

Carson Warner Memorial Skate park

Healdsburg Police Department

THE PROBLEM

Skateboarders and Roller bladers were terrorizing the downtown locals and tourists, by damaging property and causing injuries thus negatively impacting the **tourist** trade.

ANALYSIS

The police department tracked the number of incidents involving vandalism, traffic and pedestrian complaints in the downtown corridor in relation to skateboarding. Calls for service were escalating and in a 4-year period they'd climbed approximately 39%. The majority of complaints were injury and property damage as well as quality of life issues.

RESPONSE

With the support of the surrounding communities, the California State Legislature passed the skateboarding bill to declare the activity as a "Hazardous Sport". This allowed the City of Healdsburg to identify a location for a permanent, concrete, skate park large enough to meet its present and future needs. The Health and Safety Code was amended to reflect that any skate park built after Jan. 1998 would require mandatory use of helmets, elbow and knee pads. Fundraising began for the project and over \$500,000 was raised. City Ordinances were also created to prohibit skateboarding and roller blading in the downtown areas and also to regulate the conditions of use of the skate park.

ASSESSMENT

Upon the opening of the skate park and the implementation of the downtown skating regulations ordinance, calls for service were immediately reduced by 80%, and since 2000 up through 2002, closer to 90%. The damage caused by this activity to public and private property almost disappeared. The **traffic** impacts were significantly reduced which all culminated into less calls for service by the uniformed police officer.

The continued positive feedback from the community, the neighbors around the skate **park**, the parents of the participants, and the government of Healdsburg, reinforce the data and continue to demonstrated the success of the community oriented project.

Scanning

Healdsburg is a small City with a population of **11,500** and is the location of over 70 world-class wineries and tasting rooms. It's known for being the "Heart of the Wine Country" in Sonoma County. **Our** historic downtown Plaza has always been enjoyed and used as an event and performance site. Families pack picnics and attend the Summer Concert Series held on Sundays throughout the balmy summer. Summer antique fairs and crafts festivals are held in the Plaza as well. The Plaza is a one block square park surrounded by boutique shops, wine tasting rooms, restaurants and antique shops and is known as being a popular tourist destination. It is not uncommon to have over 30,000 tourists visit on any given weekend during the summer months.

In 1995, skate boarding and roller blading were very popular activities in the downtown Plaza area. The problems that the skate boarders and roller **bladers**, (mostly young males between the ages of 10 and 25), were creating were that of running into the pedestrians (locals and tourists), and damaging property by chipping curbs, benches, the stage and the fountain in the Plaza. This activity generated numerous calls to the police department, a **16** sworn compliment of officers with two to three officers on duty at any given time. Officers had to respond to several calls involving the skaters, which was draining the limited resources at hand. Tourists were complaining to City Offices and the Police Department saying that they felt unsafe in our downtown area.

The Skating problem was well known throughout the community. Many of the locals were upset that skate boarders and roller bladers were allowed to skate downtown because there wasn't enough room for them on the narrow sidewalks, which made it hazardous for the pedestrians. Many of the locals saw the skaters as criminals because of

the property damage that would ensue during their activity and because of their reckless behavior. The local merchants were tired of the skaters hitting their doors and windows, leaving damaged property or dirty hand marks on the glass. The police were tired of running the skaters off, without an ordinance or law to back them up, and the City didn't want to enact a new ordinance because there were no alternative solutions for the skaters.

The main issues identified by the police and community were:

- Injuries to pedestrians and skaters,
- Concerns about traffic hazards,
- Vandalism to public and private properties,
- Reckless behavior,
- And no alternative place to skate.

Analysis

The skateboarding problem continued until "The Steering Committee" was formed. The Steering Committee was formed by the determination of two residents, Chick and Patricia Warner, both veterinarians who lost their **son**, Carson Warner in a tragic off-road accident on June 20, 1996. He was fourteen, and an avid skateboarder. Carson's main desire was to have a place in Healdsburg where skateboarders could practice their skills without being considered a nuisance.

