

Developing Guidelines for Dog Off-Leash Areas


City of Port Phillip

Engagement Summary Report
April 2023

Prepared by
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The background features a light teal color with abstract white and dark teal brushstrokes. A large, dark teal, irregular shape with a white, pebbly or cellular pattern is positioned on the left side, partially overlapping the text area. The text is centered within the white space of the dark teal shape.

Conversation Co. respectfully acknowledges the people of the Kulin Nations as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways in the area also known as the City of Port Phillip. We pay respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

1.Executive Summary

There are over 8,000 dogs registered in the City of Port Phillip. The City of Port Phillip Council has made a commitment to develop *Dog off-leash Strategic Guidelines* which will outline their position on the provision, distribution, design, and management of dog facilities in public open spaces.

Conversation Co. was engaged by the City of Port Phillip to plan, design and deliver an engagement program to gather feedback from the community about dog off-leash areas and the principles and factors they believe should be considered in a guidelines document.

This report presents the Stage One community engagement findings, for consideration by both Council and the deliberative community panel (to be established prior Stage Two of this project).

Project Overview

The municipality has approximately 353 hectares of public open space, distributed over 169 individual spaces, and 11 kilometres of foreshore between Sandridge and Elwood. Many of the public open spaces and beaches across the City provide space for dogs to be off-leash.

Council's *Places for People: Public Space Strategy 2022 – 2032* and *Domestic Animal Management Plan* (DAMP) were adopted in late 2021. The topic of dog off-leash areas came up during consultation on both documents. As with many other municipalities, there is limited public space and there are challenges involved in balancing the desires of dog owners with the views and needs of all other users of Council's beaches and public spaces.

Engagement methodology

A mixed-method community engagement program consisting of online and face-to-face activities was used to reach participants across different levels of interest in the project. This first stage of the project; 'Developing our Understanding' required community engagement to understand the current context and promotion of the project, to create interest about the community deliberative panel (Stage Two).

Participation

There were a total of 2,577 participants at this stage in the project (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participation by engagement activity

Engagement Activity	No.	%
<i>Have Your Say</i> online survey	2,130	83%
<i>Have Your Say</i> online forum comments	48	2%
Written submissions to Council	2	0%
Community pop-ups - 10 sessions	258 [#]	10%
Community intercepts - 8 sessions	127	5%
'Focused conversations'/workshops	10	0%
Telephone interviews	2	0%
TOTAL	2,577	100%

[#] An underestimate as some pop-up participants did not fill in the demographic 'postcard' so were not counted in this total.

Community feedback findings have been reported by stakeholder groups to show diversity of opinions. Dog owners comprised 45.3% of participants (1,986 responses), 5.7% were non dog owners (252 responses) and 3.3% were former dog owners. Participants could also note their interest in this project by their membership of a sporting club or community organisation (5.7% each) , their work in a dog business such as professional dog walkers (61 responses, 1.4%)¹.

Participation was primarily by residents of the City of Port Phillip (90.6% of respondents) followed by resident or non-resident ratepayers (41.0%) and workers (13.0%). The lowest represented groups were visitors to the municipality and students².

Participation was encouraged across the municipality, with the greatest representation from Port Melbourne residents, Elwood residents and St Kilda residents. Residents from Ripponlea and St Kilda West had the lowest participation rates.

Key findings

Factors to consider for dog off-leash areas

Participants in surveys and pop ups were prompted to select their top three factors to consider for the planning of dog off-leash areas. There were a total of 2,297 respondents to this question.

¹ It should be noted that participants were able to select multiple options for this question for example: members of sporting clubs may also identify as dog owners - as a result the total numbers presented are of responses rather than respondents.

²Participants were able to select multiple options for this question but in order to provide a clearer picture of local participation, the percentages shown are of total respondents not responses.

The top five factors were:

1. Size of the area (1,690 selections)
2. Location (1,541 selections)
3. Who else uses the area and what they use it for (1,299 selections)
4. How far it is set back (from the road or other features) (1,233 selections)
5. Natural significance (eg specific habitat, wildlife) (716 selections)

Considerations for dog off-leash guidelines

Participant feedback demonstrates the following potential criteria for developing dog off-leash guidelines:

Planning: User groups agreed that dog off-leash spaces, where possible, should be setback from roads and removed from areas of natural significance or wildlife habitat. User groups were divided on the location of dog parks, with dog owners supporting walkability and equitable access across the municipality. Non dog owners supported dog parks that were further from residential areas to reduce noise pollution and dog waste. In terms of priorities for planning for dog off-leash spaces, both user groups felt the bigger the better; to provide adequate space for dogs to exercise, avoid congestion, minimise dog fights and allow other users space from dogs.

Design: Overall all user groups prefer fencing or a clear boundary in dog off-leash areas. Both dog owners and non dog owners also supported designated areas separating user groups, particularly; the elderly, children, picnicking or BBQs and busy sporting areas. For non dog owners, the motivation for this criteria was safety and noise considerations. Dog owners' motivation for these criteria was centred on practicality.

Operation and use: Non-dog owners supported greater enforcement of rules particularly for dog areas near residences and on the beach.

What is currently working well and not working well

Participants in pop ups and the online survey were asked open-ended questions about what is working well and what is not working well, regarding dog off-leash areas in the municipality.

What's working well

There were a total of 2,392 comments to this question in which the subsequent themes emerged. Because of the different sentiments between user groups, data has been presented in terms of dog owners and non dog owners. It must be noted that participants commented on the features that currently work well, but also suggested improvements for the future.

The following data presents the key themes participants felt supported good dog off-leash areas. Some participants gave examples of a positive experience surrounding the provision of facilities and infrastructure. Others expressed the lack of facilities or infrastructure may contribute to a conflict between the various user groups making suggestions for further provisions for shared spaces to work well.

These data suggest key areas for focus are the provision of bins, poo bags, water and shade in dog off-leash areas, with equal numbers supportive of the current facilities and infrastructure and those who feel this can be improved.

Dog owners:

1. Infrastructure such as dog poo bags, bins, fencing/gates, water bowls, shade, grass (448)
2. Design of dog off-leash areas (386)
3. General support for role of off-leash areas (312)
4. Observations about owner responsibility and enforcement of animal behaviour (276)
5. General support for dogs on beaches (206)
6. Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (190)
7. Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (189)
8. Benefits of socialisation for both dogs and community connection for owners (312)
9. Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (152)
10. Easy access and walkability (135).

Non dog owners:

1. Observations about owner responsibility and enforcement of animal behaviour (62)
2. Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (37)
3. Facilities and infrastructure (33)
4. *"nothing...not much"* (28)
5. General support for role of off-leash areas (22)
6. Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (20)
7. *"I don't know/I don't use them"* (19)
8. Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (18)
9. General support for dogs on beaches (14)
10. Design of dog off-leash areas (13).

Participant feedback demonstrates the following potential criteria for developing dog off-leash guidelines:

Planning: All user groups discussed the need to plan for shared spaces, with a preference across different interest groups for 'delineated' or 'separate' spaces that were 'well-signed' and communicated. Dog owners and workers prefer this to promote to non dog owners that they are in shared spaces, whereas non dog owners preferred to keep some areas dog free. Considerations included the management of sports, commuters, exercise, business and picnicking alongside user hierarchies at the beach.

Design: Community members across all user groups preferred the incorporation of fencing, dog poo bag dispensers, bins, shade, water, seating, grass and shelter in dog off-leash spaces. Design considerations were referenced more frequently by dog owners, dog workers and sporting club members. All user groups emphasised the need for open space, the importance of visibility and designing the dog off-leash area to include connected walking trails to take in points of interest.

Operation and use: *'Owner responsibility and enforcement of animal behaviour'* was placed highly for all users, particularly sports club members and non dog-owners. Participants overall felt that dog off-leash guidelines must include: education, rules, restriction and enforcement to maintain the amenity, promote safety and minimise conflict between users in off-leash spaces, in addition to clear signage and rules for dog off-leash spaces.

What is not working well

There were a total of 2,286 comments to this question in which the subsequent themes emerged. Because of the different sentiments between user groups, data has been presented in terms of dog owners and non dog owners. Participants discussed the current problems, presented solutions or gave general opinions surrounding animal management. The following data presents the key themes participants felt were not working or needed improvement.

Dog owners:

1. Infrastructure needed or wanted to improve safety, amenity, waste reduction and access to water (691)
2. Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (279)
3. Observations about owner responsibility for dog behaviour (289)
4. Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (230)
5. Dog owners not picking up dog poo/using rubbish bins (178)
6. Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (161)
7. Design of dog off-leash areas (159)
8. Maintenance-damage to parks (122)
9. Size of the area allowing spaces for all users (118)

Non-dog owners:

1. Observations about owner responsibility for dog behaviour (101)
2. Dog owners not picking up dog poo/using rubbish bins (47)
3. Council rules and enforcement (40)
4. Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (35)
5. Facilities and infrastructure (25)
6. Community and social dilemmas (10)

Considerations for dog off-leash guidelines

Common features considered to not be working well across two or more stakeholder groups have been listed below as potential considerations when forming dog off-leash guidelines.

Planning the experience: Across all stakeholder groups, a requirement for delineated spaces is highlighted. For both sporting club members and dog owners, feedback suggests the need to separate sporting fields to reduce issues with timing, destruction of sporting fields and safety issues with dogs being present during sporting games. Other areas such as parks and beaches are mentioned by both owners and non dog owners as problematic for picnickers, playgrounds and family gatherings. Feedback from community members suggest they would

like Council to plan out the experience, this includes how they create a space that separates user groups to reduce conflict, considering what else is nearby to the dog off-leash area, inclusive of distance from playgrounds, picnic areas and areas of high foot traffic.

Design: Feedback has suggested removing dogs from playgrounds and sporting fields altogether, and some have suggested installing fences or signage to prevent the shared use of these spaces. This could be beneficial to consider when forming guidelines. Improved facilities and infrastructure at dog parks and beaches is among the top ten features that are not working well for all stakeholder groups. Feedback shows that fencing, availability of bins, shade and water facilities are not working well in dog off-leash areas and could be considered when forming guidelines.

Operation and use: Owner responsibility and enforcement of animal behaviour was placed highly for all users, particularly sports club members and non dog-owners. Participants overall felt that dog off-leash guidelines must include: education, rules, restriction and enforcement to maintain the amenity, promote safety and minimise conflict between users in off-leash spaces. Council rules and enforcement is a commonly mentioned theme among non dog owners, and has been mentioned by sporting club members. Both stakeholder groups have suggested that Council should consider more patrols and stricter enforcement of dogs being off-leash and for those not picking up after dogs. This feedback around rules and enforcement could be considered when forming guidelines.

