Open Letter Regarding the AVA's GoWalk App Initiative

1 message

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Open Letter Regarding the GoWalk AVA App Initiative

Seth Werner, AVA App Fundraising Chair and AVA Finance Chair
Jeff Giddings, GoWalk AVA App Development Chair

We have carefully reviewed the comments, concerns, and questions regarding the GoWalk AVA App Initiative. We appreciate the passion behind these discussions because they come from people who care deeply about AVA and its future.

We have heard concerns about cost, club revenue, technology, ownership of club information, and whether current members would personally find value in an app. These are fair questions, and they deserve thoughtful answers. While we may not all agree on every aspect of this initiative, we share the same goal: ensuring AVA remains strong, relevant, and sustainable for future generations of walkers.

One thing we would like to clarify is that the app is not being developed primarily for today's AVA members.

It is being developed to help future AVA members discover us. That does not mean current members won't benefit from it, but its primary purpose is to introduce more people to the clubs, events, routes, and friendships that make AVA special.

Many of us use organizations, businesses, and services that offer things we never personally use. I don't order McDonald's Chicken McNuggets, but I still enjoy a Big Mac. My gym recently expanded its free-weight area, even though I rarely use free weights. Those additions were not made specifically for me. They were made to attract and serve a broader audience while continuing to support existing customers.

The same principle applies here. The GoWalk App is not intended to replace paper directions, traditional events, group walks, club activities, or the friendships and camaraderie that define AVA. Those remain at the heart of our organization. The app is simply another tool, one designed to help people discover AVA who otherwise may never know we exist.

Why Many of Us Believe This Matters

The reality is that clubs across the country have worked incredibly hard to attract new walkers. Volunteers continue to devote countless hours to organizing events, maintaining routes, and promoting walking opportunities in their communities. Yet many clubs face a common challenge: while we continue to attract some new participants, we are often not replacing members who retire from active participation, relocate, or are no longer physically able to walk. This is not a criticism of what clubs are doing today. In fact, many clubs are doing incredible work.

Rather, it is recognition that if we want to grow, or even maintain our numbers over the long term, we may need additional tools that help us reach people who have never heard of AVA. We do not believe an app is a magic solution. It isn't. No single initiative will solve every challenge AVA faces. But we do believe it is worth exploring ways to introduce more people to an organization that all of us care deeply about.

What Makes AVA Different

Some have suggested that AVA is trying to compete with apps such as AllTrails, MapMyWalk, or Strava. We do not see it that way. Those companies already do what they

do very well. What they cannot provide is the local knowledge, experience, and curation that AVA clubs provide. For example, I can open a commercial walking app near my home and immediately find dozens of routes. Because I live here, I already know which ones are enjoyable, scenic, safe, and worth my time. But if I travel to Boston, Portland, San Diego, or somewhere I've never visited before, that same app cannot tell me which routes offer the best experience. AVA can.

Our walks are curated, vetted, reviewed, and maintained by local volunteers who know their communities. They know which routes showcase local history, provide the best scenery, avoid problem areas, and offer the most enjoyable experience.

That expertise is one of AVA's greatest strengths, and the app is intended to showcase it.

Protecting What Clubs Have Built

Another important consideration is the intellectual property created by AVA clubs. For decades, volunteers have invested thousands of hours developing routes, creating directions, researching points of interest, updating maps, and maintaining event information. Those routes did not happen by accident. They represent years of work and local knowledge.

An AVA-controlled platform allows clubs to maintain ownership and control of that information while making it more accessible to walkers. It also creates an

opportunity to preserve that knowledge for future generations rather than relying on outside commercial platforms whose priorities may be very different from ours.

Simply put, this is not just about technology. It is also about stewardship.

The Financial Questions Are Important

Many of the concerns we have heard focus on cost, revenue sharing, subscriptions, and how clubs might be affected financially. Those are reasonable concerns.

Many of the financial scenarios currently being discussed are based on assumptions about business models that have not been finalized.

Just as importantly, the overall project cost is still evolving. The initial survey work and UX/UI design effort were intended to help define requirements, user expectations, and functionality before obtaining final development proposals. As a result of that work, the scope of the project has already been refined, and current indications suggest development costs may be significantly lower than some of the earlier estimates that have been circulated.

This is not unusual in software development. Projects often begin with discovery, requirements gathering, and user experience design so that organizations better understand what should be built before finalizing budgets and development plans. The purpose of this phase was not merely to design screens, but to reduce risk, clarify

priorities, and help ensure that any future investment is based on actual user needs rather than assumptions.

Development costs are still being evaluated. Revenue-sharing models are still being developed. Funding approaches are still being analyzed. For those reasons, many of the numbers currently being discussed should be viewed as preliminary rather than final.

What has been clearly stated by AVA leadership is that participating clubs need to benefit from the platform, not be harmed by it. The goal is not to reduce club revenue. The goal is to create additional opportunities for participation, visibility, and growth that ultimately strengthen clubs.

As these discussions continue, we encourage everyone to evaluate the actual plans as they are developed rather than assumptions about what those plans might become.

It's About More Than an App

One aspect of this conversation that often gets overlooked is that a significant portion of the original funding request was not for software development at all. It was for marketing.

AVA has countless wonderful events, routes, and dedicated volunteers. Yet millions of people have never heard of AVA or volkssporting.

What if AVA had dedicated resources each year to promote clubs, events, and walking opportunities?

What if more people searching for things to do in their communities actually discovered AVA?

What if more travelers learned that AVA routes existed where they were vacationing?

Some of those efforts would involve the app. Many would not.

The larger goal is helping more people discover what AVA already does well.

Supporting Clubs and Traditional Events

The app will not replace clubs. It will help people find clubs.

The app will not replace traditional events. It will help people find traditional events.

The app will not replace the AVA experience. It will help introduce people to the AVA experience.

Someone opening the app should be able to discover nearby clubs, upcoming traditional events, curated local routes, and opportunities to connect with fellow walkers. Every one of those outcomes supports the mission AVA has pursued for decades.

Looking Ahead

Not every member will use the app, and that's perfectly okay. Not every member uses Online Start Boxes. Not every member uses Facebook. Not every member uses Meetup, GPS navigation, or smartphone directions. Yet each of those tools has helped connect people with walking opportunities. Ultimately, we believe the success of this initiative should not be measured by how many current members download an app. It should be measured by whether more people discover AVA because of it.

We all want the same thing: healthy clubs, successful events, strong volunteer support, and a vibrant future for AVA. We may have different ideas about how best to achieve those goals, but we hope this letter helps explain why many of us believe the GoWalk App is worth exploring.

We welcome continued discussion, constructive feedback, and thoughtful questions as the project develops.

Sincerely,
Seth Werner AVA App Fundraising Chair AVA Finance Chair
Jeff Giddings GoWalk AVA App Development Chair