

Concord Dog Park Feasibility Study Committee Meeting
January 3, 2018

Attendees:

Tom McKean
Deborah Richardson
Bob Schulman
Don Shobry
Kate Stout
Anne Umphrey
Jeff Young

The meeting started at 7:05 with a round of introductions since Bob Schulman was unable to attend our first meeting. In describing his dog related experiences, Bob noted that when he lived in the San Francisco area and, later, in the Seattle area he had access to off leash dog parks that were over 40 acres in size.

We then discussed the format of meetings (Note: Recent practice for Town Committees is to use The New Roberts Rules of Order which gives the chairs of small committees considerable latitude in defining the formality of meeting management). Tom noted that we will need to take a formal vote on any final findings, and suggested that we take votes on any decisions or recommendations that require significant amounts of discussion.

The committee members present then unanimously approved the minutes of the meeting of December 13, 2017. Copies will be sent to the offices of the Town Clerk and the Town Manager.

We then reviewed the charge to the committee. Tom noted that this is a feasibility study. The committee is to assess interest in and the need for a dog park. The committee will then go on to identify the amenities that would be desirable in a dog park, and review town and privately owned parcels for possible use as a dog park. The options available for the committee's consideration range from gated and fenced facilities to areas of land that could be used for long, off leash walks or other off leash activity.

Committee members agreed that public outreach and education are essential in any effort to establish one or more dog parks. Public outreach is viewed as high in impact and low in cost. The need for, and importance of, public education is a reoccurring theme in the guidelines on dog park development shared by committee members. Deborah shared the AKC guide to establishing dog parks with committee members via email prior to this meeting, and the minutes of the previous meeting included a list of other dog park materials distributed to the committee.

Dog owners need to be educated on appropriate behavior in dog park settings. Outreach to the public is necessary to address any questions or concerns the public may have. Outreach is also necessary to allay the concerns on the part of dog owners that the creation of a dog park would lead to a reduction in other recreational opportunities for dog owners.

Emerson Field was mentioned because of its use by dog owners. The committee wants to understand what makes it attractive for dog owners, and the strengths and weaknesses of how it is being utilized. It may be possible to mimic those strengths at other locations around Concord like Rideout Field, giving dog owners additional recreational opportunities while reducing the burden on Emerson Field. Timesharing was mentioned as a mechanism for creating opportunities for dog related recreation without affecting other recreational activities.

The need to hold public hearings shifted the discussion to outreach to the public. The committee would like to combine notifying the public about the hearings with surveying interest in a dog park. The committee recognizes that the survey of dog owners done by Jeff Young contains a wealth of useful information, but wants to see if a survey of the public at large would provide any additional insights. Given that many people suffer from survey fatigue, Kate suggested an incentive in the form of a dollar donation to the Community Chest for every survey response. Several committee members offered to contribute towards covering the cost of this incentive.

The following mechanisms were suggested for public outreach.

- Mailings from the assessors,
- Letters to the Concord Journal (there were concerns about how many people this would reach),
- CCTV,
- Tax bills, and
- The Town website.

Two committee members volunteered to explore options for public outreach. Deborah will talk to the Town Clerk about what the town does, and the lead time for announcing public meetings. Bob will identify the major web based forums used by Concord residents. Both will give us updates at the next meeting.

The committee also noted that the target date of March 1 for a final report is not realistic.

The committee identified the following questions for Marcia Rasmussen, who will be talking to us at our next meeting on January 17.

- How are town lands classified with respect to what town department manages the land? We are trying to understand the vocabulary used to describe town lands. Are there other classifications that are commonly used in referring to town lands?

- What data is available on the attributes of the parcels (location, size, parking, topography, presence of water, trails, etc.)? How is this data accessed and searched?
- How many parcels are larger than 5 acres? 10 acres? 20 acres? 50 acres?
- Can existing parcels be subdivided for use as a dog park?
- Can Town staff map where dog owners are if we give addresses organized by dog size (small, medium and large)?
- Would the Town's online geographical information system (GIS) would be helpful to the committee? If so, would it be possible to give us an overview using a projector connected to a computer?

A member of the public was in attendance and offered the following comments.

- A survey of the general public might trigger conversations between dog owners and residents without dogs,
- Any survey should present a dog park as an addition to existing resources for dog owners,
- A survey to the public at large could incorporate data from Jeff's survey of dog owners to provide context,
- The idea that a dog park might be attractive owners of older or small dogs was a new insight, and
- Would any dog park just be for Concord residents?

The committees next three meetings will be at 7:00 PM on 1/17, 1/31, and 2/13 at locations to be determined.

All present unanimously voted to adjourn.