

Creating Off Leash Dog Parks

A Step - By - Step Guide



City of Atlanta

Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs



DEPARTMENT OF
PARKS, RECREATION
AND
CULTURAL AFFAIRS



Getting Started

The best way to start a dog park or run in your neighborhood is to go out and talk to people who have dogs in hand. If they are out walking their dogs, chances are they would enjoy the chance to discuss a dog run in the community with you. Don't be shy; ask if they would like to join a committee. Grab a few people (you don't need a lot, just 5 or 10 folks who are passionate) and set up a time to meet at someone's house to discuss the action plan.

You and your new group will need to ascertain a spot for the dog park. Potential sites could include parks, transmission line corridors, and unused road right of ways or abandoned "brown field" sites. Once you have nominated a site, it helps to let the community know of your plans ... just in case your newly picked spot interferes with a neighbor's garden.

Try posting notices about the proposed dog park in pet stores, grooming shops, animal clinics and grocery stores. Write or email local newspapers to see if they could do a small story about the idea to gain more public awareness. You'll need to write a clear outline about the need for the dog park. It helps if you focus more on how the park will benefit the community as a whole instead of how it will benefit the dogs. If it is proposed for public parkland, the parks department will then be able to tell you if the area you have selected is available to you and your group, or they may suggest another area for you to consider. If it is on land owned by another public or private entity, then you will have to make a presentation to them to explain the community benefit and how you will take on any responsibilities to make it happen and keep it running without the park being a burden to them.

(Adapted from www.animalplanet.com - "Want to Get a Dog Park in Your Community?")

INTRODUCTION

City of Atlanta Code of Ordinances, Section 110-70 (a), requires dogs to be on leashes in public areas for the protection of fellow residents, as well as the dogs themselves. To offer the numerous dogs in the city space to roam freely, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs (DPRCA) has created guidelines to support the creation of Off Leash Dog Parks (OLDP); to specifically provide safe places for dogs to exercise, play and socialize legally "off leash".

Creating Off Leash Dog Parks is an Atlanta grass-roots operation. If a group of dog owners decides an area is needed in their community, they should organize themselves as an official group with at least five members. They should also register with the Civic Association and Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) in the given area. In this booklet, the process of bringing a proposal to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs is defined in detail.

STEP ONE

Define a space for an Off Leash Dog Park (OLDP) in a City of Atlanta park.

There are certain factors in identifying and defining a site for a proposed OLDP. Look for areas that include the following:

- Underutilized sections of existing parks or other green spaces that will not interfere with park aesthetics or existing uses.
- Linear parks/easements to section off for off-leash dog use.

In identifying a site for an OLDP, there are also certain criteria that must be considered:

- The area must be a minimum of two acres.
- Sites should be divided into areas for large dogs and smaller dogs.
- Sites must be accessible for all park users.
- Water line accessibility is necessary for area maintenance and a “doggie” drinking fountain.
- Varying topography, well drained, with both shaded and open areas.
- Grades should be sufficient to prevent formation of standing water or muddy areas, but not so severe as to promote erosion.

The site must be configured to allow for fencing along the entire perimeter with a double gate system for dogs and park users at each access point and another gate wide enough to allow for maintenance truck access.

STEP TWO

Documenting the Proposal

After an appropriate site is selected for a proposed OLDP, preparation of three types of documentation should be conducted within a one-year period:

Petition:

A petition of support should be distributed to the surrounding area of the proposed site. It is important to include the signatures of both dog-owners and non-dog owners. See Appendix' 1-A and 1-B

Usage Surveys:

Usage surveys of the proposed area should be conducted for a period of six months to one year. This will allow for a minimum of two seasons to be surveyed. These surveys determine the existing use of the proposed OLDP site. Create a chart to record who currently uses the site, what types of activities they are participating in, which days and hours the park is heavily used, weather conditions, other amenities around the site such as a play lot or athletic field, and if the person observed is a dog owner or not.

Site Layout Concept:

Once the petition and usage surveys have been conducted, a description and drawing of the proposed area should be drafted. This survey identifies the dog owner group's desired specifications of the proposed OLDP, the division between small and large dog areas, infrastructure, utilities, security, signage, landscaping details, amenities for dogs and users, etc.

Drawings should be scale, reflect actual conditions of the features or facilities. If more than one site is being considered, a drawing showing how the OLOP would work should be completed for each.

