

Moving Towards a Williamstown Winter Commons:

A Skating Rink Feasibility Study



**Environmental Planning Workshop Spring 2006
Center for Environmental Studies, Williams College**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout the spring semester, as part of our Environmental Planning class at Williams College, we have worked with clients Janette Dudley and David Rempell and completed *Moving Towards a Williamstown Winter Commons: A Skating Rink Feasibility Study*. Assessing all components of the project from GIS imaging to location to potential funding sources, we have compiled the following report to serve as a road map for those bringing this project to fruition.

Reviewing associated literature, speaking with professionals in the fields of rink technology, construction, and non-profit management, and collecting public feedback, we have assembled a comprehensive look into the process of creating such a rink. Beginning with the Williamstown Master Plan of 2002, residents' strong memories of childhood skating fun on Eph's and Bridge's Pond, and an audible desire for figure skating and youth hockey opportunities, we aimed to present a project that truly meets the needs of the community.

A Williamstown Winter Commons would serve as a space where residents could come together on cold winter days to meet for exercise or simply sit and socialize with a cup of hot chocolate. We envision this project to provide not only recreational opportunities but actually foster a stronger sense of community throughout the winter months. To do this we suggest the creation of a temporary, refrigerated 60' x 80' rink located at the Williamstown Elementary School operated and managed by a new or existing non-profit organization. The ultimate completion of this project will rely on the support and dedication of the larger community, and from our perspective we are encouraged by the initial momentum the idea has gained. We thank you for your interest.

2. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

In 2002, the town of Williamstown completed a comprehensive Master Plan. As part of this, surveys were sent to each household which sought to gauge residents' visions for the future of the community. The results of these surveys reveal a desire by residents for greater outdoor recreation opportunities, particularly during the winter months.

Although several different facilities could potentially meet this need, our clients David Rempell and Janette Dudley believe that an outdoor skating rink would not only augment recreational opportunities but also encourage and facilitate social interaction. David Rempell states, "A skating rink would serve as an opportunity for people to gather with their friends and neighbors during the long, and sometimes isolating, winter season."

This sentiment has guided us as we work to address the needs of the Williamstown community.

Figure 1, taken from the Williamstown Master Plan, shows residents' responses to the supply and importance of recreational facilities in Williamstown. Community members rated the current supply of ice rink facilities as below average and their relative importance to the community as above average. We understand this to communicate a community desire for a skating rink. While the survey results do not show overwhelming support for an ice rink above all other forms of recreation, it remains the only winter recreation option on the chart other than Nordic skiing.

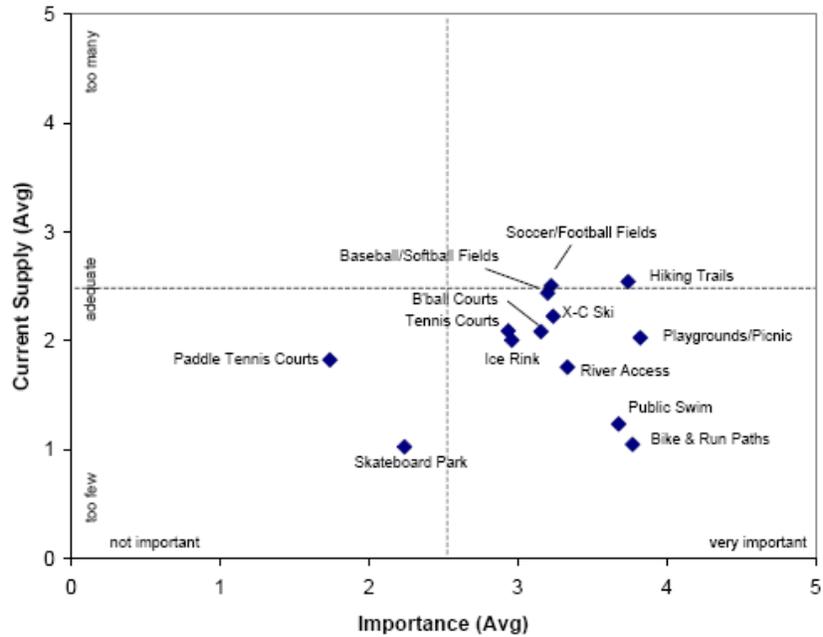


Figure 1: Recreational Facilities Survey Results from Williamstown Master Plan, 2002

The Master Plan also notes that residents who did not indicate recreation as a top priority tended to find the current supply of recreational facilities inadequate. We interpret this data to suggest that the current facilities—often catering to organized athletics or hikers—may not meet this subset of residents’ recreational needs. An ice rink or “Winter Commons” facility may offer an alternative option for recreation and social interaction to those who typically do not engage in these activities.

3. PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

Our objective for this semester was to complete a feasibility study for the creation of an outdoor skating rink in Williamstown. This task required three major areas of study: assessment of community support, site selection, and a detailed analysis of the costs associated with such a project. As environmental planners, we also wanted to pay close attention to any environmental costs or benefits associated with an outdoor skating rink. In the end we hoped to produce a report that demonstrated a desire from residents for a rink, find and recommend several appropriate sites, and provide our clients with estimates of the required and optional costs for a skating rink, as well as potential sources of funding and economic benefits. In addition, we aimed to provide appropriate recommendations so that this project may potentially culminate with a successful application for Community Preservation Act funding in January 2007. Many of the community residents we have spoken with throughout the spring have fond memories of skating outdoors as a child, and by constructing such a space in Williamstown we hope to help revitalize that spirit in the community.

In order to produce the most useful tool for the future use of our clients, we researched a variety of areas in order to provide our clients with an adequate starting point. For the first section we conducted a survey of residents to more precisely measure their views on community gathering spaces in Williamstown and the potential for a skating rink to benefit the town. In addition, we created a community profile from relevant census data to get an idea of the type of people that a rink facility will serve. Our clients stressed the importance that a rink facility bring together different segments

of the community, and this analysis helped us learn how much of an impact different demographic groups would contribute to the facility.

The second section includes a detailed description of several potential sites. Feasibility of the rink will depend on location, ownership of the site, topography, and infrastructure—including water, electricity, and parking facilities. We also included proximity to town “focal points,” such as Spring Street, Water Street, or the Elementary School as aspects of our site selection process. We consolidated all of these factors into a site selection matrix, assigning each one a value from 1 to 10 and adding them up to provide us with a quantitative basis for our recommendation.

For the final section, we conducted a cost-benefit analysis of different rink technology options and their potential impacts on the community. Our survey instrument and interviews provide the basis for evaluating these potential impacts. The costs of the project fell into three categories: required costs of installation, ongoing maintenance costs, and optional costs of additional features. We assess the feasibility of different rink management strategies, as well as the possibility for partnerships with different community organizations.

We hope that our final recommendations will function as a road map for our clients and aid them in creating a rink that will serve as a vibrant community gathering space.

4. COMMUNITY PROFILE AND SURVEY RESULTS

*Local Skating History*¹

Since other communities in Berkshire County—and Williamstown in the past—have used skating for recreation, we spent time looking into the history of skating nearby communities. Scanning local papers, *The Berkshire Eagle*, *The North Adams Transcript*, and *Advocate*, we were met with stories and examples demonstrating a variety of options for design, but more prominently, strong signs of support for winter recreation opportunities in northern Berkshire County. Looking to the successes of the city of Pittsfield’s public skating rink initiative in the Pittsfield Common, we were struck by the attitudes of pride several Pittsfield residents expressed in regards to their temporary, city-funded rink. One article in the *Berkshire Eagle* reported that the creation of such a family friendly space fostered a sense of community. One letter to the editor written by a Pittsfield resident alluded not only the rink’s ability to bring townspeople together, but recalled the strong feedback of visitors too. Paul Procopio writing a thank you note style editorial remarked of his Philadelphian friend’s gratuitous comments, “She could not say enough about how much they enjoyed spending their afternoon skating at the Common. This was an experience that her children will never forget.”² Procopio also noted enthusiastically, “They are already counting down the days until next year's trip to Pittsfield!” His comments and others point to the potential power for an outdoor rink to satisfy community need and while serving as an attraction or destination.

¹ Note: This section will be expanded to include local skating history as well, including a brief overview of past skating sites and the addition of several archival images from the Williamstown House of Local History and Williams College Archives that were not available in time for this draft.

² *Berkshire Eagle*, February 26, 2006

While recent winters lack the snow and steady cold of past memory in Williamstown, accessible and affordable winter recreation continues to be part of local culture. We interpret the successes of North Adams's ninth annual "The Sure Cure for Cabin Fever" *Winterfest*, featuring winter favorites such as chowder, llamas and the Mayor's Skating Party which drew children, teens, and adults out this February to be a positive sign of public interest.³

Similarly, winter festivities and ice skating at the Williams College Lansing-Chapman rink sponsored by the Williamstown Youth Center enjoyed local support. Currently however, both of these popular permanent facilities offer very limited free skate time and therefore do not adequately meet public need. Lansing-Chapman rents the rink to outside groups an average of 32.5 hours per week during the winter, some time that could surely be converted to local or community use⁴. Our clients emphasize their desire for a truly community oriented facility. Last week's hockey tournament hosted on Onoto Lake showcased similar energy, providing a space for area youth to enjoy the ice without time or regulatory constraints. Jim Stimpson, a Pittsfield resident, commented, "This is where hockey should be... This is where, if you want, you can play all day long." Stimpson's words echo the sentiments of David Rempell, Williamstown Selectman who too expressed the importance of having an all day rink, a place for families, hockey leagues, and youth groups to gather.

