

A meeting of the Council of the City of Blue Ash, Ohio, was held on March 8, 2007.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The first item of business at this meeting of March 8th was an Executive Session, which began at approximately 6:30PM and was held in the City Manager's Conference Room. Mayor Buckman moved, Councilman Czerwonka seconded to convene an Executive Session to discuss matters pertaining to property acquisition. The Deputy Clerk called the roll. Councilpersons Stoller, Weber, Stacey, Czerwonka, Bryan, and Mayor Buckman voted yes. Six yeses. Motion carried. (Councilman Sumner entered at approximately 6:33PM.)

After matters pertaining to property acquisition were discussed, Mayor Buckman moved, Councilman Sumner seconded to convene to the regular meeting. A voice vote was taken. All Council members voted yes. Motion carried. Council members moved to the Council Chambers at the Municipal & Safety Center.

Mayor Robert J. Buckman, Jr. called the work session portion of this meeting to order in Council Chambers at approximately 7:04 PM.

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Buckman led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councilman Rick Bryan, Mayor Robert Buckman, Councilman Lee Czerwonka, Councilman Henry Stacey, Councilwoman Stephanie Stoller, Councilman James Sumner, and Vice Mayor Mark Weber

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager David Waltz, Clerk of Council Jamie Eifert, Deputy Clerk of Council Sue Bennett, Treasurer/Administrative Services Director James Pfeffer, Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk, Service Director Dennis Albrinck, Recreation/ Sports Superintendent Kathy Swensen, member of the press, and interested citizens

Councilman Sumner moved, Councilman Bryan seconded to set a public hearing for 7:00PM, Thursday, March 22, 2007 regarding a special use application for a medical (hospital) use facility in an R-2 district at the southwest corner of Plainfield Road and Reed Hartman Highway. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. Motion carried.

WORK SESSION – Topic: Recreation Center Expansion Project

Michael Schuster and Keith Hall from Michael Schuster Architects and Doug Murdock from Schumacher-Dugan Construction were present to discuss the Recreation Center expansion project.

City Manager David Waltz explained that at this point in the process, the planning team is looking at the functional aspects of the expansion. The team is not ready yet at this stage to discuss a cost-benefit analysis or any cost estimate for the options to be discussed this evening.

Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk commented that during the past several weeks, much effort has been put forth to get the design team and construction manager teams on board. At least three or four meetings have been held thus far, and the team consists of not only members representing the project architect (Michael Schuster Associates) and the construction manager (Schumacher), but also many members from the City staff and Recreation Center staff.

Michael Schuster introduced himself to Council and gave a brief description of his company and some other current projects that his firm, Michael Schuster Associates (MSA), is working on. Also introduced were Keith Hall from MSA and Doug Murdock from Schumacher Dugan. It was also noted that Mr. Murdock was the construction manager at the Recreation Center during the 1993/94 expansion project.

Mr. Schuster reiterated that at least three or four planning meetings have been held thus far, and he talked briefly about the process already underway with the team. At this stage of discussions, they are also considering the structural aspects of the existing building, including plumbing, HVAC, etc. A 3-D model showing proposed layouts and colored floor plan renderings were used throughout the meeting to explain the various options currently being considered and discussed.

During the Issue 15 education efforts, the Recreation Center elements discussed frequently included an indoor walking track, expanded fitness center, and a family area. All of these aspects have been included within the three schematics to be presented tonight.

Also during those Issue 15 discussions, the idea of an addition to the Recreation Center in the back (to the south) was discussed. This elevation is the least visible to the public as it is away from Cooper Road and away from other major areas of the current Recreation Center. Soon after his firm was brought on board and after initial discussions with staff, the possibility of what could be accomplished along Cooper Road, the most visible side of the building to the general public, was considered. The idea of adding towards the back had inherent problems, including staffing, entrance control, etc. Given these problems, the thought of moving changes towards the more visible Cooper Road side seemed even more logical.

The three different schemes described tonight all are preliminary and are variations of having much of the addition geared towards the Cooper Road (north) elevation. All three schemes plan an addition to the rear; however in lieu of the previous thought of adding a two-story fitness center to the rear, the thought with all three schemes is to utilize this location for the addition of a second gym, utilizing the existing older gym for a different use.

