

# Dog off Leash Guidelines

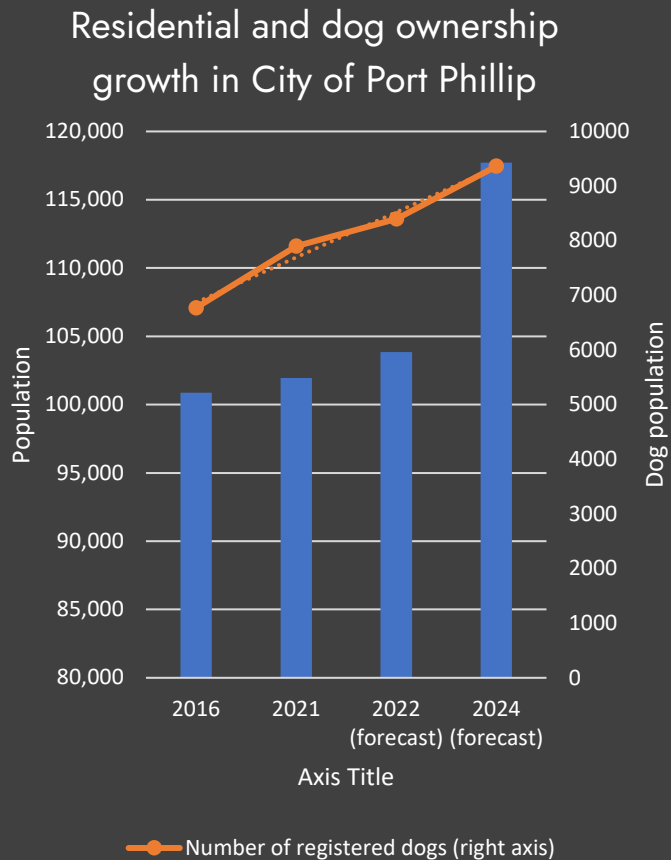
Response to Council's Draft off-leash Guidelines

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Port Melbourne 3207  
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# Policy Context



The Domestic Animal Management Plan (2022-2025) identified:

- 22.5% of respondents said there are too few off leash areas and would like more;
- 19.1% of respondents would like more fenced dog areas.

Yet these findings are not reflected in the Dog off Leash Guidelines

Why has Council not acted on this feedback?

Dog ownership and the need for off-leash areas in Port Phillip is likely to increase due:

- Forecast population growth in the municipality.
- Densification leading to smaller households and increased pet ownership.
- Changes to rental laws that enable renters (approximately 51% of Port Phillip's households) to have pets as of right during tenancies.

**Council is selectively choosing what feedback to act upon despite forecast growth in dog ownership**

# General Feedback

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The following pages respond to each of the principles and directions proposed within the draft dog off-leash guidelines.

Overall, the Guidelines infer a hierarchy of use exists with public open space and that dogs are at the bottom this hierarchy

A hierarchy of use is not suitable given that such policy should be informed through Council's Public Space Strategy – not usage guidelines.



# Principle 1: Shared Responsibility

Current wording:  
*Education  
communication  
programs and  
enforcement will be used  
to promote  
accountability and  
respect between all users  
of dog off-leash areas*

## Overall feedback:

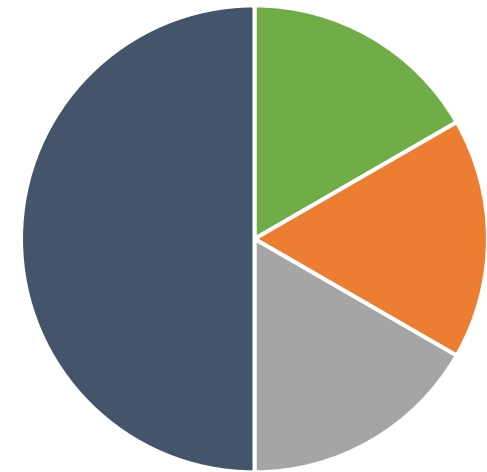
While this principle claims to emphasise shared responsibility, it does not outline the responsibility of other users within open space or other users within designated dog-off leash spaces.

The principle also does not outline Councils' responsibilities regarding dog off-leash spaces.

Therefore this principle is **NOT SUPPORTED** in its current form

Feedback on directions within this principle are included on the next page.

