

# Proposal for a Temporary Dog Park at Virginia Highlands Park by 2020

The Aurora Highlands community is requesting the creation of a public dog park facility in the Pentagon City area, specifically a site at Virginia Highlands Park as the most feasible location to support the broadest group of residents.

## Need is Significant and Now

### Approved Community Need:

The 22202 communities have been expressing a need for dog parks for over 20 years

Officially, the Aurora Highlands 2008 Neighborhood Conservation plan calls for the creation of **multiple dog parks in the area**, and specifically cites desired locations at both Virginia Highlands Park and Fort Scott Park:

- Page 40; Virginia Highlands Park recommendation #1: “Convert the area behind the tennis courts and tennis practice boards to a dog park.”
- Page 45; Fort Scott Park recommendation #11: “Convert the shaded open space behind the tennis court into a dog park.”

From 2008, the need for dog parks in the area has only increased, while the dog parks were never realized in the plan. The growth has been particularly focused in the rapidly growing core of Pentagon City. Today, residents exercise dogs off leash at Virginia Highlands Park (VHP) risking fines, and the public access areas of Met Park have become a de facto dog park, much to the chagrin of residents wishing to use the space in other ways. Part of the community benefit concession from the proposed Met Park 5/6 building included a small public dog run, although this is now unlikely to occur given the stated intention of Amazon to acquire these parcels.

### No Dog Park:

There are no publicly accessible dog parks in the entire 22202 region. The closest public dog park in 22202 is the Shirlington Dog Park or Columbia Pike Towers Dog Park both on the opposite side of I-395 and over 2 miles away.

Based on the use of Met Park, VHP, and Grace Murray Hopper Park by dog owners, we estimate there is a current need for a **full-fledged dog park facility** capable of accommodating the estimated 2,500 dogs within walking distance.<sup>1</sup>

By the recently adopted Public Spaces Master Plan’s (PSMP) own standards, a dog park must be at least 450 sq ft per dog, which is well below what national averages cite as 600 sq ft per dog.

## Size

**Approximately 25,000sq ft** The area outside fencing that is currently unused would provide approximately 15,000 sf; Observations at Met Park apartments and VHP show that there will be easily 50+ dogs (small & large) at peak times. The size would **need to be at least 22,500 ft to avoid conflicts, which can be achieved by expanding into space currently occupied by one softball field.**

The coming of Amazon to Pentagon City will only increase this need, as additional residential density is added to the area. Amazon is also [famously dog-friendly](#) and those residents will expect dog amenities.

