

# **The Case for Space**

**Expanding Recreational Opportunities for Dog Owners and Their Pets**

**A Report Prepared for**

**FREEPLAY**

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## **Executive Summary:**

The parks, recreational areas, beaches and open spaces of Los Angeles are used for myriad purposes. Los Angelenos enjoy running, walking, softball, soccer, tennis, basketball, rugby, lawn bowling, golf, a host of other sports and play with children, families and pets on the over 15,000 acres of open space in Los Angeles. Each of these recreational uses provides significant benefits to the participants. With over 3.6 million residents in the City of Los Angeles, however, different recreational activities compete for the limited open space available. The City Council and the Parks and Recreation Department must make a judgment on how to allocate scarce open space. This allocation must strive to be equitable and must be responsive to the expressed demand of citizens.

We begin with the premise that creating more open space is not a politically or economically feasible option in space-constrained Los Angeles. We are not asking to build more parks, beaches or recreational facilities. Instead, we will argue that the current allocation of open space does not meet the current demand for one type of recreational activity: off-leash dog recreation. We conclude that fairness and citizen demand require allocation of some existing open space for use as Off-Leash Recreational Areas (OLRA).

The report proceeds as follows. In Section One we briefly present evidence to support our contention that the current allocation of open space for off-leash dog recreation does not meet the expressed demand of citizens. We will focus our analysis on the Westside of Los Angeles where the expressed demand is particularly high. Section Two provides an overview of the benefits and drawbacks of OLRAs to dogs, dog owners and other residents of Los Angeles. Section Three identifies key stakeholders in the OLRA issue, and discusses the preferences of those who favor dog parks, and those who oppose them. Section Four presents criteria that attempt to satisfy the hopes of OLRA enthusiasts while recognizing the concerns of opponents. Section Five provides information that specifically addresses the concerns of those opposed to OLRAs. Section Six applies these criteria to five potential open space areas on the Westside of Los Angeles that could be re-allocated as OLRAs. In the end, we recommend that the City of Los Angeles designate a portion of Dockweiler Beach as an OLRA. As we will see, this choice may not be the "best" in terms of the hopes of OLRA supporters, but it is the "best" for all parties concerned and clearly the most likely to actually happen.

### **The case for more space...**

In Los Angeles County there are 175,000 licensed dogs, which suggests that the number of dogs is actually in excess of 300,000. In all of Los Angeles County there are only 4 areas where owners are legally permitted to exercise with their dogs without a leash. These four off-leash dog areas comprise a total of less than 10 acres of space. To begin with a fanciful example, if all the licensed dogs in Los Angeles descended on existing OLRAs, each park would be required to hold more than 40,000 dogs or 17,500 dogs per acre. More realistically, if only 1 in 5 *licensed dog owners* (35,000) would like to use an OLRA, the demand is measured as 3500 dogs per acre, or 8750 dogs per dog park.

To place these figures in perspective it is helpful to compare OLRA allocation statistics with other forms of recreational activities. Table One compares the figures for OLRAs to competing recreational uses for open space.

**Table One  
Competing Recreational Uses**

<b>Recreational Activity</b>	<b># of Acres</b>	<b># of Users</b>	<b>Users per Acre*</b>
<b>Off-Leash Recreation Area</b>	10	35,000	3500
<b>Tennis</b>	287	80,000	279
<b>Softball</b>	1050	39,375	40
<b>Golf</b>	1040	105,000	101

\* all numbers

rounded up

*Softball:*

According to the City Park & Recreation officials, there are 39,375 people in city organized softball leagues. To accommodate these softball players, the city maintains 350 softball fields of approximately 3 acres each. These figures show that 1050 acres of open space in Los Angeles are devoted to recreational softball users compared with only 10 acres devoted to dogs and dog owner recreation.

*Tennis:*

There are 287 city run tennis courts in Los Angeles. We estimate that given the size of a tennis court and surrounding facilities, we estimate that 287 acres of open space are devoted to tennis courts. According to the Southern California Tennis Association (SCTA) there are 40,000 dues paying members to the SCTA, in the city of Los Angeles. Because many tennis players do not formally belong to the tennis association, this figure is under-estimated. We make the assumption that the number is underestimated by half and inflate the number to 80,000 tennis players. Spread out over 287 acres, the number of users per acre is slightly under 300, an order of magnitude less than the estimated 3500 users per acre of off-leash park land.

### Golf:

The City Parks and Recreation department maintains 13 golf courses. Based on the assumption that one golf course takes up 90 acres of open space, an estimated 1170 acres is devoted to golfers in Los Angeles. In 1998, the City Department of Parks and Recreation issued 35,000 "city cards" that residents can use to reserve golf times at city courses. As with the tennis example, this is clearly an underestimate of the total number of golfers on city courses. To provide a fair estimation we inflate the 35,000 city card holders to a total of 105,000 regular users of city golf courses. These assumptions lead to an estimated 101 golfers per acre.