Position on directions



- Support
- Amendments required
- Insufficient detail
- Not supported
- New directions

# Principle 1: Shared Responsibility

## Review of directions

Draft Direction	Comments	Position
1. Education programs will look to educate members of the community who do not usually interact with dogs to improve their understanding and safety.	Detail will be required on the education programs and the budget commitment allocated	SUPPORT
2. Council will investigate and implement strategies that are recognised to be effective in achieving compliance with dog control regulations, and respect between all users of public open space.	It is unclear what Council will view as being 'recognised' as effective. No benchmarking has been provided by Council.	INSUFFICIENT DETAIL
3. Enforcement will be part of Council's approach to noncompliance with dog regulations.	Yes, enforcement should be part of Council's approach but should also include other users who do not comply with dog areas (eg people showing hostility to dogs in off-leash spaces).	AMENDMENTS REQUIRED

# Principle 1: Shared Responsibility

## Proposed additional directions

Draft Direction	Comments	Position
4. Council will uphold its responsibilities in maintaining dog off-leash areas and ensuring adequate signage of designated spaces	Council as the asset owner needs to outline its responsibilities to stakeholders of public open space and dog off-leash areas	NEW DIRECTION
5. All users of public open space will be aware of their responsibilities and mindful of the variety of uses in dog off-leash areas.	All users of public open space and dog off-leash areas (including non-dog owners and dog owners) need to be mindful of permissible uses and not cause conflict.	NEW DIRECTION
6. Council has a responsibility to plan and deliver dog off-leash areas based on current and future demand.	Council through these guidelines and public space strategy has an obligation to provide space that is suitable as dog off-leash areas, particularly if it removes existing dog off-leash areas as inferred.	NEW DIRECTION

# Principle 2: Safe

## Current wording:

*The safety of people and dogs will be prioritised when planning, designing, and managing dog off-leash areas.*

### Overall feedback:

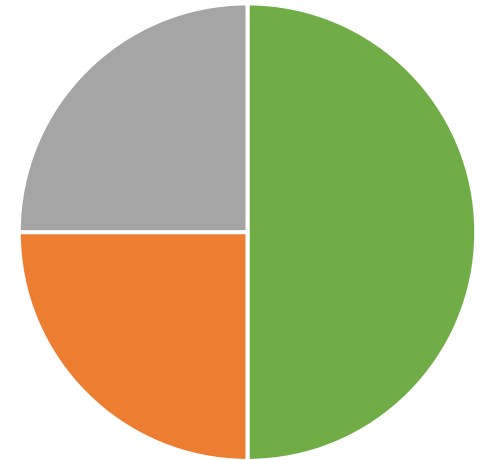
This principle lacks a clear distinction with principle 1 (Responsibility)

Principle 2 should only relate to safety and not responsibilities.

Despite these reservations this principle is **SUPPORTED** overall

Feedback on directions within this principle are included on the next page.

Position on directions



- Support
- Amendments required
- Insufficient detail
- Not supported
- New directions

# Principle 2: Safe

## Review of directions

Draft Direction	Comments	Position
1. Council has a responsibility to balance the needs all users of public open space.	Yes, but this should be included in Principle 1	SUPPORT (BUT MOVE)
2. All people have a right to be and feel safe in our public open spaces.	All people and pets have the right to be and feel safe in our public open spaces.	AMENDMENTS REQUIRED
3. Council will consider criteria relating to the safety of dogs and people when reviewing the suitability of sites as DOLAs.	Council has not indicated what criteria it is using and how this reflects best practice.	INSUFFICIENT DETAIL
4. Owners are responsible for the physical wellbeing of their dog and for ensuring their dog remains under 'effective control' and is following all regulations.	Yes, also ensure that all users are responsible for promoting a safe environment.	SUPPORT



# Principle 3: Diverse

**Current wording:**  
*A range of experiences will be provided for our dog community through our network of diverse public spaces.*

## Overall feedback:

This principle lacks detail regarding spaces it believes are suitable for dogs off-leash.

This principle should incorporate current and future demand to better inform its directions.

Despite these reservations this principle is **SUPPORTED** overall

Feedback on directions within this principle are included on the next page.

Position on directions



- Support
- Amendments required
- Insufficient detail
- Not supported
- New directions

# Principle 3: Diverse

## Review of directions

Draft Direction	Comments	Position
1. To recognise that dogs can access a diverse range of environments in the City on-leash, including footpaths and foreshore promenade.	Not relevant, these guidelines relate to off-leash areas not on-leash Further detail is required to understand the basis for this direction.	NOT SUPPORTED
2. A variety of off-leash environments across the City will offer different experiences for dogs, including areas for owners with restricted or limited mobility	Council needs to provide a plan of what space it will make available.	SUPPORT

# Principle 4: Quality

**Current wording:**  
*Dog off-leash areas will consider all users of the space, providing spaces for dogs which are well designed, well managed and fit for purpose and ensuring grounds with other primary uses are not impacted by dog usage.*

## Overall feedback:

This principle infers that dog-leash areas are at the bottom of an open space hierarchy.

