

# This SLC park will be getting needed face-lift

**Cottonwood Park** » Plan calls for improvements at facility known for its expansive dog run and issues with homelessness.

By JOSE DAVILA IV  
Salt Lake Tribune Staff Writer

Melinda Slighting regularly brings her dog, Blarney — like the famous Irish stone — to Cottonwood Park's off-leash dog run, even though it's somewhat of a trek from her home behind the Utah Capitol.

It's big, grassy, and the other pooches and people who go there are generally nice.

But it's hardly perfect.

"The hard part is there's a lot of camping, homelessness, drug issues as I'm walking in," she said. "There's been a few no-nonsense individuals. I don't bring my 5-year-old granddaughter because of that reason. I don't want her to see that kind of stuff."

Slighting's concerns are common at this large, grassy park bisected by the Jordan River near North Temple and Redwood Road. But Salt Lake City officials want to make improvements by using a slice of the \$35 million general obligation bond voters approved in 2022.

Planning at Cottonwood Park is still in the early stages, but the city's Public Lands Department is considering better signage and added amenities such as shaded areas.

The park is a place where the city's struggles and recreational opportunities have been forced to coexist.

## PARK FACES PERSISTENT PROBLEMS

One late April weekday afternoon, multiple dogs, including Blarney, were getting their energy out while their owners rested on benches and picnic tables scattered about the park. A couple of runners getting some afternoon exercise jogged along the Jordan River Trail. A family used the playground across the river in the southern half of the park.

Looming behind the playground are the now-empty offices that once housed the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food — a structure that state officials say soon will be demolished. A locked public restroom sits closer to the river near one of the park's two bridges. A portion of the bridge is damaged and fenced off, so there isn't enough room for walkers to pass one another.

A handful of tents remained pitched on the riverbank. At least two trash cans in the park overflowed. A mallard swam past a floating plastic 7-Eleven cup and other debris in the river.

Kira Johnson, the city public lands planner leading the effort to breathe new life into the park, acknowledged the roughly \$750,000 that's budgeted for improvements won't be able to address every concern but said she and other city officials want to know what matters most to the community.

"We're trying to identify: What does the community want in their neighborhood park and what would benefit them?" she said. "What would encourage more people to use this space so there's more eyes in this area and, thus, create a stronger



PHOTOS BY FRANCISCO KJOLSETH

From top, a homeless camp is seen near the Jordan River, across from Cottonwood Park; Melinda Slighting plays with her dog, Blarney, in the dog park; trash and debris are piled near the edge of the park.

sense of safety, too?"

To address persistent

safety concerns, she said, the city could add lighting and

improve sightlines throughout the park by leveling existing berms.

Johnson understands the public's worries about safety. On her bike commute to work, she often gets off the Jordan River Trail at the park and rides on city streets until she meets back up with the path by the Archuleta Bridge, which spans the railroad tracks near the Utah State Fairpark between North Temple and 200 South.

It's a detour she takes to avoid a section of the trail where large illegal camps are typically found.

The park improvement money will not be used to directly mitigate homeless camps, Johnson said. For months, however, city police and other law enforcement agencies have stepped up drug enforcement along the Jordan River Trail. Officers in Utah's capital have also placed an emphasis on breaking up makeshift camps in public spaces since last fall.

In a statement, city police said officers conduct daily patrols along the trail to "address and help prevent criminal activity."

Arrests along the river and North Temple from October 2023 through March 2024 are up 29% from October 2022 through March 2023, the department said.

## EARLY STAGES OF PLANNING

Johnson added that the trail's path can be confusing through Cottonwood Park and that she would love to include clearer signage so users can navigate it more easily.

The city is only in the first stage of community engagement on the improvement project and is encouraging residents to fill out a survey that asks what they would like to see at the park.

Responses to the survey and conversations Johnson has had at community events will inform a concept design. Once that's complete, residents will have another chance to weigh in.

And don't worry: The dog park — and its annual Halloween costume party for pups — won't be going anywhere.

## Spring into Great Rates

### INVESTMENT CERTIFICATE RATES

1 year • 8.00%

3 years • 8.50%

5 years • 9.00%

\$10,000



Call Ashley for Appointment  
801-566-5559 • WasatchCredit.com  
7324 Union Park Ave.  
Sullivan 100 Midvale 84047  
Mon-Thur 9:30-5:00  
For Utah residents only

**PIRATE O'S**  
GOURMET MARKET

Be Mom's favorite and cook for her this Mother's Day!

Come in and see our wide variety of beautiful aprons for mom

New Styles and Colors Available

PIRATE O'S 11901 SO. 700 E. • DRAPER 801-572-0956

## Get to know Inspire®. And the doctors who implant it.



Visit [InspireSleepEvents.com](https://InspireSleepEvents.com) to register for a free event.

Hear from doctors and patients in your area about Inspire, an implanted device that works inside your body to treat the root cause of obstructive sleep apnea.

No mask. No hose. Just sleep.™

Inspire is not for everyone. Talk to your doctor to see if it's right for you, and review important safety information at [InspireSleep.com](https://InspireSleep.com).



Inspire, the Inspire logo and Inspire Sleep Events are trademarks of Inspire Medical Systems, Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. ©2024 Inspire Medical Systems, Inc.

