
SKATE PARKS

A Practical Guide to Planning and Development



A Resource Guide for Recreation, Parks and Conservation

Why Build a Skate Park?



It is no surprise to any elected official or community leader in Pennsylvania that skateboarding, in-line skating and free-style biking have become extremely popular sports. Many studies indicate that participation in these activities continues to grow. According to Simmons Market Research Bureau, American Demographics 2002, there are over 16 million users of skateboards in the country, a 60 percent increase since 1999. Most participants are males between the ages of 8-16, looking for alternatives to traditional team sports.

The demand for skate park facilities is unquestionable and many Pennsylvania communities are experiencing confrontations between teenagers and local authorities regarding the use of public facilities to practice

their sport. Some communities have even banned skateboarding and roller blading at public facilities, sidewalks and streets leaving these teens with no place to skate. It is apparent that the alternative is to create designated skate areas.

Since skate boarders, in-line skaters and free-style bikers use the same type of structures and obstacles as part of their recreation, the most efficient approach is to design one facility that will accommodate all three sports. This document will refer to this combined facility as a skate park. The different sports will be combined into one term, "skaters."

When designing a new skate park, here are some important steps to guide your planning efforts.

Step 1: Research insurance options and address liability concerns.

Check with local carriers for availability of liability insurance, coverage requirements and cost.

Insured municipalities should check with their existing carrier to determine if their current policy will cover skate park facilities or if an additional rider is needed. Outside carriers that specialize in skate park insurance could also be considered.

Insurance providers may have established guidelines or require certain conditions for operation.

Determine if the skate park will be supervised or non-supervised. Your insurance carrier may dictate the choice. Some are requiring supervision. However, many insurance companies and legal professionals hold the opinion that there is greater liability exposure created when supervision is provided. Therefore, an unsupervised facility with appropriate signage could present the least exposure to liability.

Step 2: Organize a skate park committee and involve the community's skaters and decision makers early in the process.

Conduct public meetings with skaters, parents and key public officials to begin the process of organizing a skate park steering committee. Committee members should include community decision makers and a good cross section of potential skate park users. The skaters know what they want and why. Community decision makers will generate local

support for the project. When forming your committee choose both youth and adult members who are knowledgeable about the subject and able to promote the project. Also, choose members who will coordinate, organize



and record the events of committee meetings. Establish regularly scheduled meetings to insure commitment and completion of planned tasks.

Once the steering committee is established, initiate a campaign to gain community support for a public skate park. Begin by compiling information on skating and skate parks. Develop educational brochures and fact sheets that will provide an overview of the sport, its growing popularity, answers to questions and concerns, and other information that will dispel myths and misconceptions regarding skating and skate parks. Include a concise summary of your specific plan and level of funding needed to complete the project.

Develop and maintain a list of all media contacts. Include all local newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations, and community organizations that have newsletters.

Conduct field trips to other skate parks in the area to see and hear what works and what does not work.

Never lose touch with the skaters. They will be the ones using the park on a daily basis, so it is important they are happy with the result.

If your local municipality is not willing to commit time and resources to the project, an alternative is to seek support from an existing non-profit community organization that is willing to lend the umbrella of their non-profit status. This essentially makes your group part of that organization for the life of the project. With an established non-profit agency acting as your umbrella organization, you can apply for grants and collect “tax deductible” donations. The non-profit organization may be willing to handle disbursement of funds, assist with publicity, promotion and fundraising, and work with the steering committee to contract for construction. If your committee can find a non-profit community-service agency that will embrace the grass roots effort of the project, your workload will be reduced considerably. Some skate park committees take the steps necessary to establish themselves as non-profit entities.

Step 3: Consult with a licensed design professional.

Select a design consultant licensed to practice in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Consider a landscape architect, engineer, or architect with experience in park and recreation facility design and construction.

Unlike public playgrounds, which must conform to ASTM Standards, there are no approved codes of practice or other legislation regarding skate park construction, design and installation. Therefore, public facility providers must rely upon industry standards, suppliers and their sales pitch. A good consultant will provide a range of possible design solutions

(in cooperation with skate park equipment suppliers) and will be able to justify why their proposal is suitable for your needs. Care should be taken to avoid consultants who only suggest one skate park manufacturer, one type of facility or one kind of ramp design.

Step 4: Determine the best location and surface for the skate park.

Make sure the location is visible and easily accessible for skaters and local authorities. Many skate parks are constructed in existing, underutilized recreation areas like a tennis court or parking lot. One benefit of using existing court areas is that they may already have the necessary hard surfacing and fencing needed for a skate park. However, wider gates may be needed to allow vehicle access for delivery or relocation of ramps.

Look for an area with a minimum of 7,500 square feet. For example, a single tennis court is approximately 7,500 square feet and could



accommodate up to 45 riders at one time. When determining the size of the skate park, consider the number of projected users and availability of funds. If possible, consider a location with additional room for expansion.

Consider the impact on neighbors. Skate parks can generate a lot of noise. Take into account the distance to residential areas, the noise effects of various equipment materials and options for landscape sound barriers. The industry recommends that the skate park should be a minimum of 150 yards from any residential area. Consider building a skate park in an existing large community park that may already address these concerns.

