



## New York State Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation

Saratoga/Capital District - 19 Roosevelt Drive, Saratoga Springs, New York 12866  
518-584-2000 Fax: 518-584-5694  
www.nysparks.com

Received  
JUL 15 2014  
Finance Dept  
MP

Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor

Rose Harvey  
Commissioner

Alane Ball Chinian  
Regional Director

Commissioners,

NYS Parks takes every opportunity to be as welcoming to our patrons as possible. For many patrons, this means being welcoming to their four-legged friends. For many years now, an area in Saratoga Spa State Park has been used as a semi-formalized off-leash area for dogs. This area was initially simply a place to go that was outside of the main park, away from the crowds and people who may not like dogs. But in recent years it has become apparent that a more formalized situation is needed. Consistent with the findings of the 2009 Master Plan, Saratoga Spa State Park is progressing plans to construct a formal, fenced dog park within Saratoga Spa State Park. The Park would like to partner with the city of Saratoga Springs and a local citizen group to complete this project, which would be a major amenity for the Park, the city and its residents.

According to NYS Parks and Recreation Law, dogs must be on leash at all times within a State Park. Nevertheless, for years, dog owners who wished to play with their dogs off-leash were asked to go to the area across Rt. 9 from the main park. However, with the addition of the Karner blue butterfly to the list of federally endangered species in 1992, it became apparent that the laissez-faire nature of the site wasn't ideal, but the limited use was deemed reasonable. Then, when the paved parking area was constructed by DOT in 1999/2000, initially constructed as an information stop for visitors coming into downtown, the impromptu dog park started to become more popular. In an attempt to better manage the up-and-coming use, the Park posted rules pertaining to where and how dogs were permitted to be off-leash, as well as information about restrictions in areas utilized by the Karner blue butterfly, with mixed results.

This is basically the situation that has persisted to this day. However, this situation is still less than ideal. This situation is still not in conformance with NYS Parks and Recreation Law, which states that all pets must be on a leash of no longer than 6 feet in length when visiting a state park. The Karner blues, and state threatened frosted elfin butterflies also found adjacent to the site, are continuing to be impacted. And, without a fence, the off-leash area is not as safe as it should be for dogs playing so close to busy Rt. 9.

Recognizing these issues, and the outcry from the public for an area for off-leash dog recreation, the subject of the off-leash area was an important topic of the 2009 Master Plan for Saratoga Spa State Park. As a result of discussions between State Parks, DEC, and US Fish and Wildlife Service staff as well as the public, the Park decided to look for a compromise by including in the final Master Plan, a proposal to construct a fenced dog park at the site of the current off-leash area. Since that time, the conceptual idea for a fenced dog park in this location has been adapted into the current proposal for a roughly 1.725 acre fenced area for dogs at the current off-leash area, an open field east of Rt. 9 along Crescent St. (see figure 1).

