



BALLARD* KING
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Mt. Vernon RECenter Feasibility Study

Contract User Group Input Session Summaries

On September 21, 2015, Ken Ballard of Ballard*King & Associates conducted three input sessions with key contract user groups of the Mt. Vernon RECenter. In preparation for these meetings the larger user groups were sent a survey that asked for information about their organization, how and when they used the center, and other facilities that they utilize in the area.

For the sessions themselves, a series of questions regarding their use of the center and future needs were asked. The following is a summary of each of these sessions.

3:30pm Ice Skating Instructors

This session was attended by four of the skating instructors that teach both group and private lessons at the rink.

- Each of the participants were long time instructors at the center. Two also skated professionally at the rink prior to becoming instructors.
- Besides teaching classes at Mt. Vernon RECenter, several have taught at other rinks in the area. They were all aware of other rinks in the region that draw some users from the area. This includes:
 - Ashburn – 2 sheets
 - Laurel - 2 sheets
 - Reston
 - Kettler – 2 sheets
 - Cabin John – 2 sheets plus a pond, they have a large program
 - Prince William – 2 sheets
 - Fairfax
- Concerns with the existing ice rink at the center included:
 - There are too many demands on the ice rink.
 - The rink has good ice and they have a consistent schedule for use.
 - There is really only an hour and fifteen minutes for lessons in the afternoon and no weekend ice time is available.
 - Many of the public sessions have 250 or more skaters and there is no place for lessons to occur during this time.
 - There is limited time available during the summer due to all the hockey camps.
 - There is not enough space and time for off-ice training. This summer a number of instructors were using the church next door or the dance school across the street for this purpose.
 - Other coaches would come and teach here but there is simply not enough time available.

- Due to the time demands on the rink there cannot even be a true “home” youth hockey program.
- Future needs:
 - There is strong demand for a 2nd sheet of ice. Olympic or NHL sized is fine but the Olympic sized rink is better for figure skating. A second sheet plus a studio rink would be even better.
 - Better space for off-ice training. This needs to be a large room area with a high ceiling that can be used for dance or exercise. There also needs to be a stretching and weight training area. Having a hockey treadmill in this area would be great.
 - There needs to be larger restrooms next to the rink with a changing area (no showers are needed).
 - With two ice sheets, one should be designated for figure skating (harder ice) and one for hockey and public skating (softer ice).
 - There should be a snack bar that is contracted out for operation.
 - A pro-shop operation could be supported.
 - The existing warming room is fine for one rink but may need to be larger for two sheets.
 - Drop-in child care for center users is really needed.

5:30pm Swimming User Groups

This session was attended by three individuals who represented Alexandria Masters.

- The center has a great location that is not too far from D.C. and Old Town Alexandria.
- The Alexandria Masters Swim Team swims at Mt. Vernon, Lee and George Washington pools. Additional lane time is currently available at Lee. They use Lee for long course training during the summer.
- They use the center in the morning and evening hours and used to have a lunchtime program. They cannot accept anymore members for the morning or evening practice times as all of their designated lanes are full.
- Nation’s Capital Swim Club (NCAP) use the pool in the early morning hours and they take up a number of lanes which limits Alexandria Masters use.
- Concerns with the existing pool included:
 - Not enough lane time is available in the morning and evening to meet their needs.
 - They often have more than 8 swimmers per lane.
 - Air quality is poor
- Future needs:
 - A 50 meter pool with a bulkhead.

- Improved locker rooms with individual showers. Also there needs to be more family change rooms. These also need to be accessible directly from the pool deck.
- Having an on-deck shower would be beneficial as well as another drinking fountain. The locker rooms should have suit dryers.
- There needs to be a team storage area and an office for swim coaches.
- Add a wet classroom/party room/meet room.
- Include a dryland exercise area. They would like it on the pool deck rather than in a separate fitness area. However, they do not want to pay more for the use of this type of space.
- Better access to the building. Most team members try to use the library's parking lot as it is closer and easier than the main parking lot.
- There needs to be drop-in babysitting available.

7:00pm Hockey User Groups

This session was attended by five individuals who represented Mt. Vernon Seniors Hockey Club, Potomac Senior Hockey, Northern Virginia Hockey Club (NOVA Ice Dogs), and Special Olympics.

- The location of the center and rink is great and convenient for all the user groups.
- The Mt. Vernon Seniors Hockey Club has been using the ice rink at the center since it opened. They have been relatively stable in their numbers and do not need any additional ice time.
- Special Olympics have also been a long time user of the rink on Saturday afternoons but they also do not have a demand for more ice time.
- The Potomac Senior Hockey program is also not looking for any additional ice time beyond their present Thursday evening time slot.
- The Ice Dogs are the largest user group at the rink but cannot get enough time for all their needs so they also use the Ft. Dupont Ice Arena, Gardens Ice House, Tucker Road Ice Arena, Ice World, and Cabin John Ice Arena. It was also reported that there could be a new 2 sheet ice rink being built in Springfield and there has been some talk of Ft. Dupont adding an additional sheet.
- The Ice Dogs estimate that over 90% of their participants are from Fairfax County and they would like to make Mt. Vernon RECenter their "home" rink. They have had to turn a few kids away in the younger age divisions who cannot travel to the other rinks.
- If another sheet of ice was added to the center then the Ice Dogs would use it from 6pm to 10pm weekdays and all day Saturday and Sunday from August to May. They would also be willing to sign a letter of intent stating their commitment to purchase the additional ice time.

- With more ice time available, more high schools in the area might be willing to add club hockey programs.
- Concerns with the existing rink included:
 - The team rooms are in a bad location where everyone enters the rink after hours.
 - The team rooms should each have their own showers.
 - The ice system itself is old and needs to be upgraded.
 - The rink needs a new sound system.
 - The seating area needs to be upgraded and replaced.
 - There is a need for a back-up generator to keep ice if power is lost.
 - Having a storage area for the different user groups would be a big help.
 - A fifth team room for females is needed along with a referee room.
 - The roof continues to leak and the rubber flooring near the entrance to the locker rooms need to be replaced.
 - The center needs Wi-Fi.
- Future needs:
 - There is a strong need for a second sheet of ice. It could be either Olympic or NHL sized. The greatest demand is from mid-August to early May. Without a second sheet there cannot be any growth in any ice programs.
 - Add a pro-shop. The local hockey store has closed.
 - Snack bar rather than vending.
 - Skate sharpening capabilities.
 - Game room for the kids.
 - Workout or training room plus a space for functional training.
 - Additional team locker rooms.