Key findings - Limiting access

Participants were asked the question '*When would it be ok to limit access for dogs off-leash in parks or on the beach?*'. There were a total of 1,725 participants to this question. The top factors discussed by participants in surveys and pop ups for limiting dog off-leash access were:

- If there is another group using the space (e.g. sporting group using the space before a game) (1,244 comments) (38%)
- If there is increased seasonal use (e.g. foreshore in Summer, or when there is a festival/event) (1,065 comments) (33%)
- If the space is close to residents (e.g. restricting use after 7pm to minimise noise) (468 comments) (14%)
- Other limitations suggested by participants (54 comments).

There were a total of 637 free text comments provided to support the above selections. Of these, other limiting factors suggested by participants for consideration in guidelines were:

- Locating dog off-leash areas away from native habitats or other natural environments (low water quality, flooding, fire damage).
- Locating dog off-leash areas away from existing playgrounds and schools
- Not within 50 metres of beach swimming safety flags, boat ramps or emergency access ways.
- Existing crowded areas for families, small children and the elderly/immobile including areas where food is served or enjoyed.

- Removing time-based limits or seasonal limits in favour of dedicated and separate on/off-leash areas available all year.
- Removal of off-leash areas if complaints about owner behaviour significantly increase (note: likely to be unenforceable).

Key findings - Feedback from community groups and clubs

The purpose of these workshops was to specifically engage with sports clubs and environmental groups to ask questions surrounding their needs, experiences and expertise in relation to developing guidelines for dog off-leash spaces. Additionally, workshop participants were consulted for the preparation of resources and items for exploration in the deliberative panel process in the second phase of engagement.

Environmental groups

Locations of natural significance identified:

The following areas were identified as key zones for conservation for their resident bird species, plant biodiversity and source of seeds, community interest in regeneration and as areas identified that do not have other uses:

- Perce White, Sandridge (Life Saving Victoria office).
- St Kilda West Beach.
- Westgate Park.

Supports needed to protect biodiversity and regeneration:

Participants suggested following actions under the following themes to help support ecologies and natural significance when planning for dog off-leash areas.

- Site selection for dog off-leash areas: considering current usage, creating spaces away from natural significance, understanding the disturbance that dogs create to natural areas, considerations of more dog on-leash spaces.
- Increasing vegetation where possible: consider creating a natural belt along the Albert Park - Canterbury Road, enriching the habitat in dog off-leash areas with native plantings, increasing habitat in foreshore areas, planting for the removal of noisy miners, planting to support insect and bird life.
- Understanding areas of natural significance: including mapping the areas of natural significance, create priority areas for different spaces i.e is it a dog space or a habitat space?
- Education and conservation: increase planting and education instead of just fencing off areas, involve community in planting.create opportunities for education and sharing of culture, support compliance with the rules and regulation - to protect areas of environmental significance.

Sporting clubs

Factors that work well and need improvement:

Participants provided examples of factors that work well as being:

- Sharing infrastructure: demonstrating shared use of lighting assisted with funding.
- Separation of users: having little overlap between different users, selection of game times not at peak walking time, visibility of sports activities to give cues to dog owners to vacate spaces.
- Where there are smaller spaces that can be used during game days by the general public.
- Respectful coexistence between sports clubs and dog owners: dog owners recognise the routine of the club, training times, lack of conflict between the different user groups.

When asked what things were not working well sports club participants suggested:

- Management of grounds and playing surfaces: strict insurance requirements for pitch conditions and little control over damage caused to these grounds, injury to players, cleaning up of dog waste and filling in holes dug by dogs.
- Unbalanced workload for clubs and volunteers to maintain grounds: impact on play cost, time and “rigmarole”. :
- Dogs interfering with games and training: injury to players, sentiment that dog owners do not respect sports people and top tier clubs, liability for player injury, responsibility to keep children safe at sport and dogs running into traffic creating hazards on game days.
- Lack of fencing or separated spaces to manage different user groups.
- Enforcement and support from Council: desire for clear signage with rules to mediate conflict between both groups, Support from Council to promote the rules, advertise game days and other times sports grounds are a ‘no dogs’ space, limit use for dog businesses, increase provision of bins and dog poo bag dispensers and a desire for Council officer presence at games to monitor behaviour and observe how people are using the space.

Factors needed to support continued shared use:

Participants identified the following opportunities for Council support:

- Creating new fenced dog spaces with access to water and bins for dogs at sporting fields including
- Developing a maintenance strategy in collaboration with sports clubs that focuses on prevention as well as management
- Council presence at games and training to hear feedback from the community and understand frustrations.
- Potential to explore a ‘no dog policy’ for players and members on game days to create an example for the broader community
- Support from Council to enforce playing and training times.

- Support from Council to communicate and promote rules and expectations for behaviour at shared spaces through clear signage, updates online and on social media.
- Clear definitions of the rules from Council for particular shared spaces to support managing relationships between users.
- Sharing communications with public surrounding the cost of maintenance and repairs and impact on sportspeople to promote good behaviour
- Communicating playing and training times for clubs, updated schedules to promote right of way for sports during these times.

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1. Introduction

There are over 8,000 dogs registered in the City of Port Phillip. Dog off-leash areas have traditionally been established when and where the need was identified, either by Council or the community. Council now recognises that as times have changed and the population, as well as dog ownership has increased, there is a need for an overarching document to guide the direction of dog off-leash areas into the future. A guidelines document will ensure that all users of open space in the City of Port Phillip have local and appropriate access for recreational use.

Conversation Co. was engaged by the City of Port Phillip to plan, design and deliver an engagement program to gather feedback from the community about dog off-leash areas and the principles and factors they believe should be considered in a guidelines document.

2.1 Project Background

The municipality has approximately 353 hectares of public open space, distributed over 169 individual spaces, and 11 kilometres of foreshore between Sandridge and Elwood. Many of the public open spaces and beaches across the City provide space for dogs to be off-leash. These include:

- Fifteen different beach zones with varying dog off-leash conditions.
- Sixteen public open spaces across the municipality that are designated for dog off-leash areas.
- Two fenced dog off-leash areas at Eastern Reserve North in South Melbourne and MO Moran Reserve in St Kilda.

2. Engagement Methodology

A mixed-method community engagement program consisting of online and face-to-face activities was used to reach participants from a range of different levels of interest in the project. The first stage of the project; 'Developing our Understanding' required engagement to understand the current context and promotion of the project to create interest about the community deliberative panel (Stage 2).

3.1 Engagement Objectives

The objectives of the Stage 1 engagement program were:

- To gather feedback from the community about their desires, concerns and ideas regarding dog off-leash areas.
- To understand how to deliver dog parks in the future considering the distribution, design and provision of dog off-leash space.
- To create interest and 'buy-in' for the project and bring community members along the journey of the development of the guidelines.

3.2 Engagement Activities

For Stage 1 the engagement activities were based on the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum under 'Inform' and 'Consult'. This engagement used a mixed methods approach to capture diverse views across the City of Port Phillip.

Community engagement was conducted from 13 December 2022 to 21 March 2023. The engagement activities are shown in Table 1 and further information about the activities are contained in the Council community engagement plan.

4. Who Participated?

4.1 Participation by engagement activity

Table 2 shows a summary of the engagement activities which involved a total of 2,577 participants at this stage in the project.

Table 2. Participation by Engagement Activity

Engagement Activity	No.	%
<i>Have Your Say</i> online survey	2,130	83%
<i>Have Your Say</i> online forum comments	48	2%
Written submissions to Council	2	0%
Community pop-ups - 10 sessions	258 [#]	10%
Community intercepts - 8 sessions	127	5%
'Focused conversations'/workshops	10	0%
Telephone interviews	2	0%
TOTAL	2,577	100%

[#] An underestimate as some pop-up participants did not fill in the demographic 'postcard' so were not counted in this total.

[Appendix 2](#) shows a list and map of the community pop-up and survey intercept locations.

4.2 Characteristics of participants

The characteristics of the survey and pop-up participants are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of Participants

Selected characteristics	Survey No.	Pop-ups No.	Total No.	%	2021 Census %
Gender					
Woman/female	1,485	77	1,562	65.1	51.2
Man/male	693	27	720	30.0	48.8
Non-binary	13	0	13	0.5	-
Age Group					
15-24 years	30	7	37	1.5	8.7
25-34 years	366	12	378	15.7	22.7
35-49 years	875	30	905	37.6	25.4
50-59 years	541	29	570	23.7	13.1
60-69 years	313	17	330	13.7	9.5
70-79 years	104	9	113	4.7	6.3
80+ years	14	0	14	0.6	3.1
Country of birth					
Australian-born	1,709	76	1,785	74.4	60.7
Born overseas	501	27	528	22.0	33.1
Has disability/mobility challenge					
Yes	134	6	140	5.8	3.7 #
No	2,097	94	2,191	91.3	89.6

Note: Survey and Pop-ups participants only. Data source for 2021 Census data is

<https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/>

Census data 'Need for Assistance' is only a proxy measure of disability.

Of the 2,407 participants in the survey and pop-ups, 2,399 responded to the gender question with 65.1% being female, 30.0% male, less than 1% non-binary and 4.3% elected not to state their gender. As with many community engagement projects, females were over-represented compared to their proportion in the Port Phillip community.

Table 2 shows the age profile of these participants with an additional 2.4% who elected not to state their age group. Compared to their proportion in the Port Phillip community, those aged 35-69 years were over-represented in the engagement whilst younger adults in their twenties and early thirties were under-represented.

A total of 2,399 participants answered the country of birth question - 74.4% were Australian-born, 22.0% were born overseas and 3.6% elected not to provide this information. As with many community engagement projects, Australian-born participants were over-represented compared to their proportion in the Port Phillip community. Sixty-four countries of birth were recorded (in addition to Australia) with the United Kingdom, New Zealand, United States of America, South Africa, Ireland, Canada and Germany having the highest numbers of participants.

In terms of participants with a disability or mobility challenge (that impacts access), 5.8% responded that they did have a disability or mobility challenge, 91.3% did not and 2.9% preferred not to divulge this information.

4.3 Interest in dog off-leash issue

Participants in surveys and pop ups were asked about their interest in dog off-leash areas. Participants were able to select more than one response. Table 4 shows that this engagement program had high levels of participation from dog owners compared to non dog owners, sporting club members and people who work in dog businesses such as professional dog walkers.

