

Spring 2012 Honors Capstone:

Urban Dog Parks

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Abstract

This paper focuses on a new urban design phenomenon, the development of urban dog parks in the United States. After exploring both the past trends and current situation of these public spaces, the paper looks into what it would take to create such a space today. To establish necessary context, the paper explores general trends of dog ownership in the US, as well as popular opinion of off-leash dog parks (as spaces for dogs, dog owners, and communities as a whole to utilize.) The paper also looks into where dog parks have been created, community reactions to them, and the overall success of off-leash dog parks as centers of community building.

The paper finds that municipalities in the United States are becoming more receptive to the introduction of dog parks and that public support for off-leash dog parks is increasing. Dog parks have mainly been placed in suburban settings, but urban municipalities are growing more willing to introduce these spaces in urban population centers. Finally, the paper looks into the arguments of dog park opponents, who mainly cite concerns over land use. Though such drawbacks exist, the community benefits provided by off-leash dog parks (in most cases) greatly outweigh the drawbacks. These benefits include improved physical health of both dogs and owners, the creation of a public social gathering space, and the incentive for dog owners to better follow leash laws and waste ordinances.

Once this context is fully explored, the paper looks at what it would take to create a dog park today, specifically focusing on urban municipalities. Though successful dog parks have originated both through municipal and grassroots efforts, the paper notes that the way to create the most successful dog park—where “success” refers to a combination of good planning and heavy use—is to combine grassroots and municipal efforts.

Introduction

The United States boasts over 1,600 off-leash dog parks in communities across the country. American dog owners clearly love their parks, as the number of parks continues to increase almost monthly. Though this number is staggering, what's more impressive is that as recent as the mid-1990s, the number of dog parks in the entire country stood at a mere 25 (Walsh, 2011, pg.34). The dog park phenomenon is complex, as is the nature of Americans' demand for this amenity and the reason why dog parks have become so popular in a relatively short period of time. The dog park has gone from a novel concept to a reality in many cities across the United States, and this transition has caused major changes to the way that Americans perceive uses of parkland and public spaces.

Dog parks have the ability to act as centers of community interaction. This sense of community as built around and fostered by dog parks will serve as the basic argument of this paper. The paper will seek to prove that dog parks are beneficial for dogs, dog owners, and communities as a whole, and that municipalities should look to this amenity as a way to strengthen the sense of community. To do so, the paper is split into two sections: one on 'context' and the second on 'the creation of the dog park.' The context section will explore the phenomenon of dog parks in the US, looking into both academic sources and practical examples to show the community building potential of dog parks. The creation of a dog park section will address specific aspects of these public amenities, looking into both what structural elements and what governance structures of dog parks have the greatest potential to build a sense of community.

Context

The context section of this paper proposes that two groups benefit most from dog parks: dog owners and neighborhood communities. Through the next four subsections, this section will strive to show how both dog owners and communities as a whole should consider dog parks as a way to build community in their municipalities. To do so, this section is split into four subsections:

-**Subsection I** addresses why municipalities should consider building dog parks purely on the numbers—namely that the large number of households with dogs in the US would benefit from such spaces.

-**Subsection II** addresses the benefits of dogs in communities, looking into what dogs bring into social situations. This subsection also looks into the creation of dog parks as a way to foster human connection and community within municipalities.

-**Subsection III** addresses the current state of dog parks in the United States. To do so, the reasons why dog parks became so popular will first be explored, in conjunction with a look into the timeline of dog park creation in the US.

-**Subsection IV** addresses concerns raised by individuals and communities to the creation and proliferation of dog parks. The dog park is not a universally acceptable use of public space, and staunch opposition to dog parks occurs because of objections to this amenity as an appropriate use of land, with opponents citing the environmental impact of parks, the single-use nature of dog parks, and the lack of accessibility to children as downsides of this amenity. Compromises have been reached, however, and methods today exist to bring feuding communities to workable compromises over dog parks.

I. Dog Ownership in the United States

America loves dogs. These animals make up an important part of American culture, history, and even the concept of what it is to achieve the American dream (owning a house surrounded by a white-picket fenced yard with dogs frolicking around). As a society, Americans value these animals for companionship, developing a sense of responsibility, and in some cases even as status symbols. The concept of dog ownership reaches across socioeconomic boundaries, with Americans of all strata excitedly taking on the joys and responsibilities of dog ownership.

The numbers speak for themselves. The Humane Society of the United States estimates that thirty nine percent of US households own dogs, with the number of dogs at a staggering 78.2 million (2011), or one dog for every four United States residents. The American Pet Products Association takes these figures a step further, discussing Americans' spending on their pets. In 2011, the number totaled almost \$51 billion (APPA, 2012). Pet spending has been growing at a rate of \$2-3 billion each year since 2001, and experts in the industry expect this number to only keep growing.

