

Winnetka Park District Centennial Dog Beach Fencing Case # 25-28-SU



Village of Winnetka Plan Commission

January 28, 2026

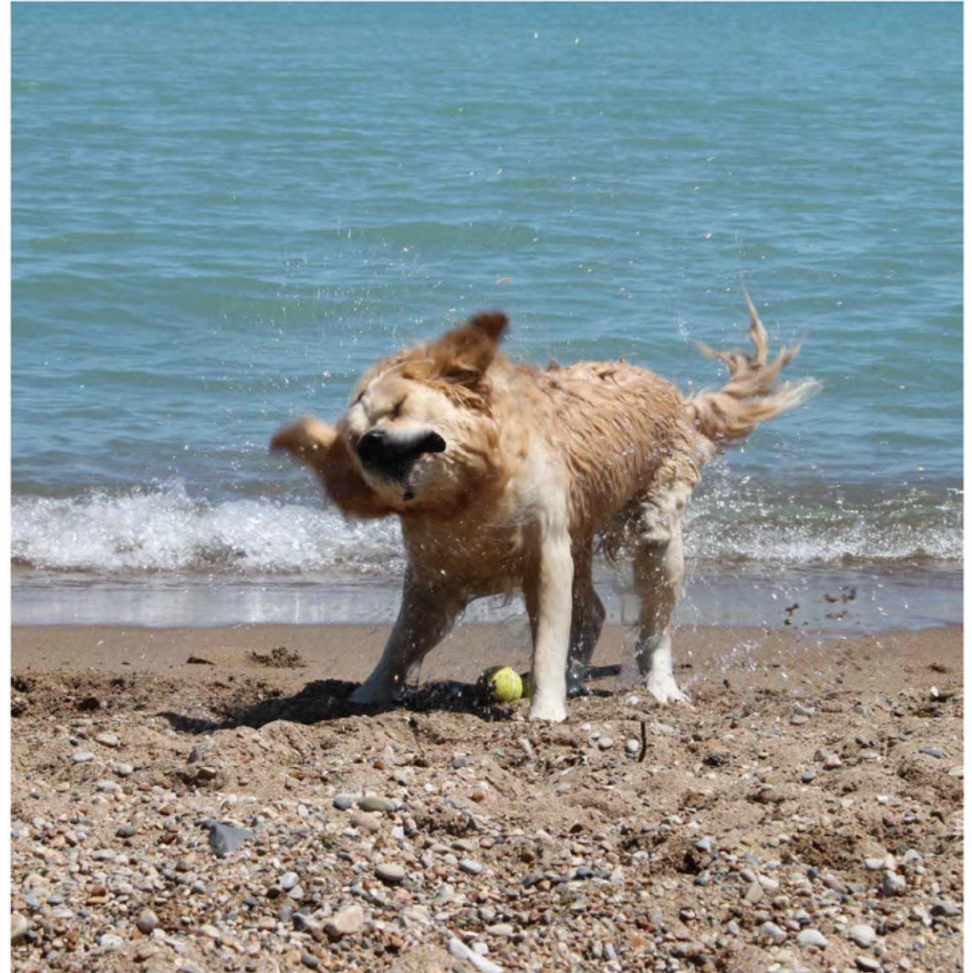
Presentation Outline

- Project Background and Purpose
- History of Centennial Dog Beach
- Applicable Laws and Regulations
- Site and Plan Overview
- Regulatory Review and Permit Status
- Public Trust Doctrine
- Special Use Permit Standards
- Conclusion and Request



Project Background and Purpose

- Centennial Dog Beach is valued as a community amenity as identified through surveys and public engagement
- Request for a Special Use Permit to install fencing on Centennial Beach
- Approval of Special Use Permit/Fencing will allow dog beach to operate as an off-leash dog park in compliance with Cook County regulations
- Approval of Special Use Permit/Fencing will allow dog beach users to run their dogs without being in violation of Winnetka's Leash Law
- The project maintains public access, improves safety and maintains shoreline connectivity
- No variations requested



Winnetka Leash Law

- **Section 6.08.020 Responsibilities of dog owners**
 - A. It shall be the responsibility of the owner of any dog in the Village to keep such dog or to cause such dog to be kept under control at all times and to prevent such dog from doing any of the following prohibited acts, each of which is declared to be a public nuisance:
 - 1. Running at Large. "Running at large" means being unconfined on or in property not owned or lawfully possessed by the owner of the dog, ***including public property***, without being under immediate control by the owner of the dog or a responsible member of his or her family or by a responsible agent of the family, by means of a leash, cord, chain or like device. (emphasis added)
 - C. The owner of any dog that does any of the acts prohibited in this section shall be subject to a fine of not less than fifty dollars (\$50.00) nor more than seven hundred fifty dollars (\$750.00).



Cook County Department of Animal and Rabies Control

Regulations VIII. Dog Parks and Areas

A. Definitions

Dog Park means an **enclosed area** of land where dogs are permitted to be off leash.



