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Yorktown scout site for dog park at Downing Park

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YORKTOWN - Parks officials are split on whether a swath of land between the tennis courts and softball field at Downing Park is ideal for a leash-free dog park.

Members of the Parks and Recreation Commission walked the acre-plus hillside last week.

Highway Superintendent Eric DiBartolo suggested the site in March. At the time, proponents were pitching the idea of a dog park but had not zeroed in on a location.

Dave Rocco, who helped collect a 500-signature petition supporting a dog park, walked the site with commission members and said they were divided on the location.

"We want to get along with everybody, but have a better alternative," Rocco said. "Here you have an ideal situation where we could raise the money quickly to put the fences in."

There are nine leash-free dog parks in Westchester. Yorktown residents have lobbied for one since 2002. Supporters meet regularly and have a Web site, yorktowndogpark.com.

They have offered to raise the money to erect a double fence around the park and furnish it with benches and trash cans. Fundraising would start once a site is selected, Rocco said.

Recreation Commission Chairman Joe Falcone called Downing Park a "great site."

"Everything's there," Falcone said. "The parking's there. You're not infringing on any residential area. The bathrooms are there, stuff like that. No trees have to come down."

The commission will look at other sites before making a recommendation to the Town Board, which will decide. Next up is Solomon's Farm, 34 acres off Gomer Street the town purchased in 2006 for \$1.25 million.

Wetlands and nearby homes could present problems with that parcel. Downing Park, meanwhile, has two parking lots, parks staff on site and access to FDR State Park next door.

"I think it's an excellent location myself," said Town Board member and parks liaison Nick Bianco. "I think it meets every criteria that needs to be met. I haven't seen any downside to it."

That said, he respects the commission's decision to keep looking.

Supervisor Don Peters, a dog park backer and also a parks liaison, said Downing Park may lack adequate parking, especially given plans to build handicapped accessible playgrounds there.

"It's a good place for it, but it is very busy," he said.

Dog owner and longtime resident Edward Murgatroyd walked Toby, his mixed-breed rescue dog, on a leash and harness at the park yesterday. Murgatroyd said a leash-free park sounded like something Toby would like.

"He loves to come to this park," he said. "He sees other dogs, and he loves to run all over."
