

**Park and Recreation
Green Dog Subcommittee
Zoom Webinar
Monday, January 31, 2022, 12:00 p.m.**

Subcommittee Members Present: John Bain, Nancy O'Connor, Clara Batchelor, Antonia Bellalta, Laurie Lasky, Nina Makhortova, and Catherine Burke

Subcommittee Members Absent:

Staff Present: Alexandra Vecchio: Director of Parks and Open Space, Jessica Zarni: Administrative Assistant, Alex Cassie: Visitor Services and Code Enforcement Supervisor, Gerry Kelly: Recreation Business Manager

Guests Present: See attached

Welcome/Call Meeting to Order

A. Cassie opened the meeting. He thanked everyone who was able to join. A. Cassie provided some background into this subcommittee. A Cassie detailed the agenda for today.

Update to Subcommittee Membership and Introductions

Each Subcommittee Member introduced themselves and discussed some of the experiences they have had with Green Dog.

Overview and Discussion of Potential Dedicated Off-leash Location

- A. Cassie stated that one of the things we did as a subcommittee on our last iteration years ago was potentially trying to make this enclosed dog space happen, and at the time we could not come to a consensus spot and exactly what we're looking for in terms of features. This is a fresh path. The soft goal of today's meeting is to look at some of the sites that he that has put together. He understands that a few or all of these may come with challenges. He is looking for any feedback.
- A. Vecchio stated that the common piece of feedback that we fully anticipate to hear here as with any project is that the neighbors that surround that property probably aren't going to love to have a dog park there. She stated that we are aware of that point for any location that we pick and if that location is the one that we decide to pursue we would need to take that into account. There needs to be some community feedback and listening sessions about the best way to compensate for that issue and for the best hours to hold all those kinds of things. She wanted to be clear that we actually don't have funding for this project at the moment. The other kind of factor that could influence this decision is

where we're able to get funding from and if there are any stipulations or requirements around those dollars, as well. This is very preliminary in terms of what we're looking at but wanted to put out some options and get some feedback from this committee and the community at large.

- C. Batchelor stated that she feels that we should be narrowing this down to at least three sites, not just one. A. Cassie stated that the idea would be to have a suite of options in different neighborhoods. His hope for tonight is to take out the deal-breakers.
- N. Makhortova asked A. Cassie if he is thinking of transitioning from the current model to just enclosed parks or if he is entertaining the idea of having a few prominent dog parks plus the green dog hours. A. Cassie stated that it's a bigger question and something that will be explored with this subcommittee. He feels that for the time being the idea is to start by looking at a few sites where we could maybe highlight this dedicated space and work from there.
- A. Cassie stated that this is a working group meeting today. Public comment is not going to be part of this meeting, but A. Cassie will take any follow-up questions and provided his email.
- J. Bain discussed a few dog parks he had visited.
- L. Lasky wondered if have consulted with an animal behaviorist or are planning on bringing one in to do a presentation so that it informs our work as outlined. She feels that it would be valuable. A. Cassie stated that in the past he has spoken with a behaviorist at the MSPCA and Tufts and at least one of them said they would be happy to be involved in this process.
- N. O'Connor stated that all of what you see wasn't just picked out of the air and we just said let's do this. It was thought about and discussed for over a year. There were meetings in neighborhoods and around neighborhood parks. She stated that initially, we were trying to get the dogs out of the parks when the children or adults were playing sporting events, because, at places like Amory and Brookline Avenue and some of the larger places where there were ball fields, they were interrupting soccer games, they were interrupting baseball games and so forth. She stated that everyone thought that it would be helpful to have dogs have their own time and their own space and then the dog owners would be able to do that. There was a leash law and the Committee worked to change the bylaw. She stated that we also knew having one or two places would not be helpful because they would be inundated. Which is there are 13 or 14 places across town. She stated that the fenced-in areas are the most popular and the most overrun. She stated the criteria for success were discussed. She stated that we're sharing the space, putting dogs on the playing fields that cost a lot of money to maintain and keep grass on them for the user groups and the residents. She stated that to understand where we came from would take 40 minutes, and she thinks Alex at some maybe we can run down a history of how we got to where we are for the new people to understand. She stated that we have always known that there has been a desire for evening hours and or all-day hours. However, in

