

Subject: Dog Park Proposal for Veteran's Park (Current Name)

Date: December 12, 2011

To: Traverse City City Commission

From: TC Parks and Recreation Commission & our Community Partners for Dog Parks
Proposal drafted by Gary Howe, Chair of Parks and Recreation (CitizenHowe@gmail.com) and Jami Moore, TC Resident and critical Dog Park champion (tcdogpark@gmail.com).

Request: Approval to establish an urban, off-leash dog park at Veteran's Park.

Our mission is to establish a fenced in, off-leash City Dog Park:

- where well-behaved dogs will socialize in a clean, safe and welcoming environment.
- where pet owners will engage with fellow neighbors and visitors to the area.
- where park visitors without dogs will visit to enjoy the benefits of a healthy, active community and the interaction between humans and canines.

It will be a well-maintained space that is self and peer regulated according to clear user guidelines. The park will contribute to both the quality of life and economic vitality of the City. As such, the Parks and Recreation Commission is committed to a partnership with community partners to design, construct and maintain a park that satisfies the needs of dog owners and non-dog owners alike with a shared goal of increasing the enjoyment of our public spaces.

* Traverse City Parks and Recreation adopted the above mission statement at a special meeting on November 17, 2011.

Brief History

There has been community interest in establishing a system of dog parks for several years. As such, it was identified in the 2010 Parks and Recreation Commission's (P&R) 5-year plan that was submitted to the DNR with the City Commission's approval.

This past spring P&R was approached by a large group of area residents willing to work with the City to establish a location. Between 50-60 people in attendance at one meeting and a core group continued to attend our meetings throughout the summer. Collaborating with P&R, this group conducted an online poll to gauge interest in different locations and indentifying people willing to pledge money towards the project at the web site **TCDogPark.com**. During the summer, the City worked with P&R to apply for a substantial grant through PetSafe. Unfortunately, Traverse City was not awarded the grant.

With that outcome, P&R revisited the project in September to reengage the community partners and move the project forward in 2012. With the assistance of the public champions, P&R held a special meeting on November 17, 2011 to consider making a recommendation to the City Commission. The City received positive support during the public comment and voted unanimously to propose the lawn at Veteran's Park as Traverse City's first off-leash dog park.

Why A Dog Park?

A dog park is an off-leash facility that is fully fenced for dogs to exercise, play, and socialize. Done well, it provides a positive social experience for dogs and their owners, as well as visitors to the park. It provides a place for people to gather with their neighbors as well as a place to meet visitors from other parts of the community or other cities. The specific accessories of a dog park can vary from site to site but generally include water for dogs, benches for owners, and amenities to handle dog waste. Since the first official dog park opened in 1979 in California, thousands of off-leash dog parks have been established across North America. They range from very simple areas to more elaborate skills training facilities that look more like playgrounds.

Why Veteran's Park?

Working with community partners, the P&R considers the lawn space at Cypress & Division Streets to be an opportune location for the City's first dog park. This space is ideal because it is currently under-utilized, yet maintained. It also has bathroom facilities, water access and parking are already in place. It is also a walkable destination for many residents. We have identified other options, but we consider this the first in what could be a series of additional dog parks, developed at a later date, if this proves popular and successful. *It is understood that a name change is appropriate as requested by the Veterans Coalition.*

