

Background Information

Rock Island currently has only one dog park and it sits on the city's outskirts, about seven miles south of Downtown. With few nearby places to safely walk their dog or let them run, the hundreds of dog owners in Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods are eager to see a destination like this for their pups in the central part of the city. Following the substantial uptick in both dog ownership and outdoor recreation during the peak of the pandemic, now is the opportune time to make this project happen. Downtown employer Illinois Casualty Company will donate the land and match City and State (grant) funds invested in this dog park up to \$100,000 to ensure that it does.

The state-of-the-art dog park, complete with resilient synthetic turf grass, fencing, decorative lighting, shade shelters and benches, dog waste bags and trash receptacles, dog-themed murals, and a camera for monitoring and streaming purposes, will turn an existing vacant lot at 3rd Avenue and 21st Street into a social gathering space for people, their dogs and dog lovers.

As Chair of the Downtown Rock Island Steering Committee formed to help guide revitalization efforts, Illinois Casualty Company President and CEO Arron Sutherland is excited to activate this space in honor of former Illinois Casualty Company President John R. Klockau, who, 50 years ago, was adamant that the company construct its current headquarters in Downtown Rock Island.

According to PlayCore, dog parks provide the community with a healthy life balance and enrich the lives of people of all ages and abilities. Their research shows that dog parks' open green spaces promote walkable neighborhoods, enhance a sense of community and generate feelings of collective safety due to the visible presence of individuals walking with their dogs.

The creation of a dog park and likelihood of increased foot traffic in the area also excites the owners of adjacent properties, including a café and performance venue that has outdoor seating and allows dogs. Directly across 21st Street from the proposed dog park site, Rozz-Tox, in partnership with the City and adjacent property Laborspace, added a walk-up window and renovated its outdoor courtyard area and parking for intimate events during the



pandemic. Rooster's, a bar and restaurant next door to Rozz-Tox, has outdoor seating and an expansive area for yard games. The businesses, along with Laborspace, collaborated in October 2021 (and years prior) to host a block party and plan to continue hosting the special event on an annual basis to celebrate their pocket of Downtown. If the timing works out, we could unveil the future dog park on the same weekend as the block party to bring the community together around this new destination.

FAQs

Is there a need for a Downtown dog park?

It is safe to say Rock Island has hundreds of dog owners in the central part of the City. The nearest dog park is seven miles away on the RI/Milan border, and a Downtown dog park is something specifically called for by the public in the 2015 Downtown Revitalization Plan. Additionally, we have a property owner willing to contribute \$100,000 toward its development on land also cited by the public in the 2015 Downtown Revitalization Plan. There's a chance, too, we could commercialize the space if it were to become a dog park with a bar/pop-up food vending as seen in other Midwest cities, such as Madison and St. Louis.

Here are the specific public recommendations developed during the visioning workshop of the 2015 Downtown Revitalization Plan as it pertains to this piece of the project:

- Introduce a dog park, perhaps located along the riverfront
- Convert empty parcels around 3rd Avenue and 21st Street into green space

Who would be responsible for the maintenance of the dog park? How would those costs be paid?

If a City/SSA-funded place management organization is created, the Downtown maintenance ambassadors could be responsible for the day-to-day and weekly maintenance of the Downtown dog park in partnership with the City as needed.

Is turf grass the best choice?

While turf is more expensive to install, it is the best choice for less maintenance in the long run. We would not have to worry about the lawn getting muddy or torn up after use and therefore would not need to shut it down at times. The Forever Lawn K-9 Turf we're considering includes built-in odor and bacteria fighters and allows for efficient drainage. Maintenance includes spraying water and applying a disinfectant solution (about \$200) on surface a few times per year, depending on use.

This would also be a unique amenity as the only synthetic lawn dog park in the QC. Part of the inspiration for this style of dog park – as well as management – comes from [Barkwood Dog Park](#) in the Cleveland, Ohio, suburb of Beachwood. Check out their livestream as well as the way they manage the park and users. We are working with WHBF to explore the potential of placing one of their weather streaming cameras at the Dog Park for streaming/monitoring purposes.

Is a dog park an amenity?

“There’s nothing like a dog park to bring people together.” -Randy Boyd, President, University of Tennessee, and former Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development

Boyd oversees the Boyd Foundation’s annual [Dog Park Dash](#), a contest in which cities compete to win \$25,000-\$100,000 grants to build dog parks. [Watch and learn more](#).

We essentially won the grand prize as Illinois Casualty Company is donating land and \$100,000 for this project! We have a great story to share here.

Also, consider these statistics from a 2018 National Recreation and Park Association survey:

- 85% of Americans consider high quality park and recreation amenities important
- 92% say their communities benefit from their local parks and trails
- 76% of Americans are more likely to vote for politicians who make park and rec funding a priority
- 78% indicate they want their local governments to increase park and rec spending, especially if it helps ensure all Americans are within a 10-minute walk to a great park
- 38% of people in the U.S. lack outdoor spaces where they can exercise – a barrier that disproportionately impacts low-income African American and Latinx communities

Budget

Parking and sidewalk replacement on east side of lot

- \$42,509 (City of RI)

Removal of existing vegetation and turf installation

- \$58,975 (BUSH Sports Turf)

Turf material

- \$110,400 (BUSH Sports Turf)

Fencing

- \$23,760 (Heritage Landscape Design)

Electric work, including decorative lamp poles

- \$28,750 (American Electric Inc.)

