



# WEST HOUSTON ASSOCIATION

*Leadership in Quality Growth*

Dog Park in Alief Project Report

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RICE

## **Executive Summary**

Alief is a densely populated, diverse community in southwest Houston. Despite having a population of over 112,000, the community is lacking a dog park. Dog parks are a communal benefit, providing mental and physical health to dogs and their owners. After considering existing parks, we suggest Boone Road Park as a potential location for a dog park in Alief. Its favorable location, layout, and amenities stood out among the location criteria employed. The cost of a dog park can vary widely, depending mostly on size and amount of additional amenities added. We considered three price ranges: Basic, Select, and Plus. We recommend the Select plan, a 1 - 2 acre park that includes built shade, water fountains, play equipment, and seating. The estimated price range is \$20,000 - \$25,000 and estimated time frame is 2 years. The funding will mostly come from three sources: grassroots donations, grants, and corporate relations. There are a number of large corporations and local, Alief-based, animal-related businesses that can be resources for charitable giving. The final source of funding is grass-roots funding, which will employ communal events and social media. There are certain risks associated with this project. Emphasizing communal engagement, scheduling consistent meetings with stakeholders, and careful planning regarding land usage will mitigate the most challenging risks. The project at hand will be a constant collaboration between the Alief community and stakeholders who are able to sanction a dog park. Advertising Alief's identity as a working-class population that's missing a communal need will be essential in seeing this project to completion.

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# Introduction and Background

Alief is a community located in southwest Houston. Directly west of Beltway 8, the neighborhood enjoys a population of over 112,000 individuals. It contains the ninth largest zip code in Houston by population size. Alief is a diverse community. Some key demographics of the population are in the table below, taken from a Houston government resource assessment of the city's Super-Neighborhoods.

A diverse population brings a diverse set of needs. One unmet need that has been identified is the lack of a communal dog park. Dog parks are a physical and mental benefit to the populations they serve. Numerous studies have mapped the warm opinions residents have towards dog parks. Data supports the fact that parks with designated off-leash areas attract more visitors, more consistently, than those without. Further, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department recommends one dog park per 100,000 residents per park sector. Alief is contained within park sector 18, an area with 240,000 residents and zero dog parks.

Super Neighborhood		
Pop. characteristics	2000	2019
Total population	41,820	112,672
Persons per sq. mile	2,962	7,968
<b>Age of Population</b>		
Under 5 years	9%	7%
5- 17 years	23%	20%
18- 64 years	63%	63%
65 and over	5%	10%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Non Hispanic Whites	17%	6%
Non Hispanic Blacks	28%	23%
Hispanics	31%	51%
Non Hispanic Asians	21%	19%
Non Hispanic Others	3%	1%
<b>Income</b>		
Under \$25,000	31%	29%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	38%	31%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	25%	28%
Over \$100,000	6%	12%

The nonprofit West Houston Association prides itself on 40 years of policy, planning, and infrastructure improvements within the greater west Houston area. In identifying this need, the West Houston Association furthers their mission by promoting the quality of life for Alief residents. In collaborating with the Alief Super-Neighborhood council and its president, both entities are benefitted. The West Houston Association is able to effectively identify a communal need and the Alief Super-Neighborhood is able to leverage assets provided by the nonprofit.

The following report presents recommendations for the realization of a dog park in Alief. Outlined below are specific suggestions that include: a park location, cost estimate, and

funding strategy. We discuss pitch strategies, risks, and a potential time frame for the project. We conclude with a final recommendation regarding utilizing “Alief’s story” in executing the project.

## Findings

### Location Findings

A number of major criteria were considered in selecting a dog park location: ownership, shape, size, and existing amenities. Further, the search was limited to already-established parks within the Alief community. Three potential park locations were identified: Hackberry Park, Boone Road Park, Mike Driscoll Park. Each location was analyzed in the following way and includes an inexhaustive pros-cons-list that informed a recommendation:

