

*July 28, 2014 - Dover Off-Leash Park Speech*

Good evening members of the City Council,

My name is Sylvia Chiu and I have been in the Dover Park neighbour for over 10 years now. I've always seen it as a welcoming park that welcomes all sorts of different people, whether it may be to playing a round of basketball with schoolmates, to lay a towel on the grass field and enjoy a picnic, or just simply using the space to bring pets out to socialize and out for exercise. Despite being a young child when joining this neighbour, I immediately realize the high number of dog owners and in the area and that was very exciting for me. I've always had a profound love for canines because they have such an uplifting effect on both their owners and others around them. Recently, I was told to conduct an ethnographic study on a location of my choice and I chose to do my study on the Dover Off-Leash Park and the neighbouring dyke on River Road. In my paper, I explored the potential role that dogs play a fundamental role as facilitators of social interaction. The results from my ethnographic research showed that the sense of community is strengthened whenever pet residency is prevalent. In my countless hours of research observation, I performed a spatial analysis which allowed me to identify the positive factors to the research field itself. The Dover Off-Leash park was used because it was a place which dog owners and their companion animal frequent.

As an ethical researcher, I positioned myself within the study environment with non-bias views. Some key variables that were examined include: human-pet relationships, attachment, social interaction and sense of community. The concept of cultural modeling was integrated in my study in the way that the nexus between dog ownership and sense of community involved social, environmental and language norms. Many participants stressed that the pilot project dog park was a great addition to the neighbourhood as it allows for social interaction between both dogs and dog owners. It is undeniable that the Dover Park neighbour is home to a large family of dogs and it should be noted that the big space we have in this beloved park should involve a space where dogs can freely roam around and maximize their time outside of the house by playing with fellow companion animals. The park is a public space that is shared amongst all parties; it is important to recognize that shared space means there is a possibility of conflicts to arise, which is ultimately why fanatic dog owners such as us are here speaking to you tonight. This conflict is undeniable because there is no way of controlling who enters a space and who doesn't because it is all open to the general public. In conclusion, companion animals emerge as an undeniably valuable and positive feature of neighbourhood life and should be recognized for their contribution to one's health and well being.

In my personal opinion as an unbiased researcher, who just so happen to also be a dog owner too, the positive of dogs within our Dover community outweigh the negative aspects. The off-leash park provided dog owners and visitors of the park a reason to show a smile, to crack a laugh or to share a conversation with someone unfamiliar. The dog park is subject to criticism like any other public space would, but I hope tonight's reflection on the dog

park highlights the side of the supporters and will be enough to bring back an open space for companion animals and dog owners alike.

Thank you for your time and have a good night.