



Playground for Doggies

Off-leash areas, badly needed in parks within the CBD, could have a dual role.

Last month, CBD news wrote about "Flagstaff Dog Pawrents" who are petitioning for more fenced off-leash areas in parks close to the CBD grid.

There are a lot of counter arguments to such a proposal. People, who usually are not dog owners, saying that dogs are dangerous and there could be incidents in the fenced off area. Another concern is that if an area is fenced, other people will be denied access to scarce park resources.

However, experience at the Flagstaff Gardens where more than 100 dog owners walk and play with their dogs at various times of the day, every day, is quite different.

These doggie "Pawrents" have become a growing community over the past 12 months. They understand the advantages of having a local and easily accessible fenced space in parks and gardens where dogs can run off-leash enjoying a small time each day to be free. Benefits include:

- safety for all dogs from dense city traffic in built up areas of the city;
- peace of mind to other park users who may not like dogs;
- minimising nuisance caused by dogs who are poorly trained, under exercised and who suffer from being unable to socialise with their peers;
- community cohesiveness that arises when dog owners and park lovers meet together on a regular basis to interact with the dogs as they play and have fun.

There are arguments that fencing will be costly and could be ugly, spoiling amenity in our parks. But there are areas close to the Hoddle Grid that are naturally suited as dog special areas. For example, the freshly renewed Alexandra Gardens south of the river and the upper area park in Birrarung Marr, that is often used for events such as the Circus - in times past. Most of that large area is naturally vegetated around the perimeter. The fencing in both places would be minimal or maybe not needed at all?

More than that. Dogs are people too, you know. Badly behaved dogs most often arise through lack of early life training and general neglect. The City of Melbourne should talk with the people at the Lost Dogs Home, who conduct training sessions for distressed, badly cared for dogs as well as for owners who want their dogs to learn special skills, such as being able to take part in Agility Training courses. The area set aside for such training sessions is not large.

Any relatively small area that allows dogs to play ball with their owners and to run around with some other dogs would suffice. Apartment dogs need to commune with their neighbouring canines, just the same as people need human interaction.

Think about what it would be like, if an area close by was fitted out with Agility Equipment just like a playground for small children. The dogs would love it. Specialist dog trainers would be able to hold courses there. Another way to encourage enterprise within the city.



After all, dogs are a valuable asset. Guide dogs that change the lives of people with compromised vision, sniffer dogs to find illicit drugs, dogs that provide company for elderly people and dogs that partake in high fashion with their colourful coats brought out on those cold winter days. These dogs are well trained and benefit from their careful education early in life apart from being thoroughly spoilt by their caring owners.

Playground and training for dogs in close-by designated off-leash areas, would enrich city life for both people and our cherished canine companions.

