

West Stockbridge Dog Park Advisory Committee
Regular meeting

January 6, 2024, 9:30 a.m.

Present: Michael Bolognino, Heather Hicks, Roni Kramer, Renee McCormick, Paige Orloff, Lorri Santhay, Jana Sax, Sharon Vidal

Citizen Guests: Barry Girdler, Wayne Marzotto

Michael Bolognino called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. He offered a motion to approve the minutes from the prior meeting, which Roni Kramer seconded and the committee approved.

Mr. Bolognino congratulated the committee on being awarded the Stanton Foundation grant, and reported that the town has already received the first payment of \$25,000 (to cover design costs) . He noted that the town will vote on approval of their contribution to the effort (\$25000 for construction costs, from existing Community Preservation Act funds) at the town meeting in May. He reminded the group that much of our work, particularly selection of location, must be approved by residents of West Stockbridge at the May town meeting, and that the committee has from now until October to get the design work done. At that point, it will be submitted to the Stanton Foundation for approval.

Renee McCormick asked how the location will be approved, and Mr. Bolognino answered that the residents who attend town meeting will vote on it. Jana Sax, Heather Hicks, and others noted that raising public awareness of our efforts will be important.

The group discussed identifying design firms and a process for creating a request for proposals (RFP) for design. Mr. Bolognino noted that both the Pittsfield and Brewster, MA dog parks were designed by the same firm ([Berkshire Design Group](#)). Roni Kramer explained for the benefit of the guests at the meeting the background on the Stanton Foundation grant award and process.

Mr. Bolognino asked about creating additional subcommittees for design, community relationships/awareness, and volunteer recruitment both for building and then future maintenance of the park. Other subcommittee efforts are focused on the logistics of forming a 501(c)3 and on managing funds and any donations that may be received. Sharon Vidal explained what town clerk Marie Ryan shared about the process for managing funds sent to the town: this entails coming to the town once a week to obtain and open mail. Our committee will keep a copy of any checks received and Ms. Ryan will deposit them and earmark them for the park. Ms. Kramer asked if town donations would be tax deductible and several members confirmed that they will not be. Ms. Vidal and Lorri. Santhay are willing to work on this process.

Ms. Kramer asked about a prospective 501(c)3 friends group to support the proposed park, and the group discussed that leadership of that (yet to be formed) organization needs to be separate from our committee, but that a couple of committee members can join that organization if desired.

Mr. Bolognino shared site updates. He was informed by the town that the cemetery site is no longer available. The Town Hall site has a few concerns: first, rearranging the use of spaces,

and second, that a dog park on site may not conform to the town master plan (which calls for new housing on the Town Hall site). At the old dump site (Oak Street), one concern is safety. Curt Wilton and Earl Moffatt of the Board of Health affirmed to Mr. Bolognino that, according to MA DEP, the way that the parcel of land was remediated makes it safe for a "passive public use". Committee members expressed concern that site excavation could reduce safety, and entail significant expense. Ms. Santhay reminded the group that ADA requirements will also need to be met. Ms. Vidal expressed concern about potential impact on wildlife at the Card Pond site. Regarding understanding environmental issues and necessary mitigation, Paige Orloff suggested consulting with Stanton Foundation and Mr. Bolognino suggested also consulting the team responsible for the Brewster, MA park. The committee discussed whether to seek alternate sites, including whether we should (and can, per the terms of the grant) consider partnership with Richmond - Mr. Bolognino will inquire with the Stanton Foundation about the feasibility of extending out of town. Ms Vidal asked if land could be donated by a private landowner, which the group agreed was another possible path to a park site (although per the terms of the Stanton Foundation grant, the park cannot be named for any individual).

The group charged with researching the formation of a 501(c)3 group to support the future park (Ms. Sax, Ms. Hicks, Ms. McCormick, and Ms. Kramer) reported on their efforts. They discussed skills that would be valuable in recruiting support for the formation of such a group. For example, individuals such as a lawyer, veterinarian, people with relevant skills from other towns, accountant, someone who knows construction and landscaping. Ms. Orloff mentioned fundraising, which Ms. Vidal is interested in. Questions discussed by the group included whether or not people outside of West Stockbridge can join the non-profit, and how to identify individuals who might be interested in providing leadership for the group. Ms. Sax will speak with the Brewster team about how they managed recruiting and launching their non-profit friends group. The group discussed working with the West Stockbridge Historical Society for information about individuals who might be interested in the effort, and Ms. Sax agreed to speak with Bob Salerno. It was also suggested that any 501(c)3 contact (Bob S. or Carmen from Brewster), be invited to speak to the 501(c)3 subcommittee rather than the full Dog Park committee.

