



PARKS

Getting on Board

Plans for a new city skate park roll forward.

BY JESS BLUMBERG

When Stephanie Murdock was a student at Towson University, she started skateboarding. Problem was, she couldn't find many legal, safe places to do it.

"Carroll Park in Pigtown was pretty much the only concrete park in the city," she says.

So, in 2005, it occurred to her that there was no point in sitting around waiting for somebody *else* to build a skate park.

She placed an ad in *City Paper* to see if there was interest, and a group of strangers showed up at Hampden Family Center for the first meeting. The meetings became monthly and, with help from the Community Law Center and classes at Enoch Pratt Free Library, Skatepark of Baltimore became a nonprofit in 2007.

The group spent the next year going around to 30 sites in the city to decide which would be the best for a skate park. They finally decided on Roosevelt Park.

"There are already tons of skaters in Hampden," she says. "Plus, it's near two schools and directly behind a rec center."

Murdock then focused on funding. The Abell Foundation gave her a \$30,000 grant for pre-development and design work.

Skatepark of Baltimore also received a \$5,000 Parks & People Foundation grant.

And, after applying three years in a row, Murdock was recently chosen as an Open Society Institute (OSI) fellow. Through OSI, she works with kids after school, mentoring them while they have fun skating.

"The skate park would keep kids off the street," she says. "Plus, with the obesity in this country, it keeps them active."

Murdock wants the new park to be a haven for skateboarders. She mentions the 2007 incident in the Inner Harbor where a police officer berated a young skater.

"This would be a place where they wouldn't piss anybody off," she says. "If you could go to a spot where you skate for 15 minutes before a cop comes along or go to a park all day—the choice is pretty clear."

Murdock hopes to break ground on the elaborate, 16,000-square-foot park in spring of 2012. In the meantime, she hopes to secure more funding and partnerships.

"I've had people tell me that black kids don't skate, or women don't skate," she says. "But that's just not true. This place could break down stereotypes."