

## OFF-LEASH DOG PARKS

On March 8, 2008, Saugeen Shores town council gave the go-ahead for the off-leash “Paws Awhile” Doggie Park. The park, to be located at the former Port Elgin landfill site, will be a three-season fenced dog park and is expected to open this August, 2008. The committee's vision is to have a three-season park, incorporating the off-leash area with small gardens, benches and an additional area for single dog usage and obedience classes.

There are numerous benefits of a community off-leash dog park, as well as some potential concerns.

### Benefits:

- Provides exercise for dogs and their owners, which contributes to the overall level of physical and mental health. Obesity in our companion animals is one of the most frequently diagnosed conditions. Physical activity is essential for treating and preventing obesity.
- Provides socialization and relieves pent-up energy for dogs (and their owner), which may help diminish behavioural problems such as destructive chewing, digging, and barking.
- Helps strengthen the human-animal bond.

### Concerns:

- Potential for dogs to fight or be intimidated by large groups of dogs. Owners MUST be watching over their dogs at all times and have verbal control of the dog while at the park. A leash should be on-hand in case an altercation occurs.
- Potential for dogs to bite or knock over adults or children. It is important to watch children carefully and ensure that they know how to approach unknown dogs.
- Potential for a dog to pick up a disease such as a viral or bacterial infection or intestinal parasites. Pets should be up-to-date with vaccinations including distemper, adenovirus, hepatitis, parvovirus, parainfluenza, rabies, and bordetella (kennel cough) as well as preventative intestinal parasite medication. Wait to take puppies to a dog park until they have completed their puppy vaccination series as they are more susceptible to infections/disease due to their developing immune system.

Anyone entering an off-leash park assumes some risk in doing so. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact us at the Port Elgin Veterinary Clinic.