



LIKE RIDING A BICYCLE | Final Report

Katie Hargrave

<https://likeridingabicycle.org/>

khargrav@gmail.com

Katie: 847/877-9856

Final Report for Creative Strategist with Chattown Skate Park and Open Spaces

Introduction

This report discusses the process and outcome for each engagement activity. Included alongside the written report are images and video files that may be used by Public Art Chattanooga (PAC) and the City of Chattanooga for the purposes of future skate park development.

I was originally brought on during Spring 2020 as a Creative Strategist for Public Art Chattanooga working with the staff of the Open Spaces (OS) division on the design phase for a new skate park. At the time I was brought on, a feasibility study had been completed (February 2020) by van der Zalm + Associates, and Open Spaces was poised to create the RFQ for designers to create designs for the new skate park. Open Spaces had funding for the design phase and the director of Open Spaces, Travis Kazmierzak, was requesting funding in the city budget for construction. I planned to create engagements exploring how public art could be a part of the design of the new park, and I was to engage with the skate community in Chattanooga in order to understand their needs and desires. When COVID-19 shut down parks in Chattanooga and public events were placed on hold, this altered what I was able to accomplish and altered the timeline of a new skatepark design and development. An RFQ has yet to be issued for designers, and a site has not been selected for the skatepark because of internal discussions between City of Chattanooga and Hamilton County staff.

In September 2020, the Directors of PAC and OS agreed that my scope of work should be altered from discussing future public art engagements within a new skate park to ongoing engagement with community stakeholders at the existing skate park. In addition to this, I have provided support with OS staff regarding research for the impact of skate park developments (see addendum 2) and ongoing meeting support to discuss options for skate park sites. The end of my time working as a Creative Strategist has been impacted by the reorganization of many city departments. As Open

Spaces was dissolved, this leaves the skate park development in question, and it is my hope that the work I did with OS will be helpful to the Parks and Outdoors Department moving forward. I am happy to be an ally to the project and I welcome contact at any time point from Parks and Outdoors staff who may wish to discuss the skatepark development.

Recommendations / Conclusions of my time as a Creative Strategist

I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with City of Chattanooga staff in the Open Spaces division, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss possible future partnerships regarding the skate park.

It is my professional opinion that due to the engagement that occurred in 2019 during the feasibility study and the engagement activities undertaken by myself as a part of this project, the constituents who use the Chattown Skate Park are beginning to feel fatigue regarding engagement. Due to this, I would recommend delaying future engagement until there has been substantial movement forward on the project (i.e. a site being selected and a commitment of funds to future development of an improved park).

One thing that became very clear to me through this process: residents do not understand how long projects take from conception to construction. It is my recommendation that more clarity from project managers be publicly available at stakeholder sites, particularly when users may not understand how development projects occur. Perhaps project panels with a description of projects, contact information, and survey links to collect data from stakeholders could be a way to allow this information to be readily available to all stakeholders.

There are a considerable number of Chattanooga residents that are deeply invested in the skatepark (both youth and adults), and these residents could become actively engaged in city governance processes if investment occurs. However, if a continued lack of investment in the Chattown Skate Park is perceived, these residents could become disengaged and frustrated in the potential of city governance to impact their daily lives. There is a perception because of the cultural place of skate culture that skatepark users are “outsiders,” and a lack of investment in their preferred recreation methods reinforces to these residents that their government officials see them as less worthy of investment than other forms of recreation.

Documentation

Provided below is a description of outcomes from each of the three engagement activities and an introduction to the process and methods used to create these projects. A link to documentation images from engagement is available via google drive. The City of Chattanooga is welcome to use this material however they wish; however, please credit Like Riding a Bicycle when using materials. Additional video interviews that were edited down to create the documentary video are also available, should other short videos be of interest. Transcripts of these interviews are included in the documentation folder along with a separate PDF of the skate park feasibility study that helped to guide parts of this project

Documentation Folder Link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1TFIgFouKwwwHzUCN1jMayvf9hBWVTdw7?usp=sharing>

