

Glenview Park Board: Ice center renovation to appear on March ballot

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A \$17 million bond referendum to finance renovation of the 44-year-old Glenview Ice Center and make improvements at The Grove will appear on the March election ballot.

By a 5-2 vote, the Glenview Park District Board accepted the recommendation of the 28-member Citizen Task Force at its Thursday, Dec. 21 meeting

The estimated annual tax impact of the bond measure would be \$35.69 for a \$500,000 home, or approximately \$2.97 per month.

Board President Bob Patton and Commissioner Dan Peterson voted against the proposal after Patton's recommendations attaching strings to the operation of a renovated ice center were voted down 5-2.

"While the Task Force considered many issues relating to the ice center, given the finite amount of time ... one issue the Task Force was not asked to address was how the ice center would be operated if the referendum passes and it is ultimately built," Patton said.

"The president's recommendation combines two very, very simple recommendations," he continued. "The first recommendation is that if the referendum passes and the Ice Center is ultimately built/renovated, the new ice center should be managed and operated in a manner where it will at least break even. The second recommendation is ... if a new ice center is constructed and has built up adequate financial reserves, any annual profits should be returned to the taxpayers through reducing portions of the bond and interest levy."

Peterson argued in favor of Patton's recommendations — saying, "If there is a demand, then we should be able to cover costs." — and voted in favor of them.

Commissioners Jen Roberts and Bill Casey made heated arguments against them.

"I have a problem with market clearing rates to cover costs," Roberts said. "It works with widgets, but we're not dealing with widgets. We are not a for-profit organization;

we have a mission."

Wikipedia defines market clearing as "the process by which in an economic market, the supply of whatever is traded is equated to the demand so there is no leftover supply or demand."

"It's not how we operate our other facilities," Casey said. "We try to keep them profitable."

Commissioner Dave Dillon noted that no strings were attached to the renovation of the golf course and other facilities.

"I appreciate the concerns, but remember this is for kids," Dillon said. "I want the referendum."

Joining Roberts, Casey and Dillon in voting in favor of the task force recommendation were Commissioners Angie Katsamakos and Dave Tosh.

Prior to the discussion that prefaced the vote, eight residents spoke in favor of the task force's proposal, including Carlo Cavallaro, who represented the task force. No residents expressed opposition.

Most of the speakers had a hockey or figure-skating connection to the ice center, which currently has one full sheet of ice and a half-sheet studio rink. They emphasized the benefits in adding a full sheet of ice, as well as the hardships that would be alleviated.

One of the proponents was former Park Board Member Ted Przybylo.

He told the board: "We've been hearing for 13 years that the ice center has the need, the demand and the demographics to support two-and-a-half sheets of ice."

Alex Botvinnik, assistant coach of the Glenbrook hockey, said his team has never played a high school game on its home rink because of its inability to secure ice time. Instead, the team holds "nine of 10 practices on the studio rink."

Pete Boland, of the GBS boys hockey Board of Directors, pointed out that the Titans are forced to hold practices at 10:45 p.m. on Mondays, 10:05 p.m. on Tuesdays and 9:50 p.m. on Thursdays because of the absence of available ice in the evening, which deprives the student-athletes of sleep. He also said that "we have to cut kids" at GBS because the scarcity of ice time prevents the club from fielding two teams, as New Trier and Loyola Academy do.

Similar concerns were expressed by Renee Schmidt, president of the Parent Board of the Glenview Blades synchronized skating team.

"We have three teams and they are getting 50 percent of the ice time they need," she said. "Girls are getting up at 5 a.m. (to practice because ice time isn't available at night)."

Christy Vazzano-Crist talked about the physical and psychological benefits derived from participation in programs at the ice center. Vazzano-Crist said she has "three hockey-playing sons and a 20-year-old, special-needs daughter, Frankie, who learned to skate at the ice center as a child and is now an ice skating instructor."

The Citizen Task Force was able to reduce the bond request by almost 30 percent by renovating, rather than replacing, the ice center and removing improvements to Sleepy Hollow Park from the proposal.

Public opinion research reviewed by the Task Force revealed that most residents did not see a need for a new ice center but supported the renovation project, which in addition to providing an additional sheet of ice would address safety, security and disability issues; energy inefficiencies; and deteriorating mechanical systems.

According to the Park District, between \$8-12.5 million in repairs to the ice center would be necessary if the \$17-million bond referendum to finance renovations to the ice center, as well as The Grove and other District sites, failed to pass in March.

Park District Executive Director Mike McCarty praised the Task Force in the press release that was issued after the Park Board voted in favor of the referendum.

"The decision made to pursue a scaled-back proposal, which is focused on our absolute highest priority needs, reinforces the District's continued commitment to fiscal responsibility and delivering high quality services to our taxpayers," he concluded.

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