

West Stockbridge Dog Park Advisory Committee
Regular meeting

December 2, 2023, 10 a.m.

Present: Michael Bolognino, Heather Hicks, Roni Kramer, Renee McCormick (via Zoom), Paige Orloff (via Zoom), Lorri Santhay, Jana Sax

Absent: Sharon Vidal

Guests: Tom Lincoln, Carmen Scherzo, both of Friends of Brewster Dog Park (via Zoom)

Michael Bolognino called the meeting to order at 10:05. He noted that guests from the Brewster Dog Park would join at 10:15. He noted that the town has money from the town preservation committee and there is an application that is due at the end of the month, that we need someone to research and complete. Heather Hicks noted that Rep SP suggested we apply for the Stanton Foundation grant but there is no additional funding from the state that he shared. Ronni Kramer, Lorri Santhay, and Heather Hicks will research these funding sources.

Mr. Bolognino reported that he spoke to Renee Dodds who did the grant work for Pittsfield dog park, and she is willing to share her knowledge. For the Stanton grant, Ms. Kramer, Ms. Santhay and Ms. Hicks will work with Marie Ryan to gain necessary info.

Mr. Bolognino reviewed available properties from the town. Assessor was very helpful and shared a number of possible properties. The ones that seem the most applicable are outside of Card Pond and the former town dump. Ms. Sax asked about Iron Mine Rd location. Mr. Bolognino shared a pdf of possible sites with the committee.

Renee McCormick will take over communications with Parks and Rec Committee (Cait). We will review other town resources with whom we hope to meet at a later time.

At 10:16, Tom Lincoln from Brewster MA dog park committee joined our meeting. Mr. Lincoln introduced himself and shared that in Brewster, the whole process took approximately 12 or 13 years. It was very contentious in the town due to feeling that dogs represented a special interest and thus the town shouldn't be involved. He elaborated on the reasons that support was finally gained, primarily issues with dog waste in other public areas i.e., beach.

Ms. Sax asked how they selected their location. Mr. Lincoln replied that they looked at several sites. Several sites were selected and then rejected by newly-elected selectboard members. They looked at town owned property, checked locations, size, zoning and ended up with only a couple of options. Some town or zoning issues with sites arose, for example conservation areas can't be fenced, which eliminated some sites. The location they selected was central, municipally zoned, and at the time it was the best choice. Their large park is about 1.5 acres, small is .75 acres. The two parks share a fence line (thus abut).

At 10:23 Mr. Scherzo joined. Mr. Bolognino recapped and noted the areas our committee has already covered.

Mr. Bolognino asked Mr. Lincoln if there were zoning issues that they came up against and Mr. Lincoln reiterated the issue with fencing conservation properties. The real thing they found with several properties was opposition from neighbors. This was true at the location they chose, which is in a residential area and thus sound was a concern. He noted that public impressions (negative) of dog parks are lots of fighting, barking, and noise. In reality Mr. Lincoln shared that those are inaccurate, although there are occasional issues.

Ms. Hicks asked if the Brewster park is open to visitors. Mr. Lincoln reported that it is, although there was discussion of making it a membership based park due to high tourism. They elected to be tourist friendly, and they also learned that a member dog park vs an open dog park resulted in a much larger insurance premium, because a member based dog park should be able to be responsible for status of all dogs admitted, while an open dog park cannot bear that responsibility. Mr. Scherzo added that the park is located on 40 acres of town property, next to the police station which many residents especially seniors and women, appreciate for safety. Mr. Bolognino noted that we do not have info about possible sites in West Stockbridge next to town hall.

Mr. Bolognino noted that we are eager to learn about their funding process. Mr. Lincoln reported they did get the Stanton Foundation grant, and the foundation worked well with them. Some of the process is difficult because of the single point of contact (town employee) but the reasons for that structure are sound. Ms. Kramer noted that the Stanton grant is going away after 2023. Mr. Lincoln noted that with the Stanton grant, the initially funding is for one year of design and that clock starts as soon as funds are received, so it's important to not accept funds until ready to work. Mr. Lincoln noted that they also received funds from the Community Preservation Commission. Mr. Scherzo noted they spent approximately \$25K on design (Berkshire Design Group), \$185K from community preservation funds, and the Friends of Park (501c3) spent \$50K (benches, kiosks, misting fire hydrants, etc). Mr. Scherzo reported that they formed Friends of Brewster Dog Park in 2019 and the park opened in 2022.

