Altamanu

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Date: April 26, 2006
Project: Dogs in the Parks, Master Plan
Subject: Altamanu Inc.'s recommendations

Introduction

We at Altamanu Inc. were very pleased to be selected by the Park District of Oak Park to assist in the development a master plan for "Dogs in the Parks" using an extensive public participation process. We were very aware, from the outset of this project, that the creation of dog parks in the limited acreage of our parks would be a contentious issue and we hoped our involvement would assist our community in finding consensus if not total agreement on this issue. Our aim was to follow Mr. Gary Balling's directive that "all of us at the Park District, working in partnership with the community of Oak Park, intend to resolve this issue harmoniously for the benefit of all".

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

Process.

Mr. Balling wished the process to be as open as possible and to give the public every reasonable forum for comment. The public commented at Community and Neighborhood Meetings, through Email and mail, surveys and personal comments. The process was also covered by the local media and potential plans of various sites were reproduced in local newspapers. The following is an abbreviated outline of that process: (see minutes on web site)

Jan 06

- Park District established Working Group, made up of Park District staff and representatives of Altamanu Inc., FOOPD and the community to guide the process
- 2 Working Group meetings held and tour of dog parks in the Area
- Altamanu Inc. carried out nationwide research for examples of the design criteria and public processes used to create dog parks and the positive and negative results.
- Altamanu Inc. met with Chicago Park District staff and toured and photographed Chicago's dog parks and discussed their planning process.
- John Mac Manus of Altamanu Inc. attended and briefly presented at a FOOPD public meeting
- Developed three pages of criteria to evaluate the potential sites
- Investigated 25 public and private potential sites in Oak Park

Feb 06

- Community Meeting #1 - Information collected to date was presented and suitability of sites discussed. Attendees made comments and suggested sites.
- 2 Working Group meetings held to assess information gathered and public comment
- Tour and assessment of potential Oak Park sites

March 06

- Working Group meetings to discuss potential sites
- Community Meeting #2 to present 5 sites for consideration
- Focus Group meeting held with representatives from VOP and Community Organizations
- Working Group meetings to discuss input from Community Meetings and Focus Group
- Altamanu Inc. researched historic significance of sites
- Contacted Dr. Parmer from the Cook County Department of Animal & Rabies Control
- Altamanu Inc. discussed historic significance of sites with Park/Landscape Historians
- On-going discussions with PD about process and sites

April 06

- 4 Site/Neighborhood meetings held to discuss specific sites at Maple, Stevenson, Taylor and Ridgeland. Citizens input recorded
- Working Group meetings to review public input
- Revised design of specific sites
- Presented 5 sites to Park Board and PDCC

May 06

- Community Meeting #3 held to present recommendations
- Presentation to Park Board at Committee of the Whole Meeting
- Park Board to consider action on a final plan at Regular Park Board Meeting

Summary of Recommendations

Our final recommendations are 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. 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 that was developed by the Park District of Oak Park.
The recommendation are :

1. **Need for 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.

2. **Local Dog Park Sites**

a. Central Site 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 used Ridgeland was stressed.

b. Northern Site at Taylor Park

The mapping of dog licenses, provided by the Village, displays an even distribution of dog ownership throughout the village; however, FOOPD members and users of the current Dog Park at Ridgeland Common are more concentrated in the central and northern sections of Oak Park. In the past off-leash dog hours were available at Lindberg Park and this fostered the development of a sense of "community" and privilege amongst the dog owners who used the park. The discontinuation of off-leash hours at Lindberg Park by the Cook County Department of Animal Control therefore had a severe impact on this community.

Lindberg Park, when the criteria were applied, did not provide a potential location for a permanent, single use, enclosed site and therefore the interest in a potential site at Taylor Park grew exponentially. Also, many dog owners stated that Taylor Park would be their first choice if Dog Park Plus was not available at Ridgeland Common.

The site at Taylor is located directly east of the tennis courts. This site, in our opinion, 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 at Altamanu Inc. also 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.

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c. Southern Site at Maple Park

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 utlizes 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. We can only speculate as to why this support was not evident as there are many dog owners in the community. Suggestions have been made by residents of the area, these include : Some dog owners (in this section of the community) use the dog park in Forest Park, others have not been as involved in Dog Park Plus to the same degree as residents to the north and therefore the dog owner culture has not AS YET developed in the area.

d. South Central 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.

This is a summary of our findings. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely:

John Mac Manus
VP Altamanu, Inc.

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