



Addendum
Minnetonka Park Board
Meeting of March 6, 2024

ITEM 7B – Purgatory Park Master Plan – Preliminary Strategies Regarding Dogs

- **Feedback received after the distribution of the park board packet**

Feedback received after the distribution of the park board packet

From: Sabrina Harvey < >
Date: March 1, 2024 at 9:52:00 AM CST
To: Rebecca Schack <Rebecca@meierschack.com>, Calvert Deb <dacatajk@gmail.com>, kwilburn@minnetonkamn.gov
Cc: Walick Christopher <cwalick@minnetonkamn.gov>
Subject: Off leash dogs in Minnetonka Parks

Dear Council Members:

My name is Sabrina Harvey and I live at 11934 Hilloway Road West in Minnetonka. I'm writing this email as a follow-up to an email I sent to Park Board Chair Chris Walick after February's park board meeting. In that email, I expressed my hope that Minnetonka develop a solution to the "dogs in the park" issue that meets the needs of everyone. Chris invited me to speak at March's meeting, but I am unable to because I'm having a surgery on March 4.

So, I'm writing this email. I'll be as brief as possible.

- I understand both sides of the issue. Off-leash dog parks have benefits for dogs and owners but also negative consequences.
- I've been jumped on and knocked down by dogs in dog parks. I've witnessed dog fights. For this reason, I no longer go to off-leash dog parks.
- No one can seriously argue that off-leash dogs don't negatively impact the environment. Visit any off-leash dog park to see how dogs impact the landscape. One of the speakers at February's meeting talked about the dog park at Lake of the Isles which he described as "really crappy" and "a plot of mud". I've been to many dog parks, and if it's heavily used, it becomes dust and mud unless it has an artificial surface or extremely durable ground cover.
- Purgatory is large so damage is "spread out", but it is clear where the heavily used off-leash area is. In the informal areas, even if damage isn't readily visible, many studies document how wildlife leaves areas where dogs run – I can provide some if you'd like.
- An unfenced dog park in the middle of Purgatory Park conflicts with the Natural Resources Master Plan.
- On almost every visit to Purgatory, I see off-leash dogs on the main trail. I've experienced and heard of countless incidents of dog waste and waste bags left on the ground. I've experienced and heard many incidents where people who ask owners to leash, control, or pick up after their dog are treated rudely.
- 40 of 45 municipalities in Hennepin County require dogs to be on a leash on public property unless it's a designated dog park; Minnetonka is one of the exceptions. Three of these (Maple Plain, Rockford, and Greenfield) are exurbs with small populations and a much different character than Minnetonka. The fourth, Woodland, is a very small city with mostly large lots and again, a different character than Minnetonka.

For these reasons, I think Minnetonka should develop a plan to move toward formal off-leash dog parks. I realize there is a group of dog owners who do not want things to change in Purgatory; letting their dogs run free is the main reason they go to the park. But continuing with current policy will result in more

conflicts with people who don't want to deal with dogs and their waste and continued environmental degradation.

In the short term, signage (maps) that clearly show where dogs are and are not allowed would be helpful, as well as signs that spell out rules.

Minnnetonka's current off-leash ordinance and lack of specification of formal and informal trails make the ordinance unenforceable. Most cities do not allow off-leash dogs on public property except in designated dog parks, but since Minnetonka has no off-leash dog parks, I suggest a two-step transition. First, the ordinance should be changed to require dog owners to purchase a permit to be off-leash on informal trails (and leashed on formal trails), which would also require the dog to be licensed with up-to-date vaccinations. These fees would help offset dog costs and make rule enforcement easier.

Then, I think Minnetonka should make it a priority to identify sites for off-leash parks and develop them. There is an area already identified in Purgatory. As these parks are developed, Minnetonka can transition to having off-leash dogs only in designated parks.

I know this is a contentious issue, but it's been around a long time and will continue to be a problem until it is addressed with consideration of dog owners, people who don't like off-leash dogs, and people who want to preserve our environment in as diverse and healthy a state as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sabrina Harvey

Name

Tawney Jameson

Full Address

5425 Spring Lane

Minnnetonka, MN 55345-4233

USA

Phone

Email

Meeting date

March 6

Agenda item

Dogs in Purgatory

Comment

I moved to 5425 Spring Lane two years ago to enjoy the park and wildlife. I have been walking Purgatory Park for over 20 years and have always lived within 2 miles of the park. I am HORRIFIED after reading your agenda to find

that you might put a fenced in dog park directly behind my home! LITERALLY behind my home and not to mention a parking lot on Spring Lane. I'm not sure if you are aware that this is one of the last spots where wildlife feels safe. I see deer, coyote, foxes, owls, etc. almost daily, but they'll be gone once the area is overrun with humans (coffee talk) and their dogs (constantly barking) 14 hours of the every day. We are already dealing with the potential development of Minnetonka Flats and now this?? Purgatory Park should be off leash or on leash - no fenced in areas. Please remember that Purgatory Park is surrounded by residential houses and neighborhoods that will be greatly affected by you choosing to put a fenced in dog park and parking lot in our neighborhood.

