

Board Discussion

Dog Exercise Areas FAQs

Guest Speaker: Tony Rankin, COO Animal Welfare League of Alexandria

Frequently Asked Questions: Dog Exercise Areas (DEAs)

From the May 2025 board presentation

1. What are Dog Exercise Areas (DEAs)?

DEAs are unfenced spaces where dogs may recreate with their owners off-leash. They are intentionally designed not to function or feel like traditional dog parks. DEA boundaries are defined by discreet bollards and signage, allowing for shared, multi-use green space. DEAs have been in place in the City of Alexandria for more than 25 years and are embedded within neighborhoods and parks. Unless you're specifically looking for the signs and bollards, you likely wouldn't know a DEA is present.

2. Do DEAs create noise, odor, or visual disruption?

No: Existing DEAs in Alexandria do not resemble traditional dog parks in appearance, smell, or sound. They are unobtrusive and coexist seamlessly with surrounding green space. Nearby examples include Monticello Park and the green space at Braddock and Commonwealth (pictured)—both excellent examples of multi-use DEAs.



3. Aren't dog parks dangerous?

While concerns about dog parks are common, extensive research on dog park design suggests that open, natural spaces—like Dog Exercise Areas (DEAs)—can help reduce stress and minimize conflict among dogs. Local data supports this: According to the City of Alexandria's Animal Services records, 327 dog bites were reported citywide between April 2024 and April 2025. Of those, only five occurred at or near a traditional dog park, and none occurred at or near an unfenced DEA.

4. Why can't residents use existing DEAs in the City?

While the City of Alexandria does maintain several Dog Exercise Areas, none are within a reasonable walking distance for most Parkfairfax residents. As a result, they are not easily accessible to our community. Creating a DEA within Parkfairfax would provide a convenient, on-site amenity for residents. It is also inexpensive to implement and requires minimal maintenance.

5. What if I'm uncomfortable letting my dog off leash in an unfenced area? Why isn't this fenced?

Unfenced Dog Exercise Areas (DEAs) offer a flexible option for dogs and their owners to enjoy a quick sniff break or game of fetch. They are cost-effective, low-maintenance, and designed to complement shared green space. However, we understand that some residents may prefer a traditional fenced environment. The Recreation Committee is actively exploring that option as part of a broader proposal. Every dog (and owner) is different, and residents are encouraged to choose the option that best suits their comfort and needs.

6. What about legal or liability concerns?

Parkfairfax's legal counsel and insurance provider were both consulted as part of the planning process. We are required to post signage indicating 1) the area is for Parkfairfax residents only and 2) handlers are fully liable for their dogs and any injury or damage they may cause.

7. Will our insurance premiums increase because of this?

No. Our insurance provider confirmed that designated off-leash dog areas fall under our current umbrella policy and do not require additional premiums or deductibles. The only requirement is proper signage.

8. Do we have the authority to establish DEAs even though Parkfairfax and the City both require leashes?

Yes. Parkfairfax legal counsel reviewed our governing documents and confirmed that the Board has authority to designate off-leash areas within the Common Element. The City also confirmed that, because Parkfairfax is private property, we may establish our own unfenced and off-leash DEAs in compliance with local guidelines.

9. What rules will be in place, and who will enforce them if this is on private property?

Parkfairfax will adopt the City of Alexandria's rules and regulations for Dog Exercise Areas. The City's Animal Services, contracted through AWLA, has confirmed that it will continue to patrol Parkfairfax and enforce the Codified Animal Ordinances, including within designated DEAs. This enforcement is part of a longstanding written agreement between the City and Parkfairfax. Contact information for Animal Services will be included on DEA signage, and they will respond to any reported violations.

10. Will a dog exercise area negatively impact property values - especially for nearby homes?

Research shows that proximity to dog parks in urban areas can actually increase property values by 8–10%. To better understand the local impact, home sales near four unfenced Dog Exercise Areas in the City of Alexandria were analyzed. For each location, values were compared for homes directly adjacent to the DEA and those several blocks away. In three out of four cases, homes closest to the DEA had slightly higher property values. While the differences were modest, the data suggests that proximity to a DEA does not negatively affect home values—likely because these spaces are unobtrusive and do not resemble traditional dog parks.

11. Are the proposed DEA locations final?

No. Proposed locations are still under review and subject to change. Based on initial feedback from May's presentation, locations directly next to or behind units will **not** be considered.

12. Is the Board voting on this now?

No vote is currently scheduled. The presentation at the May Board meeting was for informational purposes only. Further discussion will continue in upcoming meetings.

13. With condo fees increasing, how is the cost of a dog area justified?

Dog Exercise Areas are extremely cost-effective to implement and maintain. Materials required for any one location—such as signage and bollards—cost less than \$100 and would be paid for by the designated Capital Improvement Fund. Additionally, the City confirmed that no special maintenance is required beyond standard lawn care; the areas are simply mowed like any other green space.

14. How do Dog Exercise Areas benefit residents who don't own dogs?

DEAs support the whole community by providing safe, designated areas for off-leash play, which reduces the likelihood of dogs being off-leash in undesignated spaces such as wooded trails or sidewalks—improving safety and comfort for everyone. Additionally, dog amenities are a key quality-of-life feature that help support property values across the community—even for residents who do not directly use them. Finally, DEAs require minimal cost to implement and maintain.

15. Who was consulted during the research process?

The research and planning process involved consultation with several experts to ensure legal, safety, and operational considerations were addressed. These include:

- Parkfairfax legal counsel
- Parkfairfax insurance provider
- City of Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks, & Cultural Activities
- City of Alexandria Animal Services, contracted through the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria (AWLA)