Table 4. Interest in Dog off-leash issue

Interest in Issue	Survey No.	Pop-ups No.	Total No.	%
Dog owners	1,911	75	1,986	45.3
Former dog owners	134	12	146	3.3
Work with dogs (paid)	61	0	61	1.4
Non-dog owners	237	15	252	5.7
Users of parks/beaches in Port Phillip	1,408	32	1,440	32.8
Members of community organisations	248	1	249	5.7
Members of sporting club	242	8	250	5.7
TOTAL Responses	4,241	143	4,384	100%

Note: Survey and Pop-ups participants only. Multi-response question, total is all responses not respondents (people).

Table 5 shows the additional interest or behaviours of each interest group, for those assumed to be of most relevance.

Table 5. Multiple interests in Dog off-leash issue

Interest in Issue	Selected Additional Interests (% of respondents)
Dog owners (n=1,986)	57.1% use parks/beaches 9.8% belong to community organisations 9.9% belong to sporting clubs
Former dog owners (n=146)	66.4% use parks/beaches 12.3% belong to community organisations 14.4% belong to sporting clubs
Paid work with dogs (n=61)	77.0% use parks/beaches 11.5% belong to community organisations 14.8% belong to sporting clubs
Non-dog owners (n=252)	9.5% former dog owners 79.8% use parks/beaches 15.5% belong to community organisations 13.9% belong to sporting clubs
Users of parks/beaches in Port Phillip (n=1,440)	78.8% own a dog 14.0% don't own a dog 6.7% former dog owners 3.3% work with dogs 16.9% belong to sporting clubs
Members of community organisations (n=249)	78.3% own a dog 15.7% don't own a dog 7.2% former dog owners 2.8% work with dogs
Members of sporting clubs (n=250)	78.4% own a dog 14.0% don't own a dog 8.4% former dog owners 3.6% work with dogs 97.8% use parks/beaches

Note: Online survey only, multi-response question.

4.3.1 Characteristics of dog owners versus non-dog owners

Table 6 presents the characteristics of dog owners versus non-dog owners. Dog owners responding to this engagement were more likely to have the following characteristics: be female, be younger (with a median age of 43 years), be Australian-born and not have a disability or mobility challenge. As expected almost all dog owners visit dog off-leash areas, compared to 69.7% of non-dog owners. Just over one-third of dog owners' responses (35.7%) were that they only had a balcony, or no space, for their dog to use at home.

Non-dog owners responding to this engagement were more likely to have the following characteristics: be male, be older (with a median age of 45 years), be born overseas and to have a disability or mobility challenge.

Table 6. Characteristics of dog owners versus non-dog owners

Selected characteristics	Dog owners %	Non-dog owners* %
Gender		
Woman/female	67.3	54.2
Man/male	28.3	37.8
Age Group (see Chart 1)		
15-24 yrs	1.5	1.2
25-34 yrs	16.5	11.6
35-49 yrs	38.0	36.7
50-59 yrs	24.2	20.7
60-69 yrs	12.5	19.1
70-79 yrs	4.5	5.6
80+ yrs	0.7	0.4
Country of birth		
Australian-born	75.5	65.2
Born overseas	21.4	29.2
Has disability/mobility challenge		
Yes	5.3	6.8
No	92.2	88.0
Visits dog off-leash areas		
Yes	96.2	69.7
No	3.6	27.9
Dog access to outdoor spaces (at home)**	% of Responses	
No space	17.0	na
Balcony	18.4	na
Garden	26.7	na
Courtyard	37.0	na

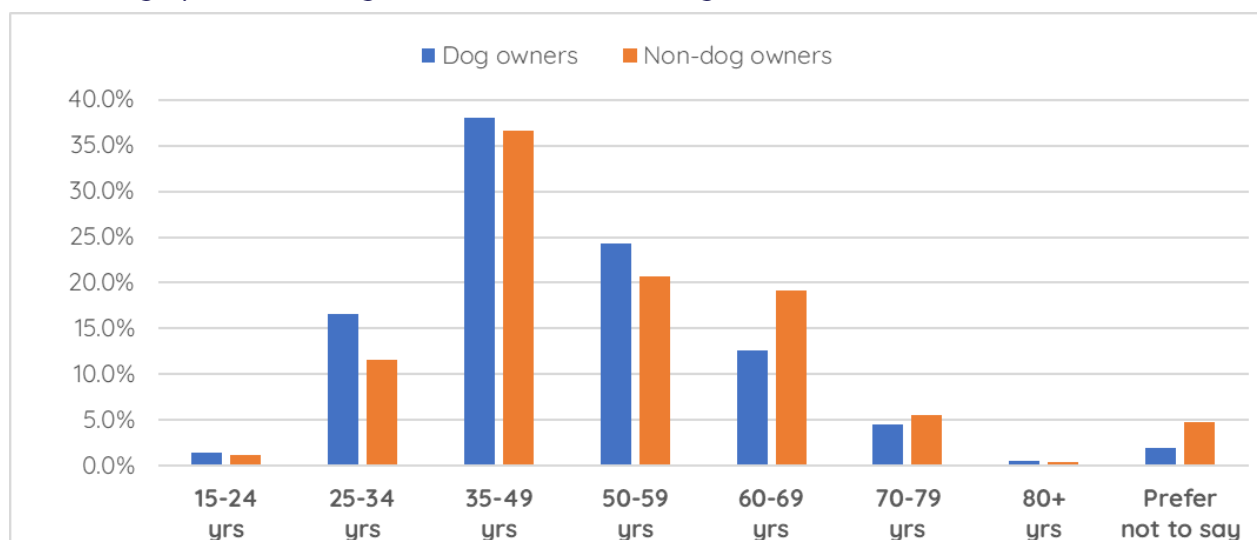
Notes: Survey and Pop-ups participants only.

* Excludes former dog owners.

** Multiple response question. Asked of dog owners however only 37.0% of dog owners responded.

Chart 1 shows the differing age profile of dog owners and non-dog owners.

Chart 1. Age profile of dog owners versus non-dog owners



Notes: Survey and Pop-ups participants only.

4.4 Connection to Port Phillip municipality

Participants in surveys and pop ups were asked about their connection to the City of Port Phillip. Just over half of respondents identified themselves as 'residents' followed by: 'ratepayers', 'workers', 'business owners' and 'volunteers'. 'Visitors' and 'students' were the lowest represented groups (see Table 7).

Table 7. Connection to Port Phillip municipality

Connection to area	Survey No.	Pop-ups No.	Total No.	%
Resident	2,141	86	2,227	54.7
Business owner	197	0	197	4.8
Ratepayer (may/may not be resident)	979	28	1,007	24.7
Worker	316	4	320	7.9
Student	24	1	25	0.6
Volunteer	161	2	163	4.0

Connection to area	Survey No.	Pop-ups No.	Total No.	%
Visitor	114	4	118	2.9
Prefer not to say	11	2	13	0.3
TOTAL Responses	3,943	127	4,070	100%

Note: Notes: Survey and Pop-ups participants only.

Multi-response question, total is all responses not respondents.

4.5 Participant location

Participants in surveys and pop ups were asked to provide their suburb. Table 8 outlines all participant locations. Port Melbourne had the highest representation with 626 participants, followed by Elwood (414), St Kilda (403) and South Melbourne (184). The lowest represented suburbs within the Municipality included Balaclava (89), St Kilda West (56) and Ripponlea (12). A heat map of participation by suburb area can be found in [Appendix 1 - Map of participants' residential locations](#).

Table 8. Participant location

Suburb location	Survey No.	Pop-ups No.	Total No.	%
City of Port Phillip	2,114	88	2,202	91.5
Albert Park	153	11	164	6.8
Balaclava	87	2	89	3.7
Elwood	402	12	414	17.2
Middle Park	100	2	102	4.2
Port Melbourne	586	40	626	26.0
Ripponlea	12	0	12	0.5
South Melbourne	182	2	184	7.6
St Kilda	387	16	403	16.7
St Kilda East	147	1	148	6.1
St Kilda West	54	2	56	2.3
St Kilda Road	4	0	4	0.2
Other Greater Melbourne	181	8	189	7.9
Interstate	2	0	2	0.1

Suburb location	Survey No.	Pop-ups No.	Total No.	%
Not stated	2	12	14	0.6
TOTAL	2,299	108	2,407	100%

Notes: Survey and Pop-ups participants only.

As previously noted, just over one-third of dog owners' responses (35.7%) were that they only had a balcony, or no space, for their dog to use at home. A further 37.0% of responses were that they had a courtyard and 26.7% of responses were that they had a garden. Looking across the suburbs in Port Phillip, the suburbs with limited space for dogs at home (no space or only a balcony as reported by their owners) were St Kilda East, St Kilda, South Melbourne and Port Melbourne. Table 9. shows participant location by dog access to outdoor space.

Table 9. Participant location by dog access to outdoor spaces (at home)**

Port Phillip suburb location	No space or balcony	Garden	Courtyard	Total Responses
Albert Park	19.0%	19.0%	59.5%	42
Balaclava	17.2%	37.9%	48.3%	29
Elwood	28.1%	36.7%	35.9%	128
Middle Park	26.5%	20.6%	52.9%	34
Port Melbourne	36.2%	23.5%	41.6%	204
South Melbourne	44.7%	14.9%	42.6%	47
St Kilda	50.0%	22.7%	30.5%	128
St Kilda East	51.9%	23.1%	26.9%	52

Notes: Ripponlea, St Kilda West and St Kilda Road not included due to low participant numbers.

** Multiple response question. Only asked of dog owners however only 37.0% of dog owners responded.

Considerations for dog off-leash guidelines

It should be noted that this data in Table 9 is from a sample of engagement participants and so is not a substitute for a more detailed analysis of housing mix and site coverage by suburb. This data would be worth considering for inclusion in a guidelines document.

5. Key Findings

The following section presents the findings from the online survey and pop up engagement activities. Findings are presented by question and for detailed responses, findings have been separated by user groups to demonstrate different perspectives.

5.1 Factors to consider for dog off-leash areas

Responses to this key engagement question were received via the online survey and at the community pop-ups (using a ball in perspex tube activity). In the online survey, participants were asked to select “your top three factors we should consider when planning for dog off-leash areas” from a list of six - size of the area, location, who else uses the area and what they use it for, proximity to residents, setback from roads and natural significance (e.g. habitat, wildlife). Participants could also indicate their reasoning for selecting any of their three factors and also suggest other factors for consideration. Table 10 presents the findings to this question in descending order of most popular to least popular.

