



Community Preservation Act Committee - Proposal Request Form for FY 2019

Project Title: Amherst Dog Park Property Purchase

CPA funding category: Check all that apply

<input type="checkbox"/>	Community Housing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Open Space
<input type="checkbox"/>	Historic Preservation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Recreation

Amount of CPA Funds Requested: \$200,000

Submitting Entity: Amherst Dog Park Task Force

Contact Person: Ellen Keiter

Phone: 914-707-1845

Email: e_keiter@yahoo.com

Please complete this form in its entirety and include the following in your proposal.

Overview of Proposal: Please describe your project and your feasibility analysis

The Amherst Dog Park Task Force was established in spring 2017 with a charge to shepherd the process of establishing a public dog park in town and to make recommendations to the Town Manager based on its findings. Under the Community Preservation Act (CPA) classifications of open space and recreation, the Task Force respectfully requests \$200,000 for the purchase of land on which to build the town's first public dog park. Members of the Task Force believe a dog park will greatly benefit the town's canine citizens, their humans, and the Amherst community at large. The vision is to construct a simple yet high-quality enclosed park that promotes off-leash play in a well-maintained and safe environment. The Amherst Dog Park will be free to all visitors and sustained by volunteers.

In spring 2017, from a large applicant pool, Town Manager Paul Bockleman appointed nine members to the Task Force; they are: Nina Allen, Mike Chesworth (Secretary), Ana Devlin Gauthier, Ted Diamond (Vice Chair), Kaye Dougan, Gina Fusco, Jack Jemsek, Ellen Keiter, and Jim Pistrang (Chair). Three non-voting members also serve on the Task Force: Dave Ziomek, Director of Conservation and Development; Carol Hepburn, Amherst Animal Welfare Officer; and Jim Wald, Select Board liaison. To date, the Task Force has conducted five all-member meetings. Its five working subcommittees—Site Location, Design, Fundraising, Rules and Regulations, and Sustainability—have each met once. All Task Force meetings are posted and the public is welcome to attend.

The Task Force is fortunate to benefit from the experiences of successful dog parks across the country and the guidance of national organizations like the American Kennel Club that have issued recommendations and procedures for establishing community dog parks. The largest challenge to date has been locating an ideal site for the construction of a dog park. The Task Force has worked closely with Amherst town staff to identify possible public and private locations. While the first choice is to obtain donated land or land already owned by the town, the Task Force is keenly aware it will likely need to purchase property. The Task Force, in concert with Dave Ziomek, has identified four potential parcels for sale (property appraisals are currently underway). Each of the properties meet the following Task Force criteria: a minimum of 1½ acres in a non-residential area with proximity to a public water supply and adequate space to allow for off-street parking.

The Amherst Dog Park will be free and open to all people. It will have trees for shade and comfortable benches for visitors. As a public recreational area, the park will be ADA compliant. If space allows, there will be two separate fenced-in areas, one for small dogs, the other for large dogs. The enclosures, four-to six-foot high, will be constructed of agricultural fencing and have dual-gate entries to prevent dogs from escaping. Ample cleaning supplies, including covered garbage cans and waste bags, will be available. The Amherst Dog Park will be open year round from dawn to dusk; it will not have artificial lighting nor restroom facilities.

There are 1,610 dogs licensed in the town of Amherst. Despite this high figure, there remains a dearth of dog parks in the surrounding geographic area. The nearest public dog parks are in Agawam, Granby, and Greenfield, all a 30-minute drive from downtown Amherst. Plans were recently unveiled for a new, private dog park sited on 18 acres in Northampton, but a high annual membership fee will exclude many families from joining.

Research supports the public health and safety benefits of community dog parks. Off-leash play areas allow dogs to exercise and socialize safely, while also encouraging people to be outside and moving. Dog parks promote responsible dog ownership and make it easier for a town to enforce its leash laws and licensing requirements. Most importantly, dog parks are ideal locations for dog people to meet others with common interests. The love people share for their dogs reaches beyond economic and social barriers and helps foster a sense of community.

There is demonstrated support for a dog park among residents of Amherst. Two public meetings, one in 2015 and one early in 2017, generated large turnouts. Over twenty residents applied for the nine-member Task Force (an unprecedented number for any town committee in recent years), and interest in the park has remained high since the Task Force began meeting in the spring of 2017.

Describe how your request meets the CPA criteria

1. Description of funding needed, including:

a. Documentation of cost estimates, budget

The cost estimates for this proposal are based on an approximate price to purchase land in the town of Amherst, which will be confirmed by appraisal. Information on the site to be purchased will be provided to CPAC after January 1, 2018.

b. Other sources of funding

The Amherst Dog Park Task Force intends to match CPA funds with \$250,000 in grants from the Stanton Foundation, which supports the development of enclosed dog parks in Massachusetts. If secured, a Stanton Foundation grant will fund 90% of the dog park's hard construction costs, including labor and

materials. Stanton grants are non-competitive and likely to be awarded if land is held by the town. To date, the Stanton Foundation has supported 30 dog parks across the state, including those in Agawam, Greenfield, and Ludlow.