Ms. Sax asked how they promoted involvement. Mr. Scherzo reported that the town committee worked on this. They currently have a volunteer steward program; volunteers come and walk the park to check and clean it. Those volunteers "make the park" according to Mr. Scherzo and Mr. Lincoln, keeping it clean and friendly.

Ms. Kramer reiterated that no design grants from the Stanton Foundation will be offered after this year and the group agreed to see if there is any way to complete that application.

Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Scherzo noted that In Brewster, the Friends of Brewster Dog Park have a memorandum of understanding with the town that allows the Friends to maintain the park. In addition to stewards, they have a program for soliciting funding from the general public. They provide waste removal services, mutt mits (poop bags—quantity 80K per year at a cost of about .06 each). Agway and other businesses donated services. Agway provided plantings and they continue to fund a lot of programs. Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Scherzo noted the advantages of

corporate sponsors. For example, in Brewster, a local waste removal company initially donated waste removal.

Ms. McCormick asked about Brewster pop (winter pop 7000). Mr. Scherzo noted that 34 stewards volunteer for the park, and not all are from the town of Brewster. Mr. Bolognino noted that we might gain support from Richmond residents, too.

Mr. Lincoln noted that when they established Friends of Brewster Dog Park, town committee members liaised with the non profit. They had a liaison with the town Board of Health and a dog trainer, and to establish the non profit it was important to have separation from town committee. Mr. Lincoln was not involved with Friends until the Brewster dog park committee was decommissioned. Ms. Kramer noted that Marie Ryan had said we cannot do that from Advisory committee but we can have a separate group form.

Ms. Sax asked how they managed donations. They explained that they established a Facebook page, took checks, cash, sold tees and hats (no sales tax on clothing), offered sponsorship opportunities for "biscuit benches"; essentially every item that went into the park had a sponsor. Ms. McCormick asked how much they charged for benches, and they reported that at first, the donation was \$1000, but is now \$2500, because the actual cost is 800-900 for the bench plus the same amount for a concrete slab underneath.

Ms. Sax asked how they found their designer. Mr. Lincoln said they used a Request for Proposals (RFP) process, which comes with specific requirements due to government involvement. They had three proposals and were very happy with final company chosen. Mr. Bolognino asked about annual operating expenses. Mr. Scherzo said approximately \$20K of fixed expenses between insurance, mutt mits, waste removal, portajohn, miscellaneous expense like blowers to clean paths; these are all raised through donations. The town does do some of the maintenance. Adding shade gazebos in each park will be an additional expense this year (\$5-10K). Drainage issues, leaf clearing, other maintenance costs arise annually. The MOU with the town of Brewster lays out what the Friends of Brewster Dog Park are responsible for and what town is responsible for. For example, the town will install benches and plow parking lot (but not the park). It's a symbiotic, good relationship public/private that really makes the park work. They are currently working with town regarding incidents in the park and legal enforcement. When there are issues they step back and allow the town to take over. There are airhorns in the parks (provided by Friends) for breaking up dog fights. Mr. Scherzo said the only vaccines they can require is rabies per state law. Rules are posted on their website (and these are set by selectboard and reviewed by dog park group). Mr. Bolognino asked who initiated rule making for park. Mr. Lincoln said liaison from selectboard to the dog park committee spent a lot of time working with the committee on rules.

Mr. Bolognino asked if there was anything they wish they had done differently. Mr. Scherzo said it has to be a collaborative effort between dedicated individuals and a willing town. Mr. Bolognino asked about guidance for dealing with neighbor concerns. Mr. Scherzo said invite them in, hear them out, listen to them, see if something can be worked out. He noted that they

changed the location of the park due to neighbor concerns. Mr. Lincoln noted that it is important just to expect reactions from neighbors.

Mr. Bolognino asked about final approval for the park. Mr. Lincoln noted that it was a town meeting vote to allow the dog park to happen. Mr. Lincoln noted again the issue of a dog park being perceived as a special interest and how many special interests are actually accommodated by the town, and that they successfully argued that a dog park should be no different.

Ms. Sax asked if the dog park had created a financial burden on residents. Mr. Lincoln said that while there was a minimal increase in town expenses, the Brewster Department of Public Works is able to absorb most of the costs. Mr. Scherzo noted that this year they got the town to include \$10K in town budget for capital needs for the dog park; Mr. Lincoln noted that the Brewster annual budget is now approximately \$44 million.

