

Appendix J: Skateboard Park Working Group Report

Introduction

The City Council convened a Skateboard Park Working Group in May of 2003 to respond to residents' requests for a skateboarding facility in Shaker Heights. The results of that process and the final recommendations are included in the Memo below sent from the workgroup to the Mayor and City Council.

Recommended Site for Skate Park in Shaker Heights

TO: Mayor Judy Rawson
Members of City Council

FROM: Skate Park Working Group
Brian Gleisser, Chair

DATE: January 22, 2004

COPY

SUBJECT: **Recommended Site for a Skate Park in Shaker Heights**

The Skate Park Working Group respectfully submits its site recommendation for a Shaker Heights Skate Park.

Purpose of the Skate Park Working Group

In June 2002 City Council was presented with a petition of approximately 200 signatures from Shaker Heights citizens supporting the creation of a city-owned skate park. At the time this group was suggesting a site at the bottom of the sledding hill at Thornton Park as that area was under construction by the Sewer District. Council raised several issues regarding the skate park in general and specific to the suggested Thornton Park site: was there support from residents throughout the community including residents in the Thornton Park area; what is the noise level of a skate park; what is the safety level of the sport for insurance purposes; and what is the popularity of the sport.

On February 24, 2003 skate park advocates returned to City Council with answers to the earlier questions. A noise meter reading conducted by the former Director of Safety at TRW showed skate parks to be the same as or quieter than swimming pools when comparing decibel levels. Articles from the New York Times were presented showing skateboarding to be one of the safest sports when protective gear is worn. It was also reported that there are 16 million skateboarders in the U.S. compared to nine million registered Little Leaguers. Between June 2002 and February 2003 skate park advocates met with PTO groups and neighborhood associations across the community regarding the skate park proposal. In addition a petition with 304 signatures, including signatures from Thornton Park area residents, in support of "building an in-line skating/skate boarding park for the children of the city of Shaker Heights," was presented to City Council (attachment 1).

On the basis of this request, City Council set aside \$70,000 at its March 10, 2003 budget work session to be considered for building a skate park if a site could be identified. A working group comprised of city

council members and citizen members was to be formed to identify a site. It was recommended that at least two citizen members be from the Thornton neighborhood given the concern by some Thornton neighborhood residents of locating a skate park in the Thornton Park recreation area.

The Skate Park Working Group was convened in May 2003 to consider sites for a proposed skate park in Shaker Heights and to recommend a site to the Mayor and City Council. The Working Group was comprised of six members: the four citizen members were Kara Girvin and Stan Holloway from the Thornton neighborhood, Valerie Jones, and Amy Shahinian and from City Council, Brian Gleisser and Ken Kovach. The Working Group met five times in 2003 (May 22, June 3, July 1, October 21 and November 3) and held one open community meeting on July 30 which was attended by approximately 100 people.

Process Followed by the Working Group

At the first meeting of the Working Group we agreed on the definition of a skate park as a flat concrete or asphalt surface approximately 120 feet by 70 feet in size (though a skate park can range in size from 60 by 70 feet up to 150 by 100 feet and larger as seen in attachments 2-6) that could hold a variety of ramps, rails, and other equipment for use by skaters. It was also assumed that the skate park must be secured, monitored and accessible only by purchasing a pass.

At the first meeting the Working Group also agreed upon a set of 13 site consideration factors to be used in evaluating any potential site. These factors included:

- *Lot size:* is the site large enough to accommodate a skate park;
- *Impact on adjacent properties:* what are the adjacent land uses and what is the proximity of the site to these uses;
- *Parking on-site:* is there currently parking on the site;
- *Visibility/security:* is the site visible for security and monitoring purposes;
- *Safety:* is the site safe in terms of location and access;
- *Existing monitoring/supervision:* is there currently supervision on the site;
- *Site availability:* is the site actually available or are there restrictions such as deed, zoning, flood plain or other such restrictions which could prevent construction;
- *Cost of site preparation:* how developed is the site;
- *Proximity of public transit:* how accessible is the site;
- *Availability of restrooms:* are restroom currently on site;
- *Availability of food and water:* is there food and water available on site or nearby for children and parents;
- *Landscaping buffer:* can the site be shielded from neighboring uses;
- *Seating area for spectators:* Is there currently seating available for use by parents or observers.

At the second meeting, the Working Group applied these site consideration factors to a list of 28 city owned properties, supplied by the Shaker Heights Planning Department, which were either vacant or used as parking lots (attachment 7). It was decided that only city-owned parcels would be considered, thus sites that were privately owned or owned by the Shaker Heights School District were not included for evaluation. In addition, the Horseshoe Lake park area was not included due to the property being owned by the city of Cleveland and the accompanying deed restrictions on that property. After applying the site consideration factors to the 28 parcels, a short list of nine possible sites was created and further evaluated at the third meeting of the Working Group (attachment 8).