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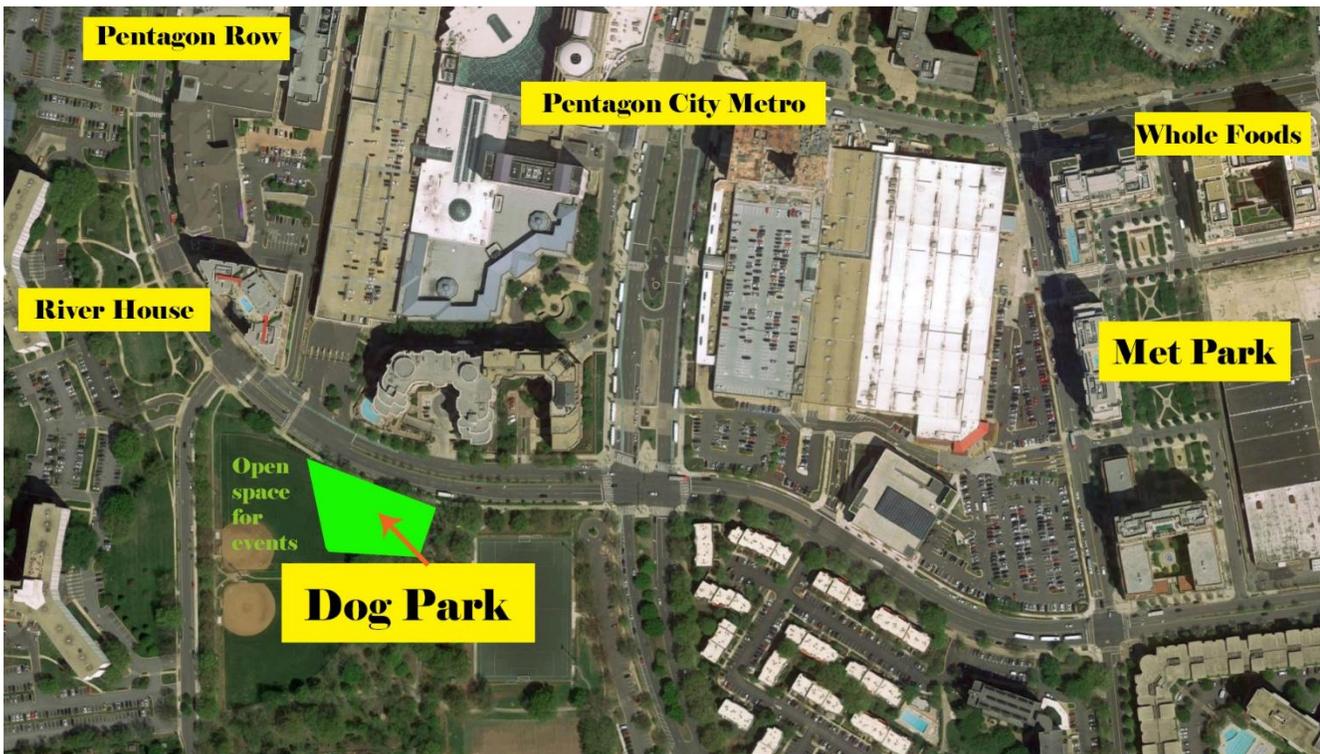
<sup>1</sup> [US Census says that 37% of households have dogs.](#) Conservative estimates for dog ownership within 10 minute walk of VA Highlands Park (~11,000 households), **only 25% households equals 2,500+ dogs.**

## Location- Walkability is Necessary

**~11,000 households within 10 minutes' walk:** The most critical need for a dog park is the area around the core Pentagon City urban area. This area is one of the most densely populated areas in the County with nearly 15,000 homes and apartments within a 15 minute walk (~11,000 within 10 minutes), virtually all of which are dog friendly.<sup>2</sup>

**“Car-free diet”** Most critically, this area has embraced the “car free diet” more than possibly anywhere else in the county. Without a car, it is virtually impossible for dog owners to even access any other County dog park facilities.

VHP is ideally suited as a location in close proximity to both the single family neighborhoods of Aurora Highlands and Arlington Ridge as well as the large dog-friendly residential in Pentagon and Crystal City.



