

Skaters vouch for pushing boundaries

Skaters

GREENFIELD

Town gathers input on skate park possibility

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GREENFIELD — When Julia Griffin started skateboarding at Unity Skate Park in Turners Falls nine months ago, she learned to push her boundaries and started getting better grades in college as a result.

“I was able to grow as a person and in the community, and learn about different people and see the different personalities that come from the skate park,” she said.

Now, Griffin, 20, hopes a new skate park in Greenfield will help others realize their own potential.

Griffin was one of about 50 community members who attended a public meeting Thursday to discuss ideas for a skate park on a piece of town-owned land on Beacon Street near the middle school. The town and Greening Greenfield are in the process of applying for an ArtPlace America grant to help fund the project.

20 Sanderson St. not far from the prospective skate park. Although most supported the project, several abutters voiced concern about possible harm to surrounding properties.

Greenfield has been without a skate park since 2010, when the park on Olive Street was demolished to make room for Olver Transit Center parking.

“Since then, 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 said.

Since that time, the town has been looking for a central location for a new park.

“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.

Recently, the town acquired a piece of land between Beacon and Riddell streets that has been identified as a good location for a skate park. The site is near the middle school and close to Federal Street School, easily accessible and visible for public safety. The property currently contains several

buildings that are contaminated with asbestos and lead paint.

“We would be repurposing a brownfield site, which is important, and revitalizing a blighted and dilapidated area,” Moore said.

The project is estimated to cost \$1.1 million and would be paid through a combination of grants, state funding and private donations. Last summer, the project was chosen as a finalist for ArtPlace America’s 2016 National Cre-

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Many children, teenagers and parents attended the meeting, which was held in the town building at

dilapidated

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ative Placemaking Fund, but did not end up receiving the grant. However, the town was encouraged to reapply under a different grant category, and is expected to find out whether its application made it to the second round of selection in coming weeks.

Round two applications are due in August and award winners will be notified in December. Greenfield has applied for \$500,000.

“With this grant, we need to include art. What’s really cool is skateboarding itself is an artform,” Moore said, adding 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, the project will not disappear.

“We will be working with other people to find other funding to do this. This is not a project that will go away,” she said.

Several abutters attended the meeting to voice concern the project might be noisy and thdrainage issues created by the concrete structure and potential vandalism to nearby Brown Motors.

“No one would ever do anything to jeopardize the park,” Griffin said, Many other skateb-oard ers in the room agreed, saying they look out for eac h o t h e r.

Ben Miner, a longtime skateboarding enthusiast and Skate Greenfield founder, 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. He said it’s remarkable how successful skateparks are.

“This is a place where we have an opportunity to reuse a piece of land that can’t be used for much else,” he said. “I think if people get past the fears and get past the stereotypes, we can do amazing things for Greenfield.”

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 the 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.”