These figures, when taken into context, bring light to a couple important observations about American dog owners. Their numbers are strong (almost one out of every two households) and their spending on pets has not only increased, but has weathered every economic shift of the past decade. People clearly value their pets, and are willing to go to great lengths to provide for their animals. Thus, the pet care industry is in a state of expansion, and this trend is likely to continue well into the future.

The value people place on their pets, and dogs in particular, does not stop with money spent on animals. Because of the large number of dog owners in the US (standing at

almost forty percent of households), dogs can be found in practically every community in the US, ranging from the most urban to the most rural settings. And dogs, no matter which setting their owners live in, need space.. In suburban and urban settings, where land is at more of a premium than in rural settings, providing space outdoors for dogs can be an issue.

The issue of providing outdoor space for dogs has been addressed in a number of different ways. Many dog owners prioritize the needs of their animals to the point where having a dog dictates choice of housing—namely, many dog owners choose to live in detached houses with fenced-in yards to give their animals outdoor space. Owners without such a luxury seek out public spaces for their animals—this often translates into parks. Whether or not a park is designated as a ‘dog park,’ this type of public green space often turns into an unofficial dog-friendly area.

Up until the introduction of the first officially designated off-leash dog park in the United States, these unofficial dog-friendly areas dominated the scene. Dog owners would bring their animals to such places for off-leash exercise, and there wasn’t much anyone could do to control or police this use of parkland. Dog owners also became unhappy with this solution, as their animals (if unleashed) were not in a controlled environment. The potential for dogs to run off or misbehave was ever present, and owners could not exert a comfortable level of control over their animals’ behaviors.

Another major issue that began to emerge was that of dog waste disposal. Pet waste in the United States, in 2004, was estimated at ten million tons (Nemiroff and Patterson, 2007, pg.237). Julie Walsh, in her 2011 book *Unleashed Fury*, discusses the problems associated with this waste, describing it as a definite harm to water sources if not properly

disposed of (pg.4). Without measures in place to either provide dog-specific areas or to penalize dog owners who fail to clean up after their pets, there were no definite ways to assure the proper clean-up and disposal of pet waste.

Thus, in reaction to both the sheer number of dogs in public spaces in the US as well as the potential environmental impacts of these dogs, groups began to form to find solutions to the absence of regulations surrounding dogs. These concerns were addressed in two ways—controlling the behavior of dog owners, and providing spaces for dogs to go unleashed. The first method, controlling dog owners' behavior, has been addressed mainly through legal means. Leash laws began to come into effect in the mid 1950s, with municipalities requiring owners to be in control of their animals in all public spaces.

Along with these laws came ordinances regarding animal waste pickup, with New York City spearheading the effort. In the 1970s, New York began addressing this issue through levying fines on owners who failed to clean up after their animals. New York's amply titled 'poop scoop law' had immediate success in cleaning up parks and other public spaces and, as Walsh writes, was quickly adopted as a "model for other cities and helped to reconcile dogs with urban life" (2011, pg.4). These ordinances helped to address many concerns of keeping dogs in urban settings, doing so through legislating accepted behaviors of dog owners and punishing those who did not follow the ordinances. These laws did not, however, address dog owners' quest for space to allow their animals to exercise and socialize.

To address owners' concerns about having space for their dogs to exercise and socialize, cities have looked into two solution proposals—devoting certain times of the day as off-leash hours in public parks, and creating separate designated dog parks. New York

City was the first city to implement off-leash hours in specific public parks. This plan, in place since the 1980s, allows dogs to roam off-leash in most city parks (every park without signs explicitly prohibiting it) from 9 pm until 9 am (NYC Off-leash). Opponents of the ordinance brought it up to the state court in 2006, but a New York State Supreme Court Judge ruled that the law fits into state code (Walsh, 2011, pg.29). This solution helps to provide dog owners with spaces for their animals to exercise, but does not address a major concern of many dog owners—control and safety of their animals in terms of the ability of animals to escape from their owners' watch, as well as dog-dog and dog-human aggression.

A designated (and fenced-in) dog park is the only solution to provide dog owners with a satisfactory level of control over their animals' actions, which in turn keeps dogs in a safe environment. The option of a designated off-leash dog park should be considered by municipalities as the best way to provide the large number of dogs in the US with spaces to exercise and socialize, as well as the best way to provide owners with an incentive to obey ordinances dealing with their behaviors in public spaces. The advent of designated dog parks is recent—the first dog park in the country only opened in 1979. This park, the Ohlone Dog Park in Berkeley, California, began as a public-private partnership in the city, and has been used as a model by many municipalities to build successful off-leash dog areas around the country (Ohlone Dog Park Association, 2006).

Clearly, the vast number of dogs in itself justifies a thoughtful discussion of how municipalities deal with dogs in their communities. Leash laws and ordinances regarding animal waste can help to regulate dog owners' behavior when taking their pets out into public, but do not address dogs' need to exercise. Plans such as New York City's to designate certain times of the day in parks as 'dog-friendly' can help to provide dogs with

the space they need, but do not address many of the issues associated with allowing dogs to roam off-leash. Designated fenced-in, off-leash dog parks are the only viable option to give dogs the space they need to exercise and socialize in a dense urban setting, but have the ability to benefit any setting in which they are placed.

