The Charles River Conservancy

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An extreme vision - *Boston Globe* - Editorial

March 15, 2004

AS IMPORTANT as the Rose Kennedy Greenway will be to knitting downtown Boston to its harbor, other Big Dig-related parklands also have the potential to make Boston a greener city with more inviting opportunities for outdoor recreation. For young people in particular, one of the most appealing proposals is to create a one-acre skateboard park in a larger riverfront park area in Cambridge between the Science Museum bridge and the Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge.

The park, a brainstorm of the nonprofit Charles River Conservancy, would be a magnet for skateboarders, in-line skaters, and acrobatic bikers. Complete with pipes, bowls, a snake run, ledges, and rails, the park would be laid out under one of the ramps of the Zakim Bridge, whose shade makes the site unsuitable for grass or trees.

The athletes would practice and perform in a site of inspiring beauty. Above them to the east would rise the obelisks and cables of the Zakim Bridge; to the south, the skyline of Boston; to the west, the Science Museum. The foreground would be the Charles River Basin itself as it laps around the New Basin Parklands, with its greenery and kayak-launching sites.

The proposal envisages a skatepark with the potential to serve as a venue for extreme sports competitions and exhibitions. A similar facility in Louisville, Ky., has become such an attraction for athletes, their families, and spectators that a local hotel runs a shuttle bus to it. The Cambridge site would have some parking space but would also be accessible from four nearby T stations.

Today, the "parklands" are a no-man's land of temporary Big Dig buildings, piles of gravel, and earth-moving equipment. It takes vision to see it as a place that could lure skateboarders away from Copley Square and strollers away from the Esplanade, but vision is what the Conservancy has in spades. To bring this project to fruition, it will also need approximately $1.1 million for design and construction. Pledges for less than half the total are in hand. At a time when sedentary habits threaten the long-term health of American youth, the Charles River Skatepark would be a good fit in the new Boston common created by the river and harbor parks.

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