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Disclaimer

The purpose of Unleashed: Off-leash Dog Park Design Trends and Planning Tips, is to provide education and considerations about incorporating off-leash dog parks into communities. This is not to be considered as an all-inclusive resource. Please refer to manufacturer specifications and safety warnings for all equipment. While our intent is to provide general resources to encourage communities to include off-leash dog parks as a recreational option for dog owners and their dogs, the authors, advisors, program directors, and contributors disclaim any liability based on information contained in this publication. Site managers are responsible to inspect, maintain, repair, and manage site-specific elements, and to ensure that trainers and program directors employed on-site are certified in the fields in which they provide programming. PlayCore and its divisions provide these comments as a public service in the interest of building healthier communities through play and recreation, while advising of the restricted context in which it is given.

• • • Executive Summary

Value and Benefits of Off-Leash Dog Parks

Dog ownership in the U.S. has grown significantly over the last several decades and evidence suggests that parks where dogs can roam freely off-leash are the fastest growing segment of urban parks. From 2005 to 2010, the largest 100 U.S. cities saw a 34% increase in dog parks. Of those cities that currently do not offer dog parks, 26.7% have stated that they plan to add a dog park to their facilities within the next three years.

Benefits associated with the creation of dog parks impact dog owners, dogs, and the communities where these parks are located. Dog parks keep individuals fit and active, increase their enjoyment of the outdoors, and help to increase social connectivity among people living in the area.

Design Considerations

To ensure a dog park is meaningful to the community as well as to dogs and their owners, a variety of planning and design considerations should be taken into account. Adequate drainage and selecting the proper surfacing is critical, but thoughtful selection of plantings, landscaping, exercise/agility training equipment, and site amenities will significantly increase usability and comfort. Moreover, choosing the right type of fence, gates, and access will further differentiate the dog park. After the dog park has been designed, a maintenance plan should be established for proper upkeep of the facility, and rules should be put in

place to ensure cooperative and acceptable behavior from both dogs and owners.

Planning and Implementation Strategies

In order to promote a new dog park in the community, a strategic, collaborative development plan with support from the community must be put into action. Draw a plan to identify the needs of the community and to explore additional mechanisms for long-term success of the dog park. Focus on forming partnerships and organizing fundraising events, including individuals in the community and dog related businesses, to accelerate the ability to execute the plan. Outlining a marketing plan is an important element of the overall success of the dog park to ensure potential users know where the park is located, the hours of operation, and other relative information regarding the dog park.

Marketing and Programming

Once the dog park is open, keep the community involved through special events that involve dog owners, dogs, and even those that do not own a pet. Providing an array of opportunities for people to enjoy themselves and others is of importance to create a more cohesive community. Well-planned programming could increase awareness of the park as well.



• • • A Call to Action

The growth of dog ownership in the U.S., and the growing interest in family activities that involve the family pet indicate that it is time to consider building dog parks that provide a space for like-minded pet owners and their dogs to gather and socialize. For the 37% - 46% of family households that own at least one dog, the presence of a dog park in the community, housing complex, workplace, or hospitality agency may influence their choices for recreational behavior. To learn more about building a dog park, refer to the References & Resources in the back of this book.

For more information, please visit: www.playcore.com/unleashed-dog-park-design.html.

Value & Benefits

The Value of Dog Parks

According to the 2015 City Park Facts report by The Trust for Public Land,¹ parks where dogs can roam freely off-leash are the fastest growing segment of urban parks; the reports shows that off-leash dog parks grew 6% in 2014 alone and increased 20% in the last 5 years. Others agree that there has been an increase of dog parks, an urban park type, across the U.S. From 2005 to 2010, the largest 100 U.S. cities saw a 34% increase in dog parks.² There are more than 1,000 off-leash dog parks in the U.S. and many park districts are considering developing dog parks in their communities.³ The recent Recreation Management State of the Industry Report⁴ states that 32.1% (a 3% increase from 2013) of parks sampled for the article include

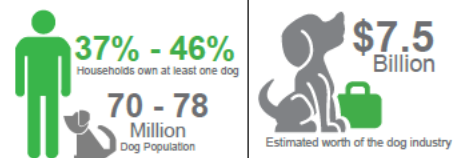
dog parks; if they currently did not offer dog parks, 26.7% of respondents stated that they plan to add a dog park to their facilities over the next three years. The development of dog parks is reflected in demographic changes as well: Pet ownership in the U.S. has more than tripled since the 70's when approximately 67 million households had pets, compared to 164 million in 2012, for a 62% increase over 40 years of American households that owned at least one pet. This outnumbers the amount of homes with children, internet connections, or DVD players.⁵ According to the American Humane Society, between 37% to 46% of households own at least one dog with an estimated U.S. dog population of 70 to 78 million.⁶ Of those that own dogs, 70% have one, while 20% own two dogs, and 10% own three or more dogs.⁷

Dog Parks

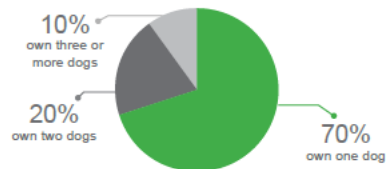
Cities with the highest per capita numbers of off-leash dog parks among the nation's 100 largest cities:

City	Per 100,000 residents	Number of dog parks
Portland, OR	5.4	33
Norfolk, VA	4.5	11
Madison, WI	4.1	10
Henderson, NV	4.1	11
Las Vegas, NV	3.6	22
Arlington, VA	3.6	8
San Francisco, CA	3.5	29
Tampa, FL	2.8	10
St. Petersburg, FL	2.4	6
Jersey City, NJ	2.3	6

Source: The Trust for Public Land, 2015 City Park Facts



Source: NRPA, The Truth About Parks and Dogs



There is an array of studies, reports, proposals, and articles regarding the benefits of dog parks; benefits of off-leash dog parks involve not only the dog owners but the dogs and their communities. At the individual level, being outdoors in a dog park offers a diversity of therapeutic, physiological, psychosocial, and psychological benefits. Emerging research suggests pet ownership impacts the individual, and that there are "collective benefits that accrue to communities through the presence of pets, benefits that extend beyond pet owners themselves."^{8p-44p} It has been found that owning a pet is directly linked to fewer visits to the doctor and improved overall health.⁵ Additionally, there are recreational benefits to pet ownership; it has been found that individuals who own a pet are more likely to participate in activities outdoors; they tend to be more active – therefore healthier than other individuals, tend to be more sociable even with individuals they do not know well, and pet ownership enhances individuals' well-being.⁸⁻¹¹

Health and Well-Being Benefits

It is no surprise that dogs make a difference in the lives of individuals. It has been stated that dogs have been linked to reduced occurrences of psychological conditions, including depression, stress, and grief.^{5,2} Dogs are seen as companions and even best friends for some; therefore, dog parks are important outlets for humans, as they provide recreational opportunities and bring together dog lovers, individuals of all ages, and individuals of diverse socioeconomic status.

In recent years, there has been an accumulation of evidence that associates dogs with physical, mental, and social dimensions of human health.⁵ Dog parks may provide a safe place for older people or people with disabilities who may not be able to walk their dogs; dog parks provide areas where dogs can exercise and run freely while their owners can socialize. In addition, spending time with their dogs at the dog park reinforces the dog-owner bond.

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Even though it has been shown there are countless benefits to physical activity, only 30% of adult Americans report they actually engage in physical activity during their leisure time, while 40% of adult Americans state they do not engage in any physical activity at all.¹³ Moreover, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that fewer than two in 10 Americans get the recommended levels of regular exercise.¹⁴ Therefore, providing recreation solutions are extremely important.^{9(p-311)} Research also shows that "dog walking is an example of purposive physical activity and has been examined as a mechanism for promoting moderate physical activity." In addition, authors indicated that there is "evidence [suggesting] that promoting dog walking could address physical inactivity and obesity."^{9(p-311)P} Others go even further in stating that dogs and dog walking provides physical health benefits linked to a decrease in risks of cardiovascular diseases such as hypertension and high cholesterol.





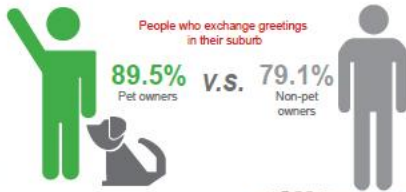
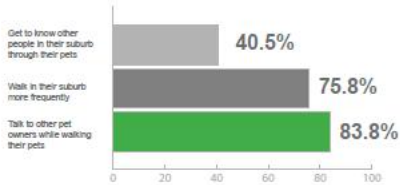
Sitting areas provide a welcoming environment for social engagement among dog owners and their dogs.

