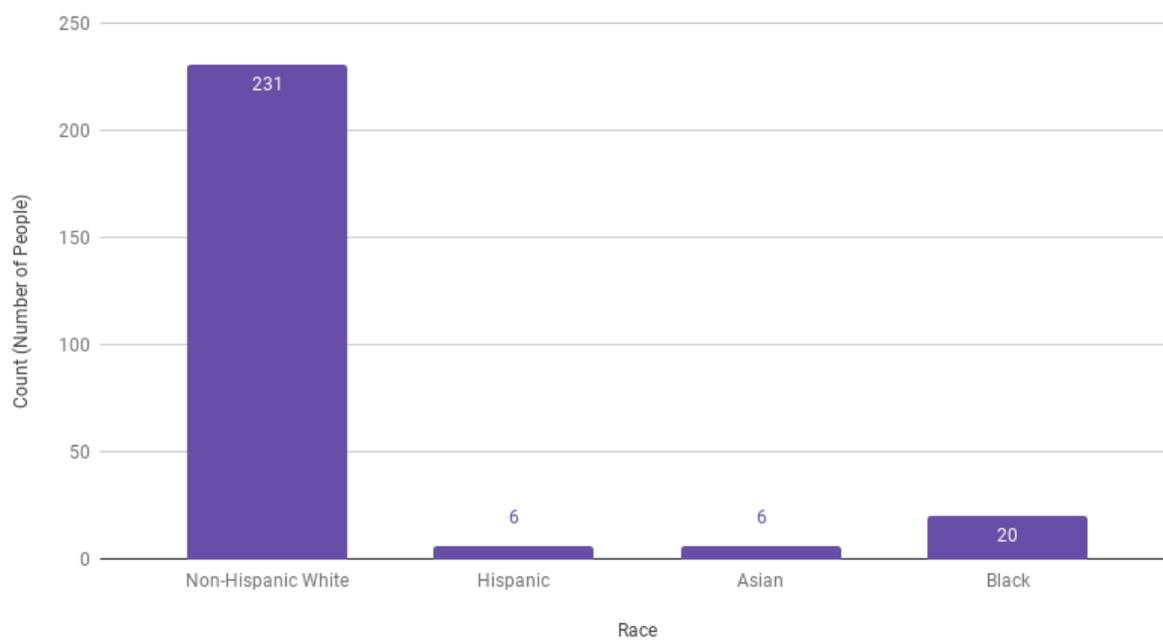
2019 Starr Farm Population Demographics: Sex



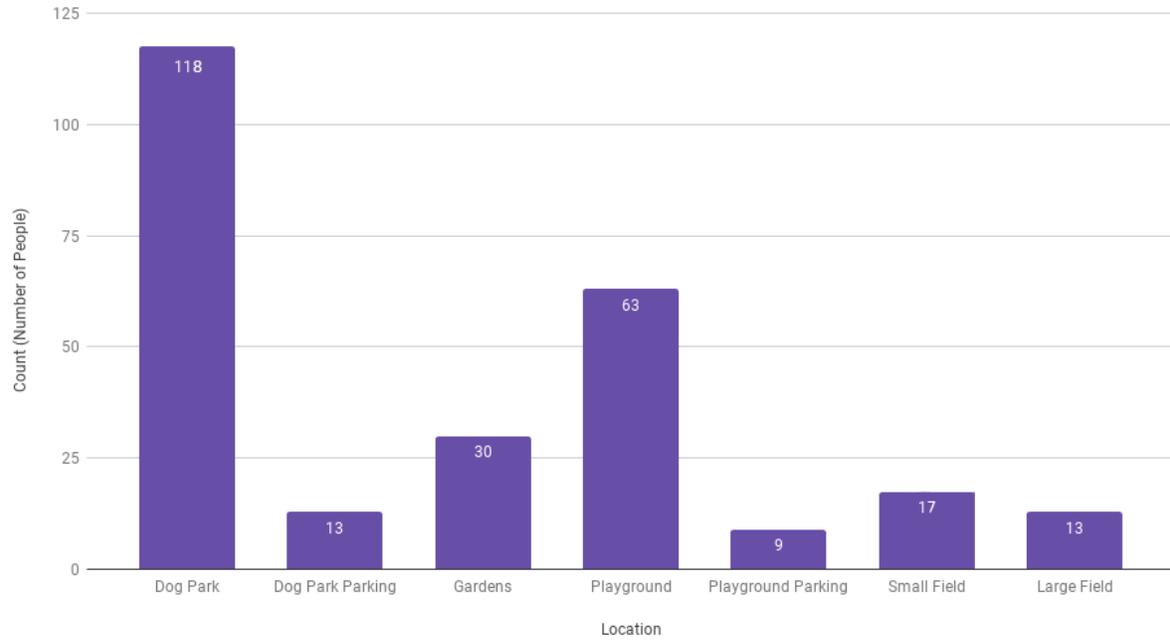
2019 Starr Farm Population Demographics: Age



