

February 24, 2017

City of Madison Parks Long Range Planning Subcommittee

Establish Ice Rink Service Area Standards

Status Report

**Summary**

The Committee has gathered information on the current Adopt Ice Partnership (AIP) rinks—their histories, operation, and present needs. To take the next step toward establishing service standards and guidelines for determining the status of current and potential Adopt Ice Partnership programs, we need to:

- identify the larger goals of ice skating which are appropriate to the AIP, e.g., recreation, health, but also placemaking and community building,
- review a map of parks which shows Parks-maintained rinks, AIP rinks, shared rinks, and previous rinks,
- estimate the cost to establish and maintain a neighborhood rink,
- determine whether standards should focus exclusively on responding to resident requests or should also guide staff in where to propose new AIP rinks, and
- propose policies to guide rink locations that meet consumer quality expectations, address budget constraints, and ensure equitable access.

**Background**

Parks has a long history in supporting ice skating through providing good ice, effective amenities, and skating instruction. Madison's rinks include-lagoon-based, e.g., Tenney, Vilas, Warner; floating rinks, e.g., Warner hockey, Goodman; and land-based, e.g., Rennebohm and Hillington Green. Over the last few decades there has been a significant decline in the prevalence of ice skating rinks. Smaller, land-based neighborhood rinks especially have been reduced as city resources were concentrated in larger lagoon-based rinks such as Vilas and Tenney. This reduction is illustrated by the attached map which shows an estimated 45 parks that at one time had rinks. This decline has been influenced by a variety of factors including: (1) maintenance expenses, e.g., labor and water; (2) amenity costs, e.g., lights, boards, shelters; (3) climate change, (4) demographics, (5) competing winter recreation opportunities, e.g., cross country skiing; (6) city priorities, e.g., the decision to expand park staff roles in snow removal; and (7) staff and volunteer priorities.

The 1997 POSP strategy described the strategy leading to this reduction in rinks (see attached selected text p.19 POSP(1997) so that by 2006 the number of ice rinks maintained by the city had declined to eight and were essentially all at larger parks (see attached newsletter article). This number was to decline even further but during this period, ice skaters began to more systematically advocate, to the point where plans to further cut the ice rink maintenance budget in 2010 caught alders' attention and the budget reduction was not approved.

In a further response to public interest, the Parks Division created the **Adopt Ice Partnership** which "combines city resources with volunteer power to provide the community with quality outdoor hockey

and ice skating.” Eventually AIPs were established at six parks. As might be expected with volunteer involvement some programs were successful and some floundered. As awareness of the program spread additional citizens and neighborhoods requested AIP rinks and in December, 2014 Park Commissioners referred the issue to the Long Range Planning Subcommittee to recommend ice rink service area standards. By March, 2015 a study was outlined but staff changes in Community Services resulted in delaying serious analysis until mid-2016.

## **Study**

AIP success factors and program cost data were gathered from AIP programs. Staff and LRP members interviewed volunteers from five programs (Hillington Green, Olbrich, Rennebohm, Westmoreland, and Wexford). Interviews were guided by the following focus areas:

### **Adopt Ice Focus Questions**

1. Volunteer management, e.g., recruitment, training, sustainability, turnover, recognition, evaluation, expectation management
2. Ice making best practices, e.g., initial creation, maintenance, calendar, thaws, snowstorms, flooding
3. Public education, e.g., thaws, hours, snow clearing, user feedback, user statistics
4. City roles
5. Lessons learned in year one to now? Factors that lead to a successful program?
6. Calendar/timing/temperature insights
7. Equipment, lighting, ground prep
8. Program augmentation, expansion, rink distribution, peer support

LRP members also conducted a focus group with Parks staff involved with rinks. That discussion was focused on the following questions: TBA-

## **Findings**

The interviews with the AIP volunteers reveal a depth of commitment that can only be considered remarkable. AIP volunteers, primarily the “flooders/hosers,” include ice skaters (of many different ages), parents of skaters, parents of ex-skaters, dedicated neighborhood volunteers (who neither skate nor have/had children who skate), and “zen hosers” who just enjoy the cold nights’ solitude and hosing. Numbers of volunteers per rink vary from 2-3/15-20. Six-eight seem to be a necessary core.