Thank you,
City of Minnetonka, MN

Name

Andrew Jennings

Full Address

4330 Windwood Way

Minnetonka, Minnesota 55345

United States

Phone

Email

Meeting date

3/6/2024

Agenda item

Draft Purgatory Park Master Plan

Comment

I have been reading the Draft plan and it appears the data on page 31 is either incorrect or extremely misleading. It lists the factors discouraging the use of Purgatory Park as follows: Condition of Trails 17% Safely Concerns 12% Available Amenities 18% Condition of Amenities 9% Presence of Off-leash dogs 47% Other 36% It does not state what percentage it is referring to but, given that the report is discussing the survey results at this point, the obvious inference is that it is referring the percentage of survey respondents. This is not the case. The raw data from the survey is presented on page 116 of the report. I shows that the actual percentages are as follows: Condition of Trails 8% Safely Concerns 6% Available Amenities 8% Condition of Amenities 4% Presence of Off-leash dogs 23% Other 17% No factors 52% I believe this paints an entirely different picture and the report should be corrected as soon as possible. I have not been through the rest of the data presented in the plan but I think it would be prudent to vet it for bias in the presentation of the data before proceeding. Thank you Andrew Jennings

Thank you,
City of Minnetonka, MN

From: Janey Lovelock <>

Sent: Monday, March 4, 2024 8:45 AM

To: Korey Beyersdorf <kbeyersdorf@minnetonkamn.gov>; Ella DiLorenzo <edilorenzo@minnetonkamn.gov>; Anne Hanley <ahanley@minnetonkamn.gov>; David Ingraham <dingraham@minnetonkamn.gov>; Ben Jacobs <bjacobs@minnetonkamn.gov>; Katie Semersky <ksemersky@minnetonkamn.gov>; Christopher Walick <cwalick@minnetonkamn.gov>; Kelly ODea <kodea@minnetonkamn.gov>; Matt Kumka <mkumka@minnetonkamn.gov>; Brad Wiersum <bwiersum@minnetonkamn.gov>; Deborah Calvert <dcalvert@minnetonkamn.gov>; Patsy Foster-Bolton <pbolton@minnetonkamn.gov>; Rebecca Schack <rschack@minnetonkamn.gov>; Paula Ramaley <pramaley@minnetonkamn.gov>; Kissy Coakley <kcoakley@minnetonkamn.gov>; Vennerstrom < >; Erin Lovelock < >; Kelly Lovelock < >; Kelly Lazauskas < >; Vyto Lazauskas < >

Subject: Purgatory Park Master Plan / Upcoming March 6, 2024 Draft Review

Good morning,

As a neighbor and frequent visitor to Purgatory Park the recent discussion for fencing areas within this natural area present great concern.

It is obvious that although the City of Minnetonka allowed for open feedback concerning changes to the use of this natural area, the decisions have been made and community input is being disregarded.

The February 7th Park Board Meeting was heavily attended by concerned citizens. Although I did not speak at the podium, I echo the emotional statements that were shared by the many attendees. It seems clear that my input, nor that of any of the many concerned citizens that have voiced their displeasure with upcoming restrictions for dog use in this open area, has fallen on deaf ears.

Walks at this park with my dogs serves as a spiritual practice. Over the years and along the trails I have met new kindred spirits, laughed, grieved, meditated and soothed my psyche. As a long time resident of Minnetonka, I used to drive to the park for my daily walk. Now, a homeowner and neighbor to the park for the past 7 years, I am able walk from my back yard to enjoy this treasure, greet the day, and observe the season's change.

Fencing areas within this great open space will only cause additional harm to the environment. There was discussion and concern about dog use and its impact on wildlife. The proposed fences will prohibit free movement of wildlife and cause further disruption of the natural area. There are Tiger Salamanders, deer, turkey, and fox, that I have observed. Fences and containment will greatly impact their free range.

Aside from the personal and emotional concerns that many of us have raised, there is the financial cost for the implementation of said changes. New parking lots, fencing, signage, maintenance, enforcement do not come without a cost to the citizens of Minnetonka.

The proposed plan appears to be an overreaction to sentiments expressed by a few. Purgatory is the one park in Minnetonka that provides an exceptional experience for dogs and their owners. I would discourage such dramatic changes and expenses.

Please, slow down, take another look. What is driving the urgency?