Report on Engagement Activities

First Engagement Activity: Video Interviews & Banners

- Report on Overview & Goals
 - Working in consultation with Travis Kazmierzak, we decided a short video documentary could be used to highlight the sense of community amongst the existing skate park community. I worked with Dillan Forsey, a local adventure video producer to shoot the footage in early August, 2021. The video was completed in September, with the goal to release the video as a part of the Battle of the Bend. Additionally, images from the footage and quotes from interviewees were used to create banners to highlight the importance of the space to build community.
 - The banners were installed for the Battle of the Bend and left on site for one week. Unfortunately, due to an increasing problem of tagging at the skatepark, these were removed so as not to be defaced. They included a QR code to the video (hosted on Like Riding a Bicycle's [website](#)) as well as a QR code to city council contact information (as I was often asked by residents "who is my councilperson").
 - I used social media and an online survey (promoted by Open Spaces social media, and available via a QR code on the chalkboards--see engagement activity #2) to gain interest for video interviews. While I interviewed 12 people due to time constraints of the shoot, it is clear there are many people who were interested in sharing their perspectives and these contacts would be important resources for future consultants. These contacts were provided to PAC.
 - The survey included demographic data as well as qualitative questions about community needs for the future skatepark.

- Qualitative and Quantitative Summary
 - Number of survey respondents: 277
 - Number of interviewees: 12 (not all included in the final video), interviewees included different users of the park (i.e. skateboarders, quad skaters, and rollerbladers), age range, gender, role (i.e. parent and child), and we sought racial diversity (while the skatepark is an incredibly diverse space, the video includes only one person of color, an obvious limitation to the project).
 - Additional contacts interested in participating in interview (that were not used for various reasons): 10 who reached out interested in participating.

- Themes:
 - Participants spoke about the existing skate park as problematic in contrast with the identity of Chattanooga as an outdoor city. There was a question of what type of outdoor activity is supported and promoted, and why skateboarding is left out of this.
 - Skateparks as economic drivers. Business owners for outdoor stores, representatives for new rollerskate rentals, and other participants who act as tourists when traveling to other skateparks addressed the income the city makes off of skate-related business and events.
 - Skateparks as a safe intergenerational space. We heard about mentorship relationships which have extended beyond skating into future business opportunities for youth and adults.
 - A safe space to develop resiliency. Skate parks teach important skills of grit and perseverance, which translate into building social skills in youth who may not participate in team sports.

Second Engagement Activity: ChattTown Chalkboard Data Collection

- Report on Overview & Goals
 - This project is geared to be able to collect data passively, when no facilitator is present. It also allows for engagement to occur in a way that also allows people to practice social distancing. I hung several chalkboard panels off of the existing chain link fencing near the shelter at the skate park using metal zip ties. One included a description of the Chattanooga Skate Park redesign process, and the others each include a question.
 - When I was visiting the park to change out questions, this piece prompted conversation with skate park users. I continually heard “didn’t we already give the city information about why we needed a new park and what we wanted at it?” One thing became clear: users did not understand how the continued engagement was different from the engagement that occurred alongside the feasibility study in 2018-19. I added an additional panel on March 29th, approximately one month after they were installed, explaining how city projects can take several rounds of feedback to come to a conclusion (*it is my recommendation that more clarity from the project managers be publicly available at stakeholder sites, particularly where users may be slightly different constituencies than other development projects, this is also included in the recommendations section*).
 - I visited the skatepark weekly to review the feedback and ask additional questions, which were identical to the questions included in the survey. While the data we collected was almost identical to that in the online survey, the chalkboards made the survey visible to people who did not follow Open Spaces on Instagram. This allowed the survey to reach a different audience through the QR code and chalkboards.
 - The chalkboards were installed in March 2021 and removed in July 2021, once the vinyl began to show wear and tear.

- Qualitative and Quantitative Summary
 - While this was not used as much as past chalkboards I have installed in other projects, I did add a QR code to the online survey. While I was on site, I saw numerous people use the QR code to learn more about the project.
 - Recommendation: Since completing this project, I have learned that some QR codes are trackable, meaning that you can see how many people use the QR code for metrics. These are known as

“dynamic QR codes” and they would allow future engagement coordinators to know how many people use the QR code. While they are not free, they could be integrated into a future budget. I would do so, were I to continue to work with the city.

- Themes

- Users want shade, shelter, restrooms, mechanisms for reporting safety risks, and water fountains that work. While porta potties were added to the park with a sink, the sink is not working, which appears to be a COVID risk as well as a general concern.

