



Heaven for dogs? It might be coming to Northampton



NOAM SCHATZ

A group of dogs gamboling at the proposed site.

By [Martin Finucane](#)

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It sounds like dog heaven.

A Western Massachusetts woman is planning a 36-acre members-only dog park in Northampton, where canines will have plenty of space to shrug off their leashes and romp to

their shaggy hearts' content.

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Sarah Schatz of Hatfield said her fenced-in facility, which she's dubbed Waggin' Trails, is an idea whose time has come.

"We're just sort of running out of space out here," she said. "I started thinking, 'I should just buy my own piece of property.'"

Dog parks, official and unofficial, are [sought out by many owners in the Boston area](#) eager to give their best friends a fresh-air workout.

But Schatz said the members-only model is a new twist, a first in New England. In researching the idea, she found only 10 others around the country.

Schatz said she plans to start the permitting process on Oct. 12 and expects to close on the property in November. She wants to open the gates early next summer.

"I'm filling a need that I know people want," she said. She calculates that within 15 miles of the proposed park there are 14,000 registered dog owners.

And while Northampton is working on plans, there is no official municipal dog park within 20 miles of the city, she said.

“I think dog parks like mine are sort of the next trend,” Schatz said.

So what would you do if you were designing a spa for dogs — and their loyal humans?

Schatz seems to have thought of it all. Her plans call for the park to be open dawn to dusk. An office and retail store will be open for part of those hours. Members can get access at other times by using a key fob.

The small solar-powered park building will have a big porch for owners and dogs to, say, look out at the rain.



NOAM SCHATZ

Sarah Schatz already owns a dogwalking business.



THOMAS DOUGLAS ARCHITECTS

Park building plans call for a large porch, which could be a good place to look out at a rainy day.

Even when the office is closed, members will be able to get access to areas in the building with two bathrooms and a self-service dog-washing area.

There will be plenty of receptacles set up for dog waste, with bags and barrels at every trail junction. And Schatz is hoping to bring a dog waste composter over from Europe that would generate power.

Schatz is poised to buy a 50-acre property, donate 12 acres for conservation, and sell 2 acres to raise funds. She'll open 18 acres at first and another 18 acres as the business gains

momentum. The park will include an area for general use that is big enough so you can “go for a real walk,” a dog pool/training area, and areas for puppies under 6 months old, smaller dogs under 25 pounds, and old dogs who just want to snooze in the sun.

Members would pay \$360 annually for up to two dogs, but monthly and daily passes would also be available. Member dogs would have to be spayed and up to date on their vaccines, and owners would have to state on their applications that the dog has never harmed other dogs or people.

Schatz knows her market. A 37-year-old mother of three, she already owns a business that walks around 80 dogs a day, she said.

Wayne Feiden, director of planning and sustainability for the city of Northampton, said he didn't see any major impediments to the project, which must get a special permit from the city's Planning Board. “She has done a good job of researching and addressing the issues that we are aware of,” he said in an e-mail.

He said neighbors have some concerns, particularly about traffic, though the level would probably be less than a residential development, which would be the most likely alternative.

Schatz, a Sharon native, said, “I think it will be a huge asset to Northampton and actually to Massachusetts,” noting that she's already received a few e-mails from people in the Boston area who are interested in the park.

And that's nothing to bark at.