

**BAINBRIDGE ISLAND METROPOLITAN PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT
PUBLIC HEARING: PROPOSED DOG PARK AREAS BATTLE POINT PARK
MAY 24, 2012
STRAWBERRY HILL CENTER**

CALL TO ORDER: A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order at 6:02 pm by Chair DeWitt.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Lee Cross, Ken DeWitt, Jay Kinney, Kirk Robinson, and Tom Swolgaard.

INTRODUCTION:

Chair DeWitt, introduced himself and the board members and staff present, and thanked everyone for coming. He announced that handouts were available for attendees to look at the proposed sites, and reminded people that the only discussion topics tonight are the proposed sites at Battle Point Park. Everyone will be allowed three minutes to speak, and people are also invited to submit written comments to Arlan Elms, Park Services Director, by the June first deadline.

PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Perry Barrett, Senior Planner, emphasized the invitation for people to submit comments via email before June first. Barrett also clarified that the Vincent Road site is not part of tonight's discussion, it is not owned by the District, and the property owners have asked that the site not be discussed.

Arlan Elms, Park Services Director, gave a brief overview of the two proposed off-leash sites at Battle Point Park, and the history of why they are being discussed tonight. In 2010, a Dog Area Working Group committee (DAWG) made recommendations regarding dog parks, including locations, enforcement and education. Originally three sites were recommended, Battle Point Park, Strawberry Hill Park, and a possible expansion and improvement at Eagledale Park. Over the last couple years the location has been narrowed down to two specific sites in Battle Point Park. The decision was guided by committee input and staff recommendations as well as the fact that the Battle Point Park comprehensive plan speaks to allowing a dog park. The south east corner is what we are looking at this evening, "Area A" and the "Corral Area." The south east area of the park is preferred because it is designated for active use, has very little development, and is underutilized; also there is adequate parking, restroom access, and a water source available. Both areas are proposed concept plans at this point, with easy access off the popular walking path. The whole south east area in general has nice views in and out, not obstructed by vegetation. "Area A," is three acres. Amenities in entry area may include, picnic bench, shelter, doggie bags, kiosk, drinking water and signage. This area would open into the play area with a self-closing gate. "Corral Area," is approximately one acre. Gated entry area would be about the same size, with same amenities. Fenced area would go all around the one acre corral site, including the corral. This site includes a proposal of signage to designate a larger, unfenced area to the east of the corral. During the dry season the designated off-leash dog area would be larger, and the signs could be pulled back during the wettest times of year.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Holly White, spoke to express that she was under the impression that general comments would be taken, her input may be better suited for public comment at a later time.

Catherine Purves, is more interested in off-leash hours, however she is appreciative and thanked the Board for being willing to do something for dog owners.

Peter Korytleo, south end resident, expressed opposition to both options. He cited that they are both underwater for months of the year, and believes they are too far from his house and therefore not convenient, as well as being not particularly interesting destinations.

Jack Salm, wanted to discuss something unrelated and would not have come if he realized this was only a discussion of Battle Point Park.

Becca Hanson, resident of Fletcher Bay, and a member of DAWG expressed appreciation for getting to the public meeting phase of the project. She appreciates that the Board wants to show good faith by offering these two options. She has exercised her dog in these areas in the past, and prefers Area A. On behalf of DAWG and the citizens with dogs, as well as the citizens who are concerned with dogs she believes we all want things to be good on the island and not divisive. She looks forward to the next steps and hopes Bainbridge Island can be a leader in innovation.

Steve Neff, resident of the south end asked what is in the budget for dog parks. Director Lande answered the question, saying \$35,000 has been budgeted for this year. Neff said he was surprised to find out that \$3,000-5,000 is budgeted by the District for doggie bags this year. He believes people should take personal responsibility and bring their own, allowing that money to be freed up for projects like dog parks.

Eleanor Wheeler, expressed support for both options as well as concern that even if both areas are adopted island dogs will still be underserved. She acknowledges that there are times when people cannot properly exercise their dogs due to physical restrictions and appreciates that these options would serve that population, due to being easily accessible with the parking nearby. There are positive attributes to the options presented in her view even though she may not use one herself.

Vickie Wenzlau, spoke to convey that she supports these locations, but worries about the area getting muddy. She expressed support for a linear park.