Each rink has evolved, through various means, one or two coordinators. Coordinators recruit, train, schedule, cajole and thank (one coordinator held a party) volunteers, liaise with city staff, promote rinks, gather and report data on usage, weather, technique (see attachments: Boehm, Flax, Hillington Green attachments), and contribute to the maintenance of hardware (shovels, hoses). Coordinators use various means for recruiting including word of mouth and friends of friends, neighborhood association meetings, websites, and newsletters, “carpe diem” skaters at the rinks, posters and flyers, Facebook, listserves, etc. Rink coordinators use a variety of software products including Schedule Genius to manage volunteer shifts. There is no formal protocol for recruiting successor coordinators.

Relations with city staff are positive. Laura, Shelly, Craig, Charlie, and Lisa were singled out for being particularly responsive and effective. Shelly even buys pizza for the volunteers at the end of the year. Relations are described as unique to each rink. Each rink also has a unique wish-list that includes some of the following:

- some sort of shelter for storage as well as a place to sit and put on skates, ideally heated;
- landscape grading to level out low spots and prevent water loss;
- additional water points;
- boards to define hockey area;
- support to concessions;
- signage, to encourage participation and instruct rink users about rink usage and maintenance
- Portapottys;
- light(s);
- shovel and tool maintenance;
- allow use of yellow caution ribbons to close sections of rink or inhibit skaters, e.g., during thaws;
- keys to and capacity for turning lights on and off;
- chairs/walkers for beginning skaters;
- picnic tables/benches

Volunteers would welcome city support in facilitating peer exchange and support, e.g., best practice sharing, volunteer training, morale boosting, input consolidation, and evaluation. This willingness to share knowledge and skill extended to getting new rinks up and going.

When queried on “volunteer management best practices” each set of interviewers had tips. Two consistent themes/responses were noted. First, the annual volunteer thank you luncheon was missed and interviewees hoped that could be picked up again. Secondly, there was a request that there could be help with recruiting or attention raising through, e.g., marketing/press/signage at rinks and alder announcement.

All interviewees stressed the benefits of the city tankers laying the 1<sup>st</sup> base. It was estimated that it takes 100 layers to establish the initial rink on that base and that on a sufficiently cold night, e.g., less than 20 degrees, volunteers can lay 10 layers/hour. Following initial rink creation an estimated 6-8 hours per week is necessary for maintenance (assuming cooperative weather). Occasional revisits by the tanker was also seen as desirable. The current SOP where volunteers shovel 2-3 inches and city crews remove larger snowfalls seemed to work.

Each set of interviews included questions on extending skating to populations that were not traditionally skaters in hopes of deriving wellness and social inclusion objectives. It was noted that costs to entry, e.g., price of good fitting skates and, skating lessons, may be a real barrier. Interviewees were, generally, enthusiastic about the possibilities of skate exchanges, skating lessons, etc. to extend the experience. The Parks’ current “Learn to Skate” program would provide great support for these new rinks.

Technological progress also may influence possibilities for AIP rink expansion, e.g., the use of rubber/plastic liners. These liners conserve water loss during thaws and will may be moved from park to park as demographic shifts influence skating demand.

## **Next Steps for Considerations around Adding New Rinks**

The success of the AIP as well as staff discussions about requests received from neighborhood groups suggests there is a desire to develop guidelines to determine how/when the program can be expanded, given obvious budgetary and volunteer availability constraints.

If it were decided to site additional rinks, influencing factors would include projected costs (which will vary rink by rink, e.g., size and grade of site), and include startup and ongoing maintenance. Based on this study, AIP petitioners would need to demonstrate neighborhood leadership and core group engagement. Presumably alder support would also be a prerequisite.

Once an AIP rink is created ongoing support would include:

- a. Operations.
  - i. Water.
  - ii. Lighting.
  - iii. Boards (not often put up at Adopt Ice locations any more)
  - iv. Spraying with water truck
  - v. Clearing Snow
  
- b. Community Services.
  - i. Signage
  - ii. Shovels, equipment.
  - iii. Volunteer recognition.
  - v. Best practices guidance.

A possible process for establishing Adopt Ice Partnership program (based on the Community Garden model) might consist of the following:

- Neighborhood group forms, notifies Parks by completing Friends of Application
- Potential sites proposed
- Parks reviews sites for access to water, parking, conflicts (master plan, utilities), cost, duplication of service, effect on vegetation
- If Parks determines is feasible, Alder holds neighborhood meeting to gauge support
- availability of funding
- Superintendent sign-off
- Park Commission approval