Table 10. Factors to consider for dog off-leash areas

Factors to consider (top three plus other suggestions)	Survey No.	Pop-ups No.	Total No.	%
Size of the area	1,620	70	1,690	23.6
Location	1,541	0	1,541	21.6
Who else uses the area and what they use it for	1,258	41	1,299	18.2
How far it is set back (from the road or other features)	1,137	96	1,233	17.2
Natural significance (eg specific habitat, wildlife)	685	31	716	10.0
How close it is to residents	334	43	377	5.3
Other - fencing and safety concerns	142	1	143	2.0
Other - provision of minor infrastructure	54	1	55	0.8
Other factors - demand, dog size, children's areas	53	5	58	0.8
Capacity to enforce behaviours	13	1	14	0.2
Proximity to water/beach	11	1	12	0.2
Existing spread/distribution of off-leash areas	10	0	10	0.1
TOTAL Responses	6,858	290	7,148	100%

Note: Survey and pop-ups (ball activity) only. Multi-response question, total is all responses not respondents.

Table 11 presents the findings for top factors to consider when planning dog off-leash areas disaggregated by participants' interest in the project.

Table 11. Factors to consider for dog off-leash areas by interests in project

Factors to consider (top three plus other suggestions)	Dog owners (n=1,910)	Non-dog owners (n=237)	Sports club members (n=242)	Work with dogs (n=60)
Size of the area	26.5%	14.0%	23.8%	26.1%
Location	24.3%	19.9%	22.8%	21.2%
Who else uses the area, what they use it for	17.0%	30.8%	21.3%	18.8%
How far it is set back	19.4%	10.7%	4.7%	4.8%
Natural significance	8.7%	4.3%	14.2%	19.4%
How close it is to residents	4.1%	20.2%	13.2%	9.7%

Note: Multi-response question, total is all responses not respondents. Former dog owners, users of parks/beaches in Port Phillip and members of community organisations not shown in this table.

Other factors raised by dog owners (in descending order of frequency) were fencing and safety concerns, the provision of minor infrastructure and proximity to water/beach. Table 12 presents summarised feedback from free text comments describing participants' rationale for choosing these factors. Feedback is disaggregated to present the perspectives of dog owners and non dog owners.

Table 12. Factors to consider for dog off-leash areas - further detail

Factors	Participants' reasoning
Size of the area	<p>Dog owners - spaces should be large enough to allow medium-big dogs to run freely and not crowd other dogs. Needs to be fenced for dog safety.</p> <p>Non-dog owners - spaces should be large enough to allow people to enjoy areas away from dogs. Also recognise that dogs need space to exercise.</p>
Location	<p>Dog owners - spaces should be located away from busy roads, BBQ/picnic areas. Walkable from home. Spread throughout the municipality.</p> <p>Non-dog owners - not near playgrounds, small children. Want to have some beach areas free of dogs.</p>
Who else uses the area and what they use it for	<p>Dog owners - spaces should not be ones children use (play or sport). If an area is used for sport most days of the week then it is unsuitable.</p>

	Non-dog owners - sharing spaces with dogs off-leash is dangerous or scary for children, elderly (bitten by dogs, knocked over), don't like barking noise
How far it is set back (from road or other features)	Dog owners and non-dog owners (consensus) - setbacks needed for dog safety or provide fenced spaces.
Natural significance (eg specific habitat, wildlife)	Dog owners and non-dog owners (consensus) - off-leash areas should not negatively impact local fauna/wildlife or vegetation. Should be the first consideration.
How close it is to residents	Dog owners - spaces should be close to dwellings so owners can walk (and not have to drive) to their nearest off-leash area. Non-dog owners - off-leash spaces next to dwellings can be noisy and smelly/dog poo, no enforcement of rules.

Considerations for dog off-leash guidelines

Participant feedback demonstrates the following potential criteria for developing dog off-leash guidelines:

Planning: User groups agreed that Dog off-leash spaces, where possible, should be setback from roads and removed from areas of natural significance or wildlife habitat. User groups were divided on the location of dog parks, with dog owners supporting walkability and equitable access across the municipality. Non dog owners supported dog parks that were further from residential areas to reduce noise pollution and dog waste. In terms of priorities for planning for Dog off-leash spaces, both user groups felt the bigger the better; to provide adequate space for dogs to exercise, avoid congestion, minimise dog fights and allow other users space from dogs.

Design: Overall all user groups prefer fencing or a clear boundary in dog off-leash areas. Both dog owners and non dog owners also supported designated areas separating user groups, particularly; the elderly, children, picnicking or BBQs and busy sporting areas. For non dog owners, the motivation for this criteria was safety and noise considerations. Dog owners' motivation for these criteria was centred on practicality.

Operation and use: Non dog owners supported greater enforcement of rules particularly for dog areas near residences and on the beach.

5.2 What is currently working well in off-leash areas

Participants were asked the question; *"What's working well in the parks or beaches where dogs are allowed off-leash?"*. A total of 2,392 comments were received in response to this engagement question via the online survey and at the community pop-ups. Some of the themes shown in Table 12 overlap e.g. support for more off-leash areas and support for more off-leash beaches.

Of the 2,392 comments made by participants, 759 comments mentioned a specific park or reserve where there was either a positive feature or an issue that should be addressed - this data will be provided separate to this report.

5.2.1 Features that work well in dog off-leash areas

It should be noted that some of the answers given to this engagement question did not necessarily directly address the survey question itself about what is currently working well. There is also some confusion around the differences of a dog park or dog off-leash area among respondents. Examples of this are when participants mentioned:

- a) A negative aspect of current off-leash areas - “Not much, the new Elwood fenced park at the beach is in a terrible location. Money should have been spent on fencing Clarke St”
- b) An opinion on the broader issue - “I believe the majority of Dog Owners are responsible and considerate to non dog owners.”
- c) Changes they wanted made in the future to dog parks and off-leash areas (where this infrastructure could exist). “Double gates, taps for washing/drinking water, bins with spare poo bags.”

Accordingly, the themes listed in Table 13 are a combination of both what is working well and what participants want to work well in the future.

Table 13. Features that work well in dog off-leash areas

Feature	Examples provided by participants
Facilities and infrastructure (552 comments)	Fencing/gates, water fountains, dog poo bags, shade, rubbish bins, seating, surveillance.
Design of dog off-leash areas (449 comments)	Large open areas, green vegetation, interesting walking trails for owners, access to fresh water, away from roads, sensory experiences for dogs, separate areas for small and large dogs, access to shade, good drainage of grass areas, pathways.
Observations about owner responsibility and enforcement of park rules and animal behaviour (434 comments)	Common view was that the majority of dog owners “do the right thing” however there were other views expressed about irresponsible owners - dogs not being on leash when required, untrained dogs and not collecting dog poo.
General support for role of off-leash areas (387 comments)	Important community spaces that should be retained or expanded.
Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (296 comments)	Separation of playgrounds, BBQ and picnic areas from off-leash space. Dog-free areas that are safe and quiet for non-dog owners. Beach areas for dogs off-leash clearly designated and known. Physical barriers help to make different areas clear to all. Careful planning for mixed-use spaces, commuting or exercising, tourism and business.

General support for dogs on beaches (252 comments)	Provides space during winter for dogs to run, and swimming opportunities for dogs.
Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (249 comments)	Generally working well but needs to be reviewed.
Benefits of socialisation for both dogs and community connection for owners (213 comments)	Again they are important community spaces and especially invaluable during COVID-19 restrictions.
Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (197 comments)	Conflict between dog owners and other users can be reduced with more signage and clear messaging.
Easy access and walkability (157 comments)	Provided within walking distance of homes and are walkable.

Participants also noted desirable features such as:

- The positioning of the dog off-leash area away from roads/car parks, bicycle paths and key walking tracks to avoid injuries to dogs and people (137 comments).
- The size of the area allows spaces for all users (111 comments).
- Variety of terrains and environments (110 comments).
- General upkeep/maintenance (106 comments).
- The need for non-dog owners to feel safe (85 comments).

Some other issues were raised by a small number of participants and these are available on request.

In addition to these specific features, participants also made more generic comments such as “Most things work well” (110 comments), “Nothing...not much” (101 comments), “I don't know/I don't use them” (43 comments) and that Council needs to collect and publish open space usage data to support the development of guidelines (11 comments).

5.2.2 Differences of opinion between stakeholders

Feedback received for this question ‘what is working well in dog off-leash areas’ demonstrated that for some people an experience can be positive and for a different person the same experience is perceived negatively. Negative feedback made suggestions for improvements so that these areas might ‘work well’ in future. Negative feedback may help to guide future governance, design and implementation of dog off-leash areas.

Feedback was analysed using a thematic coding framework. Many comments mentioned multiple themes and have been counted across multiple codes. These data have been disaggregated by participants’ interest in the project. Table 14. presents the main themes in order of frequency of mentions by interest group and includes a summary of different user groups sentiment for each theme.

Table 14. Differences of opinion between stakeholders - features working well

Interest in project	Top ten features that are working well (most commonly mentioned listed first)	Detailed feedback
Dog owners (1,911 respondents)	Facilities and infrastructure (448)	Rubbish bins, fencing, gates, water bowls, shade, grass.
	Design of dog off-leash areas (386)	Large open space for dogs to run, diversity in environments, points of interest, walkability, dog agility, hardy and non-toxic plantings, drainage, separate spaces for large dogs and small dogs. On beaches: larger dune, shallow water, avoid bottlenecks at access points.
	General support for role of off-leash areas (312)	General feedback supporting off-leash areas for wellbeing of dogs and people.
	Observations about owner responsibility and enforcement of animal behaviour (276)	Positive feedback highlighting the responsibility and respect shown by dog owners, having good control or recall of their animals. Owners cleaning up after their dogs. Negative feedback surrounding untrained dogs, lack of attentiveness or control by owners and the need for stricter rules and enforcement.
	General support for dogs on beaches (206)	General positive feedback surrounding dogs on beaches, access to water in the summer, good use of less attended beaches (i.e storm water outlets etc), position of beaches away from roads, contained with fencing, visibility along the beach.
	Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (190)	Positive feedback surrounding allocated times. Negative feedback surrounding clarity of restrictions, requesting beach access at specific times, particularly early mornings, all year or designated dog beaches with no time restrictions.

	Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (189)	Feedback surrounding clear delineation for dog areas in mixed use settings, separating picnic areas, playgrounds and dog areas. Design that is clear so non dog owners can avoid these spaces. Complaints surrounding balance between sporting clubs, commuters, exercise and events e.g Grand Prix, complaints surrounding shared beaches with kite surfing, yacht clubs and jet skis.
	Benefits of socialisation for both dogs and community connection for owners (312)	General feedback about dog parks creating community connection, improving owners mental health and wellbeing particularly in lockdown.
	Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (152)	Feedback suggesting greater signage to avoid confrontation between dog owners and other users. Clear communication of times, restrictions and rules.
	Easy access and walkability (135)	Positive feedback surrounding distance to dog parks in neighbourhoods, walkability to and between different dog parks, parking and dignity of access.
Non-dog owners (237 respondents)	Observations about owner responsibility and enforcement of animal behaviour (62)	Negative feedback: considerations for safety, untrained dogs, dog owners do not respect rules, rules are not enforced, dog owners do not observe beach times and restrictions, picking up after dogs, dogs off-leash in on-leash areas. Positive feedback: when dog owners observe the rules, most dog owners are respectful.
	Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (37)	Providing separate spaces, fencing areas for people who do not want to interact with dogs, larger spaces so different cohorts can avoid one another, set times for DOL on sports fields, retaining dog free areas.
	Facilities and infrastructure (33)	Fencing, gates, poo bags and bins, seating, shade for people
	“Nothing...not much” (28)	General negative comments

		surrounding off-leash areas. Desire for education, rule and enforcement.
	General support for role of off-leash areas (22)	General support for off-leash areas, focus on providing specific areas for dogs to avoid congestion in other public spaces.
	Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (20)	Clear signage for off-leash and on-leash so people can avoid areas with dogs. A sentiment that dog owners ignore on-leash signage.
	"I don't know/I don't use them" (19)	A sentiment that the question did not apply to non-dog owner participants. General comments about avoiding these areas, being unsure.
	Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (18)	Support for restrictions and beach times, sentiment that dog owners do not obey the beach restrictions.
	General support for dogs on beaches (14)	Good use of unpopular beaches, support for a designated beach for dogs.
	Design of dog off-leash areas (13)	Emphasis on large areas to avoid congestion between users.
Sports club members (242 respondents)	Facilities and infrastructure (44)	Preference for fencing, water, benches, poo bags, shade and bins.
	Observations about owner responsibility and enforcement of animal behaviour (43)	Sentiment that if owners are responsible, observe rules and manage their dogs, sharing spaces is fine.
	Design of dog off-leash areas (41)	Emphasis on large open spaces.
	General support for role of off-leash areas (33)	General support for off-leash areas, focus on providing specific areas for dogs to avoid congestion in other public spaces.
	General support for dogs on beaches	Good use of unpopular beaches, support for a designated beach for dogs.

	Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (27)	Emphasis on clearly defined, segregated dog areas. Dedicated and well communicated dog beaches.
	Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (26)	Positive feedback surrounding times, desire for extended beach hours for dogs. Negative feedback and desire for further restrictions to beach hours, enforcement desire for designated dog and dog-free beaches
	Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (22)	Clear signage for off-leash and on-leash so people can avoid areas with dogs.
	Benefits of socialisation for both dogs and community connection for owners (21)	Sentiment that off-leash areas are social, mental health and community building asset highlighting connection between different users.
	“nothing...not much” (15)	General negative comments surrounding off-leash areas. Desire for education, rules and enforcement.
Work with dogs (61 respondents) *top five only due to small sample size	Facilities and infrastructure (23)	Poo bags, water, fencing, gates, bins and grass
	Design of dog off-leash areas (14)	Emphasis on large open space, points of interest, visibility.
	General support for role of off-leash areas (12)	Desire for more dog parks in the City of Port Phillip. General positive comments.
	Observations about owner responsibility and enforcement of animal behaviour (12)	Desire for education, dog training, rules and enforcement for the benefit of dogs and community members.
	Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (10)	Signage to create awareness for shared space specifically for non dog owners.

Note: Former dog owners, users of parks/beaches in Port Phillip and members of community organisations not shown in this table.

5.3 What is currently not working well

Responses to this engagement question were received via the online survey and at the community pop-ups - there were 2,286 comments made by participants. In the online survey, participants were asked “What doesn’t work well in the parks or beaches where dogs are allowed off-leash?” Some of the themes shown in Table 14 overlap e.g. opposition to more off-leash areas and opposition to more off-leash beaches.

Of the 2,286 comments made by participants, 319 comments mentioned a specific park or reserve where there was an issue that should be addressed - this data will be provided separate to this report.

5.3.1 Features that do not work well in dog off-leash areas

Again, some of the answers given to this engagement question did not necessarily directly address the survey question itself about what is not working well. Participants mentioned their opinion on the broader animal management, their solution to the problem or issue, or positive aspects of the dog off-leash areas.

An opinion of the broader animal management issue - “Owners allowing dogs free rein anywhere near the off-leash areas and this is not monitored by the Animal Management dept.”

Solutions to problem - “There is one solution to this issue: DNA registration. Then you can 100% know to whom the excrement belongs and take action.”

Positive aspects of current off-leash areas - “I have no issues with the behaviours of dogs or owners in off-leash parks.”

Table 15. presents the features that are considered to not work well in dog off-leash areas.

Table 15. Features that do not work well in dog off-leash areas

Feature	Examples provided by participants
Facilities and infrastructure (776 comments)	Need more fencing/gates, water fountains, dog poo bags, shade, rubbish bins
Observations about owner responsibility for dog behaviour (457 comments)	Dogs not in effective control, lack of attention by owners, untrained dogs
Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (379 comments)	Areas are too crowded or users do not follow area rules. Dogs close to playgrounds and food areas. People congregating in off-leash areas.
Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (263 comments)	Summer restrictions apply during times when beaches are empty. Confusion over which areas are restricted and when.
Dog owners not picking up dog poo/using rubbish bins (255 comments)	

Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (204 comments)	Need beach signage on sand not on footpaths. Better communication of off-leash areas. Larger signs that cannot be misinterpreted.
Design of dog off-leash areas (184 comments)	off-leash areas too small in size. Need to be fenced. Access to shade and water.
Council rules and enforcement (164 comments)	Low awareness of rules across all users. Not enough visible enforcement of current rules.
Maintenance-damage to parks (140 comments)	Long grass, potholes, full rubbish bins. Dogs eating rubbish/dead fish causing illness.
Size of the area allowing spaces for all users (136 comments)	Beach restrictions means parks are overcrowded in summer. off-leash areas too small in size.
Location and positioning of dog off-leash areas (106 comments)	Need to be distanced from schools, playgrounds, bike/scooter paths and roads.
General support for dogs on beaches (71 comments)	Beach access needs to be increased.
General support for role of off-leash areas (59 comments)	Need more off-leash areas
Personal safety (57 comments)	Aggressive dog behaviours towards people and smaller dogs. Lack of lighting in winter for afternoon walks.

Participants also noted features such as:

- Conflict between users and feelings of not being welcome (41 comments).
- Poor lighting in winter and feeling unsafe (36 comments).
- Ground conditions affected by weather (33 comments).
- Separation of areas for small versus large dogs, different temperaments or ages (32 comments).
- Facilities for people needed - water fountains, seating, car parking (29 comments).
- Easy access and walkability (23 comments).
- Opposition to dogs on beaches (21 comments).
- Vegetation that irritates dogs eg. prickles, seeds, use more hardy plants (20 comments).
- Oppose dogs in parks (16 comments).

Some other issues were raised by a small number of participants and these are available on request.

In addition to these specific features, participants also made more generic comments such as “Most things work well” (105 comments), “Nothing...not much” (19 comments) and “I don't know/I don't use them” (13 comments).

5.3.2 Differences of opinion between stakeholders

Participants were asked the open-ended question ‘What doesn't work well in the parks or beaches where dogs are allowed off-leash?’. There were a total of 2,286 respondents to this question. Feedback comments received for this question included both positive and negative feedback, with a majority of responses focusing on what does not work and suggesting solutions to these issues. Positive feedback consisted of participants feeling that everything was working well or did not need improvement.

Feedback was analysed using a thematic coding framework. Many comments mentioned multiple themes and have been counted across multiple codes. This data has been disaggregated by participants' interest in the project. Table 16 presents the main themes in order of frequency of mentions by interest group and includes a summary of participant sentiment for each theme.

Table 16. Differences of opinion between stakeholders - features not working well

Interests in project	Top ten features that are not working well (most commonly mentioned features listed first)	Detailed feedback
Dog owners (1,911 respondents)	Facilities and infrastructure (691)	A preference for the availability and provision of facilities that improve safety, amenity, waste reduction and access to water.
	Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (279)	Delineated spaces with a priority for dogs and consideration of different sizes and breeds.
	Observations about owner responsibility for dog behaviour (289)	Sentiment of safety issues or disregard for laws being relative to the behaviour of specific owners or dogs.
	Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (230)	Sentiment that seasonal time and space allocation does not meet the needs of dogs and owners own time restrictions.
	Dog owners not picking up dog poo/using rubbish bins (178)	Feedback suggesting that whilst many owners do pick up after their dog, some do not and may place a negative outlook on owners as a whole.

	Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (161)	A desire for improved signage and communication to support lawful use of dog off-leash areas.
	Design of dog off-leash areas (159)	Suggested improvements to space, designated areas and permanent installations to improve enjoyment and decrease density related issues.
	Maintenance-damage to parks (122)	Ongoing maintenance of surfacing and litter to improve safety for dogs and accessibility for owners.
	Size of the area allowing spaces for all users (118)	Referring to density and overcrowding of locations due to size, availability and user groups (people, dog).
	Location and positioning of dog off-leash areas (96)	Where the dog off-leash area is located impacted community sentiment. Spaces that had lower general public use or visitation were preferred, as were spaces away from roads and key bicycle paths as were spaces away from people gathering large groups or near children (playgrounds, picnic areas).
Non-dog owners (237 respondents) (top five only due to small sample sizes)	Observations about owner responsibility for dog behaviour (101)	Community sentiment that owners should be required to have control and recall of their dog and follow rules of delineated spaces to ensure safety of the wider community.
	Dog owners not picking up dog poo/using rubbish bins (47)	Dog owners not picking up after their dog affects the wider community's activities and smell of the area.
	Council rules and enforcement (40)	Patrolling and/or enforcement from Council regarding seasonal restrictions, picking up after dogs. Changes to perceived unfair rules.
	Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (35)	Avoiding conflict and safety concerns of other users by either separating areas or excluding dogs from community gathering spaces.
	Facilities and infrastructure (25)	Focus on fencing for containment of dogs, facilities and infrastructure such as shade, bins and water.