Outdoor string lights along perimeter of dog park

- \$1,521.74 (City of RI)

Water service for drinking fountain and cleaning

- \$18,751.21 (Petersen Plumbing & Heating)

Shade structures with bench and dog bag dispenser, inclusive of concrete pad

- \$11,200 (City of Muscatine Parks)

Artist mural and signage:

- \$10,000 (Quad City Arts)

Total

- \$304,866.95

Downtown Rock Island Dog Park Meeting Recap

April 8, 2022, at Illinois Casualty Company (ICC)

Attendees: Arron Sutherland, President & CEO, ICC; Sandy Jones, Property Services Manager, ICC; Kathy Springer, Chief Human Resources Officer, ICC; Jeff Lam, Owner, Rooster's Sports Bar & Grill; Luke VanLandegen, City of RI Public Works; Jamie Riner, City of RI Parks; Blake Humphrey, Owner, former Airways building; Erica and Brian Williams, Owners/Residents, DuMarche Market on 3rd Condos

Objective: The purpose of this meeting was to bring a small group of stakeholders together to discuss the proposed plans for the Downtown Dog Park and collect input from adjacent business owners, property owners, residents and City staff. CED advised who from the City should be included in the meeting. Discussion items included the following:

- Project background and funding
- Project scope (surface, parking, lighting, fencing, signage, etc.)
- Maintenance

Prior to the meeting, Luke VanLandegen, Sandy Jones and Jack Cullen met Michael Peters of Bush Turf on April 6, 2022, at Animal Family Vet Care Center in Davenport to see the type of turf proposed for this park. This is the only known location in the Quad Cities that has Forever Lawn K-9 Turf in place.

- All parties were impressed with the surface material, particularly its aesthetic appeal and minor maintenance requirements. Everyone agreed the bright green turf would be more attractive than grass. Please see FAQ section above for more maintenance details. It was suggested the RIFD could hose down the surface a few times a year, depending on usage, to help keep it clean. Other maintenance includes brooming surface to keep lawn fibers looking fresh. Peters of Bush Turf also noted mounds or obstacles could be added to the park for little cost to enhance amenities.

In addition to the proper placement of signage, dog waste bags and trash receptacles, the turf itself should encourage dog owners to clean up after their pets as waste will not be hidden by overgrown grass and/or mud. If/when established, the Downtown Rock Island organization's maintenance ambassadors can monitor and maintain the dog park's trash receptacles and dog waste.

All parties at the April 8 meeting shared excitement for the community-building project, including the positive foot traffic and customers it would bring to adjacent businesses around 3rd Avenue/21st Street.

Other takeaways:

- DuMarche owners/residents asked if lighting and the camera could be strategically positioned to avoid affecting condo units. They noted there may not be as much support for the project among condo owners if it is not turfed. It was also communicated to them that if residents wanted a private entry to the park on the west side, they would likely need to pay for special gate.

- The park would be open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., the same as other City of RI Parks facilities.
- Blake Humphrey shared his plans to improve the former Airways building adjacent to the dog park. He appreciates the fact more eyeballs will be on his property once the dog park is built.
- Many cities are seeing the addition of open-air beer gardens/dog parks. While there may not be room for this type of development on the proposed site, the new dog park could spur a new business of this kind on an adjacent property.
- City surveying of the site is complete, and we are awaiting to hear next steps from Public Works. An official name, dog-themed mural concept and park design still need to be proposed prior to presenting to RI Park Board/City Council.
- Any further comments/questions can be directed to Jack Cullen at jcullen@quadcitieschamber.com or 563.823.2670.

Update from Erica Williams, DuMarche resident: “Our HOA meeting went really well and everyone is super excited about the dog park. The following is a list of the topics/concerns discussed by the DuMarche residents:”

- Benches, trash receptacles, and lights be kept to the north, east, and south sides so as to not infringe on the privacy of the DuMarche properties (back yards and east facing windows).
- Cameras are very encouraged, but request they be positioned in the southwest corner and pointed/angled so as to not infringe on the privacy of the DuMarche back yards and east facing windows.
- The turf has everyone super excited due to the clean look, drainage, lack of maintenance, etc.
- Fencing along the west side of the dog park – it is requested that the fence be placed approximately 5 feet east of the shared property line. This would ensure the arborvitae and fences won't be negatively impacted by the activities or fencing of the dog park. This “gap” would also allow DuMarche to properly maintain the fences and or arborvitae. HOWEVER, to prevent mowing and aesthetic issues, it is requested that the turf be extended to the property line.
- Trees – it is understood that the silver maple may have to be removed for the new parking along 21st Street. It is requested that the dead ash trees along 3rd be removed also, BUT replant something for aesthetics of that stretch of road, as well as a bit of a shade source.
- A private access gated walkway is requested at the location of DuMarche's current gate to the lot situated between the garages and home. This can be discussed further at a later date.
- All lighting will be either pointed away from DuMarche or scheduled to turn off at 10pm.
- Grading and drainage will be addressed so as to shed water away from the low spots as well as the DuMarche back yards.
- It is understood that the City and/or the city's designee will be responsible for emptying the trash receptacle twice a week (or more if needed).
- It is understood that the city will perform property maintenance/rinsing as required or necessary (if odors become an issue)

- DuMarche owners would like input and final approval regarding the mural on the backside of the garages.