

Kingsman Dog Park Breaks New Ground

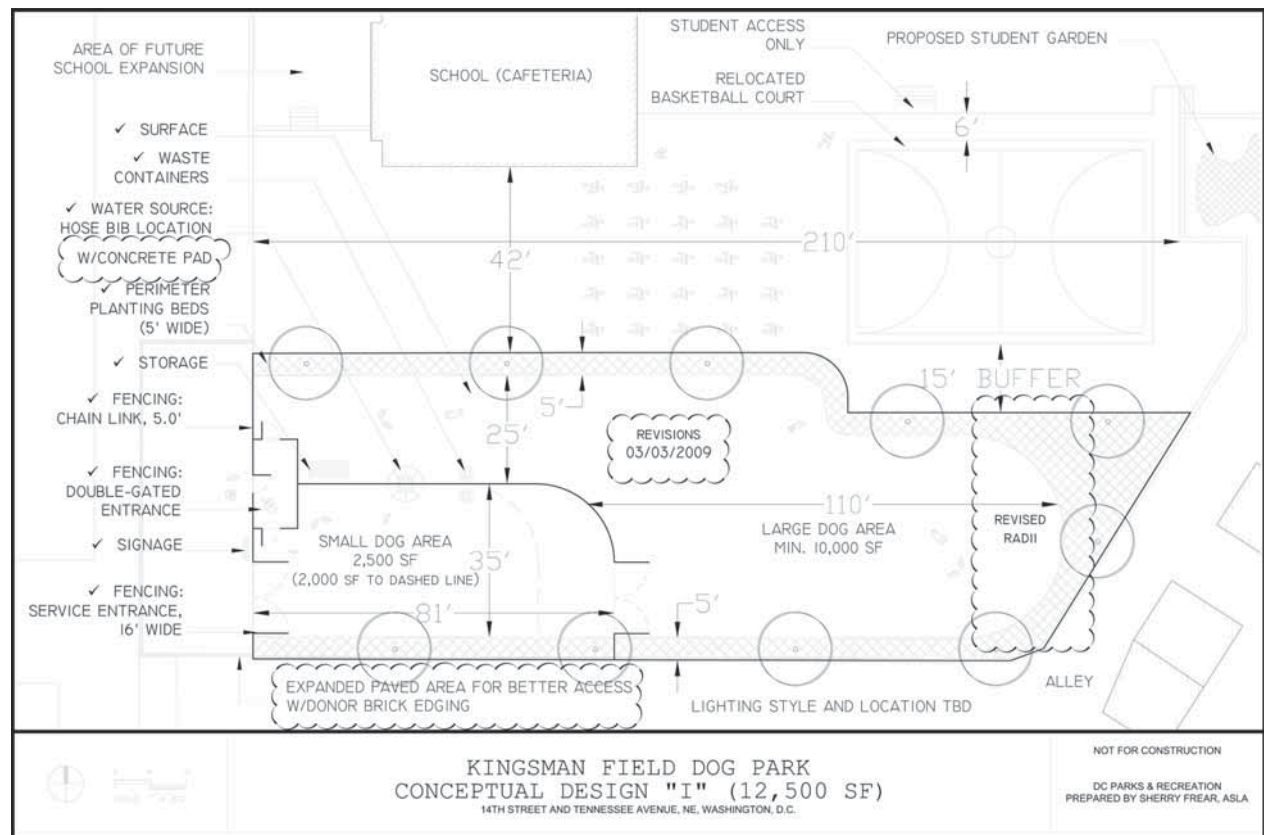
Construction to Begin at Kingsman Field as Early as March

BY HUNTER L. GORINSON

After three years in the pipeline, a largely vacant patch of asphalt adjoining Kingsman Field at D and 14th Sts. NE will soon become Northeast's first official, off-leash dog park -- care of local animal enthusiasts Hill Hounds and the District's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

According to Sherry Frear, a landscape architect with DPR's Office and Planning and Capital Projects, a pre-bid conference held in December drew eight interested parties -- not too shabby for a simplistic, 12,500 s.f. outdoor space -- and forced an extension of the deadline for pitches from developers until Jan. 20. Following a one to two month contract finalization period after that date, the selected team should break ground late this coming spring and finish up within four months thereafter.

