

Draft Proposal



Re-purposing Anderson Park for the People of Elberta and Their Canine Friends

MISSION STATEMENT: To establish a fenced in, off-leash dog park where well-behaved canine citizens can exercise in a clean, safe environment without endangering or annoying people, property, or wildlife. To develop a beautiful, well-maintained space that is open to all dog lovers and friends who are willing to uphold the park's rules and restrictions. To view this park as a community project — in partnership with the Village of Elberta — designed to satisfy the needs of dog-owners and non-dog owners alike.

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WHAT IS A DOG PARK? A dog park is an off-leash facility that is fully fenced for dogs to exercise, play, and socialize while their owners visit and supervise. The specific accessories of a dog park can vary from site to site but generally include water for dogs, benches for owners, and sanitary stations. Since the first official dog park opened in 1979 in Berkeley, California, more than 600 city- or county-sanctioned dog parks have cropped up in the United States, as well as more than 500 in Canada (2002 data).¹ In Michigan, there are more than 40 public, fenced-in dog parks and 10 privately-owned dog parks.²

HOW DOES A DOG PARK WORK? Typically, the park is divided into two parts: one for small dogs and one for large dogs. Image #1 shows a proposed dog park with 14,400 square feet for large dogs and nearly 4,300 square feet for small dogs for the Village of Elberta, located in Anderson Park. (Small dogs would be admitted to the “large dog” area, if the owner chooses, but large dogs would not be admitted to the “small dog” area.)

Each of the two sides of the park would have a "safety vestibule," which has two gates: one that enters the park and one that exits the park. This safety vestibule ensures that when an individual and his/her pet are entering or exiting the park, that individual's dog — as well as other dogs already inside the park — do not escape off-leash. It also makes the transition into the park easier for the incoming dog, because “welcoming” dogs (i.e. dogs waiting inside of the park) do not bombard the incoming dog while it is still on-leash.

Water, waste containers, bags, and scoops are supplied for the dogs. Benches and a picnic table are typically provided for the owners. Trees are a bonus, as they provide shade and improve appearance.

HOW DOES ELBERTA BENEFIT? A well-run dog park provides the community with the following benefits:

- Adds a wonderful new amenity to the life of the Village, by providing an area for community-building and socializing.¹
- Enables dogs to legally run off-leash.
- Promotes public health and safety.
- Promotes responsible pet ownership.¹
- Provides a tool for realistic enforcement of dog control laws.¹
- Provides elderly and disabled owners with an accessible place to exercise their companions.¹
- Socializes and exercises dogs in a safe environment, thus reducing barking and other problem behaviors.¹

POTENTIAL ECONOMIC LEVERAGING: From 1972 to 2010, the number of cats and dogs in the U.S. climbed from 61 million to 165 million, or 53% of the U.S. human population.³ According to a 2011 survey, 39% of U.S. households own at least one dog, which translates to around 78.2 million dogs. Most owners (60%) have one dog, 28% have two dogs, and 12% have three or more dogs.⁴ Additionally, 75% of dog owners consider their pets to be a significant part of the family,⁵ meaning they would most likely bring their pets along on family vacations and/or they would consider the dog-friendliness of a city before making it a permanent residence.

There are currently only 40 off-leash, fenced-in dog parks throughout Michigan, as can be seen by the blue indicators in Image #3.² The majority of these are located in the suburbs of Detroit, and only two parks exist North of Midland: one in Ludington and one in Manistee. (NOTE: Most of the orange “not fenced” indicators are actually just rest stops along freeways, not valid dog parks.)

Currently, Michigan’s most dog-friendly city is Traverse City, which is listed as having 11 pet-friendly hotels and one dog friendly attraction. (Elberta did not even make the list; Frankfort was a significant way down, with 6 pet-friendly hotels and no dog-friendly attractions; Manistee was ranked 8th, despite not having any pet-friendly hotels and only one dog-friendly attraction, however the city does have an official dog park; Ludington was ranked 12th, with three pet-friendly hotels and one dog-friendly attraction in addition to the official dog park).⁶

Like Elberta, Traverse City also has dog-park advocates negotiating a proposal with city officials. However, we believe that the foundation here in Benzie County has already been laid to ensure our park’s success — which could reap great direct and indirect economic benefits for the Village — and that we are several steps ahead of Traverse City, as we already have support from many local citizens, businesses, and officials. In fact, the (former) Frankfort Dog Park was recently featured on Channel 7&4’s evening news as a community “success” story, and the only Northern Michigan town to currently have a dog park.⁷

We are confident that a dog park in the Village of Elberta would actually generate direct and indirect income for the community and the local businesses, as there is no other town in North of Manistee that has an official dog park.

