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Catching air in Fremont



By William Marshak

Watching a "sick" Wallie, Rock-and-roll, railslide, ollie or melloncollie will soon be common at Central Park in Fremont. Skateboarders just got the green light from Fremont's City Council for construction of a new, state-of-the-art skate park adjacent to Aqua Adventure Water Park. Scheduled to be completed in fall 2011, this \$2 million facility will combine the best elements of street and bowl designs. Art decor is envisioned as part of the park.

The product of a collaborative effort by skateboard enthusiasts, city officials, Verde Design, Inc. and Wormhoudt, Inc., construction approval was never in doubt but its location was hotly contested by residents living across Paseo Padre Parkway from the proposed location citing noise and policing issues. Public comment included a suggestion of surveillance devices to help police and provide aid in the event of emergencies. Alternative sites near the Teen Center, closer to Stevenson Boulevard or next to the police station were favored by several councilmembers but City staff were reluctant to reconsider their findings. They cited the extra expense and challenges of infrastructure improvements, parking and utility connections necessary for alternate locations although admitting they were suitable for the park as designed.

A modern, permanent facility, the new skate park replaces a temporary wooden ramp skate park opened in 1999. Although created to bridge a five year gap until funds could be accumulated for a permanent facility, the older park was used for 10 years and finally closed in 2009 due to wear and the scarcity of replacement parts plus safety concerns. According to Roger Ravenstad, Senior Landscape Architect for the City of Fremont., careful design and a sophisticated steel infrastructure, pumps, electrical and irrigation systems built to intricate and precise requirements, will help maintain the new facility.

Trees are positioned carefully to avoid excessive debris; palm trees are used in interior spaces along with Fern Pine, a broadleaf evergreen along the perimeter. A small picnic area has been added to the rear portion of the park to help create separation from other Central Park facilities. When asked about graffiti and routine maintenance, staff noted that those using the facility would be likely to help keep it clean and usable; the skate park is designed as an "open," unfenced facility.

Councilmembers Natarajan and Chan asked for time to consider alternative locations of the park favoring the more visible and "gateway" sites near Stevenson Boulevard and Paseo Padre Parkway. This site, typically referred to as the Performing Arts Center site is vacant and was considered preferable by residential neighbors near the water park. Natarajan noted that a performing arts center might be better suited for the mid-town, civic center area planned and a sophisticated, well designed skate park could be an artistic gateway at that intersection. High visibility and easy access were cited as reasons to consider these alternatives. Staff members admitted that reconsideration of alternative locations could be accomplished without construction delays, but appeared reluctant to defer a decision.

The final vote, however, became unanimous as Mayor Wasserman and Councilmember Harrison expressed doubt about any delay, even temporary and Councilmember Wieckowski flatly stated his opposition to any alternative saying that staff had already considered these possibilities to his satisfaction. Councilmember Natarajan capitulated with the statement that she did not wish to appear opposed to the skate park even though a more complete exploration of the alternative site was a preferable course of action. Without further comment, council voted 5-0 on September 14, 2010 to proceed.

It appears that skateboarders have reason to celebrate. Goofy or regular, big spins, 5-0s and acid drops are on the way without interference by the donut shop. Pretty soon, locals will be doing diamondz at Fremont's "sick" new skateboard park.