

No spring thaw for ice arena interest

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

It may be spring, but one citizens committee has ice sports on its mind.

After getting the blessing of the Farmington Hills City Council, including money for a professional market survey, the citizens ice arena committee is getting down to cases on how to build, finance and run a facility.

The group divided into four new subcommittees: building and site, alternative uses, operations and finance. A committee that meets with a similar group from Novi that has been looking at a possible ice arena for that community has already begun its work.

Committee members who met with their counterparts from Novi were encouraged, but Dennis Fitzgerald, a committee member and chairman of the city's parks and recreation commission, said two city governments working together on one project would not be practical.

Roy Lindhardt, a member of the subcommittee that met with the Novi group, said the session amounted to information sharing only.

Novi has not pursued building an ice facility beyond the preliminary stages, and has instead bought land for softball and soccer fields.

Lindhardt, like several other committee members, has said a private venture would be the most likely to succeed. But city councilman Terry Sever, sitting in as chair in the absence of Mayor Pro Tem Larry Lichtman, said it would be a mistake for Farmington Hills to make the decision between going private or public at this point.

Sever pointed to Birmingham as an arena that is starting to make money, even though it is

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Steve Walters
Plymouth city manager

city owned and run. And many cities, like Plymouth, subsidize ice arenas as a service to the community.

"I think we should be open to those proposals that involve public support, even if it costs money," he said. "We support softball, baseball and soccer."

Plymouth City Manager Steve Walters said although there are ways to lessen the public financial burden on a community operating an arena, that may not be what the public wants.

"We could probably do a lot better by renting our arena for more hockey, but that wouldn't be fair to people who want open skating," Walters said. "Since it's supported with public money, we owe it to the public to try (to) allow access to as many people as we can."

Walters also said, contrary to any rumor, Plymouth is not going to limit access to city residents.

"That would be economically foolish," Walters said. "If anything, we would like to see more people use it."

Plymouth's arena is subsidized by the city to the tune of \$350,000 a year, Walters said.

City Manager Bill Costick told committee members that a pre-

liminary cost estimate for a proposed ice arena showed that the cost would be in a range of from about \$7 million to about \$10 million, depending on the size of the property and building.

Siegel/Tuomala Associates, assisted by the Garrison Co., which has experience building ice arenas, submitted the estimate.

A two-surface arena with team rooms, gallery and food service of about 87,000 square feet on eight acres would cost about \$7 million. That cost would not include the land, financing, permits, fees and off-site improvements. A four-surface arena of 154,000 square feet on 12 acres would cost about \$10 million.

Several committee members emphasized that the figures are only preliminary.

The committee also got a boost from readers of the Farmington Observer who sent in an informal survey about an ice arena. Of 150 responses, 142 were in favor of building an ice facility. Of the eight no responses, five cited the cost as the main concern.

The subcommittees will meet separately before the entire committee meets again May 13 at 7:30 p.m. at the Farmington Hills City Hall.



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEWIS

Morning music: Erika Jablin (left) helps Esther Kim tune her cello in Alicia Jensen's Modern World History class. The students performed Brandenburg's Concerto No. 5 for extra credit.

'Zero hour' gives students a jump on daily classes

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Six-twenty a.m.? — Too early for words, some would say, not to mention facts, figures or anything else to be ingested by tender minds.

Think again. A group of North Farmington students wipe the sleep from their eyes and are eager to learn — even though it's at a time when earthworms are still safe from the prying beaks of early birds.

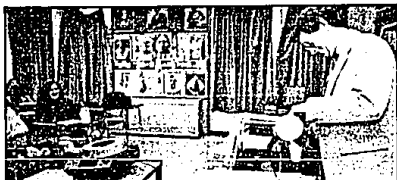
The "zero hour" is a result of an ongoing and extensive study examining the restructuring of high schools.

The early hour allows kids to take care of required courses, such as history and social studies, freeing up time to take electives such as orchestra or independent study.

This is the first year of the pilot project. Principal Deborah Clarke said the school staff hopes to offer zero hour next year.

This year, 60 students signed up. No one has dropped a course or shown up in their pajamas.

"If they want to do it," Clarke said, "they'll get up and come." The hallways are quiet at 6:30 a.m. Kids file into class; a



Maxwell's coffee: History teacher Jerry Maxwell pours a cup of coffee as his class prepares to delve into learning about the first phase of the Civil War.

few lope in after the starting time.

Those who arrive in Alicia Jensen's Modern World History class are greeted by a message on the chalkboard: On this day in 1942, Japanese Americans were put in internment camps, and in 1919, Benito Mussolini founded the Fascist Party in Milan, Italy.

A test is planned. Also, for extra credit, a group of orchestra students will perform Brandenburg's Concerto No. 5 for classmates.

Meanwhile, across the hall, teacher Jerry Maxwell pours a cup of coffee and rolls up his sleeves. The subject is the first

battle of the Civil War in his U.S. History class.

"Are you ready?" Maxwell asks.

Surprisingly, they are. "It's more laid back," said Marty Butler, 16, a junior. "We can set back and go at our own pace."

Butler takes the early class so he can concentrate on classes in the accelerated arts program. His class schedule includes Studio Arts and Drawing and Painting as well as German, Creative Writing and Algebra. Mario Corsetti is there for the same reason. The early start allows him to take band and an independent study class for a TV internship.

"This early in the morning, it's quieter in the halls," Corsetti said. "When people come into class they're not finishing up a conversation."

Kiersten Krause, 17 and a senior, also likes the learning atmosphere.

"It's a lot of different groups of students coming together," Krause said. "You talk about things and laugh about things together."

Are they learning? Sophomore Cathy Ferry recites the life of abolitionist John Brown like a textbook.

Except for a few yawns, the early hour is not a problem, students said. Some added that it gives them a jump start on the day.

"You've had an hour to warm up," one student said.

Erika Jablin, 14, a freshman, said she got used to it.

Added Jeff Leon: "It's not really a matter of discipline. It's just how fast you can wake up."



Test time: History teacher Alicia Jensen asks for quiet as students, including Becky Gardner (front) and Eather Kim (back), prepare to take a test.



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