# DOGS IN THE PARKS

**A MASTER PLAN**

# Public Meeting February 8th 2006

## INTRO - QUOTES ON THE DOG PARK ISSUE AND PROCESS

"Even in the most tranquil of park settings, land wars can break out between opposing factions with vastly different ideas of how to use available space".

*Gary W. Cramer ASL*A

"the skyrocketing support for creating places to let dogs run free"… "is the hottest new city park issue to hit America". But in some cases "the dog park issue has badly fragmented a city, while in others it has been resolved harmoniously, even adding potency to the park constituency".

*Peter Harnik Program Director, Center for City Park Excellence, Washington DC*

"All of us from the Park District, working in partnership with the community of Oak Park intent to resolve this issue harmoniously for the benefit for all".

*Gary F. Balling, Executive Director,* Park District of Oak Park

PARK DISTRICT OF OAK PARK

*In partnership with the community, we provide quality parks and recreation experiences for the residents of Oak Park.*

**EXTRACTS FROM SANTA BARBARA POSITION PAPER SUPPORTING THE CREATION OF A DOG PARK**

**"Watching your dog interact with other canines can turn an afternoon into a fascinating lesson in pack behavior.**

**The best place for this interaction is a "dog park." These parks are fenced areas set aside for dogs to meet and play under the watchful eyes of their owners".**

**Dog owners are a substantial group of park users: Other groups - skateboarders for example - have been given special consideration. The overwhelming numbers of dogs and dog owners would seem to warrant consideration**

**Dog owners are as legitimate as any other interest group, and that their needs should be taken as an integral part of the city's decision making process.**

**For many single and elderly people a dog not only provides companionship but often is the only source of home and personal security.**

**Dogs need to be properly socialized in appropriate behavior (Canine Behavior, 1965). They also need regular outings to reduce boredom and pent-up energy at home.**

**That in an era when people are often reluctant or afraid to approach or converse with a stranger, off-leash exercise areas bring people together and create a greater sense of *community*.**

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## Design Criteria and Recommendations

**from representatives of various Park Districts.**

**SIZE**

- The park should be as big as possible considering the demand and available space. Manhattan has a series of Dog Runs of about 15,000 sq ft each and some parks at $20,000 to 25,000 sq ft including 3 dog runs that are located in historic parks.
- Chicago Park District advises at least ½ an acre or 21,780 sq ft, however they have some informal sites that are more local dog runs than parks.
- Park Ridge's park is 19,000 sq ft
- Oak Park Park District has suggested two sites of ½ acre each.

**DESIGN** ("Aesthetics are needed for Acceptance" *Barry Goodinson Green Spaces DC*)

- Great care should be taken to integrate the dog park into the design of the parks. This is important in Oak Park due to the historic significance of some of our parks.
- In New York dog runs were integrated into historic parks such as Riverside Park; fencing, view corridors, planting and topography were all considered.
- Many communities in this area have avoided this issue by choosing left over open spaces, semi industrial open spaces or spaces that are not in the public's view.
- Oak Park does not have many such sites to consider

**FENCES**

- A 4 ft fence with mesh so that small dogs and tennis balls can't pass through. NY
- A flexible fence so that dogs can crash into it. DC
- We have heard from other Park Departments that tennis balls retain moisture and saliva and are a health hazard for dogs. Park Ridge
- Some dog parks in highly visible locations in Washington DC have decorative metal fences to fit into the design vocabulary of the parks. " Less like an animal pen" *Marie Chu, DC*
- The dog parks we visited in this area had various types of fencing material, cyclone and softer mesh being the most common.