The Steering Committee was comprised of Chick and Patricia Warner, Cindy Bond (**Homemaker**), Laura Sooy (Registered Nurse), Gretchen Glaeser (Office Manager), Joe Farmer (Police Officer), Gary **Plass** (Police Sergeant) and Heather Simmons (Student at Ursuline High School). Believing that the out of control skating problem would

negatively impact our tourist population, the Steering Committee and local community joined forces to eliminate this problem through the problem solving process.

A variety of methods were used to analyze the problem including interviews with property owners, downtown merchants, City of Healdsburg's Community Services (Parks and Recreation), and public works officials. Open forums with the public were held by the Steering Committee to determine what issues were associated with the skate boarders. The Healdsburg youth were contacted in formal and informal settings. Observations from police officers noted that the number of individuals skating in the downtown corridor had definitely increased as the **sport/activity** became more popular and that the activity usually took place during the hours of daylight.

The police department began keeping track of the number of incidents involving vandalism, hazardous traffic complaints, and pedestrian complaints in the downtown corridor in relation to this **sport/activity**. It was found that calls for service in these areas were escalating and in a 4-year period they had climbed approximately 39%, from 328 incidents in 1996 to 449 in 1999. Officers found themselves spending more time handling citizens' complaints about individuals participating in this activity than anything else.

In researching the problem, the Steering Committee found that the offenders ranged in age from 8 to 25 years. The victims ranged from property owners, tourists, cyclists, pedestrians, motorists, and the participants themselves. The Steering Committee found that the offenders' motivation was that they felt that they deserved a place to participate in their selected activity, and although skating was sometimes irritating to the public, they felt that they had a right to practice it wherever they desired. The Steering Committee

identified the losses to the general public as both monetary, (injury and property damage), and quality of life, (fear of physical harm or property damage).

Prior to the problem-solving process, the skating issue was being addressed in a reactive police manner. Officers were not actively asking skate boarders or roller bladers to stay off of the sidewalks **or** to be careful about damaging property, **etc.** There were no city ordinances in effect to prohibit this activity so officers were contacting offenders multiple times with no leverage to combat the problem.

The Steering Committee also learned that the culture of the sport sometimes involved rebellious behavior and activity, which was associated with **vandalism**, obscene language, and miscellaneous disturbances. The offenders wanted a skate park of their own and that this desire had been in the foreground for the last 3 years and was receiving more community interest because of the death of Carson Warner.

Response

The City of Healdsburg entertained the enforcement of ordinance violations relative to this problem but hesitated to do so as there were no alternatives available to the users. Healdsburg envisioned a new skate park to give users a safe facility as well as to abate the aforementioned problems regarding the downtown corridor but the City was unwilling to take on the liability or insurance responsibility. With that in mind, the Steering Committee looked at several alternatives in response to this problem besides building a permanent skate park. They were:

- Build a wooden portable skate facility
- Designate parking lots on certain days for this activity

- Restrict the activity to roadways only, banning sidewalk uses
- Ban use on public property, including public parks
- Restrict use to residential areas only
- Pass city ordinance restricting use
- Ignore the problem

After analyzing the possibilities, the Steering Committee decided that the best community outcome for addressing this problem would be to supply the City of Healdsburg and surrounding community with a permanent, concrete, skate park large enough to meet its present and future needs.

The Steering Committee began meeting bi-weekly and identified sub-Steering Committees for fund raising, site **location, construction**, political action, public relations, youth relations, and media liaison. A sub-committee of 3 police officers and ten community members was formed and assigned various tasks. Community meetings were continued throughout this project. The first two issues, site location and legislative change, were identified and a process to tackle them was implemented. The Steering Committee had spoken to *REMIF* (Redwood Empire Municipal Insurance Fund) who was the City's insurance carrier and they were told that a skate park would not be possible under present law. In early **1997**, the Steering Committee began communicating with state legislators and they drafted language to declare skate boarding and in-line skating a "hazardous activity". If they were successful in having legislation passed that identified skateboarding as a hazardous **sport**, REMIF would allow a skate park on City owned property.

