



Beverly, teams welcome ice-rink proposal - Airport site eyed for \$8m complex

By Steven Rosenberg, Globe Staff - August 9, 2007

A group of developers that includes Endicott College, St. John's Prep, and a Wenham insurance brokerage firm's owner wants to spend more than \$8 million to build an ice-skating complex on a 6.4-acre city-owned lot near Beverly Airport.

"The need for this kind of project is huge in this area," said Peter Petri, owner of American Financial Network, and president of the Wenham-based Innovative Sports Group. Innovative was the only company that responded to Beverly's request this spring for bids to lease the land near the airport for an ice-skating facility.

Innovative's plan calls for three rinks to be constructed on the property. Two of the rinks would be regulation National Hockey League size, 85 feet by 200 feet; one rink would have a spectator area with 900 seats, the other would have 60 seats. A third, smaller rink would be used for training by figure skaters and hockey players. The facility would also include an indoor artificial turf field, measuring 140 by 80 feet, that could be used as a practice facility for school lacrosse, soccer and other teams; four locker rooms; a concession stand; a weight training area, and a 214-car parking lot.

"I think it's going to deserve serious consideration," said Mayor William Scanlon. "If it works out, we think it would be a great thing for Beverly and for people of all ages."

Scanlon recently appointed a five-person committee to evaluate the proposal. David Gelineau, the city's purchasing agent, said the committee would look at several criteria, including the thoroughness of the proposal, the group's funding, and whether the complex meets the needs of the community. Gelineau said the committee would make a recommendation to Scanlon by next month.

If the committee recommends the proposal, Scanlon would negotiate with Innovative on final terms, which would include lease payments to the city for up to 50 years.

The \$8 million plan is the largest private investment for an athletic facility ever proposed in the city.

In its proposal, Innovative has committed to paying more than \$120,000 annually in property taxes, along with an unspecified amount for leasing the property. The group also has offered Beverly teams the facility at \$165 an hour, 31 percent less than what they have been paying to rent ice time at area rinks. Between the payments to the city and team discounts, Innovative estimates that its facility would generate \$350,000 in a combination of savings and cash revenue.

Also, Innovative estimates that the complex would generate an additional \$1.5 million annually for merchants, hotels, and restaurants.

Petri said the facility would be the home hockey arena for Beverly High School, Endicott College, and St. John's Prep. In its proposal, Innovative listed Endicott College and St. John's as major backers of the proposed facility, with Endicott committing \$2.5 million and the Catholic boys' school in Danvers to invest \$750,000 toward the complex.

The city-owned land is next to Beverly Airport on the Beverly-Wenham line.

It also sits next to a 15-acre athletic field that was an illegal fly-ash landfill until the 1970s. The former landfill was cleaned by New England Power, which spent \$5 million to remove the fly ash from the site and Wenham Lake.

To date, the proposal has not generated any opposition, and it has been greeted positively by city officials and hockey coaches. Currently, Beverly does not have an ice arena.

"It's bringing in money, and it's providing a service and a recreational opportunity that we don't have in Beverly. Having a facility like this will make Beverly a more attractive community to live in," said City Council president Paul Guanci.

"Youth hockey and high school hockey have been waiting for this for years; it would be huge," said Bob Gilligan, coach of the Beverly High School hockey team.

Gilligan said the city pays \$220 an hour to practice four nights a week at the Pingree School in Hamilton. Games are played at Salem State College's rink.

Besides paying a reduced rate for ice time for practices, Gilligan said, players would benefit by being able to practice in the afternoons.

He also said clinics teaching hockey skills could be held at the facility.

Gary Munzing, a member of the board of directors of Beverly Youth Hockey, said a home facility would cut down the amount of travel players and families have to endure for practices and games from September through April.

"It would help our program immensely," said Munzing, who added that 150 kids from Beverly enroll in the program and practice at rinks in Hamilton, Gloucester, and Salem as early as 6:30 on weekend mornings.