B. Requirements

1. No person shall be an Operator of a Dog Park unless such Dog Park is in compliance with this Regulation VIII.
2. A Dog Park must completely **enclosed** by a contiguous (*sic*) fence with each entrance designed in such a manner to secure against accidental opening.

Cook County Department of Animal and Rabies Control

Regulations VIII. Dog Parks and Areas: Dog Park Regulations – Compliance Highlights

- Fully Enclosed Facility - Dog park is completely enclosed with a continuous fence and secured entry points to prevent accidental access.
- Controlled Access & Health Safeguards - Access limited to dogs with required vaccinations and veterinary clearance, in compliance with Illinois law, through an Administrator-approved access system.
- Clear Rules & Signage – Operator (Park District) rules are prominently posted at all entrances and aligned with County regulations.
- Leash & Safety Protocols - Dogs are leashed upon entry and exit; off-leash use permitted only within the enclosed area.
- Monitoring & Enforcement - Operator conducts routine monitoring, maintains enforcement policies, and allows oversight by the Administrator (County).
- Sanitation Standards - Covered, leak-proof waste containers are provided and maintained in a sanitary condition.



Illinois Animal Control Act

Municipal Authority

- Sec. 24. Limitations. Nothing in this Act shall be held to limit in any manner the power of any municipality or other political subdivision to prohibit animals from running at large, nor shall anything in this Act be construed to, in any manner, limit the power of any municipality or other political subdivision to further control and regulate dogs, cats or other animals in such municipality or other political subdivision provided that no regulation, policy or ordinance is specific to breed.

History of Centennial Dog Beach



- Off-leash Dog beach created: 1995
- Village of Winnetka adopts Leash Law: January 2008
- Winnetka Park District installs single line of fencing on north side of Centennial Beach: 2009 - 2015
- Winnetka Park District Lakefront Master Planning: 2014 – 2016
- Winnetka Park District Passed a motion to create a “Dog Beach and Off-leash Dog Park Advisory Committee to determine locations, designs and development for both an off-leash dog beach and a off leash dog park”: September 2021
- After in-depth study and receipt of community input, WPD Park Board votes to maintain dog beach at Centennial Beach: October 2022
- Temporary fencing installed: January 2023 (Temporary fencing removed: January 2023)

History of Centennial Dog Beach (cont.)

- Park Board Adopts Ordinance #596 requiring the use of leashes on Centennial Beach: March 2023
- Submittal of Permits to IDNR & USACE: April 2025
- Submittal of Building Permit to VoW: May 2025
- Beach Cleanup: August 2025
- Submittal of Special Use Permit Application to VoW: October 2025
- WPD Receives IDNR & IEPA Approval to Proceed December 2025
- USACE and Cook County approvals: anticipated February 2026



Centennial Fencing Project Overview

- “Temporary Centennial Dog Beach Fencing” vs. “Centennial Dog Beach Fencing”
- Height 4-foot chain-link fencing inside the north and south boundaries by 20 feet
- Fence extends partially into Lake Michigan to clearly define off-leash area (15 feet)
- Fencing project includes off-season removeable panels (eastern-most 20 feet; *similar chain-link fence at Gillson Park dog beach in Wilmette*)
- Fence includes beach level pedestrian gates which will remain unlocked to assure continuous shoreline access for beach users
- Signage will be installed at all entry points to dog beach to alert users of the Dog Park Rules and to alert non-users who may have a fear of dogs or allergies to dogs that they’re entering an off-leash dog beach area
- Northern boundary fencing helps address safety concerns of off-leash dogs wandering into swimming areas (Elder Lane Beach re-opening for swimming, summer 2026)



Centennial Dog Beach Photo

Centennial Dog Beach looking Northeast 2010 – previous fencing similar in design to what being proposed



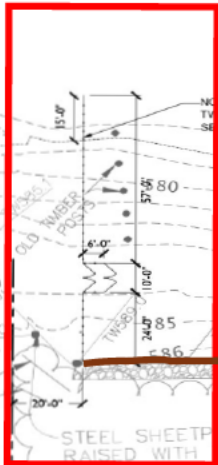
Centennial Dog Beach Photo

Centennial Dog Beach looking Northeast 2010 – previous fencing similar in design to what being proposed

