

# City Center Skatepark

## Washington Jefferson Park – Preliminary Site Analysis

4.21.08

### Background

Following the success of several medium-sized skateparks recently constructed around the city, strong community interest has catalyzed for the construction of a large, centrally-located skatepark near downtown Eugene. Funding has been identified to initiate the effort and community fundraising partnership towards realizing this goal.

One key criterion discussed by proponents of a city-central skatepark, and frequently sought-after by users of skateparks across the country, is that the facility be placed under permanent, year-round cover. Burnside skatepark in Portland is an example of one of the few public, outdoor facility in Oregon offering this feature. Similar to Burnside, discussions in Eugene have introduced the possibility of locating the City Center Skatepark in Washington/Jefferson Park under the conjoined lanes of the I-105 bridge. Following a brief site reconnaissance and discussions with operations and public safety staff, this summary outlines general factors and issues affecting this proposal.

### Opportunities at Washington/Jefferson Park

The study area includes the section of Washington/Jefferson Park under cover of all lanes of the I-105 Bridge, between the south edge of First Ave. and the north edge of the railroad tracks. This area offers several opportunities for locating a "city center" skate park facility. Most areas under cover are occupied with existing uses, including, from the north, the Connolly Memorial Horseshoe Courts (built 1976, dedicated 1990), a children's playground, a restroom building, basketball courts, and a stage area. South of the stage area, a large, open slope ramps steeply up to bridge supports just north of the tracks.

Square footage of cover for the horseshoe court area is approximately 18,600 square feet (sf); the playground/restroom area 17,400 sf; the basketball courts 17,200 sf; and the stage/slope area 19,000 sf. In addition, there are several large, open areas that are not under cover, directly adjacent to the covered area, ranging from 4,000 sf to about 9,000 sf in size.

### Area of Proposed Facility

To meet today's standards and expectations for a large skatepark serving a community the size of Eugene, an area of 15,000 – 20,000 square feet would be about right, although there are many popular skateparks in the 11,000 sf range. A few other well-known skateparks in Oregon are shown below for comparison:

Newberg 29,000 sf  
Ashland 15,000 sf  
Corvallis 14,600 sf  
Ponderosa (Bend) 11,500 sf

Pier Park (Portland) 11,000 sf  
Seaside 11,000 sf  
Burnside 10,000 sf

A large skatepark could be accommodated in one of four locations under complete cover in W/J Park. Each of these locations would involve displacing an existing use. The question of whether this would be acceptable to the community, and if so, which use to displace, would be an important topic to resolve in any community dialogue about where to locate the skatepark.

## **Condition and Use of Existing Facilities**

Although all facilities appear to be maintained and used, more information is needed regarding the use, condition, and trends of these facilities if this option is considered. The following outlines preliminary observations only.

### Horseshoe Courts

#### Use:

The horseshoe courts are used monthly by members of the Emerald Club of the Oregon Horseshoe Pitching Association. The club began in 1976, and included nearly 150 members at its peak. Today, the club has about 25-30 members. Up to six tournaments are held at the facility each year, drawing from 30 to 50 participants locally and from other OHPA clubs. Most participants currently belong to a senior demographic (60+ years). Tournaments are held between May and October.

#### Condition:

OHPA members maintain the courts in good condition. About half of the horseshoe courts are covered. Clay-base courts are located under the covered area, where they can be used year-round. Outside the covered area, sand-base courts are used for their ability to function despite wet conditions.

#### Replacement cost:

Re-construction of the horseshoe facility in an alternate location is conceptually feasible nearby within W/J Park. Replacement cost would likely be in the range of \$120,000 - \$160,000.

#### Suitability of Area for a Skatepark:

Visibility from three sides via Washington Street, Jefferson Street, and First Avenue is good. The topography is generally flat and suitable for skatepark uses, comparable to the playground and basketball areas.