II. Benefits of Dogs and Dog Parks in Communities

The creation of dog parks should not only be looked at as a public amenity for dogs, but also as a way for municipalities to build community. To look at how dog parks have the potential to aid in community building, this subsection will first address the benefits that human-dog interactions can provide in a community, and then will address how a dog park is one of the best mechanisms to utilize the human-dog relationship to foster community.

Dogs are an undeniable part of the American societal fabric. People own dogs for a multitude of reasons, and dogs provide an immense number of benefits to people through both owner-dog interactions and interactions between dogs and the wider community. The benefits of dog ownership are not easily quantified, but studies do exist that seek to put in numbers what a dog can bring to a human.

Krista Marie Clark of Butler University sought to establish such a connection between dog ownership and depression in a 2006 study. Her results show that while dog ownership is no replacement for human connection, dogs do in fact have a sizeable effect on those suffering from depression. Though Clark was unable to establish a link between dogs owned by married couples and effects on depression, she was able to establish that dogs owned by single individuals have an impact on alleviating symptoms of depression from their owner (Clark, 2010, pg.125).

These positive impacts, mainly stemming from companionship and responsibility, are not only limited to helping those suffering from depression. John Rogers, Lynette A. Hart, and Ronald P. Boltz conducted a study on dog ownership by senior citizens, concluding that dogs provide many emotional benefits to live-alone seniors. Rogers et.al. write that dogs “facilitate social contact with people, [and] are willing companions who are virtually always available” (1993, pg.266). The researchers, as part of their study, also sent out a questionnaire to all participants asking about numerous aspects of their current mental states. When comparing results of this questionnaire, the researchers noted that dog owning participants “reported significantly less dissatisfaction with their social and emotional states” than non-owners (Rogers et.al., 1993, pg.265).

Dog ownership also has an effect on the physical health of owners. This effect is best shown when comparing the amount of recreational walking that takes place between non-dog owners and dog owners. Parabhdeep Lail, Gavin R. McCormack, and Melanie Rock look into this comparison, conducting a study of walking patterns between the two groups published in 2011. Citing the commonly understood fact that 30 minutes per day of walking is enough to provide a multitude of benefits for physical health, the researchers looked to see if there was a sizeable difference between dog owners achieving this 30 minutes per day of activity versus non-owners. Their results show that there is in fact a correlation, with dog owners on average achieving this benchmark, and non-owners on average below the benchmark measurement (Lail et.al., 2011, pg.152).

Dog walking also has a social component, which can help to foster community building. Lail et.al.’s study discusses the social aspects of dog walking, which both encourage owners to exercise and interact with others while out walking (2011, pg.153).

Walsh also chimes in on this, discussing how dog walkers, when defending their rights to walk their dogs in public places, “emphasize the significance of the social connections formed with other dog walkers” (2011, pg.9). These social connections can help to start friendships, bring people closer to one another, and create a sense of belonging and togetherness within the dog owner community.

The presence of dog parks can have similar positive effects on both dog owners and communities as a whole. As America has suburbanized, informal and formal community centers that were once the norm around the country are becoming less apparent in American spaces. This can be linked mainly to the suburban tendency of single-use planning, as non-residential spaces are often separated from residential plans (Walsh, 2011, pg.14). In the same way that dog owners use walking their dogs as a means to develop social connections with other owners, parks and other public spaces should be utilized to the greatest extent to promote community building in American society today. Walsh discusses this decline of community through describing the sprawl that currently makes up much of modern urban and suburban planning. She argues that in the current American context, the tendency towards sprawling outwards takes away public space, and thus “arguably detracts from communal development and the formation of any bonds among the citizenry” (Walsh, 2011, pg.15). Combined with the transiency of much of the population, the effect is such that many Americans do not even know their own neighbors. Walsh discusses this phenomenon, citing a study reporting that, by 1990, “72 percent of Americans did not know their neighbors” (2011, pg.15). Dog parks have the potential to benefit both urban and suburban areas, though for somewhat different reasons. In a dense urban environment, the dog park could be the only available space for a dog to exercise.

While this is less the case in more spread-out areas, the social aspects of the dog park, both in socializing dogs and providing a sense of community to humans, carries significance in all settings.

Taking these figures into account, municipalities around the United States may need to address the decreasing sense of community found in American cities. To build a sense of community, people should know their neighbors and be comfortable in the areas that they call home. The implementation of strategies to build up community centers can help address this issue, creating a sense of place and uniqueness in urban and suburban environments. Though community centers can take many forms, a dog park should be looked to as a way to quickly (and inexpensively) build up a sense of place, which in turn has the potential to bring about a greater sense of community. A dog park can be proposed for virtually any type of space, regardless of size or past use. Because of its relative simplicity, this amenity can be built faster than more traditional community centers (which oftentimes require the construction or repurposing of a building), and can attract a devoted set of users with relative ease.

