

Step by Step Guide to Creating Dog Friendly Areas

Initial statement. Chicago City Ordinance 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 some room to move, Mayor Richard M. Daley and the Chicago Park District have supported the creation of several Dog Friendly Areas (DFAs) to provide safe places for dogs to exercise, play and socialize legally "off leash."

Creating DFAs in Chicago is a grass-roots operation. If a group of dog owners decide a DFA is needed in their community, they should organize themselves as an official group with at least five members. Once established, this group should form relationships with the local park advisory council, the local neighborhood association, C.A.P.S Representative, and Ward Alderman. Attendance of these organization's meetings is important and the concept of a DFA should be discussed. For more information call 312-742-PLAY.

Step One: Defining a space for a dog friendly area

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

- "Under-utilized" sections of existing parks or playlots that will not interfere with park aesthetics or existing uses
- Linear parks/easements to section off for off-leash dog use
- Land adjacent to elevated train tracks

In identifying a site for a DFA, there are also certain criteria that should be considered:

- DFAs should be at least one half acre in size (approximately 22,000 sq. ft.)
- DFA sites must be able to allow for hard surfacing
- Water line accessibility is necessary for area maintenance and a doggie drinking fountain
- Varying topography for animals (both shaded areas and open areas)

Once a preferred site is identified by the dog owner group, confirm that the Chicago Park District owns the property.

Step Two, conducting surveys

After an appropriate site is selected for a proposed DFA, three types of surveys 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 suggested to petition at least five blocks in each direction.) It is important to include the signatures of both dog owners and non-dog owners.

Usage Surveys: Usage surveys of the proposed area should be conducted for a period of eight months to one year. These surveys determine the existing use of the proposed DFA site, identifies 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 playlot or athletic field, and if the observed is a dog owner or not.

Site Survey: Once the above two types of survey types have been conducted, a site survey of the proposed DFA should be drafted. The survey identifies the dog owner group's desired specifications of the proposed DFA such as an isolation area, retaining wall or landscaping details.

Step Three: Community Support

Community support and consent is vital in obtaining Park District approval for a DFA. The dog owners group should be taken under the umbrella of the closest neighborhood association in order to assist in financial, maintenance and safety concerns.

Over a period of eight months to a year, a minimum of three public neighborhood meetings need to be conducted to acquire a public consensus of the surrounding neighbors of the proposed DFA.

Representatives from the Chicago Park District, Ward Alderman's office, C.A.P.S., the neighborhood association and the local park advisory council should be present at these meetings. The results of the petition and the three survey types should be distributed and discussed.

Step Four: Involving the Chicago Park District

After all the surveys are completed and the community approves the proposed DFA, a written proposal with all supporting documentation should be submitted to the Chicago Park District for review and consideration.

This proposal should have letters of support from the local park advisory council, the Ward Alderman, the governing neighborhood associations, block clubs, and schools, condominium associations or local business that may border the proposed site. Copies of this proposal should be forwarded to the Ward Alderman and governing neighborhood association.

Upon approval of a proposed DFA, the Chicago Park District will negotiate design possibilities, which will be shown at neighborhood association meetings for review and agreement. The Chicago Park District will also obtain costs for the proposed DFA and negotiate exactly which costs the community will be responsible for.

Step Five: Community Responsibilities

The most important aspect of having a successful DFA in a park is on-going community support and communication with the Chicago Park District. There are certain responsibilities a community must adhere to:

Maintenance: The community must assist in the maintenance of the DFA. It is the responsibility of the users of the DFA to clean up after their pets, rotate, bleach and replace any pea gravel

areas, wash down the hard surfaced areas regularly and daily clean up any waste that users may have missed. The regular users of the DFA should inform new users of the rules and regulations as well as the importance of maintenance. The dog owner group should provide the Chicago Park District with a monthly cleaning schedule and will have to sign a letter stating their agreement for the upkeep of the DFA.

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

Management: Have frequent communication with the Chicago Park District regarding the management of the DFA. If problems occur with the operation or patrons of the DFA, the Chicago Park District should be informed and involved in the resolution of the problem.

Fundraising: Organize fundraising campaigns to finance new projects for the DFA such as a doggie drinking fountain, a kiosk, an isolation area or an agility area.

Clean-Ups: Hold semi-annual entire park clean-ups in conjunction with Friends of the Parks, Earth Day and Clean and Green celebrations.

Failure to provide this type of support, both operational and financial, may result in the Chicago Park District reconverting the parkland to its original use. Each year, the Chicago Park District will return to neighborhood association meetings to discuss the success or failure of the DFA. The Chicago Park District will take appropriate action once that determination is made.

Beaches

Recently, the Chicago Park District and City Council both amended their ordinances regarding animals to allow the Park District General Superintendent to designate specific off-leash hours at certain beach locations, depending on approval from the local park advisory council, local neighborhood association and Ward Alderman.

The same process and standards that apply to a DFA in a park is the same for off-leash at a beach. For potential beach access consideration the aforementioned petitions, the three survey types and a maintenance schedule should be included in a proposal to the Park District.

Rules and regulations of a DFA and Beach Off-Leash Hours

- Owners are legally responsible for their dogs and any injuries caused by their dogs
- Owners must remain with their dogs
- Dogs must be leashed prior to and upon leaving the area. Gates to the park DFAs must remain closed at all times.
- Owners must immediately clean up after their dogs. Failure to do so can result in a fine up to \$500 (City of Chicago Ordinance 7-12-420)
- Dogs with a known history of, or who exhibit, dangerous behavior are prohibited
- Dogs must be healthy, fully immunized, de-wormed, licensed and wearing ID tags

- Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult; younger children must be closely supervised.
- Only three dogs per person allowed
- Puppies under four months old and female dogs in heat are prohibited
- Dogs must be watched at all times
- Cooperation between dog owners is essential

Dog Friendly Area Proposal Submission Checklist

Listed below are the components and supporting materials that are required for the review of your DFA proposal submission package:

Sponsoring Organization. Statement of Organization's history, mission and membership. This group is usually the dog owner group and/or the local neighborhood association.

Proposed Location. Exact location of the proposed DFA including proximity to any residential buildings and local businesses. This should also include other amenities of the park (i.e. athletic field, playlot, etc.)

Confirmation of Land Ownership. Obtain, in writing, exactly which city agency owns the land for the proposed DFA.

Specifications of Proposed DFA. Size of the proposed location, amenities of desired DFA (i.e. benches, retaining walls, lighting, surfacing, fencing, etc.)

Community Survey Results. Copy of the petition, the surveys and the desired site plan

Community Support. In your proposal, include information about the sponsoring organization's community meetings, which were held over a period of one year. Include an attendance list as well as representatives from other organizations

Involving the Chicago Park District. Include who from the Chicago Park District has been informed of the ongoing process for the proposed DFA (park supervisor, area manager, region manager, etc.)

Maintenance Plan. Information regarding methods the sponsoring organization will implement to maintain the DFA.

Expected Revenue. Identify the source of the sponsoring organization's revenue for the proposed DFA. Include any tentative fund-raising efforts.

Relevance & Enhancement to the Community. Statement of how the proposed DFA relates to the existing park, the surrounding neighborhood and the city in general.