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## **Kirkwood residents make push for dog park**

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A group of Kirkwood residents believe the need for an off-leash dog park is greater than ever, and they have organized a public meeting for Saturday.

"Station Plaza, other new condominium developments and apartments leave little space for dog owners to exercise their dogs," Lisa Short said. "Dog parks not only are beneficial for animals, but reach across socioeconomic levels to join people in their communities."

The meeting will run from 10 a.m. to noon in the Kirkwood Public Library auditorium, 140 E. Jefferson Ave. Short is the Kirkwood community coordinator for St. Louis People for Dog Parks, which assists local communities in setting up dog parks. Her goal is to raise awareness and gather signatures on petitions to demonstrate the need for a park to the city, Short said.

"Essentially, they did a survey four years ago," she said. "They said only a small percentage of people expressed interest in a dog park. I don't think many people were aware what was taking place.

"We are proposing that Emmenegger Park would be a good site for this because it is isolated from residents."

The survey in 2001 was mailed to 1,200 households and included follow-up telephone calls five days later and focus groups, forums and stakeholder meetings, said Linda Fenton, vice president of the Kirkwood Park Board.

On a wish list of 20 items, a dog park ranked 17th, Fenton said. The top concerns were for athletic and nature trails, a large community park with picnic areas and fishing, preservation of historic sites and undeveloped open-space areas, she said.

"Only 22 percent thought (dog parks were) extremely desirable," Fenton said. "If they come forward with a good proposal, we would be open-minded to it. Several (supporters) have come to at least two meetings."

The city's new parks master plan does not list a dog park as a high priority. However, "Should the opportunity arise to work with a funding maintenance and operations organization, the city should at that time consider an appropriate

location for such a facility," Murray Pounds, the city's parks and recreation director, quoted from the plan.

"At this point, an organized group has not presented itself," Pounds said.

Park board president Gerry Biedenstein agreed. He said the proposed location, funding and maintenance would be among his questions.

"In some cases (dog parks are) a single house lot in an urban area that's fenced, and in some cases they're acres," Biedenstein said. "If you just talk about Emmenegger as a whole, I don't think it's compatible. There might be a specific spot on Emmenegger, if you fence it, that might be compatible. I think the public has decided they want Emmenegger to be a nature park."

If established, a dog park likely would be structured around the University City off-leash dog play area, Fenton said.

The park opened in November 2002 on 1-1/2 acres at Vernon and Pennsylvania avenues, said Sandy Schenck, vice president of U. City People for Dogs, which manages the park.

The City of University City set aside the property for the park, mows the grass and collects the trash, Schenck said. The city also administers membership tags, collects fees and keeps a small percentage.

Residents pay \$20 annually for the first dog, \$2 for the second dog; nonresidents pay \$80 for the first dog, \$25 for the second dog, Schenck said. There are separate areas for large and small dogs. Conflicts are handled between members, and the organization has a conflict review board.

The park is run by fees, fund-raisers, a corporate donation and wood chips donated by Droege Tree Service, Schenck said. One-time costs have included \$5,000 for fencing, \$5,000 to \$6,000 for lighting and \$3,000 for park benches.

"Our goal is to raise additional money so we can keep adding amenities," Schenck said. He credited the park's success to the commitment of the volunteers who run it and its 400-plus members.

"You can't just put the park out there and hope it will run by itself," Schenck said.

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