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Lisa McNiven

TO:	COMMUNITY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING ON JULY 22, 2013
FROM:	J. M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR PLANNING & CITY PLANNER
SUBJECT:	PROPOSED DINGMAN DOG OFF-LEASH AREA

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Director, Land Use Planning and City Planner, the following actions **BE TAKEN**:

- a) that this report **BE RECEIVED** for information regarding the process for selecting Off-leash Areas and the background of the project;
- b) the lands adjacent to the Dingman Pumping Station, at 4695 Dingman Drive **BE APPROVED** as the recommended site for the next Dog Off-Leash Area ; and,
- c) In keeping with the City's Engagement Policy, adjacent properties within 200 meters of site **BE INFORMED** of the plans to construct an Off-leash Area.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
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- Dogs Off-leash Area Amending By-law (September 26, 2005, meeting of CPSC)
- Site Selection Criteria for Dogs Off-leash Areas (April 2, 2007, meeting of CPSC)
- Off-leash Area Site Evaluation (July 9, 2007, meeting of CPSC)

BACKGROUND

Dogs Off-leash Areas (OLAs) have been identified in our Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan as desirable features within our parks system. There are over 25,000 dog owners in the City who are seeking this type of recreation opportunity and requesting more off-leash sites.

Most large Canadian cities include off-leash areas to provide a suitable, attractive and safe facility for dog-owners to exercise and socialize both themselves and their pets. For many, this is their form of recreation. Off-leash areas help to reduce the number of off-leash dogs in other parks and it has been shown that better socialized dogs are better behaved dogs.

In April 2005, City Council endorsed London's Plan for Off-leash Areas. This plan calls for an equal distribution of sites throughout the City in order to serve Londoners more conveniently across the City. Currently there are off-leash areas at Pottersburg Park, 1139 Hamilton Road (East); Stoney Creek Meadows, 1343 Adelaide St. N. (North); and Greenway Park, 50 Greenside Avenue (West), refer Appendix B. The priority for the next off-leash area is in the South-Central quadrant of the City to balance the availability of OLAs.

In the summer of 2007, Council approved the Site Selection Criteria for Off-leash Areas, see Appendix A. The site selection process includes three (3) steps:

Step 1 - Initial Screening Criteria: seven general criteria that must be met for a site to be considered as a potential OLA.

Step 2 - Setback and Layout Guidelines: detailed guidelines to consider when drafting the proposed layout plan for the potential OLA.

Step 3 - Qualitative Review: criteria to evaluate the relative quality of suitable sites and to rank them.

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In 2008, residents of the Glen Cairn Area requested an OLA in their community (NE of Commissioners Rd. E. and Adelaide Street S.. Three potential sites near the Glen Cairn Area have been evaluated through this process.

OFF-LEASH AREA SITE EVALUATION

Using the parks data base and a rigorous analysis process, City staff applied the Initial Screening Criteria to City lands throughout South/Central London. They also applied the criteria to other public lands and private lands as few parkland sites are available.

A total of 8 sites were evaluated as a potential locations for an OLA, refer to Appendix B:

1. Dreamers Complex, 146 Exeter Road
2. Dingman Pumping Station, 4695 Dingman Drive
3. 3859 Scotland Drive
4. Murray Marr Storm Water Management Pond, 3526 Dingman Drive
5. Hydro Corridor at Bradley Avenue
6. London Health Sciences Centre, 500 Wellington Rd
7. Glen Cairn Open Space, 901 Commissioners Rd. E.
8. Glen Cairn Arena, 360 Chippendale Crescent

The Setback and Layout Guidelines identified Dingman Pumping Station and 3859 Scotland Drive as the two best candidates for an off-leash area, refer to Appendix C. Both are City-owned properties, meet setback and space requirements of the selection criteria, provide year round accessibility, and are accessible from a main road. Both sites are outside of the City of London Urban Growth Boundary; however, the Dingman site directly abuts the boundary. The Scotland Road site lies approximately three kilometres from the boundary making it the less desirable due to its remote location and lower Qualitative Review score of 11/25.

From these findings the Dingman Pumping Station site is recommended as the next Off-leash area with a score of 18/25, having scored higher than the Scotland Drive site in the following criteria: variety of natural setting; buffers to adjacent property, and economic feasibility as construction costs can be shared with the Storm Water Management Unit. The site has only two residential homes abutting the site to the west. As per the Setback and Layout Guidelines, the boundary of the park would be offset 30 meters from their property lines, making the off-leash area approximately ninety (90) meters or 300 feet from the two homes.