Marilyn Mandala, Winslow resident, prefers Area A. She thanked the Board for starting the process, acknowledging that everything has to start somewhere.

Bill Glasser, resident of Manzanita Bay area and 20 year resident of the island, believes either of these areas are acceptable and supports an off-leash area at Battle Point Park. He hopes the off-leash work does not stop here, believing more off-leash areas are needed.

Dennis Goans, walks his dog at Battle Point Park and supports an off-leash area there. He believes both options would be wonderful, yet Area A is preferable as it is closer to parking.

George Cawman, expressed gratitude to the Board for taking on this topic, for an underserved community, and thinks this is great first step. He lives across from Sands Field and was dismayed to see the signs that went up saying dogs were not welcome on the fields. He is glad something is being done and hopes the Board will look at more options for active use.

Wallace Couch, resident of Tolo Road, does not own a dog at this time, yet he spends about an hour a day walking at Battle Point Park, and enjoys interacting with the dogs. He expressed support for both off-leash areas, and allowing as much room as possible, further more he sees no reason for a fence and believes signs are sufficient.

Don Heppenstall, is an island resident in the Frog Rock neighborhood and a dog owner who has visited both proposed sites. He does not find the Corral Site acceptable, it is too small and he believes dogs and horses do not mix well. Area A he thinks is an acceptable site, nonetheless for numerous months of the year the site will be wet. He would like to see the fence extended a few more feet to the west as an improvement to the proposal. In closing he thanked the Board for listening to comments and looking out for the welfare of dogs.

Roger Katz, supports the premise that more is better for dogs, and acknowledges this as a good start, while there is a need for more. He has been to other dog parks and believes they are a great social area. He is concerned with mud, especially in regard to the already existing water problem. He thinks it is a good first step and requests that the Board consider other areas of the island.

Marielle Macville, resident of the south end of the island and owner of two dogs, expressed concern with having only one area at Battle Point Park. In her opinion there is already too much traffic at Battle Point Park, especially during soccer season. She would not drive to get to a dog park, and expressed concern that the proposed sites are too wet, similar to the existing dog park at Eagledale Park. She would like to approach the subject as finding a way for people to be able to get exercise, while they exercise their dog off-leash.

Terry Weldy, Winslow resident, walks her dog off-leash frequently, and believes that is what her dog needs. Different dogs need different exercise opportunities in her opinion, and she appreciates this as a beginning step.

Marylou Teske, island resident, owns a lab, and came tonight with the idea that this would be more than a discussion of Battle Point Park, she is concerned that there needs to be broader discussion and more options.

Commissioner Cross, echoed the ongoing theme that the scope of the issue of dogs on the island is huge, and that this is just a first step. The Board has to start with something finite that can be dealt with. Commissioner Swolgaard, added that the sites up for discussion came out of a citizen committee as a recommendation to the Board, and that this meeting is to gain input from the larger community regarding whether this is a good or bad idea.

Dylan Chalk, lives on Tolo Road next to Battle Point Park, and said the water that accumulates in the south east corner of the park runs off into his driveway. Feces and water quality running across his property is a large concern for him. He literally feels threatened by dogs and has not had good experiences with dogs since moving to the island. He has been bit by a dog, also while walking with his children riding in a carriage a puppy leaped in and onto them. He appreciates that dogs need a place to run, but emphasized that people need to be safe. He is concerned with both water quality and safety for his and all children on public land, and opposes both options presented.

Carol Austin, is concerned about the water after a lot of rain and about the parking not being in close enough proximity to the proposed sites. Her experience with Eagledale Dog Park is that it is a mud pit, and thinks that drainage needs to be addressed in all of these areas.

Paul Vibrans, has ice skated in Area A and finds it unacceptable, he believes emphasis must be put on drainage. He thinks the areas that were presented tonight as options, in part because they are underutilized, are underutilized because they are too wet for active use.

Marylou Vibrans, is concerned the locations may interfere with horse path and corral access, and the impact dogs could have on horse user groups.

Commissioner Robinson, said that the original horse corral agreement included possible dog use.

Robyn Teske, is opposed to a dog park at Battle Point Park. She expressed that not all dogs want to socialize, but they do need exercise. She would not want to see a lot of money spent on either of these options if they will not be used by a lot of people.