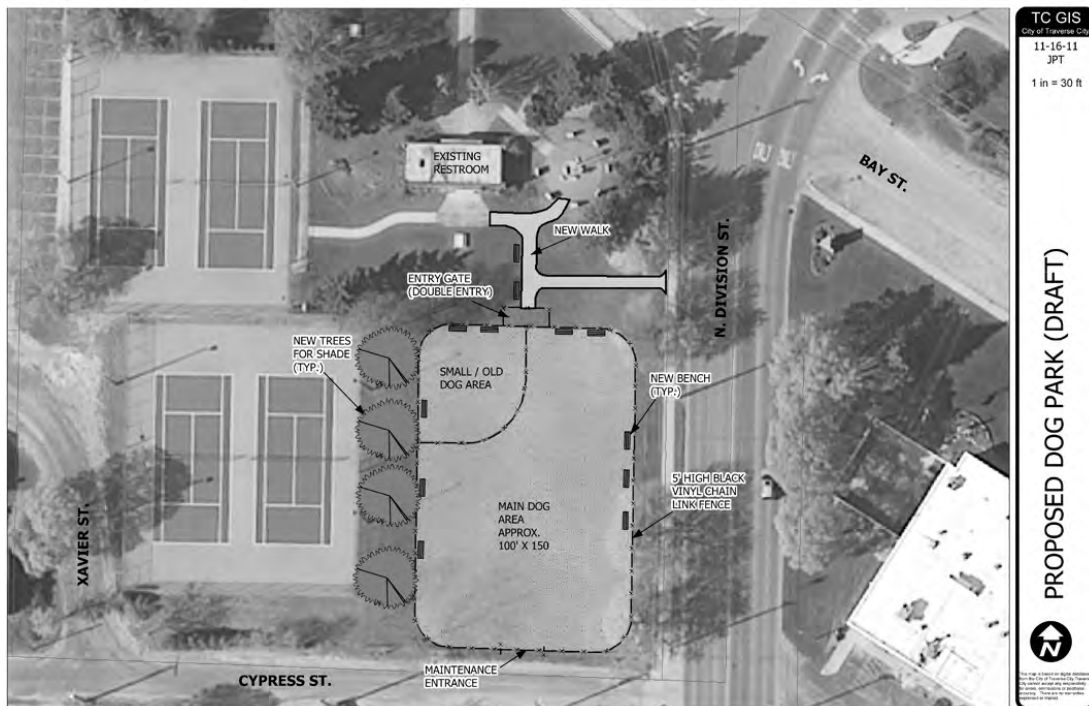


(Above) The view of the proposed space taken from Cypress St. (Below) A working concept of the area to be fenced off 2012 including future improvements like walkways, trees and benches.

Costs

The proposed phase for 2012, which includes the required fencing, gate system, signage and poop-bag dispensers, is estimated at \$15,000 for an area that includes a separate area for small and older dogs. With City support, P&R and our community partners are confident that the funds for this phasing can be raised early 2012.

Additional improvements to the park will be considered with future Capital Improvement Plans in addition to continued community fund raising. The latter will come through donations and a membership program.



Benefits to City Residents & Visitors

A well-run dog park provides the community with the following benefits:

- **Improved Social Capital:** provides an amenity within the City that fosters social exchange.
- **Increased Use of Parkland:** creates an additional activity to attract people to City parkland.
- **Responsible Pet Ownership:** off-leash dog parks help to promote responsible pet ownership and the enforcement of dog-control laws because they provide an accessible, safe place for people to exercise and socialize their dogs. Experienced pet owners have an interest in assisting others.
- **Better Neighbors:** Traverse City is an extremely tolerant place to raise a dog, but an additional advantage of providing areas for urban dogs to exercise & socialize is the reduction of barking and other problem behaviors when they are home.
- **Educational Programming:** dog parks are excellent locations for local governments and training professionals to educate about dog control rules and issues concerning health and safety.
- **Accessibility:** Provides elderly and those with disabilities an accessible place to exercise their canine companions.
- **Placemaking:** by creating a place that is welcoming to residents and non-residents, as well as to dog owners and non-owners, the City will attract people looking to live in, visit and invest in communities that provide community building opportunities like a dog park.