Landscaped berms will be added between the two homes and the OLA for visual screening.

On the east side of the site, the City will be constructing a large storm water management wetland in the autumn 2013. The concurrence of two City construction projects provides opportunities for cost savings during construction for excavated soil transportation, soil disposal and grading.

NEXT STEPS

A notice will be sent to adjacent land owners to inform them of this project and provide details of the Off-leash Area.

Capital costs for the construction of the OLA are shared between existing parks budget and the dog licensing program. Operating costs for the 2014 forward will be accommodated as per the assessment growth policy.

Detailed plans and coordination of construction schedules with Storm Water Management Unit will be done prior to the construction of the Dingman OLA. The Environmental and Parks Design Section is anticipating construction in the Fall of 2013/Spring 2014.

City staff will review the possibility of identifying smaller "neighbourhood" off-leash timed zones, with a different set of criteria, where there is a demonstrated demand from the community.

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CONCLUSION

The proposed site selection criteria identified only two suitable sites for a future off-leash area in South/Central London. After reviewing all the proposed options for the area of the City, staff recommend 4695 Dingman Drive, adjacent to the pumping station, as the only practical site for the next off-leash area. Detailed plans and coordination of construction schedules with the Storm Water Management Unit are the next steps before going ahead with construction in the Autumn 2013 and Spring 2014.

PREPARED BY:	SUBMITTED BY:
LISA MCNIVEN, PARKS PROJECT COORDINATOR	ANDREW MACPHERSON, MANAGER ENVIRONMENTAL AND PARK PLANNING
RECOMMENDED BY:	
J. M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING & CITY PLANNER	

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- APPENDIX A – Site Selection Criteria for Dog Parks
- APPENDIX B - Potential Sites in South/Central London
- APPENDIX C - Best Candidates for Off-leash area

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APPENDIX A: SITE SELECTION CRITERIA FOR DOGS OFF-LEASH AREAS

Goal

To provide suitable opportunities for Londoners to exercise and socialize with their dogs in off-leash areas, in keeping with Council direction as outlined in the Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan (as expressed below) and to achieve an equal distribution of sites across the City.

“Recommendation 148. Establish new off-leash areas where it can be shown that there will be a minimum of impact on identified natural heritage areas and other park users. Pathways, play areas, and sports fields shall not be considered for off-leash areas.”

Background

Site selection criteria were first developed through a review of similar criteria in other cities, as well as through a dialogue between staff and a dog owners group (Friends Interested in Dogs Off-leash (FIDO) in 1997). Criteria were then updated in 2003 with the London Dog Owners Association (LDOA), using accepted planning principles and recognizing the needs of both dog owners and park users (non-dog owners). The criteria were refined following up to date research on current standards used by other Canadian municipalities and London’s own experience with off-leash parks.

Dogs Off-leash Area – City of London Definition

A dogs off-leash area is an area of parkland that is used exclusively for people to walk dogs off-leash. It is surrounded by fencing and is accessed through a double-gated entry system. Its size has to be large enough to allow for features such as a large open area, trails through a naturalized area, a separate small dogs area, etc. , and be able to accommodate a large number of users. It is a popular destination of the park system and must be accessible from an arterial or collector road and must offer sufficient parking.

Current situation

London has currently three dogs off-leash areas:

- The Pottersburg-FIDO Dogs off-leash Area, on Hamilton Rd at Gore Rd
- The Stoney Creek Dogs Off-leash Area, on Adelaide St N at Windermere Rd
- The Greenway Dogs Off-leash Area, on 50 Greenside Avenue

There is a high demand from residents and from LDOA to build more off-leash areas. There is also a growing trend towards more off-leash areas throughout North America, as shown by the increasing number of municipalities with dogs off-leash parks.

Site Selection Criteria

Site selection is a three (3) step process. As with other “drive-to”, City-wide recreation facilities such as spray pads, tennis courts and large skateboard parks, only certain parks are suitable for these uses in order to minimize impacts on local neighbourhoods while providing much needed recreation facilities activities. The site selection process includes:

Step 1 - Initial Screening Criteria: seven general criteria that must be met for a site to be considered as a potential off-leash area.

Step 2 - Setback and Layout Guidelines: Of the suitable sites for consideration, there are more detailed guidelines to consider when drafting the proposed layout plan for the potential off-leash area. If some of these guidelines can’t be fully met, mitigation measures should then be explored to compensate.

