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New skate park in the works—funding now top priority

by Lawrence W. Synett

With the help of the Villa Park Skate Park Committee, the Villa Park Parks and Recreation Department and the Villa Park Board of Trustees, a new skate park is now in the works for the "Garden Village."

The new skate park will be housed just west of the Iowa Community Center (ICC), located at 338 N. Iowa Ave., only blocks from the village's current 2-4-8 Skate Park, located at Jefferson Park, near the intersection of Terrace Street and Harvard Avenue.

"The existing location presented many challenges in the ten years it has been open," said Carrie Karl, superintendent of the parks and recreation department. "The new skate park will clearly be in the open and highly visible from the ICC and Addison Road to help attract skaters to the park and to deter vandals."

A problem at the current skate park, stated Karl, includes it being tucked in behind residences with the railroad tracks behind it, reducing visibility for police or others and it not attracting users.

Also, neighbors in the surrounding area were generally unhappy with the noise, the groups of kids who would use the park just to hang out and the vandalism that would occur.

If a new skate park is built at the proposed location, stated Karl, the park would be contiguous to the ICC, which would allow for restrooms and general assistance during the many hours the park will be used.

"In addition," added Karl, "parents can drop off one child for a program and the other to skate, and have both at one site."

Another major draw in the proposed location is the fact that the village owns the

land, therefore there is no land purchase or lease acquisition necessary.

Village officials are anticipating the cost to be between \$200,000 and \$250,000, and are currently looking at a variety of grants to obtain the funding.

Best case scenario, stated Karl, is that the new skate park will be open in 2010.

"This depends on finding suitable grants, when the grant documents are due, when the money is awarded and if we don't get fully funded via grants then finding the remaining monies," added Karl.

According to Paulina Jimenez, chair of the skate park committee, finding funding will be a time-consuming process.

"This part of the process takes longer because some grants take months to process and the money needs to come from different sources," she said. "The committee is also planning a series of

events in order to raise money."

Meanwhile, the current skate park will be open.

This spring, stated Karl, the asphalt will be repaired and equipment will be inspected to make sure it is safe.

The skate park committee was initiated by a group of Villa Park skateboarders.

Through their commitment, stated Jimenez, village officials learned that skateboarding is not just a "fad" sport, but it has a strong following and if you build the park right, it will be well-received.

"They want a quality skate park to practice the sport that gives them much-needed exercise and a sense of self-esteem," said Jimenez. "We will continue collaborating with the parks and recreation department and work hard in order to make the new skate park a reality."