

**PROPOSAL to Create an Ice Skating Rink Downtown on a portion of the Library Lane Lot by the Ann Arbor Committee for a Downtown Skating Rink**

by **The Ann Arbor Committee for a Downtown Skating Rink**

Imagine fall in downtown Ann Arbor, still warm enough to bring out people strolling and outside chess games. At night you can see your breath. Driving across town on Fifth you see pure magic. On what used to be a non-descript parking lot people are skating under the stars. They are old and young, families with small children, singles and couples. Sounds of laughter, conversation, the squeals of children punctuate the quiet whoosh of skates. Skaters are resting on benches, looking at murals painted on the perimeter fence, drinking hot chocolate next to a food cart, writing about their experiences in a logbook. Ice-skating is public art in motion.

This is no fantasy of Rockefeller Center. This is a feasible, sustainable, enjoyable ice rink that the Committee is ready to bring to bring to downtown Ann Arbor.

**Contacts and principals:**

**Stewart Gordon: 734 994-5070 [gordonstu@yahoo.com](mailto:gordonstu@yahoo.com): historian/builder**

**Alan Haber: 734 761-7967 [megiddo@umich.edu](mailto:megiddo@umich.edu) : social worker organizer**

**Others on the committee:**

**Sara Duvall : recreational skater**

**Odile Hugonot Haber: nurse**

**Supporters and consultants:**

**Mark Hodesh Downtown Home and Garden**

**Elaine Selo, Selo /Shevel Gallery**

**Carol Lopez, Peaceable Kingdom**

**John Fingerle, Fingerle Lumber**

**Mary Campbell, Everyday Wines**

**Scott Schmunk, Advantage Sports**

**Aaron Hammer, Landscape Architect**

**Scott Alf, Union Stage Builder**

**Afternoon Delight**

**Moosejaw Sporting Goods**

**Jerusalem Gardens**

**Herb David Guitar Studio**

**Goal:** The committee stands ready to purchase, construct and operate a recreational, **artificial ice skating rink**. This is a pilot project, which will continue for a minimum of two months at which time the experience will be evaluated. If there is demand for the rink and the people of Ann Arbor are enjoying the rink, we anticipate a longer period of use. The rink will also be a place where ideas for the future of the Library Lane will be posted and discussed.

**Location** Below we have costed a 36'x72' rink located on the northwest section of the Library Lane parking lot adjacent to Earthen Jar restaurant and the sidewalk on the east side of Fifth Avenue. This location will require moving some grasses into large pots. A larger rink (40x85) is possible in adjacent southwest section of the same surface lot. The committee's landscape architect will consult with the city's landscape designers to expedite this process.

**Unique Benefits to Downtown:** The skating rink is a cultural asset that enriches and enlivens the entire community. The rink will draw locals, people from the surrounding region and long-distance visitors both to skate and to watch, promoting a longer day of downtown use. The rink will become a destination for families in the area, who will also need meals, snacks, and other amenities. The lighting and skating will complement other vibrant portions of downtown, such as Main Street and Liberty. The rink accords with the city's commitment to Environmental and Social Sustainability.

The Committee wishes to emphasize that the rink is a public space of active use. It is *program* that makes a public space succeed.

The rink will create positive associations for all businesses and institutions in the area. The rink will be covered as a feature in a wide range of local and regional media, building the image of downtown Ann Arbor as a happening, fun place to be. The rink could form a center for downtown events, such as an Earth Day celebration and a Solstice Party.

The Committee sees much synergy between the Library and the rink. Families come downtown to skate and take out books. The rink will have benches, which in nice weather will be pleasant places to sit and read.

**Initial Response:** People like the idea of a skating rink downtown. The first article on the project in Ann Arbor.com generated overwhelmingly positive responses.

First comment from [annarbor.com](http://annarbor.com) article, Sunday February 17, 2013

**“Perfect idea! Best idea for Downtown AA I have heard in years! Excellent!”**

Poll in [annarbor.com](http://annarbor.com)

What do you think of the idea of an outdoor skating rink in downtown Ann Arbor? 920 votes:

**Let's make it happen - 60%**

I'm not sold on it - 23%

I like the concept but I'm concerned about the cost - 17%

Almost everyone we've asked, face to face, has said “**yes,**” so we anticipate wide public approval, and appreciation to all who help make this happen.

**Management Group :** The committee is creating a non-profit. The overall management of the ice rink and its activities during the trial period will be by the officers of the non-profit.

During the pilot period, we will discuss and seek to formulate a cooperative self-management model exemplifying the principles of the commons , for consideration during the assessment, for governance of possible future operation.

