



## Skate Park Advisory Committee

City of Seattle

Duty now for the future!

**To:** Seattle City Council, John Merner - Seattle Center  
**From:** Skate Park Advisory Committee (SPAC)  
**RE:** Input on Proposed Replacement Sites for Seattle Center Skatepark/Seattle Center  
Response to Budget Proviso Regarding Lot 2 Skateboard Parks Replacement  
**Date:** 6 March 2007

The Skate Park Advisory Committee (SPAC) is writing to provide an analysis of Seattle Center's proposed replacement sites for the recently demolished Seattle Center Skatepark ("Seask8"), as described in Seattle Center's February 28, 2007 memorandum entitled "Response to Budget Proviso Regarding Lot 2 Skateboard Parks Replacement."

As a preliminary matter, the SPAC applauds the Seattle Center's efforts to identify and analyze the best possible replacement sites for the SeaSk8 facility. The February 28 memorandum clearly reflects a good-faith effort to identify potential replacement sites on the Seattle Center campus and apply appropriate preliminary siting evaluation criteria which balance potential replacement costs and benefits to the broader community.

While the SPAC considers all three proposed sites to be the product of a genuine effort to find the best possible sites on the Seattle Center Campus, it is our firm and unanimous opinion that the "Broad Street Green East" site stands head and shoulders above the 1st Avenue North Surface Parking Lot and Mercer Street Park sites. As explained in more detail below, the Broad Street site is unique in its ability to bring in a larger multigenerational, family based demographic to the Seattle Center, maximize favorable synergies with other Seattle Center amenities, and curtail past negative impacts associated with the original SeaSk8 site and design.

In support of this conclusion, we offer an analysis of the three proposed sites according to our previously provided site selection parameters (points A-E) identified in our memorandum dated February 7, 2007 as well as a discussion of the "site disadvantages" identified in the February 28 memorandum (point F).

### A. Integration with other amenities

**Criteria:** Choose a location that is family friendly and integrates adjacent space (preferably green) for picnics and non-skater family member uses.

**Discussion:** The Broad Street site is unique in offering a space that would appeal to a wider demographic of users and non-users, including entire families, other Seattle Center pedestrian passerby's and the skateboarding community. By providing immediately surrounding green

space, expansive views of the Space Needle, Science Fiction Museum, Experience Music Project, fun forest pavilion, fun forest amusement park, Frontier Gallery and the Pacific Science Center, and direct walkable access to other Seattle Center cultural and recreational attractions, this site would maximize the opportunity to bring in families and broader demographic of skateboarders. This increased multigenerational user and non-user base will increase informal surveillance and self-policing of the skatepark, as well as enhanced usage of other surrounding Seattle Center facilities.

In contrast the 1<sup>st</sup> avenue and Mercer Street have little to no integration with other amenities and are physically separated from the main Seattle Center campus. Given the lack of family friendly green space, and generally less hospitable feel of these areas, these sites would likely limit the user demographic to much the same group that had previously used SeaSk8, namely teens old enough to skate unsupervised. The Mercer street site is particularly problematic, as heavy traffic from Mercer and surrounding parking areas would render the area particularly family unfriendly. Both sites would need substantial investment in family friendly amenities to mitigate for the lack of user and non-user integration.

#### B. Provide “Eyes on the Park”

**Criteria:** Choose a location that is near pedestrian traffic and activity during the same hours that teen skaters want to use the facility – including evenings and weekends.

**Discussion:** This is an essential consideration for mitigating the difficulties associated with poorly sited skateparks. The Broad Street site is unique in providing naturally occurring activity and constant pedestrian traffic during the hours that skaters would be using the facility. This constant pedestrian traffic increases the presence of responsible adults “eyes on the park” which facilitates self-policing of the park. Experience from other projects in other locations establishes that this type of eyes on the park drastically reduces the potential for bad behavior within the park.

In contrast the 1<sup>st</sup> avenue and Mercer Street sites have comparatively little incidental pedestrian traffic and peripheral usage throughout the day, evenings and weekends. In essence, these sites would largely reproduce the original SeaSk8 site, where little regular pedestrian traffic passed by the park beyond periodic parking lot usage and during festivals. This lack of pedestrian traffic likely contributed to the site design including a fence surrounding the perimeter of the park to prevent usage during non-park hours. This “caging in” of the park further isolated the park from pedestrian viewing and enjoyment which increased the potential for bad behavior to occur unchecked by skatepark non-users. The 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. site is particularly problematic as it is surrounded on two sides by a parking garage, and sees very little ground-level adult foot traffic.

