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**SPECIAL USE PARKS, INCLUDING DOG PARKS,
SHOULD BE BUILT ON UNUSED PARK LAND**

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This article:

1. Suggests that special purpose parks be built on unused park land,
2. Describes the continuing popularity and use of Buehler Park,
3. Recommends an article on dog-parks by Ed Frawley,
4. Suggests a possible alternative to a dog-park,
5. Recommends that Rolla build animal facilities in non-controversial locations.

(An earlier version of parts of this article were presented to the Rolla city council on Sept. 6, 2016, <https://rollachannel16.viebit.com/#/VB0VuBkZVgA> 14:50-19:30)

**GROUPS DESIRING PARK LAND FOR A SPECIAL PURPOSE SHOULD BUILD
SPECIAL-USE PARKS ON UNUSED PARK LAND**

Veterans Memorial Park

Our veterans groups and their supporters have built an awesome park just south of the acorn trail on Southview Drive on land provided by the city. I used to walk by on the acorn trail with my dogs when this parcel of land was still an eyesore; and I have the highest respect for the people who cleaned it up and turned it into something very positive. Funds, labor and materials have been secured through private donations with the city providing labor and use of city equipment for infrastructure improvement and maintenance.



Figure 1: Rolla's Veterans Memorial Park

Rolla Soccer Complex

RAYSL and other soccer enthusiasts built the Rolla area soccer complex in an unused portion of Lions Club Park. Again, as far as I know, no public money was used in the construction of the soccer complex. Rolla Optimist Club once held their age 5 to 7 soccer leagues in Buehler Park, but instead of demanding that a portion of Buehler Park be dedicated to the Optimists' soccer leagues, the Optimists moved their program to the new soccer complex.



Figure 2: Rolla Soccer Complex

Veterans Memorial Park And The Rolla Soccer Complex Should Be A Model For The Creation Of Special-Use Parks In Rolla

I respectfully suggest that dog-park enthusiasts follow the admirable examples set by our veterans and soccer-enthusiasts by finding unused park land in which to carry out their plans. Many such sites, including the land behind the welcome center, exist.

Buehler Park deserves to be defended for what it is, and has been since 1958: a lovely city park for all Rolla citizens and all travelers passing through our fair city to enjoy.

BUEHLER PARK IS A WELL-USED PARK. PROBABLY THE MOST WIDELY USED SMALL PARK IN ROLLA

Over the Labor Day weekend, I visited Buehler Park twice. On Sunday, there was a large family reunion in progress with many children playing in the western portion of the park - the part where Kent Bagnall and Crystal Watson propose to build a dog-park. When I explained that the proposal would require removing both the plesiosaur and pteranodon play structures - the young girl pushing her brother on the pteranodon swing in Figure 4 exclaimed, "*No! this is our favorite swing.*"



Figure 3: Family Reunion In Buehler Park



Figure 4: Children On Buehler Park's Pteranodon Swing

On Monday, I visited Buehler Park again. There were well over 20 people in the park, including many young children playing in the area which Bagnall and Watson propose to fence in for a dog-park. (see Figures 5 through 7). One couple told me they were engaged to be married 40 years ago in Buehler Park. Two young ladies had strung hammocks among Buehler Park's great oak trees and were relaxing in their hammocks. In all my visits to Buehler Park, I had never seen hammocks in the park before!



Figure 5: Engaged to be married 40 years ago in Buehler Park



Figure 6: Relaxing in Buehler Park



Figure 7: Hammocks in Buehler Park

Following my Labor Day visit to Buehler Park, I decided to visit other parks in Rolla and take an informal survey of park use. Here are the results. Note that on a per acre basis, Buehler Park was Rolla's most popular park and second only to Lions Club in absolute number of traditional park users.

Labor Day 2016 Park Use (traditional use areas only)

Methodology: I drove by these parks between 3:00 and 5:00 pm on Labor Day and estimated the number of users in the traditional use areas (pavilions, playgrounds, and walking areas only; excludes ball fields, swimming pools, tennis courts, buildings, etc.)

<u>Park</u>	<u>Users</u>
Lions Club Park	50 -- 200
Buehler Park (highest use per acre)	20 -- 40
Green Acres Park	10 -- 20
Shumann Park	10 -- 20
Veterans Memorial Park	1 -- 5
Coventry Park	1 -- 5
Ber Juan Park (upper pavilion and playground)	0
Larry May Park	0
Murray Park	0

SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS ON DOG-PARKS

Suggested reading on dog-parks

Anyone seriously interested in building a dog park, or even using one, should read this article by Ed Frawley, "Dog Parks: Why They Are A Bad Idea." <http://leerburg.com/dogparks.htm>

Frawley writes, "*Dog parks can be dangerous.*" And further:

"I want to go on record as saying that the concept of 'Dog Parks' was well intended but a bad idea, especially when dogs are allowed to run off-leash. The main problems all stem from people who don't understand and have not established pack structure with their dogs. This means their dogs are out of control.

"The average dog owner does not take the time to understand much less install pack structure. They don't know how strong the pack instincts are in their family pets. These drives can and often do click into high gear when a dog is taken into a park with strange dogs.

