

Keep WP  
Beautiful

Orlando Sent 7-30-00

## Committee sniffs out leash-free dog space

□ Keep Winter Park Beautiful searches for turf where residents can frolic with their unfettered best friends.

By Christina Adkins

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

When it comes to letting their pets run in public parks, dog owners in Winter Park don't have many options.

Dogs are allowed in designated areas of Mead Gardens and in other public parks except for Central Park. But they are supposed to remain leashed at all times.

"Really, in no area of the city are they supposed to be allowed to run free," said Cory Clarke, assistant to the director of parks and recreation in Winter Park.

But that may change if Keep Winter Park Beautiful succeeds in its bid to create a dog park, where owners can let their dogs frolic without the worry of the city's leash laws.

"There's a lot of benefits to dog parks, one being that you can exercise your dogs in a safe and secure environment," said Bob Cadle, chairman of Keep Winter Park Beautiful.

Keep Winter Park Beautiful can't af-

Please see **DOGS, K-2**

# Pet owners, city back effort

## DOGS from K-1

ford to buy land for the project, so it wants the city to set aside an area that it can fence in and place benches inside to create the dog park, said Jean Sprimont, executive director of Keep Winter Park Beautiful and executive coordinator of city volunteers.

Because there is little land available in Winter Park, Sprimont said, the board is hoping for a small area in an existing park.

"An acre or two would be big enough for the dog to get a good run," she said.

Several sites are being examined for the project, including a recently cleared area of Fleet Peoples Park, Mead Gardens, Showalter Field in Ward Park and Lake Island Park. But at this point, Sprimont said, Keep Winter Park Beautiful is not favoring any one site.

"We will continue to investigate sites and present them all to the city commissioners and see if they would be inclined to offer us one site over another," she said.

Though Keep Winter Park Beautiful has been discussing the idea for about a year, Sprimont said, the issue needs more research before a proposal goes to the Winter Park City Commission. Key elements for a dog park would be open space, shade, fencing and a water source, whether natural or manmade. But until Keep Winter Park Beautiful gets land and permission to create the

dog park, the members can't begin to plan the specifics of setting it up.

"It's a plan that we have not really totally formulated," Sprimont said, adding that she hopes the request would be considered sometime this fall.

That's good news for Noal Chandler, who takes his girlfriend's German short-hair pointer Roo to Fleet Peoples Park about three times a week. The couple live in an apartment that allows little space for Roo to exercise.

"He gets a little willy if he's not let out to run about three times a week," Chandler said. "We obviously don't have a large piece of land for the dog to run on."

Chandler said he would welcome a dog park because he doesn't know of many places to take Roo, and Fleet is one of the few places he takes the dog regularly. He said other dog owners also frequent the park, and he has seen as many as a dozen dogs at a time in the park.

But just a few yards from where Roo splashes unleashed in Lake Baldwin, a sign reminds owners to leash and clean up after their dogs. "It's required by law," the sign states.

In fact, according to Clarke, a city ordinance bans dogs in Fleet Peoples Park. But about three years ago, the Parks and Recreation Department recognized the need to provide a place for owners to take their dogs. Officials made

"a departmental decision to suspend it [the ordinance] until we have problems doing so," Clarke said.

About seven months ago, the city received inquiries about the policy from a fisherman who had seen dogs running unleashed in Fleet. The former director called dog groups in the area and asked them to spread the word that the dogs needed to be under the owner's control. Since John Holland became director of parks and recreation six months ago, he has not received any complaints, he said.

Cadle said he is not sure how many people know about the suspended ordinance, and he thinks it would be better to have an area set aside specifically for dogs and their owners.

"If there were a place identified and set aside for this, I think more people would take advantage of it," he said.

In other city parks where dogs are allowed, leash laws aren't strictly enforced unless the city receives complaints from other park users, Clarke said. Designating property specifically for use as a dog park would make it easier to enforce the city's ordinance, he said.

The idea certainly appeals to dog owners.

Susan Castino, who also takes her golden retriever, Bentley, to Fleet Peoples Park said, "I'd love a dog park. I think a lot of us would."