Third Engagement Activity: Mobile Design Mapping

- Report on Overview & Goals
 - In conjunction with the Battle of the Bend, the annual competition at Chattown Skate Park, I deployed a mobile design mapping activity. Working off of sample designs from the feasibility study, I brought large panels with questions related to the ongoing concerns I have seen thus far (from residents, survey respondents, parents, and during city council meetings). These questions were printed on panels for participants to engage with.
 - The questions were: Why does Chattanooga NEED a new skatepark? How would YOU like to be INVOLVED in the design process? What FEATURES would you want in an improved skatepark? What kind of PUBLIC ART would you like to see at the skatepark? This data can be shared with designers to influence how different features might work together, and it can be shared with PAC to influence the public art plan for the site, as the next phase of engagement begins.
 - This occurred on 10/23/21.

- Qualitative and Quantitative Summary
 - Number of responses: 52
 - It was an oversight of mine to not ask an assistant to track demographics of those I was engaging with. I regret not collecting this data; however, the Battle of the Bend organizers might have general data for the event which could be used to extrapolate general participation.
 - Themes:
 - There is a need for functioning facilities that are maintained.
 - Parking is an ongoing concern.
 - A desire for skateable sculpture, murals, and integrated artful shade is needed, and these are opportunities for PAC to be involved. There is a culture of graffiti and tagging at the site, so care will need to be taken to provide a creative outlet for skatepark users that would not damage any public art.
 - This event (like all engagement processes) resulted in informal conversations with park users, particularly parents. Parents addressed how the skatepark is a beneficial space for their children to create a sense of community where they do not fit in other outdoor activities. However, lack of investment in the

skatepark furthers an “outsider” mentality amongst its users. Investment would allow these residents to feel seen and heard.

- The most interesting responses were to “How would you like to be involved in the process.” While some people who answered this question did not understand the question (i.e. answers that were not related to the question such as “connect the 1/4 pipes”), some answers were quite insightful. Examples of these include:
 - “I would like to recommend that people who skate the park and be impacted the most be included in selection panels.”
 - “Come up with some prototypes and 3d print them. Bring these to the skatepark.”
 - “City council should come down to the park to speak with skateboarders and the former park manager Benji”
 - “Focus groups of longtime skatepark users”
 - “Published designs should be critiqued by the people who will use it, not just city staff”

Process and Methods addendum (originally submitted 5/6/2020)

Included here is a report I created to help Public Art Chattanooga and Open Spaces Chattanooga to understand my practice and the frameworks I hoped to bring to the project at the Chattanooga Chattown Skate Park.

Purpose of this Report

Working as a part of the collaborative *Like Riding a Bicycle*, I work at the intersection of public art, community engagement, and civic planning to develop relationships with local partners, generate creative processes for public dialogue, and uncover and nourish the ways communities have power. My goal in this report is to share some of my process and methods and point to the ways in which my work will apply to the Chattanooga Skatepark design process. This report does not outline the exact engagement activities that will occur, as these will be co-developed with the Chattanooga Public Art Commission and Chattanooga Open Spaces staff and the design firm that is selected to create the Chattanooga Skate Park. Rather, this report shares how I approach my work, some of the collaborators I plan to bring into the project, and options to inform the strategies that Chattanooga PAC and Open Spaces staff might be interested in pursuing.

Process

I draw from my experience as a socially engaged artist and community organizer to create spaces and tools that bring people together around common goals. Whether these goals be utilizing existing public infrastructure, developing a community of users, or gathering public input on design documents, I ask unexpected questions, map results, and present them back to the organizations with which I work.

Engagement can come in many forms. I have led projects where host organizations coordinate meetings with their contacts and I interview those contacts, which allows me to target site-specific engagement. Other forms are more pop-up, where there are less established relationships and I come into the neighborhood (or distributed community, as is the case with Skate Park users, given that they are used by people from across the area) and do something more activation based. It is harder to guess the outcomes of these projects, as so much is dependent on who happens to be present. However, activation tools can create opportunities for more community members to see a project. My goal is to create engagement tools that can function in many different ways--both for the people who attend a session and through documentation that might persist beyond these sessions. I look forward to creating new tools and adapting existing strategies for the Chattanooga Skate Park. Additionally, I will propose ways of evaluating these tools and engagement strategies and helping to develop plans for next steps.