"When a new dog comes into a park that other dogs visit every day the new visitor is often seen as an intruder into 'the personal territory' of the regular visitor. More often than not they are not seen as new found friend. This often leads to either territorial aggression, dominance aggression or fear aggression."

In order to make dog-parks safer, Frawley suggests:

"Dogs should pass a test before being allowed in a dog park. In my opinion communities should establish and set up tests that pet owners must pass before dogs are allowed off leash into these dog parks.

"The tests should demonstrate the off leash control owners have over their dogs while the dogs are faced with extreme distraction. In other words, the owners need to be able to call their dogs back away from a group of several dogs that are playing.

"Dogs that can't pass these tests should not be allowed off leash in the parks.

"These tests should include a knowledge of how to deal with dog fights."

A Possible Alternative to a Rolla Dog-Park

The above passage might be cause for pause on the dog-park project. But if the project is to proceed, let's at least look at possible alternatives:

Lions Club has an open field and trail away from the traditional use area which is reserved for pets and pet owners. I rarely see dogs or their owners in this area. On Labor Day when I took the above survey there wasn't a single dog or human in this area.



Figure 8: Empty Pet Area At Lions Club Park

On the other hand, when I walk the acorn trail with my dog, Sasha, I almost always meet other dogs and their owners. It would seem that many dog-owners might prefer a multiple-use area to a park reserved for dog-use only.

Perhaps, on a trial basis, we could fence in one or more small areas along the acorn trail where pet owners could take their dog off-leash. I suspect many pet owners might find this preferable to a dog park.

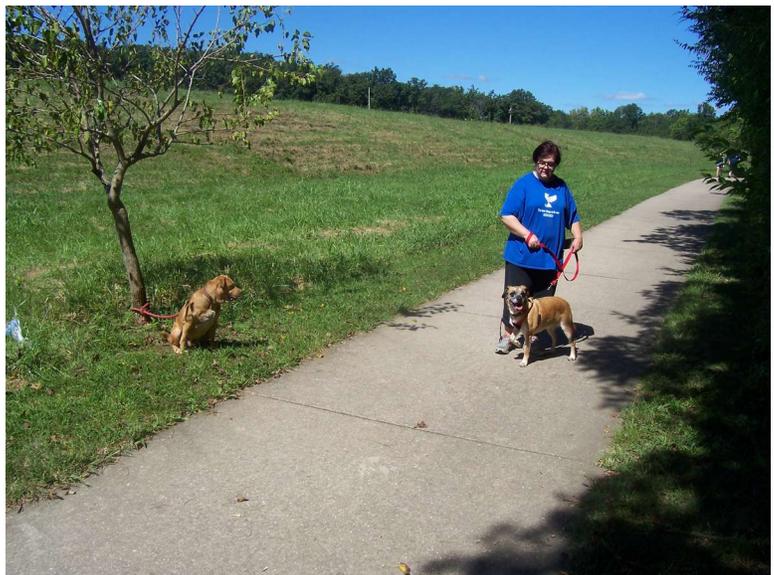


Figure 9: Dog And Owner On Acorn Trail

Rolla Should Place Animal Facilities In Non-Controversial Locations

Finally, please remember that the 11-year battle to save Buehler Park from being turned into a restaurant left some deep scars in this community. Please do not risk reopening them by raising the possibility that the character of Buehler Park will

be altered with the construction of either an animal shelter or dog-park. The selection of non-controversial sites would be a very positive civic step.

In particular, I would be very grateful if the Rolla city council would state unequivocally that Buehler Park will not be considered as a location for either an animal shelter or a dog park. The city council already declined to make such a statement concerning Buehler Park as a location for an animal shelter:

"Following a brief discussion, a motion was made by Eudaly to take Buehler Park off consideration for anything and that it remain a park. The motion did not receive a second." (minutes, May 5, 2014, Rolla city council meeting, <http://www.rollacity.org/admin/agenda/minutes/20140505.pdf>)

Nevertheless, I remain hopeful there will be a change of heart. It would certainly remove an obstacle to the fund-raising efforts for the shelter.

And for those who think the animal shelter and the dog-park are separate issues, please consider these emails I received from city administrator John Butz:

"we are beginning to make plans to replace the old animal pound on Sharp Rd. Council asked if we considered any Parks rather than buying property. Dawned on me w/ the location, access and visibility Buehler Park might make a great location for the new Animal Shelter – the back half of the property of course. Could possibly tie in with a bit of a 'dog park facility' – again on the back half." (email of April 14, 2014)

And further:

"Personally I don't necessarily see a publicly run animal shelter as being an inconsistent use as a public park. Parks frequently have public structures, restrooms, concession stands, storage areas, senior facilities, rec centers, composting facilities and the like. Dog parks in particular are a growing trend across the country so I think it could be an interesting mixed-use." (email of April 16, 2014)

The solution at hand is really straightforward: Select non-controversial locations for the animal shelter and the dog park. This will clear the way for the entire community to support these programs.

And I am heartened by the words of Rolla mayor Louis Magdits:

“speaking for myself only, I have no intention of bringing controversy to any part of our park system, we have too much to address in the near term to be distracted.” (email of April 20, 2014)

Yes, indeed, we have much to do. Instead of creating controversy and distractions, let's get on with our work.

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