Social and Community Benefits

Dog parks can be seen as social capital catalysts; these green open spaces bring people "out and about" by promoting walkable neighborhoods and an enhanced sense of community. In addition, communities have seen a positive effect on the visible presence of individuals walking with their dogs and the impetus dogs provide for their owners to walk; this generates an increased feeling of collective safety. Further research explains that "animal presence can facilitate human social approach, increase the likelihood of social contact, and serve as a conversation trigger between strangers or casual acquaintances."^{5ip-45p}

To further define the social and community benefits, it was found that a total of 40.5% of pet owners indicated that they had become acquainted with other people in their suburb through their pets. Three quarters of dog owners (75.8%) indicated that owning a dog encouraged them to walk in their suburb more frequently. Of those who walked their dogs, more than four-fifths (83.8%) talked to other pet owners when doing so. Pet owners were more likely to

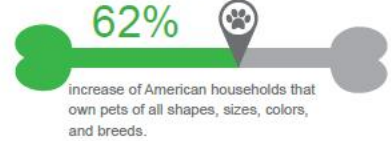
feel that people in their suburb generally say hello to each other, 89.5% of pet owners compared with 79.1% of non-pet owners [p = 0.008].^{5ip-48}



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Are **Pets** Good for Your **Health**?

Love, companionship, and sloppy kisses are just a few of the reasons people own pets. There has been a



Pets Are **Good** for You

Pets have proven to be **good for your health** in many ways:

Heart Health

Studies show that people with pets have healthier heart rates and blood pressure.

Stress Reduction

Pet owners have less stress and recover more quickly from it.

Weight Management

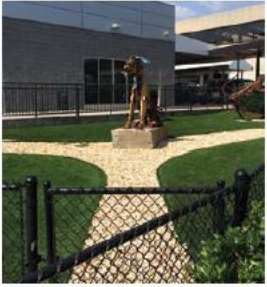
Dog owners are less likely to be obese, due to being more physically active when walking their pets.

Cholesterol Levels

Studies show that owning a pet can decrease cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure.

Sources: http://seattletimes.com/html/health/2014550627_webpets22.html

Location & Context



Hartsfield-Jackson Airport in Atlanta is one of a few that offers a dog park on their grounds.



Rest areas have started offering accommodations for drivers and their dogs (Photo courtesy of The Shenanigans of Shaanice the Shepherd Dog).



Selected restaurants offer specialized menu items for dogs (Photo courtesy of Telegraph Media Group).

Airports / Airlines

Traveling with dogs takes planning. While air travel can be a fast way to get from one place to another, airlines have varying guidelines about traveling with dogs. Some airlines allow small dogs to travel in the cabin in pet carriers that fit under a seat, although other airlines only allow pets in the cargo area. Fees also vary from free up to \$500. Airlines may allow one or two dogs per flight, but planning in advance is a must. If you decide to travel by plane with your dog, selected airports in the U.S. offer off-leash dog parks on their properties. Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Airport has established a 1,000 sq. ft. dog park outside the ground transportation area. The space is fully fenced and offers two original art pieces, flowers, grass, rocks, benches, and biodegradable bags. Operated by the City of Santa Monica, CA, their Airport Park Dog Park offers separate, fenced-in areas for large and small dogs. It offers impeccable landscaping, woodchip surfacing, and free parking. Maintenance is performed every morning to keep the area tidy and free of odor.

Rest Areas

Although some people may travel by plane, others may prefer traveling by car. Traveling on the open road can be rather daunting especially if faced with stops, traffic, accidents, and the like. Add to that an energetic dog in the back seat, and the need for periodic stops is made very

clear. Finding accommodations may not be as difficult as it was in the past, but finding dog parks at rest areas along the highway that welcome drivers and their pets may be challenging. In the East Coast and along I-95, most rest areas allow dogs but currently do not have fenced-in dog parks. Roanoke Rapids, NC, rest area at the Halifax County Visitor Center off of exit 173 offers two fenced-in areas – one for small dogs and one for larger dogs – where dogs can stretch their legs while on a road trip. The Oklahoma Welcome Center Dog Park is located at mile marker 9 on I-40 in Erick, OK, just after crossing the state line into Oklahoma. They provide a divided area for small and large dogs, small trash bags, shade, grass surfacing, and water fountains. These spaces have dog water bowls, and offer the opportunity to socialize with other travelers.

Eateries

While on the road, visiting restaurants could be a fun way to spend some time with friends and family. For those individuals that do not want to leave their dogs at a hotel or at home, coffee shops, brew pubs, and restaurants are also catering to dog owners. Some city rules permit dogs to visit eateries but only in outdoor seating areas. Some eateries are going above and beyond by allowing dogs to have dinner alongside their owners and choose from a specialized dog menu.

Corporate Settings

Considering the many benefits of dog-ownership, thinking about establishing a dog-friendly work environment may be of importance. More than ever employers and employees are starting to acknowledge the advantages and benefits of allowing pets in the workplace. Even the growing body of research on the topic is supportive of this trend. According to a recent study conducted at the Virginia Commonwealth University¹⁷, employees who bring their dogs to the workplace experience less stress during the day. In this study conducted at a company in Greensboro, NC where 20 to 30 dogs are present daily, it was found that as the work day went on, stress for employees with dogs present declined as it did for those individuals that were not pet-owners. For dog owners who did not bring their dogs to work, the stress level increased significantly during the afternoon and by the end of the day.

Besides designing programs that allow employees to bring their dogs to work, businesses are also designing off-leash areas to be used by them. A national poll of working Americans conducted in 2008 by the American Pet Products Association (APPA) showed that 17% of



Research has shown that bringing your dog to the workplace decreases stress levels.

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companies allow pets in the workplace. APPA also stated that more than 25,000 hotels allow pets as their guests. Visit [trupanion](#) (see resource section) to learn more about establishing general guidelines for dogs in the workplace.

Housing Complexes

As the pet industry continues to grow, businesses and companies are starting to understand how important dogs are to those that care for them. More organizations are marketing to and planning for this segment of the population. It is not surprising that owners of multifamily housing and neighborhood associations are starting to integrate dog amenities into their properties to add a competitive edge by targeting pet owners. By offering dog parks or dog related amenities in housing complexes, they attract tenants that are willing to spend more money to accommodate their loyal companion. Some offer fenced-in dog parks with minimum equipment, while others may offer pet washing stations, doggy pools, agility equipment, discounts at local pet service businesses, or a combination of these. These accommodations may be valuable to residents living in complexes with limited access to green space.



Housing complexes are increasingly offering dog parks to attract tenants (Photo courtesy of Weinstan Properties).

Design Considerations

Drainage and Surfacing

Adequate drainage is extremely important, especially near water fountains and rinse stations. Good drainage will help prevent mud puddles, accumulation of water and urine, and so forth, throughout the park which can stress ground cover. Below is a summary of some surfacing types that may be appropriate for use in dog parks. While the surface is undoubtedly important and correlates with park success, this is often a difficult topic for which to make specific recommendations. It is important to choose an appropriate surface for the location, usage pattern, and resources available for adequate maintenance.¹⁸

Decomposed Granite

Decomposed granite (DG) surfacing has fine consistency, is sterile, and it is often used to create paths or in areas of heavy activity (e.g., entryways). It may need to be hosed down to prevent dust. It is important to install on a flat surface, as it will migrate downhill. Proper drainage is a must, otherwise fine particles will clog drains and potentially cause flooding. Decomposed granite will not absorb moisture, and does not retain the smell of urine.



Grass

Grass surfaces are soft underfoot, are visually appealing, and can adapt to any terrain. It is important to consider an irrigation system where grass is used, and it will require periodic reseeding in heavy traffic areas and in spots damaged by repeated urination. If allowed to grow, it is difficult to identify and pick up dog waste, so regular mowing is critical.



Sand

This is a natural substrate likely found at parks that are situated at waterfronts or on the beach. Holes dug by dogs are not an issue in this surface, unless they are extremely large. Sand affords adequate drainage, and droppings are easily found and removed. However, it may be difficult for park and recreation agencies to maintain and keep clean since this surface may require specialized equipment. Sand is not accessible to people using mobility devices. Lastly, during the summer months, sand may become very hot for dogs' feet.



Artificial Turf

Artificial turf, unlike grass, does not need mowing, should not be destroyed by repeated traffic, and does not discolor from urine. To be suitable for a dog park, the turf should be permeable to allow for drainage, and be installed over a base that also drains well. Shorter pile is more desirable so that dog waste can be more easily seen and removed. Turf that does not require infill is also more desirable, so that it can be vacuumed or raked to remove hair and debris, as all of these materials reduce the drainage capacity of the product.



Mulch/Wood Chips

This substrate is easily maintained and usually inexpensive, especially since park departments may have access to free mulch resources. It needs to be replenished periodically due to decomposition, but does afford adequate drainage. Care should be taken when selecting mulch so that dogs do not get splinters. Playground type mulch, engineered wood fiber, will knit together, and may be used on gentle slopes. Since mulch will absorb urine, and may harbor bacteria and fungus that may be harmful to pets, it is best used in limited areas. Also, since they are similar in color, it may be difficult to detect dog waste on mulch.



Heavily Compacted Base Rock or Gravel

Rock or gravel may be an adequate surface for the dog park, but precautions should be taken. Since rock absorbs heat in direct sunlight, it may be too hot for the pads on dog feet, and the rough texture may cause abrasions. Gravel and rock are very low maintenance, they do not absorb odor, and dog waste are easily detected and removed from this substrate.