### Children's Play Area

#### Use:

The children's playground represents the only covered, public facility of its kind in Eugene. The community-wide function of a covered facility isn't evident, however, and the practical function of the facility has historically been to serve the nearby neighborhood. Due to its location, including the feel of the site and the frequent negative use under the W/J bridge, the play area doesn't present a very attractive option for parents. The playground is frequently used by transients and illegal campers during day and night due to the soft sand and protection from rain. Staff report that children do not use the playground when it's inhabited by transients. Frequency of use by children appears to be low on most days. The recent construction of RiverPlay just a few blocks away has probably reduced the use by offering a better option to people living in the neighborhood.

#### Condition:

The facility is outdated and does not meet current standards. The play value of the existing play structures is very low, and the structures occupy a much larger space than is needed. Sand surfacing prevents ADA accessibility, and the steep grading of the playground surface poses serious challenges to keeping it clean and safe.

#### Replacement Cost:

Although RiverPlay may serve the area, an attractive, neighborhood-scale playground is needed. Removing the existing playground and re-building a neighborhood-scale playground in one of the open areas adjacent to the bridge, or to another area in W/J Park, could offer a more visible, light and friendly area for children and parents. Without cover and sand, a re-built playground could be designed to be attractive to children but not

to transients. Cost for removal and reconstruction in a different location would likely be in the range of \$160,000- \$200,000.

#### Suitability of Area for a Skatepark:

Visibility is moderate from Jefferson Street and low from Washington Street due to the large, vegetated berms and pedestrian bridge. The vegetated berms could potentially be redeveloped as a viewing area.. The topography is more varied than the horseshoe area, but still relatively flat and well suited to skatepark development. The greatest challenge for redevelopment would be the intrusion of the restroom structure (see below). Suitability is otherwise comparable to the horseshoe and basketball areas.

### Restrooms

#### Use:

Although the restrooms currently serve some legitimate public use, they have received serious and frequent negative uses for many years, and represent a significant operational, social, and law enforcement challenge. The poor visibility, dark location, unattractive design and condition of the facility and lack of critical public mass to discourage negative use have all contributed to the problem. Currently, one area of the restrooms is reserved for OHPA users. An interior kitchen area is used by a church group, however the kitchen area is not a critical function for the park.

#### Condition:

The building structure itself is in reasonable working condition, however is old and unattractive, with poor function by current standards. The restroom blocks visibility into the area from the east, and is generally poorly located from a public safety standpoint. The design of the restroom for single-users with locking doors supports chronic negative use and vandalism.

#### Replacement Cost:

The restroom would present a significant obstacle to redeveloping the area as a skatepark, however restrooms of some type would be needed to support park uses if a skatepark is constructed. Re-thinking the nature of the restroom facility would be highly recommended, including re-location, re-design, or possibly replacement with several portable facilities in an attractive housing. Replacement with a new restroom building would cost approximately \$180,000 - \$220,000. Portables with attractive housing would cost in the range of \$35,000 - \$50,000. Both options would require significant, ongoing operational cost.

#### Suitability of Area for Skatepark:

See “Children’s Play Area.”

### Basketball Courts

#### Use:

The covered basketball courts are a frequently used facility, and represent the only covered, outdoor complex of full-size courts in the city. Cover offers year-round play opportunities, and unlike indoor facilities such as recreation centers, school gymnasiums, university or private facilities, these courts are not subject to restricted building hours, reserved use by other groups, memberships or user fees. The courts attract legitimate use, typically by older children, teens, and young adults, which helps counterbalance the abundant negative use nearby. The basketball court area is currently used, and has been used often in the past, for a variety of community-wide events. The hard surface, cover, and large, open area offer a unique opportunity for flexible community space.

Condition:

Currently, serious drainage problems with the I-5 Bridge are resulting in standing water and mud on several of the courts, which has significantly limited use. The Oregon Dept. of Transportation is scheduled to fix the issues in the coming months. The surface is otherwise in good condition. The hoist system for the hoops has been disabled, and the hoops themselves are functional but unattractive.