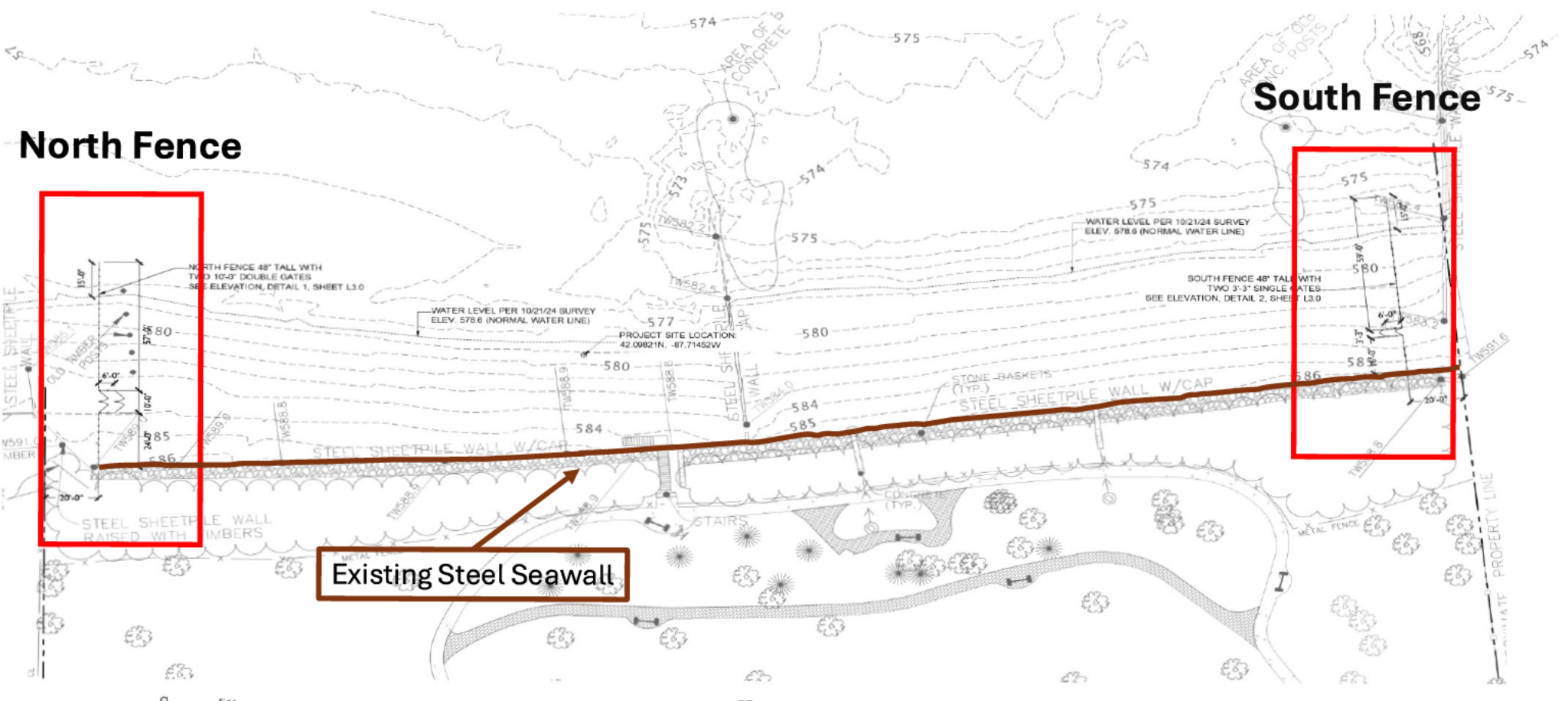
Overall Centennial Dog Beach Fencing Site Plan