2019 Starr Farm Population Demographics: Race

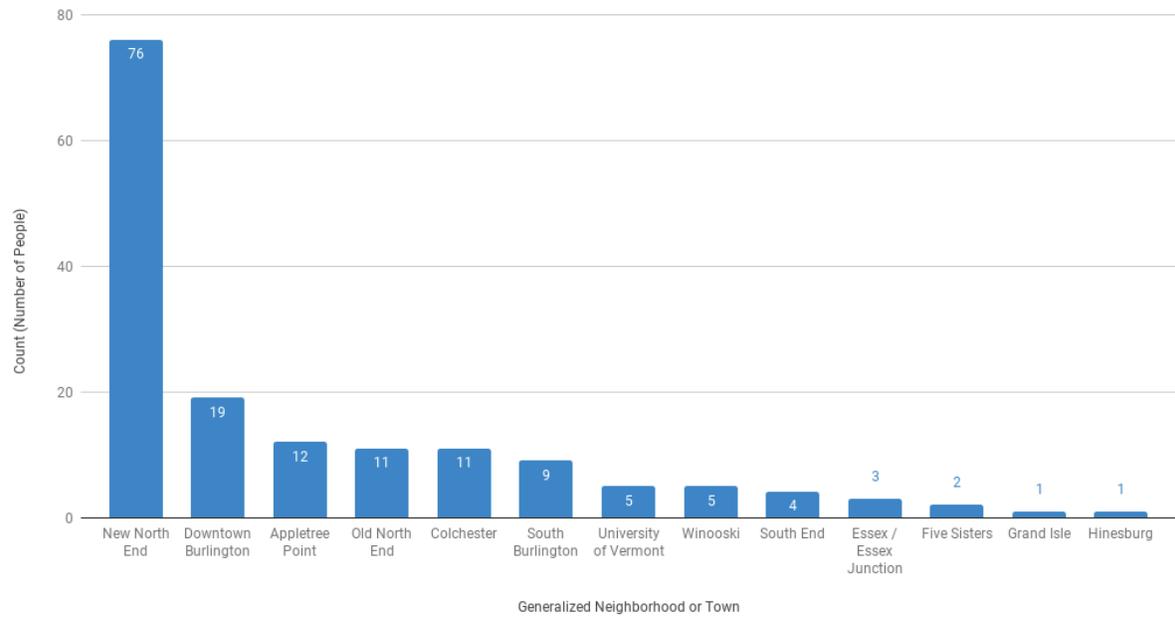


2019 Starr Farm Activity: Primary Location



2019 Starr Farm Survey Question 1

Where do you live? / Where are you coming from today?