Mixed Surfaces

Since each surface type has its benefits and challenges, mixing surfaces may be an ideal way to ensure that traffic, seating, "potty," and planting areas are treated appropriately, while adding aesthetic value to the dog park. This also offers dogs the opportunity to have access to different types of footing.

Plantings & Landscaping

Some dog parks may be designed to incorporate the living landscape for aesthetic appeal, sensory offerings, and/or natural shade. When planning for a new dog park and its landscape, which will make it more attractive to dogs and their owners, it is important to account for toxic and non-toxic plants.

Non-Toxic Plants

- Areca or Golden Palm
- Astilbe
- Bamboo
- Bee Balm
- Begonia
- Blue Echeveria
- Bugbane
- Burro's Tail or Lamb's Tail
- Butterfly Flower
- Calendula
- Catmint/catnip
- Christmas Cactus

- Cliff Brake or Button Fern
- Coleus
- Columbine
- Coneflowers
- Coral Bells
- Cosmos
- Goat's Beard
- Hens and Chickens
- Hosta
- Impatiens
- Nasturtium
- New Guinea Impatiens
- Pearl Plant

- Petunia
- Phlox
- Pony Tail Palm
- Primrose
- Queen of the Meadow
- Roses
- Snapdragons
- Spice Orchid
- Spider Flower
- Turf Lily
- Violet
- Yellow Corydalis
- Zinnia

These lists are not meant to be all-inclusive, but rather provide a basic compilation of plants that have demonstrated non-toxic or toxic properties in relation to dog health.¹⁹ For additional information on desirable and non-desirable plants, please refer to the resource section at the back of this guidebook.



Toxic Plants

- Aloe Vera
- Amaryllis
- Asian Lily
- Asparagus Fern
- Autumn Crocus
- Azalea/Rhododendron
- Baby's Breath
- Begonia
- Calla Lily
- Castor Bean
- Chrysanthemum
- Corn Plant
- Cycads (Sago Palm, Fern Palm)
- Cyclamen
- Daffodil
- English Ivy
- Geranium
- Kalanchoe
- Lilies
- Marijuana
- Oleander
- Peace Lily (AKA Mauna Loa Peace Lily)
- Pencil Cactus
- Pothos
- Ribbon Plant (Corn Plant, Cornstalk Plant, Dracaena, Dragon Tree)
- Schefflera
- Tulip/Narcissus bulbs
- Tulip
- Yew



• • • Design Considerations

Exercise and Agility / Training Equipment

Training areas can offer additional experiences to enhance the dog park. Providing agility-based equipment may be a fun way to promote active behavior. Rustic equipment (e.g., boulders and timbers for dogs to jump on), can also be provided. Preferably, this area should be located in a separate enclosure from the large/small dog areas. This area could also be used for formal training classes offered by the City's Parks and Recreation Department or by private trainers in the community.

If you can include agility-based activities, look for manufacturers that specialize in dog park equipment. Select challenges for dogs of different sizes and abilities, and slip resistant equipment to prevent injuries. The equipment should also be all-weather, UV protected, durable, and resistant to vandalism and urine. These features can help make the park into a "destination" for owners and their dogs, by expanding the recreational experiences. Areas can be designed and tailored for a variety of locations, sizes, and challenge activities.



Expert Course: Offers nine (9) activities while meeting the needs of dogs of various sizes and abilities. The suggested minimum use zone is 70' x 70'.



Best in Show Course: For those interested in a "well-rounded" course, these configurations include popular activities such as a waste station, bench, and even a trash receptacle. The suggested minimum use zone is 28' x 22'.



Small Dog Course: For those individuals that own a smaller dog, this features a hoop jump that is closer to the ground and smaller, making it just the right size for teacups and terriers. The suggested minimum use zone is approximately 19' x 23'.



While agility training courses have existing measurements, providing agility-based activities for dog is sufficient in most situations.

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Intermediate Course: Offers six (6) activities that creates an attractive dog play area in any park, public space, or pet care facility. The suggested minimum use zone is 45' x 50'.



Novice Course: This course includes four (4) exciting and fun components that can be used intuitively by most dogs. The suggested minimum use zone is 35' x 35'.



Small Dog Advanced Course: For smaller dogs interested in an advanced course, this configuration includes all the features of the Small Dog Course plus the addition of more challenging pieces. The suggested minimum use zone is 35' x 28'.

Amenities and Accessories

The amenities and accessories to accommodate dogs and dog owners in a dog park are critical components of the overall design plan. There are a variety of site-specific amenities that should be considered to promote comfort, increase usability, and to support best practice design.

Signage / Message Board

It is advisable to have permanent signage close to each of the entrances to a dog park stating the hours of operation, rules and regulations for the park, and contact information for the Parks and Recreation Department, or department that oversees the space. Messages should be clear and simple and symbols should be easy to recognize. You might also consider adding a message board to allow visitors to participate in the communication by posting public notices or reciprocal advertising information for dog-related businesses that promote your dog parks.

Welcome signs provide visitors with specific expectations and rules of the dog park.



Fencing

Some off-leash areas may be fenced; however, larger areas are more likely unfenced. Dog parks are becoming more strategic on how they use fencing in terms of park operations. In parks with high use, fencing is usually preferred instead of leaving the area unfenced. Fencing in a straight line (linear shape) is ideal in all dog parks. When selecting fencing, take into account the surroundings.

Fence Types

- Woven wire – easy to install and inexpensive. A concrete ledge can be poured under the frame to prevent digging.
- Stainless steel fencing – for strength and durability, especially in heavily used dog parks.
- Interlocking wall stone – can augment with 2-foot high stainless steel fencing attached to the top of the wall.
- Chain link fencing – easy to install, inexpensive, and durable. Consider dressing it with landscape for better visual appeal.
- Hedges – attractive, require more “depth” than traditional fences, can also use vines on chain link to reduce land area required.
- Pickets – can be alternated front and back of support to create more open space. Engraved pickets can be sold as fundraisers for the dog park.

Fence Height

- 4-foot high fencing – will contain most dogs
- 5-foot high fencing – will help contain more dogs
- 7-foot high fencing – will prevent dogs from escaping, especially recommended for larger dog areas. Also suggested if the dog park is near a residential area or adjacent to busy roads.

Solid Fencing

Solid fencing like concrete or corrugated material is not a good option, as dogs can become nervous or roused if they feel enclosed.

Some options may be to use landscaping to increase privacy screening while not completely obstructing the view. “Windows” or portals can also be installed in solid fences to provide viewing areas, and can be retrofitted to existing solid fences.

Finally, berms or platforms can be installed if the dog park has a solid fence, so the dog can see over the top of the fence, but not be close enough to jump over.

Fence Angles

Avoid 90° angles in fences – or the angle may allow dogs to corner other dogs and may promote aggressive behavior. Fencing without a 90° angle makes it easier for a dog to escape if necessary.

Desirable Fencing



Vertical Steel Rods



Vertical Timber Slats



Horizontal Timber Slats



Solid Fence with View Windows



Metal Picket



Timber Picket



Chain Link



Woven Wire

Undesirable Fencing



Concrete Blocks
(no view or curb appeal)



Corrugated Iron (no view)



Low Brick (too low)



Design Considerations

Gates

All gates should be fitted with a spring for self-closing, particularly for visitors or children who may forget to close the gates. These types of systems decrease the likelihood of dogs escaping. Gates could be triple with a swipe entry or a double gate entry for additional security. Swipe entry systems are convenient as they regulate the access to the dog park and can improve park security. Also, for improved access, consider installing the gate with sufficient space for those individuals using mobility devices.

In addition, a separate gate for exiting can improve some of the crowding that may occur while others are entering the dog park, reducing stress in both individuals and dogs. Keep water bowls, waste disposal, and benches away from gates to reduce overcrowding at entry and exit points.

Lastly, when thinking about small versus large dogs, placing gates away from each other rather than at corners

is recommended as it may decrease the amount of barking and aggressive behavior.

Electronic Access

Several companies provide programmed keys for individuals that hold a membership for the dog park. These keys can be deprogrammed if not returned upon expiration of the membership. These systems are preferable to allow access to city- or country-wide parks. The annual dues individuals pay for their membership can help raise money for park maintenance, and fund future parks and park systems.

Besides providing security to patrons, electronic access can offer additional benefits such as recording a log of park users, preventing loitering, discouraging irresponsible owners, and protecting park equipment.



Self-closing gate.



Double gated entry.



For an example of electronic access check
Gary Park District, Gary, IL
<http://www.garypark.com/Parks-Facilities/DogPark.asp>



Triple gated system provides extra security for dogs.



Electronic access gate.

Leash Posts

Leash posts can be provided next to gates or adjacent to benches and tables in order to provide a place to hang a leash or park a dog for short periods of time. Depending on dog temperament, parking two dogs at the same time may not be an option. In addition, some off-leash dog park regulations state that owners should carry their dog leash with them while inside the park. When selecting a leash post, look for a high-quality steel framed post which will increase durability and continue to be a convenient asset.

Seating

Provide seating options throughout the park in sunny and shaded areas to increase comfort. Seating should not be placed near fences, as dogs may use it to jump over the fence, or near entrances to avoid crowding. In terms of materials, metal is preferred as it may be more durable than other materials. In addition, be mindful of the design/surface; it should be incapable of allowing a dog's appendage to get stuck in a narrow opening or slot.

