SUN SAILOR
MINNETONKA / EXCELSIOR / EDEN PRAIRIE

FILM
"Echoes in the Night" documentary shows in Minnesota cities.
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FOOTBALL
Edina defeats Hopkins at opener.
PAGE 14

Thursday, September 10, 2026 $2





(PHOTOS COURTESY OF MINNETONKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS)

LEFT: Students connect with Principal Jennifer Smasal on the way into school on the first day at Excelsior Elementary Sept. 1. **RIGHT:** Students smile together when arriving for the first day of school at Clear Springs Elementary.

Minnetonka Schools kicks off back to school season



Students celebrated with smiles and fun poses before the first day of school at Excelsior Elementary.

Minnetonka City Council approves fenced off-leash areas in Purgatory Park

A liquor license for Shake Shack was also on the agenda

NATALIE TRIMBLE
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The Minnetonka canine community barked back at the City Council's approval of two off-leash areas with fencing in Purgatory Park at the Aug. 31 meeting.

Areas 2 and 5 have been approved as off-leash zones with enclosed fencing in the northwest and southwest portions of the park, leaving four-legged visitors with approximately 13 total acres of open parkland to free roam. The controversial decision was made after the city received community complaints about the need for updated off-leash safety guidelines in the park.

The community response to the decision has been mixed, with many residents believing the changes are unnecessary.

"My position is that I really think your putting up a fence is unnecessary," Minnetonka resident Karen McGowen said at the Aug. 31 public hearing. "It's an unnecessary expense. I see that the park is being used well as it is and that it should continue as it is."

Several other residents shared in this sentiment, explaining how their experiences in the park have not aligned with those told in the complaints to the city.

"I think you're using a sledgehammer to attack a problem that doesn't even really exist," said Craig Alciati, another Minnetonka resident. "Problem people with problem dogs are still going to be a problem."

To address community concerns regarding off-leash zoning, Councilmember Amanda Maxwell suggested the city try daily scheduling to help enforce regulations for free-roaming pups before establishing designated off-leash areas. For example, the council implements a schedule requiring all dogs be leashed 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. in the park.

Though the off-leash areas were ultimately

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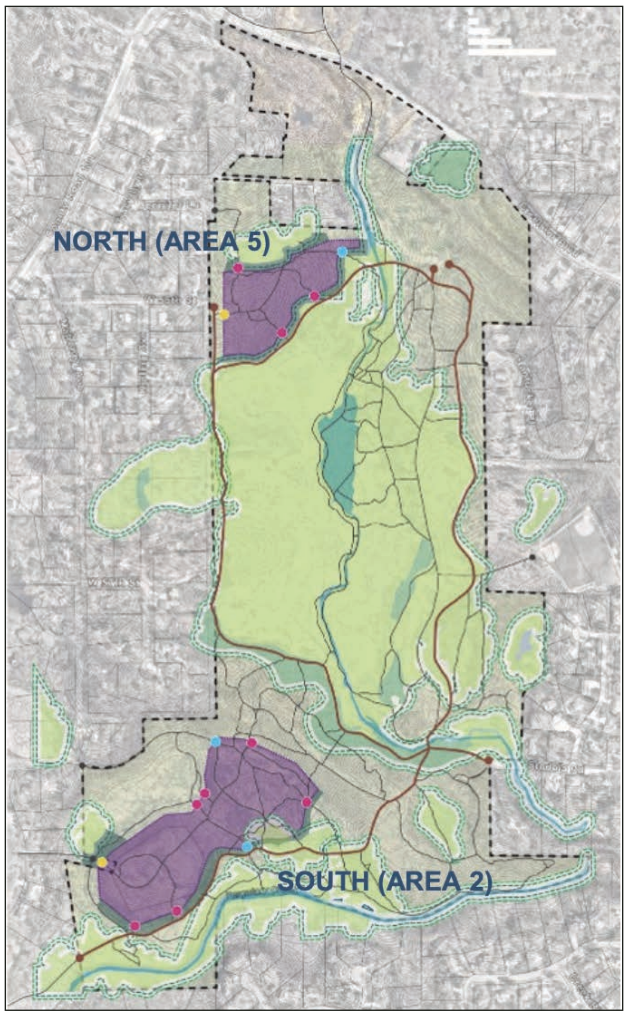
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(SCREENSHOT)

A map of Purgatory Park highlights Areas 2 and 5, which have been approved as fenced off-leash zones.