North Fence

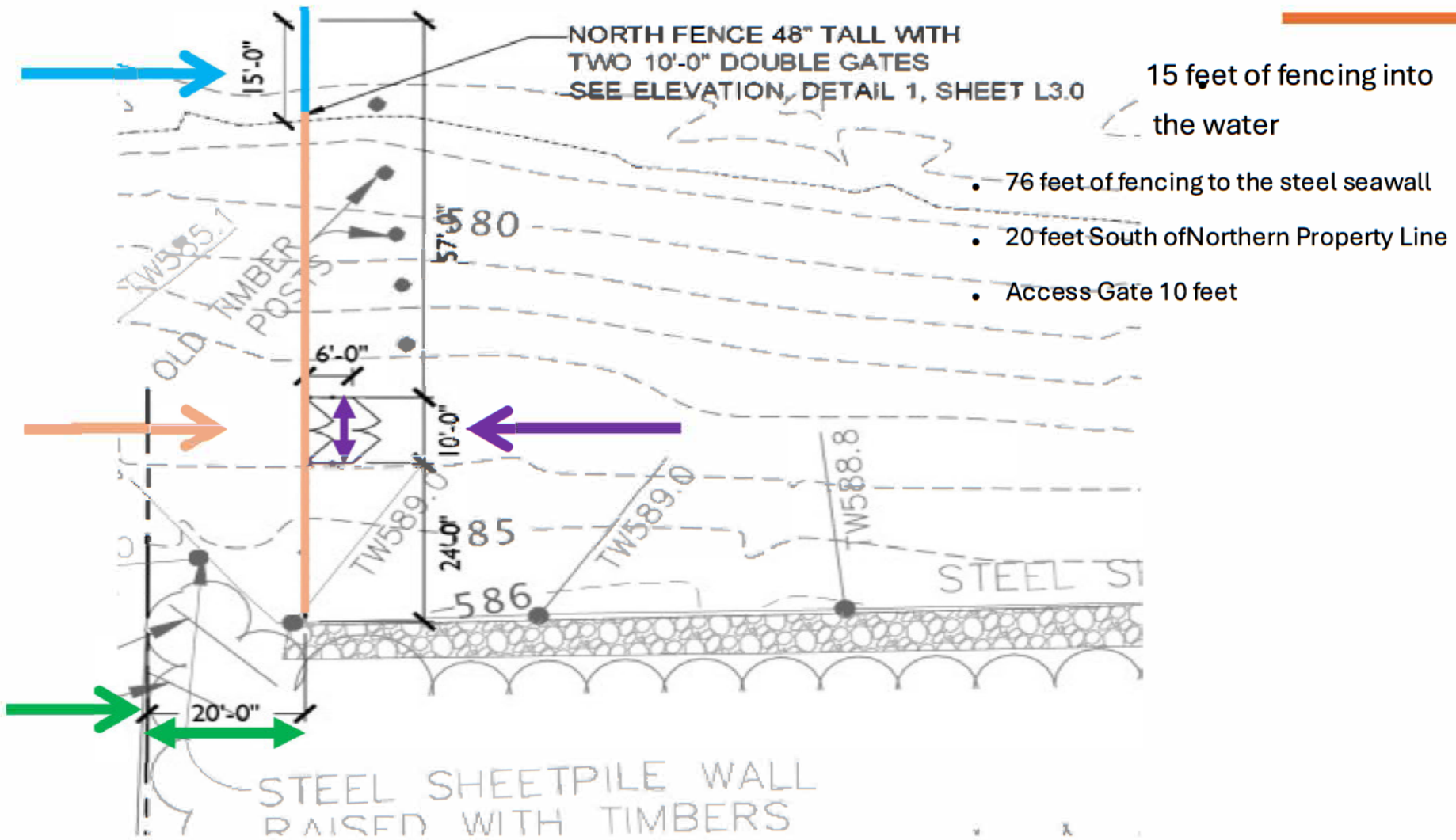
South Fence



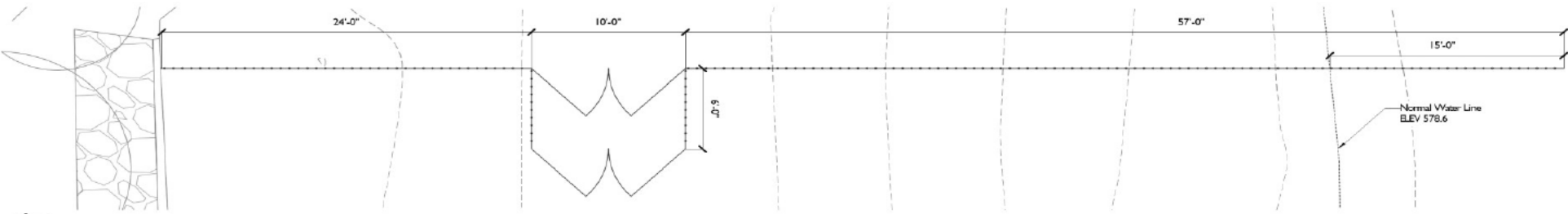
Existing Steel Seawall



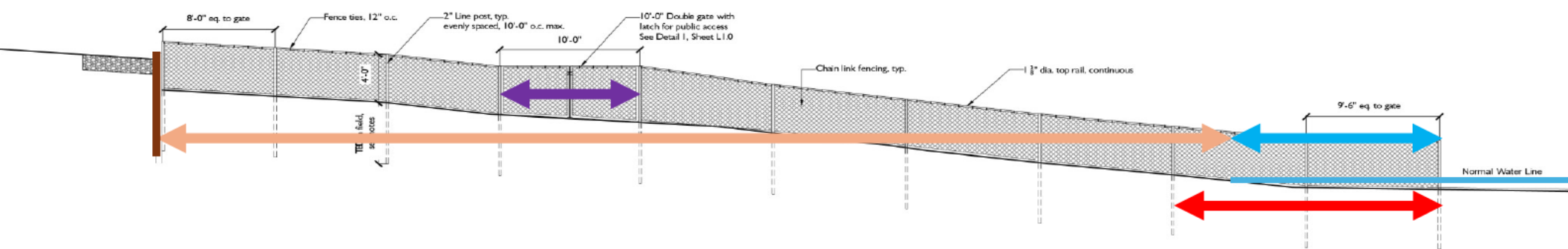
Site Plan North Fence Line



Site Plan North Fencing Line



Plan



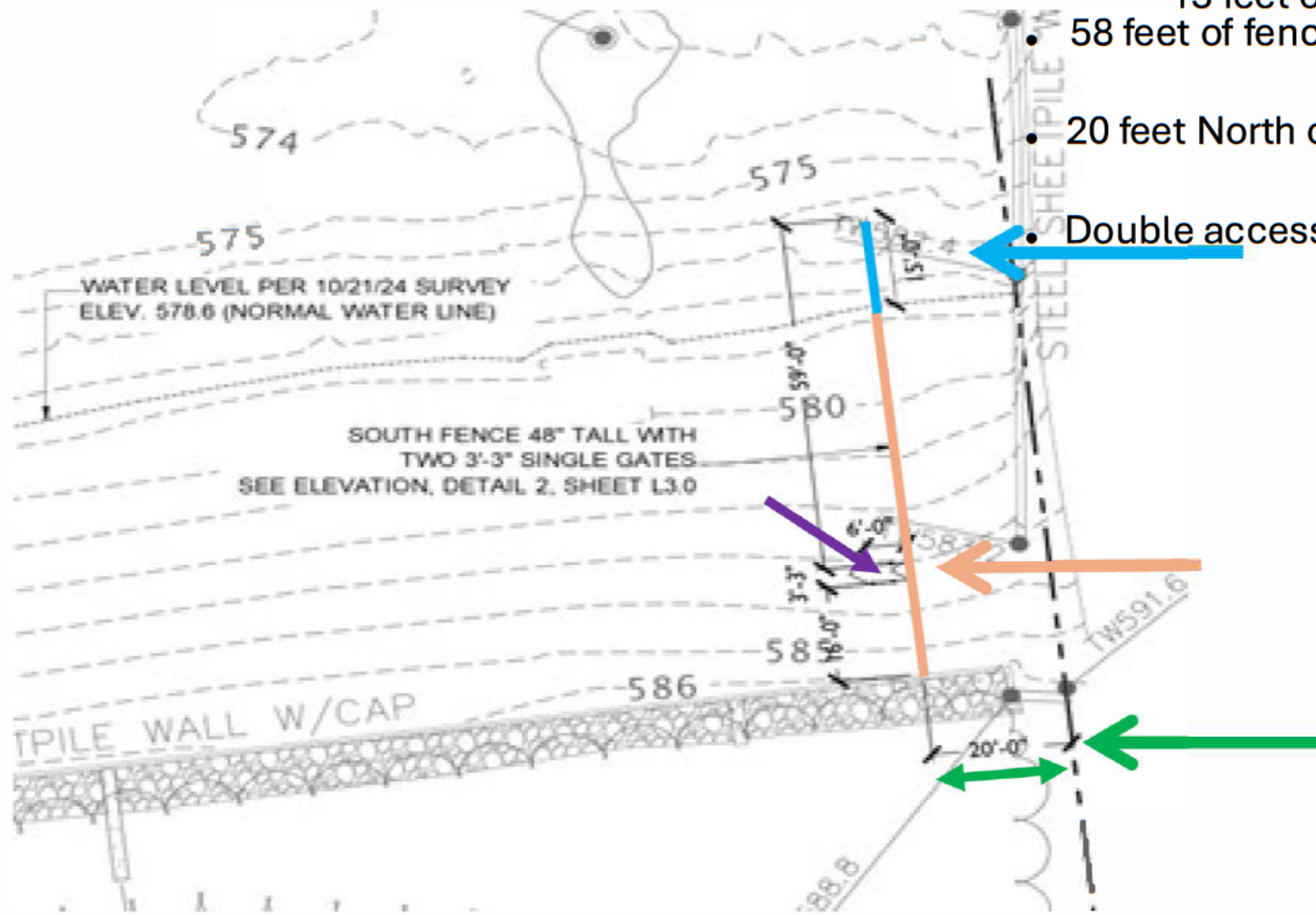