Trails

Trails may be offered to incorporate interesting routes of travel to and throughout the dog park. Accessible trails or trail segments have the following general characteristics: Trail widths are 36" with occasional segments at 32" to accommodate existing trees and permanent features,

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surfaces are stable and firm, and obstacles, surface gaps, protruding objects, and other obstructing details are minimal. Accessible trails are generally barrier free, and have slopes well under 9%.

Parking

Providing adequate parking for the dog park users is a critical consideration, as most users (95%) drive to them.²⁰ In addition, locating the off-leash area as close to the parking lot as possible helps promote accessibility and discourage owners from letting their dogs off-leash between the dog park and parking. The parking area could also be used as a buffer between the dog park and adjoining neighbors to minimize noise if that is a concern.

As per the guidelines suggested by the U.S. Department of Justice²⁰, an accessible parking space must have space for the vehicle and adjacent space to either the right or left of the space to serve as an access aisle. The aisle is needed to provide a person in a wheelchair, scooter, or other mobility device clear space to get out of their vehicle comfortably. These spaces should be located closest to the accessible entrance and located at ground level. In addition, an accessible route must be provided between the parking space and the dog park. This route should be firm, stable, and slip-resistant, with no steps or steep slopes.



Sitting areas provide a meeting place for dog owners and their dogs.

Design Considerations

Lighting

To increase safety (e.g., during the winter months) and decrease criminal activity, consider providing automatic or timed lighting.

Waste Disposal

Covered waste receptacles, with hand sanitizer, should be placed at various locations throughout the park and at entrances/exits providing easy access to individuals for clean up. It is recommended to have two to three trash cans in common areas and one outside the entrance gate. Providing waste bag dispensers and waste scoopers will also help to improve the cleanliness of the area.



This trash receptacle and bench are themed to complement the dog park.



Waste stations complete with compartments for waste and bags help facilitate clean up.

Restrooms

If possible, ADA compliant bathrooms should be located at a reasonable distance from the park. A portable toilet could also be acceptable if a permanent facility is not an option, however, these should also be ADA compliant. Visitors to the dog park may appreciate knowing that there are bathrooms available for them if needed, and it may also increase visit time and frequency.

Shade

Shade, whether natural or built, is an important consideration for both dogs and dog owners at the dog park. However, wear and tear could prove harmful to natural resources if not properly located. Offering a variety of options is of importance. Trees, which absorb surface moisture by their roots and are aesthetically appealing, may be one solution. Shade structures such as gazebos, shelters, and shade canopies are also good options.



Fabric shades provide comfortable spaces for individuals and their dogs on sunny/rainy days.



Shelters provide comfortable spaces for visitors to gather.

Watering and Cooling

Washing areas may be helpful to reduce heat during the hot seasons, administer first aid, and clean mud from pets. These areas need appropriate drainage and ground cover (e.g., concrete).

Some dog parks offer ponds where dogs can swim. These ponds may be fenced-in to restrict access; and to deter dogs from jumping in without their owner's permission. Community pools may also offer dog owners the chance

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to let their dogs take a swim by allowing them to use the facility the last day before they drain the pools. They could even offer and organize a fundraising event to do so.

Exercising dogs need access to water, and their owners will appreciate it too. Consider providing dog-level drinking fountains alongside human-level ones to provide refreshment. If this is not a possibility, a posted message should alert dog park users to bring their own water.



Pedestal style drinking fountains with attached pet fountains are good watering features.



Water features, like pet or human drinking fountains and washing stations, are great additions to dog parks!



Accessible fountains provide refreshing water for dogs and dog owners.



Before closing pools for the summer, some Parks and Recreation Departments allow dogs to take one last splash!



"Cooling stations" provide sprays to help dogs cool down and wash the sand out of their fur.



Regular maintenance can help ensure that safety and quality standards are adhered to.

Maintenance and Legal Considerations

As with any outdoor space, the dog park will have to be maintained. Depending on the surface used, the park may need to be mowed throughout the growing season, snow may need to be removed from parking lots, trash and waste stations should be picked up regularly, and trails will need to be maintained on a regular basis. Consider a schedule, such as closing the dog park once per week (or during inclement weather) to help tend to the maintenance needs and requirements. If the dog park has a grass surface, avoid weeders as they could damage the fencing – or spraying toxins at fence borders; instead, consider creating a path along the fences by lining them with 3-4 feet of material such as decomposed granite to help provide a buffer.

Below is a basic list of maintenance considerations. Additional maintenance may be required depending on the site, its amenities and surfacing, and usage:

- Tending to surfacing – filling holes and/or re-seeding
- Hand weeding/ tending to landscaping (do not use toxic weed spray in garden areas)
- Removing dog waste
- Spraying / hosing down equipment, furnishings, trash receptacles
- Refilling disposable waste bags
- Emptying trash receptacles

- Inspecting fence for damage
- Inspecting gates and locking mechanisms
- Inspecting equipment and amenities

Dog Park Rules

Members of a dog park committee should establish and enforce reasonable health and safety rules for the park. The following are rules and regulations as suggested by the American Kennel Club:²¹



Clearly communicating the rules promotes safety and fun for everyone.

Rules for the Dog Park

According to the Humane Society of the United States, a successful and well-functioning dog park needs rules that are easy to understand and are located in a visible area. Usually, these rules are drawn by the park department or the affiliated dog park association whose members are highly involved in the design and oversight of the dog park. What follows are another set of suggested dog park rules:²⁰

- Dog waste must be cleaned up by owners. Due to the concentration of dogs in one area, dog waste must be removed in order to prevent transmission of parasites, reduce odor, and promote general cleanliness. Many dog parks supply bags to pick up dog waste for free or at minimal cost which encourages compliance.
- Dog owners must be in the park, within view, and be able to maintain voice control of their dogs at all times. This encourages dog owners to seek some level of training for their dog and promotes appropriate dog behavior through strict supervision. Owners are present to observe and clean up when their dog defecates.
- Dogs with a known individual history of dangerous behavior are not permitted in the park. This discourages aggressive behavior. No dog should be excluded based solely on breed.
- Dogs must be removed from the dog park at the first sign of dangerous behavior toward people or other dogs in the park. Responsible dog owners must teach their dogs that such behaviors are unacceptable.
- Dog owners must have a leash in hand at all times. This enables the dog owner to remove a dog from the park for any inappropriate behavior.
- Small children should not be brought into the dog park. Small children can be harmed inadvertently by a playful dog. Chasing may be viewed as a threat to a dog, and running away from and high-pitched screaming may trigger hunting instincts in a dog. A responsible dog owner needs to devote his or her full attention to watching his or her dog.
- Dogs should be leashed while entering and exiting the dog park. It is important for safety and legal reasons to obey leash laws whenever your dog is not in the boundaries of the dog park.
- Female dogs in heat are prohibited from entering the dog park. The presence of a dog in heat may promote fights among unneutered males. This threatens the dogs as well as their owners who must break up the fights. Unwanted pregnancies may also result.
- Fill any hole your dog digs. Dogs and people in the dog park may be injured if they step into a hole. Designated digging areas within the dog park may help preserve the landscape and train dogs to dig only in specified areas.
- Puppies and dogs must be properly inoculated, healthy, and parasite free. This protects all dogs and promotes responsible veterinary care. For puppies less than 4 months of age without full vaccination protection, socialization with friends' or neighbors' dogs with known vaccination histories and temperament may be safer.
- Dogs must be licensed. This promotes rabies vaccination of dogs and their licensing as required by law.
- Limit three dogs per visit. It would be difficult for one adult to monitor more than three dogs.
- Do not bring food into the dog park. Fights may occur over food, and dogs may get sick if they eat foods that are not part of their usual diet.



Location & Context

Dog parks can be located in a variety of areas. It is recommended to allocate 1 to 5 acres to provide enough space for dog owners and their dogs to recreate comfortably.



Benefits

While the benefits of being outdoors have been widely documented, dog parks provide a new and exciting option to spend time outdoors. Benefits of spending time with your pooch range from physical, health and well-being, to community benefits.



Fundraising

Many citizens may be interested in building a dog park or upgrading an existing one. Community support will be a key component of funding. Bringing the community together will create a sense of ownership and pride among community members and park partners.



Programming

Creative and fun activities can be designed to attract dog owners and their dogs, targeting the different interests they may have. Consider inviting non-dog owners as a way to create awareness of the dog park and its fun options for spectators.



Design

Careful design provides dog owners and their pets with a variety of benefits. Selecting appropriate fencing, surfacing, plantings, shade, benches, and water features, among others, are essential decisions that will result in a successful, enjoyable dog park for the community.



Maintenance

Regular inspection and maintenance needs to be planned to ensure the dog park looks and remains clean and free of hazards. Properly functioning equipment, appropriate signage, and lighting will promote a safer environment for people and dogs alike.



Rules

Clearly stated guidelines will inform dog owners of the expectations while visiting the dog park. A successful dog park will have their rules posted in a visible area at the entrance of the park to hold users accountable.