"The contractor has 16 weeks... to complete the job, so start and end [dates are] kind of a moving target right now. Remember, too, that outdoor construction is super weather-contingent, although the 2010 Farmer's Almanac forecasts a



DPR's preliminary design for Kingsman Dog Park in relation to the nearby school and athletic field. (Courtesy: Department of Parks and Recreation)

dry spring," said Frear.

Where DPR Leaves Off...

Sitting directly behind E St. NE's Options Public Charter School, the Kingsman Field baseball diamond and neighboring vacant lot have long operated as a de facto gathering place for dog lovers. Official guidelines for off-leash dog parks, however, were only established by DPR in 2007.

Per those regulations, any District-developed dog park must be co-sponsored by a local group willing to shoulder the cost of maintenance and extra creature comforts. Under Kingsman Dog Park's projected \$250,000 to \$500,000 budget, the city will pay for resurfacing, signage, a five-foot chain link fence, two water sources, trashcans, lighting and a basketball court to replace the one currently occupying one quarter of the site.

"We build the infrastructure... What we look to a specific sponsor or group to install are amenities like benches, shade structures or anything extra they may want," said Frear.

Over the past three years, DPR's community sponsorship program has only yielded three dog parks,

all situated in Northwest. Although four others are set to go to ground in the coming year, the D St. park will remain the only such public vista for dog lovers on the south side of the Hill.

Hill Hounds Picks Up

While DPR is in the process of selecting a developer, Hill Hound members -- who have been using and maintaining the lot since the late 1990s -- are making sure they are well prepared to take on that "anything extra" end of their deal with the city.

In order to find just what goes into an ideal dog park, they've distributed a twelve question online survey to the membership that examines everything from the preferred size of dog play areas to the need for landscaping and playground equipment.

"The one thing that we've decided upon is to include benches, but beyond, we're going to compile the survey data and see what people think," said Hill Hounds board member Beth Kemler, who joined the group in 2008 after adopting a new puppy.

One notable topic up for discus-

sion is the choice of ground material in the park. Grass would have to be frequently reseeded, making it a costly choice. A preference towards two other decidedly more paw-resistant alternatives -- finely ground pieces of decomposed granite or artificial "K9Grass" that allows for drainage -- are also being explored by the Hill Hounds survey. Their findings will be released at the group's Jan. 21 meeting at SOVA Espresso and Wine (1359 H St. NE).

Colorfully Bridging a Budget Gap

Of course, urban park perks like pergolas and seesaws -- just two of the proposed add-ons -- don't come cheap. Hill Hounds is currently fundraising to meet the financial obligations required of their first District-sponsored project and, as of January, had already accrued nearly \$20,000 in donations.

The organization is aiming to gather another \$5000 by the end of March by selling engraved bricks that will be installed in a walkway separating Kingsman Field from the park proper. Prices range from \$120



Local pooch Cheney gets excited at the future site of NE's first off-leash dog park. Photo by Hunter Gorinson.



a single brick with three lines of black text all the way to a \$1500, 24 inch "brick array" that can feature both script and logos in a variety of colors, from "antique white" to "leather brown." It's a venture that Kemler says will make all the difference once Kingsman Dog Park opens to the public later this year.

"Adding this to the money that we've raised so far will be enough to make sure that we can buy park amenities without wiping out our funds completely," she said. "That way we'll have a reserve [some] for maintenance of the park once it opens."

For a group that managed to collect 952 signatures -- nearly ten times the amount required by DC law -- to get their pet project off the ground, that last hurdle certainly shouldn't be the hardest.

To find out more about Hill Hounds and their plans for the Kingsman Dog Park, visit www.hillhounds.com. ★

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