### What if:

Given these figures we present the following scenarios based on the question of how much re-allocation would be necessary simply to provide an *equal* allocation between OLRAs and the other recreational activities. The point of this exercise is not that dog owners have more legitimate claims on open space than other activities. Even the most vocal OLRA activists do not contend that it is necessary for dog owners to have an *equal* allocation of open space. The numbers, however, show how dramatically under-allocated OLRA space is in Los Angeles compared to other recreational uses.

- **Almost 100 times more OLRA open space** would be required to provide dog owners the same recreational opportunities as softball players.
- **Over 3 million of Los Angeles' 3.6 million residents would have to be regular golfers** to equalize the amount of open space provided to golfers as to dog owners.
- **There would have to be over 1 million tennis players**, over 25% of all Angelenos, to have the same number of users per acre as dog owners currently have.
- **There would have to be only 1000 dog owners in all of Los Angeles** who wish to use OLRAs for their current allocation of open space to equal the allocation for golfers.

These figures clearly demonstrate that the supply of OLRAs is inadequate. Moreover, the expressed demand for OLRAs is particularly high on the Westside of Los Angeles. There are two citizen groups on the Westside devoted to the increased allocation of OLRAs, FREEPLAY and Hermosa Beach Friends Of Dogs. No other area in Los Angeles has the level of citizen driven activism for OLRAs as the Westside. Although statistics are not available, interviews with Animal Control officers suggest that the Westside has a higher proportion of the dogs in Los Angeles county than any other area. Finally, FREEPLAY conducted a passive survey on the week of Oct. 4, 1998 to estimate the current usage of the Westminster OLRA. The study found that over the course of one week over 2,000 dogs used this small (.75 acres) OLRA, making it one of the most intensively used parks in the entire city.

By focusing on the Westside of Los Angeles we are also able to consider the use of beach area as an option for OLRAs. There are clear advantages of beaches over parks, such as lower maintenance costs and compatibility with existing land uses. We will discuss these advantages and some potential disadvantages of beaches in later sections.

### **The Benefits of Dogs and OLRAs:**

Dogs or companion animals have become an important part of our society. Companion animals "provide many benefits which are difficult to quantify in monetary terms, but which have important implications for the health and welfare of humans." Senator George Vast in his "Tribute to a Dog" called dogs:

"The one absolutely unselfish friend that man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him, the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous, is his dog. A man's dog stands by him in prosperity and in poverty, in health and sickness. He will sleep on the cold ground, where the wintry winds blow and the snow drives fiercely, if only he may be near his master's side. He will kiss the hand that has no food to offer; he will lick the wounds and sores that come in encounter with the roughness of the world. He guards the sleep of his pauper master as if he were a prince. When all other friends desert, he remains. When riches take wings and reputation falls to pieces, he is as constant in his love as the sun in its journey through the heavens."

Research shows that dogs are more than just companions. They provide both physical and mental health benefits to their owners. The importance of dogs in society has even helped spawn a new field of study, urban animal management, which aims to ensure that animals are taken care of in the urban environment.

Off-leash recreational areas not only foster the strong historical relationship between dogs and people, they also contribute to urban animal management and the urban environment. We begin by outlining the obvious benefits of OLRAs to dogs and proceed to show how these benefits spill over to dog owners and the community at large. We will also show benefits of OLRAs to dog owners and the community at large unrelated to the benefits of OLRAs to dogs.

Benefits of OLRAs to dogs:

- Studies have shown that dogs that exercise and are allowed to run freely are not as aggressive towards people as dogs that are under-exercised.
- Allowing dogs to have an off-leash area socializes dogs. It brings them in contact with other dogs and causes them to be less aggressive in each future encounter with dogs.
- OLRAs improve the mental state of dogs. Many dog owners report that after a visit to an OLRA their dog is less agitated, more relaxed and in general nicer to be around.

These benefits were evident during a site visit to Ocean Park Dog Beach in San Diego. In an interview, John Maloney, a regular dog park user, spoke extensively about how he regularly took his dogs to the Ocean Park OLRA without any incidence of his dogs displaying aggressive behavior toward other dogs or human visitors at the beach.

Benefits of OLRAs to Dog Owners:

The benefits enjoyed by dogs are also benefits to dog owners. A well-adjusted, less aggressive dog, is more enjoyable and easier to handle for the owner. In addition, there are benefits of OLRAs to owners alone. These benefits again are illustrated by dog owners interviewed at Ocean Park Dog beach. They include:

- OLRAs provide a vital public space allowing people to meet and form the bonds of community.
- OLRAs allow people to have the pleasure of watching their dogs at play.
- OLRAs contribute to overall physical fitness of people by encouraging them to exercise with their dogs.
- OLRAs provide an opportunity for dog owners to enjoy the outside.

### Benefits of OLRAs to the Community:

OLRAs also make dogs better members of their communities. By providing socialization and exercise opportunities OLRAs can make dogs less aggressive, reducing the risks of dog attacks. In addition, well exercised puppies and dogs are less likely to create a nuisance by barking excessively or destroying property.