Marketing

Targeting dog owners to help spread the word about the dog park will engage individuals with similar interests in the planning, fundraising, grand opening, and programming activities related to the dog park.





Dog parks provide an outlet for dog owners to socialize.

Building a Dog Park

The following are strategies intended to facilitate a proactive and collaborative dog park development process in your community, to assist in identifying the needs of the community, and to explore additional mechanisms resulting in long-term success. According to the Peninsula Humane Society and SPCA²², the following are some of the most successful strategies when designing a dog park:

- **Start with a core group of committed dog park activists.** Talk with a half dozen other dog owners who are concerned about the lack of off-leash spaces. These may be people you already know, or you can put a notice in the local paper to help identify them.
- **Hold a public meeting.** Once the core group is identified, a larger community meeting will help you get the word out to supporters and solicit input and suggestions. Encourage people to write letters in support of a dog park to public officials and the media

and to make presentations to community groups whose backing would be valuable.

- **Educate your fellow dog owners on the need to be responsible.** The guardian who neglects to pick up after his dog, or who allows an aggressive or unsocialized dog to run loose can do a lot of damage to your cause and ultimate chances of success. In Half Moon Bay, the Coastside Doggie Club has a two-fold mission: establishing an off-leash dog exercise area and promoting responsible canine care.
- **Write a clear mission statement.** Detail the need and purpose of the park, stressing the benefits to dog owners, their canine companions, and the greater community. The Redwood City Responsible Dog Owners' statement says it all: "To establish a fenced in, off-leash dog park where well-behaved canine citizens can exercise in a clean, safe environment without endangering or annoying people, property, or wildlife."

- **Demonstrate need.** Gather statistics on the dogs and their people in your community. How many dogs would use a dog park? What are the demographics of the people in your city? Who currently uses city parks – and who doesn't? Downplay the "dog factor" and emphasize people issues. Dogs don't pay taxes or vote.
- **Demonstrate support.** In both Belmont and Redwood Shores, CA, activists found that a simply worded request circulated on a petition helped convince city officials that there was both a need and widespread public support for a responsibly run dog park. Place petition gatherers at supermarkets, pet supply stores, and other high-traffic areas. Enlist the support of local veterinarians, groomers, dog walkers, and others who have a real interest in having a community of healthy, well-socialized dogs. Involve them in fund raising, gathering petitions, writing letters to the editor of local papers, and generally spreading the word.
- **Create a budget.** Determine how much it will cost to construct and maintain the park— costs for surfacing, fences, garbage removal, lawn maintenance, drinking water, field drainage, lighting, benches, amenities, and a stationary pooper scooper station. Some cities are willing and able to finance a dog park; others would rather share the cost with a group committed to maintaining the park and ensuring that park rules are adhered to.
- **Solicit the input and seek the approval of significant organizations in your community.** Talk with the proposed park's neighbors before talking to city hall. Pay attention to any red flags that may arise. Do not disregard these issues, instead come up with solutions to them. If it really is a situation that may not have an obvious solution, at least you will know what you are up against.
- **Be prepared to address a range of concerns.** Explain why some of these are non-issues and have a plan to address those, like traffic and noise, that are legitimate.

- **Gain support.** The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) can help your efforts by writing a letter of support. If you are part of a group looking to create a new dog park, and would like such a letter, please contact your local branch for their support.
- **Get to know local officials.** Your city council members and the director of your department of parks and recreation can be very instrumental. Attend meetings, join them at fundraisers, and find out what they need from you to move the dog park forward.
- **Request a hearing with city government** when you are ready to discuss your proposal. Have two or three carefully selected, knowledgeable, and articulate members of your group present your plan, clearly expressing its many benefits to the community and calmly addressing any concerns.
- **Be patient and persistent.** Dealing with city government is rarely a quick deal. While you may see your dog park come to fruition within a year, realistically it may take more time.



Ribbon Cutting - Greenway Farm Dog Park, Chattanooga, TN
(Photo by Wesley Schultz)

Partnerships and Fundraising

To reach a wider range of dog owners and to share resources, form partnerships with local veterinarians, pet stores, boarding facilities, and dog charities. Take advantage of their locations to display print material, or for online marketing, provide them with electronic photos, graphics, and press releases. Make it easy for the businesses to share the dog park information with their clientele.

Many communities may be interested in either building a new dog park or improving the existing location where dog owners can bring their dogs for socialization and exercising. To build or improve these parks, cities may require a demonstration of community support. Fundraising is essential to the creation and maintenance of these local pet playgrounds. Additionally, an array of grant programs are available to help communities enhance local dog parks, add amenities, or help support the dog park friends group. For more information, refer to the resources section of this book.

Dog Walk

The popular method of raising money through a walk is not limited to humans. Organize a walk for both owners and their dogs. Walkers can provide a donation based on how long they walk, or entry fees can be collected from anyone that wants to participate. Additionally, extra money can be raised by selling doggy bags to owners that forgot theirs, helping prevent your walk from becoming littered.

Artistic Approach

This strategy entails buying and selling dog-related items such as dog houses. Involve local artists who would volunteer their time and abilities to leave their mark on these unusual canvases. Those dog-art pieces could be

auctioned off online, by phone, or as a silent auction at a planned event.

Dog Wash

A dog wash fundraising event is very similar to a car wash fundraiser. Set up different dog-washing stations complete with water and grooming supplies. Mobile groomers may want to participate and even volunteer their time to help with supplies and advice; or you can even have volunteers do the washing, leaving the grooming to the pros.



Dog walks provide engagement in physical activity for both the dog(s) and their owners. (Photo courtesy of idahopress.com)

Cocktail Party

A different fundraising concept could be hosting a cocktail party for a cause where a fee is charged at the door. Design the fee so that it will exceed expenses, serve cocktails and appetizers, and top the event with a silent auction. Inviting local caterers to volunteer could also help with this type of event.

Sponsor Plaques / Fence Planks

A section of the dog park can be designated for commemorative plaques/fence planks with sponsors' names to let others know who helped fund the park, which would be highly appreciated by those that contributed to it. Minimum donations can be set to receive a plaque/fence plank in the park; for example, donations of \$100+ will earn their name on the plaque/fence plank.

An array of fundraising events can bring people together for a cause. (Photo courtesy of www.artistsatwork.com)



Business Sponsorship Campaigns

Begin with a letter writing campaign to all area businesses. Explain your project: the need for a new dog park, including all of the research you have done. Outline options for giving, either Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum sponsorship levels, or break down the dog park plan into individual components, with the sponsorship cost of each item listed.

Flower, Plant, and Seed Sales

Call upon the local wholesale florist or greenhouse for their assistance in this very popular event. Offer mums in the Fall, poinsettias at the Holiday, single roses or carnations at Valentine's Day, lilies, geraniums, garden seeds in the Spring and corsages at Mother's Day. By using pre-sale forms, you will not be "stuck" with hundreds of extras at the end of your sale. However, do order a few dozen spares for pickup day. This eliminates shortage problems, and allows for added sales during pickup.

Pancake Breakfasts, Spaghetti Dinners, and Potluck Suppers

School cafeterias, churches, or community social halls could serve as the site for these gatherings. Remember that community involvement is crucial to the success of a dog park, and there is no better way to involve a community than by feeding them. If you are concerned that you lack the know how to execute such an undertaking, check with the service organizations in your area.

Media Sponsorships

Invite the local media to participate in your dog park project in two very important ways. First, ask them to be the voice

of your project, informing the community of upcoming events, and keeping everyone posted on the fundraising progress. Secondly, suggest in lieu of a cash donation to your project, a donation of advertising space (or time, in the case of radio or television) for major donors. This serves as an additional incentive for businesses to

donate, as they will not only receive the gratitude of the community, but also free advertising with your Media Sponsors.

Auctions

Choose a live auction with an auctioneer or a silent auction. You can limit donations to certificates only (gift certificates for dinners, oil changes, furnace cleanings, etc.) or auction off merchandise donated by local retailers, grocery stores, nearby hotels and resorts, travel agents, and sports teams. Publish a list of all items to be auctioned, their donors, and their retail value. The high bidder gets the item and the entire amount paid for that item benefits your dog park fundraising effort.

Concession Sales

Is there a major sports or civic arena nearby? If so, there may be an opportunity to staff a concession booth with volunteers, and receive a percentage of the sales as a donation to your project.

There are many other fundraising ideas such as: gift wrap and candy sales, garage sales, car washes... you name it! You will find that a community working towards a common goal will get behind these efforts whole-heartedly, as they will directly benefit.



(Photo courtesy of Backs Local News)



Auctions, cocktail parties, flower sales, etc. are ways for a community working together to create funding, and to benefit a dog park.



(Photo courtesy of Brick Kivi Farms)

Marketing Your Dog Park

Marketing is a very important element in the overall success of a dog park - to ensure that people know where to find the park, the hours it is open, and other relative information. Marketing need not be expensive, but ensuring you connect with the places where dog owners are is critical for success.