The sense of community that a dog park can bring to a place can be directly linked to the amount of use that this amenity receives. Dog parks, at least upon initial opening, are seldom unpopular, and use statistics of numerous dog parks show the vast appeal of these spaces. Quiet Waters Park, outside of Annapolis, MD, opened a fenced-in dog run in 2001. The park, for many years, had documented use as increasing by one or two percent per year. In 2001-2002, however, when the dog park opened, documented park use increased by twenty percent (Guhne, 2006, pg.4G). Because of the introduction of Quiet Waters' dog park, the space receives more use, more regular visitors, and a larger public profile. A

twenty percent use increase of the space is huge—dog parks prove to be popular, and easily have the potential to bring people together in a space.

Calgary, a major city in Canada, offers another example of the positive community impact that dog parks can make. A 2011 study conducted by G.R. McCormack, M. Rock, B. Sandalack, and F.A. Uribe for the Canadian Royal Society for Public Health looks into this connection through the observations of multiple Calgary neighborhoods. McCormack et.al. sought to identify if a trend exists between the presence of a dog park in a neighborhood and the likeliness of dog owners to go out and walk.

Their results suggest that a trend does in fact exist, and that it lends positively towards the presence of dog parks. The results show that participants living within 1.6 km (approximately one mile) of a dog park walk their dogs more frequently than owners who do not live within this radius, with the results approaching statistical significance (McCormack et.al., 2011, pg.544). These results bring up an important point related to both physical health of dog owners and community—the popularity of dog parks inspire more frequent neighborhood walks. These walks, even if just to and from the dog park, improve the physical health of dog owners as well as help to increase social interactions between people in a neighborhood.

Both dogs and dog parks have the potential to significantly benefit communities. In a time when private land ownership and suburban sprawl pervades, municipalities may wish to seek out ways to reignite a sense of community and belonging. With almost forty percent of American households owning at least one dog, creating dog-friendly spaces should be looked to as a way to quickly (and inexpensively) convert underutilized public spaces into areas of heavy use. Dogs benefit from the creation of such spaces (in terms of exercise and

socialization), and more importantly, humans do as well. Dog ownership and dog parks are connected to increased levels of walking and neighborhood socialization—dog owners are more likely to engage in recreational walking (Lail et.al., 2011, pg.152), and the presence of a dog park is directly connected to increased frequency of neighborhood walks (McCormack et.al., 2011, pg.544). Thus, municipalities should consider dog parks as a way to help bring about community, as well as a way to encourage greater use of public spaces and amenities.

III. The Current State of Dog Parks in the United States

Dog parks, at least in their current form, were first thought up in the United States. Berkeley, California's Ohlone Dog Park led the way when it opened in 1979, and has received the distinction of being recognized as the world's first fenced-in, off-leash dog park (Ohlone Dog Park Association, 2006). Though Ohlone's opening pioneered the concept of a municipal off-leash dog park, the park didn't immediately spearhead public interest in designated dog areas. Walsh describes how the phenomenon of dog park popularity is extremely recent, discussing how the rush for dog park construction only took hold in the late 1990s. To illustrate this, she looks at the number of registered dog parks in the United States. Walsh notes the total number of dog parks in the mid-1990s at twenty-five, whereas in 2010 the number stood at over 1,600 (Walsh, 2011, pg.34). Though the number of dog parks in the US since the mid-1990s has increased substantially, the current supply clearly in no way matches up with the public demand for this amenity, as new dog parks are continually proposed and created.

The basic explanation for dog parks' increasing popularity has to do with the enforcement of laws and ordinances surrounding dogs. The two basic types of laws that

restrict dog owners are leash laws and pet waste ordinances. Leash laws, requiring owners to be in full control of their dogs, began to show up in the middle of the 20th century.

Michael Schaffer, in his 2009 book *One Nation Under Dog*, addresses some of the main reasons why leash laws were initially put into place. Schaffer describes how advocates of the laws view uncontrolled dogs as a menace to wildlife, especially when allowed to roam on beaches and nature preserves. He discusses how running dogs can disturb nesting and migrating birds, as well as produce waste that does not belong in such ecosystems. On top of this, Schaffer notes that “the leash fights also extend to ordinary city parks where the clashes concern recreational preferences, not threatened species” (2009, pg.43). The concern over ‘recreational preferences’ in city parks stems mainly from the commotion that uncontrolled dogs can bring to parks, as well as the unsanitary conditions brought by waste not picked up by owners. With these issues in mind, many municipalities enacted such leash laws to control the behavior of dogs and dog owners when on public land.

These leash laws did not come without controversy, however. Many dog owners, sensing that their parklands were being restricted, vocally opposed the laws. Though this opposition did not cause many municipalities to actually reverse the laws, it in effect stifled the effect of such laws. Thus, from the get-go, leash laws in most municipalities went mainly unenforced, and the status quo basically remained in place.