Sports club members (242 respondents)	Facilities and infrastructure (59)	A preference for the availability and provision of facilities that improve safety, amenity, waste reduction and access to water.
	Observations about owner responsibility for dog behaviour (48)	Sentiment of safety issues or disregard for laws being relative to the behaviour of specific owners or dogs.
	Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (45)	Highlighting the need for delineated spaces to reduce conflict with sports and other community use. Some feel these activities can co-exist with dogs.
	Beach access determined by seasons and/or times of the day (31)	Unfair limits to dogs on leash during certain times and days. Feelings that dogs should be allowed more frequently or have a larger designated space.
	Dog owners not picking up dog poo/using rubbish bins (30)	Issues with owners not picking up after their dogs as an overall issue, some highlight the disruption to sports and fields as a result.
	Size of the area allowing spaces for all users (18)	Dog off-leash areas being overcrowded and confined, sometimes as a result of beach access limitations.
	Council rules and enforcement (15)	Dog owners and walkers either being unaware or disregarding rules and this issue not being enforced. Suggestion for fines or patrols.
	Design of dog off-leash areas (14)	Size and positioning of areas being inadequate for different sizes and breeds and problems with density of use. Installation of fences.
	Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (13)	Having clearly marked signage to guide users and increase awareness of zones.
	Maintenance-damage to parks (12)	Emptying of bins, weather conditions making surfacing unusable, dogs damaging parks and sporting areas, drug paraphernalia being accessible to dogs.
Work with dogs (61 respondents)	Facilities and infrastructure (24)	A preference for the availability and provision of facilities that improve

(top four only due to small sample sizes)		safety, amenity, waste reduction and access to water.
	Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (12)	Dog owners disregard the rules, changing rules reflected on signage and providing signage that is clearer to avoid confusion.
	Observations about owner responsibility for dog behaviour (12)	Owners not having effective control over their dog, leading to dogs attacking other dogs, disrupting community activities and owners misunderstanding the rules of off-leash areas and bringing problematic dogs.
	Planned areas with clear delineation for different users (10)	Issues with dogs sharing spaces with other activities such as sporting fields, bike paths etc. Opportunity to separate for safety of both dogs and other users.

Considerations for dog off-leash guidelines

Across all the feedback we see differences of opinion, what works for one stakeholder group may not necessarily work for another. However, there are some clear preferences for guidelines surrounding dog off-leash areas.

- **Location:** Where these dog off-leash areas are located seems to have the biggest impact, participants that do not own a dog would prefer it if dog off-leash areas are in spaces that they (generally) do not want to use. This being a quieter beach that is either difficult to get to, is near a storm water drain and not good for swimming, or if it has a natural or man made feature that makes it tough to access. While some dog owners are happy to use areas where there is little room for conflict, for others, having a location that is close to home, or well patronized and safe is important.
- **Design:** To increase enjoyment and reduce conflict in use, there is a distinct preference for fencing or separation through the landscape design, provision of poo bags, shade (natural or artificial), water, seating, grass and shelter. Facilities and infrastructure were referenced more frequently by dog owners, dog workers and sporting club members. Participants also preferred larger spaces for visibility and shared use.
- **Keeping some areas dog-free:** All user groups discussed the need to plan for shared spaces, with a preference across different interest groups for delineated or separate spaces that were well signed and communicated. With a preference for non dog owners to keep some areas dog free. This included keeping dogs out of areas that are used to play sport, areas of transit used by commuters, spaces used for exercise, spaces used for picnicking as well as having some spaces along the beach that are completely dog free.

- **Animal management and enforcement:** Participants felt that dog off-leash guidelines must include: education, rules, restriction and enforcement to maintain the amenity, promote safety and minimise conflict between users in off-leash spaces. With a desire to see more patrols and stricter enforcement of dogs being off-leash and for those not picking up after dogs.

5.4 Limiting access for dogs off-leash

Responses to this key engagement question were received via the online survey and at the community pop-ups. In the online survey, participants were asked “When would it be okay to limit access for dogs off-leash in parks or on the beach?” and were given four possible scenarios:

- If there is another formal user, using the space (e.g. sporting group, use prior to play)
- If the space is close to residents (e.g. restrict use after 7pm to minimise noise)
- If there is likely increased seasonal use (e.g. foreshore areas during Summer, areas where there is a festival or event)
- Other scenario (participant to specify)

Overall 1,725 participants provided feedback indicating one or more of these scenarios with 637 of these also providing comments about the scenarios.

Table 17. Factors suitable to limit access for dogs off-leash in parks/on beach

Factors suitable to limit access	Total No.	%
If there is another group using the space (e.g. sporting group using the space before a game)	1,244	38.1
No additional comments made	1,092	
Comments - times when sports teams using spaces need to clearly advertised and fixed. To redress imbalance more off-leash areas should be provided.		
If the space is close to residents (e.g. restricting use after 7pm to minimise noise)	468	14.3
No additional comments made	390	
Comments - not related to residential settings, almost all sports grounds and beaches		
If there is increased seasonal use (e.g. foreshore in Summer, or when there is a festival/event)	1,065	32.6
No additional comments made	931	
Comments - early morning and evening access to beaches required when no/limited use by people. Dogs need exercise during cooler parts of the day. Different views about ‘time window’		

Factors suitable to limit access	Total No.	%
Did not support any scenarios but made a comment	432	13.4
Opposes any limitations	284	
Supports more limits	26	
TOTAL Responses	3,209	100%

The wording of this engagement question attracted some criticism from survey respondents (n=31) for being “leading” or “directive“, and assuming already that it was dogs who needed to be managed. Similar comments were made in the closing survey question [5.5 Other feedback from community survey](#) under the category of ‘an opinion about Council’.

A small number of participants (n=59) using the free text option suggested other more specific limitations that could be considered by Council in the development of guidelines:

- Locating dog off-leash areas away from native habitats (bushland, wetlands, native wildlife/birdlife) or other natural environments (low water quality, flooding, fire damage).
- Locating dog off-leash areas away from existing playgrounds and schools (particularly at drop-off and pick-up times).
- Not within 50 metres of beach swimming safety flags or 50m of a boat ramp or emergency access way.
- Existing crowded areas for families, small children and the elderly/immobile including areas where food is served or enjoyed.
- Removing time-based limits or seasonal limits in favour of dedicated on/off-leash areas available all year.
- Removal of off-leash areas if complaints about owner behaviour significantly increase (note: likely to be unenforceable).

5.5 Other feedback from community survey

Participants were able to add closing comments in the online survey but as with many community surveys, participants tended to just reiterate the points previously made or use it as an opportunity to comment on other Council decisions or services. There were 1,652 comments made by participants, with 273 of these mentioning a specific park/reserve (data will be provided separate to this report). See table 18 for other feedback provided by participants.

Table 18. Other feedback provided by participants

Theme	Examples provided by participants
More dog off-leash areas needed/expansion of time restrictions especially on beaches (385 comments)	"Opening up more dog friendly spaces will make a safer experience with more compliance as people have a way to exercise their dogs as well as live and play." "Would be great if more of the beaches allowed dogs off-leash the whole year round (eg during mornings until 10am and after 5pm) and not just over the winter."
Owner responsibilities (364 comments)	"Generally dog owners follow the rules." "It is disappointing to commonly see dog owners who have untrained dogs allow their dogs to impact people using the beach."
Support for dog off-leash beaches (253 comments)	"Early morning access on the beach should be available for dogs all year including summer. Access before 9am could work."
Council rules and enforcement (197 comments)	"Dogs are off-leash everywhere. Residential streets, shopping strips, paths along the foreshore, parks etc. council needs to do something about compliance."
Facilities and infrastructure for owners and dogs (179 comments)	'More seats for elderly owners in reserves.' "More light and shade in dog parks."
Make no changes/working well (157 comments)	"There should be no increase in the area given to dogs off-leash."
Fencing of off-leash areas (155 comments)	"Off-leash dog areas always need to be in a fenced, enclosed space."
Sharing open spaces (143 comments)	
Provision of dog poo bags and dispensers (138 comments)	"There is a lack of dog waste bag stations (which should be 100% compostable) and water stations for dogs in parks etc."
Clear signage for owners to follow and Council communications (138 comments)	"Sign post beaches where dogs are allowed and where they aren't."

Benefits of socialisation for both dogs and community connection for owners (105 comments)	"Pets are hugely beneficial for physical and mental wellbeing. Getting exercise, meeting people, being part of a community."
Need fewer dog off-leash areas/prioritise people over dogs (64 comments)	"Please give the residents who do not mix with dogs the same rights as dog owners".
Location of dog off-leash areas (54 comments)	"Please don't push dogs and owners into parks that are located close to roads, are too small or that are not adequately fenced for dog safety".
Different areas for dog size/breeds (53 comments)	"Consider having alternate large dog beaches and small dog beaches. Some animals are nervous around dogs of vastly differing sizes".
Oppose dog off-leash beaches (23 comments)	"People pay good rates to use the parks, beaches and facilities of Port Phillip and they should be for people firstly, not dogs"

In addition to the themes shown in Table 17, participants also mentioned:

- An unrelated animal management issue e.g. value for pet registration fees, an unrelated project or an opinion about Council (316 comments).
- They had no further comments (85 comments).
- A range of other opinions that were not relevant to this engagement (61 comments).

5.6 Feedback from community groups and sports clubs

This engagement program included three workshops with specific groups who use shared spaces in the City of Port Phillip. The purpose of these workshops was to specifically engage with sports clubs and environmental groups to ask questions surrounding their needs, experiences and expertise in relation to developing guidelines for dog off-leash spaces. Workshops used a collaborative approach to answering key questions, promoting discussion and suggestions for future actions.

Additionally, workshop participants were consulted for the preparation of resources and items for exploration in the deliberative panel process in the second phase of engagement. These targeted discussions also sought to balance high representation of dog owners in other engagement activities.

Environmental groups

There were three participants in this workshop. When asked the question *'What are the areas of natural significance or conservation value that should remain or become dog free or dog on-leash areas?'* participants named the following to be sensitive locations:

- Perce White, Sandridge (Life Saving Victoria office) - a haven for small bush birds, it is noted that blue wrens only occur in Sandridge and Elwood but nowhere in between these locations.