In order to gain support for this, the Steering Committee had to convince other cities and counties, that this was a worthwhile endeavor. Heather Simmons began lobbying for this legislative change and she eventually testified at the California Assembly and Senate Judiciary Steering Committee hearings for Assembly Bill 1296, the Skateboarding Bill. In October **1997** Governor Peter Wilson signed the bill into law, which limited the liability of skate parks and by doing so, opened the door for all California communities to provide safe and enjoyable parks for their youth. When the bill was signed the Health and Safety Code was amended to reflect the new classification which also required that any skate park built after Jan. **1998** would require mandatory use of helmets, elbow and knee pads.

With that hurdle out of the way, the next one was site location. The site-committee had identified approximately 40 locations within the city limits that could possibly accommodate the 14,000 square foot park. These locations were ranked in priority as to accessibility, affordability, building potential, visibility, safety, location to public services, and public vs. privately owned. After ranking these sites, the first 3 public community meetings on site location began. The Steering Committee found that although the community supported the project, there was a lot of "not in my backyard" mentality. Arguments were presented to the Steering Committee that listed some of the sites as too close to residential property, too close to commercial property, some sites, although adequate in size for skating did not allow room for **parking**, some sites were not suitable in construction quality, and all private property sites were too expensive. The Steering Committee then focused on publicly owned property. The fifth site on the abbreviated site list was a city owned catch basin with approximately 1 acre of flat usable

service area along a public roadway. This site was located along the northwest portion of the city. It is owned by the city and contiguous to city limits, but technically located outside the city limits. This site was located in a **rural/residential** area and neighbors had concerns about noise and disturbing behavior from the participants. However, the City of Healdsburg's Community Services Department, felt that it best met the needs of this project. Once the Steering Committee settled on this site, more community meetings were held along with meetings before the planning commission to assure "buy-in" from the City Council. Through these series of meetings, the Steering Committee was able to garner support from the residents surrounding this site by showing them concepts of the park and its mitigating factors and allowing for their input. The City Council and planning commission also approved the use of this site and even backed the project with some financial support. The City of Healdsburg pledged \$40,000 **cash**, the land for the park, and waived all fees related to the site.

The Steering Committee determined that this project would cost in excess of one million dollars if it were to go out and hire a contractor and pay retail prices for materials and labor. This brought the reality of fund raising to the forefront now that the legal challenge and the site had been identified. The fundraising Committee was made up of four individuals from the original Steering Committee. Several ways to raise funds were identified including:

- Newsletter mailings
- Creating a website (<http://www.carsonwamerskate.com>)
- Charitable contributions from service organizations
- Fundraising events

- Solicitation for money from the public
- Endowments
- City government participation
- ♦ In-kind donations

All of the above areas of fundraising were used to their **fullest** extent and the Fund Raising Committee successfully raised over \$500,000. Virginia Strom **Martin**, State **Congresswoman**, also became interested in this project after the Steering Committee contacted her, and she was able to secure \$93,000 in state park and recreation funds for this project. In-kind donations were solicited from contractors and the Steering Committee was able to secure the services of a local general contractor to over-see the project. The majority of the funds came from individuals donating both in memory of Carson and in support of the much needed youth park. Much of the success came from "in-kind" donations. Local businesses donated their establishments to hold fundraisers, car washes, Burger-bashes, **hundred-dollar-a-plate** dinners. Thousands of dollars of supplies and services were donated. Rock star Huey Lewis donated a round of golf and lunch with him that was auctioned off at a Rotary dinner. Volunteers generously staffed T-shirt, hot dog, and candy booths at almost every local event and "**Chili-in-the-Plaza**", a Rotary International Fund raiser, was born as an annual fundraiser to provide continued support for the maintenance of the park in years to come.

The sub-committees of Public Relations, Youth Committee, and Media Relations evolved into 3 important segments of the project during the 5 years of planning. Public Relations worked at keeping the **community-at-large** apprised of the major accomplishments and

their remaining needs to meet their goals. The Youth Committee worked at keeping the youth involved during this 5-year process, keeping in mind that the youth contacted at the beginning of this process was different than the proposed users of the park upon its completion. This created some interesting problems in that a large cross section of ages had to be maintained to keep the project "fresh". The Youth Committee also had to work at keeping the youth excited as the project "dragged on" in time. Media Relations were handled separately as to maintain a close relationship with newspapers and local television stations. The Media Relations Committee found that the local newspaper took a large interest in what was being accomplished and a large amount of free press was given to the project.

