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## Bike Park stirs up dust, spirit at Township Nine

Parcel of land is now temporary dirt-jumping park

Riders can hone mountain biking skills on pump tracks and jump lines

Park represents a partnership between city, developer, cycling community



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Sacramento City Councilman Jeff Harris had a description for the collection of dirt mounds now open at the Township Nine development for a crowd of local cyclists: “More fun than should be legal.”

Leaning Saturday on his white-and-gold mountain bike, he addressed about 100 people who gathered Saturday morning to take a spin on Sacramento’s first dirt-jumping park. Though it doesn’t look like much from afar, the 6-acre park contains an array of turns and jumps that riders say they would typically have to go to the foothills to find. They say it’s the result of a lot of community elbow grease and a testament to Sacramento’s growth as an urban bike hub.

Sandwiched between the American River Bike Trail and the up-and-coming Township Nine apartment, office and retail complex, the bike park sits on a parcel of land that will eventually be part of the development but won’t be worked on for another five years or so, said Steve Goodwin, president of Township Nine and its surrounding River District. In the meantime, it will serve as a stomping ground for bikers of all ages and skill levels.

“This is an opportunity to start really enlivening the area,” Goodwin said. “Bringing people out here, giving people places to recreate ... building a neighborhood feel, even though it’s temporary, for this sort of use.”

The idea came from Terry Cox, owner of College Cyclery in Land Park, who said he’s been searching for months for a way to introduce Sacramento to dirt jumping – a growing sect of off-road biking that involves skillful ground maneuvers as well as aerial tricks. The city leased the land from Township Nine on a one-year renewable contract and covered the cost of construction for the temporary public park. Cox recruited internationally renowned bike park designers to help dig dirt and raise ramps.

The park contains “pump tracks” that riders are meant to move through without pedaling, using the weight of their bodies and bikes to “pump” up and down the track’s small hills. It’s an ideal way for cyclists to hone their handling skills and acquire the balance they will need on trails, Cox said.

“There’s been a huge demand for one of these in Sacramento,” he said. “There are a lot of people who live in an urban environment who want to ride off-road. It’s pretty hard for folks to get off work, pack up their gear and get to the foothills. This really gives folks downtown a great place to brush up on their mountain biking skills.”

After mastering the pump tracks, riders can work their way up to the small, medium or large jump lines on the other side of the park. Starting on top of a large cargo container secured to the ground by metal rails, cyclists can swoop down a dirt ramp to gain momentum before tackling a series of mounds intended to send them skyward.

On Saturday, pro cyclists came from as far as Santa Cruz to show off aerial stunts on the jump lines, while intermediate riders practiced making clean landings after getting air. On the pump track, toddlers and seniors cruised along as families cheered on the sidelines.



Members of the Sacramento Police Department's bike unit were at the opening, putting their department-issued mountain bikes to the test. Sgt. Donald Schumacher said he expects the unit's officers will visit the park regularly to keep their skills up.

Bike and skate parks don't usually lead to increased police calls or safety issues, Schumacher said, referring to existing sites like Sutter's Landing skate park and Granite Regional Park. They actually do the opposite by keeping people off the street and encouraging a sense of community, he said.

"People are here using it for what it's meant to be used for, and that's the best security," he said. "These are the last places we worry about as far as safety goes."

The park is open from dawn until dusk each day, and while there won't be full-time supervision on-site, the department hopes to install cameras.

Saturday marked the official opening of the park, but members of the cycling community have been using it casually since construction was completed in September. Cox believes it gets about 30 to 40 visitors each day. In the spring, he will open a combination bike and coffee shop in the Township Nine development to further boost excitement about biking.

Mike Espinor, 53, comes to the park on every lunch break from his business at S & P Sheet Metal to spend an hour in the open air. He started on a road bike about three years ago, and, with guidance from Cox and others at College Cyclery, worked his way up to mountain biking. He has lost 87 pounds since taking up cycling, and he said he is getting better and better with help from other riders.

"I'm really thankful they did this for us," he said of Cox and others. "These are just really cool people. I'm still a rookie and I'm still afraid of crashing, and they've kept me going. ... Finally, I feel like I've become one with my bike."

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