

Minutes of the Dog Park Feasibility Study Committee
April 26, 2018
Assessor's Office

Attendees:

Susanne Jarnryd
Tom McKean
Deborah Richardson
Don Shobry
Kate Stout
Anne Umphrey
Jeff Young
Guest: Ryan Kane

The meeting was called to order at 5:35. We began with a discussion with Ryan Kane, Recreation Director, who has been in his position for just over two years. Ryan came from South Windsor, Connecticut, which was the first town in the area to get a dog park. It was initially surfaced with wood chips but they are converting to grass. Two other towns in the area, Glastonberry and East Windsor, also have dog parks. Ryan offered to get us more information on the East Windsor dog park (see comments at end of minutes).

Emerson and Rideout Park are under the purview of the Recreation Department. The Recreation Department does not get very many complaints about dogs at these locations. The staff has concerns about letting children in Recreation Programs and Summer Programs interact with dogs because the staff is responsible for the wellbeing of the children in those programs. Dog owners need to understand why dog interactions with the children in those programs need to be limited.

We asked about adding fencing in Emerson Park to keep dogs out of the play area. The park is made up of multiple plots that were donated to town, and the plots have different restrictions. There are fences around the pool, basketball court, tennis courts, and the track. Ryan is trying to clarify the restrictions around the playground area. There have been recent complaints over dogs going into tennis courts.

Complaints about the impact of dogs on maintenance at Emerson and Rideout go to the Public Works staff, not the Recreation staff. The playground at Emerson is much more of an issue than Rideout. The Public Works Department turns the drinking fountains on and off and provides waste barrels, which is one reason people pick up dog waste at Emerson. Volunteers move waste containers to the street so they can be emptied.

A key attribute of Emerson is the ability of dog owners to walk with their dogs. Many of the dog parks in the towns around Concord don't give owners an opportunity to get exercise. Dog owners may be willing to help with input on some type of barrier between dog walkers going around the track and the playground. They might also help with

signs encouraging good dog behavior and rules around dog/child interactions. Protection of tents and playground equipment from dog urine is another issue.

The Recreation Department is also responsible for South Meadow, which has no restrooms and no parking. The fields are lined for lacrosse and soccer. There was push back from the neighborhood in the past over siting a playground there. The Recreation Department is getting some complaints about dog waste at South Meadow, probably because it is remote, with less sense of community, so there is less self-policing. The Recreation Department is also responsible for portions of the school grounds when they are not used by the schools.

The challenges in creating new dog related facilities are concerns from neighbors. Dogs are less of an issue than the cars the facilities attract.

We noted that Newton and Cambridge have parks that are shared between unleashed dogs and other uses, and asked if this is a trend. Ryan said that shared use is not a current topic in parks and recreation circles, but that 5 to 10 years ago dog parks were a topic of interest. We asked about the possibility of a dog park on the Gerow parcel the town is trying to acquire but he doubted if that would be feasible because the land is heavily forested.

We briefly discussed whether a tag program for the parks would actually discourage scofflaws.

Ryan noted that parks usually serve as a regional resource, and that half the people that attend sporting events in Concord are often nonresidents. He also observed that the Recreation Department serves parents and their children until the children are college age, and then they serve parents and their dogs.

The Recreation Department is still working on the short-term goals in the Recreation Strategic Plan, which is their primary vision document. There are restrooms at Rideout, and there are plans to increase the availability of the restrooms at Hunt Gym.

How do we keep Emerson working? Emerson works because it is a multi-use space. Signage on good dog etiquette and rules about interactions with children might help. Putting similar policies in play at Rideout and other locations would limit the pressure on Emerson. Is there the possibility of putting a small dog park somewhere?

One possibility is the Starmet property 2229 Main Street. A key question is whether the location would be desirable for dog owners. Another long-term option is the middle schools. The backside of the Alcott School was raised as a potential dog park site but the area is wet and also contains a town well.

Several committee members mentioned the possibility of creating a dog commission or a dog owners group to work with town departments on dog related issues. Some recreation departments in other towns offer dog training classes but the Recreation

Department tries to avoid competing with local businesses. Ryan suggested we research the dog park in Charlestown, SC, which has a Yappy Hour where a beer truck comes with beverages for dog owners.

Ryan left the meeting at this point. We thank him for his time and look forward to working with him in the future.

The committee approved the minutes from the meeting of March 28, 2018.

There was a brief review of the Town Meeting.

We then moved on to consider our activities for the remainder of the year. We will have a Public Hearing on May 22. We will produce a draft report over the summer, present the report to the Select Board and the public, get feedback at a second public hearing in September or October, and produce a final report by year end.

Our next meeting will be at May 1 at 5:30. The purpose of the meeting is to prepare for the public hearing. Don volunteered to pull together a recap of the committee's activities to date. Susanne volunteered to develop some questions for the attendees at the public meeting.

No members of the public were present. The meeting adjourned at 7:03.

Additional information on East Windsor, Connecticut dog parks received via email:

Here are answers if you still need! Started building in 2011 and opened in 2012

Size: 1.04 acres

Cost: roughly \$17,000 because we had a lot of people in town donate labor (for the fence) or services (PMC overseeded for us for free).

Ground material: grass mostly except for a few high traffic areas where we have had to use stone dust.

Grass was the best idea and it is working because the park stands out and attracts people with their dogs. It is more like a park than a dog park. Voted best in CT!

The challenge is that we really need to make sure that we overseed in the fall. It really is the best time to do it and overseeding 2x a year is ideal to keep the grass looking good. Ideally, if we had three sections, we could rotate our areas better and overseed, potentially eliminating a spring shut down for overseeding. If we were to rethink how we built the park it would have been to have three areas. Having access to water would make growing grass a little easier and would make it easier to get water for the dogs. Right now people bring their own water.