

Last-minute letter to the editor

This just in from South Loop resident Gail Merritt, on behalf of the South Loop Dog PAC:

"We are happy to know that a skateboard park is being considered to address the recreational needs of Chicago's downtown young people. We have two comments about this.

One: We would like to see a community process similar to the one we have been engaged in for over three years in pursuit of a dog park. This would give the community an opportunity to consider skate park implications and locations, and to provide input. We look forward to having an extended conversation with the park district and others about this. But briefly here, we have to ask: why would one group of "special-interest" users have to go through that effort and not another? We hope the Chicago Park District will acknowledge that the value of the community effort is worthwhile for all kinds of special-interest park facilities.

Two: We were distressed to read in last week's "Chicago Journal" ["Deal on Wheels," December 2] that the location of the proposed skate board park "is tentatively planned" for the tennis courts at 9th & Columbus, right next to the dog friendly area, "Grant Bark Park."

As knowledgeable advocates for dog-friendly city living and responsible dog ownership, we can tell you that dogs and skateboards don't mix! Loud noises and erratic movement - such as those associated with skateboarding and skateboarders- are very distressing to most dogs.

For example, dogs distressed by passing skateboarders on the way to and from the dogpark may try to either bolt away (to escape from the source of distress), or, if the skater passes too close, the distressed dog may bark or attempt to bite. What might appear as aggression is actually an expression of fear. Further, dogs confined in a dog park in close proximity to skateboarders have no way to avoid the distressing noises and movement.

We want to be able to enjoy, with our dogs, a walk to and from a space where we can have a fun, relaxing time in the relatively peaceful outdoor environment that Grant Park affords. Creating a distressing environment for dogs either en route to or at the destination defeats the purpose of having a dog park, and will negate the years of hard work and community resources that helped bring about this long awaited, much needed downtown amenity.

We ask the Chicago Park District to respect the nature of dogs and the efforts of the South Loop Community and find another location for a skate park that will not conflict with other uses—canine or human."

—Compiled by Haydn Bush and Laura Putre