Attached to most leash laws were ordinances regarding the collection of pet waste. Though not as controversial as leash laws, these ordinances still placed another restriction on dog owners—if the dog fouled, the owner became legally responsible to clean up. Advocates of these ordinances cited numerous studies about the amount of pet waste left in parks as justification for legal action. A study of pet waste cleanup from the United

Kingdom, produced by Paul Webley and Claire Siviter, helps to identify the main concerns of advocates for these ordinances. Webley and Siviter observed dog owners' actions with regard to their animals' waste in a public park. Their conclusion is quite shocking—only 59% of dog owners participating in the study actively cleaned up after their animals (Webley & Siviter, 2000, pg.1378). Dog waste has the potential to contaminate water sources and create unsanitary conditions in parks—thus, by introducing waste ordinances, municipalities were hoping to increase the percentage of responsible owners by making them legally responsible for cleaning up after their pets.

Although most leash laws and pet waste ordinances were introduced in the mid 20th century, they were rarely enforced. The laws were in the books, but had little effect on the actual proliferation of unleashed dogs in public parks, even where laws specifically prohibited them. Walsh brings up San Francisco as a significant example of this, noting that only eighteen parks in the entire of the city were designated off-leash. The rest of the city's parkland, though designated as either on-leash or dog free, still saw a large off-leash dog presence. She notes that “the laws were not seriously enforced,” and that dogs effectively had a free-for-all in most city parks (Walsh, 2011, pg.80-81).

This all changed, however, in the late 1980s. Walsh writes that “it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that [leash and waste] laws were seriously enforced on a wide scale” (2011, pg.13). This increase in enforcement can be tied to the decreasing amount of public park space available in American municipalities, tied along with an increasing population of both humans and dogs (Walsh, 2011, pg.13-14). Dog owners who disobeyed ordinances (knowingly or unknowingly) began to feel the effects of these laws for the first

time, and had to seek out other means of providing their dogs with space to exercise and socialize freely, without the constraints of a leash.

Thus the movement began, and the 25 registered dog parks present in the mid 1990s ballooned to the more than 1,600 dog parks present in 2010. Many models exist for the creation of these amenities, ranging from small neighborhood spaces to large parks covering multiple acres.. The Point Isabel Dog Park in Richmond, California serves as one of the best examples of a successful large-scale dog park. The space carries the title of being America's largest dog park (at over 23 fenced-in acres), and brings in as many as 500,000 dogs in a given year (Wright, 2011, pg.80). This park, because of its size and popularity, serves as a major attraction for the city, as it brings in as many as 500,000 dogs and owners each year.

The success of parks such as Point Isabel should not be seen as exclusively tied to their large size. Neighborhood-level dog parks are also very popular with users, and have sprung up in cities across the United States. The city of Chicago is a great example of a high-density location with an increasing number of fenced-in dog parks. According to Chicago's South Loop Dog Park Action Cooperative, the city contains 19 dog parks (with one in the planning stages). Though the average park size stands at 0.16 acre, the Cooperative discusses how parks are heavily used, noting also that multiple community groups have sprung up amongst dog park frequenters (South Loop Dog PAC, 2011).

IV. Opposition and Compromise

Though the number of dog parks in the United States has increased to over 1,600, the creation of this amenity has not gone without opposition. Opponents to the creation of dog parks have different takes on the issues caused by dog parks, but one aspect of the

proliferation of dog parks connects the vast majority of opponents: land use. The space needed to create a dog park must come from somewhere, and more often than not comes from space already designated as parkland.

Dog park opponents employ two major land use arguments. The first, brought up by environmentalist groups, pertains to the impact of dogs in natural settings. Shaffer discusses the perspective of these groups, noting their stance that “dogs are particularly destructive park visitors, digging up fragile shrubs and chasing delicate wildlife” (2009, pg.48). The spaces the groups bring up, however, are not always large parks with diverse wildlife. Schaffer brings up a specific example of a 1995 scuffle between the San Francisco Audubon Society and off-leash dog groups over an urban park, where the Audubon Society tried to ban dogs entirely from the urban Fort Funston Park. Though they successfully halted the creation of a fenced-in dog zone, they were unsuccessful at banning off-leash dogs entirely from the park (Schaffer, 2009, pg.48). While the Audubon Society was unsuccessful at that point in time, the group persisted. And they finally succeeded in 2001, when dogs were completely banned from the park unless on a leash (Walsh, 2011, pg.104). Though the San Francisco Audubon Society achieved their goals in the case of Fort Funston Park, their environmental argument against dog parks—and their success stemming from the use of that argument—is rare. Groups forming against dog parks on environmental grounds are anything but common, and do not, as Schaffer notes, “sit well with many [dog] owners, who view an outdoor romp with the pup as a solidly green pastime” (2009, pg.48).

The other major contention that opponents bring against dog parks has a broader focus. Citizens take issue with the single-use nature of dog parks, citing that the creation of dog parks take away the ability of public space to serve multiple uses. Schaffer discusses

this concern by quoting a vocal opponent to dog parks in San Francisco, Marybeth Wallace. Wallace angrily says about these spaces that “no one else could use the parks with all the dogs” (Schaffer, 2009, pg.47). In San Francisco, where high population density puts public green space at a premium, the creation of dog parks would undoubtedly take up precious parkland.

