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Site recommended for Yorktown dog park

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YORKTOWN - After six years, the off-leash dog park that residents have been lobbying for could soon become a reality.

While pitching the idea to recreation commissioners at a crowded Town Hall meeting this month, dog owners were surprised to hear an ally pipe up from the back of the room. Highway Superintendent Eric DiBartolo suggested a 1-acre parcel behind the tennis courts at Downing Park off Route 202.

Unlike other sites residents had looked at, this one is already town-owned, comes with adequate parking and lighting, and is away from residences.

DiBartolo, a dog owner, said he scouted the site years ago but couldn't persuade officials to move forward on the idea of a dog park.

"I have the advantage of owning a working dog I can take anywhere I want," said DiBartolo, whose dog, Blaze, is a trained K-9 accelerant detection dog. "A lot of people don't have that, where they can just let (their dogs) run around.

"If they're used correctly," he said of dog parks, "they're fantastic."

The site requires only fencing to contain the dogs, which would run freely under their owners' watchful eyes. He said the cost to the town would be minimal and would mainly go for fencing.

Dog-park proponents began lobbying for space at FDR State Park in 2002 but were told to pursue the idea locally. Since the fall, they've been working to convince town officials of the need for a dog park and to find a site. They've collected hundreds of signatures in support of the idea and have offered to raise money to help buy fencing, and they say they would help operate and maintain it.

Several Westchester communities have dog parks, including Ossining, Bedford, New Rochelle and White Plains. Proponents in Yorktown got a boost last month when town Supervisor Don Peters lent his support to the idea.

Recreation Commission Chairman Joe Falcone said the commission would evaluate the site in June. Falcone called it a quality-of-life issue and said the commission would support it if the community was behind the idea.

"It looks like it's doable," he said. "I believe it's going to happen."

Yorktown Heights resident Dave Rocco, who owns three Labradors and has lobbied for years for a dog park, said it would be a great addition to the town's array of recreational facilities, which include two water parks, a skateboard park, an in-line skate rink and numerous athletic fields and pocket parks. He expected the search for a site to take a lot longer, but he was confident of the public support for the idea.

"It's not only that people support it for the dogs, but it's a great place for people to get together," Rocco said.