<b>Hackberry Park</b>	<b>Boone Road Park</b>	<b>Mike Driscoll Park</b>
7777 S Dairy Ashford Rd, Houston, TX 77072	7700 Boone Rd, Houston, TX 77072	13534 W Houston Center Blvd, Houston, TX 77082
Owned by City of Houston	Owned by City of Houston	Owned by county
22.4 Acres, Rectangular plot interrupted by winding trail and water	Rectangular plot, split into two halves via trail	Rectangular plot, one large trail around perimeter
Pros: Residential area, variety of scenery, water features	Pros: Favorable shape, existing amenities, renovated playground	Pros: Favorable shape, directly off of Westpark Tollway
Cons: Difficult shape	Cons: Lack of shade	Cons: Outside of Alief

### Finance Breakdown

To understand what the park would entail, we outlined a finance plan, using a tiered pricing structure that compared the cost range, acreage, time estimate, funding sources, and amenities provided. This was done to compare what a lower budget park could look like, compared to what more moderately priced and higher priced parks could entail. Note that

cost range projections were based on current market conditions and trends. Three pricing plans were created: Basic, Select, Plus. They include, as follows:

	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Select</b>	<b>Plus</b>
<b>Cost</b>	\$15,000 - \$18,000	\$20,000 - \$25,000	\$32,000 - \$40,000
<b>Size</b>	1 acre	1 - 2 acres	2 acres
<b>Time Duration</b>	1 - 2 years	2 years	2+ years
<b>Funding Sources</b>	Grassroots Donations In-kind Donations	Grassroots Donations Grants	Grassroots Donations Grants Corporate Sponsorships
<b>Amenities</b>	Shade Water fountains Limited equipment Seating	Shade Water fountains Play equipment Seating	Shade Water fountains Play equipment Seating Picnic tables Leash post

An example of Select plan budget reads:

Fencing	\$9,411.16
Shade	\$530.24
Equipment	\$4,614.00
Seating	\$4,326.00
Waste Receptacles	\$1,784.95
Signage	\$1,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$22,166.35</b>

Sustainable considerations can be made, as well, in the final implementation of the park. These supplementary elements can be referenced in Appendix 1.

# Recommendations

## Location Recommendation

The ideal dog park location is Boone Road Park. Possessing an ideal, rectangular shape, the park is naturally subdivided into two halves by a trail. The western portion of the park contains approximately four acres of viable land, while the eastern portion of the park contains approximately two acres of viable land.

Boone Road Park has several attractive amenities, including a parking lot, portable bathroom, trash cans, and a newly renovated playground. The park is located in a densely residential area. The neighborhoods bordered by Kirkwood Street, Bellaire Boulevard, Wilcrest Drive, and Beechnut Street are immediately within walking distance to Boone Road Park. Further, the neighborhoods bordered by S Dairy Ashford Road, Westpark Tollway, Sam Houston Tollway, and Bissonnet Street are within a ten minute drive.

While ideal, the lack of present shade is a drawback of Boone Road Park, especially regarding the eastern half of the plot. However, shade can be added to the park. Implementing artificial shade structures (referenced in Finance Breakdown) can provide an immediate solution. Planting trees presents itself as a long term solution. Further, we theorize that the present lack of shade will limit the risk of community pushback in allocating the land for a dog park. In other words, because there is no shade, the land is being underutilized and therefore unlikely to have stakeholders who would greatly oppose our proposed usage. Finally, the lack of shade allows opportunity for a “beautification” of the plot, which can be achieved through in-kind donations and financial support streams that are described in greater detail in the following section.

For potential design concepts of a dog park within Boone Road Park, refer to Appendix 2.

## Finance and Funding Recommendations

Following the tiered pricing analysis, in the Finance Breakdown, the Alief community is recommended to choose the Select pricing and amenities plan, as it includes all the necessary features for a moderate dog park while maintaining a favorable time frame and level of cost efficiency. This plan will take a combination of the fundraising streams outlined above and are subject to variability in implementation.

As mentioned in the park plan pricing above, funding for the Select park will mostly be raised by a combination of corporate in-kind donations and grants. Further options for West Houston Association to meet their financial goals we included below are grassroots fundraising methods.