Step 3 - Qualitative Review: If several potential sites are suitable within the geographic area, criteria to evaluate the relative quality of potential sites are used to rank them. A particular site may be more suited for a DOLA due to the presence of existing vegetation, or topographical separation from neighbours. Once all the potential sites have been ranked, they are charted on a map to ensure equity or even distribution of off-leash areas across the city.

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Step 1: Initial screening - General criteria established by the City of London for the selection of potential sites

In order to be considered as a potential location for the creation of a dogs off-leash area, a site must meet all of the following criteria:

CRITERIA	RATIONALE
1. The site is within the City of London boundary.	
2. The site is zoned OS1, OS2 or OS4, making it suitable for that usage. Written approval from the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) is required if the site is located on flood plain lands (OS4). Environmentally Significant Areas (OS5) will not be considered as potential sites for off-leash areas.*	<i>These areas designated Open Space consist of public open space (such as parks) and flood plains lands. Private open space, cemeteries (OS3) and conservation lands such as Environmentally Significant Areas (OS5) are not suitable for off-leash areas.</i>
3. The site is not expected to be (re)developed for another purpose within the next 10 years, or the level of development is expected to be minimal.*	<i>It is not worth investing capital funding on a site that would be use only temporarily.</i>
4. The site can hold an off-leash area of at least 1.5 ha (±4 acres) in size.*	<i>Research on other municipalities and London owns' experience shows that this is a required minimum size in response to the high volume of users, constant use of the site, and impacts on the grounds.</i>
5. Space is available (or could be made available) outside of areas specifically designed for structured recreational activities (i.e. sports fields).	<i>Existing park uses should not share the space with an off-leash area or be displaced for the creation of an off-leash area, unless these existing uses are no longer needed or can be relocated to another site.</i>
6. The site is accessible from a main arterial or collector road and allows space for a parking lot. The need for traffic upgrades to ensure safe access and egress for site users must be considered.*	<i>Increased traffic volume in and through neighbourhood and parking on local streets must be minimized.</i>
7. The site is available for year-round use.	<i>Dogs need to be exercised all year round and off-leash areas are used 7 days a week / 365 days a year, despite of seasonal weather conditions.</i>

All potential sites are first assessed against the initial screening factors. Those that do not meet all requirements are eliminated from consideration.



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Step 2: Proposed Layout and Setback Guidelines

Once a site meets all the initial criteria in step 1, a proposed layout plan is drafted for the off-leash area taking into consideration the following minimum setback guidelines.

MINIMUM SETBACK AND LAYOUT GUIDELINES	RATIONALE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100 metres (328 ft) away from schools and playgrounds* 	<p><i>Recognizing that interaction between small children and dogs should happen only under very close supervision, these two uses should be kept apart.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fence 30 metres (± 100 ft) away from residential neighbours Parking lot and main gate 50 metres (± 165 ft) away from residential housing 	<p><i>30 metres is our typical setback for any recreational activity in parks (ball diamond, soccer field, etc.) and is a sufficient setback from the fence. Parking lot and main gate are noise-generation areas, therefore the setback to residential neighbours is increased.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 metres (± 15 ft) away from other recreational activities such as sports fields and picnic areas* 	<p><i>This minimum setback is sufficient because of the presence of fencing. It is to allow space for a minimal buffer zone.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 metres (± 50 ft) away from high traffic roadways 5 metres (± 15 ft) away from multi-use pathways (such as the Thames Valley Parkway)* 	<p><i>This setback is to allow sufficient space for a buffer zone between off-leash parks and high traffic roadways. Because of the presence of fencing, minimum setback to pathways can be decreased.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 metres (± 50 ft) away from watercourse and ESAs 	<p><i>This setback is to allow sufficient space for a buffer zone between off-leash parks and natural areas.</i></p>

If all of the general criteria are met but some of the setback and layout guidelines can't be met, mitigation measures must then be explored to compensate.

Potential sites then proceed to step 3 to be evaluated according to qualitative criteria.

Step 3: Qualitative Review

The following criteria will evaluate the quality of potential sites and allow to compare and rank them.

