



September 17, 2019

Report of Citizens Advisory Committee

Final Dog Park Report

Summary

The Port of Olympia Citizens Advisory Committee (POCAC) for 2019 was introduced to six tasks each of which has been assigned to a POCAC sub-committee. The Temporary Dog Park task was introduced by Commissioner Downing. The task is Attachment 1.

The specific assignment was presented as:

The Port can be more involved in the community, and provide an additional public amenity simply by using a small amount of its vacant land for a temporary dog park. Many people have dogs, but no place in Olympia or Tumwater for them to allow the dogs to run free and socialize with other dogs. There is only ONE off-leash dog park in Thurston County, located way East at the Hawk's Prairie Waste Transfer Site. Dog socialization is important to teach dogs proper behavior around people and other dogs.

The Port has vacant land in Olympia, and in Tumwater. Why not create a temporary dog park that would be able to be relocated once/year. This is important so that the benefit of the dog park can be realized, but not supplanting possible leasing of a particular site to a Port lessee.

The City of Olympia has a shortage of off-leash dog parks. I would think that the City Council could get behind this, and support whatever permitting is required. This could be a great effort by the City and the Port.

Subcommittee

A subcommittee of the following POCAC members was established:

Cameron Wilson (Chair)

GiGi McClure
Deborah Pattin

Bruce Marshall was the Port of Olympia staff lead assigned to support this task.

Scope of Work

1. Who will pay for fencing, benches, dog doo-doo stations, water, port-a-potties, bark or mulch for a walking trail, gravel base?
2. What is the total estimated cost of a moveable dog park?
3. What permits are required from city?
4. Is this a legitimate use of Port funds, and can we donate use of land?
5. How to handle push back from people who think Port should use land instead for homeless camping?
6. What security needed to prevent unauthorized use of the park?
7. What Port sites might work for this?

Actions Taken / Discussions

- A similar task was assigned to the POCAC in 2014, and was tabled for possible later consideration. This committee carefully reviewed the prior research, some of which is incorporated herein.
- A long conversation was had with Port staff lead, Bruce Marshall about the pros and cons of using Port lands in downtown Olympia for a temporary dog park, as well as some of the issues surrounding past temporary dog park, further outlined below.
- Contact was made with the operators of the off-leash dog park located at the Hawks Prairie Waste Transfer Site. A summary of that conversation is contained below.
- We had a discussion with a representative from the City of Tumwater Parks & Recreation department.
- We obtained pricing for both permanent and temporary fencing solutions, which is included below.
- Made contact with Johnathan Terrell, director of Parks Planning & Maintenance for the City of Olympia. While the discussion was fairly high-level and would require further examination of a specific site TBD and the actual costs, the City does have some funds (amount unspecified) that they would be willing to allocate toward an off leash dog park on Port property in the City of Olympia.

PRIOR TASK FINDINGS:

In 2014, the POCAC was assigned a similar task – to evaluate the use of Port land for the purposes of operating an off-leash dog park. Some of the important findings of that research are as follows:

- A potential Tumwater site was identified which could meet the space needs of a dog park
- Dog parks, temporary or not, are surprisingly expensive to construct and operate
 - The original construction cost of the Transfer Site dog park was \$244,244 in 2011 – construction costs having risen significantly since then, we would expect the cost to be even higher today.
 - Operational costs were also fairly high and on the rise – from \$10,301 in 2012 to \$15,467 in the first ten months of 2013

DISCUSSION WITH STAFF LEAD BRUCE MARSHALL:

- Bruce was intimately familiar with the prior “temporary” dog parks located near the Swantown marina in the past.
- He found that, surprisingly, they received very little use
- Currently, his budget does not have the additional funding necessary to either build nor absorb the ongoing operation costs of a dog park – temporary or permanent.
- Concerns were raised about the Port’s ability to enforce laws related to operating a dog park, such as ensuring the dogs are “fixed”, current on shots, and not aggressive.
- As the development and redevelopment of downtown Olympia marches on, the Port is seeing increased demand/interest from developers looking for quality, waterfront sites on which to develop. Those sites highest and best uses are likely for more intensive (and higher revenue generating) purposes.
- Lastly, if/when the time came for a temporary dog park to be removed, particularly if that amenity were being removed so as to further the Port’s long term vision of development on its land holdings, there is potential that could become a PR issue, and/or a flashpoint around which protests in opposition may arise.

DISCUSSION WITH HAWK’S PRAIRIE WASTE TRANSFER SITE ADMINISTRATOR:

- To put it bluntly, the employee we spoke with was not a fan of the dog park.
- It is expensive and time consuming to operate, and generates no revenue.
- In addition to the hard costs such as fencing, dog bag stations, trashcans, and water sources, there are also ongoing operational costs such as mowing the grass, picking up after irresponsible dog owners, disposing of the 300-500lbs of dog waste generated weekly, etc.
- The one positive takeaway is that despite its rather basic amenities, it does see frequent use from the community, with an average weekday use of around 50 people, and 200-300 people on pleasant weekend days.
- Another interesting note – though the numbers do take a dip in the fall/winter, there is still fairly consistent use as dog owners brave the weather to get their pets the exercise they need.

