

Dog Park Feasibility Study Committee Minutes
January 17, 2018
Select Board Room

Attendees:

Tom McKean

Deborah Richardson

Don Shobry

Kate Stout

Anne Umphrey

Jeff Young

Guests included Marcia Rasmussen and 2 members of the public

The meeting started at 7:02 PM. Unfortunately, Janet Vera resigned from the committee because her commuting schedule conflicted with our meeting schedule. The Select Board will pick a replacement from a list of Concord residents who expressed interest in being on this committee.

Anne attended the breakfast for the chairs of town committees. She reported that the NRC is presenting to the Select Board next week on restrictions on dogs on conservation lands, and that there are plans for work on the grounds at Emerson Park that were originally budgeted at \$600,000.

We then met with Marcia Rasmussen, Concord's Director of Planning and Land Management. Marcia began by giving us a tour of the Concord Geographic Information System (GIS), which the public can access through the Town Web site (<https://www.concordma.gov/461/Geographic-Information-System-Program>).

The GIS presents a map of Concord upon which viewers can select and view "layers" of information. Examples of layers are government owned lands, open space lands, and wetlands. Marcia added layers under Government Owned lands to address questions asked by this committee. Government lands can now be highlighted by the size of the parcels, and by the town department that is responsible for managing a parcel.

There are 7 departments that manage parcels of town land, or the parcel may not be assigned to a specific department. The designations used in the GIS are as follows.

- Concord Housing Authority (CHA)
- Concord Municipal Light and Power (CMLP)
- Concord Public Schools (CPS)
- Concord Public Works (CPW)
- Finance Committee (FIN)
- Natural Resources Commission (NRC)
- Recreation (REC)
- Not assigned to a specific department (Municipal Purposes)

There are also zoning districts that impact land usage. Marcia suggested we start our search by looking at Municipal Purposes parcels.

The committee asked for the definition of a number of terms including “open space” and “recreation.” Marcia suggested we address those questions to Kate Hodges, the assistant town manager.

She then used the GIS to show us the data available for specific parcels. The Municipal Use parcels we looked at included the Ammendolia parcel in East Concord by Ripley School, which is partially used for the East Corridor Community gardens and is accessible via other town lands, and Quail Run, also in East Concord, which has 4 upland acres and 12 acres of wetlands.

Municipal purpose parcels in West/South Concord include a 40.45 acre parcel at White Pond and the 27.5 acre Willow Guzzle parcel, which is partially farmed.

Rideout, which is 12 acres including a recent addition, and Emerson, 14 acres in size, are managed by the Recreation Department.

The possibility of supplementing town lands with private lands or easements was also raised. Massport owns other undeveloped parcels along the southern border of Hanscom Airfield. Work is currently underway around Warner’s Pond, and there is a possibility of talking to MCI Concord about parcels adjacent to the pond. A major development project is expected for Tobin’s estate.

Marcia noted that town lands without buildings usually do not have water but it may be possible to tap into adjacent water lines. The photo overlays may indicate the availability of parking.

Jill Moonheron, Concord’s GIS analyst, is available to help us in our use of the GIS and can also add layers showing the locations of dogs if we can get the data to her in an appropriate format. Don offered to send lists of the locations or dog owners, grouped by size of dog (small, medium and large) to Jill.

Marcia suggested polling other towns on costs and experiences. As a guest, she did not realize that we already have a significant amount of information that we need to consolidate. We thanked Marcia for her excellent overview and assistance.

The next topic was outreach to the public. Deborah contacted Erin Stevens, Concord’s Public Information Officer, about ways to reach out to the public. Erin suggested

- School newsletter or email lists,
- The Council on Aging newsletters, and
- The News and Notices section of the Town web site.

The committee is unsure of how many people these options, along with the Concord Journal, would reach and whether we would connect with a representative cross section of town residents. Concord Municipal Power and Light bills were identified as another option.

Bob looked at online outreach options and reported his findings via email.

- The News and Notices section of the Town website.
- The town now allows the public to sign up for automatic updates via text or email from a list of town committees that includes this committee, but the public has to know about this option to sign up for it.
- The Concord Patch at patch.com/Massachusetts/concord,
- nextdoor.com, which usually focuses on neighborhoods rather than towns, and
- Bob is looking for any Yahoo groups or mail lists for Concord.

Kate mentioned <https://nextdoor.com/neighborhood/eggrock--concord--ma/>, which is an online community for the Egg Rock neighborhood in Concord (note: I found 11 different nextdoor.com neighborhoods for Concord).

We discussed the timing of this committee's first public hearing and the consensus was that it would be premature to hold it before the Town Meeting.

The committee still has to gauge public interest. Given that these town lands are currently available to dog owners, the question was raised as to what additional value would come from designating some of these areas as "dog parks." If we don't identify amenities that improve the recreational experience for dog owners, they may feel that the creation of dog parks will lead to additional restrictions on dog owners on the remaining town lands.

We then focused on defining our next steps.

1. Meeting with Kate Hodges to understand the definitions of terms that include open "space," "recreation," and "passive recreation activity." We also need to understand how to change or clarify the current definitions of these terms.
2. We need to consolidate the guidelines we have for dog parks into a single set of recommendations. Don volunteered to make a first pass at this.
3. We need to determine which of the town departments or other organizations (Concord Land Trust, Sudbury Valley Trustees, Trustees of the Reservations, etc.) we should talk to, and in what order. Anne asked the committee to think about this and make suggestions via email. The data in the GIS system could play a role in this.

The public offered the following comments. People are empathetic to Concord residents with dogs but, given that Concord actively tries to draw visitors, they may have concerns on what impact these visitors will have on dog facilities.

The committee members present unanimously voted to adjourn at approximately 9:00 PM.