

New condos overlook a forlorn Kingsman Field.  
Photo by Melynda Majors.

INSET: Lucien and Lilly Majors view Kingsman graffiti with dismay. Photo by Melynda Majors



## Legal Off-Leash Dog Parks

### Progress, One Paw at a Time

BY NANCY J. KELLNER

December 2007 brought dog owners some early holiday joy – the final rulemaking to amend Chapter 7 of Title 19 of the DC Municipal Regulations. Not ringing any bells? At long last, we have rules governing the creation and maintenance of off-leash dog parks in the District. Many thought this would never happen.

Now the real work begins for advocates and eager dog owners. The application packet begins with a letter from Clark E. Ray, director of the DC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), to dog park applicants in which he says: “I am excited to present you with this unique opportunity to work together to expand DPR’s offerings and services for District residents,” by establishing new public dog parks. And the current budget includes \$500,000 to be used by DPR for these parks.

The process seems simple: identify a site; complete the short application once DPR confirms that the District owns the land; draft a formal proposal stating the reasons for establishing a dog park in the neighborhood; obtain letters and/or petitions of support from adjoining advisory neighborhood commissions; obtain letters and/or petitions of support from residents within a 10-block radius of the proposed park and other individuals/organizations in the surrounding area; and submit the package to DPR and wait.

But of course, there’s more to it. Establishing a

dog park requires formation of a “friends” group to spearhead and organize the effort, persuade neighbors and commissioners, formulate and present a compelling vision, and work with DPR on a feasible design and implementation plan. DPR will have “primary responsibility for constructing and maintaining the park, and the dog park group shall have primary responsibility for daily management of the park.” (Regulations, Sec. 732.8). The dog park group will need to foster and maintain good relationships with the neighborhood and monitor park use and, perhaps, abuse.

### Poised to be Among the First – Friends of Kingsman Field and HillHounds

The Hill offers few DC-owned areas that are large enough for a sizeable dog park or, like Walter Pierce Park in Adams Morgan (DPR’s “pilot” dog park), a multi-use park for dogs, children, gardeners and athletes. Reviving an effort that has been percolating for many years, the recently formed Friends of Kingsman Field envisions a comprehensive renovation, creating a neighborhood destination in the spirit of Walter Pierce and Garfield Park (Third Street SE).

Kingsman Field is located behind Options Charter School, between 13th & 14th and D & E streets NE. The field has a large grassy area and an

oddly-shaped asphalt area behind the school and a nearby church. There are two sad-looking basketball hoops, rusting and broken fences, graffiti and untended grass. New condos flank one side of the field, and across alley-ways, there are older homes nearby.

Kingsman has a colorful and turbulent past, punctuated by riots in the ‘60s, subsequent abandonment of the site by a Safeway store, and the closing then reopening of the adjacent public school. From 1997 to 2001, annual “urban campouts” (complete with tents and marshmallow roasts) were organized by neighbors to “raise awareness about Kingsman Field and the need for greenspace on Capitol Hill,” say Suzanne Wells and Elizabeth Nelson, who organized this mammoth weekend event. Also, the District was trying to sell the land and school to private developers. By 2001, DPR realized it had jurisdiction and plans to renovate the field were underway.

The current Friends of Kingsman includes neighbors, landscape architects, kid and dog parents, urban campout veterans, Sports on the Hill, community gardeners and ANC6A commissioners Bill Schultheiss and Mary Beatty. Says Schultheiss, “I’ve been interested in rejuvenating Kingsman for many years. We now have an outstanding group of energized, experienced people working hard to realize the dream of a Kingsman

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## Release the Hounds!

Over the years, Kingsman became a gathering place for dog owners to exercise their dogs, often off-leash, provoking the ire of one very vocal and belligerent resident. Attempts to establish peaceful coexistence failed. Today, few dog-owners venture there. Melynda Majors, contact for the advocacy group, HillHounds, is enthusiastic about a new dog park not only for her two basset hounds, Lucien and Lilly, but in memory of her beloved basset, Agnes. Says Majors, “When Agnes was too sick to walk far, she’d strain at her leash to go to Kingsman. But the harassment we suffered terrified her. I couldn’t subject her to that.”

HillHounds is circulating a petition to garner support for the dog park. Download it from [www.geocities.com/fsuseminole98/KingsmanDogpark-Petition.pdf](http://www.geocities.com/fsuseminole98/KingsmanDogpark-Petition.pdf).

## Beyond the Dogs

On his website, Ward 6 Councilmember Tommy Wells says: “As a dog owner myself, I truly believe dogs are as much a part of our lives in the city as anything else. They get us outside walking and help to build closer communities with our neighbors. Having secure, off-leash areas dedicated for our dogs will be a great amenity in our city life together.” Amen and Woof!

## To learn more about:

- The Friends of Kingsman and ANC 6A meetings, contact Bill Schultheiss at [schlthss@yahoo.com](mailto:schlthss@yahoo.com).
- The dog park effort, look to HillHounds’ Melynda Majors at [hillhounds@yahoo.com](mailto:hillhounds@yahoo.com).
- The dog park regulations and application process, see [dpr.dc.gov/dogparks](http://dpr.dc.gov/dogparks).

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