## Grants

- Local (Texas): Houston Endowment, Greater Houston Community Foundation, Stedman West Foundation, Green Mountain Energy Sun Club, Elkins Foundation, Impact100 Grant
  - Many of these entities have had some kind of work done in the Alief area or have been involved in the development of infrastructure nearby in the Westchase district
  - Important to note opening dates of grants, as they may change year to year
- National: Pet Safe Unleashed, My Darling Theo

## In-Kind Donations and Corporate Support

- Volunteer Groups: Rice University School of Architecture, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Alief Community Association, Houston Complete Communities
  - Help in designing park, building park, and getting outreach to further park project steps
- 50/50 Park Partners: Initiative under current mayor to bring in private sector with public sector in city infrastructure and community development
  - Raised \$450k from Community Health Choice in Feb 2023 for Harwin Park renovation
- Surrounding Businesses: Fish N Pets Unlimited, IBC Bank, Analyte Health, Associated Testing Laboratories
  - Mission statements and/or past association with support in other Alief projects make these businesses ideal candidates to consider

## Grassroots Fundraising

These are some innovative ways to not only raise funding for this project but also to work with the community and foster support. We included corporate participation as well as local events in conjunction with surrounding schools and community centers in order to engage all of Alief's residents. In addition, using promotional materials such as Appendix 3 can be useful in keeping the community informed about the progress of the park.



Idea	Description	Locations	Case Study
Bark in the Park	corporate bonding/company day out in park	Alief Community Center, other parks	Rice Baseball game, \$10/dog, raffles
Doggie Fun Run	1K running/walk event with dog, vendors, sponsors	AJ Martin Elementary School, Notre Dame Catholic Church	Houston Humane Society Annual K-9 Fun Run, ~\$25/person
Alief Corporation Challenge	Corporate friendly competition in field events (kickball, relay racing, etc)	Alief Community Center, Boone Road Park, other parks	Westchase District Corporate Challenge, raised <b>over \$300k</b> since 1998
Social Media	Pet features on social media	Alief website, instagram, listserv, partner with news, etc	Hermann Park website "doggie wall", <b>over \$11k</b>

# Implementation

## Pitch Strategy

To optimize the likelihood of securing funding for the project, it is crucial to highlight Alief's strengths, particularly the industrious nature of its community. The Alief community stands out for its exceptional dedication and hard work, attributes that often go unnoticed in the realm of community development. This densely populated area, while comparable in size to its counterparts, lacks many essential amenities. Crafting a tailored pitch strategy is important when approaching specific grant makers or investors, emphasizing the untapped potential within Alief's hardworking population. By showcasing the unique strengths of

this community, we can strategically position the project to align with the interests of potential funders. Three potential angles we have identified are: community engagement, beautification, and mental health.



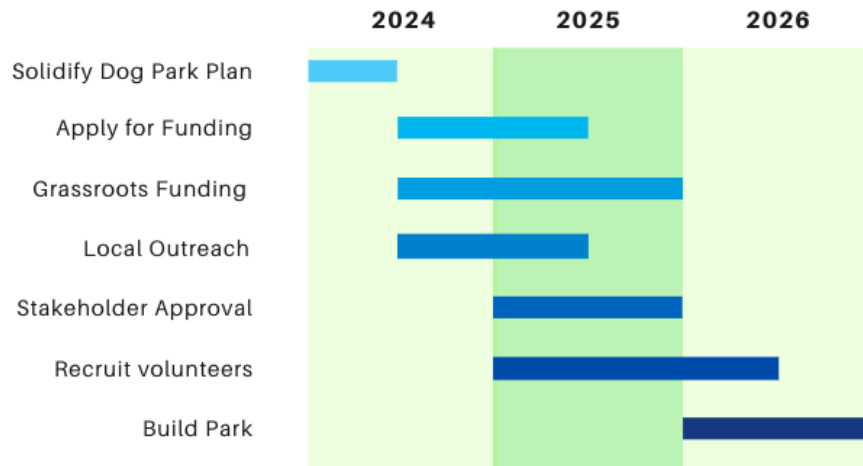
For example, West Houston Association should focus on the benefits of a dog park to overall mental health when applying for funding for the Greater Houston Community Foundation, which values mental health in the youth population.

Emphasizing the need for community beautification would be useful in getting in-kind donations from non-profits like Trees for Houston.

These are just three examples of angles West Houston Association can use to format their pitch to potential funders and grant-makers.

## Projected Timeline of Implementation

We estimate the Select park plan will take about 2 years to complete, finishing by the end of 2026. This is highly dependent on factors such as approval time from local government and authorities, as well as how far fundraising efforts get in reaching the projected goal of \$20,000 - \$25,000. It is important to note that the West Houston Association should continually evaluate progress on the budgeting process, as that can impact the feasibility of the Select park and change the strategic focus to obtaining a Basic park as mentioned in the Finance Breakdown section.



