



October 9, 2008

Town eyes letting Trump Park go to the dogs

*Brian J. Howard
The Journal News*

YORKTOWN - □After months spent mulling various sites, parks officials are leaning toward the French Hill portion of Donald J. Trump State Park for a leash-free dog run.

Recreation commissioners walked the 153-acre park yesterday afternoon to scope out sites for a dog park.

If they like what they see, they will recommend it Tuesday to the Town Board, which is expected to vote to pursue the project that night.

"It would be a partnership with the state, more or less," Recreation Commission Chairman Joe Falcone said. "I've got to tell you, it's a nice little area."

A major sticking point is that the state Office of Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation must approve any plans the town has for the park, which is possible but not a given.

A state parks spokesman said such lease agreements with municipalities are not uncommon but called talks with Yorktown preliminary.

Trump donated the parcel and a larger one 5 miles north to the state two years ago.

Besides erecting signs, little has been done since to develop them as parkland, and nothing is yet planned.

The Recreation Commission has walked several sites since June, most notably a portion of Downing Park off Route 202 that is favored by the 200-member Yorktown Community Dog Park, a residents group that has lobbied for a leash-free park since 2002. Downing has the parking, accessibility and utilities other sites lack, they say.

Town officials are concerned that Downing Park - home to ball fields, a picnic pavilion and playgrounds - is too busy to add a dog park. Supervisor Don Peters pointed to pre-existing plans to build a handicapped-accessible playground there.

Peters said state officials were receptive to a partnership under which the town would build and operate a dog run at Trump Park.

"They said as long as you're running it, that's OK with us," he said. "It's a beautiful piece of property, and we're thinking about doing some other stuff up there, whether it's a ball field or doing something with the buildings up there or passive hiking trails."

Town planners are now assembling such a proposal for the state.

The town was reluctant to look at Trump Park because of past state resistance to hosting a dog park.

The residents' group had its origins in lobbying for a dog run at nearby FDR State Park.

Dog park advocate Jonathan Nettelfield of Bridge Pointe Lane said Downing Park could accommodate a dog park more quickly than Trump Park.

Also, the only access is via Old Baldwin Road, a narrow street of six homes, the closest of which lies a quarter-mile from the park entrance.

Still, Nettelfield said Trump Park would be an acceptable location to him.

The residents' group, which met two days ago to strategize in advance of yesterday's site walk, has promised to raise money for fencing, benches and trash bins at what would be Westchester's 10th leash-free park.

"To me Trump has a lot of potential," chairwoman Laura Wuerth said. "I think the downside is it's not a turnkey solution. It's not ready to go, so that means it will require time, money and planning. We'd like to see this happen sooner than later."
