WILL A MASSIVE “SKATE GARDEN” BE THE COOP’S NEXT NEW NEIGHBOR? TWO MEMBERS HAVE THEIR (VERY DIFFERENT) SAY

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PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

By Susannah Jacob

Supporters and opponents are rallying for and against an advancing plan to build a skate park in Mount Prospect Park—the nearly eight-acre, altitudinous, tree-filled patch overlooking Eastern Parkway and abutting the Brooklyn Museum and Botanic Garden.

In his January State of the City Address, Mayor Eric Adams announced a $24.8 million project to build four new skate parks in Brooklyn and the Bronx. As reported by *Gothamist*, *The New York Times* and others, the 40,000-square-foot "Brooklyn Skate Garden" in Mount Prospect Park will consume an estimated 12% of the park's total surface area, according to the Skatepark Project, famed skater Tony Hawk's private foundation, which is a consultant to the city on the park's design and management. Skate Garden opponents counter that the Skatepark Project's calculation includes fenced-off and inaccessible portions of the park, and it would eat up at least 40% of the park's core area. The design is not yet firm.

Everyone agrees that the "Brooklyn Skate Garden" will be among the largest skate parks on the East Coast. While the "Skate Garden's" location has been decided, its design is still open to public input. On May 1, the Parks Department hosted a Community Input Meeting over Zoom, drawing some 400 participants to discuss the design of the "Skate Garden." The Parks Department held a previous meeting on March 25. Opponents object that both meetings restricted speakers to discussing the design of the "Skate Garden," not its location.

Mount Prospect Park is about a ten-minute-walk from the Coop and a regular destination for many members and their families. *The Gazette* interviewed two longtime Coop members, one who opposes and another who supports the plan to build a skate park in Mount Prospect Park.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

THE SKEPTIC

Aidan Screwvala, 22, was born in Prospect Heights and raised in Park Slope. She is a self-described “Coop kid.” An “extreme New Yorker, [who] finds something comforting in small, cramped spaces…and battling crowds to get my grapes,” Screwvala says. She has fond memories of attending the Coop’s daycare as a child, and bargaining with her mother to push their groceries up the hill in exchange for an ice cream bar. Today, her favorite shift is checkout.

She shares a similar, lifelong affinity for Mount Prospect Park. Flatbush Avenue divides the park from Prospect Park, lending Mount Prospect Park a sense of remove and relative calm. It was a safe place to sled on a snow day, away from the busy hills and bigger kids in Prospect Park; the place she posed for prom photos; and where she goes today to touch grass. “Prospect Park can get so busy,” she said. “When you want quiet, Mount Prospect Park is a tucked-away, slice of park to go to instead.” It’s a park, she says, with a well-sized clearing where dogs can run loose, without their owners worrying about their pets running too far.

Screwvala majored in Economics, Environmental Studies, and Philosophy at Goucher College. Her concentration, environmental economics, focused her schoolwork on balancing economic growth, expansion and preservation. She returned to Brooklyn after graduating in 2023. In January, she learned of the plan to pave a portion of the park. “It made no sense to me,” she says. “I thought the climate crisis was well understood by most if not all New Yorkers. The more I read, the more confused I got. I read people saying the park is under-utilized, just dust, but I see people there every day from my bedroom window.”

Screwvala joined the Friends of Mount Prospect Park as an intern. The group is opposed to the “Brooklyn Skate Garden’s” location in Mount Prospect Park. Alongside a college classmate she recruited to join the effort, Screwvala recently helped deliver a presentation during a news conference listing “inconvenient truths about paving Mount Prospect Park.” Among these: its considerable size, its impediment to rain drai-

nage and potential to increase flooding; its $11.16 million price tag of public money; and its lack of community input on the site's location. While the site's proponents argue it was chosen by over 3,000 people through participatory budgeting, the Friends of Mount Prospect Park argue the site was voted on in District 35. The chosen site is located in District 39, where no community meetings were held to decide its location.

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Screwvala emphasized she does not oppose the "Skate Garden," just its location. She wants the city to renovate an existing skate park, and make trees and greenery integral to such a project. "It's a wonderful project, a fantastic idea for a currently paved space that can be turned green," she said, referencing a central aspect of the plan to make the "Brooklyn Skate Garden" a sustainable, natural setting with trees and greenery. "Paving green space and adding back some trees to compensate for concrete will not be enough. It's a very important distinction between looking green and being green—being environmentally advantageous for our city, storing rainwater, adding shade, reducing heat. If it's paved, it will not do those things."

Finally, Screwvala seeks to raise awareness about the project among Coop members. "I've learned that far too many members of this community have no idea that this is happening," she said.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

THE SKATER

Patrick Cranston, 47, has been a member of the Coop since 2007 (he is a production editor on the *Gazette*, but favored food processing for many years prior). He supports the skate park's location in Mount Prospect Park. During the pandemic, Cranston taught his now 10-year-old daughter, Hazel, to skate as a way to be active and spend time outdoors. The father and daughter duo quickly learned that skate parks are "the leftover places where there is nothing else people want to build there." Under the BQE, next to a sewage treatment plant and the Belt Parkway, beneath the F and G train overpass near Carroll Street, the city's present skate parks are marred by grime and exhaust, Cranston said. The verdant new location is central to the project's mission: to locate skate parks in actual parks. "Hazel has asthma, the point [of the "Brooklyn Skate Garden" in Mount Prospect Park] is intentionally putting it in a nice park with access to green space that legitimizes the sport as more than a place they stick in the worst space in the city," he said. There is no skate park in Brooklyn Bridge Park, but there are roller hockey rinks, sand volleyball courts, and soccer fields, he observed. "Skaters are tired of being shunted to the last place."

In 2020, Cranston and his daughter became involved in the participatory budget approval process, which allows New York City residents as young as twelve years old to vote on community initiatives like repairing school bathrooms or updating playgrounds. When the "Skate Garden" project was awarded, they attended the ceremony together. "Over 3,000 people voted for a slice of our pool of city council money to fund this idea, it was enough to show the city this was an idea the community was behind," Cranston said.

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Cranston cites the potential for a redesigned park to improve the park's drainage. Its undecided design retains potential to build a sustainable park, while offering a green space for skaters to go, as well as their fans. "Hazel's mom doesn't like to go to skate parks because there's nowhere to sit," Cranston said (a skate park within a park would offer seating). He said he shares many of the opponents' goals to make the skate park a more sustainable place.

"We all want the same thing: green space. I know there's a lot of concern from people about how loud it will be, but there will still be a playground and a space for dogs. I hope people will be open to imagining a different use of the park," Cranston said.

Susannah Jacob is a native Texan and PhD student of US history. She takes pride in her proficient operation of the slotted, plastic bag-taper machine in the Coop's bulk department.

Correction: An earlier version of this article misstated the number of people who chose the skate park's location. It is 3,000, not 300,000.