

Ojai Skate Park - Another Summer: Another Skate Park: NOT

How the City of Ojai & the Ojai Unified School District Don't Get Things Done

by Joel Anderson

Ten Years ago current Ojai Mayor Joe DeVito, acting as a city councilman, was going to get things done! HE was going to arrange a trade with the Ojai Unified School District (OUSD). The school system would get much needed tennis court repairs in exchange for their agreement to support the then temporary skate park with a lease; Ojai's skate kids would get a much needed Skate Park, and finally have one place in Ojai to truly call their own, where they wouldn't be told, "No Skateboarding Allowed." As time (10 years) went on... time just went on... and on... and on... and now, there is still no skate park, despite recent and solid fundraising, and all those kids who were promised a skate park years ago... well they aren't kids anymore, and time goes on, which is convenient for the forces pitted against them. Several years ago (Oct. 2007), interest was re-sparked in the vision for the permanent concrete park; the new "kids" were told *Raise the Money, it will come!* So they did. The city put up \$100,000 and challenged the community with a 7 month deadline to raise the rest of the money, whatever it took. The newly organized non-profit, *Skate Ojai group* (incorporated Nov. 2007, www.ojaiskatepark.com) organized the effort. The kids raised \$250,000 to reach their \$350,000 goal, through enthusiasm, hard work and a lot of family/community support, and met their goal before the June 30, 2008 deadline. Funds were in hand!!! Now THAT'S community spirit!!!



Phantom Victory - Skate Ojai Day - May 31, 2008

the City (defined as early as 2002, see OUSD "DOCUMENT" next page 9, at lower right) had held that the currently rotting plywood ramps could be replaced by a solid, safe and permanent in-ground concrete skate park, which Ojai Unified agreed to in January, 2002.

The project started off with great promise. A large enthusiastic Ojai community turned out for "Skate Ojai Day" held May 31, 2008, proudly and publicly celebrating the efforts.

But it was not to be... quite that way. Over the recent past 12 months or so... it became increasingly evident throughout "The Ojai" grapevine that the school district and the city were really only interested in becoming commercial real estate partners with Developer Ted Moore to tear down the historic Chaparral school, and build a tri-plex theater, hotel, a very few low-income housing units (as an anticemeter for the city in reaching its Draft Housing Element), convention rooms, and a new strip mall. This was all kept on the hush-hush because they knew "Ojai" would never give popular grass roots support to such an outrage. But whispers turned to a roar and with the stated goal of turning centrally located Chaparral school

into a strip/shopping mall for financial profit. They have obviously conspired to do everything they can do to NOT get the Skate Park completed, as promised. This had become an all-too-familiar-to-Ojai classic; Lucy and the Football scenario where the kids (Charlie) wind up flat on their backs and out of breath... and Lucy (Ojai Unified and the City of Ojai) stand by idly, smugly smirking having once again foiled the ever hopeful and trusting Charlie Brown. With Ojai's Newlywed and Nearly Dead undercurrent (you can visit with your kids, but don't stay), the powers-that-be in Ojai have never really been kid friendly. Take for instance; NO Bowling Alley, NO Arcade games in the Arcade, NO More Miniature golf, NO Nordhoff Community Swimming Pool... Shoot Down the idea to show Movies at the now-demolished Ojai Frosty, The Frosty itself...

City Manager Jere Kersnar had to be reminded by local private citizen and State Farm Insurance Agent, Bob Daddi, that there were legal liability/workmens comp provisions already in place on the state books which would enable volunteering citizens to exercise their get-it-done spirit and contribute their free labors to a city/non-profit coop project to Get-it-Done. Of course it was nice of Ojai City Attorney Monte Widders, right out in the open of a public city council meeting and with his usual oratory zeal, to take credit for Daddi's liability expertise and detailed homework, without skipping a beat. But Dale Summersille, director of parks also helped; stopping the planning phase of the project several months ago, and giving the Skate Ojai group no reason for this stall...

Will the Skate Park be just another in a long line of stifled projects? No construction bids have been initiated, much less awarded... And the kids? Ask a skateboarder, they'll recall the education they've been given over the past year. And with elections coming, if there is one thing local government and the school system has taught Ojai Youth it is to be wary of politicians, school administrators, and their high-flown fork-tongued promises. Oh, and also of the seething smirky attitude they, the political elite, blatantly flaunt; Never mind the kids and what they were promised.

