

Notes from the Overlook Skatepark Proposal Community Meeting

Sunday, April 28, 2019; 7:00pm, Idlewylde Hall

Compiled by Jessica Brown, member-at-large, Idlewylde Community Association Board

Introductory remarks from Councilman Marks reiterated that at this point, the skatepark is just a concept. The Baltimore County Skateboard Council became official in October. There are no Capital Improvement Program funds going to this proposed skatepark, and it is “not close at all to becoming a reality.” Councilman Marks read a note from the Director of Baltimore County’s Department of Recreation and Parks, Barry Williams, stating that the county is not contributing any money to this project and that we are “several years away” from its being a skatepark, if approved.

Next to speak was Barbara Bachur, former Towson-area Councilwoman who worked to make Overlook a park in the late 1980s. The site of Overlook Park had previously been an industrial property. Both active and passive recreational spaces were installed. Ms. Bachur shared her opinions against the installation of a skatepark.

Bill Felter, Baltimore County Skateboard Council President, began his presentation with an apology for his original statement that announced Overlook as the site of a new skatepark that led many to believe the park was a definite.

The Baltimore County Skateboard Council (BCSC) was confirmed on Oct 10, 2018 as an official recreation council of the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks.

Before they were formally recognized, an informal group of skateboard enthusiasts had an idea to improve county skateparks, starting with a desire to change hours of operation at county skateparks. They went to the Towson Rec Council in June 2017 and presented an idea for developing a small skateboard area in Overlook park. The Baltimore County Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability was already planning on redoing the small area at Overlook Park where the volleyball court is, but the unofficial group was denied. They eventually went on to become an official recreation council with the same standing as others like the Towson Recreation Council, covered under county insurance. The BCSC convened a board of directors, has officers, as well as official articles of incorporation with the state of Maryland and full non-profit 501 (c)3 status.

There are currently [three existing skateparks in Baltimore County](#):

- Hannah More in Reisterstown (built in the early 2000s)
 - Asphalt surface, not well-maintained, at life end
- Cockeysville at County Home Park near Target (built in the early 2000s)
 - Asphalt surface, not well-maintained, at life end
- Sandy Hills in Lansdowne,
 - Only concrete surface skatepark in the county, 40 years old

Proposed Changes to Overlook Park (as originally presented at the Idlewyde Community Association General Meeting on April 7, 2019)

OVERLOOK PARK **SKATEPARK**



- 12,000-14,000 ft² Concrete Skatepark
- Childrens Wheel Park
- Improved seating
- Integrated SWMA
- Total Budget \$500K-\$600K
- Secured Rec & Parks Approval

- Fields to remain intact
- No plans to install lights at the park (which will prevent after-dark usage)
- Change hockey rink into skateboard area to be approximately 12-14,000 square feet in size (the existing rink is 11,000 square feet)
- There will be a stormwater management area (dark blue outline on map)
- Picnic area with seating and shade (light blue outline on map)
- A wheel park for children under 10 to practice biking, scootering (green outline on map)
 - There is 9,000 square feet of usable space for this area (where the existing volleyball court is) which is 80% of the existing hockey rink's size
 - It is proposed to be fenced in or protected with a vegetative buffer, shade, and a permeable concrete surface to off-set impact on Herring Run (which the volleyball court is currently impacting)
 - Could possibly be designed to look like Shepherds Bush Park in Perth, Australia (see image)



Total budget will run \$500-600,000

- Phase 1 (proposed Q3-4 2021) is for the skatepark, stormwater management, and improved seating
- Phase 2 (proposed 2021-22) is for the children's wheel park

This project is considered a "Citizen Generated Capital Project" which requires an approval process that begins with the Towson Rec Office and goes through final approval with the County Council. It includes limitations and restrictions along the way.

Funding sources are hoped to include: individual donations, grants from private and public foundations (such as the Tony Hawk Foundation), the Department of Natural Resources Project Open Space, state matching funds via state bond bills,

The BCSC is anticipating raising \$75,000, planning for the state match \$75,000 with an Open Space grant of \$450,000

The proposed Overlook skatepark should have a 25-30 year life expectancy

The process for creating a skatepark:

1. Work with Rec and Parks to identify suitable locations
2. Receive community input
3. Work with professional skatepark builders
4. Draw up plans
5. Refine the design
6. Submit proposal request
7. Finalize plans
8. Submit to Rec and Parks

*All of the above are happening while securing funding.

