



Recreation and Parks Consulting

DOG PARKS • PLAYGROUND SAFETY • THE "GUESS-TI-MATE"

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Dog Park Evaluation with Recommendations

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The following evaluation is provided in the form of an overview that identifies the positives and negatives of the existing dog park in South Nyack via a series of categories; each item that has a corresponding recommendation for improvements or additional comments will be indicated. This first section is then followed by a separate listing of evaluations and recommendations for other features reflecting specific concerns not indicated elsewhere in this report covered in the basic categories.

Design Elements

- The design and layout of the dog park is considerably smaller than the recommended one acre minimum. However, the space is appreciated by the community and possesses several characteristics that enable it to be utilized as a small dog park in a small community that makes its usage unlikely to be overcrowded with the typical problems that would accompany overused dog park conditions.
- The design, size and topography allow for satisfactory monitoring of dogs by the owners. (See "Benches" category below)
- Though parking has been problematic on Elizabeth Place, particularly in relation to the understandable complaints from the neighboring residents, recommendations can alleviate at least some of these issues.

RECOMMENDATION: Extend the white line that indicates parking along South Broadway; the line appears on the roadway towards Hamilton and Livingston Places but should extend all the way up to Elizabeth Place to encourage dog park users to park along South Broadway vs. on Elizabeth Place.

Natural Features and Elements

- There are no sight line issues re: monitoring. However, there *are* some concerns, related to the steep slope area, with overhanging tree branches that block the monitoring ability.
RECOMMENDATION: As those branches, covered with leaves in the spring, summer and early fall months, prevent clear vision for monitoring dogs, they should be trimmed and removed. They are problematic mostly because the steep slope causes these lower branches to nearly touch the ground. Trimming them will allow for unblocked monitoring and will probably improve the aesthetics of those areas.

- Shade is available in several perimeter areas, for both dogs and owners. Thus additional shade, whether via structures or trees, are not needed.

Structural Elements

- Fencing, though some is old and in questionable condition, is adequate, at least for the time being. Though the fencing along the top of the sloped area is not of the 5' minimum recommended height, it does not appear to be problematic due to the narrow "pathway" along that upper section. It simply seems unlikely that a dog would attempt to scale the fence given the pathway's adjacent steep grade. Thus, heightening the fencing there seems unnecessary; again, at least for the time being.
- The "transition entry" is very small; especially since the minimum recommended space is at least 10' X 10' or 100 square feet. However, unless other changes relating to the fencing are to be made, especially in relation to creating another fenced enclosure, enlarging the transition entry need not be a priority at this time. However, the appropriate use of the transition entry ought to be explained and encouraged via signage since the entry gates are often left open. (See "Signage" category below)
- The "hardscape" surfacing should be extended well beyond the transition entry area.
RECOMMENDATION: Ideally, the hardscape area beyond the transition entry should form an extended "apron" type shape well into the fenced enclosure. This area gets badly worn in dog parks and seldom will grass grow there. This is evident in the existing dog park. Though not a major priority, it would certainly improve the dog park's aesthetics and ultimately make for somewhat easier maintenance. In addition, hardscape surfacing should be under the benches, extending from the apron. This makes for easier maintenance AND allows the perfect place for wheelchairs to utilize the dog park and be seated near other park users (Remember: the dog park must be ADA accessible, as all park facilities)

Benches

- As the picnic table has been removed as per my informal recommendation (picnic tables should *never* be in a dog park – they encourage owners to face one another vs. monitoring their dogs as well as encouraging inappropriate dog park activities such as eating, etc.), park benches substituted.
RECOMMENDATION: Commercial park benches should be placed in the dog park along the east side perimeter fencing. That location provided some shade for users and allows for monitoring the entire space. At least two benches, placed next to one another, are recommended.

Fountains

- As water is provided in the dog park, this is a very positive component that is *always* recommended. However, this feature can and should be improved upon.
RECOMMENDATION: A "dog fountain" should be installed vs. the existing feature. As the plumbing is essentially in place, purchasing and mounting such a fountain should not be too costly or difficult. This would be a vast improvement for the dog park, especially aesthetically and functionally; it would improve the "messy" appearance of the current "water area" and it would discourage bowls being brought into the park. A regular fountain (for people) could easily be an added feature if desirable/affordable.

Waste Bag Stations

- As waste bags are available via dispensers, and *appear* to be replenished as needed, this is another plus for the dog park. Perhaps in the future, an additional dispenser may be desirable and/or different location(s) may be recommended; for now, however, the existing provision for waste bags seems to be satisfactory.

COMMENT: If the current waste bags are unsatisfactory (e.g. too expensive, etc.), alternate suppliers and/or waste bag products may be sought.

Waste Cans

- Though a waste can is provided by the dog park entry, it is unsatisfactory as it appears to be in poor condition and does not contain a top.