2019 Starr Farm Observations & Survey: Hourly Schedule Summary

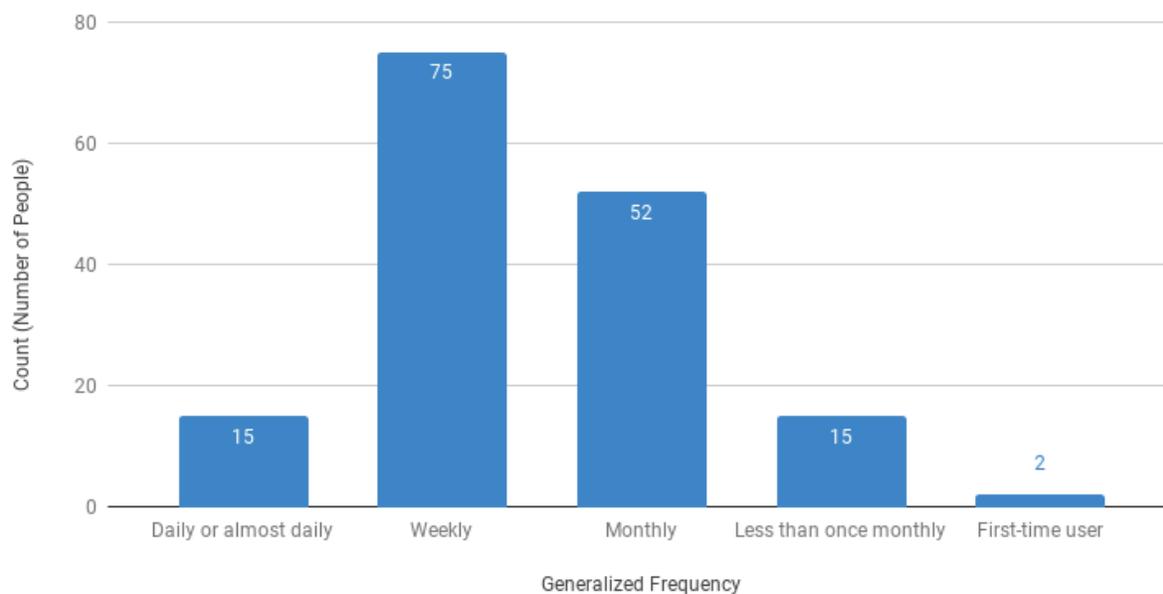
DATE	DAY OF THE WEEK	START TIME	END TIME	DOG PARK COUNT (NUMBER OF PEOPLE)	TOTAL COUNT (NUMBER OF PEOPLE)
June 7 2019	Friday	11:15 AM	12:15 PM	17	19
June 7 2019	Friday	2:15 PM	3:15 PM	2	12
June 9 2019	Sunday	9:00 AM	10:00 AM	15	40
June 9 2019	Sunday	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	11	15
June 15 2019	Saturday	7:45 AM	8:45 AM	8	17
June 15 2019	Saturday	10:30 AM	11:30 AM	9	17
June 17 2019	Monday	10:45 AM	11:45 AM	8	16
June 17 2019	Monday	1:45 PM	2:45 PM	4	6
June 17 2019	Monday	4:45 PM	5:45 PM	0	10
June 18 2019	Tuesday	9:00 AM	10:00 AM	4	10
June 19 2019	Wednesday	8:00 AM	9:00 AM	6	9
June 19 2019	Wednesday	11:00 AM	12:00 PM	0	3
June 23 2019	Sunday	7:45 PM	8:45 PM	7	21
June 24 2019	Monday	8:45 AM	9:45 AM	6	10
June 24 2019	Monday	11:45 AM	12:45 PM	3	14
June 27 2019	Thursday	8:00 PM	9:00 PM	4	9
July 2 2019	Tuesday	6:15 AM	7:15 AM	4	6
July 2 2019	Tuesday	9:00 AM	10:00 AM	7	19
July 18 2019	Thursday	2:15 PM	3:15 PM	3	5
July 19 2019	Friday	10:30 AM	11:30 AM	1	5