It is important to understand the specific context of the place and community, so I prioritize asking questions and listening, and I reflect these observations back to the community before making plans. I have been trained in ethnography, and I consider interviewing and listening to be a large portion of my practice. In addition to this, I have

familiarized myself with the initial Skate Park study and I am currently reading literature on best practices for these spaces, as cited in that study as well as in other sources where art has been effectively used (such as the Barbara Kruger skate park installation in New York City). This listening phase allows making to take place quickly and easily. I also try to make objects that are iterative and can be quickly and easily transformed as needed. Finally, assessment is a part of my work. I use Ripple Effects Mapping to understand the layered impacts to projects (beyond economic impacts, looking at social, cultural impacts as well).

Collaboration

Like Riding a Bicycle has participated in exhibitions and public events throughout the country. I am most excited to work with partners that are motivated, help to understand the local context, and who grow alongside me as an artist. In an ideal project I am pushing myself to develop new engagement methods while facilitating knowledge acquisition for community partners and their stakeholders. I have worked with non-profits, community development and advocacy organizations, festivals, and galleries on projects of all scopes and sizes from one-hour events to projects that last through several months. Collaboration allows me to bring the best individuals together into a project, based on their expertise, skills, connections, and location. In past projects, I have worked with local youth interns, student assistants, photographers, and other makers to help create the most successful projects for my partners.

My most consistent collaborator is Brett Hunter. Brett is an artist, educator, and facilitator living in Hornell, NY. He is dedicated to building partnerships between institutions, individuals, and communities. Brett is trained as a public sculptor, contractor, public historian, and teacher. He combines these experiences to develop creative methods to engage people and infrastructure of a place. He works across civic and educational institutions to create community-based arts organizations and programming that engage people of all ages. Brett is a perfect partner for this project because he understands the conditions that make for successful public art, and he even has a sculpture permanently installed in Chattanooga on the Chattanooga State Community College campus. I have budgeted to bring Brett to Chattanooga twice over the course of the project in order to assist with this project. Brett's portfolio is available online here: <https://placenotes.net/>

I also think it is important to be willing to bring in additional experts where necessary. Within my studio, I have prioritized equipment and knowledge that allows me to create quick responses to the needs of my partners, such as large format printers, vinyl cutters, and publication making supplies. Because when I am working with partners I wish to be fully present, I cannot also document projects. Thus, I almost always try to budget to bring a professional photographer or videographer to document what is being created. In this project, I am looking to collaborate with Dillan Forsey, a local adventure filmmaker who will be able to record video footage at the existing skate park to be used to highlight the benefits of this project. Dillan's portfolio is available online here: <http://www.dillanforsey.com/>

Methods

Using a variety of methods, I create tools for generating and documenting dialogue, engaging unexpected participants, and prompting curiosity. These tools function in a variety of contexts, opening up a dialogue to a broad range of people. While any one of these approaches offers an aspect of public engagement, it is the combination of context, tools, and curious objects that provides the opportunity to engage a diverse group of participants. I am interested in allowing the process of working through complex problems to become visible through these tools, so objects can be changed quickly, in effect aestheticizing the process of working through the design thinking process.

One of my favorite methods to use is interviewing. With my collaborator Brett Hunter, we created a mobile bike-radio and interview trailer. This bike trailer can stop, be used to record interviews in any neighborhood, and then used to amplify those stories via low-fi radio and an integrated amp. While the Skate Park is geared towards many different users, this could be a nice tool to use with BMX bikers, for instance.

I am interested in mobile infrastructure that can be quickly moved from one context to the next. In the past we have created custom bicycle trailers that can serve as zine-making studios, radio stations, and temporary exhibition spaces. These curious objects allow us to move to different locations: visit schools, community centers, and street corners to set up opportunities for neighborhood residents to participate without making a trip to a specific location. I am interested in thinking about what mobile infrastructure that is more geared towards skating would look like. This is something I am currently investigating.

For many of my projects, I create publications that allow the conversation to continue beyond a workshop or event. These publications have included data visualizations, essays, interviews, and reflections as well as tools that can be used to facilitate future events. Publications can allow for interaction in public meetings and workshops, and help to walk participants through a series of questions, an exercise, or ask them to share their experiences. The archive is a space of power, and when stories are put down into print, they can live on or be shared in different locations. These publications can be collected to develop an archive or they can be more self-reflective, allowing participants to think more deeply about themselves within the context of a project.