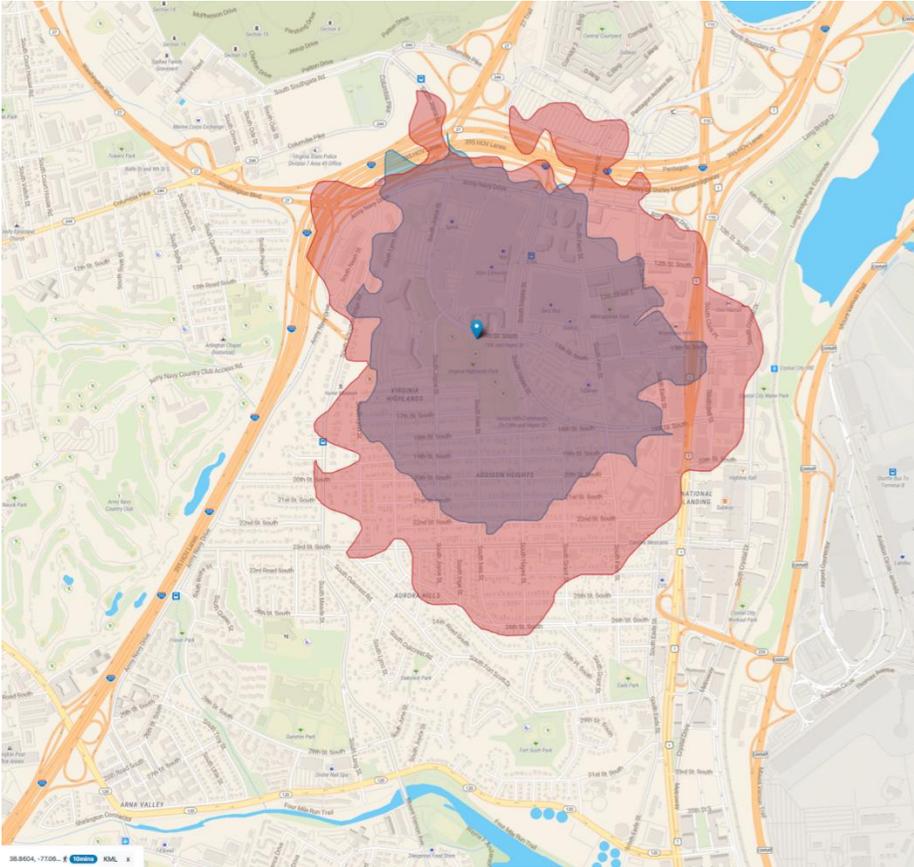
**Not located near homes:** The location provides easy access from multi-family and single family homes without any disruption to the quality of life of neighbors. In fact, the closest single family homes are the equivalency in distance away from the dog park of nearly 2 blocks. A dog-friendly multi-family building is across the street and uses VHP for its green space and dog exercising area.

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<sup>2</sup> The site proposed is within easy walking distance of ~11,000 residential units (10 minute walking distance of at least 7,000 multi-family units and 400 single family homes, and within 15 minutes of at least 3,500 additional multi-family units and 200 additional single family homes).

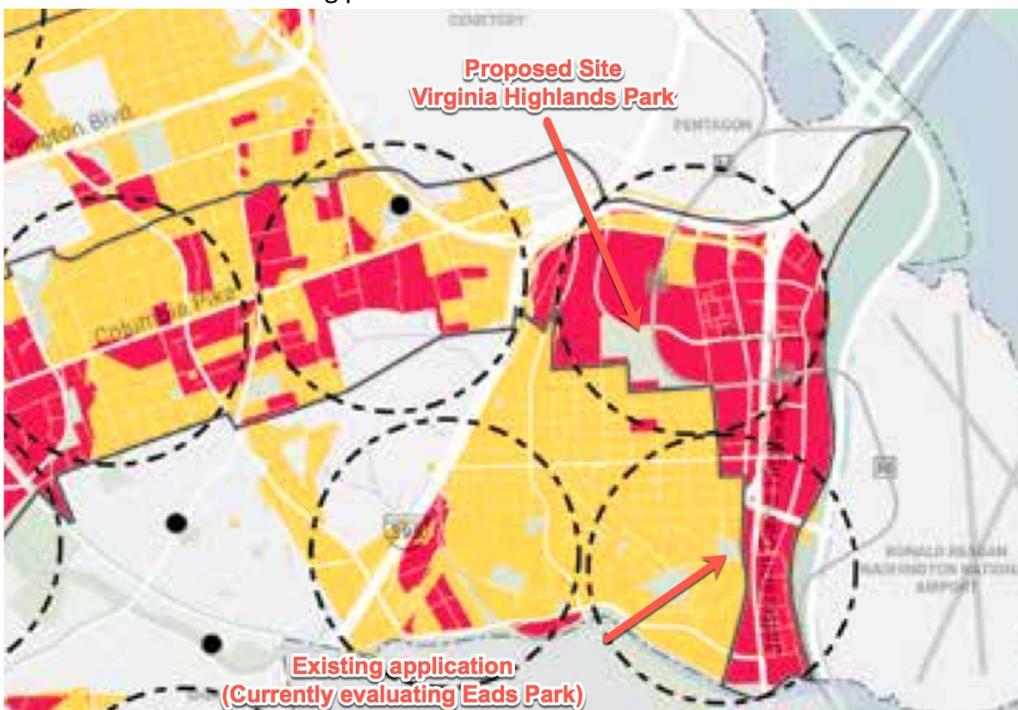
## Walkability Map:

The households' walkability are shown in the purple (10 minute) and red (15 minute) areas in the map below.



