



Park District of Oak Park Taylor Park Community Meeting #1

Subject : Meeting Minutes
Project: Taylor Park
Public Meeting Date: Monday, April 7, 2008
Public Meeting Held: Andersen Center
Date of Minutes: April 9, 2008

Minutes of meeting

1. Mr. Gary Balling, Executive Director of the Park District of Oak Park, opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. He spoke about the overall planning process for our parks and gave background on the work to date. He introduced the members of Altamanu Inc. and Terra Engineering who were to facilitate the meeting. He also introduced Park District Staff, members of the Park District Board and members of the Park District Citizen Committee who were in attendance. Mr. Balling assured the public that they would have many opportunities to give their input during the planning process.
2. Mr. John Mac Manus of the Altamanu Inc. facilitated the meeting and Josephine Bellalta and Julie Smith of Altamanu Inc. took notes and also took part in the meeting.
3. Mr. Mac Manus reviewed the information and opinions recorded at the recent Focus Group meetings and then made a presentation of existing park conditions, the history of the park and a detailed examination of the Jens Jensen design of the park from 1914. The following is an abbreviated version of the presentation.
 - Taylor Park is 11.75 acres, the second largest in the Park District
 - Many of the current site conditions are predicated on the park's history.
 - Taylor Park sits on a terminal moraine. Glacial soils and "rock flour" prevent water absorption and ground water seeps down to the lower areas of the park, flooding some areas.
 - A map from 1912 shows Ridgeland Avenue transversing the park. The remnants of this roadway may be under the surface of the park compounding drainage difficulties.
 - Mr. Mac Manus compared the neo-classical design of Grant Park with the Jens Jensen design for Taylor Park. Both are from the same era but entirely different in character and intent.



- He showed a PowerPoint presentation containing a series of diagrams examining the Jensen design, the character of the design, plants list used, and a comparison with the park today and what remains of the original design. (This presentation can be viewed on the Park District web site)
- The park has changed but the period of highest historic significance is still from the Jensen era.
- The community will decide to what level the historic Jensen's design will determine the future plans for the park.
- A master arborist from Kramer Tree Specialists is part of the design team and will help determine what original plant material remains and assess their quality.
- Hardscape and trails have been added, paths removed and special sequences altered. Shrub massings have been greatly reduced due to security issues and maintenance concerns.
- Soon after construction began changes were made to the plan and park amenities added. The Park District reports from the 1930's include additional tennis courts, softball diamonds, a cricket pitch, a band stand, a water course with bridges as well as floral displays. Over 4,000 people attended an opening ceremony and a concert at the bandstand.
- A review of the focus group issues included flooding, potential to return Ridgeland to its original layout, the moving of the play center and comfort station to the north side of the park and the picnic grove expanded and made more natural, native planting added, the creation of a wetland in the lower, flatter areas including native habitat for birds, the re-grading of the soccer field, potential lights for the soccer field, removal of the "bunker". Police suggested amenities for adolescents i.e., skate spot, and a shelter and storage area for day camp use as currently camps rely heavily on the school.
- The full minutes from the focus group meetings are also on the Park District web site.

General Statements made by the public included:

Realigning Ridgeland straight from Division to Berkshire through the Park

- Putting back the old Ridgeland realignment through the park may cut down on fast traffic moving through the neighborhood to avoid the intersection.
- I live by the park and it would impact the use of the park too much.
- It would bring the end of the sledding hill too close to the road.
- I live on the park and it is already busy; no change in alignment will change that.



- The section of the park separated by the realignment of Ridgeland would create a triangle that could be a dog park.
- Perhaps the traffic issue is really Streets & Sanitation problem, could just be lights & signal adjustments.
- Ridgeland will always be busy, Division is very busy already. People are going around the intersection not because of the shape but more because of the lights.
- If Ridgeland were reconnected, there could be a buffer between noise and homes. Hill for sledding is the only good space for kids, we cannot destroy it.
- Not enough park space in Oak Park, don't give up one inch of the park.
- Don't want to speed up the roads at all.

When a comment regarding the potential for a dog park was made, community members stated they wanted to focus on that issue first. A lengthy discussion took place.

- The Dog Park should be more central to Oak Park; it would attract all kinds of people to the park making parking worse.
- There is a migratory bird path through the park and it would disrupt nature to have a dog park there.
- It is not needed, not necessary.
- People don't clean up after their dogs. This would make it worse.
- There will always be people who do not clean up after their dogs but the people who use the dog park do clean up after their dogs and encourage others to do so.
- When dogs are in the dog park they are better controlled and managed.
- Dog owners are self policing and policing of other owners.
- Why can't they (dog owners) go to Ridgeland?
- The temporary dog park at Ridgeland Common is very small.
- There is a strong possibility that the current master plan for Ridgeland Common may suggest moving the temporary dog park.
- Mr. Balling explained that The Dogs in the Parks Master Plan called for a dog park in the north and one in the south.

