

March 7, 2023

Westport-Weston Chamber of Commerce
41 Riverside Avenue
Westport, CT 06880

RE: The Dog Festival / Winslow Park

Dear Westport-Weston Chamber of Commerce:

As neighbors and residents who live near Winslow Park and other members of the public who frequent the park, we are writing to request that the Chamber of Commerce relocate its annual "Dog Festival" to another more appropriate location for two principal reasons.

First, Winslow Park should not be used for a fee-based event. Unlike many other alternative venues around town, Winslow Park is a public facility used extensively by area residents, especially on weekends. In the past the "Dog Festival" has drawn (according to media reports) as many as 3000 attendees and 60 commercial vendors. The size and scope of such an event effectively monopolizes the ability to access, use and enjoy public parkland on the weekend, unless individuals or families pay a fee to the Chamber to gain entry.

It is important to clearly identify that while the Chamber is a tax-exempt organization, under Section 501(c)(6), it is not the same as a not-for-profit entity organization as defined under Section 501(c)(3). The distinction matters because as a 501(c)6, the Chamber is allowed to raise money *to support political candidates, policies or regulations that support the interests of its membership*. Thus it is simply not appropriate to allow the Chamber to use public property to raise funds for its private sector mission, including making political donations. While we understand that in the past the Chamber has said it would donate a portion of the net gate proceeds from the "Dog Festival" event to

eligible local not-for-profits, this is a tiny sum and the vast majority of the proceeds are simply kept by the Chamber. Regardless, the Chamber's decision to donate funds to local not-for-profits is not relevant because the public's use should not be impinged upon by any entity looking to make money for their own purpose, political or otherwise.

Second, the "Dog Festival" should not be held at Winslow Park because there is insufficient onsite parking and as a result the event has a dramatically adverse impact on traffic and pedestrian/ cyclist safety on North Compo Avenue. Historically due to limited onsite parking attendees feel their best or only option is to park illegally along North Compo Road. The extensive stretch of North Compo abutting the eastern edge of Winslow Park lacks sidewalks or bike lanes. As a result cyclists and pedestrians, including families (including those with strollers), are forced to walk/bike behind or around these illegally parked cars. Given the number of bicyclists, cars and pedestrians who use that road on weekends, this has created a dangerous public nuisance.

Regarding the "availability of off-site festival parking" we understand the Chamber uses the services of the Westport Police Department to help direct attendees. But after multiple years, the off-site parking has not stopped the traffic and illegal parking along the extensive stretch of North Compo that fronts on Winslow. In short, Winslow Park can not easily or safely accommodate large regionally-marketed events.

Fortunately, there are other alternative locations that would be more suitable for the Dog Festival because they are generally unoccupied on a peak spring/fall weekends and therefore less disruptive to Westport residents, including, for example (1) the Imperial Ave parking lot; (2) the fields and parking areas adjacent to any one of Westport's nine public school properties; (3) a facility rented or owned by a Chamber member; (4) Veterans Green (with parking behind Town Hall); or (5) Green Farms or Saugatuck rail station parking lots.


Any of these locations can accommodate the traffic and parking demands of this event better than Winslow Park, and would not lead to a situation where area residents are essentially precluded from using a popular public park on a weekend day.

We understand that the Chamber has a legitimate interest in raising funds to support its mission and political interests. And we are in fact dog owners and dog lovers who support and attend AKC-sanctioned events. But it sets an inappropriate and dangerous precedent to allow a vital public open space to be used in this fashion by the Chamber.

Therefore we respectfully request that the Chamber, working in conjunction with the Town of Westport and its Parks & Recreation Commission, locate an appropriate alternative venue.

Sincerely,

- Westport residents, including:


37 Evergreen Parkway

3 Melvin & Lorraine Lane
41 Tamarac Rd

Mark Anderson
37 Evergreen Parkway


Diana Salyer
5 Lone Pine Ln

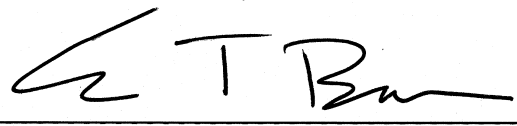
Elizabeth Anderson
37 Quapaw Parkway

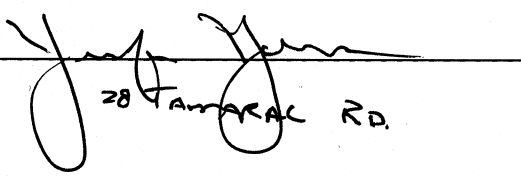
Felicitas
31 Tamarac Rd

Mia Anderson
37 Quapaw Parkway

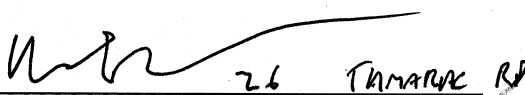
Sara Deven
10 Lone Pine Ln

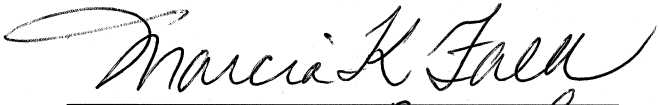

7 TAMARAC RD

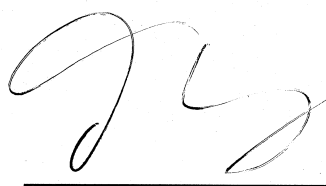

28 TAMARAC Ad.

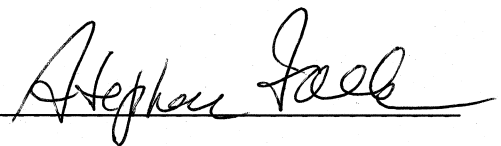

28 TAMARAC RD.


33 Tamarac Rd


26 TAMARAC RD


3 Lone Pine Lane


1 EVERETT HWY


3 Lone Pine Lane

cc: Westport Parks & Recreation Commission
First Selectwoman Jennifer Tooker