**Relationship to the City:** The City Attorney’s Office informs us that a simple resolution from the City Council would re-designate a portion or the whole of Library Lane surface from “public land, parking” to “public land, non-parking.” (Currently, the only “public land, non-parking” site in Ann Arbor is the “rain garden” at First and Kingsley, which is not a “park” and not “parking.”) This action would relieve the DDA from obligation to collect parking revenue from that area. We await from the City Attorney the exact wording of the DDA-City contract that would be amended.

A section of that City Council resolution would re-assign management responsibility for the re-designated area from DDA and its Republic Parking sub-contractor to our management group.

The area would not be designated as “Park,” both because the Park Department, at this time at least, does not want this responsibility, and because if once included in the park domain, it would need a vote of the people to remove it from the park domain.

In the trial period we anticipate a token rental for the space needed for the rink and a management relationship with the city.

**Liability:** The Committee has taken as its model the public ice rink in downtown Dexter. Dexter has no special liability insurance for its ice rink, just its omnibus existing liability policy, not even a special rider. Dexter posts a “skate at your own risk” sign next to the rink. The Committee would expect that the city’s liability policy would cover the ice rink with a posted “skate at your own risk” sign, just as the case at the new skateboard park. In contrast, the commercial rink on the top floor of the Hancock building in Chicago carries its own liability policy and has each skater sign a waiver. In three years of operations, the Hancock rink has had no liability claims.

We are assuming that the ice rink and its activities will be covered by the city’s omnibus liability policy (as the skate park is so covered.) We have had a productive meeting with Mary Fales (assistant city attorney) and are awaiting an answer to this specific question.

**Impact on the Parking lot.** The proposed rink and its periphery would cover 15 parking spaces. By City Council resolution the area of the rink and some portion of the surrounding space would become “Public Land, Non-parking”, thus clarifying the relation of the space to the DDA. As stated, a larger rink would re-purpose more parking places. The Committee sees this rink as furthering the stated city goal of converting surface parking to higher and better public uses. The southwest corner of the lot has always been designated as a public plaza.

The elevator exit path toward Fifth Avenue would go directly West rather than diagonally across the skating area over the Northwest parking spaces. We would draw minimal electric needs from parking structure service.

## City and Commissions Liaisons

We have had in contact with and presented the proposal at the following units: City Council, City Attorney, DDA, Parks Advisory Commission, the Parks Advisory Board sub-committee on Downtown Parks, Library Board.

**Feasibility:** The technology of artificial/synthetic skating ice is well established and has been tested and used in practice rinks and public facilities since 1994. The skating surface is a very low friction, polymer plastic. Skaters can enjoy it in all seasons. The Committee sees the rink as a subtle, engaging means of teaching sustainability. Artificial ice does not require the energy-consuming cooling equipment of real ice. Lighting for night skating will be run from solar panels and batteries. Artificial ice rinks are a sound long-term investment. Manufacturers typically guarantee the ice surface for ten years and oversee proper installation. The material can then be turned over and used another ten years. All additional necessary materials are readily available locally. Fingerle Limber can furnish all lumber and connectors. A key element is that the entire rink can be readily disassembled and moved to a new location or stored.

**Limitations:** Artificial ice is best for simple recreational skating, not for sophisticated figure skating as the surface does not have as sustained a glide as natural ice. Our rink would be too small for hockey. Artificial ice has more friction than natural ice and skates would, therefore, have to be sharpened more often. Our interviews with operators of current artificial ice rinks suggests that the importance of making the rink large enough for adults to skate comfortably. If the rink is too small, it becomes a child-only rink and is less used and enjoyed.

### Sources of technical information:

google: artificial ice  
Superglide  
FutureSkate.net  
GlobalSynthetic Ice.com

After consultation with several current operators of artificial ice rinks we have concluded that Superglide (an interview is attached) is the best product currently available. Unlike other synthetic ices Superglide does not require weekly oiling, a messy and expensive job. Superglide maintenance is quite simple and needs only to be cleaned with a damp squeegee each morning to remove snow or debris. No other maintenance is required.

**Budget and Financing:** The anticipated budget for purchase, constructions, and staffing of the rink for 2 months and an assessment period is approximately \$50,000. It will also be a demonstration experiment to measure the benefits of such use of open space both for public enjoyment and for community development. The committee has already raised pledges for about half the needed budget from volunteer labor, philanthropy, and local foundations.

**Construction, materials:** The parking lot slopes slightly and has irregularities requiring that we build a low level platform to support the skating surface. This deck will entail standard construction of 2x6 joists and beams on 4x4 posts. The slope is shallow and the greatest distance between the deck and the parking structure surface will be about 18". The joists and beams will be decked with ¾" tongue and groove plywood. On top of the plywood goes a special underlayment membrane and the ½ inch artificial ice panels go on top of the membrane. The panels finger joint together to produce a strong, smooth easily laid surface. Construction will include a 30" fence around the rink and one gate at the highest point of the parking structure (constituting a about 6-8" high ramp up to the skating surface).

