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Dog Area Discussions

1 message

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[I'm sending this to just a few people for now; feel free to forward to whomever you think would be interested. Jill and Lindsay, I'm cc'ing you just so there's no misperception that I'm going behind your backs; you know all of this already since you were there when I said it the first time. I'm honestly concerned about the path you've chosen and I hope we can find a better way to resolve this so the park works for everyone.]

Last week about a dozen of us met with Steve Cancian and Cara (another of the architects) at a Dog Subcommittee meeting in the park. We had a pretty good roundtable discussion, and I got to make some points I hadn't really been hearing about dog areas, namely

- * bigger is better
 - more exercise, more varied dog play
 - less conflict between dogs
 - less conflict with other park users at the boundaries
 - less wear (if you spread play out, it rarely gets down to the dirt)
- * more is better (i.e. more, separated dog play areas)
 - all of the above, plus
 - if two dogs are enemies, you can bring one to the other area
 - if someone drops a party or a show in the middle of one area, all can move
 - it sends a message that dogs are welcome in the park
- * amenities are essential
 - we need benches, drinking fountain, trash cans, bag dispenser, etc. in each area
- * Currently roughly 80% of the lawn space is effectively off-leash. (The area bordering 20th St., near the playground, is by social convention leash-only.) This system works surprisingly well! Most conflicts I've seen have been between two dog owners; when a dog has bothered a human, the owner has been polite and got the dog out of

there and the conflict was resolved amicably.

When Steve left the table (after a good hour or so), he said, "Don't try to negotiate, and instead just try to propose the best dog area plan you can, to present to the steering committee."

However, as soon as he left the Dolores Park Dogs crew started negotiating! To be fair to them, they have the best interests of the park and the dog owners at heart, and they bear the scars of many political battles, some of which are still going on today. So maybe instead of "negotiation" the best term is "pragmatism." Nevertheless...

They argued on behalf of several groups of people who were not represented there -- and since they weren't there, we couldn't ask them what they think about those issues, and what they really desired.

Here's what the straw men said:

1. Parents Of Children Who Play In The Playground.

- represented as wanting barriers between the playground and the dog area, possibly continuing across the entire field
- contradictorily, the plans for the playground specifically excluded fences or barriers, except for some boulders uphill of the playground

2. People Who Don't Use The Park Because They're Uncomfortable Around Dogs.

- represented as wanting to lay claim to the entire downhill half of the South Field, i.e. between the playground and Dolores Ave, and between the 14' north-south thruway/path and Dolores
- it was not explained why these people don't now use the far SE and SW picnic area (including but not limited to the Fruit Shelf) where by social convention dogs are currently nearly always leashed

3. People Who Want to Use The North Field As A Permitted Soccer Practice Space.

- represented as being against mixed use, where off-leash dogs can use the field at some times of day, but back off when there's an activity
- represented as requiring a 30' buffer between the field and any off-leash dog area
- represented as believing dogs are destructive to the field, but other mixed uses are not (e.g. BBQs, volleyball net poles, shade tents, croquet wickets, zombie flashmobs...)

In order to avoid conflict with these interests, the subcommittee proposed two dog areas, one where the current one is (SW uphill near Hidalgo statue, extending downhill to wherever the path is laid), and one on the downhill slope of Hipster Hill in NE.

There are some problems with the Hipster Hill one as a dog area qua dog area:

- * It's on a slope, so most play would occur uphill (W) on the flat part anyway, where it does now most mornings and early afternoons

- * It's close to the street, which is actually the main entrance to the park, allowing incursions by picnickers, sunbathers, vendors, and transients, many of whom have their own dogs with them, and all of whom are unwelcome distractions to playing dogs, and usually vice versa

- * It's close to the street, so unless we put a fence at the sidewalk, many dog owners won't feel comfortable using it with skittish dogs

- * It's on a slope, so on rainy days, wear would greatly increase, and/or it'd be too slippery to use

But the biggest problem with that area is that it's already claimed by the hipsters! If we come out with plans that have paths or benches or boulders or dog fountains smack in the middle of the most trafficked, most used part of the park, then the conversation will immediately turn into a loud, public fight pitting dog owners against hipsters (with onlookers munching popcorn and throwing insults at all sides).

I could go on, but in short, there is dialogue missing between the *actual* representatives of the other constituencies and *actual* dog owners.

In general I'm pleased with the community outreach process; it's worked well for cases where there's general agreement. But it seems to not be working in cases where there's honest conflict that needs to be resolved.

(It's also not been fantastic at reiterating the general rules of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" and "preserve and improve current park uses" which I thought the community said loud and clear at the initial "i heard they're going to close the park for 2 years" meetings last year.)

- A