Communities benefit in other ways that do not rest on the improved behavior of dogs. These include:

- **OLRAs promote public safety.** Designated spaces for dogs and their owners reduces the likelihood that dogs will be let loose in other recreational areas where they could infringe on the rights of other park users.
- **OLRAs make the surrounding area safer.** Dog owners have an interest in the safety of their community and can act as a neighborhood watch. In Venice Beach, where crime rates are high, the presence of dogs and their owners on the beach create an atmosphere of safety. In addition, designated off-leash spaces reduce the resources law enforcement and animal control officials must spend on enforcing leash laws, allowing of them to devote their time to other areas of crime prevention.
- **OLRAs are a social hub for communities.** Dogs often help people break the ice, allowing people who share interests to socialize while exercising their dogs. These interactions help neighbors to get to know each other and to build a sense of community. At a time in Los Angeles when it is often difficult for people to get any sense of community, these interactions are perhaps the most significant benefit offered by OLRAs.
- **OLRAs promote responsible dog ownership.** All users will license their dogs, not only because the threat of a fine is greater in an OLRA but also because there is considerable social pressure from regular OLRA users to do the right thing. The social aspect of OLRAs also tend to enforce the basic rules of dog ownership such as cleaning up after one's dog and always controlling one's dog's behavior. Finally, OLRA provide a centralized location for providing owner training, pet information, and veterinary services.

## **Drawbacks and concerns about OLRAs**

This analysis would not be complete without identifying all potential drawbacks to OLRAs. A competent feasibility study attempts to identify all constraints, evaluate their significance given different implementation strategies, and estimate the costs and benefits of relaxing those constraints that are not absolutely fixed. Despite the benefits and advantages of an OLRA, there are also some potential drawbacks. These concerns can be categorized in five areas:

- Confrontations that may result within OLRAs.
- Dog behaviors.
- Dog waste.
- Irresponsible owners, including liability problems.
- The effective administration of OLRAs.

### Confrontations:

The first set of concerns regard fears that OLRAs will lead to various types of confrontations. These concerns were evident in a 1998 study conducted by the city of Hermosa Beach. After receiving several letters from residents asking for permission to walk their dogs on the beach, the city council of Hermosa Beach directed staff to conduct a study. They reported several potential confrontations including those between:

- humans and dogs.
- two or more dogs.
- dog owners.
- dog owners and other park patrons.
- dog owners and police or animal control officers.

### Behavior and characteristics of dogs:

The second set of concerns raised at various community meetings focus on the behavior and characteristics of dogs. These include the following:

- Vicious or aggressive dogs may disrupt the smooth operation of the OLRA.
- Dogs may carry infectious diseases transmissible to both other dogs and humans.
- Dogs in heat may excite other dogs causing problems.
- Dogs wearing spiked collars may injure other dogs.



### The problem of poop:

The third major concern expressed about OLRAs is the problem with dog waste and owners who do not clean up after their dog. This is the main argument against establishing an OLRA on the beach. This is the primary reason why dogs are not allowed on the beach in Hermosa, and why FREEPLAY is having such a difficult time establishing beach space for dogs in Venice. There are specific concerns that dog feces and urine can pose both an environmental and public health hazard.

### Irresponsible dog owners:

The fourth area of concern is owners who fail to take responsibility for their dogs. This problem is evident in the fear that dog owners will not clean up after their dogs. On a fundamental level, this concern is driven by the belief that there is no easy way to hold dog owners legally responsible. Other potential problems with dog owners include the following:

- Owners whose dogs are not under voice control.
- Owners taking multiple dogs to OLRAs. Multiple dogs may be more difficult for one owner to control.

In addition, problems with irresponsible dog owners may be exacerbated by the actions of others. For example, people who bring food into OLRAs may cause dogs to fight over it. Similarly, parents who take small children to the OLRA may cause problems because children and dogs often frighten one another, leading to unpleasant reactions.

### The administration of OLRAs:

The fifth and final set of concerns expressed about OLRAs deal with the effective administration of the OLRA. These specific concerns include;

- Problems in enforcing the rules. Who is responsible for enforcement of OLRA rules?
- Funding. The creation of each OLRA entails initial start-up and continued maintenance costs.

With this outline of concerns about OLRAs we now turn to the identification of key stakeholders in the OLRA issue.

## **Key OLRA stakeholders:**

A number of interested parties have emerged to state their position concerning this issue. It is possible to break them down into three groups; supporters, opponents on policy grounds, and opponents for administrative reasons.

### Supporters:

Stakeholders who clearly support designating off-leash dog areas (OLRAs) include dog owners in general and advocacy groups such as FREEPLAY and Hermosa Beach Friends Of Dogs. Many non-dog owners are also likely to be included in this group because creating a designated OLRA reduces the likelihood of confrontations with other recreational uses.

The 175,000 licensed dog owners are a formidable stakeholder because of their sheer numbers. They represent a potentially powerful electoral constituency and therefore, must be taken into account. If properly mobilized, such large numbers could come out in force to support a referendum concerning recreational areas and could also affect the votes given to local representatives who favor OLRAs. Moreover, the desires of responsible owners tend to be strong because they seek to provide adequate exercise for their dogs. Thus, for them greater access to open space is not only desirable but necessary.

Consumers of urban recreational spaces are another stakeholder because they want to enjoy public spaces for sports and relaxing. Some of these people may not like dogs, but this fact would not necessarily preclude their support for a measure allowing dogs to run freely in a designated area, especially if creating a designated OLRA decreases the confrontations and competition for open space.

