

# ADVERTISER

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## Township approves permanent off-leash dog park in northern Fergus

by David Meyer

ELORA - A township park has gone permanently to the dogs - and nobody was complaining about that on March 14.

Centre Wellington council, meeting as committee of the whole, approved a recommendation that, after a pilot project, the leash-free park for dogs will be made a permanent space for owners to let their dogs run free.

Council ratified its decision on Monday night.

It also agreed that the volunteer group, Centre Wellington Off-Leash Park Association, continue to work with the township regarding the operation and maintenance of the area.

"What a success story this is," said Mayor Joanne Ross-Zuj when the issue arose.

Parks and Recreation Director Andy Goldie said the history behind the park goes back several years, with residents asking his staff for a place

where they can let their dogs run loose. One such group made a presentation to the parks and recreation committee several years ago.

Goldie told councillors a group has worked with Public Works Director Ken Elder and him for the past 20 months on a pilot project.

In late 2009, the Centre Wellington Off-Leash Park Association held an official opening of the pilot project at township-owned lands on Gleggarry Crescent in Fergus. That was attended by over 100 dog owners and interested residents.

In his formal report, Goldie stated "Staff has received many positive comments about the provision of the space and the managing of the area by the volunteer group."

He said that success means the group wants to make the status of the park permanent, as well as making a few more improvements to the land.

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## Township sets aside full time park for pooches running free

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Goldie said staff has done some research and the Glengarry site meets the group's needs without significant funding.

He also noted that many communities have tried using parks with off-leash uses, and the two did not mix very well, because it caused conflicts between dog owners and other users.

"To address this conflict, between park users and dog owners, some communities have invested capital dollars to provide large off-leashed fenced in areas for dog owners," his report stated. "A quick estimate to provide a fenced area approximately the size of two mid-sized soccer fields would be approximately \$110,000."

Goldie noted the Glengarry lands are currently zoned for industrial uses, but they would not provide a large site to build on, and staff do not believe it would significantly affect the industrial land needs of the township, now or in the future.

Goldie said the benefits of the site include being separated from adjacent homes, and the land is nicely bordered by existing hedge rows of trees, which help contain the off-leash area and provide a natural area for users.

The area also provides for informal parking on Glengarry Crescent, and the park is visited only by dog owners and their families as it is not within an existing park area, and that reduces the conflict between user groups.

"If you go, you know what you're getting into," Goldie said of the area.

If you also continue to be

make minor improvements.

Councillor Walt Visser credited the association. "That's how the whole thing started. From Day One, they've been involved."

Councillor Kelly Linton said residents in his Elora ward are asking when they will get a similar park.

Elder caused much laughter when he answered that will happen "when Fergus gets a splash park." Citizens in Fergus like the park that a citizen bequest helped to build in Elora.

Councillor Kirk McElwain said he is concerned the township is "using land we don't have for industrial development. He said the economic development committee is run out of industrial land.

Goldie said the park is small and the benefits of an off-leash park outweigh the

loss.

Visser said the small parcel would be costly service in any case.

Economic Development Officer Dave Rushton called the proposal for a park "a reasonable trade." He said the

township could sell the land for \$250,000 but it would take a huge cost to service it.

But, he said with a smile,

"I will look for council support when we need more industrial land."