- St Kilda West Beach - potential to create bird habitat for migratory birds because it is not used for recreation because of stormwater.
- Westgate Park - important location for plant biodiversity, seed sources, there is a distinct lack of noisy miners, which benefits other small bird populations and community interest in regeneration of this area.

In response to the question '*What is needed to support the protection of our biodiversity, or rehabilitation?*', participants said:

Regarding site selection for dog off-leash areas:

- Look to where people are wanting to visit and explore and create experiences away from natural areas that can be used.
- Presence of dogs disturbs flora and usually disturbs wildlife. There have been studies that show the impact of 'change of smells' or from dogs simply being in a space that affects nesting or feeding birds.
- Consider making more areas dog on leash, rather than dog off-leash to decrease disturbance.

Regarding increasing vegetation where possible:

- Creating a natural belt along the areas in the light rail along the Albert Park - Canterbury Road.
- Enriched habitat of planting within dog off-leash areas, inclusive of dog parks.
- Planting out areas along the Foreshore particularly West Beach areas to increase habitat.
- Planting for removal of noisy miners (low bush, spiky plants).
- Increased planting of plants that support the ecology of the area to support insect and bird life.

Regarding understanding areas of natural significance:

- Mapping the areas of natural significance (reference to Arcadis report) - create an action to this project.
- Need to do targeted research around what is significant and then management of that space from a dog perspective.
- Decide what is the priority area used for particular sites. If the priority is birds, dogs are secondary, the areas where dogs are a priority, birds are a secondary goal.

Regarding education and conservation:

- Instead of just fencing off an area (e.g. Pickel Street Reserve dunes) increase planting and education.
- Involve community in the planting.
- Making everything an opportunity for education and sharing of culture.
- Compliance and support with compliance of the rules and regulation - to protect areas of environmental significance

When asked *'Is there anything you could deliver with extra resources?'*, participants suggested educational resources to support dog management in environmentally significant areas, suggestions for QR codes to scan for education in places, advice around communicating environmental and conservation concepts with younger and CALD audiences and supporting visitations to areas of natural significance.

Sporting clubs

There were nine participants across the two workshops held for sporting clubs. Participants represented the following clubs: Port Melbourne Soccer Club, Elwood Cricket Club, Middle Park Football Club, Port Phillip Spiders, Emerald Hill Cricket Club, Toorak Prahran Cricket Club, Touch Football Victoria, Port Melbourne Football Club and St Kilda City Junior Football Club.

When asked what things were working well, sportsclub participants suggested:

- Sharing infrastructure, a participant spoke of an example where demonstrating shared use of lighting assisted with funding. Also increased use of general walkers at night.
- Separation of users, having little overlap between different users, for example: selection of game times not at peak walking time, visibility of sports activities to give cues to dog owners to vacate spaces.
- Where there are smaller spaces e.g. spaces behind pitches that can be used during game days by the general public.
- Respectful coexistence between sports clubs and dog owners for example: dog owners recognise the routine of the club, training times; and a lack of conflict between the different user groups.

When asked what things were not working well sports club participants suggested:

- Management of grounds and playing surfaces:
 - Sports clubs must adhere to strict insurance requirements for pitch conditions and have little control over damage caused to these grounds.
 - Injury to players because of damage to pitches and grounds.
 - Ongoing maintenance and cleaning up of dog waste and filling in holes dug by dogs. Areas mentioned: Lagoon Reserve, Peanut Farm, Elwood Reserve, Elwood Park Oval. Head St (Elwood Park) , Northport, Elwood Soccer Club.
 - Unbalanced workload for clubs and volunteers to maintain grounds.
 - Impact on play, for example When fields are not in a playable condition, clubs have to find other venues, cost, time and rigmarole. The City of Port Phillip has very few sporting fields to cater to the community, ten sporting fields versus 80 in Bayside City Council.
- Dogs interfering with games and training:
 - Creating potential injury to players.
 - Sentiment that dog owners do not respect sports people and top tier clubs.
 - Liability for player injury, responsibility to keep children safe at sport.

- Dogs running into traffic creating hazards on game days. Areas mentioned: Williamstown Road.
- Lack of fencing or separated spaces to manage different user groups.
- Enforcement and support from Council
 - Desire for clear signage with rules to mediate conflict between both groups.
 - Support from Council to promote the rules, advertise game days and other times sports grounds are a 'no dogs' space.
 - Desire for Council officer or Animal Management Team presence at games, monitor behaviour and observe how people are using the space.
 - Make it illegal to use sports fields by professional dog walkers.
 - Communicate the cost of maintenance and repairing fields.
 - Increase the number of bins and poo bags in these shared spaces.

Factors needed to support continued shared use:

When asked the question, *'Thinking ahead, what is needed to support continued sharing of sporting grounds and parks?'* participants identified a number of opportunities for Council support.

- Creating new fenced spaces (dog parks) with access to water and bins for dogs at sporting fields including: the end of Elwood Park in an unused space, open space at the Corner of Williamstown Rd and Graham Street.
- Developing a maintenance strategy in collaboration with sports clubs that focuses on prevention as well as management of dog holes and dog waste on grounds.
- Council presence at games and training to hear feedback from the community and understand frustrations.
- Potential to explore a 'no dog policy' for players and members on game days to demonstrate to the community that even clubs are managing dogs within their club.
- Support from Council to enforce playing and training times.
- Support from Council to communicate and promote rules and expectations for behaviour at shared spaces through clear signage, updates online and on social media.
- Clear definitions of the rules from Council for particular shared spaces to support managing relationships between users.
- Sharing communications with public surrounding the cost of maintenance and repairs and impact on sportspeople to promote good behaviour
- Communicating playing and training times for clubs, updated schedules to promote right of way for sports during these times.

When asked 'what arrangements do sports clubs have in place with community groups to support shared use?' participants described: giving advanced warning 15 minutes prior to game time to move dog owners off the pitch, working with professional dog walkers to use some of the 'back of house' areas and not directly on the playing surface, taking advantage of existing fenced areas that create boundaries between user groups.

Deliberation process:

Both groups made suggestions for the following ideas to support the deliberation process in Phase 2 of the engagement.

Environmental considerations:

- Research about biodiversity and birdlife occurring at the foreshore.
- Understanding of what the impact of dogs is on vegetation.
- Clarification on what constitutes dogs on-lead, is it at the owners side or on a 5m rope.

Sporting ground considerations:

- Promotion of sports clubs as a community service, communications about sporting clubs being mostly volunteer run organisations.
- Data surrounding the number of cancellations of sporting events and club relocations due to pitch damage.
- Data surrounding sports club users to understand impact- 'how many players use this field each year?'
- Best practice examples from other Councils with similar needs that manage shared spaces well.
- Cost analysis of managing shared spaces and investment in dog-specific infrastructure
- Turf expert to advise what could be done to improve the surface.
- Medical expert to articulate the impacts of rough surfaces and risk to health.
- Dog experts to dispel myths about dog behavior and exercise needs specific to age and breeds.

5.7 Interviews

This engagement program included two, one hour in depth interviews with representatives from Port Phillip Pooches and the Dog Owners Group of St Kilda. Both groups are informal community groups who communicate via Facebook and use dog off-leash spaces, with a total of 3100 registered members across both groups.

The purpose of the interviews was to understand the specific needs of these groups and get feedback surrounding criteria for planning off-leash areas. Additionally, interviewees were consulted for the preparation of resources and items for exploration in the deliberative panel process in the second phase of engagement.

Access for dogs in Port Phillip

When asked what their group's position regarding access for dogs in Port Phillip, the Dog Owners Group of St Kilda representative suggested expansion of dog off-leash areas, particularly on beaches, including a 24/7 dog beach supported by adequate signage to promote shared spaces and reduce conflicts.

Port Phillip Pooches are concerned about the lack of usage data for public open spaces and desire guidelines to be evidence based and shaped by modelling for social infrastructure. Both groups are committed to sharing public open space, supported by optimising the utilisation of existing spaces, delineation of spaces, fencing and a mix of facilities to cater to different users, including different dogs and reduce conflicts between users.

Table 19: Criteria for planning dog-off leash spaces

Criteria	Prioritisation for Guidelines	Comments
How many households in each suburb own a dog/dogs	Really important/ Good to include	Planning for visitors. Lots of dogs that use these spaces are not owned by ratepayers. Sentiment that many sports club members are not ratepayers and get preferential treatment.
Even distribution of spaces across Port Phillip	Really important/ Yes, should be considered	Aware of the limited open space available, prioritise equity of use and utilisation in existing spaces. Supported by management, maintenance, good design and clear communications about usage times.
Providing more spaces if nearby councils do not provide them	Really important/ Good to include	Consider workers and visitors to CoPP, desire to concentrate spaces to high density areas where the most will benefit. People are willing to travel for the community engagement aspect and safety.
If the space is on/next to a busy road or street	Good to include	Prioritise walkable locations with links to public transport. Suburban streets are fine, big highways can be dangerous getting dogs out of the car.
On-site car parking	Really important/ No should NOT be considered	Accessibility is important. The primary form of transport is walking, losing open space to car parking not an option.
Located in a walkable distance from home	Really important/ Yes, should be considered	Or from public transport. Plan for the future, dogs will be welcome on public transport soon.
If the space is beside a cafe/restaurant or food vendor	Yes, should be considered/ No should NOT be included	Nice to have but not as important as other factors. Dog walkers support local businesses, vendors advertise on groups' Facebook page.

Fencing/gates or vegetation to enclose the space	Really important/ Good to include	Fencing depends on usage profiles. Fencing to create visual boundaries for dogs and other users. Vegetation is not a sufficient barrier for dogs.
Lighting for use during evenings	Really important	Increase safety and comfort for people using the space, maximise usage, cater to shift workers. Lighting creates bigger numbers of park users to increase a sense of safety.
If the space is regularly used by a sports club or other group	Really important	Maximise usage, design spaces to include everyone.
If the space has a lot of people using it or, is quiet	Really important/ Good to include	Concentrating density in adequately sized spaces, high usage makes it appealing for the community.
If the space is beside a playground or skatepark	Really important/ No should NOT be considered	Dogs and skate parks don't mix
If the space is home to wildlife or important habitat	Really important	Keep them separate by providing adequate spaces for dogs. Keeping dogs separate from wildlife should be supported by education.
If there is water available - beach or lake/pond	Really important/ Good to include	Beach access and drinking water is important, lakes/ponds are not.
Size of space eg large enough for dogs to run	Really important	Football oval is a good size. Separating parts for smaller and larger dogs, Canberra has good precedents, but this tends to happen organically.
Providing different spaces for different dog sizes/breeds	Really important/ No should NOT be considered	Prioritising having the space at this stage. Ideally variety would be good but communities tend to organise this organically. Separating breeds is counterproductive if they cannot mix at the dog park there will be issues in on leash areas.