Selection criteria for a skatepark site:

- Identify need: where is a skate park needed? (Towson is centrally located, serves a wide and diverse population)
- Accessibility (walkable community, availability of public transportation)
- Parking (on-site and nearby)
- Comfort amenities (restrooms, seating, shade)
- Proximity to services (restaurants, gas stations, stores)

Other sites considered in addition to Overlook:

Old Catonsville Elementary School

- Pros: Vibrant skateboard community, accessible, proximity to services
- Cons: No parking, no comfort amenities
- It is currently a "Skate spot" pilot location

Sparks Park

- Pros: Unused space in underserved region of county
- Cons: No accessibility, parking, comfort amenities, services, subject to frequent vandalism

Cockeysville Skatepark

- Pros: Accessible, parking, services, meets need
- Cons: No comfort amenities, temporary location
- Slated to potentially be rebuilt in future

Loch Raven Center **Second choice location to Overlook Park

- Pros: In the Towson area, accessible, comfort, access to services, potential to add lights
- Cons: No parking, lots of existing daytime use that could potentially be displaced

Glendale Park **Already turned down as a site by Rec and Parks

- Pros: In Towson, accessible
- Cons: No parking, restrooms, poorly sighted

Forge Park

- Pros: Accessible, services comfort
- Cons: No parking, poorly sighted

Overlook Park:

- Pros: In Towson, accessible, available parking, comfort amenities, multi-use park
- Cons: Peak-use periods limit parking, currently heavily used by Towson Rec

Skateboarding will be an official Olympic sport in 2020. It is assumed that kids will be interested in skating as a result of its inclusion in the games.

Comments, Question & Answer

Comment: Blue Water Baltimore has been working hard on stream restoration at Overlook with lots of money already invested in those areas. The children's wheel park would overlap an existing \$30,000 rain garden installed there. Strongly encourage the BCSC to consider environmental impacts.

Q: Has the proximity to existing homes been considered at all?

A: Only this and Catonsville Elementary sites being considered have houses nearby; considered housing a pro because it brings skateboarding into a neighborhood park with walkable access.

Q: Is “walkability” really considered a pro?

A: The Tony Hawk Foundation has shown walkability does increase park usage. Mr. Felter can provide more detailed data about that as a follow up.

Comment: Resident who skateboards is opposed to a skatepark at Overlook. Also has a home adjacent to the park and is concerned that it will affect property values and encourage loitering.

Q: What is the process for public input?

A: It involves receiving feedback from the community at meetings like this one, talking with the community association for letter of consent or approval, public budget hearings (even if it’s not funded by the county, state monies would be filtered through the county), and more meetings with the Department of Recreation and Parks.

Q: If County isn’t funding it, will county still have budget hearing?

A: Yes, because state money for it would be distributed through the county

Comment: Young skateboarder stated that skateboarding is not louder than existing soccer games and sports play at the park. Noise dampening of skateboarding areas is also possible.

Q: Skateboarders already skate at the park now, so why fix it?

A: Skateboarding on a flat piece of ground isn’t enough to actually practice and develop skills. Something properly made lessens impacts of skateboarders on public property and risk of injury.

Comment: Rink is a multi-use facility, dogs run in the rink (it’s a confined space that doesn’t bother people in the field), kids go in there to use tricycles and bicycles. Losing the rink is a net-loss for the community that wants to use it. Potentially consider downsizing skateboard facility to allow for more multi-use.

Comment: In support of park. Commenter stated that her son skateboarded on Overbrook Road because there was nowhere else to skate, eventually moved to parking lots behind what was Domino's Pizza where they were hidden from view and were actually jumped and injured. Commenter would have appreciated a skatepark for kids to skateboard locally and safely when hers were young. Kids also build ramps on their own that aren’t safe.

Q: Why not improve existing skate parks, taking the proposed \$500,000 and spending it on a place like Cockeyville?

A: The Cockeyville Skatepark doesn’t fit the BCSC’s vision of expanding park access or meet the current standard for the future of skateboarding. It is a modular skatepark on asphalt and the county will not repave it. It is on the list to rebuild eventually, but the BCSC is also looking to build parks to meet future, not just current demands.

Comment: Other skateparks and considered park sites are surrounded by larger more commercial areas. Forge Park backs up to a shopping center; Hannah More has a 4-lane road separating it from residential areas; Cockeysville is in a large, commercial area. It appears as though one of those sites would make a better fit as it is not in a residential area.

Q: Is there data that shows that the existing rink is underutilized? Commenter expressed the opinion that the park is not underutilized.

A: Talks with Rec and Parks is speculative, but there is no specific data.

Comment: The fact that Phase II includes the kids wheel park means that there will be a couple of years with no space for young children. That should be considered in the work plan and proposal.

Q: Is having a skate park more important than residents who live 200 feet away from the park?

A: Building a skatepark is building for the future. There are children in the neighborhood who will benefit. It will not just be kids going by themselves, but rather parents bringing children and skating, families skating together. There will be shade and comfort areas that make the park more accessible for more ages (imagine a grandparent reading with a young child on a bench in the shade nearby while another child skateboards). Noise shouldn't be any louder than a soccer game or other organized sports. The closest houses are approximately 230 feet from the proposed skatepark, and the park should meet acceptable level for sound.

Q: Is it true that the BCSC is piloting both relaxed rules at skateparks in addition to proposing the creation of a destination skatepark?