A. Setting

Sites that provide a variety of natural terrains will score high H-5
 while more homogenous areas - all flat or all wooded - will score M-3
 low. L-1

B. Pedestrian Accessibility

Sites that are accessible to adjacent neighbourhoods via pathways H-5
 and trails will score high. As accessibility becomes more difficult the M-3
 scoring declines. L-1

C. Buffers

Sites that have existing visual buffers such as topography, vegetation, etc., H-5
 between adjacent properties and the proposed site will rank high. M-3
 Scoring will decline where no buffers exist.* L-1

D. Impact on the Natural Environment

Sites which will not adversely impact the environmental status H-5
 quo will score high, while those that require additional development, M-3
 hence impacting on environment, will score lower. L-1

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E. Economic Feasibility

Sites where construction can occur at a reasonable cost will score high.
Those where construction requires special measures or features
increasing the cost will score lower.

H-5
M-3
L-1

Total Possible 25

Once all the potential sites have been ranked, they are charted on a map to ensure equity or even distribution of off-leash areas across the city.

The higher the score, the more suitable the site, but all sites passing step 2 could be reasonably developed as off-leash parks.

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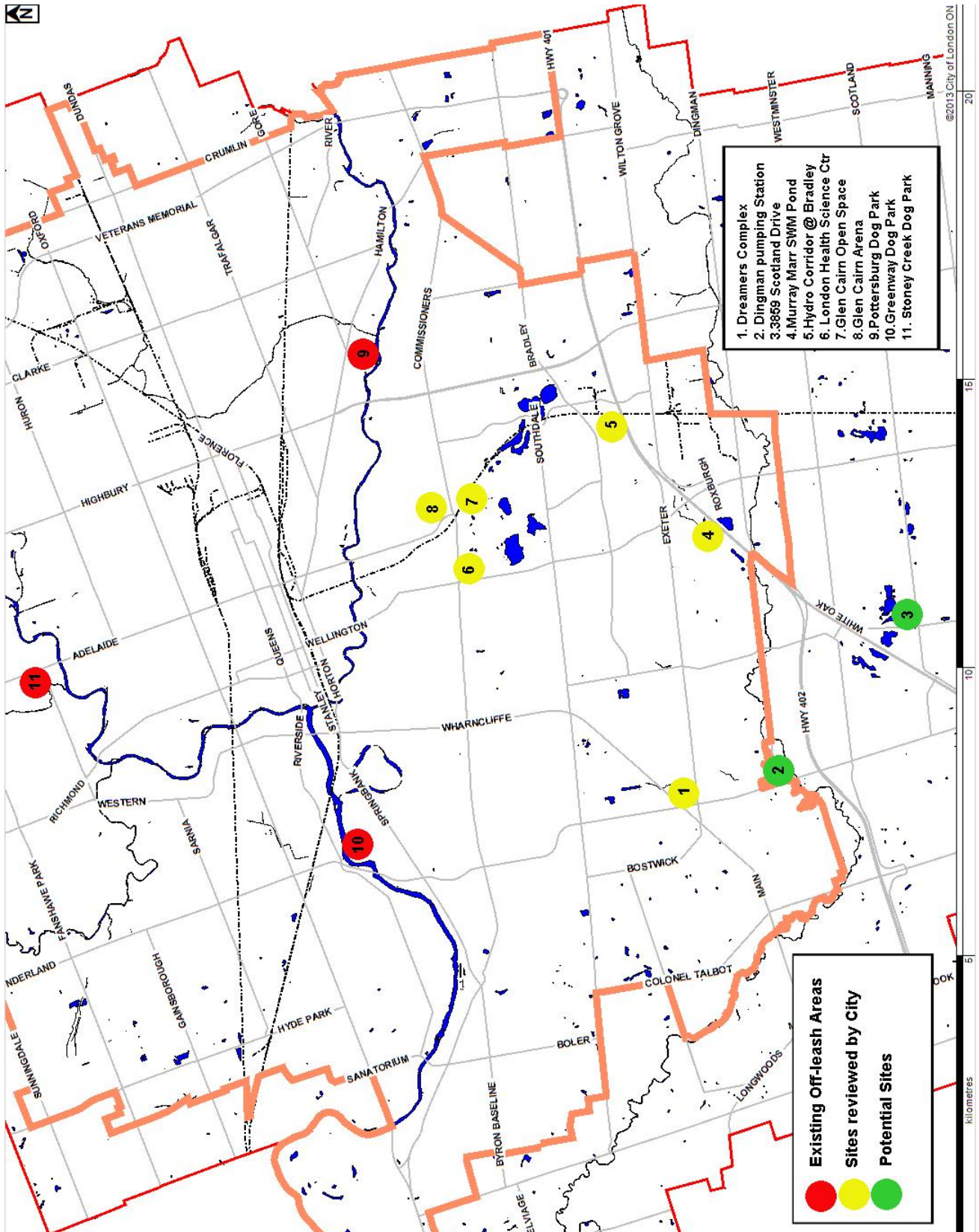
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APPENDIX B- Potential Sites in South/Central London

