

Regency Acres students want part of Highland Gate to go to the dogs



By Brock Weir

A simple project on measurement and literacy at Regency Acres Public School has snowballed into a movement ? a movement which, if students have their way, will go to the dogs.

While many of the features in the 21 acre piece of parkland that will form the centrepiece of the Highland Gate redevelopment have already been settled, students in Norma Moffitt's Grade 6 class have other ideas and are preparing to take their idea to the individuals who can make it happen.

Their idea? A new dog park to serve Aurora's west side.

?We think Aurora needs another dog park and we have designed a new and improved idea of another dog park for the Town of Aurora,? explains student Zudzin Huang. ?We would like to create the new dog park at Highland Gate so people wouldn't have to drive their car to our dog park because it is on our Regency community. The idea would be great for the environment because more people would be able to walk to our dog park instead of polluting the air by taking a car.?

So far, Aurora's only leash-free dog park, Canine Commons, lies near the top of Industrial Parkway North. Students say it is next to impossible for them to take their dogs over there without loading up their parents' cars, leading not only to pollution but a lost opportunity to get youth up on their feet and leading healthy lifestyles.

?Another reason we feel a new dog park is needed in Aurora is there are 45 human parks in Aurora like Ada Johnson Park, Town Park and our Confederation Park, but only one canine dog park,? Zudzin continues. ?That is not fair for our dogs; they deserve more. More human parks have been created as Aurora's people population has increased over the years, but the [dog] population has certainly grown too. They should have more parks to play in. These days, both parents work and this leaves our dogs alone and bored in their homes for longer periods than in the past. They need to get out and around and play with their dog friends. We think we have developed a great place for that to happen in our community dog park.?

Working on their upcoming pitch to Council, the students Bryce Lamontagne, Tiffany Kazinczi, Zach Henderson, Lily Zapata, and Brad Gardiner outline a number of proposed amenities in the park to keep dogs happy, healthy and stimulated, and, in turn that will help the Town or other stakeholders turn a profit.

?We also feel that creating a dog park will give Aurora another opportunity to make a profit,? says Bryce. ?We would like to include a snack shack bark café with lots of seats and shady areas where owners and dogs would be able to access food and snacks. All these ideas will not only be good for the dogs, but also for the owners and the Town. The money we make will be used for upkeep at the park and maybe we could host special events at the park like an agility contest, movies in the park with dogs invited. We would like to add a pool and a splash park so dogs wouldn't get hot in the summer. This also would be good for the environment since adding a pond would give the water a place to go when it rains.?

Adds Lily: ?The profit buildings, like the snack shack, [can be a place] where they go to get food if they're hungry, there will be a doggy day care, so if [humans] have to go to work their dogs can have fun. We have a washing centre so, at the end of the day, if they get muddy, you won't have to muck up your car and clean it the rest of the day.?

Final details of their proposal ? including costs ? still need to be fleshed out before they present their idea to Council, an opportunity

tentatively slated for the end of this month. They are also set to vote on a snappy name for the park, with ideas ranging from 'The Bark Park', to 'Pawz and Clawz', 'Dog & Bone', to 'Paws and Play'.

The class started a project and assignment on an idea designing a dog park for measurement and literacy, but then it snowballed, explains Ms. Moffitt, noting that, through the process and consultation with Councillor Sandra Humfries, kids have developed a passion for having their voices heard by their leaders.