the beginning, people were thrilled to death to have the ability to let their dog off-leash without being chased down and ticketed. She is a dog owner and understands why people are asking for more, but feels that we are coming into this discussion to her feels like in the middle and it's helpful to have an idea of where we came from. A park just can't be taken offline, so there are a lot of things to think about. She feels that if it's going to be small areas, then there need to be many small areas. A. Cassie is happy to share past background presentations that have full timelines.

Dedicated Off-Leash Dog Space

Steps to Piloting

1. Determine possible locations
2. Decide on design philosophy and necessary features and amenities
3. Identify possible funding sources
4. Establish rules and regulations, code of conduct, and expectations
5. Create a budget and establish Town staff role in managing and
6. Maintaining the space
7. Create criteria to rate and evaluate the successfulness of the initiative

Amory Playground

- A. Cassie that Amory Playground is currently a huge space for Green Dog usage with the existing athletic fields. There are both resident and non-resident visitors. He stated that one of the things we're exploring is the idea of the sort of fencing off the hillside as a half forested dog area. One of the things being looked at in terms of design philosophy is trying to have them not on fully grassy space so we don't have to worry about it with weather-related closures and as many, or at least different, maintenance concerns that go into it versus athletic fields. He stated that it is a little unconventional, but the idea is to look for spots in Brookline, South Brookline, and North Brookline and are open to all thoughts and comments.
- C. Batchelor stated that her concern is the slope because dog parks are never designed with turf unless they are 40 acres or more. The turf will be worn away almost immediately if you just fence in a space and say this is now going to be a dog park, which some towns do. Her concern is the slope with dogs running on it constantly, to her that's a major concern for something that's a sloping site.
- A. Bellalta stated that her concern is concentrating the area in all these trees and she wonders what the longevity of the trees are both with compaction and urine. She knows Tom Brady, Town Arborist has talked about some of the trees at Emerson being affected by the dogs always peeing on two specific trees and those trees are in a decline. She stated that maybe there could be a balance.
- N. Makhortova stated that this is right next to the road, so fencing would have to be updated, but she thinks A. Cassie had mentioned that. She stated that this location is a

major sledding destination in winter, people might be upset because if it will get all fenced in, the kids want to be able to sled. In the rain it is very slippery and kind of hazardous. She feels that in the winter it is not going to be usable at all because of this. She stated that she doesn't let her dogs near the slope because it gets slippery and she cannot pick them up safely. She is concerned about the trees and feels that we should get creative and look at other parts of Amory.

- J. Bain stated and A. Cassie discussed the area behind the backstop at Amory. J. Bain asked if these dog parks would do away with Green Dog Hours. A. Cassie stated that is a question we will be looking to answer in this subcommittee as we narrow down locations.
- N. O'Connor stated that most of these playing fields and ball fields are programmed very much and don't feel that we could take one offline and use some of that space for a dog park at Amory. She explained the different uses of the two fields.