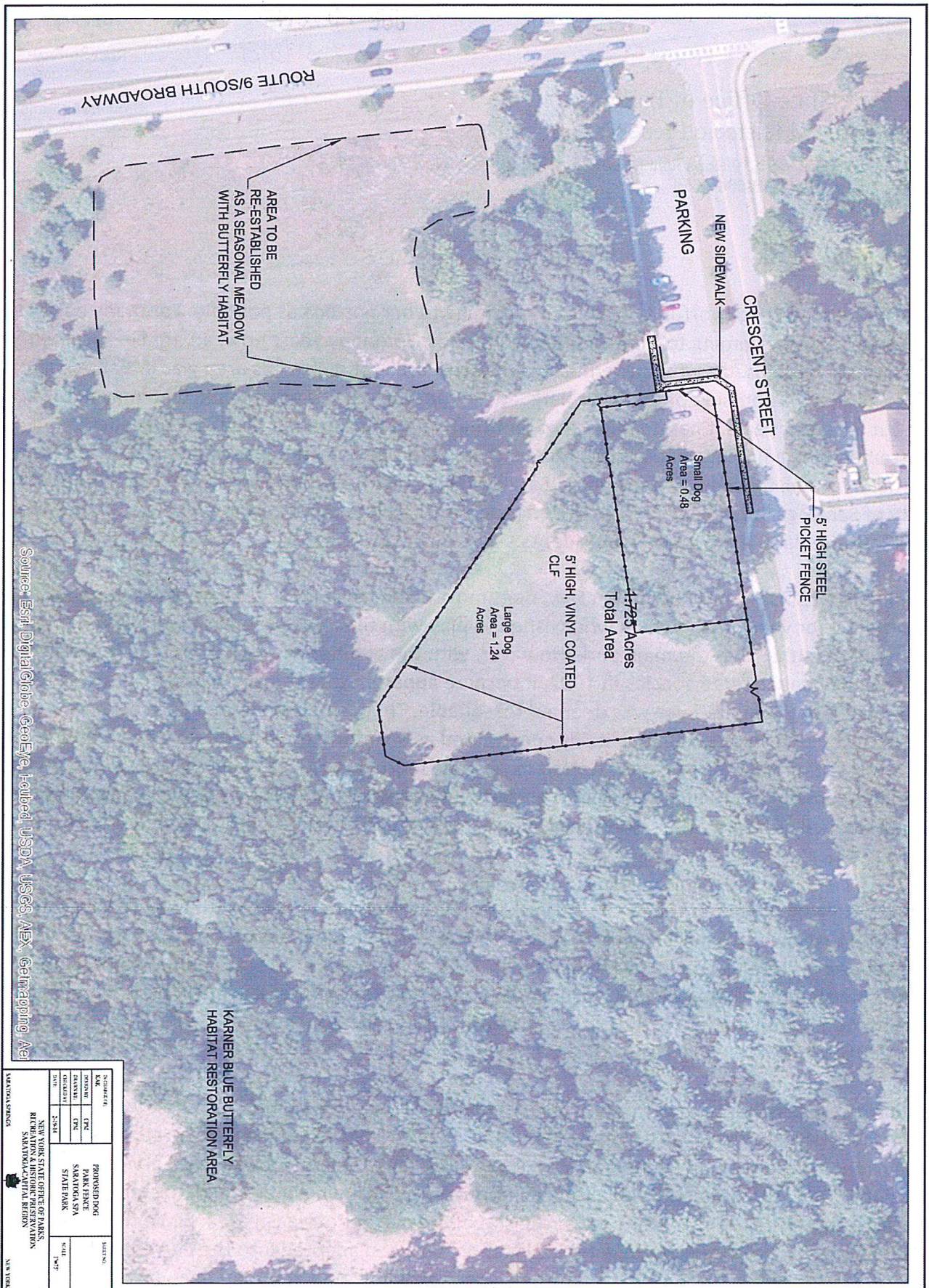


Figure 1.

A fenced in dog area will create a safe recreation area for dogs and their owners. The fence will reduce the incidence of runaway dogs and keep dogs segregated from Rt. 9 and Crescent Street, reducing the possibility of vehicle collisions. The double-gate entry/exit will provide a secure area for patrons to safely transition their dogs from leashed to unleashed, and vice versa. The separated small dog area will provide a safe environment for small dogs, free of large dogs that may unintentionally harm them, while also providing small dog owners with the option to use the large dog enclosure if they wish.

A more formal location and framework for off-leash dog access will also enable better protection for the Karner blue and frosted elfin butterflies. Many things have the potential to impact the rare butterfly populations. Most of these things, like cold spring rains or a lack of snow cover, are uncontrollable. However, restricting access to their habitat by off-leash dogs, which can trample butterflies and the plants they rely on, is something we can have some control over. And by federal law and our commitment to protecting the state's biodiversity for all citizens, we are obligated to do what we can to protect these species. A fenced off-leash area would be a good compromise to our shared goals of providing exceptional recreational opportunities while fulfilling our federally endangered species protection obligations.