Janey Lovelock
5575 Nantucket Road
Minnetonka, MN 55345

Name

Eric Cepek

Full Address

4730 Gaywood Dr.
Minnetonka, Minnesota 55345
United States

Phone

Email

Meeting date

March 6th

Agenda item

Purgatory Park Plans

Comment

I am a long-term homeowner and member of the Minnetonka community and am astonished with the plans being proposed for Purgatory Park. Out of all the parks I use in Minnetonka, Purgatory is by far the most utilized that does not have sports fields. The reason is, it works and no changes should be made outside of some trail and infrastructure updates. I am astonished the board has heard this over and over through feedback that the current park brings significant utility to the entire community and instead decides to ignore the voice of the people who are paying for it. In the report, it clearly states that 60+% responded in favor of the current status of open land in the park (including off-leash dogs). As our family uses this park daily, we have had the opportunity to enjoy many aspects of nature and community. This includes building community and coexisting along these informal trails with bird watchers, kids' environmental projects, dogs and dog owners, foragers, photographers, hikers, etc. The point is the park is a public space for the public and the public has created a community around it. Limiting access goes against the entire goal of our city and our park system. Lastly, the comments related to this land being 1. a nature

preserve, 2. is undergoing prairie restoration and 3. environmental impact. 1. How and where was this established as a nature preserve? What does this even mean? 2. Purgatory was not and never has been a prairie. If you have been there, it is fully surrounded by hard woods and the open areas were once a farm that was made from cutting down trees. We are now restoring these open areas to something that never existed? 3. Please share details of who and how this environmental impact was conducted. It is quite silly to think that people walking in the non-formal trails are creating an environmental issue. Is the next step to ban deer from using the trails and transferring buckthorn seeds? Fix this mis-guided endeavor.

Thank you,
City of Minnetonka, MN

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Message submitted from the <City of Minnetonka, MN> website.

Site Visitor Name: Andrew Engelman
Site Visitor Email:

Can you tell me why the decision to mandate all dogs on leash at Purgatory. The open spaces unleashed with voice command is so good. Thank you

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Name

Pamela Layton

Full Address

5538 Nantucket Pl
Minnetonka, MN 55345
United States

Phone

Email

Meeting date

March 6, 2024

Agenda item

Draft Purgatory Park Plan

Comment

I want to thank City Staff and Park Board members for all the work that has gone into this plan. Purgatory Park is a very special public space and protecting it is very important to me. Today I am writing to support the option to install temporary fencing along the east side of the area frequently used for off-leash dog activity. I noted that this recommendation is optional, but I think it is absolutely necessary. My property directly abuts the park boundary and my yard is very close to the primary path on the east side of the park. The frequency of dogs off-leash running through my yard as well as my neighbors has increased significantly in the last several years. These dogs are often chasing rabbits or other critters and rarely does calling by their owners stop their pursuit. Some dogs have been quite aggressive. This even occurs at night. I've had strange dogs on my deck with no owner even calling for them.

Although I do not think this fencing is the best solution — I support an off-leash fenced dog park — I want to see something done now. Like many others, I have concerns about the degradation to the creek and other ecologically sensitive areas of the park as well as reduction of wildlife by the presence of off-leash dogs and hope that these issues will be addressed over the longer term, but temporary fencing on the eastern edge should not be optional, but a priority. Thank you.

Thank you,
City of Minnetonka, MN

From: Elizabeth A <>
Sent: Monday, March 4, 2024 12:58 PM
To: Matt Kumka <mkumka@minnetonkamn.gov>
Subject: Dog park

Hello -

As a tax paying resident of Minnetonka, alongside so many others we ask that you consider how displacing this off-leash dog park will affect the hundreds of dog and dog owners that use it each day. We need this as a health outlet. It's of incredible value - concerns can be addressed another way than the draconian measure of complete elimination. The difference between this having off-leash absolutely ruins the value of it for myself, family and dogs.

-elizabeth

From: Laura Brubaker <>
Sent: Tuesday, March 5, 2024 12:11 PM
To: Sara Woeste <swoeste@minnetonkamn.gov>
Subject: Purgatory Park and Dogs

Hi Sara,

I want to register my disappointment with the proposed changes to the off-leash dog area in Purgatory Park. I learned from a friend that the current dog access to the non-maintained trails in the center of the park could be changed to a two-acre enclosed area in a muddy part of the park. That's unacceptable. Many, many Minnetonka dog owners use the off-leash portion of the park on a daily basis. They are responsible owners who clean up after their dogs, and the dogs are well behaved. The dogs are of no more risk to bring in invasive species than humans are. The arguments for changing the park rules against off-leash dogs are ridiculous.

I've heard there is a single voice with an outsized amount of power driving the change to a small fenced-in dog area. That would be a tragedy for a large part of the local community who love that their city provides an open space for their dogs to run freely. No harm is being done and no change needs to be made. I beg the Park Board to reconsider.

Thank you,

Laura Brubaker

From: David Haeg <>
Sent: Tuesday, March 5, 2024 1:38 PM
To: Christopher Walick <cwalick@minnetonkamn.gov>; Ben Jacobs <bjacobs@minnetonkamn.gov>; Kelly ODea <kodea@minnetonkamn.gov>; Matt Kumka <mkumka@minnetonkamn.gov>
Subject: Fenced-in dog park - Purgatory Park

Park Board Members and City Staff,

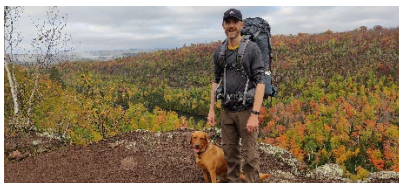
I am writing to voice my support for a fenced-in dog park in Purgatory park. I have a dog and our city has no such parks, and it's the best way to give dogs the freedom to run in a space where they can be safe, and owners don't have to worry about losing a dog or having a bad interaction with a non-dog person.