#### C. Use the Park to Draw Users to Other Uses on the Campus and Vice-versa

**Criteria:** Choose a location that encourages cross-usage between skaters and skaters’ families and non-skateboarding activities and businesses. Put the park near the parts of campus where you want families with kids. Let the skatepark provide the occasion for families to spend a much greater time using and enjoying the other amenities on campus. In turn, the proximity of kid friendly uses to the skatepark may draw new, youthful skaters and parents to the park, continuing the cycle of multi-generational use.

**Discussion:** If the skatepark is to serve as a tool for enhancing Seattle Center’s mission to serve all of Seattle, then it is essential to site it to maximize cross-over usage with other kid and family friendly on-campus attractions. The Broad Street site is unique among the three proposed locations in serving this essential purpose. Within visual range of the fun forest pavilion, fun forest amusement park, Science Fiction Museum, EMP, Frontier Gallery, and Pacific Science Center, and within a short distance from the Center House, Seattle Children’s Theatre, and the Children’s garden, this location provides a natural multi-use hub for families with children who enjoy skateboarding and rollerblading.

As addressed under point “A” above, the substantial physical isolation of the Mercer and 1<sup>st</sup> Ave sites, combined with substantial distances from family friendly on-campus attractions effectively precludes such cross-over enhancements of other non-skate attractions. The 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue site is visually and physically separated from the campus by the multi-story parking garage to the East, and a multi-story building to the north. Likewise, the Mercer Street site is cut off from the various attractions of the campus by six lanes of busy traffic, and only enjoys visual proximity with the proposed Theatre District, which would likely see very little cross-over use due to cost, programming and scheduling constraints. Isolated sites will mean that non-skater family members stay away, leading to single generational use and less multigenerational eyes on the park.

#### D. Keep the Park out of the Center of the Center

**Criteria:** Choose a location that is on the edge of the campus and near mass transit to reduce the necessity of having kids skate the rest of the campus to get to the skatepark.

**Discussion:** All three sites are either on the periphery of the campus or effectively off campus, and are located near mass transit lines.

#### E. Avoid Caging In the Park

**Criteria:** Choose a location that allows the skatepark to be integrated into the open space of the campus rather than placing it in a “cage” surrounded by “security” features.

**Discussion:** While this is largely a design and construction issue, site choice can have a substantial impact on this aspect. The proximity of substantial bus, tourist, and campus patron pedestrian traffic near the Broad Street site, and overall visibility from pedestrian level speaks highly for that location. In contrast, the parking structures and office buildings at the 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue site effectively serve to reproduce the same “walled in” and isolated feel of the original SeaSk8 site which significantly reduces user and non-user self-regulation of the park. Skatepark designs throughout the country have shown that integration of skateparks into high pedestrian traffic areas precludes the need to fence the park to minimize use during non-park hours.

#### F. Discussion of identified “Site Disadvantages”

**Loss of Green Space and Trees:** While this is largely a design issue, the SPAC strongly encourages not displacing the trees on the Broad Street site. Instead, the footprint of the replacement site could be elongated, extending to the west and southwest, leaving trees and surrounding green area as an amenity for families and spectators, as well as a natural buffer

between skate and non-skater users. We also strongly support the inclusion of “green” street-style elements – including planters and grassy areas in the skatepark itself (following the example of successful, cutting-edge “street plaza” skateparks in other cities, as identified in our memorandum dated February 19, 2007). Through careful site selection and design the impact on usable green space can be minimized.

**Potential Conflict of Use:** Potential conflicts with non-skater users can be minimized through the use of green barriers – including grass and planters – between the skatepark and non-skate areas, as well as the use of such passive hardscaping measures – such as cobblestones – in areas where skateboarding is not appropriate.

**Size:** The potential footprint of the skatepark can be quite fluid, especially if the design focus is on “street style” elements that will draw skaters off the rest of the Seattle Center campus. A good design can be shaped so as to accommodate an 8000 square foot skatepark at this site.

**High Visibility and Graffiti:** While this is again a design issue, the SPAC supports a “street-plaza” style facility that would lack the large vertical monolithic concrete surfaces that attract graffiti, and would render the entire park visible to pedestrian supervision. Experience with other skateparks reflects that, without a large “canvas” vandals are not attracted to skateparks, and that visibility prevents widespread graffiti issues.

**Loss of Sister City Flag Plaza:** While the SPAC is not familiar with this project, we do not consider it incompatible with the SeaSk8 replacement facility, in light of our support of a “street-plaza” style skatepark. Indeed, there could be substantial design overlap between the projects.

**Lack of On-Site Staff:** The SPAC recognizes and advocates that having a Seattle Center staff person assigned to youth activities and active programming at the replacement skatepark could help facilitate all of the above goals.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of these comments. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or feedback on this issue.