

MINUTES OF THE LAND USE COMMITTEE MEETING 9-27-2018

The meeting was held at 7 pm in the Town Hall. Present were Dedun Ingram, co-chair; Tom Collins, Kathy Flaxman, Eric Murtagh; Kirk Renaud, Town Council; Barney Rush, Mayor and Council liaison; and Elaine Collins, Town resident.

There was no public comment.

Dog exercise area and Path. On September 26, 2018 the Town hosted a presentation of two proposed improvements for Zimmerman Park, a new path to East-West Highway and a dog exercise area (DEA). Barney reported that more than 60 written comments had been received by the Town, of which four concerned the path (all in favor) and the rest concerned the DEA. A majority of the comments at the forum and in the letters favored having a DEA, but a number of them opposed it for various reasons. Residents who oppose the DEA expressed concerns about noise, stormwater runoff, sanitation and enforcement of hours of usage, parking, liability, and loss of property value. . Some residents requested that the Town take a look at other possible locations. Many of the issues raised had already been considered by the LUC

The Council will discuss the path at its October meeting and move forward with its design so that the path can be ready in time for the next school year.

The DEA will take some time to resolve. LUC will conduct further research into issues raised by residents.

Drainage/stormwater run-off: An important issue to resolve for Zimmerman Park (and any other location) is drainage/stormwater run-off and keeping pollution out of streams. A number of residents stated that Zimmerman Park is often too wet to play on. The Town Council will discuss hiring a water engineer to assess drainage and stormwater run-off issues in Zimmerman Park to see what can be done to remedy the sometimes boggy state of the park and to estimate costs for remedying it.

Property values: With respect to concerns raised about the DE's impact on property values, a committee member who is a long-time realtor in this area opined that dog parks are often considered amenities and could as easily raise as lower values. This opinion was also expressed by some other realtors in comments made at the forum and in letters sent to the Town.

Noise: The committee noted that noise from a DEA would likely be masked by the traffic noise from East-West Highway. LUC has been told that dogs generally do not bark when in DEAs, but will research this further, including getting information from people who live near nearby DEAs. And LUC will explore ways to mitigate noise. There are materials that could be incorporated into fencing that would help to mitigate noise. Also, plantings could be used to visually screen the DEA.

Parking: The PSC will be asked to examine parking possibilities for a DEA at Zimmerman Park. It has been suggested that a few short-term parking spaces could be designated along Maple near the park.

Enforcement would be needed to keep commuters from using these spaces. There are current parking issues in this part of Town. The Town is not enforcing its current parking rules with any regularity.

Restricting access: Methods for restricting access to the DEA (to enforce hours of use or membership use) will need to be explored. Perhaps some sort of coded or swipe-card entry could be used so that only those who have paid a membership fee would have access and hours could be limited. Issues around making DEA access membership-based also will need to be explored.

Cost: Some residents expressed objections to the potential cost. It has been suggested that some funds be put up by dog owners to cover installation of the DEA.

Open green space: Some residents said that keeping open green space is a priority for them.

Pop-up DEA: It might be useful to do one or more pop-up tryouts on a temporary basis to assess issues such as noise. There have been pop-up DEAs on several occasions in Elm Street Park.

Other next actions: LUC will gather information from people who live near nearby DEAs about other issues of concern to them, will talk to the managers of the Village and Section 3 about their processes for approving and constructing their dog areas. Other locations for the DEA have been suggested by residents, including Rosemary Circle, at Chevy Chase Elementary School (now used informally), and replacing the tennis courts (also used informally as a dog area at times).

LUC will take a fresh look at these and other potential DEA locations within the Town. LUC will meet with the authors of the 2013 report on park space in the Town to get more information on a statement at the forum that this report concluded that Zimmerman Park is not suitable for a DEA. A brief description about what occurred at the forum will be prepared and posted on the Town website.

Code changes: Some proposed code changes remain to be considered. LUC will finish these up by the end of the year and present all proposed changes to the Council in a single document.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Next meeting will be Thursday, October 25.