FEEDBACK FROM CITY OF TUMWATER PARKS & RECS:

- Surprisingly, “off-leash dog parks have scored very low in statistical community Surveys of Tumwater voters over the last 5 years”
- However, the City of Tumwater has long sought a relationship with the Port of Olympia to create a “trail system” around Port property in Tumwater, and that if the Port were willing to engage in a discussion about that, a site for a dog park could possibly be identified as part of that system
- As seems to be a recurring theme with everyone we talked to, here again there was concern from Tumwater Parks & Rec about funding. They currently do not have staff/funding to support the cost of maintaining a dog park.

FENCING COSTS:

- The cost to install permanent, chain link style fencing is approximately \$18.50 per linear foot. If you assume a hypothetical perfectly square, one acre site, that would be roughly 832 linear feet (excluding “sally port” entries). This hypothetical site would cost roughly \$15,000 to install.

- The cost to rent temporary fencing is even less attractive, at \$325 per linear foot, or roughly \$270,000/year for this same hypothetical parcel.
- It seems obvious, then, that even if a dog park is intended to be “temporary” in nature, the more cost effective solution would be to have “permanent” fencing installed and taken down when the park is (re)moved.

DISCUSSION WITH CITY OF OLYMPIA DIRECTOR OF PARKS PLANNING & MAINTENANCE:

- The City of Olympia has an interest in exploring a relationship with the Port of Olympia with respect to locating an off-leash dog park on Port owned property in downtown Olympia.
- The City has been working on identifying potential sites for an off leash dog park, but unfortunately have not yet determined a good location
- The City does have funds (amount unspecified) it would be willing to allocate to a) construction, b) maintenance/operations, or c) potentially both depending on the size, scope, and location of an off leash dog park on Port owned Olympia property.

SPECIFIC SCOPE OF WORK RESPONSES

1. Based on the feedback received, with the sole exception of the City of Olympia, the cost of fencing, benches, dog doo-doo stations, water, port-a-potties, bark or mulch for a walking trail, ~~gravel base~~ grass (a gravel base is not attractive, and can cause injuries to dog’s feet. Grass is really the only viable option for the bulk of the park area) would need to be borne by the Port of Olympia.
2. The total estimated cost depends largely on the size of the park, and the amenities provided. Though not included on the scope of work, dog parks also need a water source within the park. Proximity to existing potable water lines is a significant factor. Between permitting, fencing, bringing water to the site, grass seeding, mulch, trashcans, etc, we estimate the initial costs to build a one acre dog park would approach \$100,000. Also note, a one acre dog park is not actually very large.
3. Standard permitting fees would apply, but the specific amounts are difficult to gauge without a deeper understanding of the size and scope of the site (any structures to provide shade/rain coverage for the dog owners?). It is very possible that the jurisdiction may waive or reduce such fees if the Port were absorbing the cost to provide this amenity to the community.
4. Is this an appropriate use of Port funds? This is a difficult question to answer as it is inherently subjective. But as Bruce Marshall pointed out, and as supported by the Tumwater P&R’s own studies, use/support/demand for off-leash dog parks may not be very high in the community at large.
5. With respect to push back from advocates for using Port land to allow camping, this can also be a bit tricky. On the one hand, many homeless people have dogs, and would surely appreciate a place where they could go to allow their pets some off-leash play time. We expect it is difficult if not impossible for the homeless to access or use the Transfer Site dog park, so in some respects, this would be an amenity that might disproportionately *benefit* the homeless population that own pets. Additionally, as alluded to earlier, when Port owned lands are eventually put to their highest and best use through development, the Port will face opposition from members of the community which formerly used Port land for ANY purpose whether that be camping or a dog park, or any other temporary use. Removing an amenity to allow a site to be developed is sure to be a hot button issue.

6. The very nature of chain link fencing, and the high visibility of many Port owned properties, in a round-about way resolve many security concerns.
 - a. If “no trespassing after park hours” signs are posted, it is very easy for police to see through the fencing to catch anyone trespassing after hours.
 - b. Not to mention, this is a dog park we are talking about here, and to be frank, they don’t really make a great place to “hang out” unless you’re there with your dog. There can be strong odors, and unfortunately feces on the ground left behind by irresponsible dog owners. One can think of a many more desirable places for folks to go during the time the park is closed, so we do not feel that security is of particular concern.
7. Given that the City of Olympia is currently working on its own plans for one or more dog parks within the City limits, and given the unique desirability of all the Port owned properties in downtown Olympia for future development, we do not feel that any Port owned sites in Olympia would be well suited for a dog park, with the exception of possible funding options that would only be available if located within the City of Olympia..
 - a. On the other hand, the Port has significantly more and larger parcels in and around the airport. There is also less market demand for the real estate in those areas, meaning that a dog park there would likely be longer-term than one in Olympia. Furthermore, many sites surrounding the airport still have trees, which make for a much more enjoyable dog park experience.
 - b. Although no specific sites were identified during this task, if the Commissioners decide to explore this topic further, we would strongly recommend a focus on Tumwater area properties over Olympia.

SUMMARY/CLOSING THOUGHTS:

- While we are confident that many dog owners would welcome the addition of another dog park in Thurston County, the feedback from others has shown support at large to be underwhelming.
- The cost is higher than expected, perhaps prohibitively so when considering that a dog park does not generate any revenue but its value is solely derived from the amenity it offers to the community
- If the community is not demanding or will not perceive a dog park as a useful amenity that justifies its cost, the Port should consider carefully if those funds could be applied toward another product or service that would either generate revenue, or sufficient “goodwill” so as to better justify the expense.

Respectfully submitted,

Port of Olympia Citizens Advisory Committee