Jan Sanders, is concerned about traffic increasing in the park and hopes for more options in the future.

Scott Lowery, is a member of a non-leash dog walking group. He is opposed to both options, and thinks from his experiences elsewhere, that even on high ground a heavily used dog park will turn to mud. He does not have children, and believes his needs are not being met by restricting his use of public land with his dog.

Kirsten Fitzgerald, expressed her belief that regardless of the size of the off-leash dog park the grass will be ruined. Battle Point Park is beautiful and the proposed dog park usage will not be aesthetically pleasing, and will diminish the look of the park.

Elisa Romeo, lifetime resident who grew up on Bainbridge, is a dog owner and a parent who lives across the street from Battle Point Park. She expressed support for off-leash dog parks as an idea, but not at Battle Point Park. She has reservations regarding water at the location, in fact she kayaked in Area A two months ago. Parking proximity to dog area is an issue for her, she projects that people will have their dogs' off-leash arriving and leaving the park, which is a safety concern. She loves the park and thinks it is the best park for kids on the island, and would hate to see the dog park affect the use by children.

DISCUSSION:

An audience member asked the Board if the north east corner of the park has been eliminated for consideration as a dog park.

Chair DeWitt, answered that the Board directed staff to concentrate on areas roughly south of the soccer field and Transmitter building because that is the region that has been intensively used. Over the years the Board has heard that people like the northern part for more passive use. The north east corner has not been completely eliminated as a possibility.

An audience member stated that though the north east corner is wet parts of the year, the north west corner does not have the same issue and pointed out the fact that there is parking nearby.

Chair DeWitt, explained that during the formation process of the Battle Point Park Master Plan the majority of input from citizens supported that the north end be kept as a passive use area.

Audience member and dog owner Roger Katz, wants to address the issue of separation. As a runner and bicyclist he believes dogs running up to a person can be disconcerting, and suggests not relying on signs as the only barrier if the site is adjacent to a trail.

An audience member who supports an off-leash area at Battle Point Park wants to add his voice to those who worry about the drainage issues. If the District is going to go ahead with either of the proposed areas, he hopes they will do it right, with adequate drainage.

Audience member, Laurie O'Dell, expressed her belief that more needs to be done, yet having a dog park at Battle Point Park is a good idea. She suggested a larger oblong area in the south east corner, which could run along the fence.

An audience member brings up the fact that the drainage problem may make this area suboptimal and requested that someone speak to why these spots were chosen.

Park Services Director, Arlan Elms, reiterated the reasoning expressed at the beginning of the meeting, including that the south end is designated for active use, has parking nearby, is adjacent to the trail, and has a water source close by.

Director Lande, offered that in previous meetings regarding Battle Point Park, citizens wanted the north end left passive, and that the original 1972 deed of the park to the District also designated it as for passive use. Complications for allowing active use in this area include bird and wildlife habitat as well as the pond. During the Battle Point Park master plan process it was expressed that the hill allows for a sweeping view across the park and citizens wanted the north end left alone. He conceded that Battle Point Park may not be the most optimal spot but it is hard to find a place where everyone will be happy. It may not be a perfect location, but it is one of the few places that is open rather than forested.

An audience member spoke regarding taking into consideration that people who do not like dogs do not want to be near them, if this is such a popular park for people perhaps it not a good choice for a dog park.

Commissioner Robinson, said dogs have always been an issue as long as he has been on the Board and will probably always be. The Board hears from people all the time that have run-ins with dogs. He emphasized that the Board is trying to do something for this user group, and that some of the District parks have deed restrictions in regard to off-leash dogs.

Carrie Carver, owner of a Golden Retriever, spoke to express concern that when people walk by with their dogs on-leash next to the proposed enclosure, as both options are set along the popular walking path, they may be frustrated with barking dogs running up to the side of the fence nearest the path.

A Battle Point Park neighbor brought up the fact that it is already a heavily used park, and wonders what the impact of adding additional traffic to the mix will be.

Commissioner Cross, stated that the District is starting with Battle Point Park because it gets the most use, and therefore also the most complaints regarding off-leash dogs. There are real safety issues that must be addressed as the District is legally liable, consequently something needs to happen at Battle Point Park. If there are other options expressed by the public, such as the north west corner, that is useful for the Board to hear.