TOTAL = 118

TOTAL = 263

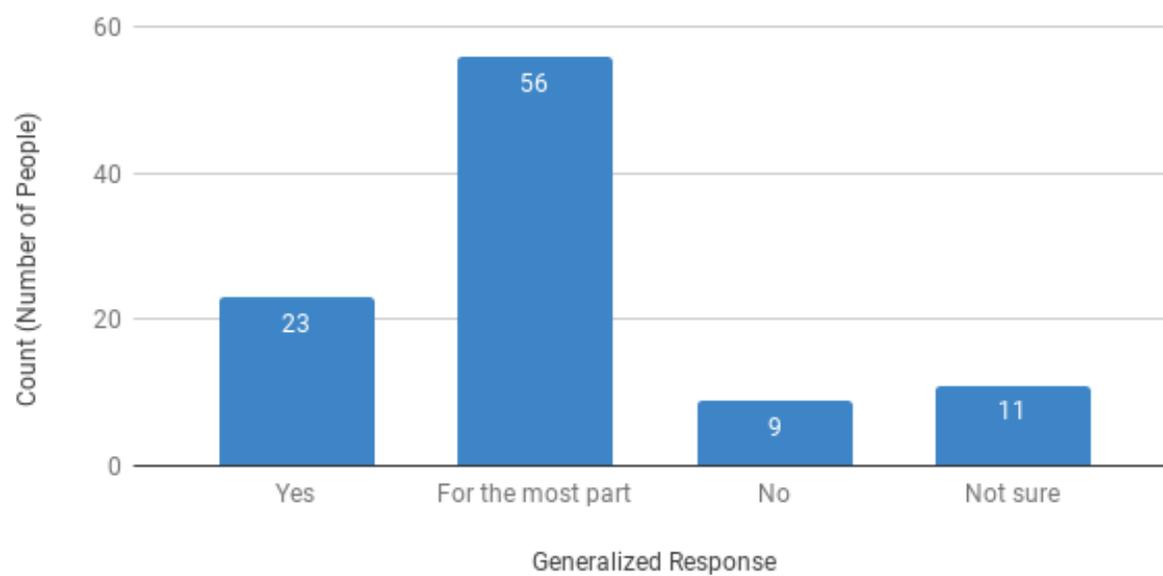
2019 Starr Farm Survey Question 2

How often do you come here to this park?



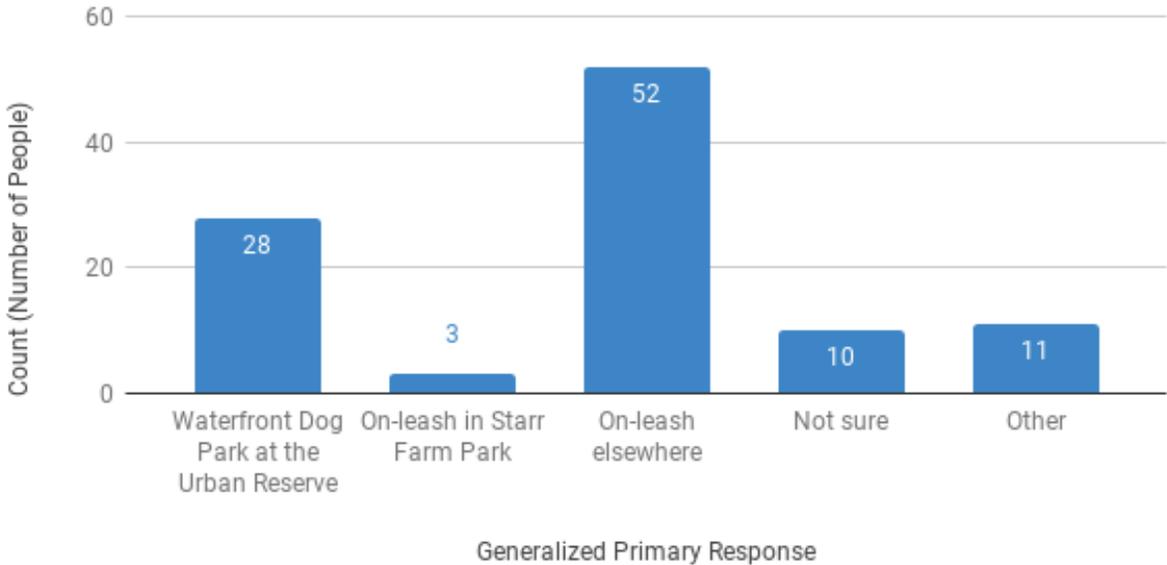
2019 Starr Farm Survey Question 3

Do you believe the rules of the park are being followed?