Replacement Cost:

Re-location of the basketball courts would likely impose the greatest impact on current use patterns and opportunities within the park, and cause the greatest impact in the new location due to the large area required. Replacement cost would run in the range of \$200,000 - \$250,000.

Suitability of Area for a Skatepark:

Visibility is moderate from Jefferson Street and Washington Street. The topography is level. The site is otherwise well suited to the needs of a skatepark, comparable to the horseshoe and playground areas.

## Stage Area

Use:

The stage area is used for various community events. The sloped area south of the stage and north of the rail lines is currently used as a “backstage” for performers during occasional events. The area receives high levels of negative use, with frequent camping, drinking and drug use.

Condition:

While in need of cleaning and cosmetic refurbishing, the concrete stage structure remains in good condition. The stage feature contains infrastructure, e.g. power service, to support large events, which is in good working order. The backstage area is compacted dirt with little vegetation due to lack of water and light. The area towards the upper bridge footings is dimly lit and somewhat impacted by fumes and noise from trains.

Replacement Cost:

The function and use of the stage area would need to be explored further, and either integration, replacement in a different location, or removal would need to be considered. A location for replacement would need to be found in conjunction with a large, open hard-surface space as exists with the basketball courts. Replacing the seat walls west of the basketball court could be one option, although the area is not under cover. Replacement cost may be in the range of \$120,000 - \$150,000 or more, depending on the relocation site.

Integrating the function of a stage, either by including the existing stage structure or replacing it with a stage more suitable to multi-use as a skatepark feature, could eliminate the need to re-locate the existing feature. A method for handling periodic conflicts with stage use would need to be adopted and followed by users.

Suitability of Area for a Skatepark:

Although the significant slope (15 feet or more) poses a design challenge, it also presents an opportunity to use topography to create deep bowls and other features. Complicating factors may include engineering slope and retaining walls, and addressing concerns associated with maintaining the stability of the I-105 bridge footings. The feasibility of modifying the slope would need to be explored further with ODOT officials before this site could be considered a viable option. Of the four options, this may pose the greatest opportunity for diverse skating terrain, however offers the least area within which to build.

## **Alternative Locations**

### **I-105 Storage Area:**

One other potential location exists under the combined width of the I-105 bridge near the north end of Washington and Jefferson Street in Skinner Butte Park. This area is currently closed to the public and used by the City of Eugene for storage. The Skinner Butte Park Master Plan (2001) calls for opening this area for bicycle and pedestrian access between Skinner Butte Park and Owen Rose Garden. The covered area is substantially lower and narrower than the area south of First Ave, offering about 14,000 square feet of total area. Presumably, a skatepark of about 12,000 square feet would fit in this area, depending on clearance to the bridge beams and other access and amenities. Possible advantages might include rehabilitation of an under-utilized park area, synergy with youth activities at the adjacent Skinner City Farm, simplified public process by avoiding conflicting uses, and cost savings by avoiding replacement of existing facilities. Disadvantages may include relocating a centrally-located and frequently-used storage facility, less public visibility and therefore greater potential for negative use, and costs for substantial access improvements at the north end of Washington Street to accommodate users. It is also unclear whether the existing restroom at RiverPlay (1000 feet to the east), or the Owen Rose Garden (1000 feet to the northwest) would be adequate to serve the skatepark.

### **Other W/J open spaces:**

Although there are other areas within W/J Park that could accommodate a large skatepark, the need for good cover limits options to the areas described above. South of the rail lines, the freeway splits and becomes more elevated. Placement directly under either branch of the freeway in these areas wouldn't afford the desired cover, even for a portion of the skatepark. Rain falling obliquely would likely saturate any covered areas. Spanning the gap between the freeway branches with a roof or tensile structure would be a significant cost, engineering, and operational barrier.

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