

Dog park coming to Jeffersonville

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Dr. Laura Strong, a veterinarian, is helping to lead the establishment of the first-ever dog park in Jeffersonville. (photo by Dale Moss, The Courier-Journal)

Dogs in Jeffersonville are soon to have their own place to play.

The city will fence and equip an acre or so of Highland Park, joining too few other cities in doing right by their dogs. "It's a sign of a progressive community," said Dr. Laura Strong, a veterinarian.

Strong helps lead the charge, succeeding at a notion that struggled for traction. Talk of a dog park traces at least to Keith Fetz's proposal to commit a grassy island along Park Place. That at least five years ago.

Fetz, a city councilman, backed off after people didn't seem to get it, but he tried gamely to keep the general idea alive. "It's not that far out on a limb," Fetz said.

At Eastside Animal Hospital, which Strong owns, clients asked occasionally about the nearest dog park and were referred to Louisville. Strong is not surprised by their interest.

"People are putting greater and greater value on their pets and the human-animal bond," she said. "And it's a great way for dog people to socialize with other dog people."

At Highland, playground-like areas will be set up for dogs small and large. Owners must purchase an annual pass to be swiped at a gate. There will be rules and expectations, and the city will monitor use.

"I just hope the people will like it," said Bob Manor, parks superintendent. "I think they will."

Plus good, wholesome activity at Highland should diminish activities of the other kind. The off-the-beaten-path park has taken its hits. "It'll curtail kids tearing stuff up," Manor said.

Strong, and her husband Dave, donated \$7,000 for fencing. Consider it Eastside's gratitude, a fitting payback.

"If you hope for something to happen, you have to try to make it happen," Laura Strong said. She recommended Highland — at the end of Spruce Drive, off Plank Road north of 10th Street — after talking to kids there at a parks program.

"It's great space, easily accessible," she said.

Fetz applauds Strong's generosity and her determination. "She's trying to change the mindset a little bit," Fetz said. He also Mayor Tom Galligan for staying open to the concept.

"I'd always throw in, 'It'd be a nice fit,' " Fetz said. "It'd be a nice fit."

Strong looks forward to saying Jeffersonville has a dog park, which she believes is Southern Indiana's first. "People will be able to gather in a common space for their dogs to have fun," she said. "It will bring people together. It will create more of a sense of neighborhood."

The dog park at Highland should open in late summer or early fall. Jeffersonville also expects too to include a dog park in Vissing Park, and it may add others.

"It's getting to be the thing," Manor said.

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