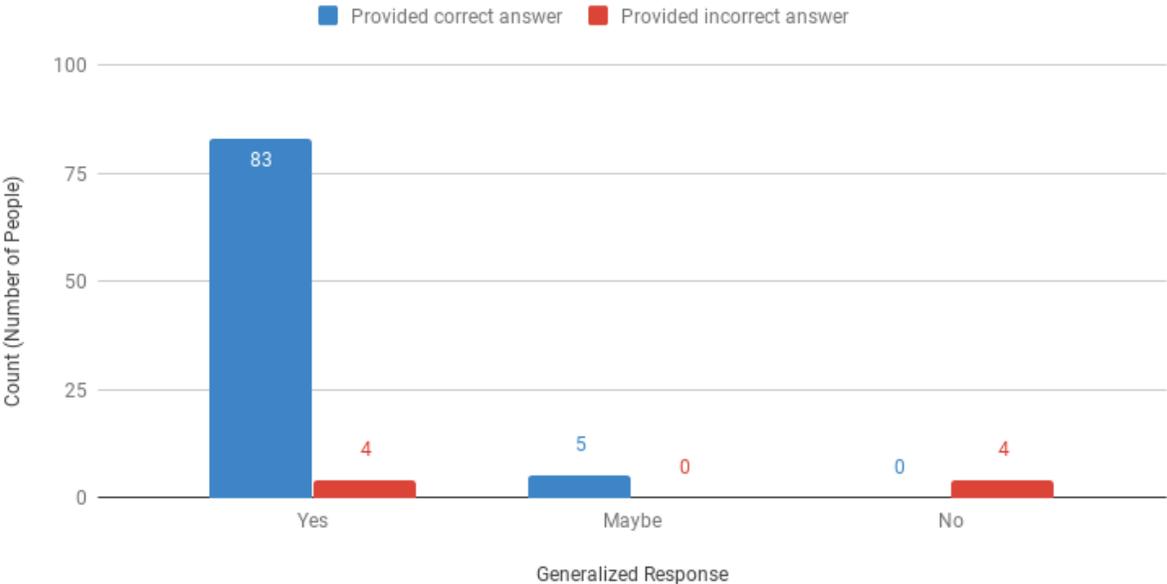
2019 Starr Farm Survey Question 5

If this dog park area weren't here, where would you go?



2019 Starr Farm Survey Question 4

Do you know the hours of the dog park area?



NOTABLE SUB-RESPONSES

(QUESTION 5)

- On-leash at Leddy Park (x4)
- Backyard (x3)
- Likely would come here more often, if that meant the space were converted into more fields or play space for humans
- Maybe go to Waterfront Park, but seems sketchy unless mid-day
- To City Hall to file a complaint
- It would be a shame
- Not sure. But that would be such a bummer if this disappeared
- Not sure. Likely drive out to trails and fields in Huntington
- Does North Beach allow dogs? / Oakledge Park? (Incorrectly thought O.P. has off-leash space)
- Concerned construction would limit garden use
- N/A. But the upkeep of the gardens is very important to me - offers equitable access to healthy food and chance to teach about food systems
- N/A. Not a dog owner. Mostly appreciate the playground picnic table, open field space, and portable toilet off the bike path up here; good resting point between Colchester Causeway and Downtown; though, the liveliness of the dog park is perhaps also part of the park's draw

2019 STARR FARM SURVEY QUESTION 6

Further recommendations? (Open-ended)

NOTABLE SUB-RESPONSES

(QUESTION 6)

TREES & SHADE

- More (larger) trees, shrubs, and shade (x19)
- Pavilion of sorts (x2)
- I feel like we've been placing demand for this for a while; even a couple more trees would make a huge impact
- Groves for density, not just singles
- More clustered trees – pines would be lovely
- Even a tent could work for summer months if trees are too hard to maintain

GRASS & PLANTINGS

- Re-seed / improve the grass (x6)
- Plantings around perimeter of fence

SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING

- Replace deteriorating signage – including at the playground parking lot
- Rebranded, more consistent signage
- Less signage or at least consolidate information to one or two boards only
- Clean up signage
- The signage does look super worn out and mismatched
- Signage showcasing the dog park from the bike path (it can be easy to miss)
- Signage or arrows on the bike path saying what is featured in the park
- Map of all City parks and amenities should be made available (permanent sign)
- Path down to water access directly from the park? / Direct access to the waterfront without needing to leave the park?
- Clarify the status of the trial period

FENCING

- Nicer fencing (x2)

DOG PARK ITEMS

- Dog treat dispenser (not sure why treats can't be allowed; would be willing to pay 25-50 cents and have that add up to help the park system)
- Clean and re-paint the blackboard / More space for blackboard and bulletin board
- Place the poop bag dispenser at the first gate entrance, not inside the second
- More dog toys / Communal Frisbees and balls
- More tunnels / More advanced obstacle course
- Matching chairs / Replace plastic chairs with those of a more durable material (They look too scrappy and easily crack)
- More benches / Clean up the benches, or at least offer a wipe dispenser

GARDENS

- More organized garden work days
- Maybe an additional wheelbarrow or little wagon to help move supplies across the gardens
- One or two more beds for more gardening space

PLAYGROUND & FIELDS

- Bigger playground / Especially more swings
- Maybe legitimate soccer nets over on the fields

ORGANIZED EVENTS

- Organized dog and owner meet and greet events
- Maybe some sort of event that brings the dog owners and gardeners together

RESTROOMS

- Real restroom (x2)