## Risk Mitigation Plan

This plan does include a variety of risks, so we have included a risk mitigation plan to ensure that the process to start and build this dog park is more streamlined. The three main risks identified are categorized under: community, government, and land.

Category	Identified Risk	Mitigation Plan
Community	Lack of interest by the Alief	Continuous engagement through

	Community in supporting the park.	grassroots efforts and outlining of benefits.
Government	Long wait times and high fees involved in acquiring necessary approval.	Regularly scheduled meetings with stakeholders.
Land	Insufficient usage of land and land neglect.	Clear plan for construction before building and performing maintenance.

While there may be other risks involved, these three are outlined because they are the highest priority to be addressed, if necessary.

## **“Alief’s Story”**

We finish on a recommendation that falls in line with the section “Pitch Strategy.” We believe your greatest asset is what we refer to as “Alief’s story.” You are serving a large community of hardworking, working class residents. They are missing an incredibly basic need: a dog park. This story is emotional and resonant. We recommend that throughout the process of realizing the project, you utilize “Alief’s story” as a way to garner support. Effective pitch meetings, contacting stakeholders, and garnering financial support will all depend on the utilization of this narrative. “Alief’s story” is what makes this project unique. We strongly urge that it inspires the work ahead. If communicated properly, we have no doubt that this project will come to total fruition.

# **Appendix**

## **1. Sustainable Considerations**

Houston is striving to be more environmentally friendly, as a whole, and Alief should not be excluded from these efforts. While not a priority in implementing this dog park, if chosen to, the dog park can have sustainable infrastructure/supplements. Note that these will come at an additional cost, but may draw more visitors.

One idea would be in the grass of the dog park. To be more sustainable, the park can omit grass or have minimal grass. The benefit of doing so would be decreased water and

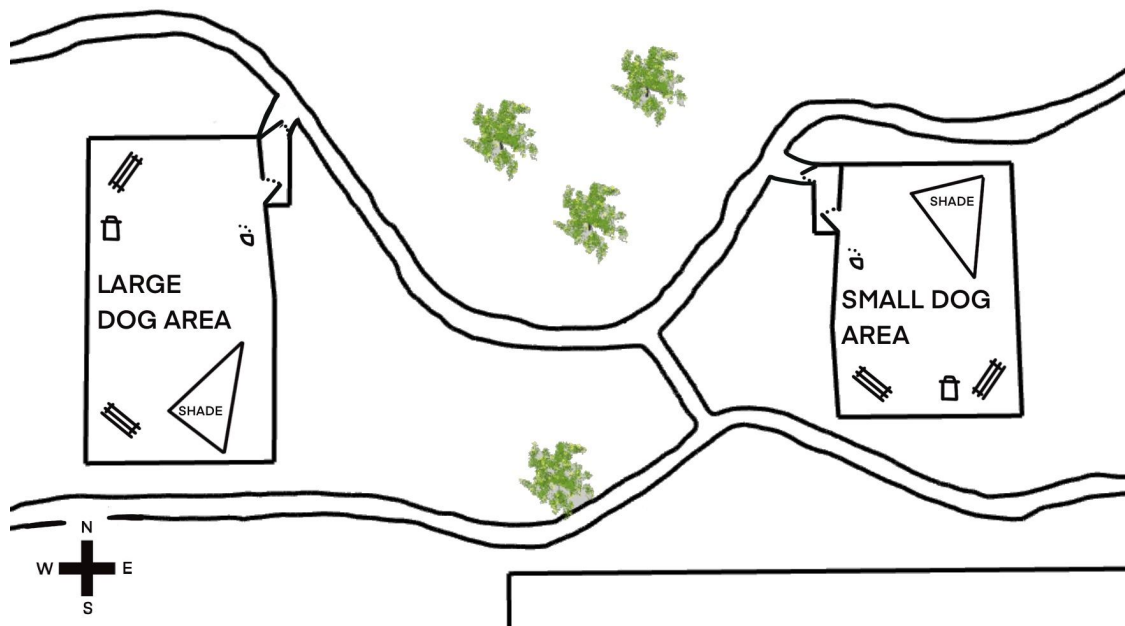
maintenance costs, however it may become muddy after the rain and it may not look as aesthetically pleasing. On the other hand, grass could be replaced entirely with synthetic turf, which looks and feels like grass. The benefit is decreased water costs and nice aesthetics, however turf involves higher upfront costs to purchase and install, and would require maintenance.