An audience member asked if Battle Point Park is so heavily used, why have an off-leash area at all?

Commissioner Cross, answered that because Battle Point Park is where a major problem is, the District proposes having a place to direct people with off-leash dogs to go within the park.

Karen Hamilton, suggested the area in the middle of the park north of the soccer fields.

Chair DeWitt, answered that that area is part of the water management for the soccer fields, and is also considered part of the north, passive use area.

An audience member suggested the possibility of joining the two areas and rerouting the path.

An audience member stated that, for future meetings, it would be helpful for the public if the District could publish which park's deeds speak specifically to the restriction of off-leash dogs.

Director Lande, answered that for certain, Gazzam, Meigs and Ted Olson have restrictions, the District is checking into the Grand Forest and Pritchard Park having possible restrictions.

The issue of dog restrictions on baseball fields was raised by a member of the audience. It was explained that issues with feces and urine in areas where children may be diving into the grass is a major concern.

The issue of people who do not pick up after their own dogs was raised and Commissioner Robinson encouraged everyone to help monitor other dog owners, in an effort to help user groups avoid conflicts.

Chair DeWitt, stated that the Board is aware of the fear of enforcement issues and that before the District gets to that stage, it is committed to provide a place for people to have their dogs off-leash. At that point, the education and finally the issues of enforcement and possible ticketing will be addressed.

Marylou Teske, is concerned that the Eagledale Dog Park is not used, and does not want to see the District spend money on another dog park project if it will not be used.

Deborah Baker, spoke to say she respects leash laws and uses the Eagledale Dog Park quite often, and considers it a good experience. Unfortunately the Eagledale location is a mud pit for a majority of the year, limiting its usefulness. She supports the Battle Point Park "Corral Area" option, as she would like to see another dog park that is functional year round.

Commissioner Kinney, suggested opening up the meeting for general comments. Commissioner Robinson, said a lot of people have already left because the Board said they would be limiting comments, so it may not be appropriate. Chair DeWitt, said he appreciates the restraint everyone has shown to keep comments on topic, and there will be other public meeting regarding this issue and opportunities to give input.

Commissioner Cross, assured audience members that written comments that are submitted mean a lot, and will all be looked at.

Chair DeWitt, opened the floor for ideas for topics to consider in the future.

Jack Salm, asked that the Board discuss the topic of alternate parks at a future meeting.

Senior Planner Barrett, explained that page 68 of the District's Comprehensive Plan lists proposed dog park sites, and that it would be a good place to start.

Marylou Vibrans asked about the possibility of an expansion or upgrade for Eagledale Dog Park, specifically if there is anything that can be done about the drainage.

Chair DeWitt, responded that yes, it is on the list of possibilities.

An audience member suggested that compliance with the leash laws may be better if the District put signs at the specific properties with deed restrictions to inform people as to the importance of compliance.

An audience member asked if the evidence of community uproar surrounding this issue is documented or anecdotal, and suggested that if it is not being documented, to start.

Director Lande, responded that much of it is anecdotal, but that the issue is real.

An audience member suggested that for those who are interested in data collection, PAWS of Bainbridge Island has a community pet needs survey online that could help with collecting data. They will be sharing the information they compile with the District.

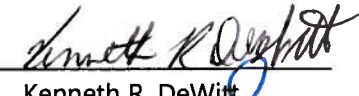
The Vincent Road site was brought up by an audience member, and it was reiterated that it has been tabled for now by the City, while they deal with an access issue, not because it is toxic.

Commissioner Robinson, clarified that Vincent Road is a former hazardous waste site. It has been cleaned up by the County and under the auspices of the Department of Ecology and it is safe for people and dogs to be there.


Chair DeWitt thanked everyone for coming, and encouraged attendees to call or email with additional input.

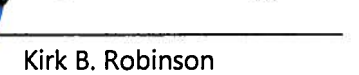
MEETING ADJOURNED at 8:39 pm.

Helen M. Stone
Terry M. Lande
BAINBRIDGE ISLAND METROPOLITAN
PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT

BY: 
Kenneth R. DeWitt

BY: 
John Thomas Swolgaard

BY: 
Jay C. Kinney

BY: 
Kirk B. Robinson

ATTEST: 
Lee Cross