Surface choice will be dictated by a combination of factors including local temperature and budget. Concrete is the most preferred surface by the skaters. This smooth, non-brushed surface is ideal for skating but is expensive to install and more difficult to maintain in cooler climates. Therefore, in Pennsylvania, you may prefer to use asphalt. If selecting asphalt, a fine aggregate smooth-finish is desired. If your budget allows, it is advisable to finish the area with a thin, hard polyethylene (color coat) shell similar to the surface used for tennis courts. This will create a smooth and durable ride for many years.

For a site with existing pavement, invite skaters to test ride the surface. A fresh topping of asphalt or concrete may be required. For new construction, an engineer or landscape architect is needed to test soils and, if necessary, design drainage.

Step 5:
Contact several skate park equipment suppliers and investigate the various options for skate park ramp construction.

There are many factors involved in determining ramp construction materials. The three most important components are budget, intensity of use, and local environment. The choice of

materials is vital to the acceptance and success of the skate park.

Skate ramp design includes individual components such as the frame, deck, riding



surface, and transition plates. Depending on the manufacturer, the type of materials may vary for each ramp component.

Several materials are suitable for skate ramp construction. The primary materials are wood, concrete, steel and composite materials such as polyester powdercoating and Skatelite. Each has benefits and drawbacks.

Talk to several sales representatives of different equipment suppliers in order to make an informed choice. It is important to investigate all strengths and weaknesses of the various ramp materials including construction and design of the equipment. Important issues for discussion include quality, durability, noise, safety provisions, reconfiguration flexibility, long-term maintenance requirements, life expectancy, warranty and service after the sale.

Contact references of recent skate park installations to get feedback from customers and users. Visit “older” skate parks to see long-term durability of various equipment materials.

Step 6: Designing the skate park and layout of the obstacles.

Conduct design workshops with a design professional and skate park equipment representative. Be sure to involve the community's skaters in the process.

For a successful skate park, the plan must be professionally designed to fulfill the needs of all users (skate boarders, in-line skaters and free style bicyclists) and range of ability levels, from beginners to advanced. Professional design is crucial to skate park safety and exposure to liability.

The general design guidelines are: no cross patterns, segregation, and emergency access. The goal is to have flow throughout the park. Cross patterns exist where skaters cross each other's path in order to go from obstacle to



obstacle. Segregation is necessary to separate the more experienced from the less experienced skaters. These two groups skate at different speeds and styles. Keeping them in their own respective areas will ensure that each group has the safest and most enjoyable experience at the skate park. While the experienced riders will use the "Novice Area" to practice new tricks before they hit the larger ramps, too much segregation will make some areas less

desirable. Segregation is best controlled when supervision is provided. Provide access that is wide enough for construction, maintenance and emergency vehicles.

Skate boarders, in-line skaters and bikers can use the same ramps, however, preference of ramps and the way they are used may be different. Consider bike specific obstacles in the



layout. These obstacles will cater to bikes and enhance the overall usage of the skate park. Often times, a single obstacle will suffice. Skate boarders and in-line skaters will be able to use these obstacles just as well and the bikers won't feel left out. Examples are spines, ledges and grind boxes. If supervision is provided, bikers can be assigned special sessions while boards and blades can be scheduled together.

Other site amenities for consideration include parking, bike racks, lighting, fencing, bleachers, benches, restrooms, water fountains, trash receptacles, pay phones and signage. A small shelter is desirable for checking in skaters, collecting fees and liability waiver forms, posting schedules, storing first aide equipment and maintenance tools. Some parks rent protective gear.

Newly developed or renovated public park and recreation facilities must be accessible to persons with disabilities. Accommodations for disabled spectators at a skate park include special provisions for accessible parking, viewing areas, walkway surfaces, drinking fountains, and comfort facilities. Specially designed skate ramps for wheelchair participants may be available in the near future.

Other Tips:

Searching the Internet will provide a wealth of information regarding skate park equipment manufactures and suppliers, design, cost, liability concerns, etc. Here are web sites to get you started. www.bmxriders.org, www.iisa.org, www.skateboarddirectory.com, www.skatepark.org, www.sk8parks.com, www.skateparkinfo.org, www.skateparkmag.com, www.spausa.org, www.tonyhawkfoundation.org

Include modular pieces that allow for easy replacement or occasional reconfiguration of the skate park layout to maintain user interest and challenge for multiple sports and skill levels.

Develop a maintenance management plan. All skate parks require some level of maintenance and this should be considered at the budgeting stage. It is important to consider the long-term maintenance requirements when selecting equipment and construction materials. Warranty, service after the sale, availability of replacement parts and costs are also important considerations when selecting a manufacturer and supplier. There must be weekly, routine inspections of the surface and equipment to ensure user safety and continued interest.

Develop an emergency response procedure in case of an accident. Post emergency information, which should include the name of the facility, physical street address and the appropriate number(s) to call for emergency response. Emergency personnel should be familiar with the facility so they know how to access the site with vehicles and equipment. If the facility is supervised, determine the amount of first-aid training required and to what extent staff and volunteers are permitted to administer treatment.

Determine if the skate park will be free to the public or whether to charge daily or seasonal admissions. Pay-per-use skate parks are typically supervised, while free skate parks are often unsupervised.

Bring it all together with an opening event. Consider having a “community build” day or grand opening that features exhibitions by expert skaters and bike riders. Invite the local media and equipment vendors. Have refreshments and music. Make it a celebration!

For information regarding grant funding and location of skate parks in your area call the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation at (717) 787-7672. Request contact information for the regional office that serves your county or check our web site at www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/grants

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