The decision of the Park Commissioners about a dog park in Taylor was discussed. Some attendees differed over what the decision of the Park Board was.



- Why is this even an issue? Two years ago wasn't it voted down in Taylor Park?
- The answer is they said it should be examined for potential.
- A temporary Dog Park at Taylor Park was turned down, why waste time and money on this issue again?
- The decision of the Board was clarified by Mr. Dick McKinley who had a detailed knowledge of the issue.
- The board decided that there should not be a temporary dog park in Taylor but that Taylor Park should be evaluated during the master plan process for a permanent dog park and that is what is taking place now.
- I don't want this dog park; it is perfectly simple. Dog owners are asking for another privilege. My dog was attacked by another dog and it knocked my child down.
- I don't want people to mess up the park.
- How much does a dog permit cost, answer was given as \$39.00 a year.
- I am in favor of a dog park. I walk my dog on a leash, I pick up after others, and some people aren't going to obey the law.
- A dog attack should not impact my right to use the park.
- Taylor Park has the great ability for creative play. How do you maintain that with the fencing and still keep the magic of this park.
- Mr. MacManus compared the situation with the dog park that had been built in Prospect Park in Brooklyn, which is an historic Olmsted Park. The design took into account the topography and planting of the park, it has a decorative fence and care was taken to try to integrate it into the overall design.
- I live by the park and for 35 years I have seen 99% of the people not responsive to picking up for their dog.
- How can you keep an open park when you put a dog park next to the tennis courts?
- It would stop the flow of people; inhibit the watching of tennis and watching the kids play next to the kid's park.
- I am interested in families with children, what has been the number of incidences between dogs and people at Ridgeland Park? I would like to hear what they know.
- The answer is that the dog park permit ensures that each dog is vaccinated; it keeps the dogs safe with each other. Ridgeland Common has never had a situation between people and dogs; they have had one dog



to dog incident where the owner of the aggressive dog said they will never bring their dog back to the park.

- The number of people who own dogs is a minority and the majority of park users have kids. We should not make it a good place for a minority.
- The park will still have people walking dogs around the park.
- The suggestion to place the dog park close to the tennis courts was first made because there was talk of moving the play center to the north side of the park. As this was an important issue, the Board decided to wait for the master plan.
- Many people are not in favor of the Dog Park. It has been seen that many people let dogs run in the park and in the tennis courts.
- Would a large enough space be made for the dogs without taking away from other areas of the park?
- Not everyone has that easy access to a park; we walk our dog to all of the parks for good exercise including Taylor. The park is used that way in absence of a place (for the dogs) to go.
- Use your back yard
- Many people do not have a back yard
- Too bad if you don't have a backyard, don't get a dog then.
- Dogs need exercise; putting too many dogs in one backyard would be hard.
- The tennis courts are very often utilized, would it excite the dogs?
- A lot of dogs need somewhere to go.
- I am opposed to the dog park, Jens Jensen did a beautiful job, and it would mess up the flow. It would not be good enough and it is not worth it. The space is not adequate to be a good dog park; our precious park space should not be used to make a private area. It's a personal pet, why expect the village to build something for your pets.
- Recreate native planting
- I'm not pro or against, how is the temporary park policed? How/who will monitor in Taylor Park?
- The electronic lock code is given when you get your permit. That is your pass to the park. Without it you cannot enter.
- The dog park can only be used by Oak Park residents
- I live one block over from Taylor Park. I would rather have a park used for people, and more playground equipment is needed.
- Going green, can we be more environmentally conscious?



- This would change the look of the park. Where will people (that come to the dog park) park?
- The park should stay what it is.
- Take a survey in the room to find out what people will want, for or against.
- That would only show what people want in this room. Many more are not here and deserve to be part of the decision.
- There will be an online questionnaire where you can give your opinion about the all the issues, the information is on the flier and is at www.oakparkparks.com
- I'm a resident across from the park, and cars pull up and let dogs out, quite a number of them don't pick up after their dogs.
- The park is so overused already that parking only on a few sides is available. Garbage is everywhere.
- There will be more cars to bring the dogs; parking will have to be addressed.
- Oak Park is so underserved by open space that it is an issue to everybody.
- Mr. Mac Manus stated that the parks and all public property should be open to all of our citizens. Many do not have access to parks close to their homes and they have to travel to get to a park. Access to public property is for everyone.
- I live two and a half blocks from Taylor Park. Diversity is the selling point in this community; you meet people and make friends within the community. The dog park is also about people and making relationships with people you wouldn't always meet.
- Yes dog parks do promote community.
- I am a senior citizen and retiree who uses the parks with grandchildren, the origin of the park and integrity of the original design are important. I am against a dog park.
- I think it's catering to the interest of one group of people.
- It will smell, be noisy and they bite.
- I live across the street from the park and I find pleasure in watching the dogs play in the park, I think its fine the way it is.
- We are victims. Even a happy dog is scary to a 6 year old.
- Tennis is for a specialized group. It has areas fenced off for a minority; maybe people could put tennis courts in their own backyard.