Mr. Bolognino asked the group to discuss other individuals we would like to invite to future meetings for the benefit of gaining their expertise. He suggested bringing the Pittsfield dog park team to meet with us (including local businesswoman Renee Dodds and a representative from the city of Pittsfield) to discuss their effort. Ms. Sax noted that another knowledgeable individual we might invite to a future meeting is Bob Salerno from West Stockbridge Historical Society. Ms. Vidal suggested that we meet with someone from the Egremont Dog Park. Ms. Santhay will reach out to their treasurer to see how they initiated their effort and how they continue to fund and maintain it. Ms. Sax asked about a chamber of commerce/merchants organization and Ms. Vidal suggested consulting with the Joe Roy; she will research this. Mr. Bolognino suggested bringing back the Brewster dog park leadership for a second discussion regarding their process in forming a 501(c)3.

Mr. Bolognino reviewed with the group a preliminary schedule we received from the Stanton Foundation.

Key dates are as follows:

January - October 2024	Design initiated (including RFP process) and finalized
October 2024	Design sent to Stanton Foundation for approval
November 2024	Construction bids
January 2025	Project awarded to a contractor
April 2024	Begin construction

Mr. Bolognino suggested that prior to the May town meeting, we hold an open forum to inform West Stockbridge residents about the project and our process, to solicit their feedback, and to encourage participation. Ms. Sax suggested taking a group picture with our dogs to share. The committee agreed that objectives for this meeting would be: 1. introduce our committee to the town; 2. discuss the SF grant and how it relieves the town of financial burden; 3. solicit volunteers; 4. get feedback from residents; 5. share that we have met with representatives of many other MA towns who have developed successful dog parks; show images of other MA parks.

The group agreed to promote this meeting using the Local Yokel, our committee Facebook page, the West Stockbridge community group also on Facebook, and flyers in town. Ms. Sax noted that the Local Yokel deadline is Jan 15. Ms. Orloff will write an article/press release in consultation with Mr. Bolognino and Ms. Sax. The group decided on February 24, 2024 at 3 p.m. for the proposed meeting. Mr. Bolognino will ask Marie Ryan about reserving a space in Town Hall for this purpose.

The group discussed tasks to be completed by various subcommittees of this committee. Ms. Hicks asked about forms to be filed with the MA Attorney General for 501(c)3. Ms. Vidal said she will investigate the plans for the cemetery site. The group also discussed again the role of a 501c3 in soliciting financial support. Ms. Hicks would like to work on the design subcommittee and she and Mr. B will work on RFPs. Ms. Sax will work on the open forum with support from Ms. Orloff and Ms. Vidal. Ms. Kramer will work on finding images of other dog parks to share at the meeting.

Then citizen guests were asked to speak. Wayne Marzotto shared that he appreciated the opportunity to join the meeting. He encouraged the group to fully explore all sites and to make thorough inquiries with the town regarding their intended use. He also suggested exploring successful integration of our efforts with the town Master Plan. He resides on Oak Street and shared his concerns about that location due to access, ADA compliance, and potential environmental issues. Mr. Girdler shared similar concerns about groundwater contamination and access at the Oak Street site. Ms. Vidal asked their opinions about the Card Lake site; they said they felt that location may make the most sense due to existing parking and the possible secondary benefit of dogs perhaps reducing the impact of geese. Ms. Sax asked them about their general opinion of having a dog park in town which they said is neutral. Ms. Vidal asked if

they have any suggestions for sites and they suggested consulting again with the town. The guests departed at 10:36 a.m.

In a continuing discussion about possible sites, Ms. Hicks asked about parcels zoned for marijuana growth; Ms. Santhay discussed land on Baker Street. Ms. Sax will talk to the Stanton Foundation representatives to see if the site can be in a neighboring community e.g. Richmond. Mr. Bolognino. will speak with a local real estate agent about possible additional sites. Ms. Vidal asked if the committee can buy the site with grant money and the group confirmed that is not an option.

The group agreed to ask the dog park representatives from Pittsfield to join our next meeting. Mr. Bolognino will email them to invite them. Questions to be asked of them include their recommendations for a successful and supportive relationship with town residents, their experience with the design process, and others.

The committee agreed that our next regular meeting will be January 20, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. at Town Hall. Subcommittees agreed to set their next meeting times separately.

The meeting adjourned at 10:53 a.m.

Respectfully submitted

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Paige Orloff, Secretary