Section of fencing in the water (15 feet) during the season

Section of fencing winter months (71 feet); 76 feet during the season

Section of fencing removed for the winter months (20 feet)

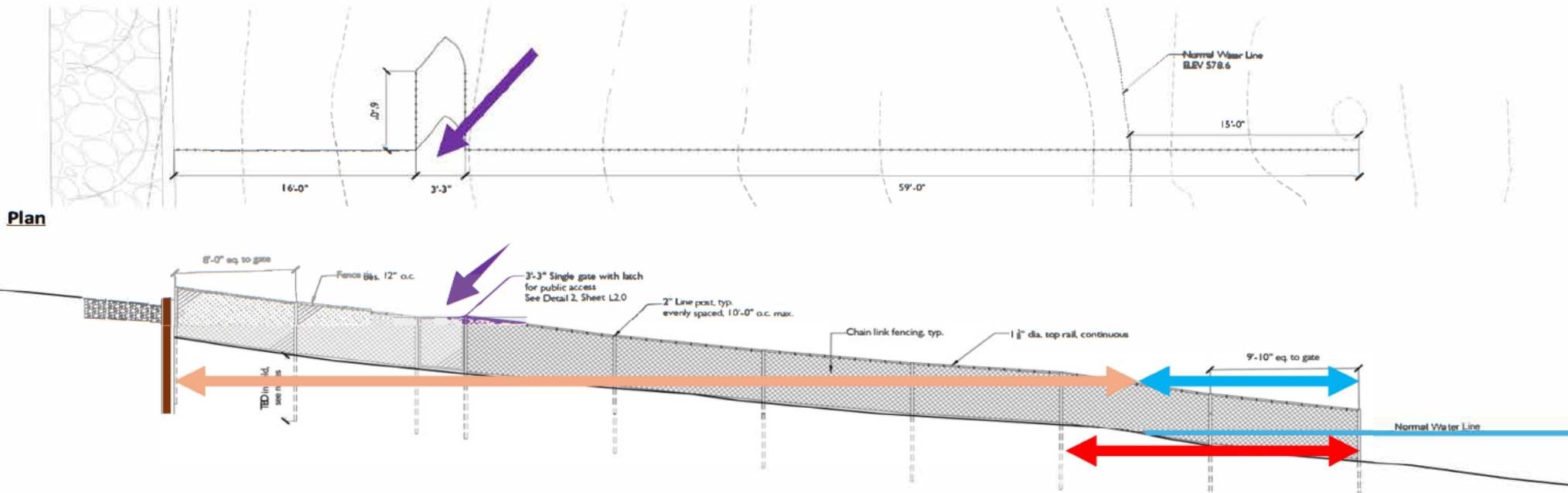
Gate access (10 feet) to remain unlocked

