

Date: May 5, 2006
Project: Dogs in the Parks, Master Plan, 3rd and Final Community Meeting
Public meeting Date: Wednesday, May 3, 2006
Public Meeting Held: Stevenson Center, 49 Lake Street

Minutes of meeting

1. Mr. Gary Balling, Executive Director of the Park District of Oak Park, opened the meeting and presented a series of PowerPoint slides that addressed the following:
 - The history of Dog Friendly Policies of the Park District of Oak Park (PD)
 - Information on the PD Comprehensive Plan process
 - Results of the public survey that was part of that process - Dog Friendly Areas/Dog Parks ranked #8 in the order of most important facilities needed in the Oak Park system.
 - Limited public open space in Oak Park and the extraordinary demands on that space - NRPA standards call for 10 acres per 1,000 residents
Oak Park with 82.9 acres of public park land has 1.6 acres per 1,000 residents.
 - A detailed description of the “Dogs in the Parks Master Plan” process
 - When individual Site Master Plans for each park will be carried out
2. Mr. Balling introduced John Mac Manus of Altamanu Inc. who presented the following:
 - Maps showing the location of all licensed and vaccinated dogs in Oak Park. There are approx. 2,500 licensed dogs in Oak Park and probably double that number in reality.
 - Dog ownership as shown on these maps is spread evenly across Oak Park
 - A review of the master planning process and criteria and sites considered
3. Mr. Mac Manus then presented a summary of the recommendations based on the public process. These recommendations were based on: public comment on potential locations; Park District comment on sustainability and potential costs; comments made by the Working Group; data of the location of Dog Park Plus users; Emails, surveys and letters from the public collect by the Park District and Altamanu as of April 26th 2006. They are also premised on the established need for 1.9 (two) dog parks in Oak Park based on the recommendations made in the Comprehensive Plan

The recommendations, that are detailed more fully below, are:

1. The Park District should establish a Task Force, to work with Cook County Forest Preserve to establish a regional facility.
2. Retain the existing dog park at Ridgeland Common, by far the most popular site.
3. If Ridgeland Common can not be used at some time in the future, (after a master plan in 07), the site at Stevenson Park should be considered as an alternative.
4. Establish a Dog Park in Taylor Park, however, it should be considered temporary until the Master Plan for Taylor Park is carried out in 2007
5. Investigate the possibility of purchasing the privately held site at Garfield and Home.
6. Evaluate the potential of a Dog Park at Maple Park as part of the master plan in 2007.

Establish a Task Force to work with Cook County Forest Preserve to establish a regional facility.

Due to the limited public green space in Oak Park there is no park that can facilitate a regional scale dog park. It is unlikely that such a facility will be created in Oak Park in the future. However, there is a definite need for such a facility in the Oak Park area and that need has been compounded by the discontinuation of off-leash dog hours at Lindberg Park. Though members of the public have stated their interest in convincing Cook County Forest Preserve to allow such a facility on their property, I would recommend a more collaborative approach in exploring this issue. The Park District should develop a task force which would include residents, members of FOOPD as well as an elected official from the Park District Board, the Village Board of Trustees and an elected official from each neighboring community to be identified. We recommend this task force work to find a positive solution to this problem with the Cook County Forest Preserve.

Retain the existing Dog Park at Ridgeland Common

This was by far the most popular site for a dog park. All who attended the neighborhood meeting held at Ridgeland Common voted for a dog park on this site. It was also by far the most popular site in Emails and surveys sent to the Park District and Altamanu Inc. Members of the general public and FOOPD stated that this was their first choice because of Dog Park Plus which is currently located at this site. Its central location and its distance from residences were secondary reasons. However, this park will be the subject of a Master Plan in 2007 and its current uses will be reexamined at that time. If the Dog Park and Dog Park Plus are not recommended in the Master Plan, the site at Stevenson Park should be considered as an alternate for the central area of Oak Park. It should be noted that at all community and neighborhood meetings and in many Emails, the importance of Dog Park Plus to dog owners who use Ridgeland was stressed.

Establish a Dog Park at Taylor Park

This is the most controversial of the proposals. It is based on the results of the public process to date. This site is a “compromise site”; that is, no other site is available or suitable in the northern sections of Oak Park where the greatest demand has been evident. It is also a “consensus site” that is, though there has been definite opposition, the majority of those who attended public meetings and who made comments by other means were in favor of this site.