Additional ideas for planning dog off leash areas

When asked if there were *'Any other things the group would like to tell Council about dog off-leash guidelines?'*, participants emphasised:

- Communication and presence from Council
- Involvement of community members in in design and planning process- keep the conversation going
- Keeping people informed about the dog off-leash areas' schedule and time- avoid last minute announcements so dog owners can plan alternatives
- Planning for the future; dog ownership is growing (changes to rental rules and pets, more single/couple families with no children, hybrid working). These trends, alongside provisioning ratios and usage counts are needed to support policy development and link to planning policies.
- 24/7 beach access for dogs
- Clear signage at all dog off-leash spaces

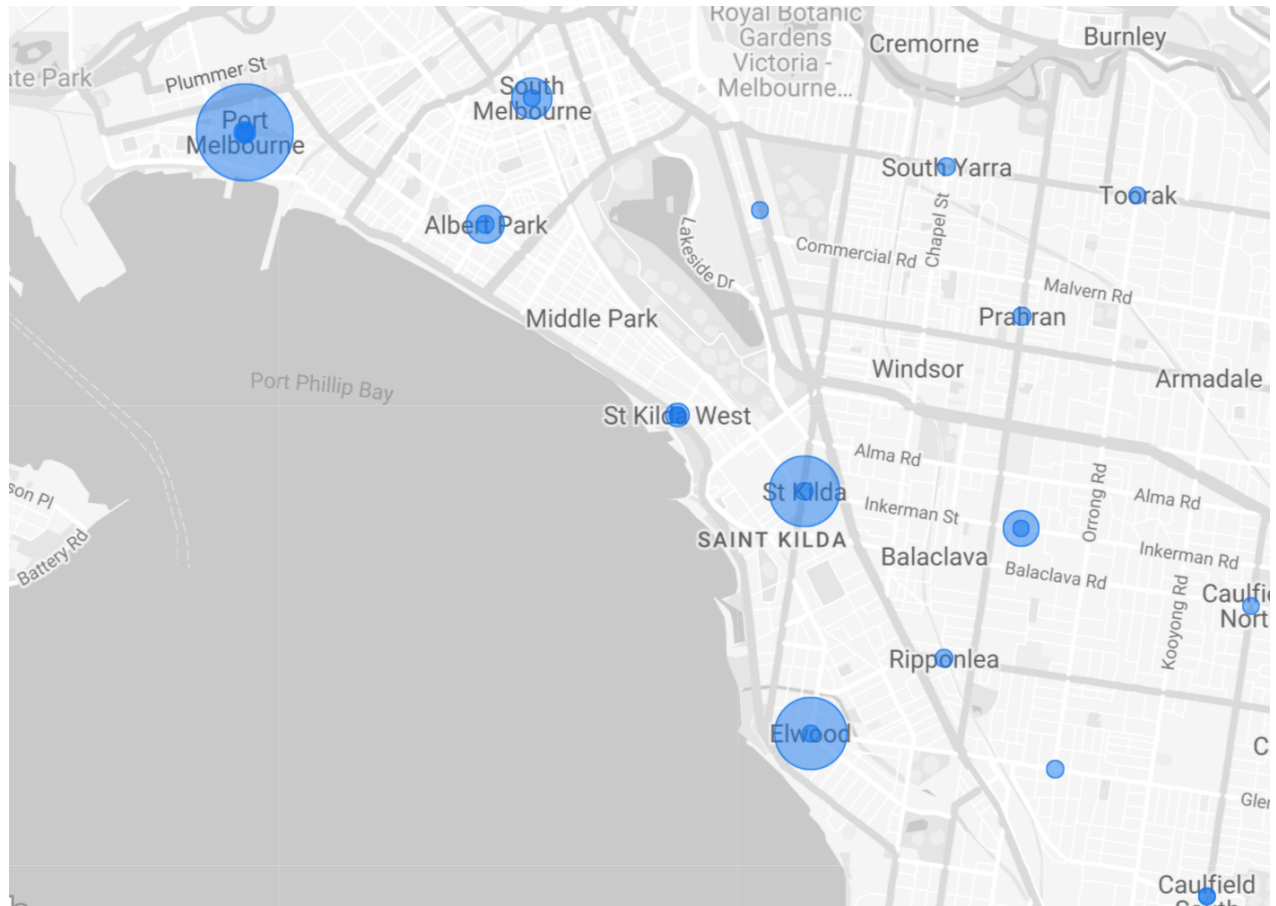
Deliberation process

When asked if there was any particular research or speaker participants would like the deliberative panel to hear from, participants suggested:

- Examples of best practice: *City of Kingston Public Open Space Strategy*, Canberra, New Zealand and New York where dense populations are using creative ways to provide dog off-leash spaces.
- Select community members that bridge a gap between Council and the community, select people who are well connected in their community to spread the message so community members honour the outcome.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Heat map of participants' residential locations



Appendix 2 - Map and list of community pop-ups and intercept locations

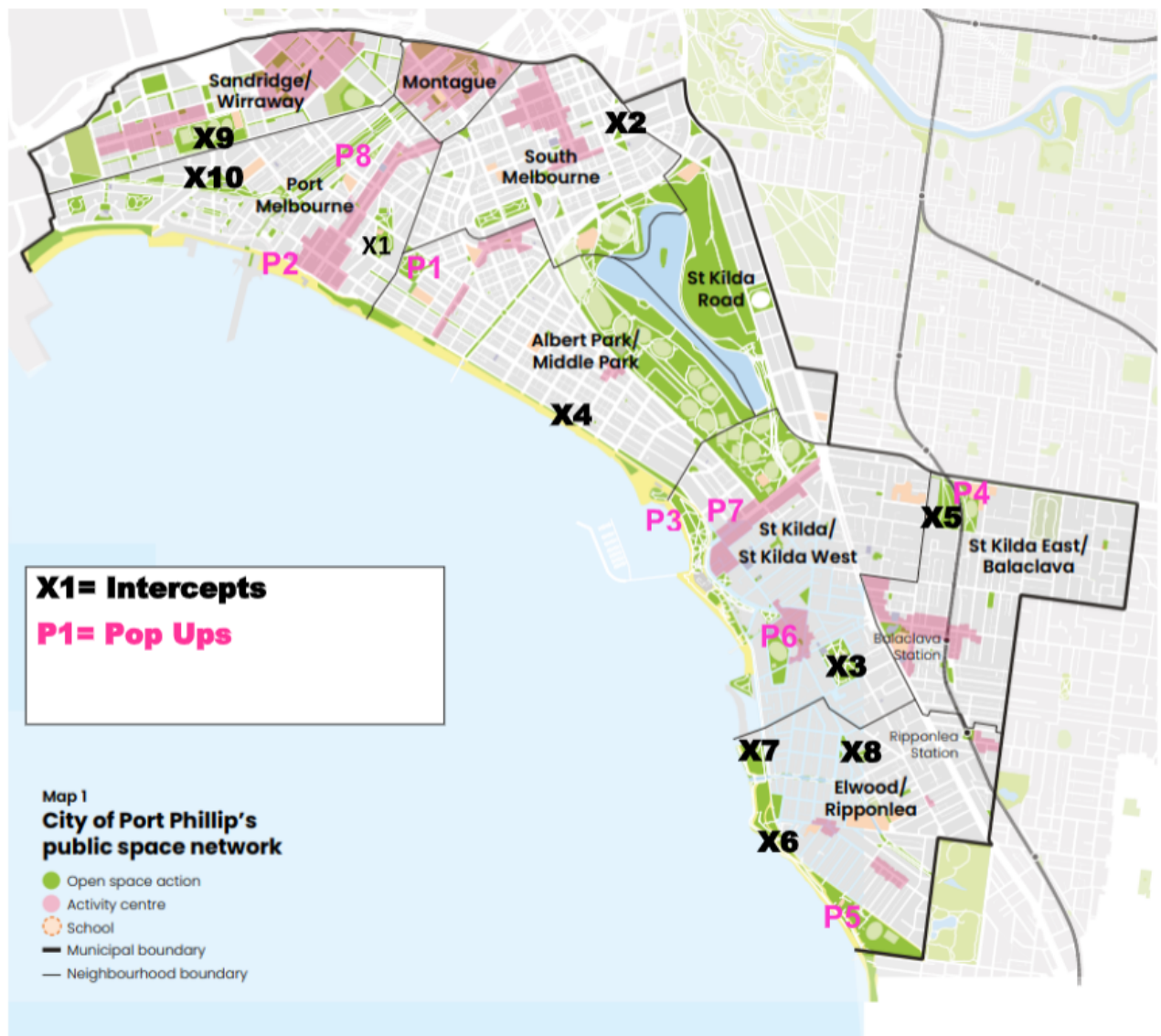


Table 20: Community Pop-ups and Intercept Locations

Engagement Activity	Location	Suburb
Pop-up 17 December 2022	Gasworks Farmers Market	Albert Park
Pop-up 17 December 2022	Lagoon Reserve	Port Melbourne
Pop-up 18 December 2022	Port Melbourne Beach	Port Melbourne
Pop-up 18 December 2022	St Kilda Harbour Dog Beach	St Kilda
Pop-up 19 December 2022	Alma Park East	St Kilda East
Pop-up 19 December 2022	Eastern Reserve (North)	South Melbourne
Pop-up 30 December 2022	Elwood Beach	Elwood
Pop-up 30 December 2022	St Kilda Botanical Gardens	St Kilda
Pop-up 7 January 2023	Middle Park Beach	Middle Park
Pop-up 7 January 2023	Peanut Farm-Veg Out Market	St Kilda
Intercepts 11 January 2023	Alma Park West	St Kilda East
Intercepts 15 January 2023	Esplanade Market	St Kilda
Intercepts 19 January 2023	Point Ormond Dog Beach	Elwood
Intercepts 19 January 2023	Clarke Reserve Dog Park	Elwood
Intercepts 19 January 2023	MO Moran Dog Park	Elwood
Intercepts 22 January 2023	Smith Reserve	Port Melbourne
Intercepts 28 January 2023	Garden City Reserve	Port Melbourne
Intercepts 28 January 2023	JL Murphy Reserve	Port Melbourne