DIRECT ECONOMIC BENEFITS: We already have raised \$1,000 with minimal fund-raising efforts, and we have already put a portion of this money back into the community: 1) we paid a local artist to design the park’s logo 2) we paid Bayside Printing for our posters and business cards over the last two years 3) we purchased FRANKFORT DOG PARK hats that we have been selling to generate a profit for fund-raising efforts. If a dog park were created in Elberta, we could again work with local businesses and artisans to create memorabilia that could be sold by the Village (example: perhaps Greg Jaris of the Trick Dog would be interested in designing/making/selling dog park-related items for his business and/or the Village).

INDIRECT ECONOMIC BENEFITS: If Elberta were to market itself as the most dog-friendly town in Northern Michigan, this could bring people to the Village (tourists and/or permanent residents) who would spend money in our shops, restaurants, and hotels. This has already been minimally and locally demonstrated at the (former) Frankfort Dog Park, where people would drive from neighboring Beulah, Honor, and Lake Ann to spend one morning and/or evening per week in Frankfort.

WHERE WOULD THE DOG PARK BE LOCATED? The proposed location is at Anderson Park, which makes an L-shape at the corner of Frankfort Avenue, George M. Street, and Steele Street. There are five neighboring residences to the park: an adjacent residence to the South on Steele Street; an adjacent residence to the East on Lincoln Avenue; and three residences located to the North across Steele Street.

This area is currently a recreational park with out-of-date playground equipment and a basketball court. There is an existing water-pump building, and an existing water line beneath the site could be tapped. The park is well shaded and has a few benches on site.

The visibility of this location would promote usage and would demonstrate to visitors that Elberta is a welcoming and inclusive community.

WHO WOULD BUILD THE DOG PARK? Following a successful fund-raising effort, the park would be built, owned, and operated by the Village of Elberta. Annual maintenance expenses would be raised by the "Friends of the Elberta Dog Park" (many of whom were formerly unofficial members of the Frankfort Dog Park, in operation from May 2010 to September 2011).

WHAT ARE THE COSTS? Preliminary estimates put the construction costs in the \$_____ range for Phase I. If pursued, Phase II estimates would require about \$10,000 to \$15,000 in additional funding, with the majority of the costs attributed to the construction of a new basketball court. Fencing for the dog park would match that currently at Anderson Park, which is galvanized, chain link, and four-feet tall. Benches, picnic tables, underground sprinkling, water spigots, and signage are not included in this estimate, but could be additional costs, if the Village wanted to pursue these amenities. (Currently there are two benches at the site.)

It should be noted that, with minimal fund-raising efforts over the last three months, more than \$1,000 has already been raised by members of the (former) Frankfort Dog Park. We are very confident that this figure could quickly be added to, and that the park could be completely self-sustaining. Sanitation bags and a sanitation-bag dispenser have already been purchased and could be installed in the park as soon as possible.

PHASE I: As can be seen in Image #1, Phase I of the park would require 500 linear feet of fencing to completely enclose the facility. The fencing would go around the basketball court, so that could continue to be used by the public. Additionally, the playground equipment that is currently located on the "small dogs" side of the park would need to be removed; something that Village officials have said should happen anyway, since the equipment is out-of-date and possibly out-of-code.

Before any construction or deconstruction at the site occurs, however, it has been suggested by Ken Bonnie that the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) be contacted to ensure that a dog park can be located in the vicinity of a water-pump house.

PHASE II: As can be seen in Image #2, Phase II of the park would deconstruct fencing around the basketball court. This would then become part of the “large dogs” side of the park. The basketball court would be reconstructed at an appropriate location within the Elberta Waterfront Park, most likely near the current playground equipment and the pavilion area. An estimated cost for the new concrete would be \$8,800. The Village would need to determine whether the basketball posts, backboards, and hoops could be refurbished and reused; if not, this would incite additional costs.

IMPORTANT: The basketball court would not be removed from Anderson Park until sufficient funds were raised, because we do not want to take away a public space; rather, we are trying to add to the aesthetic and usability of the Village. Funds for this basketball court removal and replacement would be raised by The Friends of the Elberta Dog Park, possibly be in conjunction with the Village, Frankfort-Elberta Athletic Boosters, SEEDS After-school Program, and/or other local programs.