RECOMMENDATION: Securely closing waste cans are necessary for a dog park and should be purchased and installed. It should also be placed *inside* the dog park in a convenient location for both the users of the dog park and the DPW workers who will empty it regularly.

COMMENT: If desired, a waste can specifically designed for dog parks can be identified and related information provided.

Signage

- The existing signage is minimal and must be improved.

RECOMMENDATION: First, a sign should be provided that indicates the park name, “South Nyack Dog Park” (it’s really not a “dog run” which has more of an urban connotation) or whatever name might be decided upon. The name can be on a separate sign or at the top of a new “rules” sign; in *some* manner, it should indicate, at the top, that it is a South Nyack park facility. Ideally, it should be a sign that is uniform with other South Nyack parks or other municipal facilities. Next, the rules must be extended, formally and legally placed in the municipal code of ordinances and then identified clearly on signage at the dog park. A suggested list of rules and additional information for new signage is provided separately and accompanies this report.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, INFORMATION, RECOMMENDATIONS, etc.

The following are recommendations, very specific to the South Nyack dog park, relating to concerns and issues currently being experienced but not indicated above (provided in no particular order...):

- The hours should be changed to reflect the typical “dawn to dusk” hours most dog parks use. Rather than indicating *exact* hours (e.g. 7:00am - 7:00pm or similar), “dawn to dusk” allows for seasonal changes in natural light. In addition, the extremely limited hours indicated on the existing signage seem to be unpopular and without current justification.
- The wooded, slope areas along the especially along the north and west sides of the park could use some “clean up”. There are many broken branches, sticks, twigs, brush, rocks (some quite large) and litter throughout that space. Cleaning that area combined with the recommended tree branch trimming would ease monitoring and improve aesthetics and safety throughout the sloped spaces.
- If screening is truly deemed necessary, re: nearby neighbors, hedges or a tree line could be created along the existing fence down the “middle” of the park.
- Ideally, the hard surface area towards the middle of the dog park should be removed if at all possible. It is unnecessary and potentially very hot in the summer on dogs’ paws. Other than hardscape surfaces around the entry, apron and under benches, etc., the rest of the park should be grass covered or “natural” (as throughout the sloped areas). Perhaps when that existing hard surface is removed, that area, and the space just beyond where the hardscape apron should be, could be seeded for additional grass/natural coverage.
- If an additional space is considered, such as for “small dogs only”, the recommendation would be to utilize some of the green space nearer to the existing dog park entrance vs. closer to the stairway. The design for the new space would try to maintain a good distance from the existing playgrounds as well as avoid interference with the natural walkway from the stairway. If requested, a suggested design could be provided.

- Dog walkers issue: Several hours of research was done on this topic, as well as a discussion with an area veterinarian. It is commendable that the Village Board is interested in trying to accommodate these local businesses but it is definitely a challenge to do so. The issue is one of safety – for ALL involved: the dog walkers, the dogs under the dog walkers’ care and other park users and *their* dogs. Even compromise is difficult. The rule at the overwhelming majority of dog parks across the country is a maximum of two or three dogs per person being brought into the dog park at one time. In addition, it’s important to remember that the dog walkers are not the *owners* of the dogs

All that said, a few thoughts have surfaced that *could* be experimented with; however, I am NOT recommending any of these with the possible exception of the last one, which I believe I actually may have mentioned at the meeting I attended. I simply must stand by my two or three dog per person maximum to maximize safety, the absolute priority for any dog park.

Remember, too, that the dogs being brought into a dog park by a dog walker are not being brought in by their *owners*; canine behavior is typically better and more predictable when dogs are handled by their owners who know them best.

- Perhaps a particular daily time period for dog walkers could be arranged; maybe a “dog walkers ONLY” time at the dog park. Signage could indicate this time period to all the other users. Problems, however, could include more than one dog walker desiring to use that time period at a time; thus possibly MANY dogs and VERY FEW people monitoring those dogs, increasing the risk of an incident. In addition, enforcement would likely be problematic and
- If a separate space was created for “small dogs only”, as suggested above, that space might also be able to accommodate dog walkers, though probably only one at a time, as the space would be very small. This option would still allow small dogs to utilize the main fenced enclosure. Problems here, however, might involve some semblance of scheduling which, again, would require some enforcement.

NOTE: For both of these above options, the village might consider fees from dog walkers for the privilege of exclusive time in a portion of a public park. (Again, however, these options have some “built-in” problems that I simply can’t recommend)

- Dog walkers could be required to bring additional individuals into the dog park with them in order to meet the maximum of three dogs per person rule. This would be fair but probably quite difficult for the dog walkers.

- Suggested, basic rules are on a separate sheet. This listing should be considered a draft and several items may be altered as needed or desired by the Village.