

Clark County Council OKs pact with DOGPAW for parks' maintenance

By [Jack Heffernan](#), Columbian county government and small cities reporter
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Tikka, a 7-month-old German shepherd, hurdles a puddle to return a ball to her owner Friday at the Dakota Memorial Off-Leash Dog Park in east Vancouver. (Joshua Hart/The Columbian) (Photo Gallery)

The nonprofit organization that manages four dog parks in Clark County has renewed a participation agreement with the county for maintenance of the parks, a sign of stability after the organization had struggled at times in recent years.

The Clark County Council approved the agreement with DOGPAW, or Dog Owners Group for Park Access in Washington, last week. It runs until 2026 after the previous agreement, signed in 2016, expired.

The agreement allocates responsibility for signage, brush cleanup and several maintenance items to the county. DOGPAW agreed to oversee waste disposal, bulletin board maintenance, trash cleanup and maintenance of any structures or improvements implemented by the organization.

“It’s a win-win proposition for us,” county Parks and Lands Division Manager Galina Burley told councilors last week. “We’re really excited to keep going. This is a great partnership.”

At times in the past couple of years, DOGPAW has appeared at risk of dissolving due to leadership turnover and a shortage of volunteers, membership and revenue. But by the end of 2019, the organization's revenue had outpaced its operating expenses for the first time in years. The county stepped in to maintain three of the parks, a duty cemented in the current agreement.

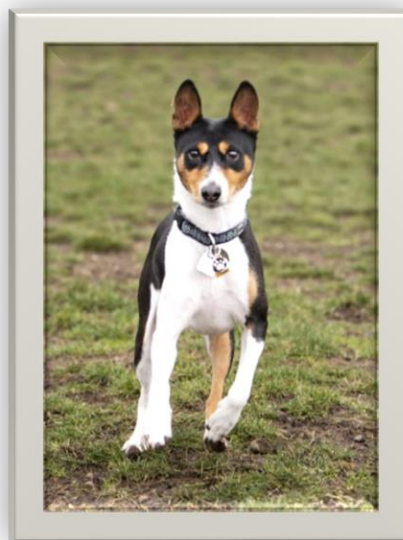
"It's nice to see that we were able to get this worked out and that the organization is healthy and strong," County Councilor Julie Olson said.

Sally Jenkins, who joined the organization's board as vice president the summer of 2019, became its president in October. Jenkins is a retired business owner who lives with two rescue dogs: a Pomeranian mix named Kaiju and Chauncey, a Cavalier King Charles spaniel.

The organization has noticed an uptick in use at parks in the past year, at least some of which could be the result of COVID-19 social distancing protocols. About 2,000 owners and their pets are using the parks each day, according to an estimate from Cynthia Etheridge, the organization's communications director.

"We are aware these numbers vary based on weather, but our parks are seeing lots of increased traffic to the point of overflow parking at one of the parks," Etheridge said. The organization has roughly 60 volunteers, and the county has recently asked the organization to record volunteer hours. But the organization has continued its long-standing recruiting effort as previous presidents have spent upwards of 60 hours per week heading the organization.

For more information on how to volunteer, go to www.dogpawoffleashparks.org.



(Joshua Hart/The Columbian) (Photo Gallery)