On a related note, when I campaigned for city council this year, I heard from many people who were wary of visiting Purgatory Park because of the perception of dogs running off-leash. It's a fact of life that not everyone is a dog person (BUT I CANNOT IMAGINE WHY! DOGGOS RULE), so even though my dog is fully under voice control, I will keep her on a leash around strangers because they might be uncomfortable with a strange dog - because that's the considerate thing to do. No amount of saying "she's a friendly dog" is going to reassure a mom of young kids in the park if my dog runs near them. In my personal experience, the majority of dog owners at Purgatory Park have well-behaved dogs, but I have also experienced dogs that are totally out of control, and dangerous to kids and older people.

A fenced-in dog park, similar to the one in Minnewashta park, solves this issue, by creating a safe dog-friendly space with well-defined rules - and I would be eager to use it!

Thanks for your service to the city and park board!

-David



On Mar 5, 2024, at 7:39 PM, Jerrold Gershone > wrote:

Hello Park Board:

The following are my initial thoughts on the Purgatory Park Draft master Plan

The off-leash dog problem is acute and needs to be addressed sooner than the plan indicates. The POST Plan that was adopted by the city has directives to promote community health and wellness and promote equity and inclusion. A significant number of people don't feel safe in the park due to off-leash dogs and they therefore are not included and their wellness is not being taken into consideration. I understand the off-leash proponents want their dogs to run free, however the city has an obligation to protect the safety of residents and park users and to provide for the inclusion of all residents. A solution is a fenced in dog park somewhere in the city. This is what most other cities have done. Dogs can run free in the enclosed dog park and residents won't be threatened.

I support that the draft Master Plan emphasizes Purgatory as a preserve and strives to protect and restore its abundant natural features. The plan needs to be more directive about how humans will interact with the preserve while protecting it and minimizing environmental impacts.

Thanks for listening.

Jerrold Gershone

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From: ruth rustad < >
Sent: Monday, March 4, 2024 1:40:00 PM
To: Patsy Foster-Bolton; Brad Wiersum; Kimberly Wilburn; Deborah Calvert; Paula Ramaley; Kissy Coakley
Subject: Purgatory Park Master Plan

My name is Ruth Rustad and I live at 3830 Victoria St. in Minnetonka. I have lived here for 29 years.

I am writing because I have a number of issues with the "Purgatory Park Master Plan" that was posted this week.

1. I am completely missing the rationale for moving the fenced in dog park with resulting feces into the wetlands. It seems to me those things should be kept away from the wetlands.
2. I would not use a dog park of any size. I go to Purgatory to hike with my dog, not to stand around and watch him run around. I have not spoken to anybody who wants or would use a fenced in dog park, they are fundamentally different from the way we use the park with our dogs.
3. This document makes it clear that the plan for the park is to turn it into a wildlife refuge rather than a community park that people can use and enjoy. Many of the informal trails are scheduled to be removed, effectively barring people from large portions of the park. We have been hearing for a long time that the plan was to restore the park, but never once was it said or even hinted that once the park was "restored" we would be unable to use it.
4. This document bears no resemblance to what was presented at last month's meeting, but was clearly already in existence. It was not written in the couple of weeks since that meeting. The city had this plan decided on a long time ago. At the meeting there was overwhelming opposition to the plan that was presented; not only were our concerns totally disregarded, but the plan was made worse.

5. The city has not demonstrated that they have the legal right to carry out this plan. They were asked at the last meeting to research our claim that there is a covenant ensuring off leash privileges for dogs, and have shown no signs of doing so.

I think that at a minimum these plans should be put on hold until the above is dealt with. I also think that the citizens of Minnetonka need to give permission to change Purgatory Park from a community park that we can use and enjoy into a nature preserve where we can't even go once trails have been removed.

Somebody at the last meeting stated that restoring the park is incompatible with dogs. I don't know why she thinks this, it is not dogs that are causing degradation to natural resources. It is increased population of Minnetonka, and increased park usage by people who wear shoes and boots and cleats in the winter. It is not dogs who are driving the wildlife away. Wildlife has existed in the park alongside off leash dogs for decades. Again, it is increased population and increased park usage, and also increased population of coyotes in the park. I am guessing that is why they want to ban people from large areas of the park, but again, I think you need to get the citizens of Minnetonka to agree to this step, and we have not been asked or informed about it.

Purgatory Park is a beloved resource to many of us. It is a big part of what makes Minnetonka special, and it seems like you just want to take it away or turn it into something else. That hurts. I have nothing against nature preserves, but I don't think we need one in suburban Minnetonka as much as we need the park as it is.

