

valuable addition to the community.

Responding to concerns, he said the idea is not part of any effort to crackdown on leash laws at Millennium Park, nor does he feel creating a dog park will necessarily lead to any changes in how leash laws are enforced there.

City animal control officials were not immediately available to comment this afternoon about the current enforcement practices at Millennium Park and the department's outlook on enforcement there going forward.

O'Malley described himself as a "dog lover." He grew up in a household with dogs that his parents, who are residents of the neighborhood, still own.

At Thursday night's meeting, he was in good company as nearly every hand in the room raised when asked how many in attendance owned dogs. A vast majority also indicated they supported the idea for a dog park in the neighborhood.

However, as the meeting progressed, a consensus on the dog park was less clear.

"People clearly have some concerns," said O'Malley after fielding around a dozen questions and comments. "This is the beginning of a more heated conversation than I expected."

While using a yet-to-be-pinpointed section of that decade-old city park built on a former landfill site is O'Malley's "first" choice, he has said previously that it is "not the only choice."

"We can do anything at this point," he said.

He also said at the meeting he's open to considering other options as well – including one idea put forth to mimic a dog park in nearby Brookline that has no fencing, but instead posts hours for when dogs are allowed to run around a certain area unleashed.

And, regarding having one off-leash section be fenced and another open, but with hours posted, he said, "I think we can have both."

No matter what the end result of the dog park discussion is, O'Malley said that in order for any potential proposals to receive city approval, the neighborhood will need to show that residents are mostly unified on what they want.

A nine-page document detailing the city's process of seeking dog park approval was handed out at the meeting at which the councilor gave a PowerPoint presentation dubbed "Woof Roxbury. He discussed creating a friends group to further explore the topic, and, if one is created, oversee the dog park. The friends group would be elected and consist of four officers, seven board of directors and general membership, O'Malley said.

Some asked whether such a bureaucratic process was needed to establish a dog park.

The councilor explained that he is trying to follow the city's long-standing process.

"It's not as simple as putting up four fences," he said.

After some outcry and confusion when he mentioned that standard city regulations limit dog parks to dimensions of 100-by-100 feet, he said that a proposal for larger dog park space can still be requested and approved on a

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case-by-case basis. And, he asked that residents not get distracted or dismayed by that figure because it is possible to amend the rule in certain instances.

O'Malley said that because dogs dig, a dog park at Millennium Park would be limited to certain areas of the former landfill that have not been "capped."

Responding to calls from the audience that it seemed absurd that a dog could dig deep enough to reach any buried hazards, he said that is simply a matter the city's public works department has told him it will not budge on.

He hopes that if the community agrees to move forward with the process of trying to create a dog park, and that if the community also chooses to do so at Millennium Park, that the development of a dog park would coincide with the city's plans to start a second renovation phase of the park near the West Roxbury Education Complex in the fall.

The process to create a dog park is likely to take at least close to one year he said, though the timetable could vary.

Some of the criticism Thursday was likely not foreseen because of how much space the potential site, Millennium Park, offers and because there are no residential areas abutting the property.

In other area cities and towns that have established dog parks in recent years, the chief opponents to such plans have often been abutting residents to the proposed dog park, concerned about such factors as increased noise, traffic and parking.

Last fall, an encounter between an unleashed dog and a trainer at Millennium Park revived talks about turning part of the space into a dog park.

O'Malley has a next meeting scheduled for Sept. 21 at 6:30 p.m. in a to-be-determined, but larger venue. The councilor has established a Facebook page and Twitter account that can be used as another forum for discussion and will be updated with news related to discussions of a potential dog park in the neighborhood.

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