

Downtown ice arena considered

By Josh Flickinger Staff writer | Posted: Saturday, October 31, 2015 10:00 am

BELOIT — A local group is looking into bringing a hockey arena to downtown Beloit.

Chuck Gilbert, director of sales and marketing strategy at Hendricks Holding Company, has made several preliminary presentations to local agencies trying to secure funding for a feasibility study to delve deeper into the building of a potential arena.

Gilbert presented in front of a Visit Beloit board meeting Wednesday morning in an attempt to procure some of the \$29,000 that is necessary for the study to be completed. Gilbert said he is working with Brent Fox, CEO of Hendricks Holding Company, Rob Gerbitz of Hendricks Commercial Properties and Rich Spanton, the CEO of AccuLynx.

The study will be completed by BKP Consulting, the same firm that completed the feasibility study for the Beloit Snappers potential stadium several years back.

The study will address issues such as who would use the facility, how much revenue it could generate as well as how much it would cost to operate, and where the facility should be built.

At the conclusion of the study, Gilbert said, the stakeholders should have enough information to determine whether to proceed with or suspend planning of the facility, which would be operated as a not-for-profit.

Gilbert has set a deadline of the end of the 2015 calendar year to have the funds raised for the feasibility study to proceed.

Currently, local skaters and hockey players use the Edwards Ice Arena, a facility operated by the City's Parks and Recreation department. The facility has required at least \$73,000 and as much as \$109,000 in annual public subsidies over the past five years.

City Manager Lori Luther said local government is interested in what the study would find.

“We are interested in discovering what options might be available to create a multi-purpose, financially stable facility,” Luther said. “The city has committed \$1,000 to support the feasibility study.”

Director of Parks and Leisure Services Brian Ramsey declined to comment on the possibility of a new arena, saying he didn't have the necessary information at this time.

Chad Larson, president of the Beloit Youth Hockey Association, said his organization is intrigued by the possibility of a new arena.

“It’s an exciting thing,” Larson said. “Our goal is to build interest and participation in hockey in Beloit, and a new arena would certainly build a lot of interest.”

While Larson feels a new arena would be a net positive, he does have concerns when it comes to the cost of ice time.

The BYHA, which currently has around 200 members, saw their membership decrease by 30 percent the last time fees were raised about a decade ago.

“Our facility, compared to most in a three-state area, is lacking in a lot of ways,” Larson said. “But the other part of that equation is that it helps us keep costs way down. We are significantly less expensive than facilities in Rockford and Janesville because we aren’t a year-round, hockey-only facility. If the cost of ice time doubles or triples in a new facility, I think we would risk losing a substantial percentage of our membership.”

Larson also raised the possibility of keeping the Edwards facility open while the new arena operates.

“We are a long way from knowing specifics about the operation of this place, but maybe a solution would be to keep Edwards open, but during a smaller window,” Larson said. “Instead of opening from October until March, maybe you could open in November and run it until February. There are a lot of variables that still need to be understood.”