

## Skate park proposal gains ground

By KENDRA WALTKE / Lincoln Journal Star

Longtime Lincoln skateboarders said years of educating the public seem to be paying off.

A plan to build an in-ground concrete skate park on public park land east of Star City Shores, 27th Street and Nebraska 2, moved forward Thursday.

The city's Parks and Recreation Advisory Board gave its nod to the plan after a brief discussion.

"It seems to be a great location," said committee member Karen Hand, especially because of the lack of adjacent homes.

A skate park there would link with nearby trails, be visible from the street and use a parking lot that is currently used only a few months of the year, the committee noted.

Kevin Wilkins, 38, of Lincoln, editor of "The Skateboard Mag," attended the meeting to voice his support. "The access for people who don't drive is great," he said.

The 40,000-square-foot park would be built where there is now a gravel lot and turf area east of the paved parking at Star City Shores.

Plans could call for an in-ground concrete bowl, with interior corridors and curves and street elements like curbs, railings and stairs.

And that would be a big step up from what Lincoln has now, said skateboarding supporters.

Lincoln has two modular skate parks — concrete pads with above-ground removable ramps — one nearby at Tierra Park at 27th Street and Nebraska 2 and another at Peter Pan Park, 33rd and W streets.

But an in-ground setup is preferable for intermediate and advanced skateboarders, said Phil Burcher, owner of Precision Skateboards who at age 46 said he is "the second oldest skateboarder in Lincoln."

When parks and recreation officials proposed building another \$25,000 modular park in northwest Lincoln, the skateboarders bristled.

"The ramps are an inexpensive approximation of what a skate park should be," Burcher said.

Scott Stovall, 24, a skateboarder and parks and recreation employee, even collected about 250 signatures from skaters asking the city to build a better park.

So instead, the \$25,000 and possibly more funds would go toward this project, said parks and recreation Director Lynn Johnson.

And the remaining \$300,000 to \$400,000 needed to build the in-ground park will have to be raised by skateboarding groups such as the Lincoln Skate Park Fund.

The new skate park would not charge admission and would not be supervised, Johnson said, partially because keeping it unstaffed would cut down on the city's liability if an accident occurs.

Other cities have reported that keeping the parks clean is not a problem, Johnson said.

Pat Hybl, 17, of Lincoln, agreed.

"It's kind of like your home. You wouldn't want anything to happen to it."

The next step will be raising the money, Johnson said.

Skate park supporter Joshua Berger said he is working with an advertising firm to brand and market the fundraising effort.

"We think it's an obtainable amount," Berger said, especially if supporters can get national grants earmarked for public recreation. "What makes this possible is that the city is going to provide the land and have ownership."

And parks and recreation has been very cooperative with this latest effort, skateboarders Wilkins and Burcher said.

Burcher said he has promoted building a permanent skate park in Lincoln since 1984, when the city was cracking down on street skateboarding. Efforts in 1998 resulted in a 3D model and professional plans drawn up by architects, but no park.

But municipal fears of liability issues have ebbed as more cities build skate parks, supporters said. And skateboarders seem to have changed the public's perception of skaters as vandals and hoods.

"It doesn't have to just be for a 13-year-old boy," Burcher said. "This can be a family sport."

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