Dog owners who attended the neighborhood meeting stated that this was a small site but that they were willing to accept “whatever they could get”. Some residents who attended the meeting expressed their concern with the proximity of this site to an existing play lot, approx. 35ft. Community historians expressed their concern that Taylor Park is a Jens Jensen design which should be restored and some local residents expressed their complete opposition to a dog park in Taylor Park under any circumstances. As with most public open spaces in Oak Park, residents have expressed the desire for a myriad of other uses for the park.

We have a deep respect for Jensen’s designs and the public process. Therefore we recommend that the dog park be installed as shown on the final plan, but that it should be considered temporary until the Master Plan for Taylor Park is carried out. At that time, the current uses in Taylor may be altered and the dog park expanded or potentially removed.

Continue investigating the potential purchase of the site on Garfield at Home

This privately owned site, just to the east of the post office on Garfield at Home, has potential. It is located directly south of the rail lines and I-290, has only one direct residential neighbor and is close to the Animal Care League HQ. The opportunity to purchase this site and its use as a dog park has to be weighed against the cost of purchase and potential clean-up.

Evaluate the potential of a Dog Park at Maple Park as part of the master plan in 2007

We recommend that this site be considered as part of the Maple Park Master Plan that is to be carried out next year, when both the positive and potentially negative attributes of a dog park can be explored in detail.

The proposed site at Maple Park is considered by Altamanu Inc. as the best site from a purely physical standpoint. It is the largest site. The park is not historically significant though it has some very picturesque sections. A significant portion of the site faces Harlem Avenue not the community. It utilizes two basketball courts currently unused. The cost of installation is moderate as water and sewer are already on site. There are existing fences on two sides and, with suitable site improvements such as removal of some of the concrete pad, mounding and additional plantings, it could be integrated into the fabric of the park and screened from Maple Avenue.

However, though there was some support for a dog park on this site at the public meeting and more support expressed through Email after the meeting, there was no overwhelming display of support from the community.

4. John Mac Manus opened the meeting to discussion and started the discussion off with the question “Is anyone against any of the recommendations?”

General Statements made by the public included:

- I am a dog owner but I am against dog parks in our parks. Dog parks turn into lavatories - feces and dust fly in the summer – The size does not allow the dogs to run – The best

alternative and best use of our resources is to establish a dog park at Thatcher Woods which is cleaner and not near a playground

- Have you been to our dog park at Ridgeland? If you had you would have seen a very different situation. The dog park is clean and very successful.
- It is too small and I wonder how house owners near buy will feel it would affect their house prices?
- Some people have moved to Oak Park because it was a dog friendly town.
- Stevenson offers a site where dogs could run
- John Mac Manus reviewed recommendations at the request of a resident
- The size of Ridgeland Common is totally inadequate
- At Ridgeland Common the dog park is very small but we live in an urban area which is densely populated - Thatcher is great locale - I was at Ridgeland Common with 5 or 6 other dogs and the dogs were running and playing and having fun
- I've been at Ridgeland Common when parents have let kids into the dog park to play unsupervised.
- I am looking for an alternative to one's backyard and I want a facility to fit the needs of all – we provide space for soccer, baseball, etc. – why not dogs park?
- You are lucky you have a back yard, many of us live in apartments and think that (the dog park at) Ridgeland is great.
- John Mac Manus spoke about multi-use facilities such as soccer fields and baseball fields vs. single use facilities such as tennis courts, skate parks and dog parks, which are fenced off and single use. .
- It is one of the issues to have a permanently fenced-off area.
- There is a great deal of sympathy and demand for a dog facility...Ridgeland is adequate.
- What surface will be used? Many possibilities and all have advantages and disadvantages.
- I visited Taylor Park and the dog park area staked out...its too close to the tot lot - 25-30 feet to playground –We paced it out – There were other mothers there and they all thought the same
- The Dog park limits other uses – the playground is too small at Taylor - Taylor Park is not a good site for dogs
- I am not against dogs, it is just that my kids are terrified of big dogs
- Stevenson is long and narrow so dogs can run - Due to minimal cost and limited impact on the neighborhood, please consider a third dog park at Stevenson as a place where dogs can run
- I live s near Taylor Park and like the Taylor Park location but “What’s best for our dogs?” – “Will you go to Maple Park if the Taylor Park site is not open?”
- Disappointed that Maple Park not recommended - Trying to get neighbors to support Maple Park location. Local dog owners should work with FOOPD
- I would use a dog park at Maple
- I would drive there if I had too
- I wouldn't. We need a dog park near where we live. A place we can walk to a local park.
- It would be ideal to have a series of local dog parks and a regional facility, just in the same manner parks are planned, however, there just isn't enough space in our parks.
- Bill Dwyer (Wednesday Journal reporter) asked for a show of hands of who is in support of working collaboratively with other governmental/municipal agencies to pursue a regional facility – almost all hands went up
- Ridgeland Common is a good site because of proximity to the new developments (of condos and town homes) along Lake St. – need to have a central location where community is very dense

