

Date: April 10, 2006
Project: Dogs in the Parks, Master Plan
Public meeting Date: Monday, April 10, 2006
Public Meeting Held: Field Center, 935 Woodbine
Subject: A potential permanent Dog Park in Taylor Park

Minutes of meeting

General: The meeting followed the same format as other community meetings

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
 - Information gathered by Altamanu Inc. from Parks Departments across the country addressing the planning process used to create Dog Friendly Areas (DFA’s). The data show that Dog Parks are the hottest issue for urban parks across the country.
 - Relative sizes of DFA’s
 - Issues the public have with DFA’s
 - Examples of DFA’s
 - The design criteria used to select potential sites (see copy of PowerPoint presentation)
3. Mr. Mac Manus assured the meeting attendees that no decision has been made and all open spaces in Oak Park were examined for suitability. Some sites were ruled out initially as they were obviously unsuitable, due to size, existing use and/or adjacent uses.
4. The sites that have been selected as potential sites for further consideration included sites at the following locations:
 - Taylor Park
 - Ridgeland Common on the site currently used as a DFA.
 - Maple Park which was discussed with residents at a community meeting the previous evening, and
 - Stevenson at the SE corner between the reservoir and multi-use space and the elevated rail-lines.
5. Mr. Mac Manus expressed his concern about integrating a dog park into an historic landscape. He compared aerial photographs of the park today with the historic drawing of Jens Jensen’s original design. The changes in the design overtime were discussed. Long views into “clearings’ have since been blocked by new planting; the tennis courts have been expanded; paths removed and the peripheral layer of shrubs has been removed over the years due to security concerns and maintenance difficulties.

6. The entire park had been evaluated for a potential site. All were eliminated except for a site just east of the existing tennis courts. There were also some concerns with the potential site selected; the proximity of the play lot and access to the tennis courts.
7. Mr. Mac Manus then presented photos of the potential site and 3 alternate plans for the dog park in this location. Each plan moved the dog park further away from the existing play lot and expanded the dog park to the north towards the existing soccer field. . The final plan showed the dog park a minimum of 35ft away from the play lot and from the tennis courts. The final plan has a curvilinear outline to allow for circulation around the Dog Park and views across the space to more distant parts of the park.
8. He then presented a series of before and after renderings showing how the dog park might look in place and read through 3 pages of criteria developed by Altamanu Inc., the Park District and members of FOOPD. These criteria were used to evaluate the site.
9. He then opened the meeting up for discussion. Statements made by the public at the meeting included:

What is the distance from the playground? – 35 ft.

What is the size of this site compared to Ridgeland Common? – Taylor is larger

Is it possible to expand the potential dog park to the northeast? - The air raid siren building is in the way but it may be possible.

Can the building for the air raid siren be moved? – yes, but costly

The area being considered is the safest area in park for little children to run around

Practically speaking, the way the park is used is that the kids walk from the ball field to the playground. I am not against dog parks but against the location of this park; concerned with the noise for the tennis players and safety of children going from field to playground.

There is a fence around Dog Park – that won't stop kids from crossing the space

I saw kids who enjoyed watching dogs when I saw a common fence dividing playground from a dog park.

There is enough space to pass by between tennis courts and Dog Park

Did we look at the sledding area as a site? – It is very steep and used and the area up the hill from it is used as a gathering space

May need to move the gathering area so that it's closer to top of sledding hill

What about the northeast corner of the park as a potential site? - It has drainage problems and is close to Ridgeland and houses

There was a discussion about how dog owners use the parks

Some dog owners tie their dogs to fences while they collect or watch their kids

Mr. Balling asked the attendees not tie dogs to fences and leave them unattended

Would people from other suburbs use the dog park? -Our dog park is run much differently than those in Chicago or Forest Park. It's for residents only and you need a park district dog permit to enter.

Why isn't the dog park up against the tennis court fence? It could increase the size of the dog park. - It is pulled back from the fence to allow for circulation, flow and passage through the park...

How good of a site is it for dogs? – Can we throw Frisbees and tennis balls? – We need a larger area

Do we know our time frame? When will the park be open? – Yes, dawn to dusk just like the park.

If you build the dog park next to the tennis courts, (without leaving space for access to the courts) players will have to walk all the way around to retrieve balls that go over the fence

Noise is a concern of mine. – The noise from Division/Ridgeland will drown out most noise on the site

Never heard of any incidences between kids and dogs in the park although dogs can be intimidating.

The entrance to the Dog Park can be from the opposite side, quite removed from the playground

But you would be taking away a place for kids to run

35 feet is an acceptable distance between the dog park and the playground

Mr. Mac Manus used a measuring tape and demonstrated how long 35 ft was when measured out in the room

There are other tot lots, but not any other dog parks (Ridgeland is temporary)

No one is against tot lot – but also dog owners want to enjoy their dogs

In the 2000 census: 2900 households with kids age 1 to 5 years, but there were 5000 dogs

Seeing the sites considered, this is the only north side site

Mike Grandy reminded everyone that they should be respectful of everyone's opinion even if they disagreed. We are all neighbors

This is not tot owners versus dog owners.

Why don't we take on the soccer fields?

Why was Lindberg ruled out?

Mr. Mac Manus spoke about the process used that eliminated Lindberg. There was no site far enough away from residences.

