

Pulled out of the trenches

Park District brass saved by community outcry over Grant Bark Park

While we're as pleased as anyone that the Chicago Park District has found a fairly permanent and more suitable home for the long-awaited Grant Bark Park, it's somewhat troubling that the Park District apparently skipped over some crucial details when first settling on a site at Roosevelt and Michigan.

The Park District's official rationale for moving the dog park to a secluded patch of grass near Balbo and Columbus is that community activists wanted the original site left alone for the time being. Grant Park Advisory Council President Bob O'Neill, among others, is hoping to eventually transform the currently barren southwest corner of the park into a Millennium Park South of sorts, complete with the same outsized public art and outdoor cafes found 12 blocks to the north. And if the decision is indeed based on a desire to keep their options open at Roosevelt and Michigan, which serves as a gateway to both the Museum Campus and the South Loop, the Park District's reasoning is sound.

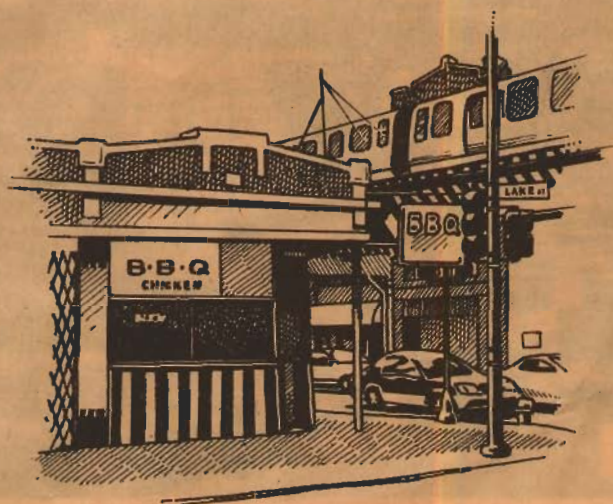
The new location, tucked behind a Park District groundskeeping building on one side and hemmed in by the Metra tracks, should serve South Loopers well without drawing an excessive number of interloping basset hounds and yellow labs from outlying areas. It also utilizes a postage stamp-sized portion of Grant Park that for all intents and purposes has few other practical uses, and while still relatively centrally located, is far enough away from Michigan Avenue to drown out any excessively loud yapping.

ively load-capping.

However, an off-the cuff remark by Park District Liaison Lara Khoury at a recent community meeting leads us to wonder whether the Park District is using the community concerns to cover their tracks from a fairly large oversight. Halfway through the meeting, held to run the dog park switch past the South Loop's devoted dog owners, Khoury matter-of-factly remarked that the park district would have racked up steep bills if they'd stuck to their guns. Something about cost-prohibitive trenches being necessary to connect the dog park with utility lines from Michigan Avenue, which would have easily surpassed the \$150,000 price tag expected for the dog park. The new site's proximity to a park district building, she added, would likely save money.

We don't want to rain on the parade, but shouldn't utility lines have been taken into consideration earlier? After all, the Park District spent much of the last four years holding community meetings and presumably looking into relatively important details like how the lights would go on and the water would flow. And while the Park District agreed to split costs down the middle with South Loop Dog PAC, where, exactly, would the extra money have come from?

In some respects, the Park District is lucky that their carefully plans for a Dog Friendly Area (DFA) Roosevelt and Michigan weren't universally celebrated. Otherwise, it's apparent they would have dug themselves, along with the neighborhood's legion of dog lovers, into a fairly large hole.



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