



This month the [Glen Iris Neighborhood Association](#) drew its highest attendance ever for a single meeting. Monday, July 1, saw nearly 100 people gathered at [St. Elias Maronite Church](#) to hear what residents had to say about a potential skate park at [George Ward Park](#). The [neighborhood association had tabled discussion about the project at their May meeting](#) until further research could be investigated.

The meeting started 20 minutes late and initially focused on [the regular business of the neighborhood](#). Cris Worley from the [A.Skate Foundation](#) was introduced, after which association vice president Michael Gray explained that audience members' comments would be limited to two minutes. Worley was then given the floor and she addressed misinformation recently circulated around the neighborhood, the A.Skate Foundation and its programs, and how skateboarding is neurologically beneficial to autistic children.

Peter Karvonen, owner of Faith Skate Supply, talked about the 3,500 skateparks that have been constructed throughout the country the past six years. He also related the history of the old Vestavia Hills skatepark. A third speaker, criminologist Christy Ivy, addressed the concerns from a crime and constructive policy angle.

All three speakers defended skaters from the stereotypes most recently perpetuated by a flyer circulating around the city, addressing such things as potential noise issues, the look of the park, and those perceiving skateboarders as "thugs on drugs."

The majority of speakers from the audience were overwhelmingly supportive of the skatepark. A few naysayers voiced their opinions as well. To everyone's credit, the discussion remained civil and engaging.

Many Glen Iris residents spoke of appreciating the diversity in the neighborhood. Others explained how, although they were not interested in skateboarding, it should not stop others from enjoying the activity. A local architect urged his fellow residents to stop the "what if" debates and work on Birmingham being "first" with something rather than always last. A 40-year resident of the neighborhood reminded people of how disconnected to reality it seems when they approve land for use by dogs but are considering refusing it to a use by people.

After the discussion, a motion was made to approve the skatepark at the triangular site in the northwest corner of the park. Glen Iris residents were asked to stand and raise their right hand to vote in favor of the skatepark. The motion passed 52 - 9 (with one abstention), thus clearing a major

hurdle for the skatepark plans to move forward.

Additional items discussed at the meeting:

- City councilor Valerie Abbott reminded everyone about [a meeting in Jasper called by the Black Warrior Riverkeeper on July 9](#) to discuss strip mining along the river. (Those opposed to the mining but unable to attend the Jasper meeting can contact the Alabama Surface Mining Commission in Montgomery).
- UAB is instituting a campus public transit system where students and employees can ride for free.