



City on a Hill Press

City

If You Build It, They Will Skate

Ten years after initial plan, \$1.3 million skate park opens along San Lorenzo River

By Katia Protsenko

After 10 years of delays due to legal, environmental and financial hurdles, Santa Cruz is finally home to a new \$1.3 million skate park.

Local skateboarders, such as 19-year-old Ryan Moffat, were thrilled by the opening of the 15,000-square foot park situated within Mike Fox Park on the bank of the San Lorenzo River.

"The bowl system is amazing. It's got parts for beginners and parts for intermediate and advanced skaters," said Moffat, preparing to skate one of the park's many obstacles.

The park has been flooded by skaters of all ages since its Feb. 22 unveiling, and appears well on its way to becoming a beloved local attraction.

Local architect Zach Wormhoudt, who has planned skate parks all over the world, designed the new site. Wormhoudt took over the project when his father, the park's original architect, died in 1997.

Construction of the still-unnamed skate park overcame a number of financial and legal challenges. An increased cost of construction materials pushed the park's price tag from its original 1996 estimate of \$500,000 to the final \$1.3 million. The Department of Parks and Recreation ended up having to take out a \$500,000 emergency loan from the city to complete the project.

Legal issues over where to locate the park slowed construction as well, until the site at Mike Fox Park was finally agreed upon. Another site at Neary Lagoon, near Bay and California Streets, was turned down in 2000 after neighbors won a legal battle on the grounds that city preservation laws prohibited skateboarding in the area.

While local skaters may be excited that their park is finally built, some neighbors are not happy with the new addition to their area.

The manager of a nearby hotel, who asked to remain anonymous, said that several of his guests filed complaints in the last week. He has also had problems with unauthorized parking.

"There are skaters all night long, making noise, yelling, and shouting," he said. "It's a nuisance."

However, City Councilmember Mike Rotkin is pleased with the park's opening, and feels that neighbors need not be worried.

"[Most neighbors] at first are terrified, but like the bumper stickers say, 'Skateboarding is not a crime'—it's not," Rotkin stated.

"If anything, it'll cut back on people grinding up the sidewalks and benches."

Rotkin also downplayed the seriousness of the skate park's financial troubles.

"The money [for the projects] will be coming back," Rotkin said. "It's not a long-term problem."

"It's new and state of the art," Rotkin continued. "It's the Parks Department's job to provide recreation for the community. [This park] is very welcome."

Moffat and other local skateboarders also feel the park was a worthy investment.

"It's good to keep kids interested in things that are good for them physically," Moffatt said. "The city dedicated money to free utilities for skaters. It's proof that Santa Cruz is a skater-friendly town."

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