Thank you,

Ruth Rustad

3830 Victoria St.

Minnetonka, MN 55345

From: Lisa J. Cepek <>
Sent: Wednesday, March 6, 2024 8:18 AM
To: David Ingraham <dingraham@minnetonkamn.gov>
Cc: Kelly ODea <kodea@minnetonkamn.gov>; Sara Woeste <swoeste@minnetonkamn.gov>; Leslie Yetka <lyetka@minnetonkamn.gov>; Matt Kumka <mkumka@minnetonkamn.gov>; Brad Wiersum <bwiersum@minnetonkamn.gov>
Subject: Re: Purgatory Park Master Plan

Dave,

Thank you for taking the time to respond and for clarifying the "preserve" vs. "park" status. Perhaps it's a lack of consistent messaging about Purgatory, since it is called by both terms in

various areas on the Minnetonka webpages and signage. I'm sure this will be addressed with future signage efforts.

I would like to see addressed some of my other expressed concerns regarding the language of the draft, and the assumptions regarding dogs that haven't been substantiated or documented to the public. Specifically, the concerns regarding safety (are there redacted police reports or is it just personal narrative?) and ecological degradation (long term studies to prove this is true or just conjecture?).

You mentioned that you don't see in the draft that the proposal limits where dogs can go, just provides an off-leash enclosure for those who want it. It is my belief that the language of this draft and the anti-dog sentiment that I can see from some when I read the minutes of past meetings, leads a reader to assume that the removal of dogs from Purgatory is coming, if not today than in the near future. Would the Park Board consider adding language or addressing this intent at tonight's meeting. If you really aren't moving towards the removal of the off-leash options in Purgatory, please address this tonight as it would be helpful to those who are fearing this as our future.

Finally, when considering restoration, what are we restoring it to? This area is not a former upland prairie like we see at Carver Park Preserve. Let's not forget why it was named Purgatory. It was because it was a mosquito-ridden swampland that nobody wanted to visit.

I ask that you continue to clarify goals and objectives and ask dog owners to join in the conversation in a way that hasn't been done in the planning process to date.

Thank you,

Dr. Lisa Cepek

On Wednesday, March 6, 2024 at 06:39:43 AM CST, David Ingraham <dingraham@minnetonkamn.gov> wrote:

Lisa, thank you for your input on the Draft Master Plan for Purgatory that we will be reviewing tonight. As a dog owner and 20+ year enthusiast at Purgatory I share your concern for the park. It's a special place for everyone, and a great place to be with your dog and other dog lovers.

It is a challenge balancing all desires of people using the Park. I would like to respond to a couple of your comments.

In my review of the Draft it does not recommend limiting the dogs from the areas they currently use. There is mention of the potential of a future enclosed area for dogs - this would potentially serve the needs of some who have requested that opportunity. This is not a resolved issue.

The report references Purgatory as a Preserve because that is the status in our Park System. It has been that way for quite a while. Preservation of the natural resources and restoration of the Park are goals for the City. The City Council approved both the Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) and Parks and Open Space Plan (POST), that affirmed that goal. It was also foremost on the mind of some of the property owners who have transferred (donated or sold) parcels to the City to expand the Park. Most recently the Reily property transfer included language about preserving and restoring the park, which was part of her decision to make the property available to the City. At our meeting in February some individuals expressed a thought that her property carried covenants to preserve "off-leash" status for dogs. As was reported at the meeting, that was not the case.

Again, thank you for reaching out. I'm copying the Park Staff so they can include your feedback along with the others we have received.

I hope you will be able to attend our meeting this evening.

Dave Ingraham

Park Board

Sent from my iPad

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On Mar 5, 2024, at 9:04 PM, Lisa J. Cepek < > wrote:

Dear Members of the Minnetonka City Council and the Minnetonka Park Board,

I'm writing to you to express my concern over the recently released City of Minnetonka Purgatory Park Master Plan. I am a resident of Minnetonka for the past 17 years and visit Purgatory Park every day.

This document presents itself as a scientifically based report on Purgatory Park, it's land, it's use and it's future. Unfortunately, it is not a scientific study or an environmental impact study. The views in the study reflect a very serious bias against certain users of the park, the nature of the park, and the purpose of public lands. It's difficult to weed through the information to understand who is responsible for this report and who the players are, but on page 12 of the document, we can read that *"In order to provide a technically sound, user-friendly, and sustainable planning document for Purgatory Park, the planning team, made up of landscape architects and community engagement specialists, had many discussions with city staff and in-house technical experts to find solutions to issues affecting the park's functionality, natural resources and aesthetic beauty."* From the start of the reading, we can see that the

greatest users of the park, the dog owners, were absent from the discussion and planning for the future of the park.

