

## SECTION 6 ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL DOG PARK SITES IN BELFAST

With the design considerations for a successful off-leash recreation area in mind, the Belfast Dog Park exploratory group obtained a map from the Belfast Planning Office showing all the publicly owned lands in the city.

After studying the map and identifying all city-owned properties, the group first agreed upon several city-owned properties that we would exclude for consideration as potential sites for a dog park. These sites included Steamboat Landing, Heritage Park, and Belfast Common, as we



Of all city-owned properties, only Belfast City Park, Wales Park, or Walsh Field have most of the components critical to a successful dog park in Belfast. Of these three, the Walsh Field site appears to be the most promising.

assumed that restricting any portion of these highly prized properties would be inappropriate and politically unfeasible. Ironically, Steamboat Landing serves currently as the city's *de facto* dog park; it is certainly the city park most visited every day by Belfast dogs and their owners.

After determining the sites that would be excluded from consideration, the exploratory group then set out to inspect seven locations that we thought might be possible sites for a dog park. The sites included 1) the "old ski slope area" on outer High Street, 2) Sportsman's Park on Shepard Road, 3) the site of the former city landfill on Pitcher Road, 4) a wooded parcel in the Belfast Industrial Park just south of the airport runway, 5) an undeveloped area in Belfast City Park, 6) Wales Park, and 7) an area in the Walsh Field Recreation Area.

We rejected four of the sites because of their remoteness or the high costs that would be associated with site preparation, construction, and/or the providing critical components (e.g., potable water, restroom facilities). In addition, we were concerned that a remote site would not be as well used as a central one and would cause some dog owners a sense of insecurity when using the park alone.

We determined that three areas warranted further consideration: 1) the undeveloped area in Belfast City Park; 2) Wales Park; and 3) the undeveloped parcel in the Walsh Field Recreation Area. A summary of our evaluation of each of the three sites follows.

## BELFAST CITY PARK

This is an undeveloped, grassy area in the south-east corner of the park, below the children's playground area.



### ADVANTAGES

- ◆ Gently sloping land with a spectacular water view.
- ◆ Sea breezes to cool site and keep bugs at bay.
- ◆ Parking, potable water, and restroom facilities nearby.
- ◆ Accessible by foot to most people inside the bypass.
- ◆ Other focused recreational areas nearby — such as tennis courts, swimming pool, and playground — setting a precedent for a specially designated recreation area, in this case for the city's dog owners.

The Belfast City Park site, just below the playground area, is too small to accommodate a number of dogs, and has very poor drainage in the spring.

### DISADVANTAGES

- ◆ Less than half acre available is too small for a city's sole dog park: crowding dogs could lead to aggressive behavior and make maintenance more difficult.
- ◆ Not enough space for a separate area for small dogs.

- ◆ Proximity to playground could overexcite some dogs.
- ◆ Site has very poor drainage in springtime.
- ◆ City Park is not currently open to cars in winter.
- ◆ No shade for dogs, little for owners; landscaping would be required and would further decrease amount of open play area for dogs; also, the area would need to be screened from playground with shrubbery.
- ◆ Location might be perceived as less accessible to people from the East Side and neighboring communities.
- ◆ Nearby residents may object to project.

## WALES PARK

Top of Main Street hill, at intersection of Main Street and Lincolnville Avenue; between Congress Street and Lincolnville Avenue.

### ADVANTAGES

- Flat, well-drained, already developed field.
- Accessible by foot to most people inside the bypass as well as by car.
- Easily accessible year-round.
- Distant water view, pleasant vista and neighborhood.
- Breezy elevated location might keep bugs down.
- Parking area, small pavilion.
- Possibly the least-used public park in Belfast; it is curiously empty except for transient teenagers and a short season for peewee football players.
- At least one neighbor highly supportive of using this area for dog park.



Wales Park is also too small, and has inadequate parking.

## DISADVANTAGES

- ◆ Less than an acre of usable space, not adequate space for the city's sole municipal dog park; crowding and overuse could become an issue here.
- ◆ Little shade for dogs; landscaping would be required and would reduce open space available for play.
- ◆ Some traffic noise from Main Street.
- ◆ Six-foot chain link fencing may be perceived as obtrusive in such a visible location.
- ◆ Minimal space for parking; five or six cars would fill space currently available.
- ◆ Neighboring residents may prefer to keep park empty or object to using it specifically as dog park.
- ◆ Traditional users of park may feel they "own" it.

## WALSH FIELD RECREATION AREA

This is an undeveloped parcel adjacent to the baseball diamond in the Walsh Field Recreation Area; access to the area is off Route 5 (Lincolnvil Avenue) south of US Route 1.



## ADVANTAGES

- ◆ More than an acre of relatively flat, well-drained land.
- ◆ Ample paved parking in proximity of site.
- ◆ Potable water, restroom facilities, and sidewalk to site.
- ◆ Pleasant view of surrounding wetlands and ball fields.

- ◆ Adjacent ball diamonds already surrounded by tall chain-link fences, making prospective dog park fairly unobtrusive.
- ◆ No residential neighbors.
- ◆ Ample space for additional, specially designated areas for small dogs or shy/aggressive dogs or solo training exercises.
- ◆ Equally accessible for East Side residents, downtown residents, and even people from neighboring communities.
- ◆ Not already designated formally or informally for another use; it is land that has never been developed or used by the city.



The undeveloped (and unmowed) site at the Walsh Field Recreation Area appears to have all of the attributes needed for a successful dog park, and looks to be the least expensive to turn into an off-leash recreational area.

## DISADVANTAGES

- ◆ Outside the bypass; essentially inaccessible by foot for most Belfast residents.
- ◆ Traffic noise from Route 1.
- ◆ Low-flying aircraft cause noise and may possibly spook some dogs.
- ◆ Undeveloped nature of the parcel may require grading, adding an expense.
- ◆ No shade exists at current time for dogs or owners; landscaping and/or construction of one or more shelters would be required.
- ◆ Parking may be a problem when adjoining ball diamonds are in use.
- ◆ Possibly a buggy area in spring or summer (though that doesn't seem to be a problem for ball players and fans).
- ◆ Accessibility in winter might be an issue.