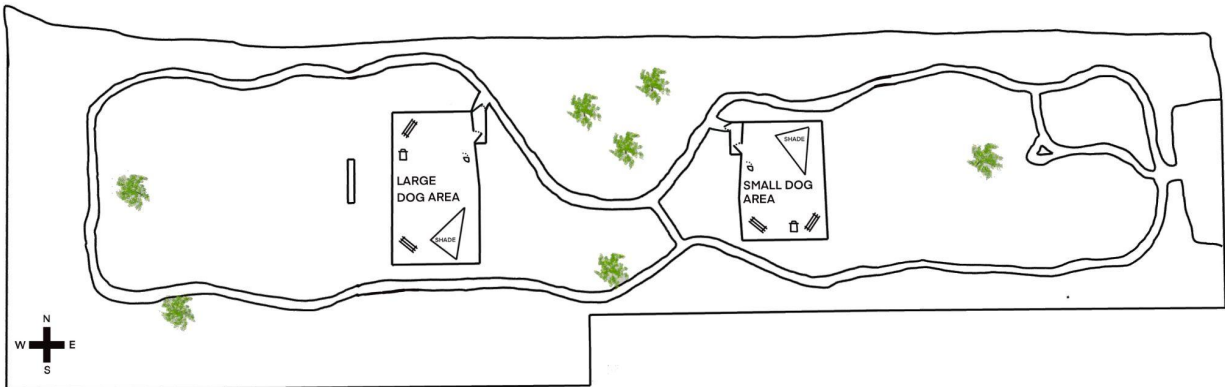
If natural grass is retained, the next idea would be to use organic landscaping, such as compost or mulch. In addition to grass, it would be environmentally friendly to plant trees around the park—for both clean air and shade—and other types of organic vegetation. The usage of trees as shade would be particularly beneficial, as it would provide a natural solution to Boone Road park’s shade problem, and would eliminate the need for synthetic shade.

Finally, as it relates to energy, other sustainable considerations to be made include: solar lights and solar energy, reclaimed/recycled water in water fountains, and dog waste compost. All of these ideas can be expanded upon in future projects to make this dog park, and Alief as a whole, more sustainable for years to come.