When comparing the actual amount of space dedicated to off-leash dog parks in San Francisco to the entirety of available parkland, however, it seems that Wallace’s opposition is not rooted in fact. Schaffer writes that in 2001, San Francisco designated seventeen parks as off-leash dog areas, compared to 174 parks without off-leash areas (2009, pg.46). And this is in San Francisco, a city that both Schaffer and Walsh view as being a major leader in dog-friendly areas. Though opponents such as Wallace need to be included in discussions when planning dog parks, a presentation of the facts should help to quell fears such as hers about the amount of space that dog parks take up.

Another issue raised by opponents of the single-use nature of dog parks has to do with the child-friendliness of these areas. By allowing dogs off their leashes in fenced-in parks, owners are able to make sure that their dogs do not run away, but are still not completely able to control their animals’ behavior. Claire Leschin-Hoar addresses the issue of children in dog parks, saying that dog parks around the country have not been able to come to a consensus about how to deal with children in parks. She writes that “rules [regarding children] vary drastically across the country—from no mention of age requirements to strict enforcement and possible fines should young children be present inside the off-leash area” (Leschin-Hoar, 2005, pg.58). With a lack of uniform codes dealing with children in dog parks, the potential for accidents and injury exists. Dogs, after all, are

animals, and can never be completely controlled by their owners. Thus, although dog parks can benefit many people in a community, they do not serve as a child-friendly amenity, and have the potential to take away green space from families with small children.

Though opposition to dog parks has caused many roadblocks in the creation and expansion of dog parks throughout the country, communities in most cases have been able to come to compromises on most issues. The path San Francisco took to resolve its conflicts should be looked to as a model of how to find compromises on future disputes—as Schaffer writes, the city both strengthened leash laws and pushed forward dialog to create more off-leash dog parks (2009, pg.46). This solution made concessions to every group party to the issue. Environmental groups and opponents to single-use parks received stricter regulations. Proponents of off-leash parks received support from the city for the creation of more designated fenced-in dog parks. This model, though not perfect, helped to resolve disputes between groups in the city, and should be seen as a positive way to address all concerns regarding the creation and proliferation of off-leash dog parks in urban settings.

As dog parks increase in popularity and more are proposed and constructed, opposition will undoubtedly increase as well. However, if municipalities proactively address these concerns, a compromise between dog park proponents and opponents should be easily reached. Dog parks have the potential to benefit many groups, including dog owners themselves and communities as a whole. The presence of a dog park increases neighborhood walking, attracts large numbers of people to parks, and has the ability to strengthen the sense of community in a place. Though opposition to this amenity exists, it shouldn't discourage municipalities from at least exploring the potential of building up dog parks. Compromises can be reached, and communities as a whole can benefit.

The Creation of a Dog Park

The increased number of dog parks present in the United States should be seen as a testament to the success of this amenity in communities across the country. Dog parks come in many sizes and types, and there is not one dog park model that should be looked at as more successful than any other. Dog parks succeed in locations varying from large, multi-acre recreation areas to small neighborhood parks in densely populated urban settings. The governance structures of dog parks also vary greatly, with three main models pervading: government-developed and operated parks, dog parks operated by public-private partnerships, and completely privately operated dog parks (that do not receive municipal support). This section will focus on identifying main trends in dog park planning across the United States, looking into what works, as well as what doesn't. To do so, this section is split into two subsections:

-Subsection I examines the structural elements of dog parks, looking into both necessary elements and innovations in dog park construction. This section also addresses how a well-planned park structure can help mitigate problems associated with the parks.

-Subsection II identifies and explains the different dog park governance structures, with a focus on describing both the positive and negative aspects associated with each model.

I. Structural Elements of Dog Parks

Dog parks come in all shapes and sizes, but two main features are constant through all US dog parks: fences and safety gates. To ensure a level of safety and control of animals, the space must be fenced-in. As long as the fencing adequately separates the off-leash park from the surrounding areas and is durable enough to handle dogs, the actual type of fencing used doesn't have to be of a specific type. Parks around the country utilize many types of park fencing, looking at both financial restraints and aesthetic qualities to determine which type of fencing is best for their parks.

Adequately gating a dog park is just as important as fencing it in. Dog park gate designs range from a single in and out gate to complex systems of entry and exit. As more dog parks are being created, experience is starting to show that complex gates work better. Clare Leschin-Hoar addresses this point, discussing the common application of double gates in dog parks. This allows owners to keep control of their dogs upon entry and exit, and makes escape from the park much more difficult (2005, pg.58). Leschin-Hoar also looks into the newest safety trend surrounding gates: separate entry and exit gates. She writes that "dogs routinely charge the entrance to greet the newest pooch," which can cause chaos when people are using the same gate to enter and exit the park (Leschin-Hoar, 2005, pg.58). A separate exit gate can help to mitigate this problem, as owners can more safely control their animals in these congested areas of the dog park.