IS THERE A NEED? One hurdle in the formation of a dog park is demonstrating the need for a facility that is dedicated for off-leash use when a community does not have the infrastructure to test that need. Fortunately, we have already demonstrated a successful 16-month interim dog park in Frankfort at the fully fenced high school track, which has showcased the popularity of and the need for a dedicated dog park in this area.

FORMER FRANKFORT DOG PARK: For 16 months, visitors and residents of Benzie County were allowed to use the Frankfort-Elberta High School track field as an off-leash dog park. The first two months were slow, averaging about 5 dogs each Saturday. Since our communities are relatively small, we started with just Saturday mornings as the “official” time for dog park. By the end of the first summer, numbers had increased to an average of 22 dogs each Saturday. Throughout the winter, we expected the numbers to drop significantly, but we were surprised to see an average of 15 dogs each week.

This past summer, our numbers increased dramatically (minimum attendance of 10, maximum of 45, and an average of 30 dogs per week). We decided to start another “official” time on Thursday evenings. Numbers then started to even out between the two days, so that we were averaging 15 to 20 dogs on Thursday evenings and 20 to 25 on Saturday mornings.

Unfortunately, as visitors and residents learned that the track was open to dog use at any time (the Frankfort-Elberta Area Schools had no hours, rules, or regulations posted), more conflict occurred between dog owners and other users of the track facilities. Consequently, the park was closed to dogs on Labor Day.

Until that point, for a successful 16 months, hundreds of Benzie County residents and tourists alike were amazed that the City was offering a place to bring dogs to socialize; a place where owners could likewise socialize with other dog-owning attendees. As such, many patrons became more invested in our community.

ELBERTA PARK HISTORY WITH DOGS: Elberta is already a dog-friendly place. A large majority of the parks allow dogs and a Mutt Mitt program is recently up and running. The popular Waterfront Park, however, was recently closed to dogs, because of the conflicting nature of children playing and the potential for irresponsible dog owners.

A park devoted to dogs and their owners would reduce the impact on other parks, as well as the impact on the Elberta beach. A centrally located park would allow Elberta residents and visitors to easily walk their leashed dog to the park. Since this is the only park of its kind in Benzie County — and Northern Michigan, for that matter — residents and visitors from other local communities would travel to Elberta to use the park, thus bringing in potential dollars to the Village.

WILL THERE BE RULES? All dog parks have posted rules, usually established by municipal ordinances. Areas typically addressed include: safety, hours of operation, canine health (neutering, vaccinations, licensing), and waste control. Sample ordinances and rules are available from many online sources, and a list of potential rules and regulations can be seen in Appendix 3.

CONCLUSION: Dog parks are becoming increasingly popular thanks to responsible pet owners, community agencies, and officials who realize their important role in improving not only the quality of life for dogs, but for all of us. This park would be a great addition to the Village of Elberta, as both a community-building project and an income-generating asset.

RESPECTIVELY SUBMITTED BY THE FOLLOWING:

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Resources

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<http://www.dogchannel.com/media/dog-magazines/dogfancy/start-a-dog-park.aspx.pdf>
2. **Dog Goes**. *Michigan Pet-Friendly Places* <http://www.doggoes.com/parks/michigan>
(Image #3)
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4. **The Human Society of the United States**. *Pet Owner Statistics: American Pet Products Association 2011-2012 National Pet Owners Survey* 8/11/2011
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7. **Up North Live / Channel 7&4**. *Push for Pooch Parks* 6/17/2011
<http://www.upnorthlive.com/news/story.aspx?id=631120>

APPENDIX 1

Anderson Park Images

Image #1: Phase I of the Elberta Dog Park construction, which leaves the basketball court in tact.

