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U.S. denies land for Stratford dog park

By Elizabeth G. Howard on March 26, 2014 in Latest News, Lead News, Pet Central, Property Transfers, Regional News · 2 Comments



This parcel of land off of Ryders Lane was denied by US DOT due to its proximity to Merritt Pkwy. Greg Reilly photo.

About author



Elizabeth G. Howard

Elizabeth Howard is a Stratford-based journalist, blogger and poet. She writes on the arts, education, music, the environment, green lifestyle, American culture, travel and food. You can find her online

The conveyance of a 2.4-acre parcel of land on Ryder's Lane slated for use as the future Stratford dog park has been denied by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

According to Rep. Laura Hoydick (R-120), the land is owned by the Connecticut Department of Transportation. The town requested conveyance last year, and the legislation to convey the land was passed in June. However, other state and federal agencies with vested interest were allowed to review the conveyance. Hoydick said the U.S. DOT did not contact her about its denial until last week.

"So, even though [the U.S. DOT] never owned that parcel of land, because it is located along an interstate corridor, the Federal Highway Administration has the right to review ConnDOT's right-of-way," Hoydick said. "The land is supposed to stay with the ConnDOT in case they [the U.S. DOT] need it."

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|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | 30 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

TUE 02 Senior calendar: May 29-June 4
 June 1 @ 8:30 am - June 4 @ 4:00 pm

TUE 02 Catholic Daughters meeting
 June 2 @ 6:30 pm

Hoydick said that "if you told me eight months ago that we would still be working on this, I'd have laughed."

The Stratford Dog Park Association (SDPA), led by former Stratford residents Carissa and Matt DeBernardo, has spent more than three years and thousands of hours raising funds to build a dog park in Stratford. As reported in The Star in February, the volunteer group has raised \$17,000 to build the park. Nearly 40% of the funds raised — \$7,000 — are in the form of a Petco grant that will expire in early April.

"We could probably apply for an extension," said Carissa DeBernardo, president of the SDPA. "We have done everything we can but we have to provide photographic proof that building has started. We don't want to be liable for this money if this is not going to happen."

Marc Dillon, chief of staff for Mayor John Harkins, said their office also was informed of the denial last week. He said the mayor's office continues to "be in talks" with the ConnDOT to work out an arrangement for use of the land that works for both the DOT and town.

"We thought it was a done deal," Dillon said. "As far as we were concerned, we had accomplished what we set out to do, which was to acquire a piece of land for the dog park."

Dillon said the mayor has referred SDPA back to the Parks and Recreation department to try again and locate a parcel of land for its use. The DeBernardos expressed frustration over the long-delayed project that they consider a labor of love.

"[The town is] showing the taxpayers, who want this park — one that is funded by donations — that they can't get their act together," said Matt DeBernardo, SDPA vice president. "Talk about mismanagement. If the DOT wants to stonewall us, then why don't they [the town] have a plan B? It is clearly low priority."

Hoydick said that because of the land's proximity to the Merritt Parkway, it's possible that other outside groups could be influencing the land's use. She said she is also working with private landowners to find land that could be leased, though she said this is not the ideal option since any installed infrastructure would have to be removed once the lease ended.

"They need to find a location and push it through," said Carissa DeBernardo. "We still feel that Roosevelt Forest is still the best option, but we don't have the ability to choose at this point. We have been asked to be included, but that was when we had a location. Now that we have no location, why are we meeting with the town?"

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