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NEWS

Community may take control of Aurora dog park

By **Chris Simon** ■ Aurora Banner
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The Aurora dog park is the site of a lot of memories for Helen Clarke.

She used to bring her German shepherd, Cleo, to play and frolic with other pooches at the park.

So when the inevitable time came to put down the 14-year-old dog, it seemed only fitting Cleo spent some final moments at the Industrial Parkway North site.

Ms Clarke sat the dog under a tree and allowed friends – both two and four-legged – to say their goodbyes.

"We brought her in on a blanket and all the dogs came by," she said. "It was pretty emotional. It's such a great place for the dogs to come, but it's not only the dogs that benefit; people socialize here as well."

For local dog owners, the park gives their pets an opportunity to exercise and explore in an open, natural setting.

Roughly 100 dog owners use the facility each day, Ms Clarke said.

The park is technically under the supervision of the town, though Ms Clarke has been volunteering to clean and maintain the site for years.

However, a pending agreement may help ease her burden.

The Canine Commons committee may take over care of the park, giving more people a chance to help out with routine maintenance.

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The agreement would also allow the committee to host fundraising initiatives, seek sponsorship and promotion and work toward the upgrade and expansion of the park.

"It's pretty exciting," said Ms Clarke, a member of the committee. "I've been a one-person show, but now I've got support from other people. I'm hoping this means we'll get a budget and can do some fundraising. We've got a few things on our list that we'd like to see done."

The park needs lighting, fresh water access, a better drainage system and improved fencing, she said.

The proposal will also benefit the municipality, parks manager Jim Tree said.

The committee will be allowed to approach council with specific funding requests and town staff can step back from the daily operation of the site.

"The park was supposed to have been operated by a volunteer group. That's what was put to council at the time."

There was never an executed operations agreement, however, so the town has been involved by default.

"We've found a deal that works for everybody," Mr. Tree said. "We're very happy to have a group of go-to people. It can lead to a lot of benefits."

The draft agreement will be debated by the town's parks and recreation advisory committee this week.

Council is expected to review the proposal in June.

"The park is very popular and we're trying to keep costs down to taxpayers," parks committee member and Councillor Chris Ballard said. "There's been a request by users to expand the size of the run area. We were not sure about going ahead, because we didn't have citizens in place to help with an expanded facility."

Chris Simon is a journalist with the *Barrie Advance*.

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