

TO: Mayor John Street
City Council President Anna Verna
City Planning Commission Chair Gary Hack
Fairmount Park Commission Chair F. Eugene Dixon

CC: Philadelphia Inquirer
Philadelphia Daily News

FROM: William P. Becker, a member of the Design Advocacy Group

DATE: April 25, 2002

The Design Advocacy Group is very concerned that the Street Administration is prepared to proceed with construction in JFK (Love) Park when there is no public knowledge of, and therefore no public support for, a revised design. We call upon the Administration to hold public hearings on the future of this important and unique public resource before proceeding with any construction work. JFK Park is an integral part of one of the most important and successful urban designs in any American City, the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. It is inappropriate to trivialize such a significant space as a single purpose sports park or to plan it without the guidance of architects and landscape architects of national stature, working with appropriate guidance and public comment. None of our peer cities would undertake such an important piece of urban design with anything less.

There appears to be consensus in the Philadelphia community that something must be done about JFK Park, given its dysfunctional design and increasingly deteriorated condition. There is, however, NO consensus about just what that something should be. The issue of whether or not skateboarding should be a permitted use within the park has gotten much publicity of late. While the answer to this question will have a major effect on the ultimate design of what gets built, it is certainly not the only issue. Other questions that need to be addressed include the size and character of the central water feature; the renovation or elimination of the former Visitor's Center; the number and location of pedestrian entrances to the park; pedestrian paths through the park; the balance between hard surfaces and natural landscape areas; whether or not to include food service; and the position of the access and egress ramps to the garage below.

If the administration is committed to finding an alternate site for skateboarding, how about Franklin Square, adjacent to the Ben Franklin Bridge and new Constitution Center? This location needs an infusion of vitality. It is in Center City, adjacent to the historic tourist attractions, near the waterfront and accessible by public transit. A new skateboarding venue could help transform this underused space into an attractive place for tourists and visitors to sit and be entertained.

The Design Advocacy Group is comprised of architects, planners, developers, and other concerned citizens. Our mission is to provide an independent and informed public voice for design quality in the architecture and physical planning of the Philadelphia region.