

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
July 10, 2023
7:00 p.m.**

Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith Presiding

Present: Council Member Patrick J. Hickey
Council Member Clifford G. Olney III
Council Member Sarah V.C. Pierce
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith

Also Present: Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager

City staff present: Scott Weller, Logan Eddy

DISCUSSION

Skateboard Park Proposal

Ryan N. Starr began the presentation by directing Council's attention to a handout (on file at the City Clerk's office) and a powerpoint presentation he prepared. He also added that he is a lifelong skater, and his own children are now 3rd generation skaters. Stating the City is long overdue for a skate park, he informed Council that the current skate park has been moved around two or three times over the past decade and pointed out that every time it is moved, damage occurs. He stressed the skate park needs a permanent home, and said that last year, he reached out to Council Member Olney about finding the skate park a permanent home and getting the community more involved.

Mr. Starr then drew Council's attention to the power point presentation and began identifying the need for a new park. He told Council the equipment is in poor condition and the park is too small, which makes it difficult for a proper flow and can make for dangerous conditions. He discussed at length the benefits of having a skatepark in the City and explained that compared to other areas in New York State, Watertown's skate park is inadequate for the size of the City.

Informing Council that Oswego and Saranac Lake recently added skate parks, Mr. Starr indicated their population is smaller than Watertown. He mentioned Saranac Lake had a skating competition at their new park, bringing in skaters from around the state, and brought in revenue for the village. He expressed concern that teens and young adults in the City are under-served and said that, once children reach the age of 13, options are limited for things to do. He believes that a skate park could offer more positive options. He informed Council there is a regional demand for a skate park and he has heard from people that live in the surrounding areas, such as Adams and Fort Drum, who think a skate park is a great idea and would be a wonderful asset. He indicated that a skate park also will give people a reason to stay in the area and that it will create a positive and creative outlet and be a healthy hobby. He added it can also be a tourist draw with events and competitions, which will increase sales tax revenue.

Mr. Starr then explained to Council the skate park committee's wants and stressed the importance of a concrete park. He explained that concrete is the most durable for the north country weather and added that it is a must if they are to ask for a Tony Hawk Grant. He explained that Tony Hawk Grants only

support concrete skate parks and no longer fund metal or wood parks because they do not last, adding the Tony Hawk Fund wants their investments to last forever. He said his committee is requesting more space for the park, noting that the current park is cramped together which creates a traffic jam. He explained that this can push riders away because they cannot get enough ride time. He pointed out that the current space is not friendly to new riders, stating it is overly congested and can be intimidating for beginners. He would like to see a mix of street and transitions for the new park along with BMX-friendly and beginner-friendly.

Moving the discussion to proposed options, Mr. Starr told Council the price ranges, which are from \$50-\$75 a square foot. He summarized the different pricing options as follows: Option A: 20,000 sq ft for \$1.25 million; Option B: 10,000 sq ft for \$625 thousand; and Option C: DIY with permission and builder recommendations. He added that the Oswego skate park landed roughly in the middle with a cost of \$62.5 sq ft so that would be his guideline. He recommended that Option A is the safest option which would have 20,000 sq ft, would be a regional level facility and would be event-ready with room to spare but also discussed the pros and cons to the other options.

Mr. Starr drew Council's attention to some of the fun things that could be added to the park to put the City's stamp on it such as river influence, a wave ramp, flying saucer, local stone and an art wall. He suggested other amenities such as a canopy/covering, bathrooms, lights and a memorial bench. He discussed at length the possible locations and stressed the importance of it being accessible, centrally located and, if possible, near food, gas and bathrooms.

Mr. Starr wrapped up his presentation by discussing funding. He stressed that he is not naïve to the financial reality, noting the City is not expected to cover everything. He explained to Council that if they want a skate park grant, from the State Park Project, local fundraising and donations must be demonstrated. He said he would encourage the naysayers to not jump to conclusions and the City was never expected to be on the hook for the full expense. He said there will be a lot of fundraising and the cost will be spread out over years. He informed Council that he has contacted several businesses around the City and has gotten positive support but stressed concerned that, without a commitment from Council, no one will take the project seriously. He noted that some of the possible funding could come from Jefferson County, unused ARPA funds along with grants from the Skatepark Project and Public Art. He summarized what each of these funds and grants consists of and what needs to be done in order to qualify for them. He reiterated that none of this can move forward without the City's endorsement. Council Member Ruggiero asked if the City would qualify for the Tony Hawk Fund and wondered whether there were restrictions as to where the park can be built.

Mr. Starr said that Watertown would qualify for the Tony Hawk Fund. He explained that a decision on how much money to ask for needs to be established first. He said he has gone through the grant guidelines, and he is not aware of any restrictions as to where the park could be built.

Council Member Ruggiero said she endorses the project.

Council Member Pierce thanked Mr. Starr for the great presentation and asked if Mr. Starr's group is an organized group and if they have a name.

Mr. Starr said there is no name, and they are just a group of riders that have come together and have made a Facebook page.

Responding to Council Member Pierce's question on the age of the current skate park, Mr. Mix said it must be well over 20 years old.

Council Member Pierce asked what kind of maintenance is required in the winter.

Mr. Starr stated there would be very little winter maintenance and noted the concrete will last a lot longer than wood and metal.

Councilmember Olney said he likes the ideas of it being a City and private sector collaboration and he agrees that, once the City endorses the idea, businesses will come forward to help the project. He also suggested doing some sort of public outreach for ideas about the park. He also suggested hiring an engineering firm to design the park before applying for grants and funding.

Mr. Mix indicated that the City would need a conceptual plan to be drawn and cost estimates before they could apply for any grants.

Mayor Smith pointed out that the City cannot solicit donations and he suggested formalizing the name of their group and reaching out to Rande Richardson at the Northern New York Community Foundation (NNYCF). He explained that then donations can be made to the specific group.

Mr. Starr agreed with Mayor Smith and requested guidance as to how to go about it.

Mayor Smith suggested also reaching out to Jefferson County. He reiterated why this is also another good reason to contact the NNYCCF.

Work session ended at 7:55 p.m.

Margaret M. Puccia
Deputy City Clerk