Tim Baird, Ojai Unified's former Superintendent recently ducked out of Ojai for a higher paying superintendent job with Encinitas Union School District (EUSD) near San Diego, educating elementary aged youth. Reportedly he now takes home a salary of over \$200,000 annually there, at least \$65,000 above what he had been making in Ojai.

Baird showed his true Ojai "community" spirit when he abandoned his sleepy little stepping stone of Ojai. Under Baird's self-promoting tutelage, the Ojai district has already spent well over \$60,000 in scarce educational (and public) funds, on attorney fees toward his unrealized pet strip/mall development project.

The school district and its representatives have failed to appear at city council meetings on the Skate Park (save one single meeting in June, which Baird attended); yet Skate Ojai is blamed by OUSD for OUSD being uninformed.

Misinformation began to appear on the Ojai grapevine of public opinion that a public skate park would generate drugs, violence, etc., and pose serious law enforcement problems. Baird had begun filing safety complaints regarding the site, just as Skate Ojai had started Fundraising efforts; however his numerous complaints directly contradicted the opinion of Ojai's former chief of Police Bruce Norris, who was an ardent supporter of the Skate Park. Norris did not see any unsolvable enforcement issues with the location.

And so the seeds of doubt were being actively planted in an effort to undermine and turn public opinion against Skate Ojai and the skate park project.

After serving on the Ojai Valley Youth Foundation (OVYF) and also as founding president of Ojai's Green Coalition, Baird's fleeting actions have become crystal clear; his seemingly altruistic OVYF position was only an ornament to boost his brief "community" image. His actions proved his true motives were more aligned (or maligned) against, not with Ojai school-aged youth.

If it weren't so sad it might almost be funny; our educational system, an institution established to help kids, but actually bringing them down and promoting the private development aspirations of its public administrators. City officials also were complicit as they withheld official pertinent factual information for over a year [Memorandum dated Oct. 12, 2007] which would have disputed numerous and direct inaccuracies the school district had presented.

On July 1, Ojai Unified Interim Superintendent Jim Berube filed an appeal with the City of Ojai to "Overturn the approval of the skatepark project" by the Ojai Planning Commission (OPC). The appeal issues are purely operational. Skate Ojai Continued Next Page...

- October 7: the project (publicized)
- October 14: Make conceptual presentation to OUSD Board of Education
- October 23: Make conceptual presentation and preliminary cost estimate to City Council
- October 29 - Nov. 6: City Council Action: Direct staff to proceed and prepare RFP for construction
- November 10: Site Design Group to prepare construction documents for bid
- November 18: City Council Action: if additional square footage is needed for the project, direct Monte (Widders)/Staff to write letter to OUSD informing them that the City would like to proceed with and to exercise the option for the additional 3,500 sq. ft. (or square footage needed) effective January 1, 2009 (which will give time to HELP move and demo and prep site)
- November 20: Deadline for community to donate materials (all donations must be in writing) at 5pm to the Ojai Recreation Center
- December 18: Staff to prepare staff report and RFP for construction
- December 22 - Jan. 6, 09: Deadline for Skate Ojai to have all money/donations in the bank for the project
- January 13, 2009: City Council approves RDA to go out for construction
- January 13, 2009: City Council meeting
- January 19: City Council Action - Direct staff to proceed with project, what type park - in ground/above ground/hybrid
- May 16, 2009: City Council Action - award construction bid
- May 16, 2009: City Council Action - Direct staff to prepare an NOE for CEQA
- May 16, 2009: City Council Action - any other resolutions and approvals needed
- May 16, 2009: Construction bid opens
- May 16, 2009: Construction begins
- May 16, 2009: Construction ends (based on 120 day schedule)