STEP THREE

Involving the Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs (DPRCA)

- The initial proposal should be taken to any pertinent neighborhood associations and the appropriate NPU for their information, review and comment. If there is a Conservancy or an official "Friends of" group for the park you will need to take the proposal to them as well. You should get letters from each group you meeting with and include in your proposal submission.
- After all the surveys and documents in Step Two are completed and the NPU approves the concept of the proposed OLDP, a written proposal, including a capital budget, an operating budget and the site layout concept with all supporting documentation should be submitted to the DPRCA.
- This proposal should have a letter of support from the NPU on the concept..
- DPRCA will review the proposal package and the design. After DPRCA has reviewed the proposed location(s) and design, and any revisions required have been made, a final design will be approved. The DPRCA will identify exactly which costs the community will be responsible for.
- If there has been significant change required to the design or a new location identified, the proposal may have to go back to the NPU for their information.
- In some cases, a formal revision to an existing Park Master Plan may be required.
- The proposal may be subject to review by the Urban Design Commission (UDC). For information on the UDC, contact the Department of Planning and Community Development.
- The proposal will go to City Council for approval.

STEP FOUR

Community Responsibilities*

The most important aspect of having a successful OLDP in a city park is ongoing community support and communication with the DPRCA. There are certain responsibilities a community must adhere to:

Maintenance: The community must maintain the area. It is the responsibility of the users of the OLDP to clean up after their pets, rotate, and replace any pea gravel or mulch areas, wash down the hard surfaced area regularly and daily clean up of any waste that users may have missed. The rules and regulations must be posted at all times, and regular users of the area should inform new users of the rules and regulations as well as the importance of maintenance. The dog owner group should provide DPRCA with a monthly cleaning schedule and will have to sign a letter of agreement for their upkeep of the OLDP.

Monitoring: The community or users of the OLDP should assist in the monitoring of the site. The dog owner group members should encourage the enforcement of the leash laws outside the site, monitor the behavior of the dogs and dog owners using the OLDP and assist in the education of new users.

Management: The community or users of the OLDP must have frequent communication with the DPRCA regarding the management of the OLDP. If problems occur with the operation or patrons of the OLDP, then the DPRCA should be informed immediately and involved in the resolution. The OLDP community leadership must keep DPRCA updated with contact information.

Fundraising: The community or users of the OLDP must organize fundraising campaigns to finance on-going operations and new projects for the OLDP such as doggie drinking fountains, kiosks, isolation area or an agility area.

Clean-Ups: The community or users of the OLDP must hold semi-annual "entire" park clean-ups in conjunction with Conservancies, Friend of the Parks, Earth Day and Clean & Green celebrations.

*Failure to provide this type of support, both operational and financial, may result in the DPRCA reconverting the parkland to its original use.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

All the rules shall be posted on a sign at each entrance to the off leash area. In the event that the rules are not posted, users of the area shall still be held responsible for knowing and following the rules, and may be fined or otherwise penalized for failure to abide by such rules.

- (1) All users of the off-leash area shall assume all risk and liability associated with such an area.
- (2) Owners are responsible for the action of their dogs. Each dog must be kept within sight of her/his owner and under voice control.
- (3) Dog owners have responsibility for watching their dog's behavior. If a dog displays aggressive behavior or fights, the owner shall be responsible for immediately controlling or removing the dog from the off-leash area.
- (4) No more than three dogs per owner shall be allowed in the area at one time.
- (5) All dogs must wear a collar and ID tag.
- (6) All dogs must be properly licensed, healthy, and have current vaccinations.
- (7) No puppies under 16 weeks are allowed.
- (8) No dogs in heat are allowed.
- (9) No dogs are permitted to enter with pronged collars.
- (10) Any dog that barks continually must be removed or muzzled by her/his owner.
- (11) Owners must clean up after their dogs.
- (12) The off-leash areas have double gated entrances. Owners must close and latch both gates after entering or exiting the area.
- (13) No children under the age of 12 are allowed in the area without close adult supervision.
- (14) The only food of any kind allowed is bite-size dog treats.
- (15) Do not feed dogs without the owner's permission.

(16) Bicycling, skateboarding, rollerblading, jogging or strollers are not allowed.

(17) Dogs are not permitted on benches.

(18) The off-leash area may be closed in times of bad weather or for maintenance.

(19) Serious problems resulting in injury must be reported immediately to the Office of Parks.

CITY OF ATLANTA DOG PARK PETITION OF SUPPORT

This petition, supported by the undersigned constituents, is directed to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. Its goal is to support the designation and construction of an enclosed dog park at _____ Park with the specific location at _____

We, the undersigned constituents of _____ (name of neighborhood and/or association) respectfully urge you to authorize the creation of to an "off-leash" dog park to be created at the location described above.

In creating a dog park, we hope to accomplish the following goals (The below goals are only an example to be used as a guide):

1. To establish a fenced in, off-leash dog park where well-behaved canine can exercise in a clean, safe environment without endangering people, property, or wildlife.
2. To develop a beautiful, well-maintained space, open to all dog lovers and friends who are willing to uphold the park's rules and restrictions.
3. To view this park as a community project, in partnership with the City of Atlanta, designed to satisfy the needs of dog-owners and non-dog owners alike.

We request the City of Atlanta to approve this petition

_____(provide description) The design of the park will include
_____(provide description)



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