

Neighborhood Skateparks for a Better La Crosse Erickson Park Proposal

The public skatepark is an integral part of any city, and the increased popularity of skateboarding in recent years highlights a need for more of them. Not only are skateparks a place for outdoor recreation for people of all ages, but they're a place where people connect. Skaters, BMX riders and the like, have a bond that transcends borders, language barriers and cultural differences. Show up to a skatepark in any corner of the globe, and you'll find the same things: laughter, encouragement, and young people getting exercise and fresh air, all the while honing a skill that can translate to becoming a better, more successful community member. These activities reward perseverance and nurture a sense of self-worth. They teach people at a young age the value of falling down, and getting back up to try again. They encourage individuality and creativity.

As someone who's been skateboarding at Leuth park for 20plus years, and has seen the growth of La Crosse, and the rapid growth of the La Crosse skate scene in the past decade, I see a need for more options. In recent years, cities like Minneapolis have embraced the concept of "wheel friendly plazas," Doing away with the old model of large, costly, community funded skateparks, and instead including small city funded skate plazas in public parks, neighborhoods and urban centers.

"Skateable art" is another concept gaining in popularity, where instead of discouraging skateboarding in urban areas, developers have included modern art pieces that are both aesthetically appealing, and functional for skating. Skate-stoppers on ledges and rails are an eyesore, and they create an unhealthy relationship between skaters and business owners.

I'd like to see these plazas become as common as basketball courts and baseball fields, and here are the reasons this applies to La Crosse:

- Leuth Park can become crowded at times, and some people who are learning feel intimidated by doing so around big crowds and more experienced skaters
- Skaters need variety, and will seek it no matter what. The more public skateparks and wheel friendly plazas are available, the less skaters will be on private property. This creates a better public image of skaters and a better relationship with downtown business owners. Less skate-stoppers on ledges, and more skateable stuff!
- Skateparks function as neighborhood centers, and give neighborhood kids something constructive to do and bond over. Having a centrally located park in Goosetown is ideal, but a lot of parents might think twice about dropping off their children there after school unsupervised. Having more skate spots in neighborhood parks gives kids and parents something to do, and opens up dialogue in the neighborhood. We already have neighborhood playgrounds, why not skateboard playgrounds?
- Skateboarding is not a cost prohibitive activity, like golf or snowboarding. All someone needs is a skateboard, and they can participate. This allows lower income families and underprivileged youth to be a part of something, to have a friend group that functions like a family, where old decks, wheels and trucks get handed down to kids who need them, and everyone is welcome.

- As of 2021, skateboarding is now an Olympic event! This is a clear sign that skating has majorly gained in popularity, and the wheels are in motion (pun intended) for a new generation to embrace skateboarding as a sport, as a culture and as a lifestyle. The city has basketball courts, baseball diamonds, and tennis courts in several neighborhood parks. It's time to give skateboarding the attention it deserves in La Crosse.

With that said, here are some examples of the kind of thing we're looking for:



This is a perfect example of a small skate plaza feature in a public park, one that wouldn't take up a ton of space and would be well within budget for the Erickson Pool location.



Here is a perfect example of skateable art. Silly as it may be, here's a small skate plaza/modern art piece shaped like a cast iron with bacon and eggs. A hot spot for skating, no doubt.



Eau Claire recently completed their first “legal skate spot.” This is exactly the kind of thing I would like to see happen here in La Crosse, skate obstacles added to existing parks and green spaces.

A New Skate Park Proposed In Upcoming City Council Budget Meeting

The Eau Claire Skaters Association is slated on the agenda for the Eau Claire City Council’s budget meeting on Monday, Nov. 8, where they will request \$200,000 for a 5,000 square-foot skate park that is planned for Boyd Park.



In addition to their first legal skate spot, and their existing public skatepark, this fall Eau Claire skaters will be proposing a second full skatepark be built.