We looked at it in detail

An attendee who had spoken at the Maple Park public meeting made a statement:

There is a Park Board meeting on April 20 at 218 Madison at 7:30pm where public comments will be taken at the beginning of the meeting

There were not many people in support of a dog park at Maple. Residents were concerned with how the dog park will be run. Dog Parks at Taylor and Maple will have some visibility from neighbors. Ridgeland Common and Stevenson are bounded by RR and streets. It is not an intimate neighborhood setting. The attendees at the Stevenson meeting were not as passionate. It is a more urban area and a more urban crowd

"I think two logical choices are Stevenson and Ridgeland if we are going to have a dog park at all"

- Unfortunately both are adjacent; they are both on Lake Street, we need to spread out the dog parks.

One resident spoke in favor of a dog park in Lindberg, on the western edge of the Park near the gardens, South of tennis courts. The turf is extremely soft and after scientific investigation the attendee stated that it was half as harmful on dogs in comparison with the turf at Ridgeland

Mr. Mac Manus stated that this particular site was ruled out because it was too close to residences.

The fence of the proposed dog park meanders to avoid memorial trees.

There are several hundred memorial trees throughout our parks with plaques at base of them for perpetuity. Some are located around the dog park site under consideration.

We will have to meet with relatives and discuss the issue. They may want the trees to be moved. They may be very attached to a specific tree.

Erosion is the issue for trees in a dog park

A single use for a dog park is the same as a single use for tennis courts

Tot lots are a single use too – new playground will be installed at Andersen beginning in May – more opportunities for kids to get exercise

Why the excess of vaccinations? – This is dictated by Cook County

Why such a high fee? - To offset costs of registration, maintenance, staffing etc.

The fee for using a pool is substantially more

I am concerned with row of evergreens. People hide under them and drink there. Then my kids run in and play there. This is potentially dangerous. - We can limb up the evergreens slightly. They are beautiful trees.

The dog park is equally distanced to tobogganing and soccer as to tot lot

We haven't given enough consideration to moving the tot lot? - We have but it needs to be near the bathrooms.

No problem with tennis courts at Lindberg

My concern; what you did is aesthetically nice but to put this in a park with so much activities already is a concern, also, have you looked at the bottom of the hill? – Yes we have and it was ruled out because of drainage problems and visibility from Ridgeland

What is the process from here on?

Mr. Balling addressed the process:

1-The working group will examine and discuss all the sites under consideration

2-There will be discussion with the Park District

3-John Mac Manus, the consultant, will make a recommendation at the third community meeting

4-Then there will be a presentation to the COW on Thursday, May 4 at the Oak Park art Conservatory,

5-And finally the Board will take the proposal from our consultant under consideration at the meeting on Thursday, May 18 at 218 Madison, 7:30pm

Most of comments from the public tonight have been on how to accommodate a dog park in the park rather than being opposed to a dog park

Let me reiterate, Taylor Park is the only north site (Ridgeland and Stevenson are considered central) just as Maple Park is potentially the only south site

Considering size and scale of the park this space (for a dog park) at Taylor is not big enough

At last meeting we talked about two dog parks – are we still talking about two?

Even if Taylor is small, this space still works rather than going to the city

The recommended size of a dog park is ½ acre

Mr. Mac Manus stated that Chicago has lots of land, but their dog parks are still small, most less than 10,000 sq ft and the largest planned for Grant Park will be 13,000 sq ft. There is simply not space available for all the demands on park land in urban areas.

This is better than nothing

At the Board Meeting in May, will a dog park come out of it? – Mr. Balling said that he could not speak for the Park Board however the board advanced the dog park study. The plan was originally scheduled to be completed later in the capital improvement plan. This shows interest and determination to handle this issue.

Ridgeland Common is used for Dog Park Plus – what is its size and why can't we have a (permanent large scale) dog park there?

Gary Balling: That is a regional issue – you need to talk to the Forest Preserve if you want that much space. That space is used by numerous groups for numerous activities, base ball, sports camp, the High School etc.

Why not use tennis courts. We converted tennis courts to basketball and a skate park at Stevenson
We don't have to have single use tennis courts or soccer fields – make temporary parks during winter months with temporary fencing

Is Dog Park/Dog Park Plus off the table? John talked to Dr. Parmer who said that Oak Park must comply with Cook County regulations, “No shared spaces.”

These parks are half the recommended size – since all parks are small, can we have three dog parks?

Have you looked at leasing or a co-use with another community – Elmwood Park or River Forest?

John talked with other communities. The Chicago Park District has no plans for Dog Parks in Columbus Park. He also informed the meeting of the Chicago Park District process for establishing a dog park. It has to be initiated by a neighborhood organization and have a petition showing the majority of residents in the area were in support.

Why does the Chicago Park District have problems with dog parks? Because they cause contention in the community

Is the concern with kids going by the Dog Park and/or visibility?

You are trying to fit something in that doesn't fit? It comes down to we don't have enough park space
Taylor Park is to have a Master Plan in 2007 – tot lot would certainly be looked at

So we would put the dog park in then do a site plan? - The dog park would be pretty easy to reshape.

When would it open? – We need to find dollars; can't say when.

A range for the cost could be \$10,000 to \$30,000 for fencing, path and water.

Can you move the Master Plan to this year? - No, we need to stay on track and make sure we serve the whole community.

Will Dog Park Plus stay open? - It's up to Dr. Parmer and Cook County

I'm concerned with such a small space proposed for a dog park. It may make the space unusable. - Yes, the Park District is concerned too.

Right now we have set a maximum of 200 dog park permits to be issued for use at Ridgeland Dog Park

Mr. Balling thanked everyone for attending and sharing their opinions.