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Park/ From page 1

approved at the meeting, it wasn't without concern from the council. In addition to Maxwell, Councilmember Deb Calvert expressed her disapproval for spending money on fencing around the designated areas and Kimberly Wilburn objected to the recommended staff off-leash action altogether.

The total estimated project cost is $218,000, which will cover expenses for tree and brush removal; site restoration; fencing; signage; and new amenities, including bag waste stations and garbage disposals. Site restoration, along with tree and brush removal are required for fence installation in the approved off-leash areas.

An Off-Leash Dog Area Feasibility Study was performed by Bolton & Menk following the June 15 study session, to aid the city in developing the fenced off-leash areas. As part of the study, five fence type options were considered. Staff recommended the use of wood posts and welded wire mesh materials— which is a common fencing solution for naturalized park settings— bringing total fencing costs to an estimated $125,000.

Access points to Areas 2 and 5 will be available along the existing city trail system in the park. Area 2 encompasses approximately nine acres of high-quality woodland and oak savannah with an overall perimeter of 3,000 feet, while Area 5 contains about four acres of weedy, low-quality woodland with a 2,000-foot perimeter, according to a presentation from the Aug. 31 City Council meeting.

Project funding is proposed through the reallocation of two previous Park and Trail fund CIP projects related to the red barn site from before 2020, as well as unspent project funds that remain available from the park habitat stewardship plan in 2023.

The council adopted a revised off-leash dog ordinance for Purgatory Park in November 2024. An Off-Leash Dog Strategy and Guidance Plan was presented to the council in April 2025 and Areas 2 and 3 in the south end of the park were originally considered for off-leash zoning in May 2025. On Aug. 25, 2025, staff was advised by the council to implement Areas 2 and 3 plus an un-leashed corridor between the two areas and the main parking lot to test the effectiveness of the plan. It wasn't until July 15, 2026, that the city reviewed fencing costs and implementation of Areas 2 and 5 for the plan.

City staff anticipate clearing and restoration efforts to begin this fall and winter, with the intent of starting the fence installation and signage updates as soon as spring 2027. Brush and tree removal would start this winter and continue into early 2027. Prior to proceeding, city staff are required to obtain multiple quotes from specialty contractors as part of the fencing process.

SHAKE SHACK LIQUOR LICENSE

In addition to the Purgatory Park off-leash updates, a new Shake Shack location opening in Minnetonka could soon be obtaining a liquor license.

Located at the new Wells Fargo Site on 1809 Plymouth Road, the fast-casual restaurant is expected to open mid-September, serving burgers, hot dogs, fries and signatures shakes. There are currently 415 Shake Shack stores in the U.S., with the Minnetonka location being the fifth in Minnesota, according to an Aug. 31 meeting document.

At approximately 3,000 square-feet, the new restaurant will seat 54 guests inside and 38 on the outdoor patio. If approved for a liquor license, the restaurant would offer beer and wine to customers ages 21 and older.

Shake Shack will be open seven days a week 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and until midnight on Fridays and Saturdays.

If approved for a 2 a.m. liquor license, the Minnetonka location would be the first Shake Shack to obtain one. The license would be reviewed annually during the license renewal process and a device will be used to scan IDs for alcohol sales.

The Minnetonka Shake Shack location will employ 50 team members who will undergo alcohol awareness and safety training by ALE Training.

A continuation of the public hearing for the liquor license is planned for Oct. 5.

ADOPT A PET

TRIPP





Tripp, this affectionate, easy-going male, brown tabby kitten was born in March 2026. Tripp likes watching wildlife at the window, playing with toys by himself and interactively with you. He is very friendly with known folks and hesitantly friendly with strangers. Tripp greets you at the door and is quiet until meal time. He will let you place him in your lap or will jump in. Tripp stays for short sessions of petting or brushing and is okay being held for a short while. Siblings are available.

This cat and others are available at Cat Tales Rescue. Cats have been vet checked, spayed/neutered, wormed, tested for FIV/FeLV, have distemper and rabies shots. Adult adoption fees are $200+tax. For further information leave a message at 612 202-9492 or email cattalesmn@outlook.com


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