In several projects I have led multi-modal tours for groups of all ages and mobility. These tours allow us to discuss topics in the spaces where they are relevant, such as identifying and using native plants where they grow or discussing proposed infrastructure where it is designed. Embodiment is important; being in place allows us to feel what a space is like, move through space, and even create a spectacle. For two projects geared towards developing new infrastructure (Turn to the River in Terre Haute, IN and The Heights Line in Memphis, TN), these tours allowed design documents to be seen within the locations where designs were planned, and they allowed the designers to troubleshoot based on feedback from participants.

Using vinyl or large scale prints, I can develop large scale asset maps. These maps help visualize both what the community has as well as pointing to neighborhoods wants and needs. In addition to asset maps, large scale maps act as facilitation tools to discuss the challenges and opportunities in public infrastructure.

Finally, I find pop up events to be important and allow for projects to be deployed quickly and easily. I am looking forward to the official public meeting process, but also getting out and meeting skaters where they are using the streets currently.

Impact of Skateparks addendum (originally submitted 9/7/2020)

This is a collection of data and research about the impact of skateparks on their communities. I compiled this information to both share with OS personnel to assist in their advocacy for the project and to inform the questions I generated for the engagement activities.

- **Skate Parks and Crime**

- [“The Urban Grind: Neighborhood Perceptions and Planning Realities”](#)
 - This article (Especially “Neighborhood Context Matters” section on p.28 shows that actually the realities of urban environments allow neighborhoods to be more tolerant of the noise/litter that accompanies skateparks than exurban or suburban sites).
 - This resource also includes sample surveys which could be useful for us.
- [Top 6 Benefits of Skateparks](#)
 - Data not linked in this resource, but it does share anecdotes that discuss how skateparks can alleviate crime pressures.
- [Dispelling Stereotypes... Skate Parks as a Setting for Pro-Social Behavior among Young People](#)
 - Skateparks as a way to create positive social experiences for youth. Could be an argument for tying to a YFD
- [Tony Hawk Foundation study](#)
 - Sites police perceptions of crime reduction with skateparks
- [Intrinsic value of co-designing skateparks](#)
 - Crime prevention through environmental design section is of interest.
- [City Heights Skatepark case study](#)
 - Codesign of skatepark to increase perception of skateparks as safe places for youth

- **Destination parks along linear parks**

- It does seem there are examples of skateparks along multi-use paths like the Riverwalk and there is no data to suggest there are more accidents or crime in these areas, nor that usage is lower. Here are two examples I was able to find.
 - [Mammoth Lakes Skatepark is along their multi-use path](#)
 - [Boulder also has one along their multi-use path](#)

- **Skatepark Activity Plans**

- [Minneapolis Skatepark Activity Plan](#)
 - Minneapolis’ parks consistently rank high in national studies of park effectiveness. They have outlined goals for how to ensure use and ongoing effectiveness of their skateparks.

- **Misc. other resources**
 - [Skatepark Project](#)
 - [Public Skatepark Development guide](#)
- **Economic Impact Skatepark**
 - [Economic impact of local parks \(not skate specific\)](#)
 - [Some good talking points about economic impact and investment here](#)
 - This is not a white paper by any means, but could provide some helpful points to use when advocating for investment.
 - [Similarly good talking points \(see #5\)](#)
 - [Tourism and economic dev \(see page 7\)](#)

Interview Transcripts

Included in the [documentation folder](#) is a folder with transcripts of the interviews filmed at the skatepark in early August. Excerpts of these interviews were used to create the documentary video and banners. While the specific interview questions and follow-ups were somewhat individualized, a general list of interview questions included:

- Tell us your name.
- How long have you lived in CHA?
- What kind of user are you (i.e. a parent, roller skater, inline, BMX, skateboard)?
- How long have you been coming to the skatepark?
- Can you tell me about the community you have at the skatepark or that you have built through participating in the sport?
- How is the community of the skate park changing and growing? What are you looking for in a new skatepark?
- Why is the skate park important to you?
- What does the skate park do for the city? What would a new and improved skate park do?
- What do you like about the existing skatepark?
- What features do you think are important in a new skatepark?