What follows is a list of potential marketing opportunities:

Bulletin Boards

Many entities that offer services for dogs have onsite bulletin boards where other pet related businesses can post their information. Check with local veterinarians, boarders, groomers, shelters, and pet supply stores. Many services will utilize the bulletin boards, so make sure your advertisement is bright, colorful, and noticeable to differentiate from others. One way to do this is to create an 8 1/2" x 11" color flyer, then fold the bottom 1/3 up to create a pocket. Insert business cards with the relevant information (location, hours, etc.) printed on them so dog owners have an easy way to take your information with them.

Utilize different media to successfully market a dog park, such as a blog, a website, and a print flyer.



Brochure Stands

Dog related businesses may also offer the option to leave trifold brochures on the counter. If so, stands can be purchased inexpensively at office supply stores, and word processing programs will generally have a template to create brochures.

Adoption Events

Check with local shelters and pet supply stores for their schedule of adoption events. This is a great way to connect with new and existing pet owners and tell them about dog parks. If your park is fee based, offer a one-day free pass to familiarize new attendees with the dog park.

Social Media

Social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. can be valuable tools in building a dog park's clientele. Utilize these websites to promote events at the dog park, and then invite people to attend. Dog owners love to share photos of their pets, so promote photo submissions and keep the pages fresh with images of people and their pets having fun at the dog park! You can even hold contests to promote usage, new membership, and other social events.

Websites

Searching for "dog-friendly" online will result in a list of sites that promote dog-friendly locations across the U.S. Listing your dog park on these sites helps to demonstrate that your community welcomes dog owners. Pet owners who prefer to bring their four-legged family on vacation will often rely on these sites as a resource for finding things to do in a destination city, so be sure your dog park is included.

Local Media

Local interest television shows and news outlets may offer another option to promote your dog park. Contact local TV stations and inquire about their schedules, often the local interest shows revolve around a theme, so contacting them at your earliest convenience may help generate interest in a pet related episode. If you can bring a (well behaved) dog to the station with you, people love to see pets on TV. If the station will allow you to use the taped segment (or link to it) be sure to use your social media outlets to further promote the show.

Newspapers (print and/or online) may allow you to submit an article about the park, contact them and be sure to ask for their publication guidelines in advance so you can



Social media marketing campaigns are a great way to promote events and invite people to attend.

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adhere to any writing style guidelines they have in place. If your city has a magazine, don't forget to contact them for editorial opportunities.

Overall Guidelines

Remember that no matter which outlets you choose to promote your dog park, creating a compelling connection with dog owners is critical for success. Rather than the typical homemade cut sheet or brochure that is black and white, very wordy, and lacking images, remember that your advertising needs to clearly state WHY your dog park is a valuable element to the dog and its owner. Consider maximizing the usage of pictures, and utilizing colored font for headlines and call outs. One great way to "tell the story" is to profile a dog and its owner, and/or include testimonials from people who use the dog park. Peer reviews are one of the best tools you have to build trust with new users.

Remember, whatever methods you use, marketing is extremely important. A good marketer knows where their target customers are and then reaches them there with a compelling message that states the benefits for both dog and owner.

Local TV and newspapers allow businesses to target very specific geographic areas.



Programming

Consider providing the community with special events that will involve dog owners, dogs, and even those that do not own a pet. As stated before, there are many benefits of dog parks; therefore, providing individuals with different opportunities to enjoy themselves and others is of importance. Researchers stated that, "8% of all pet owners and 11.9% of dog owners indicated they took part in community or social activities involving their pets."^{5(p.49)} There is an untapped population eager to be part of events with their companions – their dogs. Take advantage of the opportunity! In addition, consider having a dedicated website for the dog park, to provide visibility to the location, events, and an easy way for visitors to find you. Add your dog park to databases already in existence such as Dog Goes (See resource section) where individuals can search for dog parks near their residence or when traveling. There are even free smart phone apps to locate dog parks.



Wave Poles



Dogwalk



Standard Jumps



Paws Table



Tunnel



Hoop Jump



Teeter Totter



A basic agility course often includes the components shown. Check the resource section for more information.

Agility Training Classes

Offering agility training classes is another way to provide the dog owner community with the opportunity to spend more time outdoors with their dogs. Agility training can also be a revenue-generating prospect for the owner of the dog park.

It is important to ensure that hired trainers are certified and possess the qualifications needed to provide the service. The United States Dog Agility Association, Inc. (USDAA) is the largest authority for the sport of dog agility. They offer three different certification programs: Championship program, Performance program, and Junior Handler program. Visit their webpage for a searchable database of USDAA Licensed Groups, and other agility guidelines (See the resource section for contact information).

Special Events

The success of a dog park could also come from the special events that are organized. Special events could include educational workshops, health clinics, or even festivals. Consider developing regular programming to build participation among locals. Some dog parks already offer obedience training and introductory agility classes that provide information to owners on how to use the courses with their dogs.

In Los Angeles, the Friends of Hermon Dog Park offers a monthly happy-hour or "yappy hour" at their dog park. This initiative developed from a need to let individuals know about the dog park; over time it evolved into an event for people to meet and socialize among dogs and owners alike. Throughout the years, they have developed other programs such as "Howloween" and the Big Peanut Butter Lick-off to name a few.



(Photo courtesy of eveningsonpawade)



(Photo courtesy of espoulette@me.com)

Special events can include festivals as well as educational workshops.

Beyond the dog park, consider organizing events that welcome dogs or even include them as a central part of the organization. Even those individuals that do not own a dog may have the opportunity to enjoy the interaction with dog owners and their dogs.

Membership vs. Free

There are varying advantages and considerations for having a members only dog park versus free-to-all dog parks. Utilize the following table to consider the potential benefits of investing in paid memberships and the features that public spaces provide.²³

<p>Size When paying for a membership, the dedicated areas and spaces are generally larger. Some dog parks could be as big or bigger than 4.5 acres. They may include additional amenities like benches, shaded areas, rinse centers, pools, and other amenities that may be hard to find in free dog parks. While there may be some large free dog parks, they may not be as well-kept as the membership based ones.</p>	<p>Rules Free dog parks may not enforce their rules as strictly as membership-based parks do. Usually, at a free dog park there are more rules since there may not be an on-site attendant and no one to clean up after visitors. Since many members only dog parks have onsite attendants, rules can be more effectively enforced.</p>
<p>Cleanliness Many of the free dog parks are maintained by the dog owners and it is up to them to pick up after their dogs. While most free dog parks are clean and properly maintained, there are some that are not; dog waste and even broken toys and trash may be found. When paying for a monthly or annual membership, a portion of the fees goes towards a cleaning crew; while cleaning is still up to the owners, the park attendants take care of unwanted waste and general maintenance of the grounds (i.e., mowing).</p>	<p>Limited hours Most dog parks have well stated hours of operation. However, free dog parks may allow entrance 24/7 while most membership only parks may only allow access until 9:00pm – this may be because membership only parks rely on before or after hours to perform regular maintenance and inspection.</p>
<p>Safety Entrance gates may present the single most difficult issue when visiting a dog park. Some free parks may only have one gate which may make it difficult when entering/exiting the premises. Some others may lack in maintenance which may result in holes in the fences or ground that may prevent dogs from being kept safe. In comparison, the members-only park may have high vinyl-coat safety gates with separate entrances/exits. This prevents dogs from escaping and from getting hurt or injured. In addition, most membership-based dog parks have good lighting and on-site attendants.</p>	<p>Crowds Free dog parks may have regulars, which means they will visit often, creating crowds of people. Membership based dog parks are more exclusive, therefore, crowding may not be an issue – providing owners and dogs a more open space to get to know each other. However, because of density issues, urban dog parks may attract more people than the ones in other areas, especially during the weekends when the weather is nice and people want to be outdoors.</p>

Off-leash Dog Park Case Study

Charleston County, SC

Utilizing marketing to promote your dog park

In Charleston County, dog parks are seen as much more than just places to let dogs release energy and roam off-leash; they are seen as spaces and destinations where people can meet others, enjoy the outdoors, relax, be physically active, and spend a good afternoon with their best friends – their dogs. Today, there are a variety of creative offerings that promote the park system goals while also generating capital to support the dog park sustainability efforts.

Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission (CCPRC) operates three dog parks in the Charleston vicinity. Their off-leash dog parks are located within their larger regional parks in James Island County Park, North Charleston Wannamaker County Park, and Mount Pleasant Palmetto Islands County Park. Interestingly, each one of these three dog parks serves a diverse user group with their own unique set of goals and interests. Each frequently hosts events that bring people together in meaningful ways to promote socialization and physical activity.

Tom O'Rourke, Executive Director of CCPRC, emphasizes that dog owners are not a homogenous group; therefore, when organizing events, it is important to consider the needs and interests of each group. He stresses that, "it

isn't about the dogs, it's about the customer," referring to dog owners. He goes on to explain that, "it's more than just the dogs having fun ... Are the people having fun with one another? It's about people socializing and interacting. You can't forget that part."