**Proposal:
Courting Dogs**

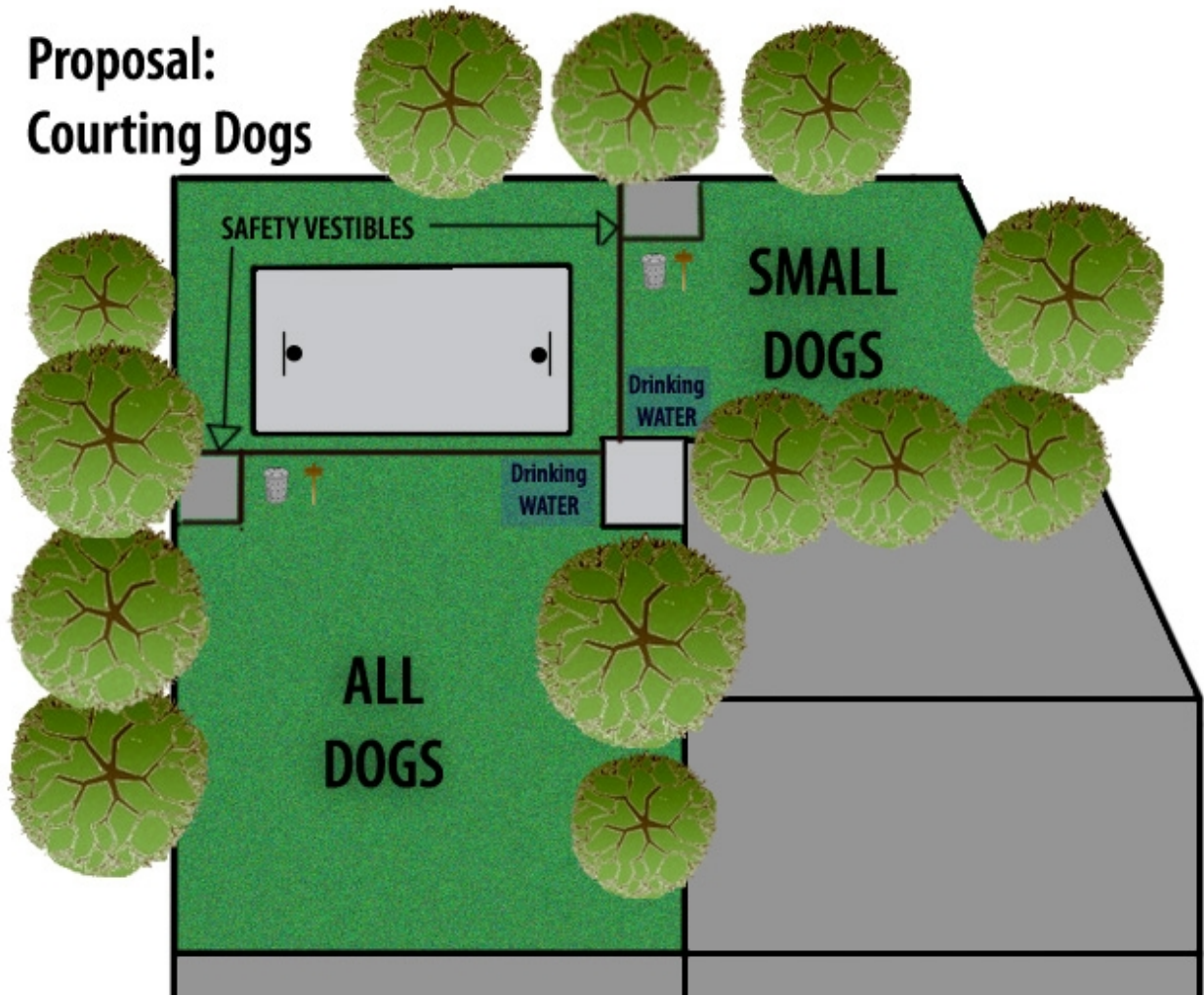
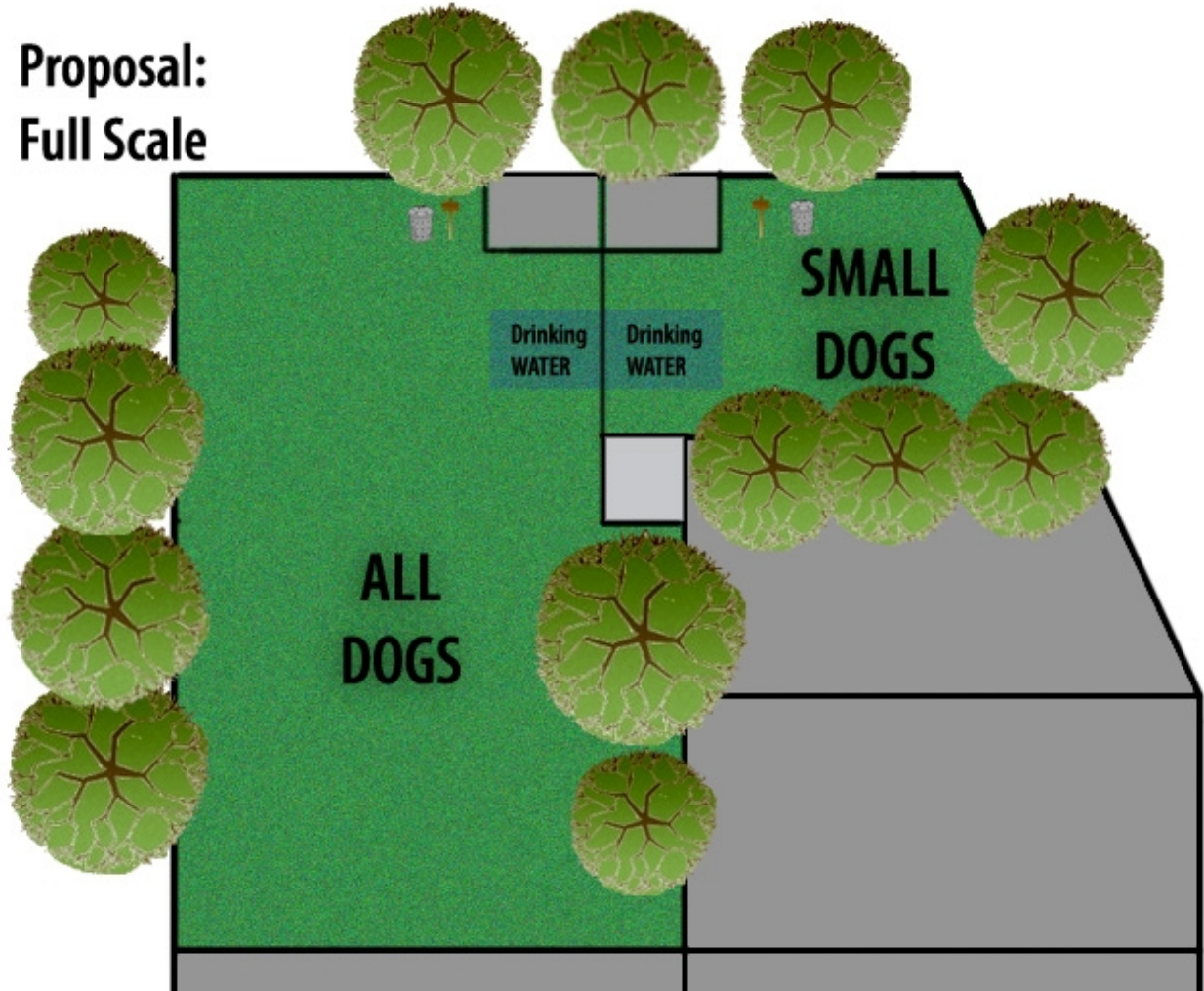


