



Misserville Skate Park

Responding to Youth Led Recreation Initiatives

Misserville Skate Park is a project that began as a result of a forum held with teens at the [Lawrence Teen Coalition](#) in 2001. Staff from [Lawrence CommunityWorks](#), a Community Development Corporation and partner of Groundwork Lawrence, attended the forum and introduced a variety of planning projects that local teens might want to work on in hopes of gathering those who were interested and engaging them in a process of advocacy, planning, and design work. When the concept of building a skate park was raised, several avid teen skateboarders expressed strong interest. Having been kicked out of several local public spaces by police for skateboarding, these teens assembled, dubbed themselves “the SK8 Kids”, and pledged their involvement in making the skate park a reality.

Lawrence CommunityWorks asked Groundwork Lawrence for help in facilitating the process for siting, designing, and construction processes because of the organization’s expertise in designing and improving public spaces, especially parks. Groundwork staff worked with the SK8 Kids to develop schematic designs for the skate park, which first included visits to a number of similar facilities in the region. The group evaluated several skate parks, and identified design aspects that they both valued and disliked. They took pictures and made lists of design elements they found important, and also began searching across the city for places where such a facility might be appropriate.

Next, the group went through a design and advocacy process to more clearly formulate their ideas, and to gather local support. The SK8 Kids built clay and plastic foam models, and then presented the concept to a variety of groups around the city. They also collected 600 signatures on a petition favoring the development of a skate park in Lawrence, which was later presented to the Mayor. After finding little support for building a skate park on a vacant lot downtown, the SK8 Kids decided to find an existing city park that might be better suited for recreational skating. They also decided to work with representatives from the [City of Lawrence](#) in getting it built. After several site visits, and with encouragement from the Mayor’s Office, the group decided to focus its efforts on creating a skate park at Misserville Park, located adjacent to Leonard Elementary School in Lawrence’s North Common neighborhood. The park, which had long been utilized during recess time by students at the Misserville School, consisted of a few ball courts, a handball court wall that attracted graffiti, several hundred square feet of pavement, and few recreational amenities. The SK8 Kids envisioned something greater for the large underutilized space near the Leonard School, and decided to try and make Misserville Park home for their concept.

In 2003, the SK8 Kids and Groundwork Lawrence met with the principal and students of the Misserville School and presented their idea for locating a skate park there. The Leonard School students and principal were receptive to the idea, and participated with the SK8 Kids in a collaborative public design process for the whole park with Groundwork Lawrence and [Cosmos Associates](#), a landscape architecture firm. Neighboring residents were invited to the design sessions, as were representatives from the City of Lawrence and others interested in the project. After several meetings, Cosmos Associates had produced three park layout options from which the group could select a final design.

Although the SK8 Kids and Groundwork Lawrence kept focused on their vision, the project entered a long period of dormancy once the conceptual design process was complete. During this time, Groundwork and the City worked to find funding sources to support the final design and construction of Misserville Park, and worked to ensure the City's eligibility to receive State park construction funds. Finally, in 2005, the City was awarded grant funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Urban River Visions program, which supported the completion of 100% construction documents for the complete renovation of Misserville Park, including final designs for the skate park component. From the single layout option chosen at the last community design meeting, Cosmos Associates drew construction documents to renovate the entire park, including community garden beds for student use as an outdoor classroom, a grassy field, an artificial turf field, a basketball court, trees, trash receptacles, and a state-of-the-art skate park.

In late 2006, with many of the SK8 Kids now juniors in college, the City won its third [Urban Self-Help](#) grant from the [Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Division of Conservation Services](#). With this funding, the City and Groundwork Lawrence managed Misserville Skate Park's construction, which was completed in Fall 2007.

These photos illustrate pre-construction conditions at the Leonard School and Misserville Park.



These photos illustrate conditions found today at the Leonard School and Misserville Park.





Groundwork Lawrence Role:

- Project management & site design
- Technical resource for residents, students
- Community Outreach
- Partnership development/management
- Fundraising

Project Impacts:

- 12 youth engaged in public advocacy and design process
- Early investment in planning & design process leveraged state funding to complete final design and construction documents

Project Partners:

- [City of Lawrence](#)
- [Lawrence CommunityWorks](#)
- [Lawrence Teen Coalition](#)
- [Lawrence Public Schools – Leonard School](#)
- [Cosmos Associates](#)

Project Funders:

- [Commonwealth of Massachusetts – Urban River Visions program](#)
- [Commonwealth of Massachusetts – DCS Urban Self-Help Program](#)
- [City of Lawrence HUD/Community Development Block Grant Program](#)