Boylston Street Playground

- A. Cassie stated that one option is to carve out a chunk along the back of that field to use as dedicated dog space and another option is the whole field being a dog space.
- L. Lasky stated that this was her favorite on the list. She stated that this is the only one that has that kind of space and potential. She wondered if this has been the field that when the Old Lincoln School is used temporarily, isn't this a field utilized by the kids, and does that rule it out. N. O'Connor stated that yes, historically this field was used.
- A. Bellalta stated that this park is up for redesign, and she feels it might be an opportunity to use it. Things might get shifted.
- N. O'Connor stated that it's parkland. However, we should be good neighbors, and be aware if Old Lincoln is going to be used.
- J. Bain just wanted to remind everyone that two large apartment houses are being built in that neighborhood, and that would be their park. He can't see taking over the whole park for dog use, the only place he could see it happening in Boylston is along this pathway, so you don't have any abutters on that end.
- C. Burke stated that the BHS freshmen just vacated the Old Lincoln school, but she was under the impression although nothing set in stone that part of Pierce was going to be moving into OLS for the people are hoping is the upcoming Pierce rebuild. Also, her takeaway on this is who will go to it, how will they get there and where will they park. Very few can walk there, but people she thinks will be looking to drive there, and she is not sure how adequate the parking is.
- C. Batchelor thinks there will be negatives to other sites, but she does think that if it's concentrated on one side, you won't have as many issues with neighbors and she thinks to John's comment about new apartment buildings being built. Coolidge Corner has tremendous growth and apartment buildings, and there has not been any creation of new

open space. She doesn't feel that because it will take part of a park offline that it won't work because that will be true wherever ever it goes. She thinks it's a good potential site.

- N. O'Connor, G. Kelly, and A. Bellalta discussed what is currently programmed in this field.
- A. Bellalta stated that the bridge is going to take years and you need both a hard surface and a soft surface. She wonders if you use the area closer to the hotel, take up that walkway that is currently not being used, and a portion of the field there. She feels that would be at least a bit of a run. She is concerned about taking up the park completely. She stated that the bridge is a bummer because a lot of people would come over the bridge from Emerson over there. She feels that it's less utilized now because there's more of a walk.
- N. O'Connor stated that the reason we have 14 off-leash shared spaces is that we knew had one or two spots wasn't going to work. She feels that we are going to need to have bits and pieces all around town to give people the ability to get there on their own.

Coolidge Playground

- A. Cassie stated that he knows unconventional to replace the tennis court with a dog space, but this was just out-of-the-box thinking. This was looked at previously as a subcommittee. He reviewed the other chunks that were looked at as a subcommittee. A. Vecchio wanted to point out that there is a lot of pressure for additional pickleball courts, there are a limited number of tennis courts in Brookline and this could be a location for pickleball.
- N. Makhortova stated that she has some friends that live in this area and the tennis court is really appreciated and heavily used. She sees that the area next to it, it's quite small, but maybe there is a way to modify the entrance to the park and allocate a slightly larger area. She stated that the tennis court is located right next to a private house, those people are upset about tennis courts already and she can't imagine how it will be if you bring dogs there. She thinks it might create issues, but feels that people in that area need something. A. Cassie stated that we are trying not to take away field space because it's such a premium for everybody. That's not to say it's off the table. The goal is to find underutilized space.

Griggs Park

- This is a park sort of between Washington Square and Brookline village that has Green Dog. It is a little unconventional because it's a smaller park, but it has the Green dog hours until 1:00 PM. The thought was maybe we take a chunk and turn it into a dedicated space.

- A. Bellalta and A. Cassie discussed the wet area of the park. She is concerned about the maintenance of a wet dog park. She likes it because it kind of integrates with the rest of the park. She wonders how much of the interior is used. She wonders if there is a way to try and fix the drainage in that area if we were to consider that space. She stated that it is a beautiful park. A. Cassie stated that one of the concerns we have gotten about Griggs in the past is folks asking to provide some sort of barrier fence for the playground area.
- C. Batchelor stated that she likes it as a dog park space. She stated that a common surface could be stone dust, and she thinks that would do well in a wet area. She stated that in terms of the trees sometimes in dog parks where they have existing trees they put small fences out like five feet from them to protect dogs from peeing directly on the trees.