The objective of the Steering Committee was to create an appropriate and safe place for youth to practice skills and in doing so, legitimize their sport. The Steering Committee wanted to create a site in Healdsburg with easy access to all skaters and roller bladers.

They identified the following three goals:

- Reduce vandalism in the public properties and roadways,
- Make the crowded downtown sidewalks safer for pedestrian traffic and motorists,
- Reduce the concerns of the local merchants complaining of the activity outside their businesses.

During the community meetings with business and community members, the need for a city ordinance to ban skateboarding and roller blading in the downtown corridor, on school and government properties was identified as a priority. This ordinance was written by the Steering Committee with the assistance of the City of Healdsburg and was put into effect after the completion date of the project, (ATTACHMENT 1). The

decision to postpone the ordinance until the project was completed was a decision jointly made by the Steering Committee and community members thus avoiding conflicting messages to the youth participants. The Community Services Department along with the Police Steering Committee members, developed a warning period and maps so that the youth participants would know the restricted areas when the city ordinance was in effect. The next ordinance that was written pertained to the use of the Skate Park. The Steering Committee along with the City of Healdsburg's Community Services Department developed the ordinance specific to the skate park spelling out definitions, prohibitions, and exceptions, along with the penalties for the violations of the ordinance, (ATTACHMENT 2). In **addition**, signs were posted at the park indicating the rules, (ATTACHEMENT 3). An additional rule was developed that kept graffiti away from the park. If graffiti was found on any area within the park, the park was closed for a minimum of three days. During that time the graffiti was removed but no one could use the park. There have been very few occurrences of graffiti since that rule was established. The users tend to police themselves so that they have free use of the park.

Some of the difficulties encountered during the response phase were:

- Maintaining community interest
- Organizing fundraisers
- Securing invitations to speak to specific groups
- Securing a non-profit organization to sponsor the Steering Committee
- Keeping the youth participants participating in the process
- Several land issues, including hazardous material, drainage, compaction
- Continued neighborhood concerns

- Hiring an architect
- Finding qualified sub-contractors
- Maintaining open dialog with city officials

On May 20, 2000 the Carson Warner Memorial Skate Park officially opened to an appreciative Healdsburg and surrounding area community. The park consists of 14,000 square feet of concrete ramps, bowls, jumps, and flat skating surface. Also incorporated was a paved parking lot. As expected, there was and continues to be a learning curve. Uniformed officers diligently patrol the skate park issuing citations when needed for violations of the skate park ordinance. The skate park is clearly signed which is the only warning skaters receive.

Assessment

The Steering Committee found that with the opening of the skate park and the implementation of the downtown skating regulations ordinance, calls for service were immediately reduced by 80%, and since 2000 up through 2002, closer to 90%. The damage caused by this activity to public and private property almost disappeared. The traffic impacts were significantly reduced which all culminated into less calls for service by the uniformed police officer. Several methods of evaluation were used to determine the overall effectiveness of the problem solving **effort**. These evaluations take place annually. The methods include:

- Evaluating the calls for service in the restricted areas
- Evaluating officer initiated versus calls for service at the skate park

- The reduction of traffic hazard complaints caused by skaters on public streets
- The reduction of citizens' complaints of **sidewalk/pedestrian** mishaps
- The lack of damage to public and private property
- Feedback given continuously from the community regarding the effort the police department gives in patrolling the skate park
- The continued involvement of the Steering Committee even though the park has been handed over to the City of Healdsburg

The evaluation process is conducted by the Healdsburg Police Department with input from community services, the civilian members of the Steering Committee, and the community.

The Steering Committee, in assessing the response, found that all goals were accomplished and a community need was fulfilled. This was measured using police statistics and overwhelming positive community input.