Second, early in the document, we also see references to Purgatory Park being a nature preserve. On page 10 it says, *"Purgatory Park serves a special purpose in the community as a nature preserve, which is a protected area of importance for flora and fauna that is preserved and managed for conservation purposes."* Purgatory Park has not been designated as a nature preserve and this large step to say it is a preserve is an intentional attempt to create a special status for the park which fits the needs of the preservationists and restorationists. In fact, one of the largest groups that oppose dogs in the park is the group "Friends of Minnetonka Parks" who themselves have incorrectly labeled Purgatory a preserve for years. Again, a small group of citizens has been allowed undue influence in this process that is not fair to the majority of the park users. In fact, some of the wording from this group's website is taken directly into the Master Plan Document.

Third, the document is riddled with inflammatory language related to dogs. For example, on page 22, it says *"there are concerns that dogs are too hard on the park's natural resources."* There has been no scientifically founded data to say that this is true and is conjecture by a few folks who have had undue influence on this document. Also on the same page, it says, *"there have been safety incidents"* with the dogs off-leash. Nowhere do we see any data or reports substantiating this claim. On page 25 we see *"Off leash dog traffic can trample existing vegetation and spread invasive species seeds."* This comment again is highly suspect. On any given day we can see all manner of wildlife in the park, all of which can spread seeds. Again, the blame of issues on dogs without proper science or study is visible. Finally, the quote on page 42 clearly shows bias as it states, *"I believe we need to find solutions for the following issues regarding off-leash dogs: safety, ecological damage, and the enforcement and regulation of the off-leash dog ordinances."* I would tell you the number of comments that the authors had to choose from that were in support of not changing the existing rules regarding dogs, but as you can see on page 33, the number of comments in support of the existing structure was left off, but you can see the number of comments in the opposing camp, again reflecting the bias.

Finally, it is clear that the writers of this document did not choose to understand or learn how dog users engage with Purgatory Park. The idea that a 3 acre fenced dog run would be a sufficient alternative to the 155 acres of Purgatory is preposterous. People do not go to Purgatory to simply allow their dogs to run. A fenced in yard can do that. We go so that we can hike and explore in nature with our dogs. It allows the dog and the owner to get exercise and engage with the land. Our kids, who would never go on a hike in Purgatory, will go with us to take the dog, and watch the creek water rise and fall through the changing seasons. Friends meet up at Purgatory to hike with dogs and socialize. The idea isn't to stand with the dog, it's to hike and move with the dog. That is how the majority of people engage with the land in Purgatory.

These acres are public lands, set aside for the enjoyment of the citizens of Minnetonka. I'm writing to ask that you do not adopt the recommendations set forth in the Purgatory Park Master Plan draft document. Further study and engagement with a balanced group of invested individuals is needed before adopting a land management plan. Please do not be swayed by a marketing document put forth by a group of individuals motivated to change what has worked and been celebrated by the residents of Minnetonka for years.

Respectfully,

Dr. Lisa Cepek

4730 Gaywood Drive

Minnetonka, MN 55345

Name

Sabrina Harvey

Full Address

11934 Hilloway Road West

Minnetonka, MN 55305

USA

Phone

Email

Meeting date

03/06/2024

Agenda item

Off-Leash Dogs in Purgatory Park

Comment

I applaud the writers of Purgatory Park’s master plan for acknowledging problems caused by off-leash dogs. However, the plan’s recommendations for addressing these problems are inconsistent with Minnetonka’s goals for the park. Purgatory is designated a preserve, “which is a protected area of importance for flora and fauna that is preserved and managed for conservation purposes” (p. 10 of the plan). Restoration priorities in Purgatory include returning the “established prairie to on-leash only to allow for restoration” and “...to provide a new off-leash dog area” (NRMP, Appendix A, p. 16). The NRMP was approved by the city council. 40 of 45 cities in Hennepin County require dogs to be leashed on public property unless it’s a designated dog park; Minnetonka is an exception. Three of the other four are exurbs; all four are cities with small populations and a very different character than Minnetonka. Minnetonka wants a safe and inclusive park system. Dogs running free can undermine both goals. I’ve been jumped on, knocked down, and treated rudely when I ask someone to pick up after their dog. Many others have experienced this. To meet its park goals, I suggest a two-step transition. Minnetonka should require dog owners to purchase a permit to have off-leash dogs on informal trails (while continuing to be leashed on formal trails). Most cities require dogs to be licensed and up to date on vaccinations; Minnetonka does not. Permit and license fees would help offset dog costs and make rule enforcement easier. Next, Minnetonka should make it a priority to identify sites for off-leash parks and develop them. As these parks are developed, Minnetonka can transition to requiring off-leash dogs only in designated parks. A lasting solution to this issue must include the needs of dog owners, people who don’t like off-leash dogs, and those who want to maintain a healthy and diverse natural environment. Thank you for your consideration.

