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Skatepark still faces uphill climb

A fundraiser is planned for today for the project that has had trouble raising money in the weak economy

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Skateboarders will roll into Papa's Pizza today in their latest effort to raise funds for a world-class skatepark envisioned for a site under the Washington-Jefferson Bridge.

But the project is well behind schedule in securing the money for construction and maintenance, officials said.

The Washington-Jefferson Skatepark would be a world-class, 22,000-square-foot facility, open year-round, 24 hours a day, supporters said.

Since fundraising began in 2008, the group has collected about \$370,000 toward its goal of \$800,000 to build the skatepark.

The city has contributed \$292,000 while Skaters for Eugene Skateparks and the Eugene Downtown Rotary have raised about \$40,000 each, said Janet Brown, a skate group board member.

But the city's tightening budget has left the Parks Division unable to find the money to maintain the skatepark once it's built, said Johnny Medlin, director of parks and open space.

The city remains "very interested" in the project, Medlin said, but the recession has made fundraising difficult for a skatepark that was scheduled to be built by now.

The project's success could hinge on finding the right combination of a public-private partnership to raise capital and operation funds, Medlin said. Options could include private management of the skatepark and fees to offset maintenance costs, he said.

Brown said the challenge is explaining to the community the need for a large skatepark in a city that already runs five smaller ones.

She said the skatepark would improve an area that has been plagued by public drunkenness and other crime. The skatepark's large size and top-quality features would draw professional skateboarders to multi-day competitions that would bring an economic

boost to the community, she said.

“There’s a lot of people in the community who have not had a lot of exposure to 20,000-square-foot skateparks and the huge benefit that it would be to the community,” Brown said. “We have plenty of skateparks in town, but it’s like comparing the basketball courts at Washington-Jefferson Bridge to Matthew Knight Arena.”

As part of the ongoing fundraising efforts, Skaters for Eugene Skateparks and the Eugene Outdoor Program at the River House are inviting the public to eat today at any Papa’s Pizza in Eugene or Springfield. The skate group will receive half of the value of the food purchased.

Skateboarders will hold a party and raffle for a skateboard deck or a signed Portland Trail Blazers 2010-11 basketball at the Papa’s Pizza at West 11th Avenue and Chambers Street.

SKATEPARK BENEFIT

What: Fundraiser for Washington-Jefferson skatepark project

When and where: Today at any Papa’s Pizza in Eugene-Springfield

Details: Visit papaspizza.net, find “Locations,” click on the restaurant you’ll visit, then today’s calendar item, and print out the flier

More information: skateeugene.org or 541-682-6321

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