Every month from May till October, CCPRC hosts Yappy Hour. For a small entrance fee, this happy-hour event includes live music from local bands, beverages, and food. In 2014, a total of 1,596 people and 1,233 dogs attended this event raising \$7,643 in revenue and \$5,000 in sponsorships. Another similar event held during the warmer months from May till October was Pups, Yups, & Food Trucks where local bands, beverages, and food trucks target a different group of individuals and their dogs. This last event was attended by an average of 150 people. In 2013, this event raised \$4,500 in revenues and \$1,800 in sponsorships; however, this event was later replaced by Bark in the Park – Oktoberfest!

Other events include Pet Fest, Santa Paws, and Dog Day Afternoon. Pet Fest, usually held during the last weekend of March, offers exhibits, demonstrations, experts, and entertainment. It provides an opportunity for local organizations and businesses to highlight their causes, products, and services in a pet-friendly environment. Santa Paws, offered during December, collects pet food for the local animal shelter for a 20% discount on a photo package with Santa Claus. Their Dog Day Afternoon event, held in September – at the end of the summer season –



(Photo courtesy of Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission)



In an effort to make trips to the dog park more enjoyable, Charleston County has developed the concept of "Petiquette," behavior-based guidelines – or "pet etiquette" for four-legged visitors and their two-legged companions. Visit <http://www.ccprc.com> to learn more.

brings dogs and dog-owners together for a last splash in the Adventure Waterpark before it closes. This event also raises funds by selling entry tickets.

An annual Top Dog contest is also an event favorite where a mascot is picked as their agency model. All the people in the community, with or without dogs, are invited to campaign for their favorite dog on Facebook or any other social media site, driving traffic into the CCPRC's own website to vote. O'Rourke explains that this simple strategy "creates much stir in the community" and a sense of belonging. The dogs' pictures, bio's, and stories are also featured on the website. O'Rourke adds



The CCPRC website provides information about location, programming, features, and upcoming events. Visit <http://www.ccprc.com> for more information about their dog parks.



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"the dogs are often rescued dogs... adding to that feel-good aspect." Events are held to generate revenue and to sustain the maintenance and upkeep of the dog park. O'Rourke provides more information regarding revenue generation by stating that dog parks "have to be operated with the same passion and creativity as a waterpark, athletic complex, or community center." There are many other programmatic events that can be held once every year or multiple times a year such as volunteer cleanups, obedience classes, dog nutrition classes, or outreach activities where individuals may prepare care packages for K9 military units.

Bark in the Park - Oktoberfest!

New 2014 Event Offered by Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission



For this new event, pets are encouraged to bring their owners to one of Charleston's biggest Oktoberfest celebrations at Wannamaker County Park. The costume-friendly event offers pet exhibits, demonstrations, experts, entertainment, and more. Pet owners got a taste of Bavaria with live Oompah music, tasty German food, and plenty of beverages. Pets must be restrained/leashed when not in the dog park. A total of 1,143 people and 555 dogs attended this first time event raising \$9,682 in revenue for a total of \$5,863 in profit after expenses were calculated.

Off-leash Dog Park Case Study

Stockbridge, GA

Transforming an underused floodplain into a PAWpular dog park!

The City of Stockbridge, GA opened its first off-leash park in March 2014. Of the three parks the City of Stockbridge, GA manages – Clark Park, Gardner Park, and Hidden Valley Park – Clark Park is one of the city's most popular parks with two pavilions, restrooms, a walking track, grilling area, a newly installed playground, and the new off-leash dog park. Clark Park is the only one of their parks that offers separate fenced-in areas where small and large dogs can roam freely in their designated spaces. About 1 acre of the 11.8 acres was designated for the dog park providing a new recreational space for community members and their pets.

Drainage considerations were certainly a top priority as the dog park was located in a repurposed floodplain. The Public Works department was able to work through the challenges by installing walking paths, sitting areas, and plants at the lowest part of the park. They installed the

main agility equipment in higher zones. On a particularly wet area, an underdrain system was installed to help divert stormwater to the pond which now results in more effective drainage after storms.

Design Considerations for Park Users

The dog park is located in a semi-wooded area and features three separate double-gated entrances. Two areas are designated for large dogs (over 20 pounds) and one area small dogs (under 20 pounds), which helps protect the smaller dogs from the larger ones. Mulch and grass are used as surfacing and existing oaks and pines are used for natural shade. Black vinyl coated chain link fence was installed around the perimeter of the park to further designate the area and promote security. Benches, water stations, pet stations, and agility equipment are additional design features that further enhance the park experience for dog owners and their dogs. Adjacent to the park is ample parking, restrooms, and a pavilion for those visiting the park.



Carefully planned drainage helps divert stormwater more effectively after storms.

Community Support and Funding

The City Council had initially authorized capital funds under SPLOST III (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) for a dog park in the city of Stockbridge but then had to pass an ordinance to regulate the park since this was the first dog park to be created in the area. City council members approved an amendment to city code in December 2013 to allow an off-leash dog park within the Stockbridge city limits. The city council was successful in establishing the designated off-leash area for dogs within public city parks to serve the recreational needs of residents who own dogs without disregarding the rights of those residents that do not own dogs.



Off-leash dog parks provide a variety of benefits for the citizens and the community, such as exercise and social interaction for dogs and their owners.

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Realizing a Variety of Community Benefits

The establishment of this new off-leash dog park provides a variety of benefits for the citizens and the community at large such as exercise and social interaction for dogs and their owners. According to Kevin Walter, Public Works Director, "the dog park has been much needed. Stockbridge citizens have been requesting it for some time and now that it's open, it has proven to be very successful." At first, the dog park was to charge a small fee to the public as other dog parks in the county do; all dogs using the park were to be registered with the Stockbridge City Clerk's office and eventually pay a registration fee. Although this was the original plan, they have decided to offer it free to all people in the community.

Clark Park - Dog Park Rules

The special off-leash area is one of the most popular features of Clark Park. They have even set special rules for visitors:

- Use of the park is at your own risk
- Owners are responsible for the actions of their dogs
- Owners must clean up after their dogs
- Aggressive dogs are not allowed and must be controlled and/or removed
- No more than 2 dogs per owner
- No dogs in heat are allowed
- The small dog enclosure is for dogs less than 20 pounds
- Both gates must be closed and latched after entering or exiting the area
- The only food allowed of any kind is bite sized dog treats

For more information about the City of Stockbridge Dog Park call 770.389.7900 or visit Clark Park Bark Park - Stockbridge, GA on Facebook

Off-leash Dog Park Case Study

Gahanna, OH

Embracing the needs of residents and donors through conscious planning and land use

In the suburb of Columbus, OH, the City of Gahanna created a new dog park at Pizzurro Park. The Gahanna Department of Parks & Recreation owns and maintains 750 acres of parkland for the resident population of 35,000 individuals. For quite some time community members had been requesting an off-leash dog park in the area and the redevelopment of Pizzurro Park offered the opportunity to create a win-win-win for dog owners, parkland donors, and the safety and well-being of community members.

Up until 2007, residents used a small fenced-in area in an undeveloped park to exercise their dogs. This park was partially funded by a private citizen group, Pooch Playground, Inc. Due to its popularity and heavy use, the area was often muddy and over crowded. In 2007, the original off-leash area was eliminated when the site was redeveloped into a community park for active recreation and the City's day camp program. At the same time, the Pizzurro City was considering how to maintain the underused park in a flood plain along Big Walnut Creek. While Pizzurro Park offered a shelter, two ball diamonds, basketball courts, a playground, canoe access, and fishing, the 23 beautiful acres of remote parkland had acquired a reputation for undesirable activities. As a result, the parkland donors were discontent.

To reenergize Pizzurro Park, assuage the concerns surrounding the Park, and fulfill the community demands for a recreation area that permitted off-leash dog activity, the Gahanna Department of Parks & Recreation created a new plan for the Pizzurro Park property. With the establishment of a community advisory group, The Dog Park Advisory Committee (DPAC), the Department actively sought community input on how to make the space most beneficial and enjoyable. The DPAC members consisted of community members, local dog park advocates, Parks Board members, city administration, and many members of Pooch Playground, Inc. DPAC discussions led to the identification of user group priorities and allowed the Department to balance the desired design attributes within the resource requirements.

Through the process, a new design for the site emerged, calling for replacement of the two softball fields with a four acre fenced area where dogs could run off-leash and owners could socialize. The ball fields and back stops were removed and 6-foot chain link fencing (some of which was existing around the old outfields), sitting areas, waste stations, double entry gates, and paved paths were installed. The new dog park includes four distinct areas: a shaded and fenced area for dogs 25 pounds or less; an agility area for all dogs; and, two larger areas for dogs over 25 pounds. The larger areas can be operated separately or together as one large space. When maintenance is being done in one area of the park (e.g., reseeding, feature

replacement), the other area remains open. In addition, the fenced-in areas provide paved trails suitable for individuals using a mobility device, as well as numerous shaded and seating areas. Adjacent to the dog park, the Department preserved the existing playground, basketball court and shelter. A frequent visitor to the park stated, "I love that the Gahanna dog park has a paved trail within the park, benches throughout, and a sitting area to bring a laptop to work or socialize with other dog owners. I really get excited about going to the dog park and seeing how happy my dog gets. She is such a character and I know she brings joy to other dog owners who get to pet and play with her."