- Dog owners are good people. A good place for dog parks in the NE section that floods a lot, on the strip of land by Ridgeland, dogs could go in that area as most people don't use it.
- Let's open discussion to other elements

It was decided by the attendees that no decision on the dog park would be made at this meeting and that other issues should be discussed:

- What about the idea for a wetland in the area that already floods?
- It's a beautiful setting for the wetlands, but we need more detail of what that means. What will it look like?
- There are a series of areas in the Chicago Parks that have been naturalized
- It would provide a different environment for birds.
- I like the idea, but want to know more. Is there a safety hazard? What about West Nile, kids drowning?
- We should make the large open area on the top more usable, can these areas be useable (drained)?
- It used to be a baseball field, in 1986/87. When the soccer field went in, it was a drought year, but the following year you could sink up to your knees in it. 200-300 tons of clay etc has been added to stabilize it.
- In July and August grass would get killed; so there is a method to moving the soccer field/changing the orientation to prevent erosion.
- MWRD doesn't want to get more water; it is a very complicated problem, taking in too much, getting rid of some.
- When the playground was made, we dug a hole and there was 6' of topsoil you could eat with a spoon, and then we hit solid blue clay, never got deep enough to get rid of water. The hole filled up with water on top of the hill.
- Would water area attract snakes?
- South Oak Park residents would like a natural area for my child to play. Attendee referenced the book "Last Child in the Woods." I want my kid to play in the woods and to have those sorts of experiences.
- Maybe Jens Jensen did research on soil?
- It seems that Scoville Park was more researched; Taylor Park was just a farmland area at the time.
- Think about what is a park; at 6am walking is peaceful.
- We need a passive park refuge, we need to be sensitive to the overuse and have a balance of what a park should be.



- I moved to Oak Park because of the history of the area, try to reintroduce earlier (historic) elements.
- There used to be a chain of pools, streams, bridges, along the north edge. It was not natural but quite lovely; the water went down the hill and was collected in a basin and pumped back to the top.
- Maybe we can have water features to collect the excess ground water?
- There was a watercourse until the 1950's, polio scare knocked it out.
- In the late 60's early 70's a lot of the shrubs were removed since you couldn't see thru them. It was a security issue.
- You want to be able to see into the park. The Jensen areas may make families with small children nervous.
- We need balance in the park, it is very difficult to use swampy areas of the park, try to make upper parts more useable.
- I want a beautiful natural area, explore the idea of using Jensen's philosophy and not use a lot of concrete.
- Bring back discovery and magic.
- We want kids to play soccer but area is completely swamped, flooding is a big problem, people go to other communities, keep grass by control of irrigation. I have seen the irrigation system on during wet times, during times when there should be games.
- There are leaks in the irrigation system, the irrigation head is on a swing arm and is easily disrupted.
- The system has been on a timer and now has a rain sensor so that it turns off when there is precipitation.
- Is the system outdated, yes or no?
- Yes, but I am trying to keep it going.
- This is the only dedicated soccer field in the park district. There is year round use here and it is also used as ball fields.
- I agree that there are demands on park district, tots, dogs, sports, etc. but the needs of the community should be accommodated without having a winner take all.
- Balance, not a majority rules or strongest opinion rules, have an understanding of what the community needs.
- Balance? environment issues, exploration in nature, Dog Park where will it go?
- Skate dot, could that go somewhere in the park? (no answer)
- Mature trees have been lost; will the new trees be faster growing.



- The arborist will assess what we have and will advise us on what needs to be replaced and what will do well as well as making recommendations for what should be preserved.
- There are many memorial trees; preserve them.
- It may be obvious but retain the series of walkways for passive use, maintain a wonderful walking facility.
- Playground - what needs to be done?
- Balance fixed objects for kids
- Create interesting play areas for exploration

Mr. Balling brought the meeting to a close. He thanked all the attendees and stated:

- Altamanu will come back with at least 3 different plans for the park. They will take your ideas and information from the questionnaire and present the potential designs at the next meeting on May 5.

However some residents continued to make comments

- The picnic area should be kept, very popular, it is the only one in park system you can cook at.
- Trash ends up in neighboring homes; I have seen grills moved to other areas of the park.
- Can some of the money be spent on security? There should be 24 hour security at the park, maybe a bike patrol.

Mr. Mac Manus thanked the attendees and said that Altamanu Inc. would have at least three concept plans for discussion at the next public meeting.

END OF MEETING NOTES