

The dog days of summer are coming to Sequim

Group works with city to create off-leash pooch park

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The Sequim Dog Park Pals have a dream; a dream that someday soon, all Sequim's dogs will be judged not by their leash, but by the quality of their canine etiquette.

In scarcely more than a month, the Pals have gone from a loose, unnamed affiliation of dog owners to an organized group

that successfully persuaded city leaders to tentatively approve an off-leash dog park. While the Sequim City Councilors wanted more details before offering final approval, they were supportive of the concept.

"This is happening now because of the support and because of the donations, and volunteers who have stepped up to make it at little or no expense to the city," said David Brown, one of the Pals leaders. "It's been very smooth and successful."

The Pals have gathered more than 1,400 signatures of area residents who want to see a dog park in Sequim, proving that there are many interested dog

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Photo by Ariel Hansen

With two golden retrievers and a corgi mix between them, Sequim Dog Park Pals David Brown, left, and Ruth Marcus, right, are working with the city to create an off-leash dog park. The park will provide socialization and exercise opportunities for the canines, and a place for those who love them to gather.

Dog park

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owners in town.

"Other than parents, we're probably the largest special interest group in the area," Brown said.

These signatures, and the willingness of the group to put up a large portion of the materials and money needed to make it happen, have helped plans for the park to sail through city hall.

Though the Pals have commitments from a construction firm to donate fencing and the labor to install it, and from an artist who will be making decorative gates, they still need donations to offset other costs and volunteers to help maintain the park when it is installed.

"It's only going to happen if we can get the fundraising and the volunteers together," Brown said. "Every little bit would be helpful."

The Pals need donations to cover the cost of the park's essentials, including running water, double gates, separate areas for small and large dogs, benches, trash cans, signs and a bulletin board. If those are covered and money remains, they have a wish list of extra amenities they would like to offer, including a gazebo for bad weather, a doggie splash pool, picnic tables, lamps for dawn and dusk and agility obstacles.

"It's all geared toward both convenience and safety,"

Brown said.

Safety is essential, the Pals agree, and rules for the park will clearly state that any dog that can't be controlled by voice command shouldn't be let off leash. If a dog is misbehaving, users have the right to ask that the dog be promptly removed and can call the police if it isn't.

"It's an issue we take very seriously," said Ruth Marcus, a founding Pals member. "(Users) need to use good judgment, pay attention to their dogs while there."

She hopes that park patrons will educate each other on dog etiquette, on how to recognize and solve canine behavior issues. The park will give owners a place to let their dogs exercise at full speed, which simply cannot be done in a back yard or on a leash. Because dogs are pack animals, they also learn social skills as they encounter other canines.

"Bringing dogs together to socialize and play is important," Brown said. "Dogs that are exercised and run free are happier and safer to have in town."

Owners would also have to have proof their dogs are licensed and vaccinated, answering one concern of city councilors.

Although owners will need to keep an eye on their off-leash dogs at the park, it will provide an opportunity for people to make connections and socialize.

"By having places for dog owners to rendezvous, it establishes

community relationships," Marcus said, mentioning several close friends who she gathers with only for dog events.

Brown agreed. "I think a dog park will be one of the most fun places in town," he said.

The location is ideal, both Pals agreed.

Just east of Guy Cole Center at Carrie Blake Park, where many of Sequim's dog shows and agility trials are held, is a mostly flat field of just more than an acre that city staff say could be relatively easily converted to a dog park.

"It couldn't be a more perfect place," Marcus said, citing proximity to bath rooms and parking and the central location of the site.

With city approval, the Pals hope to have the park ready for dogs by August. In the meantime, the Pals have a go-ahead to gather donations and work with a park designer.

"This is what we had hoped for tonight," Brown said after hearing the council's vote. "Now we can start fundraising."

He hopes to have a formal agreement between the Pals and the city complete in about a month, outlining financial responsibility, liability, maintenance issues and other details. With the support the council showed the concept, it is likely they will approve the formal agreement, paving the way for a dog park in Sequim.