### Opponents on Policy Grounds:

The two elected officials representing the Venice beach area, Los Angeles City council member Ruth Galanter and County Supervisor Don Knabe, have expressed concerns over creating more OLRAs. Galanter currently appears opposed to more OLRAs. Her chief concerns are for public health and safety. Council Member Galanter supports the findings of Ronald F. Deaton, the Chief Legislative Analyst, that state that a potential health risk exists when humans come into contact with dog feces or are bitten by dogs. Galanter has also been influenced by the potential costs to the city for establishing, outfitting and maintaining proper dog areas. Galanter, however, has changed her position from time to time and in fact claims some responsibility for the creation of the Westminster dog park.

A concern voiced by both Council Member Galanter and Field Deputy Tom Martin of Supervisor Don Knabe's office is that of government liability for these off-leash areas. Since beach ownership is divided between local, county and state governments in California, indemnification against liability is problematic.

Merchants, vendors, home owners, and residents in the surrounding areas of off-leash dog areas also have an interest in this issue. At the present time, many people walk their dogs on the boardwalks which can be disruptive to others. Their primary concern is that creating an OLRA will increase the number of dogs coming to the beach and therefore increase the disruption caused by dogs on the boardwalk.

Two organizations have expressed environmental concerns over increased OLRAs. Heal the Bay, an environmental organization dedicated to protecting the Santa Monica Bay, has expressed concerns about the potential environmental problems of dog waste. The second is the California Coastal Commission which issues permits necessary to alter the physical characteristics of beaches in California. Chief among its concerns is potential restrictions to beach access. An off-leash recreational area for dogs may draw the Coastal Commission's attention if it hindered full accessibility of the beach. The Coastal Commission, however, has permitted dog beaches in other areas of California.

Finally, the Society for the Protection of Animals (SPCA) has raised concerns about unspayed dogs running free which may increase the potential for un-wanted litters.

Administrative opponents:

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), animal control officials, lifeguards, and employees of the Department of Beaches and Harbors have vested interests in resolving questions over enforcement and access to beaches. These workers have the responsibility of ensuring the safety and cleanliness of parks and beaches. At the present time, the LAPD assigns 30 officers a day to beach detail in the summer months. While the officers respond to many different complaints, they must also address those concerning dogs on local beaches. None of these groups are anxious to police beaches or parks for dogs, resolve disputes over dog-related matters, or handle problems with dog defecation. For example, in a report to the Hermosa Beach city council, Chief Gary Crum of the Los Angeles County Fire Department Lifeguards said that they were opposed to the idea of allowing dogs on the beach because of sanitation concerns over fecal matter on the beach and the need to enforce pooper scooper laws. Beach authorities also voiced concerns because beach cleaning machines are not designed to pick up all feces left on the beach. Consequently, the operators of the machines would be exposed to fecal material when cleaning the machines and disposing of the collected waste.

**Overcoming stakeholder concerns:**

This list of stakeholders opposing OLRAs presents significant obstacles to the allocation of more open space to dog owners. At first, it appears to be a Herculean task to overcome them. Taking a step back, however, the opposition to OLRAs stems either from a lack of knowledge of the facts or a lack of creativity in the design of policies that can overcome the concerns expressed by all stakeholders. It is important to return to the fundamental problem: dog owners and their pets are provided significantly fewer recreational opportunities compared to other users of Los Angeles parks. Reasoned policies for the allocation of recreational space may overcome these impediments.

### Correcting Misinformation:

Much of the opposition to off-leash recreational areas stems from misplaced fears concerning dogs. Consequently, clarification and information provision can significantly reduce opposition from certain stakeholders. Two areas are particularly prone to misplaced fears: the dangers of dog bites and problems emanating from dog feces.

**Dog Bites.** A fear of an increased number of dog bites or other incidences is a major impediment to acceptance of off-leash areas. The evidence from existing areas, however, show that this fear is misplaced. A report by Hermosa Beach city staff studied several areas that allowed dogs on the beach: Huntington, Newport, Del Mar, Cardiff, Carmel, Laguna Beach, Pismo Beach, and San Diego. Only Huntington and Del Mar reported any instances of dog bites, and these cities only reported a small number of incidences (under five). In contrast, six of the eight cities reported no incidents or confrontations at all.

Further evidence that this fear is unwarranted is that the new Westminster dog park has had no reports of dog bites since it opened. This successful record is largely due to the significant self-policing capabilities of community groups like FREEPLAY. Those who fear increased incidences of dog bites apparently ignore the important role of peer pressure in protecting against unpleasant confrontations. Finally, to the extent that OLRA's confine dogs to spaces under community supervision, dogs are less likely to become involved in confrontations than if they are roaming free in other open space areas.

**Health Risks from Dog Feces.** The City of Los Angeles has raised concerns over the possible transmission of diseases through dog feces left in off-leash areas. The Chief Legislative Analyst of Los Angeles compiled a list twenty diseases that could possibly be transmitted by dogs. While all dogs are subject to gastrointestinal and external parasitism, the city reports that only humans with particularly weak immune systems such as AIDs patients and young children stand any significant chance of contracting diseases from such dog-borne parasites.