On July 30 an open community meeting was held at Shaker Heights City Hall to hear comments regarding the nine possible sites on the short list. The community was notified through notices sent to neighborhood associations and through publicity in the Sun Press. A “full house” filled City Council chambers as residents and business owners expressed their concerns regarding specific sites for almost an hour and a half. Residents from the Thornton, Lomond, Moreland, Malvern, and Mercer neighborhoods attended to comment on sites in their respective neighborhoods, as did representatives from Sunrise Assisted Living, Ohio Savings Bank and the RMS owned shopping center between Warrensville Center Road and Farnsleigh Road. While there was general agreement that recreation programs are needed for older children in Shaker Heights, two major concerns became apparent with respect to locating a skate park: (1) a serious concern as to the level of noise produced by a skate park and its detrimental impact on nearby residences or businesses and (2) the potential problems of loitering, control, and security when attracting significant numbers of children between the ages of 10 and 18. Having sufficient parking to serve a skate park was also mentioned. In addition there was a general concern regarding the City making a decision on a skate park prior to the citywide recreation assessment scheduled to occur in 2004. Residents commented that any decision on a skate park should occur within the context of the overall recreation assessment.

In terms of public comment, it should also be noted that 29 letters were received opposing certain specific locations for a skate park, including letters from the Executive Director of Sunrise Assisted Living on Chagrin Boulevard, the Property Manager of the Van Aken Towers Condominium Association at 16300 Van Aken Boulevard and the Managing Member of the owners of the Continental Luxury Apartment at 3341 and 3351 Warrensville Center Road. Of the 29 letters received 19 came from residents in the Thornton Condominiums located at 3333 Warrensville Center Road, adjacent to Thornton Park. (Attachment 9 lists the addresses of the letters.) A copy of a letter sent to the Sun Press opposing building a skate park at the base of the Thornton Park sledding hill, signed by 77 residents of the Thornton neighborhood, was also received (attachment 10).

Recommendation

Based on the site consideration factors and concerns voiced by residents and businesses, the Working Group recommends that **an enclosed skate park be built as an extension of the Thornton Park ice skating rink building on property currently occupied by tennis courts.**

The Working Group identified an enclosed Thornton Park site adjacent to the ice skating facility as the best location for a skate park for the following reasons:

- There is adequate space on the existing footprint of the tennis courts to accommodate the dimensions of a skate park;
- Enclosing the skate park eliminates noise impacts on adjacent property owners, similar to the enclosed ice skating rink;
- There is existing parking serving Thornton Park (and more parking could be added in the unused green space alongside the western parking lot if needed);
- An enclosed skate park would be secure as part of the ice skating rink facility;
- An enclosed skate park would be monitored and supervised as part of the ice skating rink facility;
- User fees for the skate park could be generated in much the same way fees are currently generated for the ice skating rink and pool at Thornton Park;

- The site is available as it is city owned and already used for recreation purposes, though it would require the relocation of tennis courts; and
- Restrooms, food and water are currently available at the ice skating rink facility.

When compared with the other possible sites, only the Thornton Park site had the parking, on-site monitoring and supervision, and restrooms, food and water already in place.

Other Observations

While it is recognized that enclosing a proposed skate park significantly increases the cost of a skate park, it also increases the usage of such a facility in that it allows for year round use of this recreation investment by Shaker residents. Presumably equipment would also have a longer life as it would be protected from the weather effects of Northeast Ohio. As to relocating the existing tennis courts, it was felt that (1) most neighborhood groups would not object to tennis courts given their relatively low intensity usage and (2) relocating tennis courts to school properties would seem to be a feasible joint City/School recreation program given the precedent that tennis courts already exist at school facilities.

An enclosed skate park at Thornton Park would provide much needed recreation programming for an age group (10 to 16 years old) that currently has relatively few recreation possibilities in Shaker Heights while eliminating the two major concerns most often voiced by residents and businesses – noise and uncontrolled use of a skate park by unsupervised children. While the investment would be higher for such a facility, the return on usage, longevity, and programming quality would also be greater.

Acknowledgements

The Skate Park Working Group appreciates the assistance provided by Ms. Jeri Chaikin and her staff in arranging for meetings at City Hall and Ms. Joyce Braverman and her staff for providing city property information. In addition the Work Group appreciates the interest of the many Shaker Heights residents who participated in the community meeting and who also took the time to send in their comments and concerns.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this community discussion.