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WEST ROXBURY

Friends group likely to form at next West Roxbury dog park meeting

Posted by Matt Rocheleau November 22, 2011 05:26 PM

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By **Matt Rocheleau**, Town Correspondent

A friends group that would help plan, and later manage, a proposed dog park in West Roxbury is likely to form when neighborhood residents meet next week for the fourth time in as many months to discuss the matter.

At a series of meetings held since mid-August, District 6 City Councilor Matt O'Malley, residents and city officials have been discussing the idea of creating a fenced-in dog park, which the councilor [proposed over the summer](#).

O'Malley has scheduled a 6 p.m. meeting for next Wednesday at the Roche Community Center, where the agenda is slated to focus on "next steps," including talking about possible sites for the park and, if enough interest is shown, establishing and electing officers to a "Friends of the West Roxbury Dog Park" group.

Roslindale resident and a director of advocacy at the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Kara Holmquist said she will help run the Nov. 30 meeting. She said O'Malley is not expected to attend.

"He's stepping back to see if the community will run with it," she said. "It's great to have support from the City Council, but you really want to have a dog owners, dog walkers, park users and others really invested in it, too."

"There has to be a group that forms [the dog park] and continues to support and maintain it ... a group that they really cares for it and is committed to seeing that it's a success," Holmquist, a dog owner who has attended two of the three West Roxbury dog park meetings thus far, said by phone Tuesday.

At [the most recent meeting](#) on the subject last month, city park, public works and animal control officials met with neighborhood residents to explain what options would be legally permissible and physically possible regarding the potential creation of a dog park in West Roxbury.

The city has strict legal guidelines regarding dog park creation. Also, building a dog park at Millennium Park, a 100-acre site that has received nearly all of the focus so far in the neighborhood's dog park talks, could raise further legal complications because the park was formerly a landfill and includes areas that have not been "capped."

No clear consensus has been reached so far at meetings held with residents to discuss the feasibility of a dog park and an appropriate location for one. Some residents have voiced support for creating a fenced-in dog park at Millennium Park. Meanwhile others would prefer to leave the park as-is.

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At the first, standing-room-only meeting in August, [controversy rose](#) about whether creating a designated area for dogs to run off-leash might lead to a crackdown on leash law enforcement at Millennium Park, which O'Malley has said would be an "ideal location."

City regulations, adopted on a municipality-by-municipality basis according to [a state law](#), require a dog to be leashed at all times whenever the four-legged pet is not on their owner's property. The city says the laws are "intended to protect people from free roaming dogs."

Last fall, an encounter between an unleashed dog and a trainer at the park [revived talks](#) about turning part of the space into a dog park.

Because some of the unforeseen debate about the dog park idea has caused talks to move at a slower pace than originally planned, previously-scheduled elections of officers to lead the friends group have been postponed.

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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