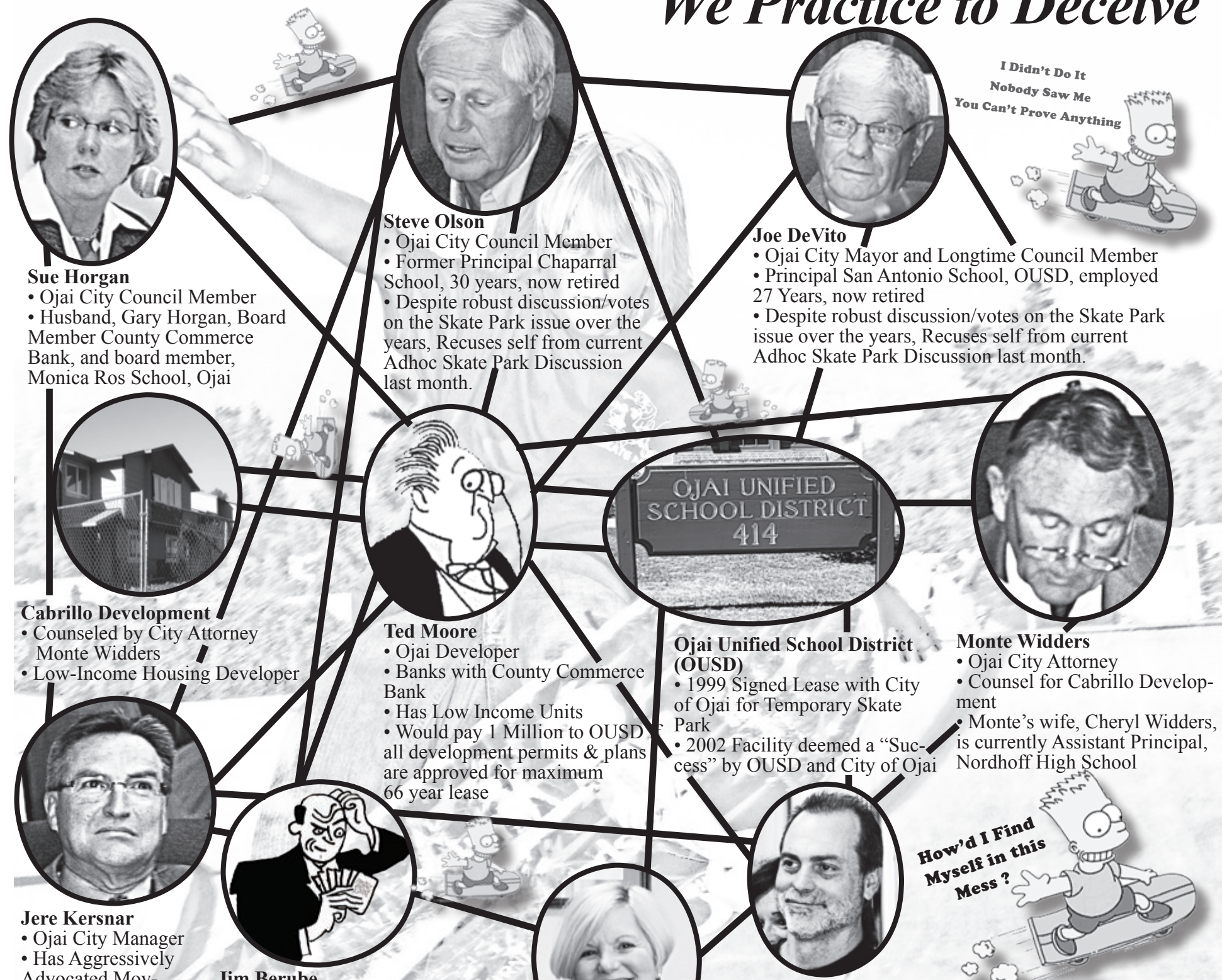
May 16, 2009 • Ribbon Cutting/Grand Opening

TIMELINE: Original Skate Park Proposal

• Dated: June 2008 •

- July 17-22, 2008 • Staff to Work on RFQ, Staff to proceed and do soil tests, topo maps (and title), geotechnical tests, temporary erosion control/quality management reports using monies already allocated to the project by City Council.
- July 23: Send out RFQ to design firms.
- July 31: Deadline for letters of interest and RFQ's
- August 4-6: Staff & Skate Ojai to review and grade RFQ's
- August 11/15: Staff to schedule finalists, prepare questions for panels & check on references.
- August 18: Panel to interview top design firms
- August 19: Special City Council meeting/joint meeting with Parks & Recreation Commission and invite Planning Commission and OUSD officials.
- August 19/20: Present timeline
- August 19/20: Present amount monies raised
- August 19/20: Presentation of design build skate park process
- August 26: Staff prepare additional report and documentation if needed for Aug. 26 City Council Meeting.
- August 26: Hire designer, and update Council on Project.
- September 13: City Council Action - Direct staff to proceed with project, what type park - in ground/above ground/hybrid
- September 22: Designer/Staff to hold community workshop #1, 1-3pm
- September 29: Designer/Staff to hold community workshop #2, 5-6:30pm
- September 29: Final conceptual and 3D renderings submitted to City
- September 30: Site Design Group to give City list of specific materials and quantity needed for
- October 1: Planning Commission/Parks & Recreation Commission joint meeting for designer to present conceptual and preliminary cost estimate
- October 1: List of specific materials needed for