Thank you,
City of Minnetonka, MN

From: Laura Brubaker <>
Date: March 5, 2024 at 12:28:55 PM CST
To: Brad Wiersum <bwiersum@minnetonkamn.gov>, Deborah Calvert <dcalvert@minnetonkamn.gov>, Kimberly Wilburn <kwilburn@minnetonkamn.gov>, Kissy Coakley <kcoakley@minnetonkamn.gov>
Subject: Purgatory Park and Dogs

Dear Minnetonka City Council Members,

I want to register my disappointment with and anger at the proposed changes to the off leash dog area in Purgatory Park. I learned from a friend that the current dog access to the non-maintained trails in the center of the park could be changed to a two acre enclosed area in a muddy part of the park. That's unacceptable.

Many, many Minnetonka dog owners use the off leash portion of the park on a daily basis. They are responsible owners who clean up after their dogs, and the dogs are well behaved. The dogs are of no more risk to bring in invasive species than humans are. The arguments for changing the park rules against off-leash dogs are ridiculous.

I've heard there is a single voice with an outsized amount of power driving the change to a small fenced-in dog area. That would be a tragedy for a large part of the local community who love that their city provides an open space for their dogs to run freely. No harm is being done and no change needs to be made. I beg for this proposal to be stopped at the level of the Park Board and if not, then by the City Council.

Sincerely,

Laura Brubaker

On Mar 5, 2024, at 12:20 PM, Laura Brubaker > wrote:

Dear Minnetonka Park Board Members,

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center of the park could be changed to a small enclosed area in a muddy part of the park. That's unacceptable.

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Sincerely,
Laura Brubaker

From: Eric Cepek < >
Sent: Monday, March 4, 2024 12:53:37 PM
To: Brad Wiersum
Cc: Kissy Coakley; Paula Ramaley; Rebecca Schack; Patsy Foster-Bolton; Kimberly Wilburn
Subject: Purgatory Debacle

Mayor and Council,

I am a long-term homeowner and member of the Minnetonka community and am astonished with the plans being proposed for Purgatory Park. Out of all the parks our family and community is in Minnetonka, Purgatory is by far the most utilized that does not have sports fields. The reason is, it works and no changes should be made outside of some trail and infrastructure updates. I am astonished the park board has heard this over and over through feedback that the current park brings significant utility to the entire community and instead decides to ignore the voice of the people who are paying for it. In the report, it clearly states that 60+% responded in favor of the current status of open land in the park (including off-leash dogs). As our family uses this park daily, we have had the opportunity to enjoy many aspects of nature and community. This includes building community and coexisting along these informal trails with bird watchers, kids' environmental projects, dogs and dog owners, foragers, photographers, hikers, etc. The point is the park is a public space for the public and the public has created a community around it. Limiting access goes against the entire goal of our city and our park system. Lastly, the park boards comments related to this land being 1. a nature preserve, 2. is undergoing prairie restoration and 3. environmental impact.

1. How and where was this established as a nature preserve? What does this even mean?

2. Purgatory was not and never has been a prairie. If you have been there, it is fully surrounded by hard woods and the open areas were once a farm that was made from cutting down trees. We are now restoring these open areas to something that never existed? This is important for our city to restore something that was never there?

3. Please share details of who and how this environmental impact was conducted. It is quite silly to think that people walking in the non-formal trails are creating an environmental issue. Is the next step to ban deer from using the trails and transferring buckthorn seeds? Fix this misguided endeavor.

I could go on and on about the idea of adding interpretive stations and the idea of establishing a nature center to walk on paved trails and not actually be given the opportunity to immerse themselves in the actual nature.

This is a pre-packaged plan from third party non-Minnetonka consulting group with ZERO input recognized from the majority of the population.

Please reach out with any feedback.

Eric Cepek

4730 Gaywood Drive

Minnetonka, MN 55345

Phone:

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On Mar 6, 2024, at 1:16 PM, Steven Schmirler <

> wrote:

Please vote 'no' on the Purgatory Plan.

It is sad when the voice of the community is trampled by the machinations of the government.

See you all tonight.

Read the responses at the end of the plan.

Respectfully,

Steve
.....

From: Friends of Minnetonka Parks <>
Sent: Monday, March 4, 2024 2:25 PM
To: Christopher Walick <cwalick@minnetonkamn.gov>; Ben Jacobs <bjacobs@minnetonkamn.gov>; Anne Hanley <ahanley@minnetonkamn.gov>; Ella DiLorenzo <edilorenzo@minnetonkamn.gov>; David Ingraham <dingraham@minnetonkamn.gov>; Katie Semersky <ksemersky@minnetonkamn.gov>; Korey Beyersdorf <kbeyersdorf@minnetonkamn.gov>
Cc: Matt Kumka <mkumka@minnetonkamn.gov>; Leslie Yetka <lyetka@minnetonkamn.gov>; Kelly ODea <kodea@minnetonkamn.gov>; Mike Funk <mfunk@minnetonkamn.gov>; Deborah Calvert <dcalvert@minnetonkamn.gov>; Rebecca Schack <rschack@minnetonkamn.gov>; Kissy Coakley <kcoakley@minnetonkamn.gov>; Patsy Foster-Bolton <pbolton@minnetonkamn.gov>; Paula Ramaley <pramaley@minnetonkamn.gov>; kwilburn@minnetonakmn.gov; Brad Wiersum <bwiersum@minnetonkamn.gov>
Subject: Response to Purgatory Park Master Plan Draft

Hello Park Board Members and All,

Please find our response to the Purgatory Park Master Plan Draft in the attached document.