- Portable toilet on this side of park instead of the other side

MISCELLANEOUS

- Paid staff member to help enforce etiquette norms, even if just towards closing hours / Have a staff member lock the gates and potentially monitor use throughout the day
- Fines for noise (need enforcement)
- Offer an additional off-leash dog park elsewhere in the city to disperse demand
- Snack bar
- Keep it up - would be disheartened to lose this dog park
- Don't change a thing
- Keep things as they are and don't over-do it – use any available funds to enhance the Waterfront Dog Park

SOURCES

¹ <https://www2.burlingtonvt.gov/Archives/assets/0/122/318/360/815/816/1584/1600/e8b39711-4c8f-4551-85d9-72d5cd7df125.pdf>

² <https://enjoyburlington.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2015/10/2015-BPRW-Master-Plan-FINAL-LOW-RES.pdf>

³ https://activelivingresearch.org/sites/activelivingresearch.org/files/SOPARC_Protocols.pdf

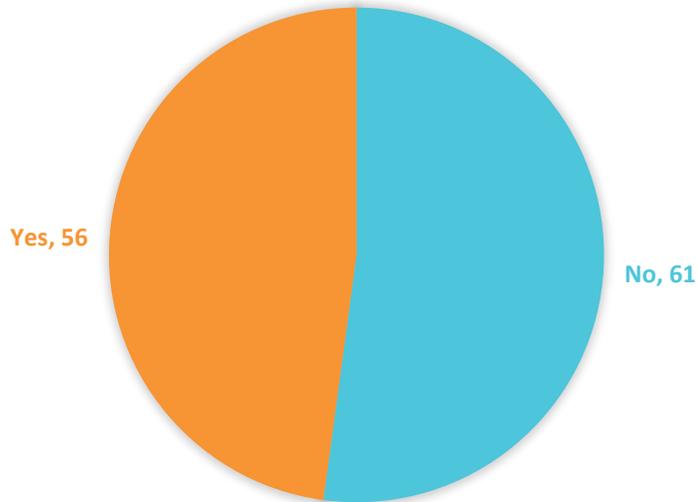
⁴ https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1_VMghufSGed2c3i74g7Ptat6eK1DUW_dl7bclCAXU-g/edit?usp=sharing

Attachment A -
2018 Survey and Observation Results



DOG PARK
STARR FARM SURVEY

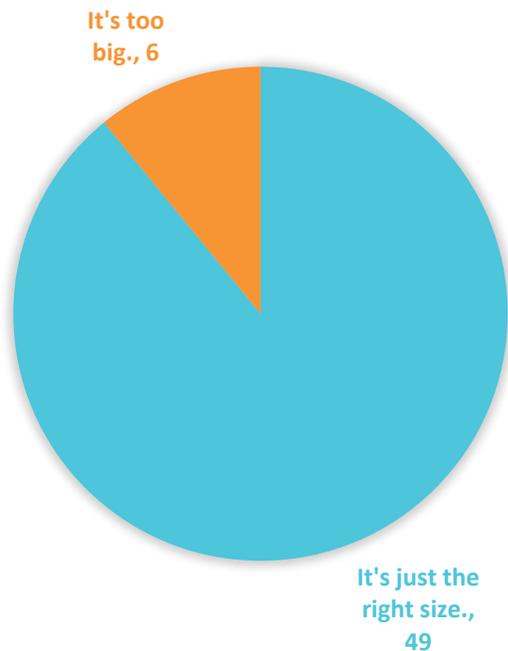
DO YOU (OR YOUR DOG) HAVE ANY THOUGHTS ABOUT THE DOG PARK?



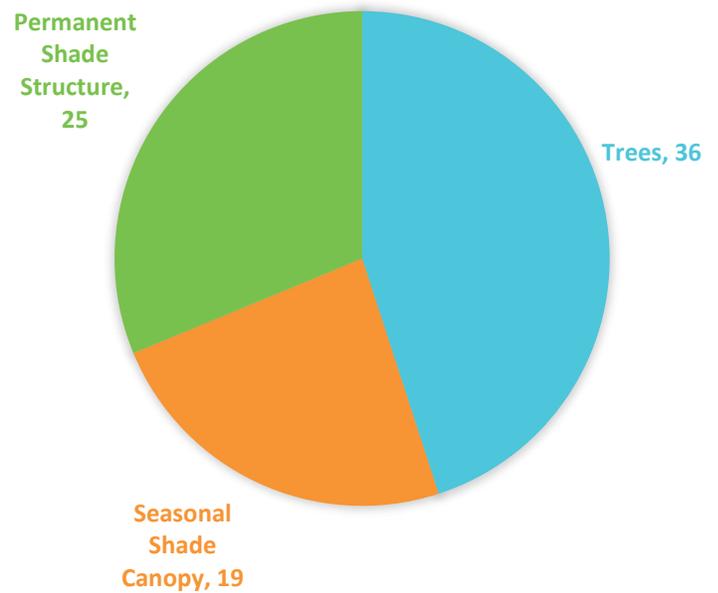
HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT THE DOG PARK?



