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FEATURED

Will GVR get a dog park? They're a step closer

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Leslie Kush, president of the Canine Club Steering Committee, speaks in favor of a GVR dog park in Green Valley at Thursday's meeting.

Lillian Boyd Green Valley News

A previous version of this article stated that, according to GVR Foundation President Tim Stewart, the GVR Pickleball Club supported a dog park at Canoa Ranch. Stewart has since told the Green Valley News that the GVR Pickleball Club has not issued official support.

Green Valley loves its dogs, but for those looking for open spaces, it's a long drive to the two public dog parks in Sahuarita.

The GVR Foundation and a group of dog-loving GVR members are looking to change that with a proposed private dog park coinciding with a yet-to-be-formalized Canine Club.

So, could a dog park be coming soon for GVR members?

We want a dog park

The GVR Planning and Evaluation Committee on Thursday discussed several projects identified as having interest among members, including a dog park.

Leslie Kush is president of the Canine Club, a newly formed group of about 50 GVR members who have submitted an application to become a GVR club. They have met each week since mid-December to develop ideas for the club and to research what it would take to make a dog park a possibility.

"A lot of GVR members who use the Pima County dog parks find they're very much on the outskirts of our boundaries," she said. "We sat around and dreamed of a park closer in, frequented by people we knew, knew their dogs. We saw an opportunity to bring more attention to our need."

Kush said for many Green Valley residents, packing their dogs in the car and getting to Sahuarita — which operates two public dog parks — can be challenging.

"I think it could be so helpful as seniors can so often be challenged with mobility or balance, briefly or for a long period," she said. "A dog park becomes an essential part of having a happy household at that point."

Kush said a 2018 GVR survey showed about 50% of GVR members are dog owners, and the desire for a Green Valley park comes up a lot, even among people who don't have dogs.

"We figure the more we talk about a dog park the more likely we are to have one," she said. "We don't think a dog park is an entitlement and we really want to help."

If the dog park is approved by the P&E Committee, it would be a GVR members-only park. Kush said the concept of a membership park has a lot of benefits.

"When people know each other they seem to come at the same time, then they look after each other," she said. "If someone's mobility is impaired, other people are cleaning up after the dog for them, making sure their dog's ball gets thrown."

"We think there's a lot to be said for a well-managed membership park where people can know who they are mixing with and what dogs, (and) have some kind of control over the environment, and that makes it safer and cleaner usually."

GVR Foundation

The GVR Foundation supports a dog park and has been instrumental in getting the Canine Club going.

Foundation President Tim Stewart said he and fellow P&E Committee member Carol Lambert contacted dog owners about a club.

"When we are out talking with folks, they say, 'Gee, we need a dog park.' It's something we hear repeatedly," he said. "Carol, having a gorgeous dog, said, 'Hey, I'll work with you on that. Let's see what we can do.'"

"It was always my contention that there was a massive need and there would be great enthusiasm for it. Dog people are very passionate about their dogs."

Stewart said the Foundation's part in the dog park will be funding efforts and helping to plan.

"We're a partner and that's what we want to be," he said. "We will work with staff to give them input. Once you identify a location for a park and what you need, you can do fundraising."

The foundation has suggested an unused area by the pickleball courts at Canoa Ranch, a location Stewart said is ideal for the type of dog park they are looking for.

Originally, the land had been planned for additional courts, but with the creation of the 24-court complex it remains vacant and unclaimed.

"I think it would work well there. It's on the south side of Green Valley and we have nothing over there," he said. "That's the place we recommended to GVR. They would have to do engineering but we've never heard it committed to any purpose, it's not additional courts."

He said the area already has certain infrastructure in place, such as water and restrooms, and does not intrude on homes. He also said the GVR Pickleball Club supports a dog park there.

It meets the main needs Kush sees for a Green Valley dog park – space to separate dogs of different sizes and types, clean water, level land for ADA accessibility and a convenient location for residents.

Questions

During the meeting, GVR members also brought up concerns and questions, including liability, location, cost and timing. Some questioned whether there were potential insurance liabilities due to the possibility of dog bites.

CEO Scott Sommers said that's something they are still exploring the cost of with their insurance provider.

The original estimated budget presented for the project was \$95,000. It has now gone up to as high as \$270,000.

GVR Director Kathi Bachelor raised her concerns with the project's timing and unforeseen costs during the meeting as an audience member.

"With all of the (projects) that GVR is now anticipating that have been in the works for years, why should we grow this extra thing under the radar, or under the trees... when we don't even know what the costs are going to be for these other projects that we really want these other clubs to get... that have been waiting for a long time," Bachelor said.

Bachelor added that she didn't want this project to be rushed when costs hadn't been locked down.

Director Bart Hillyer, who also was in the audience, was skeptical of GVR taking on a dog park and listed several questions for the committee to consider.

"How many GVR members actually own dogs? How many GVR members use the dog parks in Sahuarita? I don't know the answer to that," Hillyer said. "How many HOAs have dog park areas? I don't know the answer to that question either but I can tell you that my HOA does."

Hillyer argued that a dog park would make more sense to be managed by a municipality or an HOA, rather than GVR.

"It seems to me that the first step ought to be a coordinated lobbying effort with GVR Foundation, the Greater Green Valley Community Foundation, the Canine Club and individual dog owners all lobby Pima County to have a park," Hillyer said. "To me it just doesn't make much sense for GVR to have a dog when it doesn't have any people parks."

Sahuarita's two dog parks are Quail Creek-Veterans Memorial Park and Anamax Park. Quail Creek and Rancho Sahuarita have private dog parks for residents.

The Canine Club and GVR Foundation said the county has no plans to bring a dog park to Green Valley, and the possibility of adding a dog park to the Canoa Hills Trail Park has been ruled out.

Kush believes safety concerns could easily be mitigated by the dog park etiquette class they plan to require of Canine Club members.

"We are going to train the owners as much as we are going to train the dogs," she said.

What's next

The committee voted to move forward with the dog park, collaborating with Canine Club members to determine amenities and location and then present a recommendation to the committee next month.

Kush is hopeful for the dog park and said the Canine Club will be considered for approval in the March meeting and hope to have a kick-off event in the fall.

The Canine Club will also unveil a website featuring local resources for dog owners soon.

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Have an interest?

If you have questions or comments about the proposed GVR dog park or Canine Club, email club leaders at: info@gvr canine.org.

Jamie Verwys

Reporter

Reporter Jamie Verwys grew up in Sahuarita and graduated from the high school in 2006. She lives in Tucson and graduated from the University of Arizona with a bachelor's degree in journalism in 2018.