



## BELMONT

# Advocate searching for space to park the dogs

## Town, state say no to pet playground

By **MATTHEW SPOLAR**  
Monitor staff

A Belmont dog park advocate who struck out last year in requesting town-owned land has also been denied by the state and is expanding her search to other towns in the Lakes Region.

Lisa Clutters, president of the Happy Tails Dog Park group, first approached the Belmont selectmen in June 2008 with a plan for an off-leash dog park where member dog owners would have a passcode to the gated park. If given a piece of land, her group would raise money for fences and other improvements, she said.

See **DOGS - A6**

## DOGS Continued from A5

"It's an amenity that any municipality should have," Clutters said. "It's like a human child's park."

Clutters returned twice more to the selectmen, the last time in August, but the board had concerns about giving town land to a citizen group and objected to the parcel of residential land on Dutile Road suggested by Clutters.

Last month, the state Division of Forest and Lands denied a subsequent request by Clutters to use land in the Sanborn State Forest in Gilmanton for the park.

Bill Carpenter, administrator for the state's land management bureau, said when Clutters made her request, it was the first time in his experience that someone had suggested a dog park on state land.

He said the park would have given "very exclusive rights for one user group"

and didn't seem to be an appropriate use of state land.

"We gave it a very close look and it just doesn't work for us," he said.

There are eight existing dog parks in New Hampshire, Clutters said. Four are on town property in Concord, Hooksett, Portsmouth and Derry, while four in Raymond, Amherst, Rochester and Nashua are on private land, she said.

Clutters said that in the present economy, the chances of her group raising enough money or getting a bank loan to buy a two-acre piece of land are slim. She would much prefer a town designation of public land for the park or a donation of private land, and the group has taken out an ad in the *Laconia Daily Sun* asking for landowners to contact her organization.

At the August selectmen's meeting, Belmont resident Donna Cilley argued that dog

parks are needed in cities, not rural areas like Belmont with lots of open space. But Clutters said the dog park would serve a community purpose by bringing dog owners together in one location, much in the same way parents and their kids mingle at parks.

"Dogs are like the ultimate icebreaker," she said. "It is a community morale builder."

Clutters said she is now in the process of reaching out to other towns in the Lakes Region. Late last year, the group changed its name from the Happy Tails Dog Park of Belmont, N.H., to "of the Lakes Region."

"We are hoping to open a line of dialogue with neighboring towns," she said.

Amy Lovisek, Laconia's assistant director of parks and recreation, said Clutters had recently contacted her department about a potential park there and said her office would have a meeting on the

subject once the new parks and recreation director arrives next month.

Jeff Pattison, chairman of Laconia's parks and recreation commission, said he would not support a dog park on town-owned land because his research on the issue had raised liability concerns.

"A good day is a day that there are not problems in the park," he said.

Josh Jasper, who headed up a community group that worked to open a dog park in Concord in 2007, said at the dog park on Manchester Street that liability rests with the dog owners inside the park and the city has had no problems so far.

Clutters said she will not rest until she has found land for a dog park in the Lakes Region.

"We are nothing without a piece of property," she said. "I never take 'no' for an answer."

## LOCAL & STATE

## CONCORD MONITOR