Altamanu

Date: April 14th, 2006
Project: Dogs in the Parks, Master Plan
Public Meeting Date: Wednesday April 12th, 2006
Public Meeting Held: Ridgeland Common, 7pm
Subject: A potential permanent Dog Park in Ridgeland Common

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
    - Time line for individual Site Master Plans for all the parks

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 or more than 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 showing 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.

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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
    - Stevenson at the SE corner between the reservoir and multi-use space and the elevated rail lines.
    - Maple Park

5. He then opened the meeting up for discussion. All members of the public in attendance were in favor of a permanent dog park at Ridgeland Common. Statements made by the public at the meeting included:
    - The Dog Park Plus use of Ridgeland Common is very important to Dog owners.
    - It promotes a sense of community and it allows larger dogs to get much needed exercise.
    - Mr. Mac Manus stated that the problem is, though Dog Park Plus is very popular, Cook County and specifically Dr. Parmer will not allow shared use of an area that dogs are allowed off-leash.
    - Mr. Balling addressed this issue. The system in Oak Park of shared use at specific times had worked for 15 to 20 years. He said it was now in the hands of Cook County. Dr Parmer had been invited to attend the focus group meeting to discuss this issue but he was unable to attend and Mr. Balling asked John Mac Manus to call Dr Parmer and discuss Dog Park Plus.
    - Mr. Mac Manus informed the meeting that Dr Parmer stated that Oak Park would have to abide by the regulations and he did not think that Dog Park Plus could continue once a permanent site was established.
    - A resident stated that Dr Parmer has his own convictions, but others may see it differently.
    - We should keep Dog Park Plus until it is officially stopped by Cook County.
    - Why can't we expand the existing dog park at Ridgeland?
    - Because the park is used for Base Ball, Sports Camp, marching bands and many other uses.
    - Can we use more of the berm? The dogs love to climb.
    - Mr. Grandy stated that the berm was used in winter for sledding and the rest of the year by runners who use it for training.
    - Other members of the audience concurred with Mr. Grandy.
    - Mr. Balling stated that long-term use would be decided as part of the master plan public process. The master plan that will take place next year.
    - There are many issues Cook County has to address. Oak Park and other built out communities face the same problems of density, lack of green space and over use. We need Cook County to consider a regional dog park in this general area.
    - What happened to the Cook County plan to open a dog park in Thatcher Woods?

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- Mr. Balling was not sure why this plan was no longer acceptable to Cook County.
- Why don't we just ignore Cook County?
- Mr. Balling stated that non compliance with Cook County regulations raises the issue of liability and safety which was a major concern for the Park District.
- I think that two ¼ acre parks will not be enough.
- They have to be large enough to throw Frisbees and really exercise our dogs.
- Mr. Mac Manus stated that it would be wonderful if Oak Park could provide residents with unlimited space but unfortunately Oak Park is very underserved by green space. Mr. Mac Manus stated that he felt sorry for people who had gotten used to being able to let their dogs run off-leash at Lindberg Park in particular. It is a beautiful and a large park. And he realized that it must be very difficult for people to now get used to such small spaces. However, that is the situation at present. Every inch of green space in Oak Park is precious to the community.
- How about expanding the hours for Dog Park Plus?
- How about expanding the hours during the off season when few people use the park? Mr. Balling stated that the Park District could consider it.
- Erosion is a major issue. We may put out cones to get dog owners to use different areas of the turf and prevent erosion of the turf.
- Mr. Grandy spoke about the difficulties the PD faces in keeping grass growing on the overused fields, the problems of constant use and the severe problems of erosion in the parks.
- What about using an expanded space off season and then taking down fences when needed.
- This could be a labor intensive solution
- What if the public takes down the fences?
- That seems like a great idea in the beginning but over time people move or lose interest and then the Park District has to take over the job. It is not sustainable.
- What about we rotate the dog park plus to other parks and that way reduce erosion?
- I wish we had other parks we could rotate to. There just isn't enough space.
- How many people use the dog park at Ridgeland?
- We have 200 passes for the park and we have started to turn people away.
- It is not unusual for the Park District to have waiting lists. We have them for gym and sports camp.
- The issues we face at Ridgeland are the multiple uses and how the Dog Park will affect other uses such as Base Ball and Sports Camp.
- The PD has put up netting to prevent balls going into the Dog Park
- It is good to have adjacent uses. Mr. Balling stated that a dog park in Maple Park might help with the community's safety concerns. He stated that parks are always safer when they are well used.
- The Park District should map all the dog licenses to determine densities etc.

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- Mr. Balling stated that it was a good idea but PD staff were working very long hours and getting ready for peak season. This is not a good time for additional work.
- How many dog parks will we have?
- Even if they are small it would be good to have at least three – South , Central and North
- We will have to see. There used to be servere erosion at Ridgeland and the PD does not want to back slide by trying to do too much. We have up to 50 games per week as well as marching bands. We irrigate and over seed and it is a constant battle for Park staff to keep grass growing. Now we will be adding more work for park staff.
- Why not use cement in the Dog Park?
- There was a concern at Ridgeland that the concrete was too hard particularly on old dogs and the PD installed wood chips.
- Though the mulch is easily obtainable we have to change it which adds to the maintenance and cost.
- Won't our fees pay for it?
- The fees go towards the cost of permitting, paper work as well as maintenance. And then there are the costs of the fencing and other potential costs such as a new water line.
- Yes we need water in the dog park, for both dogs and owners.
- What does the High School use the field for? Don't they have their new field with artificial turf?
- Yes but there has been expansion in sports at the High School due to Title 9.
- Have there been any complaints about the dog park or Dog Park Plus?
- No official complaints but people are watching
- Could we share with River Forest?
- Ridgeland is a temporary solution but it is the best we have. It is better than Taylor because of Dog Park Plus.
- Taylor is the closest park to me but I prefer to come here because of Dog Park Plus.
- Couldn't we use the park more in winter?
- Many attendees agreed that they would prefer Dog Park Plus at Ridgeland than a small park at Taylor.
- Let's keep Ridgeland until the master plan.

6. Mr. Balling summed up, thanked the public for attending, stressed that the Park District wants to hear from the community and encouraged the attendees to remain involved. He then reminded the attendees of the dates of the next meetings and encouraged all to attend.