



July 1, 2010

Town offers to split asbestos costs with dog park group

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YORKTOWN — Officials won't OK a leash-free dog run at Trump State Park until old buildings there are removed. But they can't remove the buildings without dealing with the asbestos inside them. And that won't happen until someone agrees to foot the bill.

That's where things stood last week when the Town Board agreed to split the \$8,000 abatement cost with dog park proponents, who are mulling the offer.

"Hopefully this is it," Councilman and parks liaison Terrence Murphy said of his cost-sharing proposal. "Now the town has made the commitment to do that, and the ball's in their court."

Murphy said his aim is to put the dog park question to rest following years of wrangling.

"I feel bad for them," he said of the Yorktown Community Dog Park committee, "but this has been going on for three-and-a-half years."

Still, some fighting for a dog park for as long as eight or nine years think they deserve more for their money. At one point recently, they offered to pay the full abatement cost if the town OK'd opening the entire 151-acre state park to leash-free dogs. The state would have to consent as well.

"We're not in the making-parks-safe-for-people business," committee member Jonathan Nettelfield said. "We're in the dog park business."

The town reviewed numerous possible dog park sites before settling on Trump Park last year.

Formerly the estate of one-time county parks chief William Delavan Baldwin, the main house burned down years ago, but several buildings remain. Donald Trump and others tried for years to develop it, first as housing and later as a golf course, before he donated it and another site as state parkland in 2006.

The deal on the table entails a fenced-in acre or so near the park entrance off Old Baldwin Road. The committee must raise about \$50,000 for the fence. They boast 400 members, a website (yorktowndogpark.com) and monthly meetings like one this week where a decision was expected on the cost-sharing idea.

Town Supervisor Susan Siegel gave state parks officials until June 18 to agree to pay for the asbestos abatement. The reply from the agency, which is facing the closure of existing state parks, was that now was not the time budget-wise, which Siegel took as a no.

She cast the sole vote against splitting the cost with the dog park committee, saying the town faces too many expenses — Town Hall fire alarms, community center boiler repairs — to invest even \$4,000 in a dog park.

The plan is to have the asbestos removed from a vacant caretaker's house and cabana buildings and

let firefighters use them for a controlled-burn training exercise. An in-ground pool would be broken up and filled in.

Leaving the structures in place presents liability issues, Siegel maintains, similar to the former Holland Sporting Club, a cluster of buildings on 14 acres on Mohegan Lake the town purchased in 1994.

Chairwoman Laura Wuerth's Rhodesian Ridgeback, Tsavo, was 3 when she began lobbying for a dog park in town. Tsavo recently died at age 12. Wuerth said the town's offer benefits the town but would cost her members a lot.

"It's a wonderful deal for them," Wuerth said. "So that is a decision we need to make."