**Local construction, schedule:** First, exact location and size must be agreed on. Then, the Committee will produce suitable drawings for the Building Department. After approval, the deck will be constructed with team of professional carpenters (both Stewart Gordon and Alan Haber are skilled in the building trades), stage builders (who have committed to the project) and community volunteers in 7 days, like an old-fashioned barn-raising. The spirit of community effort and the surrounding publicity are an intrinsic part of the project and its momentum. Local sourcing of materials allows rapid delivery of any additional materials necessary.

**Operation:** The rink will be open and attended from 11 AM to 11 PM daily. Ideally, skate rental and skate sharpening will be available on site, though the committee has not finalized a process by which this will be done. Some lighting is already available on the surface level of the parking structure. We are arranging with solar energy workers to install solar panels for the top of the elevator tower to power additional LED lighting. In the two month period of testing the feasibility of the ice rink, the committee plans to ask a token donation of \$3 from each skater and install a donation box.

**Staffing:** We intend to hire several staff "greeters," so one adult supervisor is present at all times the rink is open, to greet users, collect waivers, answer questions, take care of any problems that come up, encourage users to write comments in the comment book, keep a daily log, collect donations. We will have 3 four-hour shifts a day. Pay rate will be at the current "living wage". We will also invite volunteers through the Ann Arbor city volunteer network to help out further. Overall supervision will be by the Committee.

### **Staff and volunteer training.**

- 1) All volunteers and staff will complete the Parks Department "365" training.
- 2) All volunteers and staff will complete the Volunteer training by the Police Department.
- 3) All volunteers and staff will complete training by the Center for Conflict Resolution.
- 4) All volunteers and staff will read and discuss Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.
- 5) All volunteers and staff will read and sign the mission statement.

**Security, Safety and Comfort.** The Committee intends that the area we undertake to manage will be a safe and pleasant environment for everyone of all ages. A welcoming code of conduct statement for the commons will be posted, including basic provisions of such standards posted in other public facilities, and describing the culture of peace and non-violence we expect to prevail in the area we are maintaining. Our diverse team and staff will be selected with attention to the capacity to interact respectfully with the diversity of our downtown populations.

Staff and volunteers will be responsible for security on the spot, as a team. People with problem behavior will be engaged by the team, reminded of the rink culture and the posted code conduct, and helped to get their behavior together, or if needed asked and helped to leave the area. We have been assured by the Ann Arbor Police Department that they are only two minutes away if there is any serious trouble.

In addition we have begun discussion with the University of Michigan School of Social Work to secure a student field placement in the area, with social worker supervision, to be alert to problems and people with needs and to be a helping presence.

### **Timeline of Rink Development**

**June : Formation of non-profit to receive funds, build and administer the rink. Legal opinions from the City attorney on liability and relation of the rink non-profit to the City.**

**May- August: Fundraising and establishment of partnerships. Drawings, building permit.**

**Early September: City Council Resolution in support of the rink. Ordering the Artificial Ice (Superglide) and other materials for construction of the rink.**

**September: Hiring of staff and lining up of volunteers to build the rink. Lining up volunteers to assist staff in running the rink. Removal of parking meters from the designated rink space.**

**1 October -7 Oct : Constructions of the Rink. Installation of additional lights and sound system.**

**15 October: Opening Day.**

**15 October- 15 December. Rink open. Collect data and comments for assessment.**

**1 January 2014: Begin assessment.**

**15 January 2014: Complete assessment. Plan for removal and storage, relocation, or continuance on Library Lot site.**

**Advisory Committee:** The Ann Arbor Committee for a Downtown Skating Rink has

begun to assemble an advisory committee to draw on the interest and expertise of Ann Arborites to help this happen in the best possible way and provide general guidance to the operation of the rink. Downtown businesses and individuals have already expressed interest in being part of such a committee. We would expect to maintain a regular liaison with the DDA, the Library, the City Parks and Recreation Department, and other City staff as appropriate during the operation of this project.

**Assessment:** The rink will collect user profile data, not only on skaters, but everyone who uses the space. Management of the non-profit will also collect citywide data on potential rink use and attitudes toward the rink and its activities. The staff will fill out a logbook. Skaters and users will be encouraged to add comments to a separate comment book. After 2 months of operation, we will convene the advisory committee, data analysts, and others interested to assess the successes and failures of the overall project, its continuance and funding.