Highlights from **Scheme 1** include:

- Construct the new gym to the rear and consider removing the existing racquetball courts and creating a “gym lobby” area and small restroom area between the current gym and the newly constructed second gym.
- Convert the older gym (along Cooper Road) into a two-story fitness area using much of the existing structure. Add an elevated track along the upper level of the fitness area. The Cooper Road elevation would have a new façade, and would include a small expansion to accommodate the new elevated track. This track would be about 1/10 of a mile in length. Mr. Schuster commented that a larger track, perhaps 1/8 of a mile, would be more desirable as smaller tracks often get too crowded quickly. It is also important to make sure the track is wide enough to accommodate at least two persons able to walk side-by-side, along with a passing lane. This track would run not only over the second story fitness area, but also through the top of the roof of the existing fitness center towards the west. A “tunnel” or other type connector would be likely.
- Create a secondary entrance (perhaps with a canopy) to the Recreation Center building facing Cooper Road towards the northwest corner of the building. This would make the abundance of parking along Cooper much more attractive.
- Add a freight elevator to make the existing basement more functional.
- The existing fitness area would become the new family/café area.
- This scheme would leave the existing locker room, offices, and Rooms ABC essentially as they are today. There may be a little room to expand the locker rooms slightly.

Highlights from **Scheme 2** include:

- Take the existing older gym off and take areas consisting of rooms ABC, the existing tot room area, and original lobby to create a larger addition (as compared to Scheme 1) to the front/Cooper Road side of the building. This addition would be wider than that proposed in Scheme 1.
- This Scheme would allow the elevated track to be wider and about 1/11 mile in length.
- A two-story fitness area would be constructed in the vicinity of the existing older gym fronting Cooper Road.
- Locker rooms would be moved towards the back of the building (approximately where ABC are now).
- The existing fitness room area would become the family/game area, perhaps with a rock-climbing wall.
- Overall, a lot of the current building would remain in place (though a new Cooper Road façade would be created), and the addition would be towards the back.

Highlights from **Scheme 3** include:

- Rebuild the entire Cooper Road frontage, including a two-story fitness center in the vicinity of the existing older gym, and locker rooms towards the back where existing rooms ABC currently sit.

- A family area/café area would be incorporated in the vicinity of the current fitness center and lobby area. This area would be very open and light and would serve to enhance the pool area as well.
- The elevated track would be about 1/9 of a mile in length and would be on the second level of the fitness and run along the remaining Cooper Road elevation to the west.
- Locker rooms would be larger and moved towards the back of the building, similar to Scheme 2.

Mr. Schuster reviewed each of the three schematics utilizing a 3D model.

Mr. Waltz briefly reviewed the basics of the three schematics and commented that a fourth could be considered – going back to the original thought of adding on to the back of the building (and leaving the existing gyms in place). However, he commented that the idea of adding to the Cooper Road elevation makes sense as the typical resident will be able to see improvements and what the additional tax revenue did for the Center.

Highlights from discussion with Council afterwards included:

- In addressing a question from Councilman Czerwonka, Mr. Schuster answered that they have been considering the existing building mechanicals. The cost per unit may be more variable when building on existing structure, whether that structure was from the 1979 original construction or the 1993/94 addition phase. He further commented that the existing structure does impact the difficulty in building an elevated and broad running track.
- In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller, Mr. Schuster confirmed that there could be “environmental” issues when constructing an elevated track through different areas. For example, in order for the track to be continued along the entire front of the building, with some schemes, it may be necessary to construct a “tunnel” for that track to go through. Temperature changes could be felt with such different environments for a track. When you have such parts that you add on to, you may have to make changes to the existing structure to make it work. Mr. Waltz added that in such a scenario, some real dollars must be spent to make it happen; however, there appears to be little of anything that is new.
- Councilman Sumner commented that he likes the thought of adding to the Cooper Road elevation as well as the thought of making the center open and light.
- The idea of doing something slightly different with the second gym towards the back was suggested – the thought being to make it something more than a “big block.”
- In addressing a question from Councilman Bryan, Mr. Schuster commented that in all schematics, the two community rooms that currently exist in the lower level would remain as is. Recreation/Sports Superintendent Kathy Swensen commented that those rooms are utilized often by non-profit type groups (such as the Boy Scouts, etc.) and also by Blue Ash neighborhood associations. For Schematics 2 and 3, there is also opportunity to have space for additional community meeting rooms in the upper level. Currently, rooms ABC are being utilized approximately 90% of the time for exercise classes.
- In addressing a question from Councilman Bryan regarding parking, Mr. Funk commented that during the day, the front part of the parking area along Cooper Road is used very little. With a reconfigured entrance area and addition out front, he predicts the use of this area would increase substantially. He commented there may be some opportunity to add some parking towards the rear/existing soccer areas.
- Mr. Waltz added that parking will not be able to be increased drastically in his opinion. He also commented that the general family area/café area may also be utilized for informal meeting areas for community groups. Overall, renting of the facility for large weddings though will be discouraged, especially once the new Golf Clubhouse and Performing Arts & Conference Center are open for such uses.
- Mr. Funk commented that in looking at the overall Capital Improvement Plan, the team is also keeping the future needs of the children’s whale pool in mind as it will be necessary to look at that within the next three to five years. A future suggestion may be to move this whale pool project up to minimize disruption at the Center. Tennis improvements are also being kept in mind at this time. Cost estimates will guide such future suggestions.

- In addressing a question from Councilman Stacey, Mr. Funk commented that Schematic 1 approximately doubles the size of the fitness area. However, this scheme may not result in as open and light a fitness center as the other two schemes.
- Councilman Bryan commented that perhaps the team should not consider Scheme 1 too much further as it would be his guess that we would not be happy with the result much past the next five or seven years. Mr. Funk agreed and commented that it would be his preference to plan for the next 20 or 30 years for the community. However, costs, not yet known, will need to be considered.
- In addressing a question from Councilman Bryan, Mr. Funk commented that the Recreation Board has reviewed these three schematics at a recent meeting, and they are very enthusiastic. He speculated that they were leaning towards a project in scope somewhere between Schematics #2 and #3.
- Some discussion was had regarding community outreach. Mr. Schuster suggested that now might be too early to solicit public input. His experience has been that it would be best to get more definition to the project and to fully address the bigger picture items. Oftentimes, the public will start focusing on the details (for example how big will the lockers be, etc.). He also commented that the 3D models often provide good visuals for the public and suggested perhaps display of a model under glass at the Rec center. They could also assist in developing animated fly throughs and other visuals which could be displayed on kiosks as well as on the City's website.
- Mr. Waltz agreed that it might be too early to go to the public yet and agreed with Mr. Schuster that more definition and solidification of the building functions should be confirmed. He also mentioned that a decision needs to be made on the overall amenities. For example, should the racquetball courts be removed. The space does not appear warranted given its current usage levels. No Council member expressed an objection to removing the racquetball courts.
- Mayor Buckman commented that it is his opinion that Scheme #1 appears too limited and that he would favor #2 or #3.
- In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller, Mr. Funk commented that he does not believe that it would be necessary to shut the entire facility down at any time. However, there may be some downtime for certain functions, and some uses may be shifted during different phases.
- Councilman Sumner encouraged that public outreach begin soon. He commented that it is important to avoid the perception that this is the final plan.
- Mr. Murdock commented that in his opinion, moving the locker rooms (as shown in Schemes #2 and #3) makes them more functional and also allows the construction of a family locker room area, especially important to families with younger children.
- Overall, pending cost estimates, it appeared the consensus of Council that they favored Schematics #2 and #3.

ADJOURNMENT

All items on the agenda having been acted upon, Councilman Bryan moved, Councilman Sumner seconded to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. The Council meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:47 PM.

Robert J. Buckman, Jr., Mayor

Jamie K. Eifert, Clerk of Council

MINUTES WRITTEN BY:

Susan K. Bennett, Deputy Clerk of Council