## Public Space Master Plan (PSMP) Map Cites Dog Park Need in 22202:

The recently approved Public Spaces Master Plan also identifies the need for dog parks in the Pentagon City Area, which also neatly correspond to the location in this proposal. The map below shows the proposed location in relation to the recommended areas for dog parks from the PSMP:





## Site Specifics

The proposed site at Virginia Highlands Park makes use of underutilized area in the northern edge along the park service road. We propose using two separate areas for a main dog area and a dog area for dogs under 25 pounds, separated by the service road, as shown below.



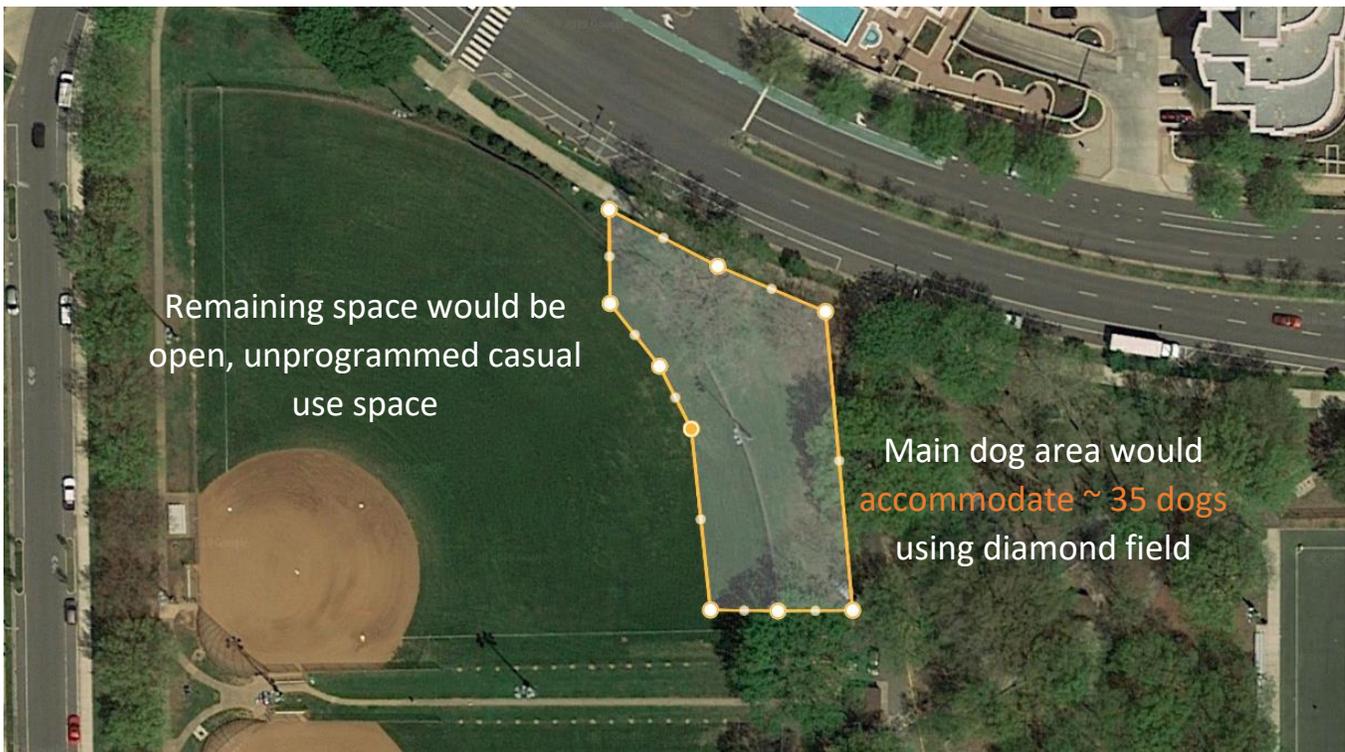
These areas represent approximately 7,000 square feet for the area for dogs under 25 pounds and 8,000 square feet for the main dog area.