Topics of assessment will include the following:

- How much staffing is required
- Break-even charge for skating to make the rink self-supporting
- Volunteers
- Times and periods of use
- Long-term budget
- Food carts
- Events, draw and management

**Initial Project Budget. Expenses and Revenue (see Accompanying Pro Forma for long term financial viability)**

Expenses

Capital investment for 36'x72' skating rink.	
~2600 sq. ft. of artificial ice @ \$10.00/ft	\$26,000
Underlayment membrane@~ \$1.50/ft	4,000
Delivery estimate	500
Permits	100
Lumber for support and fencing	6,000
Lights (solar LED system)	800
Carpenters \$100/day / 4 carpenters/2days	800
Art Poster	800
Liability insurance (fold into existing city policy, as is done in Dexter)	0
On going Expenses: Employee (\$150/day for 60 days/)	12,000
Tap into existing parking structure electricity	100
contingency, signage, supplies	1,000
	\$52,100

## Income:

Private seed donations	50,000
Donations from users \$1.00 or more 40 people/day/80 days	3,200
Pledged additional private donations	1,000
In-kind contributions: volunteer labor time, organizing, attending, benches and amenities love and art.	
Total	54,200
Surplus at conclusion of trial period .....	\$2300

**Larger Vision.** Our vision is a free society where in our town people can voluntarily get together, determined to do something beautiful, invite others to join and make more beautiful, enter into partnerships with government and public facilities and resources and make it happen, not for personal profit, but rather for the fun of it and what we might learn and for the service and enjoyment it might provide. That is base for our vision: voluntary association, private-public co-operation and partnership.

**Ann Arbor Committee for a Downtown Skating Rink** is currently a not-for-profit unincorporated association. It intends to form a non-profit corporation for the purpose of establishing and operating a downtown skating rink for the initial trial period. The Committee undertakes this project as a public service and to gain experience in the public use of the Library Lane surface lot for public community purposes.

## **Report of an hour-long phone interview with Jennifer Hesse (312-654-2894), project head for the Hancock Observatory synthetic ice rink Chicago, Illinois**

**Development and Installation.** The rink opened in 2010 and is in its third season, which will end in April.

**Material.** The surface is eXtra-Ice, over a poured cement floor. The company installed the rink.

**Size.** 900 sq. ft. The rink can accommodate 18-20 skaters at a time. This small size accommodates children well, but adults find it too small to skate comfortably.

**Skateability.** Professionals tested the ice in the first season and found it took a few minutes to get used to the surface, but found it easy once they sensed the surface.

**Cost.** \$6/ half hour. Skate rental/ \$1.

**Liability.** The rink carries liability insurance. Each skater signs a liability waiver.

Rules of the rink are prominently posted. In three years of operation there have been no injuries or claims. One young child cut his hand on a skate, but the cut was treated at the rink. The rink keeps 4 helmets and makes them available if parents want them for their kids. They have never had more than one in use at a time.

**Shoe storage.** The rink provides open cubbies to store shoes with a statement that shoe storage is at the patron's risk. There have been no incidents of stolen shoes.

Three 9' benches have been adequate for parents to sit and skaters to put on skates.

**Sharpening.** Skates need to be sharpened after 12 hours of use. Jennifer bought a small skate sharpening unit and the eXtra-Ice people taught the staff to sharpen skates. There is enough down time for the staff to keep the skates sharpened.

### **Positive Features.**

- 1) Kids liked being able to skate without being cold or wet from falls.
- 2) Each year has produced much positive PR coverage.
- 3) The rink has frequently been rented out for parties.

### **Negative Features.**

1) The eXtra-Ice system requires application of a lubricant gell once or twice a week. Jennifer and her staff have found this to be a labor-intensive, tough, dirty job. The rink first has to be vacuumed to pick up tiny shavings of the plastic. Then, the staff must get down on hands and knees and apply the gel. Using mops wastes too much of the very expensive gell. This process takes two people about an hour on their small rink. After two years the rink needed to be washed with soap and water. A light floor buffing restored to new condition.

2) On the advice of eXtra-Ice Jennifer bought heavy, expensive mats for skaters to walk on. These mats turn out to be heavy to move and largely unnecessary. She recommends light weight inexpensive rubber mats around the rink.

**Outlook for the Rink.** Though the rink is physically holding up well, much competition has appeared in downtown Chicago. There are now two massive city-sponsored rinks and a free rink at Navy Pier. The Hancock rink has seen gradually decreasing use this year. Because of its small size it seems to be a one-time novelty – skating 1000 feet up looking down at the city of Chicago.

**Conclusions.** The Committee should make its rink large enough to satisfy adult skaters and stay away from skating rink material that requires application of a lubricant. Rental skates should be a feature from the beginning. On site sharpening is probably necessary.

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