Hard data collected from the Healdsburg Police Department shows that 30 months prior to the opening of the skate **park**, there was an average of 12 monthly citations written in the downtown corridor for skate **related** violations such as vandalism, peace disturbance, and traffic related offenses. In addition, numerous calls for service occurred due to complaints by businesses owners, residents and tourists because no ordinance existed to regulate where skaters could skate. The data showed that 30 months after the opening of the skate park there was an average of .8 citations written and calls for service in the downtown area were negligible. Since the opening of the park in 2000, data shows that citations have decreased for violations within the skate **park**, from a high of 40 citations in July 2000, to a low of 10 citations in July 2002. The number of self-initiated stops by

uniformed officers has dropped of a high of 68 in July 2000 to as low of 8 in July of 2002. The continued positive feedback from the community, the neighbors around the skate park, the parents of the participants, and the government of Healdsburg, reinforce the data and continue to demonstrated the success of the community oriented project. Without the community-based **support**, a park of this nature could have become a community problem instead of a community asset that solved an increasingly growing hazardous downtown problem.

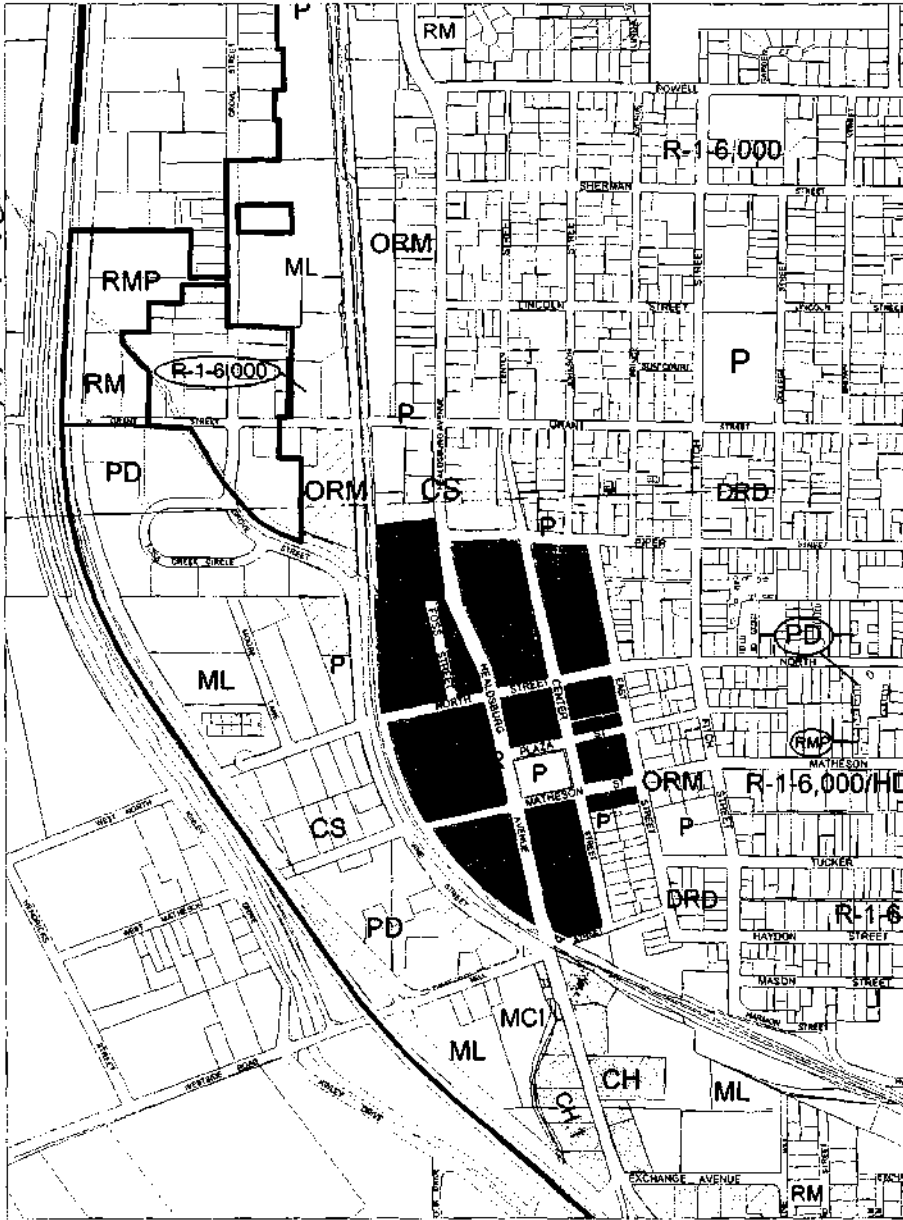
Agency and Officer information: Two officers and one sergeant were involved in this project initially. The Chief of Police supported the **staff's** involvement and sent the sergeant to a Problem Oriented Policing course. Upon his return to the department, he presented what he had learned to the other officers and sergeants. No additional incentives were given to the officers who participated in this project or any problem-solving endeavor. This was the first problem-solving project that the department was involved **in**, therefore, no resources or guidelines were in effect for them to use. Release time from their shifts and site visits were granted to the officers during this project. There were no additional financial resources available beyond the existing department budget. Officers were allowed to participate in Steering Committee meetings and address government bodies when necessary. Today, one officer and one sergeant remain on the Steering Committee.