Site Plan South Fence Line



- 15 feet of fencing into the water
- 58 feet of fencing to the steel sea wall
- 20 feet North of South property line
- Double access gate

Site Plan South Fencing Line



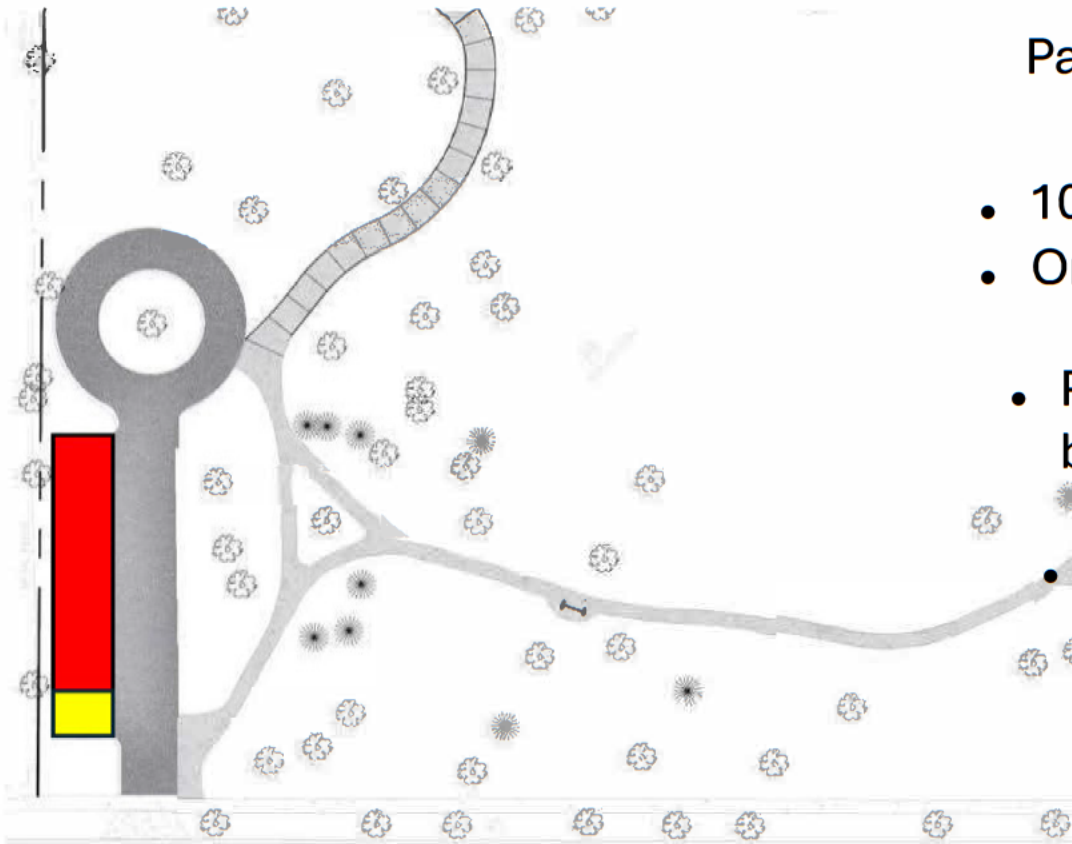
Section of fencing in the water (15 feet)

Section of fencing winter months (58 feet); 63 feet during the season

Section of fencing removed for the winter months (20 feet)

Gate access (3 feet, 3 inches) to remain unlocked

Centennial Beach Parking



Parking Lot includes

- 10 Regular Parking Spaces
- One Accessible Parking Space
- Parking demand does not change because the use does not change
- Dog beach parking pass required

Centennial Dog Beach Passes

- Dog Beach Season April 1 – March 31
- 16 year average
 - 310 Resident Passes
 - 75 Non-Resident Passes
- 2024 All previous passes were reset and only current year active passes were activated

Year	Resident	Non-Resident
2010	351	75
2011	311	73
2012	320	89
2013	275	71
2014	285	65
2015	267	63
2016	315	70
2017	333	80
2018	371	94
2019	356	105
2020	245	56
2021	300	86
2022	232	54
2023	243	54
2024	434	92
2025	319	71
Average	310	75

North Shore Off-Leash Dog Beaches

Sunrise Dog Beach (Lake Bluff) Top

- Seasonal Operation (Late May – Early September)
- Beach and Water Access

Evanston Dog Beach (Evanston) Bottom

- Seasonal Operation (March 1 – First Winter Weather Event)
- Beach and Water Access
- Includes one or more portions of chain link fence



