

NATIONAL NSW CITY LIFE

Half-pipe dreams: Sydney finally offers skateboarders room to move

By Andrew Taylor

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Sydney is undergoing a skate park building boom as councils construct half-pipes, bowls and ramps ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics in which skateboarding will debut as an official sport.

Yet controversies over proposed skateboarding facilities in Rushcutters Bay and St Peters suggest the sport is still regarded with hostility by some residents.



Wei Lee performs a 'front side 5.0' in front of an appreciative crowd at the Meadowbank Skate Park. COLE BENNETTS

The City of Sydney revealed plans last month for a new skate park at Sydney Park in St Peters, which it expects to open in June 2020 - seven years after deputy lord mayor Linda Scott moved a motion to build new skate parks and repair ageing facilities.

The new skate park has attracted criticism from parents concerned about the loss of cycling facilities, but a council spokeswoman said the skate park would be built alongside the Sydney Park bike track.

Another skate park is under construction in Glebe, while a facility has been proposed by the Inner West Council for Leichhardt Park after the NSW government stepped in last year to prevent the building of a skate park at Callan Park.

“Skating is fun, healthy and could go on to win Australia an Olympic gold medal one day,” Cr Scott said. “Sydney has long been short on all sporting facilities, and I’m working to fix this - starting with skating.”

The announcement follows the opening in April of the Meadowbank Skate Park in the City of Ryde and the Sydenham Green Skate Park in Sydney’s inner west in 2018.



Matthew Orchard hones his skateboarding skills at Meadowbank Skate Park, one of several newly built in Sydney. COLE BENNETTS

A spokeswoman for the City of Ryde said the inclusion of skateboarding in the 2020 Olympics was a sign of the sport’s legitimacy.

This enthusiasm is not shared by everyone. Vocal protests against a proposed skate park in Rushcutters Bay Park by some eastern suburbs residents and former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull prompted the NSW government to halt its construction.

Woollahra councillor Anthony Marano said opponents of the skate park were elderly, retired and “have nothing else to do with their time”.





The inclusion of skateboarding in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics suggests the sport is gaining legitimacy. COLE BENNETTS

“The reality is that most of the people against this will be dead in 10 years,” he said. “I don’t mean to be rude, but they are all elderly people and if we listened to them, we wouldn’t do anything.”

Concerns about anti-social behaviour and adults using the Meadowbank Skate Park have also been voiced on social media.

Lian Loke, a senior lecturer in the University of Sydney Design Lab, said skate parks had often been associated with youth delinquency by older residents, who found them intimidating and dangerous.

“The fear may stem from imagined rather than real danger associated with packs of mostly young men hanging around skate parks at night drinking alcohol,” she said.

Graham Bradley, an associate professor at Griffith University’s School of Applied Psychology, said skate parks in isolated locations might attract anti-social youths, but well-lit skate parks in central locations “did not pose any great danger”.

Opposition to skate parks is no surprise to Cameron Sparkes, who said he had been verbally and physically abused while skateboarding. As a teenager, he was grabbed around the neck while skateboarding in Martin Place by a man who tried to place him under citizen’s arrest.

Mr Sparkes, a spokesman for the Sydney Skateboarders Association, said skateboarding was still viewed as threatening despite its elevation as an Olympic sport.

“There’s always been this perception held by people outside of our community that everyone is a drug addict or a drug user,” he said. “Honestly, it couldn’t be further from the truth.”

A 2010 study by Professor Bradley found skateboarding fostered positive behaviour such as cooperation, physical skills and helped “young people achieve a sense of identity and self-confidence”.

Dr Loke, who is curating the [ElectroSK8](#) arts event at Sydenham Green Skate Park on August 10, said she had witnessed little aggression or competition among skateboarders.

“More a camaraderie with skaters looking out for each other, trading tips and an unwritten code about respectfully sharing the use of the park,” she said.



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