Aside from fencing and gating, dog parks vary dramatically in structure. One of the greatest variances is with surface cover. The four most common surface options for dog park spaces are concrete, gravel, turf, and mulch (Hawn, 2009, pg.37). Each surface type contains a number of pros and cons, and, because of cost, maintenance, and sanitation, not

one surfacing material is appropriate for each and every dog park. Roxanne Hawn writes about these surfaces, suggesting which materials work best for different parts of dog parks. She views concrete and gravel as best for heavily-trafficked entry and exit spaces, as they require little maintenance and can withstand the commotion common in these areas (Hawn, 2009, pg.36). Using these materials for the entire surface of a dog park, however, could be seen as potentially cost-prohibitive. Cheaper materials, such as turf and mulch, can be utilized to fill up dogs' exercise spaces, especially in areas where traffic is lighter. As with fencing, the surface chosen for dog parks around the country varies greatly, affected by financial restraints, climate, and aesthetic demands. When planning a dog park, municipalities should pay special attention to the types of surfaces they utilize for their parks.

Dog parks must not only have fences, gates, and suitable groundcover, but also mechanisms to collect and discard dog waste. Waste collection mechanisms vary greatly from park to park, but a few models of dog waste collection and disposal should be able to fit into almost every dog park proposal. Quiet Waters Dog Park takes a hands-off approach to this issue, by merely placing mailboxes at the park entrances for users to supply with bags. The system works, as park users are cognizant of their responsibility to supply waste bags (Guhne, 2006, pg.4G). Other parks, especially those run by private groups, provide bags in dispensers for users of their dog parks.

Another way to handle animal waste in dog parks is to compost it. A trial run of a dog park composting system took place in Montreal, Canada over a period of one year. In that year, the park produced 394 pounds of compost from almost 1,000 pounds of dog waste, and saved an approximate 7,000 plastic bags from being used (Nemiroff &

Patterson, 2007, pg.237). Though composting systems such as Montreal's take a lot of planning, coordination, and effort to operate effectively, they should be looked to as potential ways to 'green' dog parks and help decrease the impact of dog waste and plastic bags in landfills.

The amenities in dog parks around the country vary greatly. Many parks are currently installing drinking fountains for both dogs and humans, giving users access to fresh water. The fountains have proven to be wildly popular amongst park goers, but have not gone without issue. Joni Guhne discusses the issues with fountains in Annapolis, Maryland's Quiet Waters Dog Park. Guhne notes that heavy use of the park's fountain "had churned the surrounding ground into a mud hole, and the only solution was to install an expensive cement pad" (2006, p.4G). Parks with fewer resources than Quiet Waters have learned from this highly publicized mistake, and many now build fountains outside the off-leash areas of the park.

Amenities such as trees, water features, and even fake fire hydrants have been strategically placed in dog parks to accomplish a number of goals. Jess Clarke discusses the positive effects that these amenities can have on dog to dog contact, describing how they can help control inter-dog aggression. She quotes Douglas County, Colorado Parks Director Randy Burkhardt, who notes that "these are places that dogs will investigate, which helps to alleviate lots of dogs in one area at a time" (Clarke, 2010, pg.43). Thus, if aggression between animals becomes an issue, owners can quickly step in to mitigate the issue and direct their animals towards other areas of the park with interesting features.

Another way to mitigate aggression between dogs, especially dogs of different sizes, is to provide separate areas for small dogs and large dogs to exercise. While this structure

is not universally applicable (especially in smaller parks), a tiered system of dog play areas has brought peace of mind to many small dog owners. Leschin-Hoar notes that this proposal, “the hottest safety trend today,” also helps alleviate a number of issues unrelated to aggression, including lessening crowding and providing the ability to close off spaces in need of repair (2005, pg.58).

Other amenities can be developed to spur human interaction and develop community. Picnic tables, park benches, and community boards can be installed in parks relatively cheaply to provide areas for dog owners to interact with one another. The time spent at a dog park, especially when surrounded by other dog owners, could become a meaningful community-building exercise, with interactions between owners spurring on friendships. Community boards would especially benefit urban neighborhood parks, as dog park users could find out about the events and news of their immediate area.

Clearly, the structural elements of dog parks are as varied as they are important. When planning dog parks, municipalities should look into the different potential paths that these parks could take, and learn from both successes and mistakes that past dog parks have made in order to create an even better public amenity. Dog parks can be built in almost every urban and suburban setting, and can be created with extremely varied financial resources, visions, and aesthetic interests. This flexibility of dog park creation should be seen as one of its greatest assets—a dog park could be designed to fit into basically any American community.



This view of Ohlone Dog Park in Berkeley, California exhibits many important design elements of a successful large dog park. Note the different surface materials employed, as well as the double-gated entrance, picnic bench, and trees. (Photo credit: Ohlone Dog Park Association).