Image #2: Phase II of the Elberta Dog Park construction, in which the basketball court is removed and the “all dogs” section is expanded into this space.

**Proposal:
Full Scale**



APPENDIX 2

Maps of Dog Parks by State

Image #3: Map of Michigan dog parks.



Image #4: Map of Northern Michigan dog parks.



Image #5: Map of Illinois dog parks.



Image #6: Map of Indiana dog parks.



Image #7: Map of Ohio dog parks.



APPENDIX 3

Proposed Dog Park Rules & Regulations

1. Hours of operations are 6am to 10pm.
2. Owners are legally responsible for their dogs and any injuries caused by them.
3. Dogs must be properly licensed.
4. Dogs must be up to date on all vaccinations.
5. Dogs must be in good health.
6. Dogs should wear a collar and identification tags at all times.
7. Owners must clean up after their dogs.
8. Owners must never allow their dogs to bark at, intimidate, attack, or threaten another pet or person.
9. Dogs showing aggression towards people or other animals will be removed from the park. Animals who exhibit a history of aggressive behavior will not be permitted.
10. Puppies using the park must be at least four months old.
11. Owners should not leave their dogs unattended or let them out of sight. If young children are permitted in the dog park, they too should be under constant supervision.
12. Dogs in heat will not be allowed inside the park.
13. Violators will be subject to removal from the park and suspension of park privileges.
14. Please consider making a donation to the Village of Elberta's Dog Park to help keep this a fee-free park.