It is important to note that the Stanton Foundation does not fund land purchases. In order to receive financial backing, the Foundation requires a dog park be constructed on *town-owned property*. Furthermore, the applicant must contribute a 10% match (\$25,000) on hard construction costs. This contribution must be in cash, not in-kind services. The Task Force proposes to raise this money through private contributions such as a Kickstarter campaign or a “buy a brick” fundraiser.

Notably, Peter Wells of Berkshire Design Group has generously offered his design services pro bono for the Stanton Foundation application. This includes preparation of schematics, preliminary drawings, bid documents and, if necessary, an initial site survey. Berkshire Design Group is an award-winning firm of landscape architects, civil engineers, and land surveyors headquartered in Northampton, MA, with experience designing dog parks.

c. Timeline on how CPA funds would be spent, including over multiple years

Thanks to early and ongoing property research, the Amherst Dog Park Task Force anticipates using the full amount of CPA funds within six months of notification (by December 2018). The Task Force will have additional information regarding potential properties after the December 8, 2017 submission deadline, but before CPAC makes its final decision; it will provide updates to the committee. This information will include a review of town-owned sites that were considered for the dog park but ultimately deemed infeasible by the town.

2. Urgency of the project, if any.

Citizen interest in a dog park has grown steadily in Amherst over the past ten years. The Amherst Dog Park Task Force cannot apply to the Stanton Foundation until land has been secured and town ownership is demonstrated. The Stanton Foundation accepts applications on a rolling basis, but only allots ten grants per calendar year. The Task Force hopes to submit its grant application as soon as possible in 2018.

3. Estimated timeline from receipt of funds to project completion.

Once land has been purchased, the Amherst Dog Park Task Force will apply to the Stanton Foundation for the maximum amount of \$250,000 to cover the design and construction costs of the Amherst Dog Park. If awarded, the Task Force expects completion of the park within six to twelve months of Stanton grant approval.

4. Acquisition or preservation of threatened resources.

Although the purpose of land acquisition is not for conservation, the Amherst Dog Park Task Force will establish a management plan to serve as good stewards of the recreational property. The Task Force is exploring sustainable waste management options, such as an anaerobic digester or composting system, to reduce the impact of dog waste on the environment. It will ensure the property retains as many large-growth trees as possible and that the land drains properly to prevent standing water. If CPA funding is used, the land must be preserved for “open space” purposes in perpetuity.

5. Populations(s) to be served by the project.

The Amherst Dog Park will serve the entire population of Amherst and its visitors. It will be a recreational locus for dogs to exercise and socialize, as well as a gathering place where people from diverse neighborhoods and backgrounds can meet and form friendships. The American Society for the

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) estimates that 44% of American households have a dog—that’s nearly half the U.S. population! Households with dogs reach across all economic, ethnic, and cultural communities. Approximately 50% of Amherst residents live in condominiums or rental apartments and do not have access to open space to exercise their pets off leash. A public dog park in Amherst will enhance the livability of a town already rich in culture, education, and open space.

6. How will the CPA investment in your property, facility, or project be maintained over time?

Public education for dog families will be critical to the park’s success. Rules and regulations will be prominently posted. This entails people cleaning up after their dogs, quieting excessive barking, and curtailing any aggressive behavior. The park itself will provide a terrific venue for teaching responsible dog care (all dogs must be vaccinated and licensed, for example). Maintenance is another vital consideration. The Task Force will establish a Friends of the Amherst Dog Park group to help care for the site, such as organizing park clean up days at the beginning of each season. The Friends group may hold “Dog Park Do’s and Don’ts” workshops when it first opens. It will also be the responsibility of the Friends group to continually supply the park with waste bags and other necessities. The group will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the town of Amherst detailing expectations and responsibilities with the aim of minimizing impact on town resources.

The Task Force is poised to launch a concerted campaign to build strong community support for the Amherst Dog Park. This will be accomplished through an active social media presence and wide disbursement of printed materials.

7. Which relevant Town committees and/or commissions are you working with?

The Amherst Dog Park Task Force made a formal presentation at Town Meeting on November 6, 2017. Task Force Chairman Jim Pistrang met with the board of the Leisure Services and Supplemental Education Commission. The Commission embraced the project and plans to submit a letter of support to CPAC. Mr. Pistrang and other members of the Task Force will meet with the Conservation Committee on December 13 with the hope that it, too, will follow up with a letter of support.

8. Other information regarding the project deemed necessary for CPA?

The Amherst Dog Park Task Force remains hopeful that public land will become available for the dog park. If such land is indeed available, it will greatly reduce the scope of this CPA funding request. The Task Force will notify CPAC immediately if there are changes to its application.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Pistrang (Chair) jim@jpcr.com

Nina Allen

Mike Chesworth

Ana Devlin Gauthier

Ted Diamond

Kaye Dougan

Gina Fusco

Jack Jemsek

Ellen Keiter

<https://www.amherstma.gov/3344/Dog-Park-Task-Force>