Oh What a Tangled Web We Weave, When First We Practice to Deceive



Sue Horgan
 • Ojai City Council Member
 • Husband, Gary Horgan, Board Member County Commerce Bank, and board member, Monica Ros School, Ojai

Cabrillo Development
 • Counseled by City Attorney Monte Widders
 • Low-Income Housing Developer

Jere Kersnar
 • Ojai City Manager
 • Has Aggressively Advocated Moving Skatepark from Current Set Location elsewhere to make way for Ted Moore Development, from Day 1

Jim Berube
 • Ojai Unified Interim Superintendent
 • Signed Original Lease for Permanent Skate Park, Jan. 2002
 • Appeals his own decision for Skate Park (above), to "overturn (Planning Commission) approval of skate park, Appeal filed July 1, 09

Cheryl Widders
 • Wife of Ojai City Attorney Monte Widders
 • Assistant Principal, Nordhoff High School
 • Regularly Attends City Council Meetings re Skate Park

Tim Baird
 • Former OUSD Superintendent
 • Moved out of Town

Ted Moore
 • Ojai Developer
 • Banks with County Commerce Bank
 • Has Low Income Units
 • Would pay 1 Million to OUSD for all development permits & plans are approved for maximum 66 year lease

Ojai Unified School District (OUSD)
 • 1999 Signed Lease with City of Ojai for Temporary Skate Park
 • 2002 Facility deemed a "Success" by OUSD and City of Ojai

Monte Widders
 • Ojai City Attorney
 • Counsel for Cabrillo Development
 • Monte's wife, Cheryl Widders, is currently Assistant Principal, Nordhoff High School

Steve Olson
 • Ojai City Council Member
 • Former Principal Chaparral School, 30 years, now retired
 • Despite robust discussion/votes on the Skate Park issue over the years, Recuses self from current Adhoc Skate Park Discussion last month.

Joe DeVito
 • Ojai City Mayor and Longtime Council Member
 • Principal San Antonio School, OUSD, employed 27 Years, now retired
 • Despite robust discussion/votes on the Skate Park issue over the years, Recuses self from current Adhoc Skate Park Discussion last month.

Skate Park Update Due at the next Ojai City City Council Meeting on July 28. The July 14 City Council meeting has been cancelled.

Continued From Previous Page... tional, and legally not grounds to break the lease. As in the original lease agreement Ojai Unified must negotiate these terms in good faith.

So it seems the torch has been passed to yet another pedagogical bureaucrat interested only in stifling kids with publicly expensive and litigious stall tactics, despite contract law and overwhelming community support. Is it any wonder why our schools are broke?

- Joel Anderson, editor

"We've been confused the whole time we've been here, like... why isn't there a big park here?" - Jason Jessee, Skate Legend

Ojai Unified School District Board Agenda Item Summary
Meeting Date: January 15, 2002
Title: Approval of Skateboard Park Concept
Exhibit: Memo of Information
Explanation: In April 1999, the District entered an agreement with the City of Ojai to place a skateboard facility on the Park and Ride lot adjacent to the District Office. The placement was temporary in order to determine the impact of the facility on the District Office site and surrounding area prior to the possible establishment of a permanent skateboard facility. The facility was recently reviewed by District and City representatives and deemed a success.

DOCUMENT

FOR: Action

Recommendation: Approve the concept of building a permanent skateboard park.

Breaking News

SAT. JULY 11, 2009: Ojai Unified School District held a rare 11 am board meeting at the Ojai Valley Inn to discuss hiring a new superintendent. Before the meeting, the Ojai Sheriff was contacted by the Inn, and told to expect a disturbance. Seven respected Ojai citizens, showed up for the "public" meeting. Ojai Valley Inn staff and the Sheriff were perplexed as to why there needed to be a police presence at the Inn. No disturbances were reported, no arrests were made... It remains unclear the extent to which OUSD publicized the meeting, according to the Ralph M. Brown Open Meeting Law.

more info. www.ojairec.com
www.ojaiskatepark.com

