

EDITORIAL

Skate park would provide excellent outlet for exercise, artistic expression

Greenfield did it once. Can it do it again? About a decade ago, largely through the persistence of volunteer supporters like Mary Cohn, the town built a skate park that became home turf to many of the sport's young local enthusiasts. But the park was closed and its plywood ramps dismantled in 2010 when the Olver Transit Center was built on the site off Olive and Hope streets.

Attempts to find a replacement home for skateboarders faded — until now. A coalition of town leaders and community activists has found a new location and promises to find the money needed.

"All the kids that are in here and many more have been skateboarding around town in places that they probably shouldn't be, but they need to exercise and have creative outlets, as well," Recreation Director Christy Moore told a public meeting convened to discuss plans for a new skate park.

The town and nonprofit Greening Greenfield are applying for an ArtPlace America grant to help fund a \$1.1 million park on a piece of town-owned land on Beacon Street near the middle school.

"Our main goal was to find a place that is in the heart of downtown so everyone can have easy access to it,"

Moore said.

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Christy Moore, recreation director

Recently, the town acquired a piece of land between Beacon and Riddell streets easily accessible and visible from the road, a consideration for public safety reasons. The property currently contains several dilapidated buildings that are contaminated with asbestos and lead paint, all of which

would have to be safely removed. So, the park plan would repurpose a brownfield site and revitalize a blighted area.

The project is estimated to cost \$1.1 million and would be paid through a combination of grants, state funding and private donations. Greenfield has applied for a \$500,000 ArtPlace grant on the assumption the park would have an artwork component.

Moore said the design could incorporate artwork in the park's various features, as well as a graffiti wall where kids would have the freedom to paint and draw whatever they choose.

Susan Worgaftik of Greening Greenfield said even if the town doesn't receive the grant, that funding will still be sought for the project.

It's good to see volunteers committed to this project again, and joined by the town's recreation department. That teamwork helps remove the unfair sense that skate parks invite crime, which has concerned some of the proposed park's would-be neighbors.

Several abutters attended the meeting to voice concern the project might be noisy and pose a vandalism threat to nearby Brown Motors.

We hope the sport, which gives young people a healthy outlet for their energy, has outgrown this stigma. The only significant infraction we remember at the old park, which was located next door to Recorder offices, was enthusiasts sneaking in after hours.

Ben Miner, a longtime skateboarding enthusiast, said society has criminalized skateboarding for years by not building the proper facilities for those interested in the sport, leaving skateboarders no other choice than to skate on whatever curbs or rails they can find.

Mckenzie Webb, who lives on Grove Street abutting Hillside Park, said it's remarkable how much her neighborhood changed after the community came together to revitalize their park.

"There are so many kids over there just today playing. The drugs, the drinking, the homeless, everything has disappeared," she said, adding, "I feel like the skate park could probably do the same for your area."

We agree with those who say that a well-designed park would be a good reuse of a vacant, blighted property and become another recreational asset to the town.