Moreover, an analysis of the Legislative Analyst report by Dr. Ellie Goldstein, a leading public health expert, has shown this list to be highly misleading. Many of the diseases listed are not endemic to Los Angeles and many others are very rare. In his words, "it is as likely that people will get any of these listed diseases from their pet dog as their chance of getting hit by lightning." Based on this analysis Dr. Goldstein concludes that the creation of new off-leash recreational areas pose minimal risks from a public health perspective.

**Pollution Risks from Dog Feces.** In a 1996 letter to Councilmember Ruth Galanter Joel Reynolds of the Natural Resources Defense Council argued that off-leash dog beaches could result in the contamination of coastal waters. Clean water for bathers and other beach users is certainly a high priority, and his concern is a valid one. Nevertheless, this fear is clearly repudiated by the evidence: the ocean water off of existing southern Californian dog beaches is *not* any more polluted than at other beaches.

The Southern California Coastal Water Research Project recently completed the most extensive sampling of coastal water quality ever undertaken. This project collected weekly samples from 307 sites from Point Conception to Mexico. Several of these sites were at existing dog beaches located at Huntington Beach, Laguna Beach, and Coronado. As seen in Table Two the recorded bacteria levels at each of these beaches were far below all existing and proposed standards for water quality. Moreover, the water quality at these beaches was comparable to nearby beaches that did not allow dogs.

**Table Two**  
**Average Recorded Levels of Pollution Indicators (per 100mL)**

CITY	Total Coliforms	Fecal Coliforms	Enterococci
Huntington Beach	56.7	22.3	7.2
Laguna Beach	42.0	32.0	n/a
Coronado	28.0	4.5	4.0
State Standard	10,000	400	104

A major finding of the report is that the single largest contributor to elevated bacterial levels in coastal waters is storm water and urban runoff emitted through storm drains. Clearly, on-going and critical efforts to improve the water quality off of Southern Californian beaches will be better spent attacking the main causes of this problem rather than focusing on dogs that lead to no discernible increase in pollution levels.

Policy Options that Address Stakeholder Concerns:

The remaining concerns of stakeholders are both valid and important. Nevertheless, they do not preclude serving the equally legitimate demands of dog owners because these concerns may be addressed as additional open space is made available to dog owners. Existing OLRAs throughout California provide a wealth of alternative techniques by dog owners can gain access while protecting the recreational opportunities, safety, and well being of other stakeholders:

- Make a provision in the city municipal code to allow dogs on the beach in early morning and evening hours.
- Establish a permit system to allow only dogs with permits to be allowed on beach areas.
- Have a community group sponsor the OLRA and require it to hold orientation classes for owners and their dogs on how to use OLRAs.
- Establish a reporting system for people to report violations of rules at OLRAs.
- Establish a monitoring system to enforce the rules of the OLRA.
- Enact strong enforcement policies, such as fines for failure to control a dog or failure to clean up after a dog.

Each of these policies reduces risk by separating dogs into designated areas and by maintaining controls over their behaviors. We will look at each concern individually, examining how such policy designs can allay the concerns of stakeholders.

Overcoming the poop problems:

One of the strongest arguments against creating OLRAs is that they will become unsanitary and unsightly because of urine and dog waste. While the risk of disease is quite small, the chance of infection is likely to be larger when the waste is not immediately removed. In addition, there is no argument that dog feces on the ground is smelly, unsightly, and unpleasant to be around.

The fact remains that dogs will create waste regardless of whether or not they are on a leash. Thus the more important issue is finding a way to ensure that waste is properly disposed of in a timely fashion. A number of effective methods have been employed to encourage and ensure that dog owners clean up after their pets: (1) mandatory compliance on the part of dog owners to immediately remove dog waste from public spaces; enforced either by the community group or through fines; (2) regularly scheduled volunteer patrols to sweep the parks and beaches of all debris; and (3) conveniently located trash cans and waste removal bags. The use of plastic bags, "pooper scoopers",

and trash cans are also effective means of dealing with the problem. As evidenced by the Westminster dog park there is considerable social pressure for owners to clean up after their dogs in an OLRA. This social pressure is not as concentrated in non-OLRA designated open space.

*Irresponsible dog owners and liability concerns:*

Concerns regarding liability are another significant obstacle that must be addressed to facilitate the creation of OLRAs. A city that is exposed to expensive law suits because of injuries related to OLRAs is not likely to encourage their creation. Cities have, nevertheless, found a number of ways to reduce their exposure to liability claims. Claremont dealt with the issue by creating an ordinance, which states:

"The use of off-leash areas by a dog owner or other person having care, custody or control of that shall constitute agreement by the dog owner and the person having care, custody, or control of that dog toÖa waiver liability of the city, and his or her agreement to protect, indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the city from any claim, injury, or damage arising from or in connection with such use."

Alternatively, cities may rely on signage. By signage, one means "full and complete signage, both advising visitors that the park is an off-leash area and that they use the area at their own risk, and advising dog owners of their assumption of liability and hold harmless agreement.