As proposed, the site would include:

- Approximately 1.725 acres of off-leash access
- Approximately 0.48 acres dedicated to small dogs and 1.24 acres available to small and large dogs.
- An approximately 0.7 acre wooded area to be thinned in order to retain larger trees but remove the understory for open access to natural shade.
- A double-gate entry/exit to ensure control of dogs while entering/exiting the fenced play area.
- Fully accessible sidewalks connecting the parking lot, the dog park entrance, and existing sidewalks.

The proposed site plan incorporates two types of fencing – an aluminum picket fence for areas visible along Rt. 9 and Crescent Street and a chain-link fence along the less visible portions of the enclosure. The picket fence is intended to present a more appealing façade on those sides that are highly visible along the main gateway through the State Park and entrance into downtown Saratoga Springs. The chain-link fence is recommended as a more economical way to securely complete the enclosure.

We ask the City to partner with us to construct this public amenity in 2015. We propose that the Park and the City each contribute ½ of the total base project cost. The current estimate for the complete project is \$65,536.46 (see table 1). This estimate reflects all materials and construction needs, including site work, as well as State contracting requirements such as the use of prevailing wage. This is the current best estimate of the costs, however, the true cost won't be known until after a formal competitive bid process. Assuming the current estimated cost of \$65,536.46, the cost-sharing breakdown would be \$32,768.23 paid by both State Parks and the City. If the City agrees to partner on this project, the actual cost-sharing breakdown would be determined based quotes received during the bid process. However, for the purposes of establishing this agreement before the bid process, the Park proposes a 50% cost-share with the Park, but not to exceed \$33,000 in match from the City. Any additional costs, which are not expected, will be the responsibility of the Park.

As part of this proposal, the Park suggests a third partner. As was stated in the 2009 Master Plan, Parks set out to seek public support for this project through the formation of a Friends Group, comprised of local citizens willing to work with the Park towards the creation and maintenance of an eventual

**Table 1. Preliminary Budget Estimate**

| <u>Commodity</u>      | <u>Unit</u> | <u>Quantity</u> | <u>Price</u> | <u>Total</u>       |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Concrete Walks        | SY          | 140             | \$42.90      | \$6,006.00         |
| Chain Link Fence      | LF          | 991             | \$32.76      | \$32,465.16        |
| Aluminum Picket Fence | LF          | 515             | \$48.82      | \$25,142.30        |
| Site Restoration      | LS          | 1               | \$1,950.00   | \$1,950.00         |
| <b>Total</b>          |             |                 |              | <b>\$65,563.46</b> |

fenced dog park at this site. Thankfully, an unincorporated Friends Group for this project has been formed and has proven to be eager to help. This group is open to the public and we urge any interested citizen to consider joining.

To date, the Friends Group has been holding meetings to discuss the nature and logistics of the dog park as well as conducting fund raising events in support of this effort. Last year's "Dog Days of Summer" event brought in nearly 100 participants and raised almost \$2,000. As the third partner in this project, it is proposed that the funds raised by the Friends Group be used to provide amenities in the dog park that will enhance everyone's experience. These amenities could include benches, shelters, waste receptacles, agility obstacles, and any number of other amenities to help make this a world-class dog park.

Funds raised by the Friends Group are being placed into an account that can be used by the Park to purchase amenities as suggested by the Friends Group. NYS Parks can set up a Capital Gift Account which can be used to transfer funds from the City to the Park. The Park would then use the combined funds to construct all proposed features. The Park would be solely responsible for all construction contracting and billing and would be responsible for ongoing upkeep and maintenance of the site in the future.

We feel this proposal is a feasible and equitable way to progress this project in a timely manner and in a way that best meets the needs of the Park, the City, and the users, who are overwhelmingly City residents. We ask the council to partner with the Park by agreeing to match the Park's allocation of funds (in addition to design services and construction oversight) with an equal allocation of funds of approximately \$32,768.23, but not to exceed \$33,000. With such a partnership, the City, together with the Park and the Friends Group, will be able to construct what is sure to be a highly popular and much needed public amenity for the City of Saratoga Springs.

Respectfully Submitted,



Michael Greenslade, Park Manager, Saratoga Spa State Park