On that last note, it is important to point out that from 1972 to 2010, the number of cats and dogs in the U.S. climbed from 61 million to 165 million. According to a 2011 survey, 39% of U.S. households own at least one dog, which translates to around 78.2 million dogs. 60 % of owners have one dog, 28% have two dogs, and 12% have three or more dogs. Additionally, 75% of dog owners consider their pets to be a significant part of the family and are likely to bring their pets along on family vacations. **The “dog-friendliness” of a city is an important factor for many before considering a place to live or visit.** Traverse City has about a dozen pet-friendly hotels listed on BringFido.com, yet, without a dog park, we still lack what is normal for communities committed to creating quality services for a diverse population.

Phasing Plan

November-December 2011:

- Parks and Recreation Recommendation (Nov. 17)
- City Commission Presentation & Approval (Dec. 12/Dec. 19)
- Work with City staff to establish fund account
- Community partners begin turning pledges into funds
- Outreach for Support

January-April 2012:

- Collaborate with City staff to finalize park guidelines
- Collaborate with City staff to finalize design & costs for phase I
- Establish membership system
- Continue to raise funds
- Consider city financial contribution
- Develop details and plan for future amenities
- Explore name change process & possibilities

May 2012:

- Opening ceremony
- Install fencing

Summer 2012

- Evaluate use and issues through continued observation and direct surveying of visitors & residents.

Park Guidelines

Clear, respectful and inviting guidelines are a critical piece to a successful dog park. Working with staff and the community partners, P&R will build off of current rules and regulations concerning pet ownership, health and safety and noise control. In addition, best practices from around the country will be used to establish a set of guidelines that ensure they meet our mission for a “*well-maintained space*” that will “*contribute to both the quality of life and economic vitality of the City.*” There is a strong coalition of committed citizens who are willing to take ownership to make certain that “*the needs of dog owners and non-dog owners alike*” are met.

Examples of guidelines or types of guidelines to be posted are:

- Hours of operations.
- Owner responsibilities (injuries, park cleanliness and management).
- Dogs must be properly licensed & up to date on vaccinations.
- Dogs must wear a collar and identification tags.
- “Off-leash” dogs will be under control by their owners. If control is not possible, do not enter.
- Owners are responsible for the behavior of their animals. Animals who exhibit a history of aggressive behavior will not be permitted.
- Puppies using the park must be at least four months old.
- Owners should not leave their dogs unattended or let them out of sight.
- Young children are permitted in the dog park only with adult supervision. Infants or small children are strongly discouraged from entering the off-leash area.
- Dogs in heat will not be allowed inside the park.
- Food is not permitted inside of the off-leash area.
- Information to report feedback

Outside Resources Used for this Proposal

- Emerson, Dan: Dog Channel. How To Start A Dog Park 6/2007
<http://www.dogchannel.com/media/dog-magazines/dogfancy/start-a-dog-park.aspx.pdf>
- Dogpark.com for best practices concerning guidelines, funding and amenities.
- Dog Goes. Michigan Pet-Friendly Places <http://www.doggoes.com/parks/michigan>
- CBS Sunday Morning. Pets: All in the Family 4/10/11
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/04/10/sunday/main20052532.shtml>
- The Human Society of the United States. Pet Owner Statistics: American Pet Products Association 2011-2012
- National Pet Owners Survey 8/11/2011
http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/pet_overpopulation/facts/pet_ownership_statistics.html
- Damron, Julie: The Record. Dog Park Offers Lots of Perks 6/18/2008
http://www.recordnet.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080614/A_LIFE11/806140303/-1/A_LIFE11
- Bring Fido. Dog Friendly Vacations— Top 10 Dog Friendly Cities in Michigan
<http://www.bringfido.com/destination/state/michigan/>
- Up North Live / Channel 7&4. Push for Pooch Parks 6/17/2011
<http://www.upnorthlive.com/news/story.aspx?id=631120>
- New TC park may go to the dogs, Record Eagle November 16, 2011
- Park for Pups? The Ticker, April 9th, 2011
- Special thank you to Jordan Bates, Aubrey Parker and John Vinkemulder for the use of their Dog Park Proposal to Village of Elberta.