Knyvet Square

- A. Cassie believes that Knyvet Square has some historical aspects to it that might be challenging.
- The idea would be to take a quadrant of this space and use it for something
- Currently Knyvet is a passive park.
- N. O'Connor wonders if there are any restrictions on the deed.
- J. Bain thinks it would be a shame to take any of this. It's a beautiful passive area and feels that we need to protect the park. He would not support this place. A. Vecchio and J. Bain discussed potential design parameters for a dog park
- N. Makhortova stated that the quadrant outlined in this slide has a lot of different plants and bushing growing there. It is not like an open terrain and it's sloppy. She was wondering if the plan was to get rid of those bushes, which sounds like a bad idea. She wondered if A. Cassie considered the square on the left. A. Cassie stated that it wouldn't be the whole site, it would be a chunk of it and the space to share can be explored further.
- N. O'Connor is not opposed to this site.
- L. Lasky stated that it is a beautiful park and the subcommittee in the past concluded it was a gem decided to pass it over as one of the potential fenced-in spaces.
- A. Bellalta is on the fence about this location. She stated that it does have horticultural qualities, it's passive and it doesn't even have existing green dog hours. She thinks we have to be careful with still taking away gems from Brookline when we are in an era where we're trying to protect our trees and our open spaces. If this is considered to her it has to be looked at very carefully as to how it's integrated. It is a very classical design and thinks the subcommittee needs to be careful.

Larz Anderson

- The idea here would be to use some of the areas that were associated with the former Building Department and reconfigure that into some dedicated office space.
- C. Burke stated that in her experience Boston residents use a fair amount of our green dog resources and it wouldn't be a bad thing if we could somehow collaborate with them on a kind of a hybrid Boston Brookline site. She wanted to point that out since this site is on the edge of Brookline and Borders Boston.
- N. O'Connor and A. Cassie discussed the landscape makeup of the area. N. O'Connor discussed the other two areas at Larz that were previously looked at by the subcommittee.
- C. Batchelor thinks this is a great choice. There is parking and doesn't detract from really important areas of the park. She would keep this location in the mix. A. Bellalta agrees. L. Lasky agrees and wanted to point out that very terrain areas are great for dogs. She sees that as an asset, not a deficit. J. Bain agrees as well.

Winthrop Square

- A. Cassie stated that this location was previously a green dog location., but that changed over time from ongoing issues.
- N. O'Connor discussed the history of how this became a Green Dog location why it was removed. She discussed how this looks like an ideal location, but the number of dogs and owners that came to this space regularly was so out of control. She stated that this area is programmed. She wonders if we could take a portion of that park to the right on the Freeman street side and fence off just a square block and maintain the programming that's existing there now. G. Kelly itemized the programming for this area.
- L. Lasky stated that Noise was a big problem in acoustics because of being surrounded by tall buildings with hard surfaces. She doesn't know a lot about physics but wonders if it is possible to do some more plantings that might absorb some sound. She doesn't think because of the history we should write off this location. C. Batchelor people think that the trees block noise, it's psychological. She stated that she is not an acoustical engineer, but every acoustical engineer has told me no. A. Bellalta stated that you need both distance and barriers.
- N. Makhortova stated that it is her understanding that there were large gatherings by breeders in the past. She agrees with the noise and she has seen in her research that some dog parks have written in the rules to have your dog under voice control. She likes the idea of splitting the area into two halves. She thinks for the noise there definitely needs to have some regulations established.

Corey Hill Outlook

- The idea of this location is to have a vertical downward dog route sort of carved out on the field side. One of the issues that were brought up by someone on their engineering team is there is a fairly significant tree to the neighborhoods that are located in the middle. The thought was to take the space and utilize gravity.
- A. Bellalta suggested using the opposite side that doesn't have the tree. A. Cassie stated that he knows some folks rent the sundial area and the general area for ceremonies and things like that. He is open to suggestions.
- N. O'Connor stated that it is a popular sledding area. N. Makhortova suggested looking at the hill area behind the playground. A. Cassie stated that people in the neighborhood like the delineation of dog activity on one side and the other side for the playground the kids.
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- A. Bellalta suggested rotating the cutout 90 degrees and having it across the bottom of the hill.
- C. Batchelor does not think it should go on the opposite side of the field near the sundial but agrees that it could go across the street