Such policy direction is not suitable within usage guidelines, as the Public Space Strategy should determine whether this is a suitable approach.

Instead, Council should recognise that off-leash areas are a suitable use in some spaces

**Therefore this principle is NOT SUPPORTED**

Feedback on directions within this principle are included on next page.

Position on directions



- Support
- Amendments required
- Insufficient detail
- Not supported
- New directions

# Principle 4: Quality

## Review of directions

Draft Direction	Comments	Position
1. Good dog parks should be good parks for everyone.	Yes, but good dog parks should prioritise the needs of dogs and their owners.	SUPPORT
2. Some sites, including sports grounds and playgrounds, have other primary uses and dog usage of these areas will be restricted to ensure the site quality remains safe and fit for usage.	It is unclear why this direction is required given existing local laws, other than to demote and delegitimise dog usage.	NOT SUPPORTED
3. When reviewing DOLAs, Council will look to better utilise and engage with spaces currently in use.	This wording suggests that Council will only review current dog off-leash areas and not all open space. Instead, all open space should be considered for better utilisation.	NOT SUPPORTED
4. Designing new or upgrades to, DOLAs will consider a variety of experiences	Yes, but need to define experiences.	INSUFFICIENT DETAIL



# Principle 5: Environment

**Current wording:**  
*Dog off-leash areas cannot impact on areas of historical value and environmental significance.*

## Overall feedback:

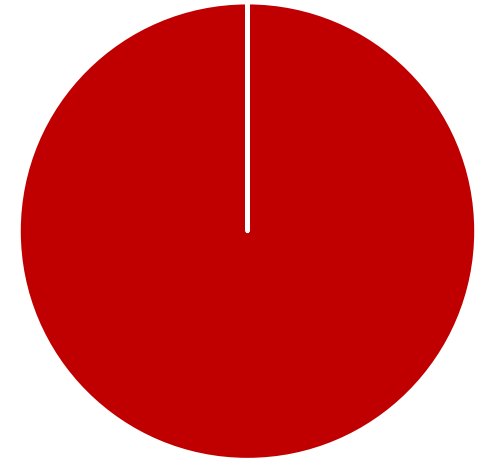
There is no reason why dog off-leash areas could not be designed in sympathy towards areas of historical value and environmental significance.

The City of Port Phillip has limited opportunities for new public open space it is very unlikely that any space will be completely devoid of other significance.

**Therefore this principle is  
NOT SUPPORTED**

Feedback on directions within this principle are included on the next page.

## Position on directions



- Support
- Amendments required
- Insufficient detail
- Not supported
- New directions

# Principle 5: Environment

## Review of directions

Draft Direction	Comments	Position
1. Some environments have a primary role to protect and enhance flora, fauna habitat and/or heritage values which makes them incompatible with dogs and dog related infrastructure.	Seems to infer that dogs will be banned from such areas, rather than indicating on-leash usage. This is outside the scope of off-leash guidelines.	NOT SUPPORTED
2. Daily and/or seasonal restrictions will apply to some off leash areas to balance the needs of different users of open space (this will particularly apply to foreshore areas and sporting grounds).	The wording implies that that off-leash access will be lost to some areas that are currently available, yet there is no comparable direction granting new space for off-leash usage.	NOT SUPPORTED
3. There are some areas in the City where it is not be possible to provide the desired type and level of off-leash provision for owners and their dog.	This direction is too broad and does not give any specific guideline. It goes against the intent of these guidelines.	NOT SUPPORTED

# Conclusion

## Response to Principles

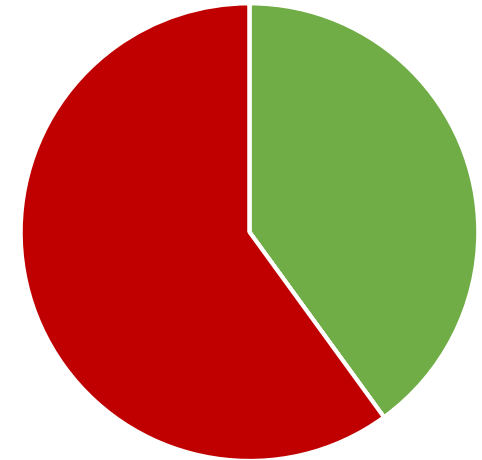
Overall, the Guidelines fail to enhance dog off-leash areas within the City of Port Phillip and does not address current and future needs.

Council has not identified how it will assess demand to determine new dog off-leash areas that may be required and has not been informed by benchmarks comparing itself to other comparable municipalities.

Council must not proceed with the Guidelines in their current form with further community engagement required.

Feedback on directions within this principle are included on the next page.

## Response to principles



- Support
- Amendments required
- Insufficient detail
- Not supported
- New directions