



March 22, 2022

Shelton Planning & Zoning Commission  
City Hall  
54 Hill Street—Third Floor  
Shelton, CT 06484

RE: Application #21-26, “Dogtopia”, Shiller Management LLC, 850 Bridgeport Ave.

Dear Chairwoman Harger and Commission Members,

Please accept the following statement regarding the proposed “Dogtopia” location at 850 Bridgeport Ave., submitted by S&S Shelton Development, LLC on behalf of Red Barn Dog Ops CT, LLC. We appreciate the commission’s diligence in support of the petition for a revision to the Statement of Uses and Standards of PDD#2 to permit “Dog care services, limited to indoor daycare, grooming, training and overnight boarding.” At the request of the commission, we respectfully submit additional details regarding the operations of the proposed Dogtopia location.

**Boarding:** Overnight stays for our dogs are provided as a safe, convenient, and familiar service to our pet parents. Our business is primarily focused (90%) on dog daycare services, much different from a traditional boarding facility/kennel that those unfamiliar with our model sometimes reference. Any dog receiving services at our facility (daycare or boarding) must complete a thorough evaluation process before being admitted into an open-play environment. Overnight stays are scheduled in advance with existing customers, not dropped off at random. While the offering of overnight stays represents a fractional piece of our business, it is critical most especially to our regular daycare pups that are most comfortable in a familiar environment with familiar friends, providing an additional level of safety as well as reassurance to our pet parents. Removing the option to offer this service to pet parents or placing arbitrary limits on capacity or duration of stay not only has detrimental effects on the business, but more importantly is a disservice to our community seeking accommodations for their furry children. Boarding services are a requirement of our business model and offered at all Dogtopia locations nationwide.

The number of dogs staying overnight fluctuates greatly based on peak holiday and vacation periods. In further transparency, we are including the average number of dogs per night across four local facilities. Three facilities averaged two dogs, six dogs, and nine dogs per night in their first year of operation. The fourth facility averaged nine dogs per night in year five of operation. However, we must reinforce the point that these numbers fluctuate depending on the season, and placing limits based on the average would greatly disadvantage the business and our availability to service our regular customers.

**Capacity limits** were mentioned by the commission in terms of both daycare and overnight stays. As with each of our daycares, we follow the guidelines of the local jurisdiction and are required to obtain a



state of Connecticut kennel license to operate, which includes an on-site inspection. We defer to the Department of Health and Department of Agriculture in terms of any requirements to operate a safe and healthy environment for our pups and employees.

**Daycare Enrollment:** As mentioned previously, our primary business model is dog daycare. Pet parents bring their dogs on average two days per week, providing a stable and familiar environment. As such, our enrollment is similar to that of a child daycare facility, allowing pet parents to pre-register for a set number of days per week. This further reinforces daycare as the primary service, as well as provides stability and predictability with staffing levels.

**Franchise:** We are the largest operating franchisee for Dogtopia with 23 locations from Boston to Raleigh, NC. We are also local owner/operators, with our headquarters located in Bridgeport and residents of Trumbull. The proposed Shelton location is less than a 10-minute drive, and we are excited to bring this much needed service to our local community.

**Staffing:** While there are not hard limits on the number of employees on-site or in the playrooms, we emphasize that our approach is more than just a number. At minimum, there is always at least one certified canine coach in each playroom when dogs are in open play. Our three rooms allow us to separate by both size and temperament. These factors, as well as the energy and playstyles of the dogs in the room, are far more important and managed by a team that is trained by an internationally accredited curriculum (International Association of Accredited Canine Behaviorists).

**Support & Expertise:** Dogtopia has 185 locations nationwide, all operating by the same high-quality standards that the brand requires. Our support office includes an environmental biologist, canine behaviorist, and veterinarian. These subject matter experts provide additional support to ensure that we have the necessary requirements to operate a safe, healthy, and fun environment for all dogs in our care.

**Noise/Odor:** Controlling for noise and odor are a necessary requirement for being good neighbors in our community. Extensive acoustical and mechanical measures are in place to ensure that our facilities are smelling fresh and not a disturbance to co-tenants or residents. There are not any residences in direct proximity to the proposed location. Co-tenants Dominos and Staples have both expressed their support for our business.

**Business Model:** While our model may not be the perfect fit for everyone, we respectfully ask that pet parents are allowed to choose what is best for their dog and their family. We are confident in our product and the safe, quality service that we provide.

**Purpose:** We are passionate dog owners and aim to provide the highest level of care that we expect for our own. Daycare is a purposeful choice made for the love of your dog. We believe every dog deserves daycare and would like to reinforce the incredible positive impacts on the wellness of the dog that we can provide and have demonstrated successfully. With daycare as our primary service, we aim to provide safe socialization, exercise, and education to dogs that otherwise may not have the opportunity to experience these benefits. ***Dogtopia's noble cause is to enhance the joy of dog parenthood and enable dogs to***



*positively change our world.* This is further demonstrated by our foundation, which supports employment initiatives for adults with autism, youth literacy programs, and sponsors service dogs for veterans.

It is our sincere hope that all questions regarding the operations of the business have been addressed in this letter and we look forward to providing additional context if needed at the meeting on March 29, 2022.

Sincerely,

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