FREEPLAY, in their proposal for an OLRA addressed the issue of signage. In their report, they stated that it is important for OLRAs to announce designated off-leash areas so that the general public can then make an informed decision regarding access. "There are three types of signs that may be required: regulatory, advisory and warning signs. The choice of sign, its location and size is dependent on the information to be presented and the uses for which it is designed. Advisory signs are necessary at every entry point to the area and between one access point and another. Regulatory signs should detail relevant regulations and corresponding fines for non-compliance." The purpose of the signs is to improve relations within the local community by emphasizing positive messages to encourage responsible behavior of dog owners.

The concerns about irresponsible dog owners can yet again be mitigated by the presence of a strong community group that helps maintain order. The social and community aspect of OLRAs is actually a deterrent to irresponsible dog ownership. We contend that in many ways the self-policing evident at the Westminster dog park is more effective than external (city-run) policing. As one Westminster regular explained, "It is one thing to get a ticket from an anonymous cop, it is another thing to get corrected at by my neighbor who I have to see everyday."

### Administrative Concerns:

The administrative concerns for the most part apparently stem from the belief that OLRAs will require a significant amount of "new" work for the various government agencies. It is certainly possible to think of ways to create an OLRA that would in fact require a host of new work for the agencies. For example, a new OLRA that would require regular replanting of grass would require significant on-going maintenance by city staff. A new OLRA in close proximity to other recreational activities would require on-going administration by animal control officers, especially if clear and definable boundaries do not exist. It is clearly possible, however, to design new OLRAs in a way that decreases these on going administrative costs. For example, an OLRA without grass and away from competing recreational uses would decrease these on-going maintenance costs.

A second administrative concern is the amount of start-up money an OLRA may require. An OLRA requiring a new fence, significant new signage, and new trash cans is likely to have significant start-up costs. As with maintenance costs, however, it is possible to minimize these costs. For example, an OLRA located such that a new fence would not be required to separate dogs and other recreational activities would be much less expensive.

The point is not that start-up costs and maintenance costs are irrelevant concerns. Instead we argue that these costs can and should be minimized by the site selection process.

### **Criteria for new OLRAs:**

Given the hopes of dog owners and the fears of OLRA opponents, it is clear that a sound decision must be based on criteria for new OLRAs that pay close attention to all stakeholders. Moreover, given the significant opposition to OLRAs, we propose that when accessing tradeoffs, greater weight should be accorded to the concerns of opponents than the wishes of dog owners. Given the paucity of current OLRAs and significant opposition, we believe that dog owners are or should be satisfied with any increase in available open space. **In short, we believe that overall the best site for a new OLRA is one that minimizes the opposition and maximizes the feasibility of a new OLRA actually being created.** The analysis up to this point suggest the following criteria are essential to choosing a successful site for an OLRA:

- **Limit conflicting recreational uses.** It appears that dual use for different recreational purposes will be difficult to manage and maintain. It is, however, feasible to consider some way of designating a site for off-leash exercise by hours rather than a physical boundary. This selection criteria is designed to minimize the fears about various types of "confrontations."
- **Compatibility with surrounding land uses.** It would be inappropriate to select a site in close proximity to a major traffic thoroughfare for fear of dog safety. It would also be inappropriate to site a facility directly adjacent to homes. Again this criteria helps mitigate fears about "confrontations," as well as dog behavior and irresponsible owners.



- **Accessibility.** In order for a dog park to be utilized it must be accessible to dog owners. Given the current under-allocation of OLRA space dog owners will accept some amount of travel to get to a new facility but attempts should be made to minimize this travel time. In addition, to limit the fears of confrontations with people outside the OLRA it is important to consider the availability of parking adjacent to the OLRA.
- **Strong community involvement and support .** As the laundry list of fears shows, an OLRA is more likely to be successful in an area that enjoys a large amount of community support. Many of the concerns about dog behavior and irresponsible owners can be addressed through the active involvement of a local community group. In addition, a strong and active local organization can help alleviate many of the concerns about dog waste. As evidenced by the Westminster dog park, an effective local group can create significant pressure and social norms towards responsible dog ownership.
- **Start-up and maintenance costs .** There are some costs associated with any new OLRA. Since we are re-allocating existing open space for off-leash use and given that many key stakeholders are opposed to OLRAs for administrative (cost) reasons we should attempt to minimize the costs involved in the process. The potential start-up costs include additional signage, trash cans, fencing, and water hook-up if necessary. The potential on-going maintenance costs include; cleaning, repairing fencing, replacing grass, patrolling by city staff. A strong community group can help reduce these costs. For example, donation and volunteer efforts have contributed greatly to the construction and maintenance of Westminster Park. In addition, proper site selection can reduce costs.

### **Beaches beat parks.**

In an effort to narrow the focus we begin with a simple choice, park or beach area. Using the identified criteria, there are clear advantages of beaches over parks. First, beaches would have lower maintenance costs than parks. As evidenced by the Westminster OLRA, dogs are very hard on grass, and this is compounded by the overuse of the park. The beach sand is more resilient to the pounding of running dogs and therefore require less regular maintenance.