This view of the Coliseum Park Dog Run in Chicago, Illinois, shows how a dog park can be successful even in a very dense urban setting. Note the surface materials employed, as well as the play feature in the center of the park and strategically placed refuse bin by the park's entrance. (Photo credit: South Loop Dog PAC).

II. Governance Structures

Though the structural elements of dog parks can vary greatly, the governance structures of these parks do not have as much room for variation. Strong governance structures are important for the success of a dog park, as people need to be responsible for the space from the planning and creation stages to the operation and maintenance of completed dog parks. Three main governance structures of dog parks exist: government designed and operated parks, parks maintained through public-private partnerships, and completely private dog parks. This section will look into all three, showing how each structure has both merits and faults.

Municipal governments across the country continually open dog parks for their citizens. These parks tend to be well-researched, large, and geared towards development. In 2007, Salt Lake County, Utah decided to go down this path, publicly announcing plans to develop dog parks around the county. Authorities planned to start with one park and continue from there to build more as public demand for this amenity increased.

Salt Lake County's experience in dog park planning is a prime example of both the pros and cons of government-initiated and operated parks. A benefit of this type of development is the amount of public input sought by government officials. In Salt Lake County, officials held public meetings and publicly addressed their intent to get into the dog park operations (Dethman, 2007, B03). The county also allocated \$400,000 for the creation of its first dog park—funding of this level is only possible when the government itself takes on dog park planning and creation. While this governance structure allows much community input and large funding allocations, it also causes some issues. Leigh Dethman describes these issues, stemming mainly from bureaucracy: Salt Lake County had to scrap

plans for a park after months of planning because of a disagreement with the city government of Salt Lake City (2007, B03).

Public-private partnerships are another popular governance structure for dog parks. Parks created under this structure do not receive the same level of funding that a government-sponsored park would, but still do receive the benefit of government logistical support and publicity. One of the best examples of such a venture comes from Culver City, California, where a dog park opened in 2006 on an old industrial site. A non-profit group, the Friends of the Culver City Dog Park, was formed to raise money and convince Culver City authorities that a dog park on the site was a worthwhile venture. The group raised \$100,000, which in turn convinced city authorities to seek out grants to clean up the space. The city was able to secure \$250,000 in grants, which, when combined with the group's \$100,000, ensured that the dog park would become a reality (EPA, 2008). Such a venture could be easily repeated in cities around the country. Culver City's park should serve as a model of garnering public support for dog parks at the grassroots level. Benefits of public-private partnerships are a combined funding source (government and fundraising) as well as increased community involvement (as compared with government-operated parks). This model is not perfect, however, as the time lapse between planning and creation could be quite large—in Culver City's case, it was over five years.

Privately funded and operated parks make up the third main governance structure. Nonprofit groups in urban settings usually undertake the creation of such parks. The South Loop Dog Park Action Cooperative is one such group, having opened two small parks in central Chicago neighborhoods. The funding for this group comes mainly from membership dues and donations (South Loop Dog Park Action Cooperative, 2011). Because of this

structure, the group must actively seek out new members from the community, which in turn leads to a large level of community involvement in these parks. Community involvement is the greatest benefit provided by privately operated parks—groups must come together to design and create these spaces without government support. However, the lack of government support is also the greatest drawback to this type of governance structure—if groups do not continually collect membership dues and expand their reach, they are likely to be unsustainable in the long term.

Though all three types of governance have both pros and cons, one structure stands above the rest. Municipalities and citizen groups should look to public-private partnerships as the best way to implement plans for an urban dog park. This governance structure has the ability to bring communities together, rile grassroots support for dog parks, and petition municipalities for funding to improve parks. Dog parks can bring immense benefits to communities around the United States, and the best parks should have strong support from both municipalities and community groups.

Conclusions

The creation and proliferation of dog parks should be seen as a win-win for communities. These spaces were created in response to a crackdown on leash laws across the country, and have eased the transition from little oversight on dog owners' actions to actual enforcement of ordinances regarding dogs. Those in favor of leash laws win, as municipalities are currently working to find ways to curb the prevalence of unleashed dogs in most public spaces. Dog owners also win, though, as this crackdown on leash laws cause municipalities to seek out alternative spaces for dogs to exercise and socialize.

Dogs undoubtedly benefit from these spaces, but the biggest benefits go to humans.. Dog parks serve as prime examples of community centers, where park goers can connect, bond, and forge friendships with their neighbors and fellow community members. With thirty nine percent of American households owning dogs, there is certainly no shortage of people willing to make use of these spaces. And with the large amount of variation present in dog parks, communities around the United States could create dog park plans that fit into their community structures with relative ease.

There is not one right or wrong way to create a dog park. Every governance structure has seen successes, and could be implemented basically anywhere. The most successful structure, the public-private partnership, helps to engage city officials with community members, and creates an amenity supported at both the grassroots level and top levels of municipal government. America should expect to see more dog parks in the future—this amenity has proven its worth in communities across the country, and will continue to do so into the future.

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