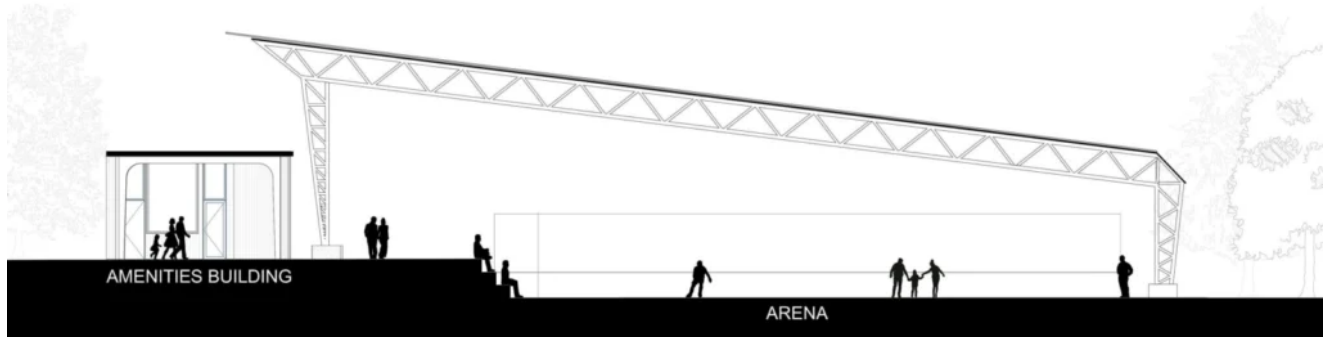


Cape Elizabeth ice arena group moving closer to goal

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By Drew Johnson

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The open-air design of the proposed Cape Community Arena. *Contributed / Caleb Johnson Studios*

A volunteer group advocating for a four-season ice arena in Cape Elizabeth has made progress, from increasing community support for the project to finding a potential donor to fund it.

The nonprofit Cape Community Arena Group updated the Town Council Monday on its effort to build an open-air arena next to the Public Works building, adjacent to Gull Crest Fields.

The group is entering the permitting process and hopes to stick to their timeline of having Cape residents skating at the new facility next winter. That, however, is dependent on the town approval process.

“We need to develop a facility that’s going to work for the town,” said Council Chairperson Jeremy Gabrielson. “Part of that is making sure that we have good financial plans in place for the arena so we understand what costs are associated with it.”

Julie Furt, the arena group’s chairperson, said she doesn’t think the arena’s estimated cost of \$5 million will be an issue.

“We have identified one potential anchor donor who could potentially donate up to the entire full cost of the project,” Furt said. “We do still anticipate looking out to the broader



Children play hockey on the outdoor rink outside Town Hall in Cape Elizabeth. The citizens group who got the rink built is making progress on its plans for an open-air arena in town.

Contributed/ Julie Furt

community for some fundraising efforts. It will take dollars to get us through things like the planning process in order to secure that anchor donor.”

She declined to name the potential donor.

The town not only could break even on the arena but possibly could make a profit, she said.

“The budget associated with running a facility like this once it’s built is not a huge number,” Furt said. “If the town wanted to make a profit on this ... that wouldn’t be an issue. We feel very confident in that.”

There’s a shortage of ice available in the region, she said, and that ice time is bought up “extremely quickly.”

“There’s limited assets in town,” said Chris Hooper, group board member and treasurer. “Our high school hockey teams are currently scrambling to find access to ice time.”

Currently, Cape Elizabeth’s hockey teams play their home games at Troubh Ice Arena in Portland.

Plans call for three sides of the Cape arena to be open. The roof would be sloped over the rink, with spectator seating under the highest part.

Attached to the arena would be an amenities building, which would include warming, viewing and skate rental areas, a workout room and restrooms.

While the project initially focused on an ice rink, the group now envisions an arena that could have a range of uses.

“There’s no sort of multi-use facility like this,” Hooper said. “A facility for the town to be able to host sporting events or entertainment events is just something that doesn’t exist in town today.”

In a survey conducted by the group, 45% of the 262 respondents said they’re interested in a facility that could host concerts, like the Portland Symphony Orchestra, for example, while over 40% said that a family ice skating should be prioritized.

Other respondents said they’d like to see an arena used for youth hockey, soccer, lacrosse, yoga and fitness classes.

The group has held multiple informational sessions that helped residents who had been unaware of the project to get on board.

“We’ve had a number of folks who had never heard anything about the project who were very engaged and very positive,” Furt said.

She noted the group's success in spearheading the installation of an outdoor skating rink by town hall in 2020.

"We raised about \$25,000 in a very short period of time and built the rink that's behind town hall," Furt said. "This year it is owned by the town and being run by the town with some help from our volunteers."

Gabrielson said he had a favorable view of the ice arena project.

"I think it is really positive that we have this group of citizens who have taken it upon themselves," he said. "Personally, I think it looks like a great project."

The organization is expected to meet with the council again in February.

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