- It would be ideal to have dog parks in the north, south and middle of town – people want to walk to the dog parks
- What was the objection to the dog park in Taylor by the picnic area? - John replied that it is too close to houses and picnic grove is used often
- I have never seen it used
- It depends on the time of day and the time of year.
- Mr. Grandy of the Park District stated that the picnic grove was heavily used by the soccer leagues and church groups as well as families in Oak Park
- I would like to thank the Park District for all their hard work – great job on presentations – was late for this meeting because of parking...parking will be an issue if dog park is located at Stevenson Park
- At the neighborhood meeting here that was not considered an issue by the attendees and the local park representatives. It is interesting it is coming up now.
- I have always found it easy to park here.
- I haven't, you get ticketed on Lake Street and the spaces on Humphrey are full
- The Park District has done a remarkably good job of process. At the beginning of the process I thought the dog park would be at Maple Park
- There is a benefit of walking to the dog park. The dogs will “take care of business” along the way
- And of course you always pick up after your dog
- Of course
- The number one priority in the community survey was neighborhood parks, a place that people can walk to – it follows that the same is true for a dog park as well
- Liked the first recommendation about approaching the Forest Preserve – this needs to be done - recommendation will kick start the process
- Thank you to John Mac Manus and the Park District
- If every one has finished with the general discussion we can move on to a detailed discussion of the potential site in Taylor

A discussion on the size of the recommended Dog Park at Taylor Park was initiated

- John Mac Manus stated that the layout of the potential dog park at Taylor was conceptual only and though we can discuss that layout the most important issue is whether there should be a dog park at Taylor or not.
- Three attendees expressed with the proximity to tot lot
- Current tot lot is inadequate
- Establishing dog park before master planning process is putting cart before the horse – We need a bigger conversation with all users of Taylor Park
- Leave Taylor Park alone until master plan is completed
- If anything happens to Ridgeland we will have nowhere to use. Therefore we do not want to wait for the master plan
- Representatives of FOOPD expressed their concern that the size of the dog park as staked had been reduced and that the distance between the dog park fence and the tennis courts had increased. It had been shown on drawings as 10 feet.
- Mr. Mac Manus stated that the outline of the proposed dog park had changed, due to the following:
 - Memorial Trees in the area were at this stage to be exclude from the dog park and that the layout reflected the comments made at public meetings, including the need for a corridor to link the tot lot to the soccer field along the edge of the tennis courts, and also to provide access to all the entrances to the tennis courts.

He also expressed his concern that the corridor which would be longer than a tennis court should not appear to be narrow alley between the 10-12 ft fence of the tennis courts and the fence of the dog park. He would rather see this corridor eliminated and the number of entryways to the tennis courts reduced. At the moment there were 4 entryways on the east side, potentially these could be reduced to two or the entryways could be changed.

- What about moving the dog park further to the north?
- The park had already been moved as far north as possible and if it was moved any further it would be too close to the soccer field.
- Also, other members of FOOPD have stated that they did not like the move to the north as it would then include too many trees in the dog park and people would not be able to see their dogs.
- There was no decision on an agreed layout of the dog park
- If we had the luxury of time, it would be ideal but our concern is that if Dog Park Plus closes, Ridgeland Common Dog Park would not be enough and we would have no alternative
- When the master plan is completed for Taylor Park, the configuration of the dog park at Taylor could be changed
- Is Taylor Park the most prudent place for the entire community? - Concerned that this dog park site will be fast-tracked
- Concern expressed with dogs being equated with children and a heated discussion followed
- Mr. Mac Manus and then Gary Balling asked the attendees to have respect for each other and the opinions of others
- We are all taxpayers and deserve to have our recreational needs met
- I have lived in Oak Park for 20 years and my dog is my entertainment and my community. A dog park is very important to me and to others.
- We pay taxes for schools but have no children.
- Can the Dog Park get “yanked” (removed) if public voices a negative opinion?
- The Park District responds as best it can to the wishes of our residents.

5. Gary Balling wrapped up the meeting by thanking everyone in attendance.