Ms. Sax asked if the Brewster dog park advisory committee disbanded when the park was opened. Mr. Lincoln noted that it disbanded after the building of the dog park was approved by the town. Ms. Sax asked who continues to be involved: currently, these are Mr. Lincoln: the Brewster department of public works, and the Brewster town manager, and they report annually to the select board. They shared that they are the busiest park in town. Friends of Brewster Dog Park maintains the park. Mr. Lincoln noted that templates for basic MOUs for town/501c3 partnership are on the Stanton Foundation website. Ms. McCormick asked about shade shelter funding; this will be from nonprofit per Ms. Scherzo; they will get estimate and then source donations. They shared that they have people with very relevant experience on 501c3 leadership (vet, retired vet, co owner of Agway, marketing person, dog trainer, non profit experience, past chair of town dev committee). They now offer quarterly education sessions at the park with dog trainer (with board member who does it gratis).

Ms. Sax asked what was the best marketing tool they used. Mr. Scherzo said Facebook initially but they have now engaged a marketing firm. Developing a robust email list was critical. Support from a local business can assist with this. Mr. Lincoln reported that there were mailings to all licensed dog owners in town. Mr. Scherzo noted that mailings are very expensive (\$1500-2000) and they only did one prior to the town meeting vote.

Mr. Bolognino asked for final questions and comments. Mr. Lincoln noted that Mary Lynn Glasser has written a book about dog parks operation and design; she is a professor who has designed many dog parks. She is an accessible resource; mlglasser@aol.com. She came and did a training for free with the Brewster dog park committee. She was very helpful and provided insights that might not have been obvious, for example, no picnic tables in a dog park. Mr. Scherzo wanted to invite the committee to come visit the park in Brewster. Mr. Lincoln offered his contact information as well (email add viking1929@hotmail.com ph 508-737-0751). Group agreed to ask WS library to order Glasser book.

Mr. Scherzo. left the meeting at 11:05.

Mr. Bolognino asked that the group review Stanton Foundation requirements due to end of year deadline. Mr. Lincoln noted that final designers were not involved when they made their application. They had only a preliminary sketch. The Brewster selectboard committed to 10% of construction costs, which ended up being a total of \$500K (thus a \$50K commitment from the town). The town is going to have to pay something whether through CPA or general fund. But the commitment is that they want the town to have skin in the game. Selectboard can commit to that percentage in order to get the design done. If they had failed in town meeting, the money would never have been spent. Mr. Bolognino noted that town commitment will be challenging. Mr. Lincoln noted that the town commitment sourcing is up to the town. Ms. Kramer noted that the commitment is necessary but the funds won't be spent unless and until the construction grant is obtained.

Mr. Bolognino noted that we will need to determine if we can go to the select board before end of the year. Group discussed 501c3 and committee overlap which needs to be minimal (2-3 people). Ms. McCormick asked about ideal nonprofit leadership and Mr. Lincoln noted that (ideally pro bono) legal work will be needed, as well as experienced fundraisers and marketing professionals. Mr. Bolognino and Ms. Sax agreed that they will figure out timing with selectboard. Ms. Kramer said the grant application requires a letter of assurance. Mr. Lincoln affirmed that the selected point of contact in the town (in our case, Marie Ryan) will send the application, which needs to include possible site, rough sketch of possible park, commitment to 10% funding of hard costs, etc. Mr. Lincoln noted that the budget can be hypothetical at this stage because many costs are still unknown. Mr. Bolognino asked if their application materials are available for review. Mr. Lincoln suggested calling the Brewster town office to see if it is available. Ms. Sax noted that we can do both Community Preservation Act and Stanton Foundation applications.

Mr. Lincoln left the meeting at 11:25.

The group discussed best approach to the selectboard regarding Stanton Foundation. Ms. Kramer reviewed the list of requirements. Ms. Sax suggested we go to Selectboard to explain the grant requirements and timing. Ms. Santhay found Acton, MA Stanton Foundation application data and will share with group.

Group discussed next meeting day/time and agreed to meet next Saturday 12/8 at 9:30 a.m at Town Hall. Ms. Sax asked that minutes be completed asap for submission to Marie Ryan.

Ms. McCormick asked if the committee has additional questions for Parks and Rec beyond details on site selection. Ms. Kramer noted that fencing at Card Pond may be an issue. Ms. Sax asked again about 0 Iron Mine Rd property (3.2 acres) and Mr. Bolognino will follow up on that. Mr. Bolognino asked if we can change location of the park if necessary after receiving grant funds, and Ms. Kramer affirmed that we can. Mr. Bolognino and Ms. Sax agreed that they will go to select board meeting on Monday 12/4 at 6 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 11:38 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Paige Orloff