

WHEN COMMUNITY AND COMMUNICATION CONVERGE

# Unique Public-Private Partnership Brings Dog Park to Bucks County Township

A \$2.5 million, world-class dog park is coming to Bensalem Township in Bucks County through a unique public-private partnership that will cost the township nothing and create a win-win for the community.

BY MELISSA GRIMM / GRIMM AND GROVE COMMUNICATIONS

**M**any community vision plans share similar goals, such as more green space and greater walkability, to enhance the community identity. Achieving these admirable goals can be challenging, with many priorities competing for budget dollars. Some forward-thinking townships, however, are exploring public-private solutions that enable them to add value to the community at no cost to taxpayers.

## Meeting the needs of a Bucks County township

A current project in Bensalem Township, Bucks County, for example, is shaping up to be a destination dog park, and a public-private partnership is behind the new venture.

“As the ‘Gateway to Bucks County,’ Bensalem is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family,” says Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo. “And with so many four-legged family members in our township, our residents have long requested a closer dog park with first-rate amenities. We certainly didn’t envision it on the immediate horizon.”

Still, DiGirolamo and his team always kept the possibility of a new dog park on the township’s wish list, as did the residents.

When Catalyst Experiential of Newtown Square in Delaware County approached Bensalem about unmet community needs they might help to fulfill, the municipality welcomed the opportunity. A dog park was high on the list. Nearby dog parks were small and limited in amenities, yet without other options, there were waiting lists to get into them.

Catalyst described to township leaders how it could create a dog park and combine it with visual communications technology to meet the community’s needs. This laid the win-win groundwork to plan a feature-laden new dog park and civic engagement venue.

“We explained how Catalyst could accomplish this without having to raise taxes,” says CEO Thaddeus Bartkowski. “Our plan was to take an awkward, unused plot of land on Street Road and repurpose it into a world-class new dog park at zero cost to acquire, design, and develop.”

Working together, the two parties moved forward to develop plans to turn a lifeless piece of property into a vibrant local go-to. Catalyst is assuming all costs, including purchasing the undeveloped land.

Ground-breaking on the park will occur in the spring, and the plans call for a specialized turf surface, water features, an area dedicated solely to small



**An integrated display, similar to the one above, will greet visitors at the \$2.5 million dog park in Bensalem Township, Bucks County. The venture, funded through advertising sales, is the result of a unique public-private partnership.**

dogs, a free-standing building equipped with dog washing stations, including shampoo and towels, a shade pavilion with a solar component, outdoor spritzers for the dogs to cool off, and an agility course. Slated to go live this fall, it's set on a 1.5-acre plot with .8 acres devoted to the dog park itself, with a giant arborvitae wall to shield residents.

The entire project is funded by advertising on an integrated display in the township, which also allows for local public service announcements, event reminders, and safety and security messaging.

“The dog park will add much to our sense of community,” DiGirolamo



notes. “We are looking forward to an attractive, engaging gathering place that will become an important part of our township and a point of pride for us.”

### **A deeper, more intrinsic need**

Catalyst Chief Marketing Officer Joe Weinlick explains that Catalyst Experiential is “pioneering a new breed of partnership that enables municipalities to create well-designed public spaces that serve, communicate with, and energize members of their community.”

The locations for these integrated displays can include landmark monuments, pedestrian bridges, fire stations, and dog parks, just to name a few.

“Catalyst is providing value to communities through the convergence of community and communication,” Weinlick says, noting how signage has evolved over the years to what is now possible to help communities establish a sense of place.

“In the early days, plywood signs on posts replaced whitewashed barns,” he says. “In the early 1980s, large-format vinyl was a big deal. It was only a little over a decade ago that the first digital billboards were introduced. Still, no one in the outdoor space was actively addressing the lack of aesthetics.

“We asked, what if instead of starting with the need for a sign, we started

by identifying a deeper, more intrinsic need within the township so that the sign itself becomes the secondary use.

“It is this fundamental rethinking of the format and purpose of signs that is enabling local governments, schools, and charities to speak directly to the communities they serve,” says Weinlick. “Revenue from businesses that advertise on the sign funds the entire project, but the communication is integrated as part of an aesthetically pleasing presentation that helps accomplish local priorities.”

Bartkowski coined the term “monument” several years ago to describe municipal gateways that help to create a sense of place and enable suburban communities to stand out in a “sea of sameness,” Weinlick explains.

The Concord Township Monument in Chester County, for example, transformed an overgrown plot of land between two lanes of a busy divided highway into an embodiment of civic pride, with a 350-foot-long reflecting pool, five programmable fountains, architectural lighting, and a custom brick and stone structure that features the township name.

For Bensalem Township, this public-private partnership will soon bear fruit, giving resident dog owners a place to exercise and socialize their dogs and the township a new service at no cost to the taxpayers. ♦

## **Reasons to consider a public-private project for your township**

### **Lower cost to taxpayers**

Projects fulfill community needs at an affordable price.

### **Collaborative process**

Participatory planning and design empower the community and ensure that the project is meaningful and in keeping with the local aesthetic style.

### **Reinforcement of a sense of place**

Townships can stand out in a “sea of sameness” that has become prevalent among communities. They can also reinforce a local sense of pride and place with a unique opportunity to create a showcase that becomes an iconic part of their township.

### **Beautification of unattractive places**

Townships can repurpose underused spaces and eliminate community eyesores and transform them into a space the community can be proud of.