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Audit Bureau
of Circulations



Opinion

Be Part of the Solution

Some time ago, a group of teenagers approached the Township Council with a request for a place that they could skateboard. Skateboarding, they noted, is an increasingly popular recreational activity among teenagers—especially young males. If practiced safely with the use of protective equipment, it can be a fun and healthy sport that can give a low-impact aerobic workout. In this day and age of growing obesity among young people, such workouts are to be encouraged. To improve skateboarding safety, these youngsters told the Council, a growing number of communities have provided supervised skateboard parks. These may have professionally designed “bowls” and “ramps” that are located away from motor vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

In response to their request, a committee was formed and some research was done into the kind of space needed and the cost of a skateboard park. While the initial committee was unsuccessful in its goal to create a skateboard venue, a lot of leg work was accomplished. Unfortunately, however, there is still no place for these youngsters to practice their sport.

A well-written letter to the editor appeared in last week's edition of the *Tribune*. A youngster chronicled his experience at Town Center. He noted that he and some of his friends had purchased desserts and drinks and were sitting on the benches between two of the restaurants. Other teens were skateboarding because, as he noted, “this is the only place other than the town's busy streets where kids can skateboard.” The teenagers were chased away and the young author wondered, “What did we do wrong?”

The owners of the Town Center read the letter and heard the young man's concerns. While teenaged customers are desirable, they noted, a large grouping of teens can become noisy and a detriment to the use of the area by adults. In some cases, the owners added, the teenaged groups overflow the seating and block the stairway to the second floor, making it difficult for patrons to have access to the restaurants and stores there. Rather than turning a deaf ear on the situation, however, they have opted to act and be a part of the solution.

The Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth (HCHY) initiative has taken over where the initial committee left off. They have organized the group and work is now proceeding on fund raising for a skateboard park at the Monmouth Court Community Center. Peter Schofel, a principle of Town Center, has become involved in the skatepark committee and is working with the youngsters and the HCHY. The proceeds of coins thrown into the fountain at the entrance to the Town Center have been donated to the skatepark in the past and the owners are considering doing that again. While the dollar amount is small, it does publicize the need for additional funding.

Last week there was a meeting about the proposed park and a group of agitated residents opposed the plan. While some begrudgingly admitted that a site was needed, most felt that the park should not be on their street – the NIMBY syndrome – Not In My Backyard.

We understand the neighbors' concerns about parking, noise and litter. But rather than simply saying "not in my backyard," we encourage the residents to do as the owners of the Town Center have done: Join the committee. Be a part of the solution. If you have concerns about parking, noise, litter, trespassing, or anything else, take them to the committee and help create rules with which both sides can live.

A list of rules and regulations have been formulated already and security issues have been addressed. The neighbors should have input into any other regulations which they might feel are warranted.

If both sides listen to each other, it can be a learning experience for everyone. We need to show our young people that we respect them and their needs. We need to show them that going through the process can work. They are already learning that this park is not a gift to them and that they must work to earn the money needed for its installation. They will also have to learn that if they do not live by the rules, the park could disappear.

Last week, we noted in this space that a consensus-based vision and a Master Plan were needed for the future use of the Livingston Mall and we encouraged the bringing of all the stakeholders to the table to structure an improvement to the town's largest tax payer.

In much the same way, we encourage all the stakeholders in the park to come to the table and work on providing this recreational facility for our youngsters and for our community as a whole.