Rollingwood Park Dual Usage of Youth Fields for Sports & Dog Park Considerations in Relation to Recent Proposed Capital Investments in the Park

Prepared for Rollingwood community discussion on youth baseball fields and off-leash dog use and a joint session of City Council and the Rollingwood Commercial Development Corporation scheduled for November 19, 2025.

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1. Executive Summary

The Rollingwood community is currently evaluating significant park improvements funded by the Rollingwood Commercial Development Corporation (RCDC), totaling more than half a million dollars. These investments include upgrades to the youth baseball fields that are presently being used for dual purposes: organized children's baseball and informal, off-leash dog activities during non-baseball hours.

Rollingwood has both the land and financial resources necessary to meet the needs of youth sports families and dog owners without forcing both groups into a shared space that creates preventable risks. Both the 2018 Park Master Plan and the 2021 Comprehensive Plan indicate strong community input, a desire for safe and functional recreational spaces, and clear recommendations for separating incompatible uses.

Despite this, there has never been a comprehensive and explicit public evaluation of the question: Should Rollingwood preserve the baseball fields for baseball and also build a separate dedicated dog park? This omission has contributed to confusion within the public record and an incomplete understanding of the risks inherent in continuing dual-use practices.

This report consolidates the evidence, policy guidance, stakeholder needs, risks, and planning documents to present a clear conclusion: The most beneficial, safest, and most fiscally responsible solution is to discontinue dual use of the baseball fields and build a dedicated off-leash dog park elsewhere on city parkland.

1.1 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What makes dual use unsafe?: Dog waste residues, urine saturation, digging, and unpredictable dog behavior introduce hazards that disproportionately affect children.

Why not restrict dog use to off-hours?: Contamination remains embedded in soil and turf for days or weeks. Time-based sharing does not prevent sanitation issues.

Why not leash-only rules?: Dogs still urinate on fields and may lunge or react unpredictably. Leash rules do not protect turf.

Why not build both?: That is the recommendation—preserve youth fields and build a dedicated dog park.

Has the community ever had a significant voice on this choice?: No. The question has never been clearly framed for residents and was passed by City Council in a regular session in 2017. This reference document is intended to add that clarity.

2. Stakeholders and Their Interests

Youth Sports Families: Seek safe, sanitary fields. Children are disproportionately vulnerable to pathogens in turf and soil.

Dog Owners: Desire reliable, well-maintained off-leash spaces that support exercise and socialization.

Coaches, Volunteers, and Sports Organizations: Need predictable field quality and reduced liability exposure.

3. Roles and Responsibilities of Governing Bodies

Rollingwood City Council: Final policymaking authority. Approves or denies park usage rules, dog park construction, and RCDC funding acceptance. Ensures alignment with the Comprehensive Plan and Park Master Plan.

Rollingwood Parks Commission: Advises Council on park needs, community input, and consistency with planning documents. Reviews conditions, conflicts, and proposed changes.

Rollingwood Commercial Development Corporation (RCDC): A Type B corporation managing Type B sales tax revenue. Can fund dog parks or baseball field improvements but cannot set park policy.

Summary: City Council = Policy; Parks Commission = Advisory; RCDC = Funding.

4. Evidence-Based Risks of Dog Use on Youth Fields

Sanitation Risks: Parasite eggs (roundworm, hookworm), Giardia, and bacteria remain in turf and soil even after waste is removed.

Safety Risks: Dogs may knock children down, chase balls, or engage in fights near minors.

Behavioral Risks: Off-leash settings may trigger pack behavior, resource guarding, and prey instincts.

Veterinary Best Practices: Strongly recommend keeping dog parks physically separated from youth recreation areas.

5. Research on Dual-Use Fields

Cities across the U.S. avoid dual-use baseball fields due to sanitation, safety, and liability issues. Standard practice: prohibit off-leash dogs on sports fields and provide separate fenced dog parks.

Rollingwood's 2018 Park Master Plan identifies dog use on ballfields as a problem and recommends a dedicated off-leash area.

6. Field Maintenance and Cost Considerations

Urine burns turf. Digging creates holes. Waste embeds in infields. These increase maintenance costs and undermine capital investment. Dual use accelerates field deterioration and increases hazards for youth players.

7. Legal and Liability Review

Duty of Care: The City owes heightened duty when minors are primary users.

Known Risks Increase Liability Exposure: Continuing dual use after risks are identified introduces legal exposure.

Insurance Perspective: Mixed-use facilities involving dogs and children are considered higher risk.

8. Solution Opportunity: Dedicated Dog Park

A dedicated dog park removes conflicts, protects children, supports dog owners, and aligns with both the Park Master Plan and Comprehensive Plan. Rollingwood has the land, funding, and planning foundation to do this.

9. Conclusion

Dual use is unsafe, unsanitary, and inconsistent with municipal best practice and Rollingwood's planning documents. The City should end dual use and construct a dedicated dog park on appropriate city land.

10. Appendices (Referenced Documents)

Appendix materials referenced include:
- Park Master Plan Dog Park Appendix

- 2018 Park Master Plan
- 2021 Comprehensive Plan
- Comprehensive Plan Strike Force materials
- RCDC funding eligibility guidelines
- Community feedback excerpts (where applicable)

Source Documents:

Comprehensive Plan (2021):
https://www.rollingwoodtx.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_and_development/page/9110/final_cp_draft_10_12_2021.pdf

Comprehensive Plan Main Page: https://www.rollingwoodtx.gov/bc-cpsf

Park Master Plan (2018): https://www.rollingwoodtx.gov/bc-pc/page/rollingwood-park-master-plan-2018