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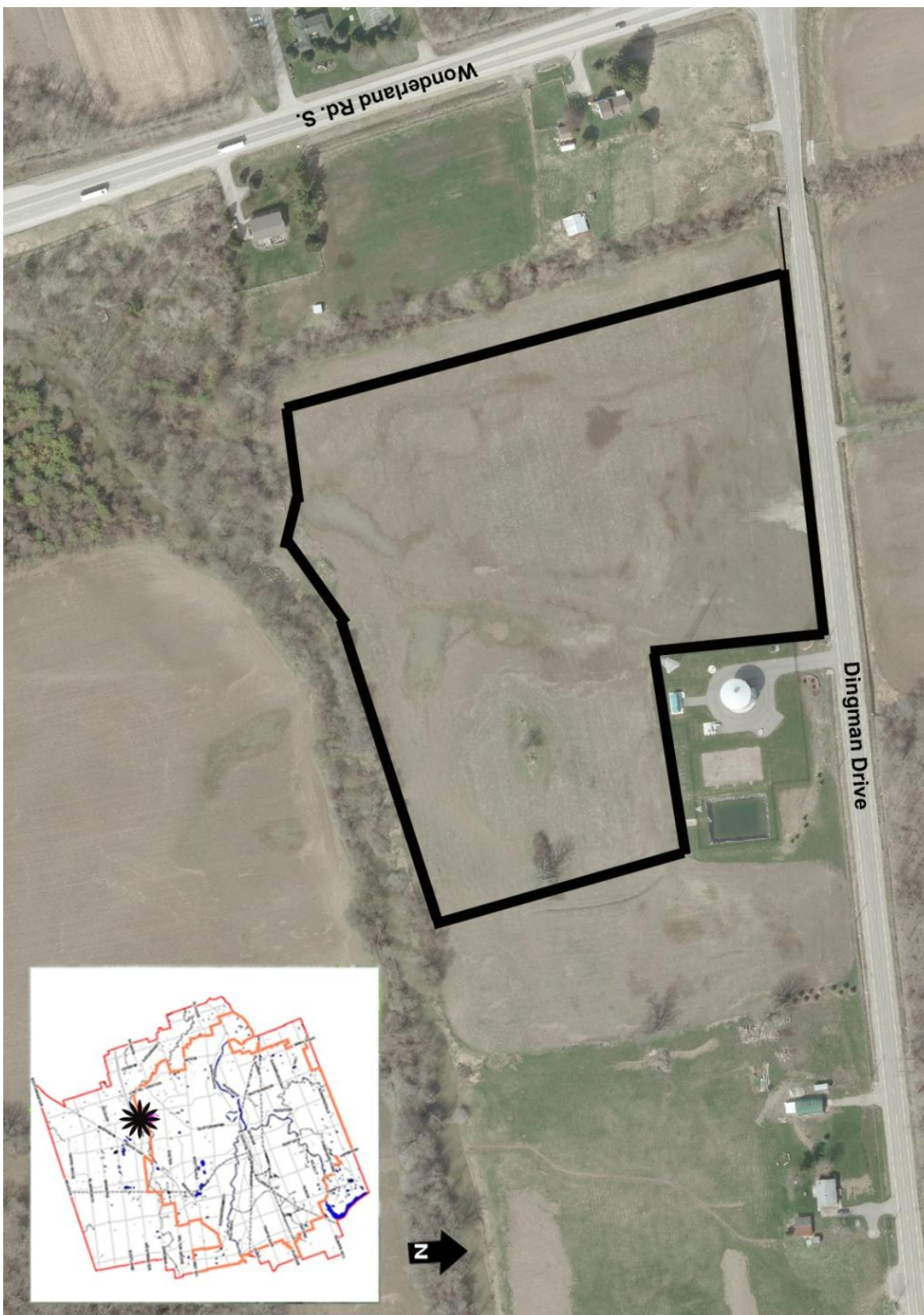
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**APPENDIX C- Best Candidates for Off-leash Area
Dingman Pumping Station Site**

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3859 Scotland Drive Site