Golf Course

- The wooded section along the golf course in mind was detailed. The idea may be a loop trail that is fenced in and folks could walk the loop with the dogs off-leash.
- Parking for this site would need to be created.
- C. Burke loves the idea in general of getting more creative with the golf course for uses. She would be for exploring this. N. O'Connor agrees.
- C. Batchelor thinks it's a great location and agrees with Catherine that it would be nice to have other uses of the golf course.
- L. Lasky thinks it is a fantastic idea.
- A. Bellalta loves the idea and feels that if it's not this precise location somewhere else at the golf course could work.
- N. O'Connor stated that it could be thought about in the master plan at the golf course.
- J. Bain thinks it's worth looking at.

Little Field Park

- It is a tree-acre grass lot right next to Heath.
- G. Kelly always said for years it would make a great dog park.
- G. Kelly discussed the programming that takes place in this area.
- L. Lasky wonders if this area would have a greater problem with abutters more so than other locations that have been looked at so far. N. O'Connor things being close to homes will be problematic, they will not want dogs parking and making nice outside their windows. She is worried about the people all around these sites.

- A. Bellalta wonders if we have to use the whole park because she is concerned about the transformation of this park is for the neighbors there if it becomes enclosed and the surfaces changed. She thinks a park integrated with a park is her priority rather than creating one. She wonders if it could be a portion of the park. She discussed the dog park in South Boston in Washington. She stated that it's well integrated with all the rest of the spaces, it becomes more of the community activity. She would like to see the dog areas that we create more the heart of the rest of the community rather than just for the dogs.

Newbury College (Former)

- The idea for this is to take some of the former Newbury College lots that are right next to the Fisher Hill Parking lot.
- C. burke loves this area. She thinks a lot of people who walk could walk up from both the Dean Park area and Waldstein area. She thinks that it is a very quiet area and is underused. She thinks it has a lot of potentials.
- C. Batchelor second everything C. Burke said.
- L. Lasky thinks that it is a great location. Her only concern is that it looks small.
- A. Bellalta thinks it's a great location and second L. Lasky's concern.
- J. Bain thinks it's a great location to look at.

Skyline Park

- The idea here is to try to find a way to encompass an area of woodland and have a walking path again through this area where the dogs could explore. Tom Brady, Town Arborist shared with A. Cassie that there might be some challenges because this is a little nebulous in terms of overlap with DCR land. J. Bain stated that there is an area near the donation dumpster that he thinks would make a perfect dog park.

Soule Recreation Center

- The idea here is to take a portion of the hillside and parking lot. It would take a natural area and make it into a hybrid recreation space.
- C. Batchelor thinks this is a great site.
- L. Lasky thinks it's a great spot.
- A. Bellalta thinks it's a great area.
- L. Lasky loves this location. It seems to have to all
- C. Burke agrees on all points, she thinks it is great.

Eliot Playground

- The flat grassy area for a potential dog area was detailed. There is a potential for a community garden in this location. He discussed a previous area that was looked at sort of between the parking lot and where the tennis courts are. He stated that there will be issues with abutters.
- N. O'Connor does not like this option, there will be issues with abutters. She stated that a lot is going on in this park.
- A. Bellalta thinks the whole site needs to be looked at again for potential locations.
- L. Lasky does not like this space. She agrees with N. O'Connor about the abutters and thinks the location will be too stimulating for the dogs being so close to the basketball courts.
- C. Batchelor thinks it's a great location for a community garden.
- C. Burke agrees with L. Lasky about it being too stimulating for the dogs in that area. She thinks Little Field is so close and that should be focused on instead.

Next Steps

- A. Cassie discussed the next steps.
- N. O'Connor stated that G, Kelly knows the most about the programming in these locations and feels that it will be very important for the subcommittee to know.

Adjourn

Meeting Adjourned