Second, many beaches appear to be under-utilized especially during the winter months. In interviews, several Los Angeles County lifeguards indicated that even on weekends during the winter it is rare to see a large number of people either playing or simply relaxing on the sand part of the beach. Most of the activity is concentrated in the boardwalk areas. There are so few people on some beaches that lifeguards estimate that they only need to patrol small sections of the beach during winter months.

While beach use increases dramatically during the summer, there are still areas of beaches where the potential conflict with other recreation activities is limited. Although it is difficult to quantify comparative utilization of beaches over parks, several site visits confirm that many beach areas, even on weekends, are underused. It is difficult to say the same thing about park areas.

Third, we consider the existing land use of potential sites. From the perspective of dog owners, a perfect OLRA is a wide open space where dogs can run free. Most dog owners would also prefer an area that does not become muddy during rainy weather. Since a grassy area can quickly become a mud field with overuse, the beach area seems to be a more viable option. As one Venice area dog owner stated, "Sand I can brush off, mud means a bath production."

Another clear advantage of beaches over parks is that picking up dog fecal matter is physically easier on a beach than in a park. All of the existing OLRAs come equipped with shovels and rakes that owners can use to clean up after their dogs. It is often quite funny to observe owners contorting and digging into the park to pick up after their dog. On a beach the soft sand makes clean up an easier task, almost like a cat's litter box. The sand also makes it possible for dog owners to scoop up dog urine which is impossible in a park setting. While this may seem trivial, cleaning up dog waste is a significant concern of OLRA opponents, the sand makes clean up easier for dog owners and therefore increases the likelihood that it will happen.

Fourth and finally, we believe that beaches offer advantages in terms of accessibility. It is important to remember the balance between accessibility for dog owners and protection of homeowners. Most of the small park areas on the Westside are directly adjacent to houses which increases the conflict between the two groups. Many of the beaches are a distance from homes decreasing this conflict. Many beaches also have adjacent public parking, which tends to be empty in the winter months. In contrast, most parks in Los Angeles have very little parking available.

Given these factors we concentrate our analysis on comparing different beach areas as potential sites for a new OLRA on the Westside.

### **And the winner is...**

There are 23 distinct beach areas in the Los Angeles region (see Appendix A). In an effort to narrow this number down, we begin by eliminating beaches that clearly fail one of the identified criteria. Nine of these beaches clearly fail the accessibility criteria. Four of these (Leo Carrillo, Nicholas Canyon, Zuma and Point Dume) require long drives on the congested Pacific Coast Highway towards Malibu. Four of these beaches (Malaga Cove, Abalone Cove, Point Fermin Lighthouse and Cabrillo) require long drives through the winding roads of Palos Verdes peninsula, making them inaccessible. We eliminate two additional beaches (Los Tunas and Topanga) on the accessibility criteria primarily because they offer insufficient parking.

Six of these beaches (Santa Monica, Will Rogers, Manhattan, Hermosa, Redondo, and Torrance) present significant conflicts with other recreational users. Much of the recreational activities on these beaches actually takes place on the sand parts of the beach. For example, there are more than 100 volleyball courts on Manhattan Beach. In addition, five of these six beaches are surrounded by other incorporated cities, preventing the city or county of Los Angeles from dictating the particular uses of these beaches.

This process of elimination leaves five candidate beaches: Venice Beach, Dockweiler, Marina Jetty, Playa del Rey, and Motherís Beach. It is important to note that we are not comparing these beaches to those eliminated above but to each other. Table Three compares each of these areas using the criteria developed above. Table Four provides a rank ordering of each of the prospective beaches. Note that a "1" equals the top score and a "5" equals the bottom score in Table Four.

**Table Three**

<i><b>Beach Area</b></i>	<i><b>Conflict Potential</b></i>	<i><b>Compatible Land Use</b></i>	<i><b>Accessibility</b></i>	<i><b>Community Involvement</b></i>	<i><b>Costs</b></i>
<i><b>Venice Beach</b></i>	Very popular and high traffic area especially in the summer.	High traffic areas around pier and pavilion area are inappropriate.	Very accessible to Westside residents. Parking is costly and in short supply during summertime.	An OLRA this area has significant community support, but also elicits opposition.	<p><u>Start-up:</u> Significant due to need for widespread signage. Given other activities, fenced area is probably necessary</p> <p>Few existing trash cans.</p> <p><u>Maintenance:</u> High tourist traffic require ongoing patrols and on-going clean up.</p>
<i><b>Dockweiler</b></i>	Lightly used. Large stretches are often completely empty.	Size of beach (wide and over 4 miles long) indicates it could accommodate an OLRA while allowing competing uses elsewhere.	Ample street and pay parking. But not particularly accessible to Westside residents.	The large open space and parking indicate that the area would be acceptable to OLRA activists. The lack of housing near the area suggests minimal opposition.	<p><u>Start-Up:</u> There is currently a fenced area on the beach suggesting no new fence costs. There are currently a large number of trash cans.</p> <p><u>Maintenance:</u> Fence may not be necessary decreasing maintenance costs.</p>

