

GAZETTE

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South Loop community may foot half the bill for proposed dog park

By Marie Balice Ward

A section of Grant Park is likely to become a dog park, said members of the steering committee of South Loop community group Dog P.A.C., at a recent meeting. The project may cost more than \$150,000, depending on the infrastructure needed and the size of the park. Up to

half the cost may be the responsibility of the South Loop community.

A sloped area just off the northeast corner of Michigan Avenue and Roosevelt Road near the Metra train tracks seems destined to become an area for dogs to be walked and to play and run. Previously, said

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Section of Grant Park likely to become dog park

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Gail Merritt, a member of the Dog P.A.C., this section of Grant Park was used for construction crews.

Merritt recommended the area to Chris Gent, project manager of the Grant Park Framework Plan, as a possible site for the dog park, and Gent deemed it feasible. Alderman Madeline Haithcock (2nd Ward) supports the site as well as the concept of a dog park and recently supported increased fines for owners who walk their dogs without leashes. Merritt reported Haithcock said that the community's share of the funding would not be a problem.

The Grant Park Advisory Council also supports a dog park in the South Loop area, said GPAC President Bob O'Neill. Mayor Richard M. Daley also endorses dog parks as part of his efforts to bring families back to the city.

Sarah Booth, a Dog P.A.C. steering committee member, noted that exercise, safety, and community relations are among the reasons to establish a dog park. "Many breeds," Booth explained, "need to run off leash. Dog owners should be able to enjoy the parks with

their pets, feel that their pets are safe—away from the street—and a sense of community with neighbors is created by dog walking." She added that disabled people need to let their service dogs run, and a designated dog park is an ideal site for them. Without a dog park, dogs are required to be on a leash and owners may be fined up to \$500 if dogs are not restrained.

Laura Khoury of the Chicago Park District explained dog parks were established beginning in 1995 due to disagreements in the Lincoln Park area between dog owners and other residents. Since then, dog park criteria have been established and require that any park be no less than one-half acre in size; include a hard surface such as asphalt with peat gravel; and provide dog drinking fountains, water or hose accessibility for clean up, benches, a double-gated fence, and dog waste dispensers. Khoury also said the local community—not the Chicago Park district—is responsible for day-to-day maintenance, as the park district already has its hands full maintaining the city's 552 parks.

To create a dog park, three

community meetings must be held to ensure neighbors are aware of the proposal and can raise objections. A site survey also is required.

Another Dog P.A.C. steering committee member, Kristina Lyons, said the Grant Park site has been visited many times over the last two months in an effort to determine if anyone is using that section of the park. Only two people have been seen there during those 135 visits, indicating there likely would be little community opposition. Site surveying of the proposed dog park area will continue for at least three more months.

Among the other dog park requirements are letters of endorsement from area businesses, schools, and chambers of commerce, and an agreement by the community to provide up to approximately one-half the cost, with the remaining amount contributed by the Chicago Park District.

Next on the Dog P.A.C. agenda are a petition drive, fundraising, name-the-park and design-the park programs, and two more community meetings in time for the Chicago Park District's 2004 budget planning which takes place in October.

Khoury also suggested the community group become part of a larger community entity to ensure ongoing maintenance and funding.

The next meeting will be held the third or fourth week in April, when a landscape/architect representative of the Chicago Park District will attend. In addition, Khoury will provide an overview of the other Chicago dog parks's designs.

For more information and to learn about upcoming meetings, visit www.SouthLoopDogs.com/DogPAC.

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