**PARK ELEMENTS**

- A double gated air lock entryway to allow an area to leash and unleash dogs. This area should be paved to prevent erosion.
- A separate utility gate for maintenance trucks
- A bulletin board where park rules and other information can be posted.
- A dispenser for "mutt mutt" gloves and plastic bags. (Many Parks Districts do not supply there items). The entryways to some dog parks can appear unsightly due to a profusion of plastic bags along fences.
- Main dog park should have sub-areas for small, timid, or old dogs. These can be used as time-out areas for aggressive dogs when empty. Also agility areas with exercise equipment.
- Need water features for dogs and drinking fountains for people and hose bibs for maintenance. (Some dog parks have sprinklers, French have doggie toilets )
- Topography to add interest for dogs and people. The edge of the Berm at Ridgeland Commons is popular.
- Shade, provided by trees and if not possible some sort of shading device or screen
- Add a viewing pad or path as "We always find that pedestrians that do not have dogs will stop to watch… and smile". *John Herrold NY Parks*

**VEGETATION AND EROSION**

- Mature trees and vegetation can survive within most dog parks but new vegetation will not last
- Add shrubbery and other plantings around the perimeter to soften the visual impact
- Erosion and digging usually kill most vegetation
- Some dogs dig in specific areas forming holes that can become drainage problems
- Fence of trees and areas of vegetation that must be preserved.
- Need enough space so that areas can be cordoned off and rotated (not likely in Oak Park due to lack of space)

**GROUND PLANE MATERIAL**

(Mix of materials in recommended by Harvey Rubenstein of Tetra Tech)

- Grass and dirt in large dog parks where areas in use can be rotated
  Issues:
  Most natural and suitable for dogs
  Potential erosion problems and then mud
  Dogs dig pot holes leading to drainage problems

- Wood chips are very common in urban dog parks
  Issues:
  Relatively inexpensive and material is easy to obtain and replenish
  They can spread
  Need to be changed often (?) as they absorb urine and can smell
  Soft but can be sharp and hurt paws

## GROUND PLANE MATERIAL CONTINUED

- Paved Asphalt/Concrete
  Issues
  Easily cleaned but tough on dogs
  Large areas of either can be unsightly

- Pea Gravel
  Issues
  More expensive
  Spreads, does not compact well
  But could be used with other materials "wood chips could ring a center, more durable area" *John Herrold NY Parks*

- Stone Screenings/Stone Dust
  Issues
  Expensive
  Compacts and binds forming a solid surface but soft enough for dogs
  Can be aesthetically suitable for parks
  Needs to be replenished every few years
  Gets dusty and dust blows, wet down and keep away from paths and play areas
  "Stone Dust washed by sprinklers every night". *Proposal Village Voice NY.*

- Synthetic turf is to be used at South Gate Street in DC
  Issues
  Aesthetically pleasing but very, very expensive

## MAIN CONCERNS OF PUBLIC AT LARGE

- "The concern on everyone's mind …is feces". *Brian Smart Utah State University*

- "Traditional composting does not work" *Brian Smart Utah State University*
  Suggests dog-waste composters see "City Farmer" web site www.cityfarmer.org

- "The interface of children and dogs creates a bit of hysteria. *Brian Smart*

- Use of limited space for a single activity especially in underserved areas is always a cause for concern

- Aesthetic Issues,
  Visual impact - needs to integrated into site
  Potential smell - must be well maintained
  Noise - Berkeley site of the first dog park established bark free quiet hours 2004

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**NOTES FROM THE DOG PARK TOUR**
(Accompanied by PowerPoint images at public meeting)

**Park Ridge**
19,000 sq ft
Site partially concealed by buildings and pool fence
Has a double gate
Cyclone fencing
Plastic bags unsightly
Completely covered by wood chips that are spreading
Dogs like to dig holes leading to drainage problems
Some benches and tables
Dogs like to run around them

**Beck Lake**
Site is regional and very large not an appropriate comparison

**Skokie**
Park is a grassy area, large enough to fence off areas to recover
Separate areas for agility training and young dogs
Using French drains to counter drainage issues
Occasionally have to ban certain dogs
Most of their problems are with the humans not the dogs
Provide bags- 2,200 bags for $72
Fee $35
Use an owner's pass system, Vermont system
Insist on knowing which dogs are and are not spade
Use puppy area for time outs
Dog treats allowed but no food
No children