The entire park area is free to the community and while the park occasionally closes due to high water, Pizzurro Park is now one of the most visited parks in the City of Gahanna. It is estimated that approximately 100-200 people visit the park per day, depending on weather conditions. Individuals from Central Ohio frequently visit the park with their furry friends while their families are seen using the playground and basketball court. The once rentable shelter is now open-use only to limit potential conflict between renters and individuals allowing their dogs' off-leash outside the fenced area.

The Department of Parks & Recreation maintains the space daily, providing turf care including over seeding and fertilizing each season, and regularly inspecting the fences and gates to ensure user safety. The park is on the priority list for snow removal because of year round site use. The

user groups are often observed proactively self-policing: enforcing rules such as waste removal, confronting and reporting undesirable behaviors, and contacting the Department quickly to allow for speedy resolution of concerns.

The original dog park advisory committee members, park donors, and the community provide positive feedback about the site. The creation of the park allows dogs and their owners' access to a safe place to exercise and socialize, and has created a community of dog owners who had felt excluded in the past because of a lack of open space to exercise their pets. Resident Lynn Vermillion, Dog Park Advisory Committee, and daily park user, mentions a story about an experience she had one morning at the dog park talking with a young lady, whom she did not know. The lady said, "I've lived here for several years but have never felt like I was a part of the community until the city built this dog park. Now, I come every day and have met a lot of people. This park has become my community." Another frequent visitor agrees, "Visiting the dog park in Gahanna is on our to-do list at least three or four times a week. I love seeing how excited my dog Lucie gets when we drive into the park. She knows exactly where we are from the minute I pull in and her excitement makes me smile. It is not just a place my dog enjoys but a place I enjoy. I usually end up inviting a friend or two and their dog and we walk on the trail and end up getting a couple miles of walking in. It is great exercise for us all."



Off-leash Dog Park Case Study

Lake George, NY

RV Park PAWineers of the Industry

Founded in 1966 by the late Vic King and his wife Jessica, Lake George RV Park is an award-winning RV camping resort in New York and has been a model in the industry for more than 45 years. For many years they have been creating new park offerings that go beyond guests' expectations. They have received the highest rating from the campground inspectors at Good Sam Travel Guide (previously known as Woodall's and TrailerLife). Lake George RV Park is one of few campgrounds in the United States to have met the newest rating criteria: 10/10*/10. In addition, the park was one of only 42 campgrounds, RV parks, and resorts across the country to earn an all-around "A" grade in the seventh annual GuestReviews™ satisfaction survey of independent parks.

The RV Park, currently managed by President/CEO Dave King, Suzanne Hunsicker, and their families, sits on 120+ acres and offers 400 RV campsites, fully equipped vacation rentals with 30 and 50 amp hookups, water, sanitary, cable TV, and Wi-Fi at each campsite. The park also offers an extensive list of onsite amenities, including an indoor heated pool, 3 miles of paved trails that connect to the Warren Country Bike Trail system, 4 playgrounds, movie theaters, live entertainment theater, horseshoe pits, fitness center, private ponds for fishing and bumper boats,

and trolley service to the surrounding area.

and trolley service to the surrounding area.

The tradition of designing new amenities to meet the needs of their clients and going beyond expectations continues today. After 8 years of extensive research, implementing a customer survey that showed guests were requesting a space for their dogs, and studying the market trends, Charlie's Bark Park was developed. The onsite off-leash dog park, recreation area, and pavilion is a "must-see" destination of Lake George RV Park. Reserved for registered guests only, the 2 acres off-leash dog park offers walking paths, a 10,000 sq. ft. synthetic turf play area, spray fountain, agility equipment, and other elements that are sure to get tails wagging. The fully enclosed park has areas designated for both large and small dogs. In addition, the pavilion located at the dog park's entrance houses a dog wash station, pet treats vending machine, and accessible restroom.

Charlie's Bark Park was designed with dog lovers in mind. According to CEO David King, "An estimated 60% of guests bring their dogs with them to the RV park. As dog lovers, we understand that dogs are like children, and there's nothing worse than having to leave your 'child' behind when you go RVing." Lake George RV Park has always welcomed dogs but the idea was to "create a whole park specifically for them. We feel this will be a game changer, and will increase our solid base of loyal and

returning campers every season," King said. The dog park was built in an underused area but centrally located within the RV Park. The already existing natural buffer zone to other surrounding spaces made it the perfect location providing a barrier to unwanted noise for adjacent guests.

Even when the cost of Charlie's Bark Park exceeded what most would invest in a dog park, the "over the top" dog park which King says is an industry first, has exceeded the expectations of management, dog owners, and non-dog owners alike. Surprisingly, the agility equipment has been used more frequently than was first anticipated. Maintenance is minimal thanks to highly responsible pet owners that clean up after their dog companions and police others to do the same. The RV Park maintenance staff picks up the trash regularly and clean the restrooms daily. Other maintenance practices include irrigation at the entrance of the dog park once or twice a week for upkeep. Lake George RV Park offers an array of programming for guests; in the future, they hope to be able to offer programming for guests' loyal companions – their dogs – by scheduling yoga classes (Doga) or agility 101 training classes. Also coming soon, they have invited mobile groomers in the area to bring their trucks to the park. This will be an opportunity to test new programming at Charlie's Bark Park.

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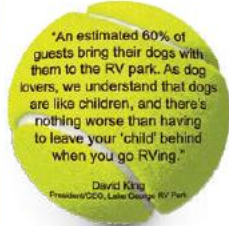
Charlie's Bark Park – Vending Machines

The Charlie's Bark Park vending machine dispenses the following articles/treats:

- Locally made dog treats
- Milk bone dog treats
- Tennis balls
- Shampoo (the most popular item)
- Frisbees
- Toys
- Grooming combs
- Dog shirts
- Dog glasses

For more information about the Lake George RV Park and Charlie's Bark Park, visit <http://www.lakegeorgervpark.com/explore-the-park/outdoor-facilities/charlies-bark-park/>

Photos courtesy of Charlie's Bark Park



"An estimated 60% of guests bring their dogs with them to the RV park. As dog lovers, we understand that dogs are like children, and there's nothing worse than having to leave your 'child' behind when you go RVing."

David King
President/CEO, Lake George RV Park

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Resources

- American Pet Products Manufacturers Association – <http://www.americanpetproducts.org>
- Animal Legal & Historical Center – <http://www.animallaw.info>
- Bark Park – Dog exercise equipment <http://www.dogparkproduct.com>
- Bring Fido – <http://www.bringfido.com>
- Committee for a Coastside Dog Park (CCDP) – P.O. Box 382, Half Moon Bay, CA 94019. www.coastdogs.org or coastdogs@aol.com
- Designing a Model Dog Park Law – <http://www.animallaw.info/articles/ddusdogpark.htm>
- Dog Goes – Dog park database <http://www.doggoes.com/dog-park-usa>
- Dog Park Locator
Android App – <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.omecha.dogpark>
- iPhone App – <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/dog-parks-locator/id372866508?mt=8>
- For a complete list of toxic and non-toxic plants to dogs please reference the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) – <http://www.aspcare.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants>
- Pet Poison Hotline – <http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com/poisons/> or 800-213-6680
- Planning Parks for Pets. \$17.50 from the National Recreation and Park Association Office, 22377 Belmont Ridge Road, Ashburn, VA 20148-1290; 703-858-2190
- Redwood City Responsible Dog Owners.
Nancy Morales, 650-369-4991, pmsearch@best.com
Bret Montague, 650-342-9937, bret_montague@jcmfg.email.com
- So You Want to Build a Dog Park? A Comprehensive Guide for Municipalities and Private Entities. From Susyn Stecchi, DogParksUSA, www.dogparksusa.org

Trupanion – Guidelines for dogs in the workplace <https://content.trupanion.com/files/pdf-pet%20rules-and-etiquette.pdf>

United States Dog Agility Association, Inc. (USDAA) – <http://www.usdaa.com>

Funding Sources

American Humane Society Grants – <http://www.americanhumane.org/animals/professional-resources/grants/>


List of Animal Welfare Funding and Fundraising – <http://www.library.wisc.edu/memorial/collections/grants-information-collection/resources/animal-welfare-funding-and-fundraising/>

Petco Foundation Grant Opportunities – http://www.petco.com/petco_Page_PC_foundationgranttypes.aspx?CoreCat=LN_PetcoFoundation_GrantTypes

Walmart Community Grant Guidelines – <http://foundation.walmart.com/apply-for-grants/local-giving-guidelines>

PetSafe Bark for Your Park Grant – <http://www.petsafe.net/barkforyourpark/>



A photograph of a dog park. In the foreground, a light-colored dog is running towards the camera, holding a yellow toy in its mouth. The dog is wearing a purple collar. In the background, there is a green agility structure with a ramp and a platform. The park is enclosed by a black fence, and there are trees in the distance. The grass is green and slightly dry in some areas.

“ Dog parks keep individuals fit and active, increase their enjoyment of the outdoors, and help to increase social connectivity among people living in the area. ”

Unleashed®: Off-leash Dog Park Design Trends and Tips helps communities advocate for funds and build dog parks to promote outdoor activity for people and their dogs!

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