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Skate Park Committee moving forward

Foundation status, 501(c)(3) designation sought to aid fundraising, grant money

By Paul DelGuidice
For The Villa Park Independent

During the Committee-of-the-Whole portion of the Villa Park Board of Trustees Monday, March 23 meeting, the Villa Park Skate Park committee presented a plan for a new facility. Recreation Dept. Supervisor Carrie Karl began the presentation by showing an artists rendition of the proposed facility.

"The park will be located west of the Iowa Community Center where the soccer field currently is," Karl said. "We will reorientate the [property] so we won't lose the soccer field."

The Skate Park has been an issue since neighbors of the old Skate Park (near Jefferson School) complained of poor maintenance, noise and gang activity at that location. The Village dismantled that facility in late 2008. The converted tennis courts made a less-than-ideal skate park, according to Skate Committee Chair Paulina Jiminez, but without it, there is no place in Villa Park for skateboarders to safely practice their sport. The plan presented to the Board seeks to address this shortcoming with a safe, modern, state-of-the-art "skateboarder's paradise."

According to Karl, the cost of the new skate park will be approximately $250,000. This includes about $150,000 for equipment and another $100,000 in amenities and for construction. Labor costs will be cut through a combination of volunteers and using Villa Park staff.

"Most of the cost is in the equipment," Karl said. "Then

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there is the (concrete) slab which is needed. There are also amenities such as a security fence, cameras and a bike rack."

Depending on funding, the skate park is scheduled for completion by fall of 2011. Several fundraising options were also discussed, including contributions from the Village. The Skate Park Committee has pledged to raise $52,000 and is asking the Village to match this figure to pay for equipment.

The Park & Rec. Dept. has attempted to garner grant money, but has been rejected so far. One problem is there are few grants available for municipalities. The private grants are all geared toward charitable organizations. To address this, Karl suggested forming a 501(c)(3) nonprofit/charity foundation.

"This 501(c)(3) [designation] would benefit other projects in Villa Park's future such as the historical museum," Karl said.

Karl also asked for $5,000 to be diverted from the Park & Rec budget as 'seed money' for the skate park.

Paulina Jiminez next told the Board that she has fielded questions by many residents who are interested in helping move the skate park forward. This includes people offering to work on building the park as well as donating money to the project.

"Since I began working on this project, many people have approached me saying 'if you need my help, here is my card, I'm a carpenter,' or 'I'm an electrician,'" Jiminez said. "They all want to help, but don't know how."

The Skate Park Committee, made up of interested residents and many skateboarding youths, is also actively seeking assistance from local businesses.

"We will ask for help and donations from local companies," Jiminez said. "We have a concrete company in Villa Park... maybe we can get (a deal) on the slab."

Jiminez also explained the concept of the park has evolved into an open-space plan to make the site more inviting and user-friendly. There will be a security fence and cameras, as well as a covered meeting area along with plenty of flat space for skateboarders to practice besides the ramps.

The concept of keeping the skate park open -- that is, without a roof, as opposed to an enclosed indoor park -- has recently been gaining popularity, according to Karl. This reportedly helps reduce vandalism while keeping the facility approachable to new users.

Trustee John Davis asked about the liability of keeping the park 'open.' Village Manager Bob Niemann said there would be no negative effect, as there is still a perimeter fence along Addison St. as well as the train tracks. Adequate lighting is also included in the plan.

"I think this will be a community project that Villa Park can be proud of," Jiminez said. "It can help bring hope to Villa Park."

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— Skate Committee Chair Paulina Jiminez