North Shore Off-Leash Dog Beaches

Moraine Dog Beach (Highland Park) Top

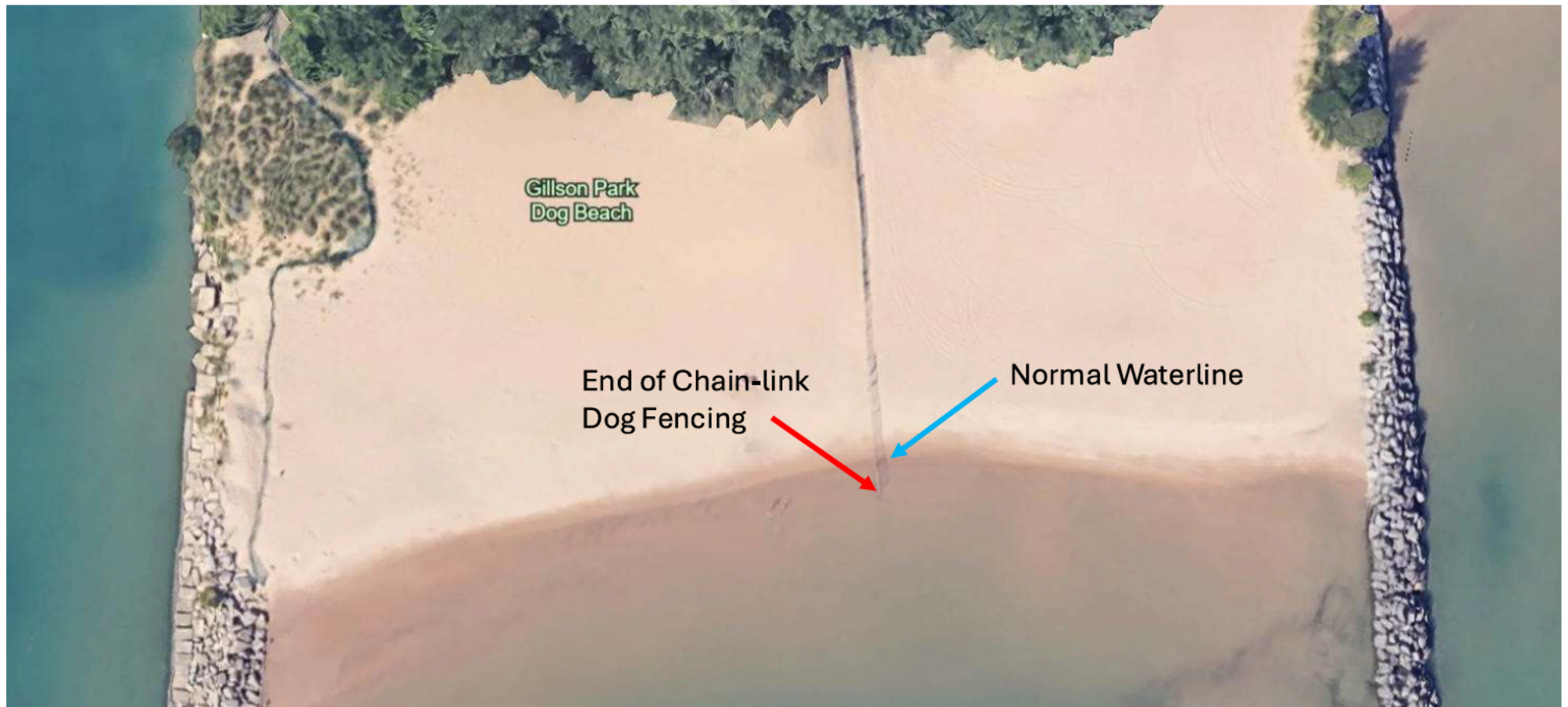
- Seasonal Operation (Mid April – Mid November)
- Beach and Water Access
- Includes one or more portions of chain link fence

Gillson Dog Beach (Wilmette) Bottom

- Open Year-round
- Beach and Water Access
- Includes one or more portions of chain link fence



North Shore Off-Leash Dog Beach Gillson Beach



Centennial SUP Review Comments VoW

November 7, 2025 – Case No. 25-28-SU First Round Review Comments

Fire Department Review Comments

Staff Reviewer: John Ripka, Fire Chief, 847.716.3303 - jripka@winnetka.org

1. No comments. Emergency access for public safety is unchanged and the beach level gates will not be locked to allow for traversing along the lakeshore.

- WPD Response: Received the comment. (November 17, 2025)

Police Department Review Comments

Staff Reviewer: Brian O'Connell, Police Chief, 847.716.3400 - boconnell@winnetka.org

1. No initial comments.

- WPD Response: Received the comment. (November 17, 2025)

Centennial SUP Review Comments VoW

December 5, 2025 - Case No. 25-28-SU Second Round Review Comments

Fire Department Review Comments

Staff Reviewer: John Ripka, Fire Chief, 847.716.3303 - jripka@winnetka.org

1. No comments.

- WPD Response: Received the comment. (December 15, 2025)

Police Department Review Comments

Staff Reviewer: Brian O'Connell, Police Chief, 847.716.3400 - boconnell@winnetka.org

1. No comments.

- WPD Response: Received the comment. (December 15, 2025)

Public Trust Doctrine

- Based on U.S. Supreme Court decision. *Illinois Central RR Co. v. State of IL*, 146 U.S. 387 (1892).
- Lands under navigable waters of Lake Michigan are held by state in trust for the people of the state.
- Doctrine codified by Illinois Submerged Lands Act. 5 ILCS 452, 460.