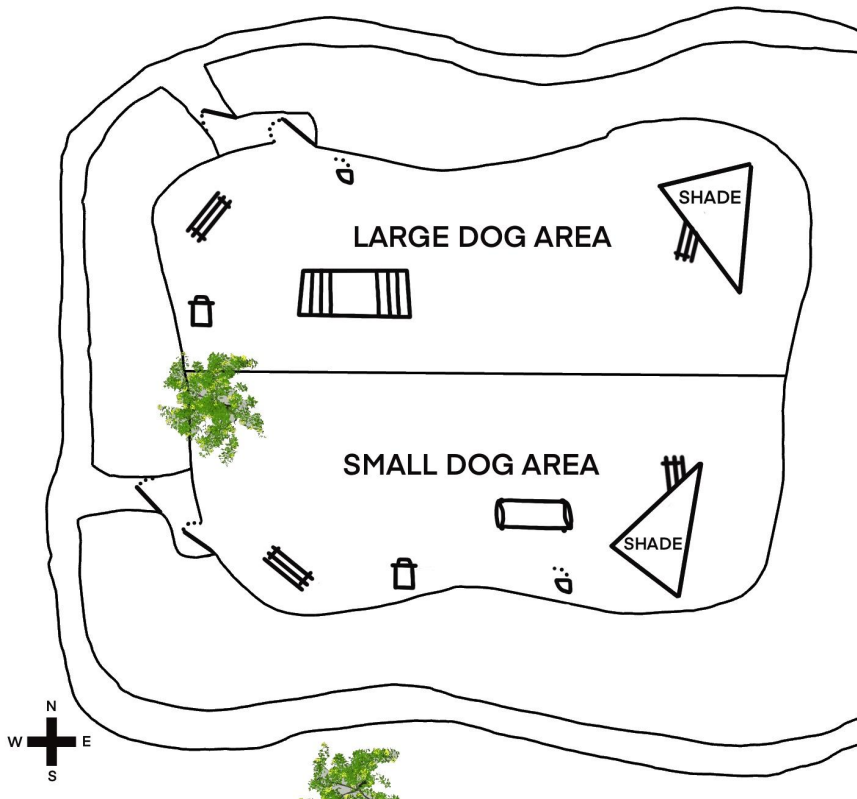
## 2. Design Concept

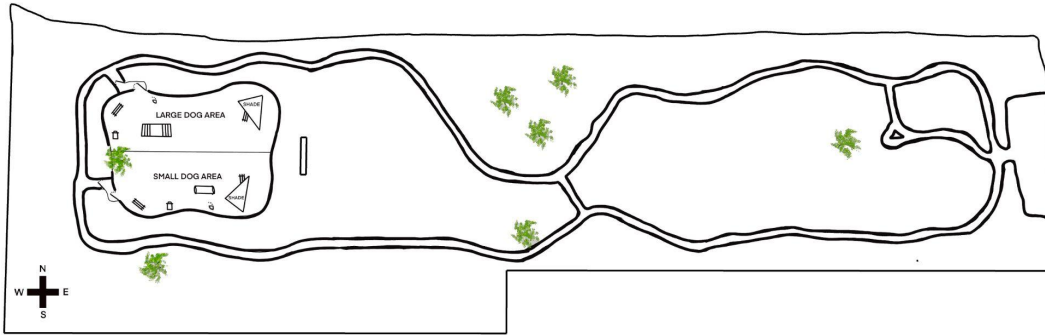
The overall design of a dog park within Boone Road Park can vary widely. However, we imagine it to resemble one of the following mock-ups:





Concept 1: Large dog area and small dog area on separate sides of Boone Road Park. Each area has artificial shade, trash can, water fountain, benches.

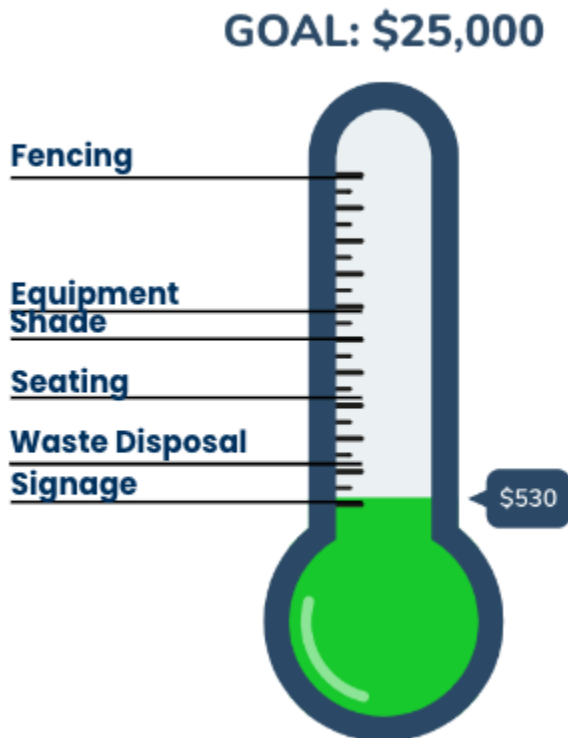




Concept 2: Large dog area and small dog area separated by fence. Each area has artificial shade, trash can, water fountain, benches, and play equipment. Dog park is on western side of Boone Road Park, encompassing a large plot of land.

### 3. Promotional Material

This fundraising thermometer is a tool West Houston Association can use to motivate donation efforts, especially for grassroots fundraising initiatives.



# References

## **Introduction and Background**

[Alief Demographics](#)

[Zip Code Population Rank](#)

## **Select Plan Budget Example**

[Fence](#)

[Shade](#)

[Equipment](#)

[Seating](#)

[Waste](#)

## **Funding Case Studies**

[Bark in the Park Concept](#)

[Westchase Corporate Challenge 2023](#)

[50/50 Park Partners Harwin Park](#)

[Hermann Park Doggie Donor Wall](#)

[Houston Humane Society Dog 1K Walk](#)