

Last days at the dog park

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Killian the dog gets so fired up on Sunday mornings that he will not lay down when owner Kelly Breckenridge tells him to.

And once she and husband Jason get their chow-wolfhound mixed-breed in the car, "He starts to whimper, he's so excited."

That's because Killian knows it's time to go to the makeshift "dog park," at North Farmington High School. As many as 60 dogs have been showing on some Sunday mornings between 8:30 and 9:30 a.m., in the soccer field along Farmington Road.

Organizers with the group Parks for Urban Pups, distinguished by their bright blue T-shirts with "PUPS" logo, erect temporary orange fencing to close gaps in the fenced soccer field. It has served in this capacity for more than two years.

On this Sunday, about 28 dogs and owners milled about the dewey grass. The corgis, Irish setters, shepherds, beagles, mastiffs and mixed breeds don't know it, but next Sunday is the last day for the unsanctioned park.

"It's terrible," said Jason Breckenridge, adding that in Chicago, "they have dog parks everywhere."

When brown, short-haired Aspen the weimaraner squats, owner Michelle Katz trots over with a plastic bag. All those who show for the dog park pick up dog feces, break up the occasional poach-fight, as well as romantic canine interludes.

"No one wants animal feces on the ground; children play here," said Breckenridge. "But it's not the people here, it's the people who come in Monday through Friday and don't clean it up."

In an Aug. 27 letter to dog park organizer and PUPS member Jess Elson, Farmington Superintendent C. Robert Maxfield wrote, "I do not believe that fields that are used by school-aged children should also be used as a recreation area for dogs. While I realize that you are committed to cleaning up after the dogs, I believe that the health hazard still exists."

Elson said he then spoke with Maxfield, and the two agreed to give dog park organizers three Sundays to spread the word that the park's last day is Sept. 16.

Randy Foutch, a Connecticut native now living in Farmington Hills, said the parks in Connecticut allow dogs. "I'm really surprised that my dog is not welcome, even on a leash. As a taxpayer, that is how I want to use a park, but I can't do that."

Many park-goers say the park has been good for their dogs. "I say, 'We're going to the dog park,' he gets excited, he goes to the door," said Dawn Deak of Plymouth.

Nearby, her golden retriever Sonny wags his tail and romps with a shepherd and a corgi. Talking with Deak is Doreen Hand of Northville, who also watches as her black Labrador Hamilton fends off an aggressor. "She stands up for herself," Hand said.

"I think the community

demands we have dogs that are socialized, that don't bite," said Jeanne Bisanz of Farmington Hills. She said that in a dog park, "Even aggressive dogs, when they're off-leash, work out their issues."

Dr. Sid Grossberg, a PUPS steering committee member from West Bloomfield, said the group is working with that city's parks and recreation staff to have a dog park included in a five-year recreation plan. Some Farmington Hills dog park enthusiasts say they'll continue to seek city approval for a permanent dog park site.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL LERSEN
Play time: Dawn Deak brought Sunny.



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Frollicking: Canines career around the field.

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