Public Trust Doctrine

- State can't sell submerged land to private party, ***but it can permit its improvement with structures such as wharves, docks, and piers that improve use of lake for public purposes without impairment to the public's interest.***
- Doctrine extends only to Normal Waterline.
- The Illinois Supreme Court has held that the public trust doctrine for Lake Michigan extends "to recreational uses, including bathing, swimming and other shore activities."

IDNR Permit

- Illinois, Department of Natural Resources, Office of Water Resources has issued **Permit No. LM2025011** to Winnetka Park District authorizing the installation of the proposed fencing. Application filed 4/25/25.
- IDNR staff reviewed application and concluded the proposed fencing:
 - Will not obstruct or interfere with navigation.
 - Is an acceptable encroachment per the Park District Code.
 - Will not impair any rights, interests or uses of the public
 - Is not likely to cause bank or shoreline instability on other littoral properties.

Park District Code (70 ILCS 1205/11-2, Reclamation)

- Park Districts which border upon any navigable body of water, the title to the bed or submerged land of which is vested in the State of Illinois, **may take possession of, enclose, fill in, reclaim**
- **protect any portion of such submerged land bordering thereon, over which there shall be shoal and shallow water not fit for navigation.**
- **Park District can establish, construct and maintain parks and boulevards over and upon such land,** and all right, title and interest of State of Illinois in and to such bed or submerged land is granted and ceded to such park district and title thereto vests in such park district **to be held for the use and benefit of the public** as part of said park district for park and boulevard purposes exclusively.

Special Use Standard 1 – Public Health, Safety & Welfare

- **Standard: The establishment, maintenance and operation of the special use will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, comfort, morals, or general welfare.**
- **Response:**
 - Dog beach has operated safely for more than 25 years
 - Fencing improves containment and reduces unintended interactions between dogs and other users of the beach and other nearby park district facilities
 - Fencing will enhance public, health, safety and welfare, not be detrimental to or endanger it
 - Seasonal fence removal and inspections address safety concerns relating to the lakefront

Special Use Standard 2 – Compatibility

- **Standard: The special use will not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity, nor substantially diminish or impair property values in the immediate vicinity.**
- **Response:**
 - Dog beach footprint remains limited and defined
 - Public shoreline passage maintained with gates that will remain unlocked
 - Proposed fencing will protect use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity, including adjacent residential properties and nearby park, not be injurious to that use and enjoyment
 - Dog beach has operated for more than 25 years and property values in the immediate vicinity have increased over time

Special Use Standard 3 – Orderly Development

- **Standard: The special use will not impede the normal and orderly development and improvement of surrounding property for uses permitted by right in the district of concern.**
- **Response:**
 - Proposed dog beach use is consistent with historical use of Centennial Beach
 - History confirms that existence of dog beach has not impeded the normal and orderly development of residential properties in the vicinity

Special Use Standard 4 – Adequate Parking and Utility Facilities

- **Standard: Adequate parking, utilities, access roads, drainage and other facilities necessary to the operation of the proposed use exist been or are to be provided.**
- Response:
 - History confirms that existing Centennial Beach parking is adequate to support dog beach users
 - Approval of the requested special use and installation of the proposed fencing will have no impact on storm water drainage in the area
 - No new sanitary sewer or potable water facilities are needed to support the proposed special use
 - No outstanding comments or concerns from Village's Public Works or Water & Electric Departments

Special Use Standard 5 – Adequate Access Improvements

- **Standard: That adequate measures have been or will be taken to provide ingress and egress in a manner which minimizes pedestrian and vehicular traffic congestion in the public ways.**
- Response:
 - The proposed fencing will have no impact on pedestrian and vehicular congestion in the public ways
 - Gates which remain unlocked have been incorporated into the fence plan to maintain pedestrian access across the Lake Michigan shoreline
 - No outstanding Police or Fire Dept comments or concerns

Special Use Standard 6 – Compliance with Regulations

- **Standard: The special use conforms with the of the Zoning Ordinance and all other Village ordinances and codes.**
- Response:
 - Cook County animal control requirements addressed
 - State and federal permits - obtained IDNR (USACE still under review)
 - Village code requirements for fencing and safety satisfied

Conclusion and Request

- Centennial Dog Beach is a long-standing community amenity
- Proposed fencing will improve safety and regulatory compliance
- Design preserves public access and shoreline connectivity
- Approval will mitigate safety concerns that will arise once Elder Lane swimming beach re-opens this summer
- Winnetka Park District respectfully requests the Plan Commission recommend approval of the requested Special Use Permit



Thank You

Questions