### Alternative Criteria Matrix

<i>Beach Area</i>	<i>Conflict Potential</i>	<i>Compatible Land Use</i>	<i>Accessibility</i>	<i>Community Involvement</i>	<i>Costs</i>
<b><i>Marina Jetty</i></b>	Little used by other recreational activities. It is in close proximity to Venice Beach which is highly used.	The beach is comparatively small and somewhat narrow. It is also the is fairly close to many houses. Also there is a Tern breeding program on beach.	Very accessible to Westside residents. Parking is a potential problem, especially during summer.	Because of accessibility this would be very favorable for OLRA supporters. Potential concerns with homeowners.	<p><u>Start-up:</u> Small enough so that a fence is probably not needed. Few trash cans.</p> <p><u>Maintenance:</u> The proximity to a highly used area would indicate that higher maintenance costs are likely.</p>
<b><i>Motheris Beach</i></b>	This area is used primarily by two rowing clubs to launch boats. A potential conflict on weekends.	Beach is surrounded by hotels on three sides indicating a potential for conflict.	Moderately accessible to users. Pay parking only	Again accessibility would lead to support by OLRA backers.	<p><u>Start-up:</u> Small enough so fence is unlikely, many trash cans.</p> <p><u>Maintenance:</u> Little would be necessary to maintain in current state of disrepair.</p>
<b><i>Playa del Rey</i></b>	Observation indicates few other uses.	A small beach area would concentrating impacts in a confined area.	Moderately accessible to Westside users. Pay and street parking.	Distance from Westside indicates less support.	<p><u>Start-up:</u> Small enough so fence is probably not necessary. Not many trash cans.</p> <p><u>Maintenance:</u> out of the way location decreases needs for maintenance.</p>

**Table Four**  
**Ranking Criteria Matrix**

<i>Beach Area</i>	<i>Conflict Potential</i>	<i>Compatible land use</i>	<i>Accessibility</i>	<i>Community involvement</i>	<i>Costs</i>
<i>Venice Beach</i>	5	5	1	1	5
<i>Dockweiler</i>	1	1	4	3	1
<i>Marina Jetty</i>	4	3	2	2	3
<i>Motherís Beach</i>	3	4	3	4	4
<i>Playa del Rey</i>	2	2	5	5	2

The results of these tables indicate that Dockweiler beach best fits our identified criteria for a new OLRA. Dockweiler scored highest (a score of one) on three of the five criteria (Conflict potential, Compatible use and Costs). Dockweiler scored low (4) on accessibility and in the middle (3) on community involvement.

Given that the proponents of OLRAs must overcome significant opposition, Dockweiler is clearly the best choice. It is far from potential homeowner and has limited alternative recreational users, minimizing potential conflicts. The existing fenced area and high number of trash cans indicate low start-up and maintenance costs. What Dockweiler loses in terms of accessibility it gains in terms of size and available parking.

A potential second choice is Playa del Rey, which ranked second on three out of five categories, but lowest on community involvement and accessibility. It scored low in these areas mainly because it is closer to housing and smaller than Dockweiler and provides less parking.

Marina Jetty and Motherís Beach scored in the middle to bottom (mainly 3ís and 4ís) on all the criteria. They are both small and pose have significant potential of conflict with existing uses.

Finally, Venice Beach dramatically shows our weighting of the three main opposition concerns (conflict potential, compatible land use, and costs) over the supporters hopes (accessibility and community involvement). Venice is clearly the preference of OLRA users but is clearly less desirable from the perspective of other stakeholders.

**Conclusion:**

While more areas are needed, attempts to create them face significant political opposition. The current allocation of space for off-leash dog use ignore high expressed demand by dog owners on the Westside. We have developed criteria for choosing a new OLRA that attempt to mitigate the concerns of opponents while attempting to serve some of the hopes of dog owners. Until OLRA users clearly demonstrate their ability to manage and self-police an off-leash beach area, it will be extremely difficult for these users to get their first choice of sites. The example of Westminster Dog park is clearly a step in the right direction. The Westminster users and FREEPLAY provide an example of how the process can work. By choosing a site that speaks directly to the concerns of opponents FREEPLAY and other community based organizations will have the opportunity to again prove that OLRAs provide significant benefits to dog owners, their pets, and most importantly, the community at large. With this added experience and track record it is our belief that the ultimate goal of FREEPLAY of 1 acre of OLRA per 100 dogs can some day become a reality.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Los Angeles County Beaches**

**(listed from north to south)**

1. Leo Carrillo State Park
1. Nicholas Canyon Beach
1. Zuma Beach
1. Point Dume State Beach
1. Malibu Surfrider State Beach
1. Las Tunas State Beach
1. Topanga State Beach
1. Will Rogers State Beach
1. Santa Monica State Beach
1. Venice State Beach
1. Marina Jetty Beach

1. Motherís Beach (Marina)
1. Playa del Rey Beach
1. Dockweiler State Beach
1. Manhattan State Beach
1. Hermosa State Beach
1. Redondo State Beach
1. Torrance State Beach
1. Malaga Cove
1. Abalone Cove Beach
1. Point Fermin Lighthouse
1. Cabrillo Beach
1. Long Beach City Beach