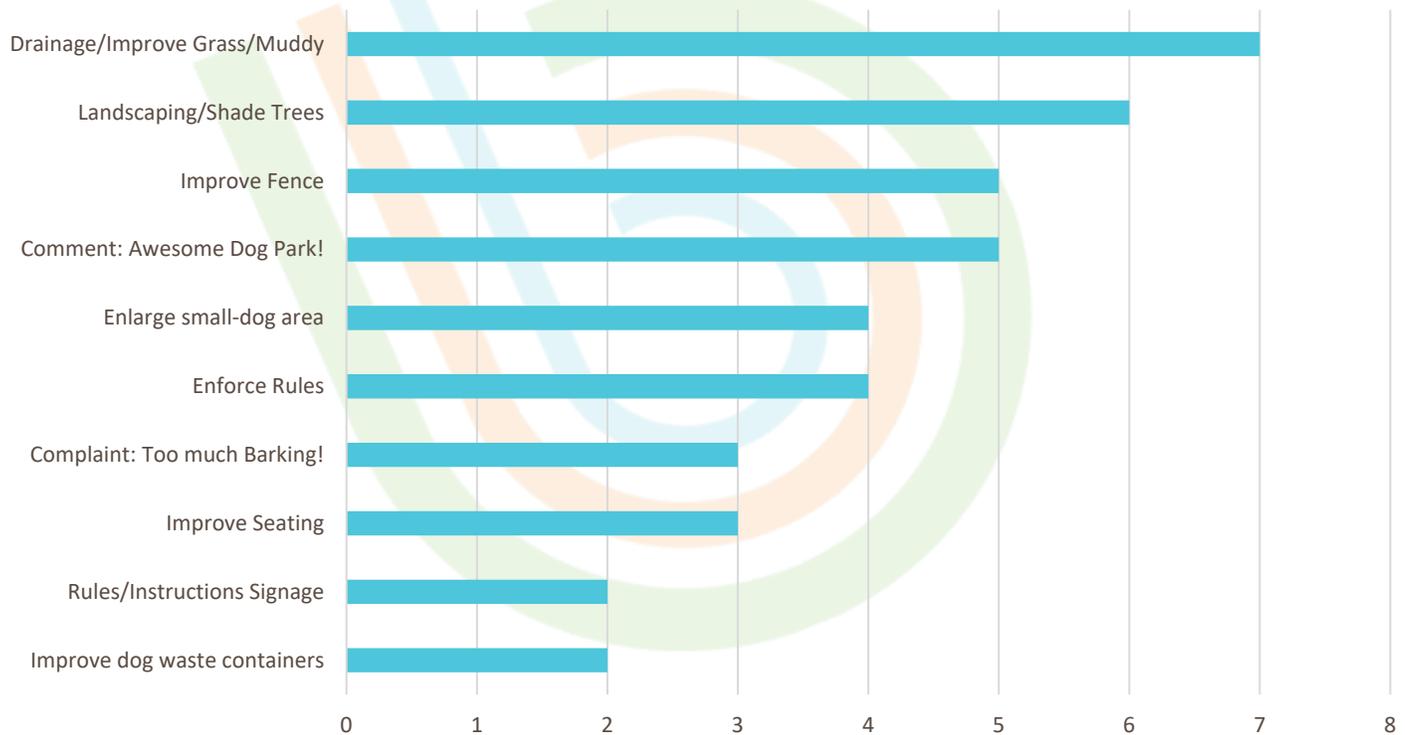
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE SIZE OF THE DOG PARK?



IF WE WERE TO ADD SHADE TO THE DOG PARK, WHAT TYPE OF FEATURE(S) WOULD YOU PREFER?



DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO THE DOG PARK? (Only suggestions with at least 2 comments included on chart)



Unedited Responses:

Do you have any other suggestions for improvements to the dog park?

As a neighbor who lives a mile away we frequently hear barking dogs. It really is a problem that can disturb the peace.