Project contact persons information:

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ATTACHMENT 1



EXCERPT FROM CITY OF HEALDSBURG ORDINANCE NO. 949

CHAPTER 13A SKATING REGULATIONS

13A-010 - Purpose

The purpose of this Chapter is to prohibit skating activities, including but not limited to, skateboarding, in-line skating, roller blading, roller skating or other types of skating on sidewalks and streets within the specific areas. The City Council finds that skateboarding and skating creates a physical hazard to pedestrians and motorists in congested areas in that these devices can quickly change direction, often without warning to nearby pedestrians and motorists, and that a person operating or using such a device can become easily hidden behind pedestrians and motorists and thus be unseen to others nearby. It is the intent and purpose of this ordinance to eliminate those hazards by prohibiting persons from riding, propelling or using skateboards, roller skates, roller blades, in-line skates or other types of skates on public rights-of-way intended for vehicular traffic, on sidewalks and/or parking lots in certain districts within the City as defined herein, and other areas as set forth in this chapter.

13A-020 - Definitions

The following definitions apply to the provisions of this chapter:

- (A) "Sidewalk" shall mean that area adjacent to a traveled highway or pedestrian access to an entrance to a building, whether hard surface or not, upon which the public is customarily invited or permitted to walk or otherwise use.
- (B) "Skateboard" is a mechanism on wheels which are fastened to a platform, commonly constructed to accommodate a standing person. Skateboards are normally propelled by the operator pushing off the ground with one foot or by the force of gravity.
- (C) "Skates" shall mean any footwear device which may be attached to the foot or footwear, to which wheels are attached, including wheels that are 'in-line' and where such wheels may be used to aid the wearer in moving or propulsion, including in-line skates, roller blades or roller skates.

13A-030 - Prohibition

The riding or propelling or use of skateboards or skates by persons is prohibited:

1. On all sidewalks and public rights-of-way intended for vehicular traffic within the following districts as set forth and defined by the Zoning Code of the City of Healdsburg:
 - A. C District (Commercial)
 - B. M District (Industrial)
 - C. P District (Public)
 - D. M-P (Health Care Services District)
2. In the Healdsburg Downtown Plaza
3. Within public parks and recreational grounds
4. In pedestrian walkways or parking areas situated within a shopping center if the person in charge of the shopping center has posted a sign which is in plain view of pedestrians and motorists prohibiting skateboarding or skating.

13A-040 - Exemptions

The provisions of this chapter shall not apply to:

1. Privately owned roadways
2. Any parks specifically designed for skateboarding or skating activities.
3. In any public park or facility where the skateboarding or skating is conducted as part of an activity or event and a permit allowing said use is obtained from the City with adequate proof of insurance supplied.

13A-050 - Penalties

The violation of this chapter shall be deemed an infraction for a first offense and punishable by a fine not exceeding \$50.00 for a first violation; second and subsequent offenses within 1 year may be prosecuted as a misdemeanor or an infraction."

NOTE: A COMPLETE COPY OF THIS ORDINANCE MAY BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING THE CITY CLERK.