

July 6, 2018

Board of Selectmen
Town of Woodbridge

Re: Dog Park Proposal

Dear members of the Board of Selectmen:

As you review potential locations for a dog park, I hope you will keep published guidelines in mind.

A few years ago, the city of Ann Arbor, Michigan Park Advisory Commission Dog Park Subcommittee issued "Recommendations and Guidelines for Dog Park Site Selection, Design, Operations and Management" (2013/2014). This document is available on the internet as a pdf file. In preparing the report, Ann Arbor's staff and subcommittee researched the best practices of more than a dozen cities. The report summarizes the placement design and management practices of the other cities at pages 6 and 7. While the entire document is worth reading, a few considerations specifically apply to the proposal to replace the Fitzgerald Tract's Chestnut Grove with a dog park.

First, "use conflict avoidance" is a consideration. The consulted towns have guidelines on "avoiding play areas and other recreational amenities, high use areas, natural areas and water sources, wildlife, trails, community gardens, and historic sites." Further, in the context of nearby homes (which I believe applies equally to nearby recreational uses), cities recommended "making sure that noise and activity levels are no more than other park uses." Second, parking "should be readily accessible, close to the site, sufficient/adequate size, and convenient." More generally, "it is important to consider parking when locating a dog park." All of the cities said they are complying with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for access to their dog park(s). Third, most cities recommend having a source of drinking water both for dogs and their owners. Fourth, "all cities contacted have galvanized or vinyl coated chain link fences, with a minimum height of 4 feet."

The Chestnut Grove falls short when matched up to these criteria. Existing parking is located several hundred feet away. ADA compliant parking spaces would need to be built next to the dog park entrance. Cars driving to the ADA parking would have to traverse existing walking trails, in direct conflict with existing walkers. Moreover, the current parking is often full in the late afternoon/early evening hours, as residents come to enjoy the existing walking trails. The walkers generally are quiet, strolling solo or in small groups with quiet conversation. Some may listen to the birds only casually, others stop to identify the singers. Parking space shortages and noise level divergence present two specific "use conflicts." The premature ending of an agricultural experiment of potential statewide significance represents another obvious use conflict. Finally, the long stretch of walking trail that runs the length of the existing Chestnut Grove fencing presents a direct use conflict.

The Chestnut Grove fencing is agricultural deer fencing, not chain link. Appropriate (i.e., chain link) fencing is needed to keep dogs in any dog park – and especially where, as at the Chestnut Grove, walkers, runners, strollers, and even leashed dogs would be using the adjacent walking trail. In this regard, please note that the American Kennel Club, too, offers guidelines on dog parks and they, too, recommend chain link fencing. There is no drinking water at the Chestnut Grove; indeed, the water available to the community gardeners is unsafe to drink.

I recognize and respect that it is the Board of Selectmen's responsibility to weigh competing factors and interests in siting a dog park. I urge you to review potential sites in light of the criteria offered by other towns. I believe you will find that the Chestnut Grove falls short in meeting the municipal design criteria summarized in the Ann Arbor report.

Please also refer to the Ann Arbor document for best management practices once a dog park is in place. The report offers many ideas worth adopting in Woodbridge.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amey Marrella". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Amey Marrella