Improve drainage especially at the entrances. Maintain and replace fencing. Less reliance on volunteers. It is the only park in the city that is locked overnight, why?

Need to reseed and sections of the park so grass can grow/regrow

Plant more grass to help prevent how muddy the park gets. Also dog safe salt in the winter- its very slippery

The dog park was a buying point for moving into the neighborhood! I am so grateful for the dog park.

We need a stronger, more durable fence. The current fence is temporary garden fencing. Better latches on gates. Signs reminding people to pick up the poop as well as to make sure one gate is closed before you open the next one.

A 3 sided shelter to protect against the wind in winter

Allow slightly earlier access on weekdays - 7:00 or 7:30; remove the fear that complaints from a few neighbors will ruin it - one man came out and screamed about barking (which was happening), but it had literally only been 5 minutes (the owner is working on this with his dog) and it was 20 am on a weekday

Bigger small-dog park

The dog park needs to have the external fencing upgraded. Strong chain link fencing will last decades! The dog park is an awesome resource for our neighborhood! The network of dog park volunteers who work with Parks and Recreation to maintain the park allow this wonderful amenity to operate at minimal cost.

Add a water feature. I see dogs on the beach where they are NOT supposed to be almost every time we go down there...maybe a water feature at the dog park would help owners keep their dogs out of the beach

Dog Waste containers that keep the smell in.

Focus on more grass so that there is less mud in the spring! More natural features (plants, shrubs, trees) for the summertime. And my dream would be having the north gate opened whenever the south gate is so that the dog park can be part of a walk up/down the bike path (instead of backtracking in the winter).

I think it's a great place for people to hang out with other dog people. DON'T change it too much, it is working very well!

Trees are preferable, but seasonal shade would be a second choice.

We only wish people would use the small dog area so we don't have to worry about our big dogs trampling puppies while running around doing their thing. This is the reason we don't go anymore. Too much risk.

"Enforce municipal ordinances. Aggressive dogs should not be allow. Only dogs up to date on shot, registeres with the city should be allowed, but no one will enforce this.

The dog park is also very dirty. Stop going years ago due to the conditions"

Fences should be a little higher. .Some people are scared of dogs and sometimes the dogs run like they will jump the small fence.

Keep it closed at night. People go late at night. Make it smaller

More structured hours.

(Forgot to say, please use native species!)

Grounds have become impacted. Large mud pit created in the middle is gross. Another main entrance would be helpful when it is busy.

I so appreciate the thought and maintenance and funding that support this wonderful park. I especially love the recently added artwork.

If possible, adding a wooded area feature for very active dogs who like to run in the woods.

It would be awesome if there were an area for small children to hang out without being inside the enclosure with the dogs.

More obstacles. I think planting a grove of trees would be really great as well.

More trash barrels. More poop bag holders.

I love your Dog park. I come all the way from the South End on Sunday mornings. I feel the size is perfect because it allows one to get away from any dog(s) that are playing a bit to rough. If you were to do anything, I think you could extend the little dog park a but further into the larger part as I very rarely see dogs in that corner as we are mostly up by the structures and at the very end of the dog park. That would also give the little dog park that tree just to the north of the small enclosure. The trees along the east side provide great shade in the am hours. I am not sure what happens in the pm as I haven't been at the dog park then. I also

feel you could ask for volunteers to help make renovations as no doubt we would volunteer. I really appreciate you giving so much thought to your dog park. Thank you.

more seating

More seating. Improved dog play equipment (in the middle) and new fence (it's patched in so many places and not strong). I'm a volunteer who helps lock up weekly.

Please add trees for shade. it would be great if the date the water is turned off for winter is posted somewhere. Parking at the dog park should be for dog park users only. In the summer months many people use the dog park lot to park and walk the path to the beach...leaving little to no parking if the athletic fields are busy and that lot is full. Maybe the lot can be expanded to the west? Also there are a few spots that need grass re-seeded that always turn to mud/puddles with any amount of rain. Would also be great if the trash can for waste at the north side of the park was there year round, although I suppose it is removed for accessibility reasons in the winter.

Replace entire fence (similar to dog park near waterfront) replace shed add more benches throughout

Have penalties for owners who allow their dog to bark continuous. Have someone enforce rules.

The barking/fighting/ territorial displays of the dogs are numerous and increasing. Can the park be moved?

I don't use it as the big dogs would terrorize my small one--a separation might be in order. my big problem are dog feces and parasites which are not picked up.