We appreciate the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback at this point in the process.

Thank you,

The FoMP Board of Directors

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Friends of Minnetonka Parks
www.mtkaparks.org

March 4, 2024

The Friends of Minnetonka Parks (FoMP) appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback for the draft Purgatory Park Master Plan. We look forward to this city-wide park system master planning process as the plans will provide a key framework to foster equitable access to biodiverse parks. Thank you to the Natural Resources staff for initiating this process and for their work preparing this plan.

We would like to offer the following feedback for consideration and suggest that the set directives in the NRMP (2021) and POST Plan (2022) be revisited and adopted. Also, while reviewing the priorities and recommendations of this draft Purgatory Park Master Plan, consider using the POST plan mission statement as the mission of the **Minnetonka Parks, Open Space and Trail System Plan is to be leaders in providing a welcoming, comprehensive and balanced system of high quality parks, natural areas, trails and programs for all to enjoy.**

1) Equitable Park Access

The plan needs additional review to determine concrete ways to remedy the equity, access, and community displacement issue. A Guiding Principle in the POST Plan is to **Promote Equity and Inclusion** and the above POST mission describes a *welcoming* park system for *all to enjoy*. FoMP supports this principle and mission and agrees that people should feel safe and welcome while visiting any Minnetonka park. This is a foundational component for any park system and master planning process.

- a) Many comments in the draft park master plan appendix demonstrate that people no longer visit the park due to their upsetting interactions with off-leash dogs. Also, parents of young families describe their toddlers' traumatic experiences with dogs running up to them.
- b) The POST Plan (p. 14) states: "Top barriers to visiting parks and open spaces include off-leash dogs ..."
- c) The council-approved NRMP (Appendix A, p. 16 **Restoration Priorities**) includes the following two directives:
 - i) "Open up and restore areas where pioneer and Siberian elm trees dominate on the northwest side of the park to **provide a new off-leash dog area.**"
 - ii) "**Return established prairie to on-leash only to allow for restoration.** Increase diversity within the established prairie and savanna core of the park to build resilience and promote stability in the face of disturbance."

We ask that you consider master plan amendments/additions that offer concrete solutions to address the inequity identified in the POST, NRMP, and draft master plan feedback.

2) Environmental Sustainability and Natural Resources Restoration

The draft master plan does not address or characterize the environmental degradation from park visitor overuse or unstructured use, nor a vision for a reimagined trail system that balances visitor access with the preservation of natural resources. Can the consultants be asked to perform a more in-depth analysis of environmental impacts such as parking lots, recreational amenities, extent of informal trails, and off-leash dogs, keeping in mind that Purgatory Park is a preserve? A Guiding Principle in the POST plan is to **Advance Environmental Sustainability and Resiliency**.

- a) Some of this information was included in the council-approved NRMP (p. 16, Appendix A) but was not referenced in the draft master plan:

“Large tallgrass prairie restorations have created a diverse core within the center of the park but are **showing signs of becoming less diverse due to the dominance of big bluestem, overuse from off-leash dogs, dog walkers, and woody encroachment.**”

3) Public Safety and (Un)Enforceable Ordinances

Public safety, ensuring that all park visitors feel welcome and safe while visiting a park is the mission and responsibility of the city and Park Board. FoMP strongly supports this mission. The public survey and comments in the draft master plan reveal that a significant percentage of park visitors don't feel safe. This is an urgent issue, and we suggest immediate action to remedy this significant public safety concern.

- a) The POST plan (p. 21) prioritized a feasibility study for adding a dog park. 19% of respondents in the POST plan community survey desire a fenced dog park.
- b) The Community Service Officer (CSO) reported at the February 2023 Park Board meeting that they are unable to enforce the leash ordinance as it's currently written. Park patrols now occur infrequently. A frequent CSO presence in the park ensures public safety and compliance with park rules that directly impact public safety.

We suggest that the next draft of this plan clearly articulates and illustrates the linkages between the NRMP and POST plans. We understand that everyone desires a safe and accessible park system. Our Minnetonka parks differentiate us from other communities because they provide exceptional biodiverse and climate-resilient natural amenities that improve the quality of life for residents and park visitors. **We support moving forward with the council-approved directives identified in the NRMP and POST plans, and suggest that the Purgatory Park Master Plan align with those directives and recommendations.**

Sincerely,

Friends of Minnetonka Parks Board of Directors

Friends of Minnetonka Parks

We envision a park system that honors and builds on our city's heritage of preserving, restoring and managing our distinctive high-value natural spaces that enhance Minnetonka's quality of life and distinguish it from other cities.