

The New Bedford Dog Park – Will it End as an Urban Myth?



by
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With 46.3 million households owning a dog in the U.S. this year, it's no secret that people enjoy the companionship of "man's best friend." And that definitely applies to the city of New Bedford. One has only to drive by a local park or wander past a neighbor's house to interact with a dog.

Living in the city with a dog can present its challenges though. For one thing, a number of New Bedford citizens live in multi-unit buildings or tenements. Living in an apartment usually means a lack of yard space for your dog to enjoy, and we all know that dogs need consistent exercise to remain healthy and happy. For that reason, an official dog park would be a welcome sight to many.

The battle for an official dog park in New Bedford, which makes so much sense to many, has been going on for over four years now. The city formed an official Dog Park Committee in 2008, but despite taking the initiative to form a committee, they've been unable to come to a consensus on where the dog park should be located.



While this committee was holding meetings and getting nowhere fast, local dog owners took to a state-owned lot on Hawthorn Street to exercise and socialize their dogs, which quickly became known as the city's "unofficial dog park." However, city

officials took note of the use of this lot and began issuing tickets to people who were allowing their dogs off leash, a violation of a city ordinance.

The most recent development in the plight for a New Bedford dog park involves city officials reaching out to the Dartmouth Dog Advisory Work Group, or DDAWG. DDAWG is a non-profit organization, not a town committee, which successfully lobbied to use a 12-acre lot of the Dartmouth Regional Park and Trails complex located off Old Fall River Road for a Dartmouth dog park.

Though that project has come to a halt due a lack of funds, New Bedford officials feel that partnering with DDAWG would be beneficial because according to Ward 5 City Councilor Jane Gonsalves, a dog park committee member, "We don't have as much land as Dartmouth does." Ward 6 City Councilor Joe Lopes also noted that partnering with the Dartmouth group would divide the cost between the two cities. However, the last reported activity regarding this partnership initiative is that DDAWG refused an invitation to meet with the New Bedford Dog Park Committee in November.

While all of this has been going on, Fall River has managed to develop a city dog park located on Locust Street, complete with separate fenced-in areas for small and large-breed dogs. Their dog park successfully operates without any paid attendants or Animal Control enforcement. Dog owners are simply reminded to pick up after their dogs, and the consensus seems to be that it's operating successfully.



In fact, the park is so popular that it has its own Facebook page, complete with photos and interaction between park-goers. The Fall River community became so involved with the dog park effort that funds were raised to purchase doggie play equipment and vocational school students were allowed to build metal benches, making the space even more inviting to dog owners far and wide.

Following the quandary of the New Bedford dog park reads more and more like a mystery novel. While well-running dog parks are popping up all over the country, New Bedford seems unable, or perhaps unmotivated to create a much-needed space for dogs and their owners.

It's frustrating to see search results that say, "Sorry, there are no off-leash dog parks in New Bedford, MA," when you run a Google search for "New Bedford dog park." Why should New Bedford residents have to pack up their pets and drive to Fall River or other communities that have dog parks? With a little persistence and focus, I feel like New Bedford should be able to accomplish this. The countless dogs and dog owners that call this city home would be thankful.

Will the effort and time pay off, or will the New Bedford dog park end as an urban myth?

Elizabeth Cincotta is one of the co-founders of the Daily Dog Blog. Follow their Facebook page for updates. Leave her a comment here or contact her at Beth@dailydogblog.org.