**The “main dog area” according to Arlington’s standards of 450 sq ft per dog would only safely accommodate approximately 17 dogs.** However, we know that even within Met Park, just one apartment complex, frequently 20 or more dogs are using casual use space as a de facto dog park in the evenings and weekends. Therefore, the 8,000 sq ft accommodating only 17 dogs at any given time is simply insufficient for the greater needs of the community and the nearly 11,000 households within a short distance from the park.

Since the 8,000 sq ft space may not actually be sufficient space in the large dog area given the continuing population increase in the area this side of Virginia Highlands Park has been slated for renovation under the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and has also been identified as needing master space planning, which should allow revising the size allocated to the dog park.

In addition, there is an **opportunity to expand the large dog area to the west by using land currently used by one of the softball fields**. Expanding to the west by approximately 30 yards would nearly double the space as shown below and provide the needed capacity.

This aligns with the Aurora Highlands Civic Association’s approval to re-evaluate this side of Virginia Highlands Park, including a [formal proposal from the Aurora Highlands Civic Association in 2016](#), to make use of these underutilized diamond fields for open space and other community needs.



## Logistics

**Quickly and Temporarily 2019:** Given that this area of the park has been slated for improvements under the CIP program in 2016 and is recommended for a master planning process in the PSMP, we suggest that the location proposed may be temporary at relatively little cost that could easily be funded out of general maintenance budgets before the end of 2019.

**Change in shape or size in the next 5 years** when permanent configuration and fencing could be implemented as part of the master planning process for VHP. Design funding of over \$592,000 was already approved under the 2016 CIP program for renovation work on this side of the park but was never used.

**Temporary Fencing** could be achieved using the heavy-duty temporary fencing of the type currently warehoused by the County at no or relatively low cost.

**Water Source already exists** in the area delineated in the diagram by the “small dog park”.

**Trash Service already exists:** In addition, there are already County trash bins and trash service provided by the County along the service path between both dog areas.

**Shed already exists** to store the necessary maintenance tools at Virginia Highlands Park. Volunteers can use it to store the necessary items including dog bags, first aid kit, broom, shovels, clippers, signage, and tools.

**Easy Entrance Access:** The service road is ideally situated to allow for owners to enter and exit the dog park without using main sidewalks.

**Easy Parking (if needed):** There is plenty of street parking, and lot parking at Virginia Highlands Park.



## Support

### **Neighborhood Conservation Plan**

The NC Plan calls for the creation of **multiple dog parks in the area**, and specifically cites desired locations at both Virginia Highlands Park and Fort Scott Park/

### **Resident-Volunteers to Help Maintain the Park**

The dog park will be maintained by **Pentagon City Dogs**, residents of both single-family homes and multi-family high rises in Pentagon City who have signed up in advance to help maintain this dog park.

- **20 neighbors have signed up as volunteers to maintain the park**

### **Civic Association Support:**

The proposed site, and the majority of Pentagon City, fall within the Aurora Highlands Civic Association boundaries. The Aurora Highlands Civic Association has endorsed this proposal and has also pledged to support this group

- **The AHCA civic association unanimously supported the VHP proposal on July 17, 2019**

### **Community Support:**

- **Over 100 community members have signed up as users and supporters of the park**

### **Parks and Recreation Commissioners**

**In 2017 commissioners have expressed support for “temporary use spaces”** in this area as a prelude to more intensive redesign.

### **Shirlington Dogs II Support:**

Shirlington Dogs II endorses the proposal and has offered to lend their knowledge to ensure a Pentagon City site is well implemented and maintained.

- **Shirlington Dogs II provides a letter of support, attached.**

### **Local Business Support:**

- **Two Way Dog Walking of Crystal City supports the dog park at VHP**

**County’s Public Space Master Plan (PSMP):** Map Cites Dog Park Need in 22202, near Pentagon City.