A: County skateparks suffer from a lack of participation because of their very limited schedule with months at a time when some are closed outright (full schedule is viewable by clicking [here](#)). Baltimore County skateparks have the most restrictive rules of any in the state of Maryland. Most parks elsewhere are open from sunrise to sunset. Any that are fenced and locked are unlocked in the morning and locked at night. They also have the strictest rules for outdoor facilities in Baltimore County (basketball courts, tennis courts, etc have the sunrise to sunset rules). Additionally, skateparks require a paid attendant, and a signed individual waiver of liability. Skateboarding facilities are not any more dangerous than other rec facilities. Statistics show that skateboarding is safer than many other sports and recreational activities, including basketball. All of these tight restrictions mean underutilization of facilities and limited access to children, families, and skateboarders of all ages.

Comment/Q: Residents who live close by should be considered highly. What will this do to property values?

A: Property values in the Stoneleigh school district have only been steadily rising due to the desirability of the area. The skatepark should not negatively impact that.

Comment: A more suitable idea may be to repair/update Cockeysville's skatepark as it is more easily accessible by emergency vehicles.

Q: Sight lines in park are downward; bathrooms are not accessible; the park is not well-maintained. Who will pay for upkeep and clean up of the skatepark?

A: Park facilities is done by the Baltimore County Department of Property Management. Upkeep is dependent on park budget.

Comment: Park is quiet and appears underutilized. Much like your favorite restaurant on a Saturday night: while you like it to be empty and quiet, an empty restaurant isn't one that's likely doing well. Much like a restaurant, a healthy park is used. Commenter is in support of a skatepark.

Comment: Quiet parks are better for nature and wildlife, including vulnerable bird populations. Commenter opposes the skatepark.

Comment: Screen-free time for kids is really important. A skatepark could help kids spend more time away from their screens.

Comment: Parent of 7-year-old girl is in favor of skatepark.

Follow up Q from commenter: if approved, will the design be up for community input to be inclusive of all ages?

A: Yes, the layout will be appropriate for the space and made to be used by range of community members. The BCSC is looking more at street park design as opposed to deep bowl designs. This will best accommodate a range of skills and all ages.

Comment: Kids are skating in the street; they need somewhere to go that's safe.

Follow up from Mr. Felter: Before now, no one in Rec and Parks was knowledgeable about skateparks, and previously, no skateboard council was helping run and support programming for the area. An involved council should help ensure utilization of skateparks.

Q: What is the capacity of the skatepark? How many kids would be using it? What kind of traffic is drawn in from other communities?

A: It's impossible to know how many are going to come and use it, but thousands of residents are close enough to use it. The skatepark in Hampden gets 50 skateboarders a day, but people come and go a lot, no large influx of skaters at once.

Q: Good for neighborhood at large, but living 230 feet from skate park, what about people getting to the park and noise from people going to/from, (not just noise from being there).

A: Current issues with parking and noise from travel as well as noise from games should be directed to Towson Rec. The BCSC doesn't anticipate frequent large gatherings of skateboarders as you have with many families gathering for a soccer game at the same time.

Comment: Commenter is excited about a possible skatepark. Please consider mitigating noise. There is, however, no one place that is absolutely perfect. The BCSC is a responsible steward of the park.

Comment: Park would bring skateboard community together which has an impact on kids growing skill sets, friendships, and bringing a sense of community together.

Comment: Commenter can see both sides of the issue. As an educator, she sees the need for kids to be outside, playing, running, moving, and while some would be impacted more than others, pros will outweigh the cons. If this is done with proper monitoring and oversight, it will be a benefit to community.

Q: Who repairs concrete?

A: The County's Department of Property Management is responsible for maintenance. Unofficially, at places like Lansdowne, knowledgeable folks go in and do repairs themselves.

Q: Would a plaza-style skatepark like the one proposed be fenced-in?

A: The BCSC isn't generally in favor of barriers like fences, but they are in favor when they are appropriate. The county is more liable when there is a fence in disrepair (rather than having no fence at all), so generally no fences is considered better.

Q: Was Putty Hill Park ever considered?

A: Not a considered location with Rec and Parks.

Comment: Young skateboarder is excited to see Overlook possibly become a skatepark.

Comment: Carroll County installed a skatepark many years ago. It was very well-used and so popular that now there are other skateparks in that area.

Comment/Q: The current rink is derelict and neglected. The skatepark would seem to be an improvement to that space. What would be done if no skatepark is built there?

A: David Marks suggests forming a Friends of Overlook Park group that could raise money to supplement what is being done with public money. It would be designed to be responsive to needs of the community.

Comment: Project Open Space funds are generally spent to gain more outdoor space, not to reuse existing space. Encouraged consideration of the park's original mission and purpose and not to overlook its importance.

Comment: A bike park would be really helpful for little kids. Commenter wishes it was already in place.

Q: Is 50 users (as estimated use the park in Hampden) too few to make it worthwhile?

A: Numbers are difficult to estimate and project, but this is good usage, especially if programming is planned and run through the BCSC.

A follow-up meeting is expected to be held within the next several months.