³ *Berkshire Eagle*, February 14, 2006.

⁴ Dave Fitzgerald, interview conducted by Justin Bates, 5/10/2006

4.1 WILLIAMSTOWN COMMUNITY PROFILE

Conducting a demographic study is vital to any community planning project, as the goals of the project must always reflect the residents it will ultimately serve. The community of Williamstown has several important characteristics that apply to our Winter Commons project.

Population Breakdown

As of the year 2000, Williamstown had a total of 8,738 residents, with a gender split of 47% male and 53% female. Residents 65 years of age and older comprise 19.4% of the community, compared to only 12.4% for the national average⁵. Children ages 5-14 make up only about 9% of the population. The percentages are swayed considerably, however, by the presence of 2000 college students, as the 15-24 age range makes up approximately 30% of the population⁶. This large population of active residents at Williams could be a strong asset to our project, if we can make a link with attributes favored by students. It will be important to survey their opinions, but also give them proper weight, as our clients want the link to primarily serve the rest of the community.

Households and Families

Another piece of demographic information vital to our project is the nature of households in Williamstown. The town has 2,883 total households, including 62.1% defined as family households (two or more people related by birth, marriage, or adoption),

⁵ www.census.gov Fact Sheet for Census 2000, Williamstown, MA

⁶ www.census.gov Fact Sheet for Census 2000, Williamstown, MA

as well as 37.9% non-family households. While 25.7% of households contain children under 18 years of age, 34.5% contain at least one member over 65, including 443 total residences that consist of a single elderly person living alone⁷. One of the goals of our project is to bring together different demographic groups, and it seems once again that getting the support of the senior population, as well as families, will be vital to our success. The redefinition of our project as a Williamstown Winter Commons may help address this aim by envisioning the site as a place for people to gather, walk around, watch children skate, and socialize with other members of the community. While the ice rink is the focus of our project, these other aspects must not be neglected.

Economic Factors

The US Census also reveals several interesting economic factors. The town has a low unemployment rate, at only 3.5%, and a mean household income of \$51,503, well above the US level of \$42,000⁸. This data suggests that Williamstown residents may have the resources to support an ice rink. Transportation statistics are also important to our project, as people have to walk, drive, or take public transportation to reach the site. A sizeable portion of the Williamstown population regularly walks to work, showing the importance that this facility be accessible to pedestrians and a reasonable distance from the town's center. That being said, 61.2% of people drive alone to work, suggesting also that on the weekend residents have vehicles that they can use to transport their families to a recreational facility.

⁷ www.census.gov Fact Sheet for Census 2000, Williamstown, MA

⁸ www.census.gov Fact Sheet for Census 2000, Williamstown, MA

4.2 RECREATION SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS⁹

*Survey Design and Implementation*¹⁰

To accurately reflect the Williamstown public's opinion, we tabled at five different community locations, the Williamstown Transfer Station, Wild Oats Community Market, Williamstown Youth Center, The Human Race, and outside the Williamstown Post Office. The survey consisted of 15 questions and took roughly 4 minutes to complete. Of those who responded to our survey, 6% have been living in Williamstown for less than one year, 16% for one to five years, 38% five to 20 years, and 39% 20 or more years. Roughly half of the respondents had children under the age of 18 living in their households, and 8% of respondents were over the age of 65. Over a three week period, 66 surveys were completed.

We had several questions that guided the survey design going into this project, namely the following: Is there a demonstrated need for increased recreational and social opportunities in Williamstown during the winter months? Are community gathering spaces important to Williamstown residents? How does the sense of community in Williamstown differ between the summer and winter seasons? How satisfied are people with recreational and social opportunities in Williamstown? The second portion of the survey focused on the specifics of a Winter Commons, asking respondents to indicate which amenities they "might like to see be part of the Winter Commons design." The second portion of the survey touched upon facility site location, estimated frequency of use, willingness to pay admissions fees, type of use, and degree of support.

⁹ For Quantitative and Open Response Raw Data, please see appendix.

¹⁰ For complete survey see Williamstown Winter Recreation Survey Appendix.

Survey Results and Analysis¹¹

To analyze or survey results, we first began by tallying each of the quantitative responses and logging open-ended comments. Gauging by apparent trends, we then entered all data into a comprehensive spread sheet to investigate correlations between questions and larger response patterns. The survey process in turn helped us further vision our project.

Our first finding confirmed the Williamstown Master Plan results, demonstrating respondents' interest in increasing recreational opportunities in Williamstown, while also suggesting that a Commons might increase community satisfaction. Of the 24% of respondents who were “strongly dissatisfied” socially, 72.5% supported the creation of the rink; 100% of those who responded that they were “strongly dissatisfied” with recreational opportunities indicated their support for the project.

Respondents' Degree of Support For the Creation of a Winter Commons Ice Skating Rink

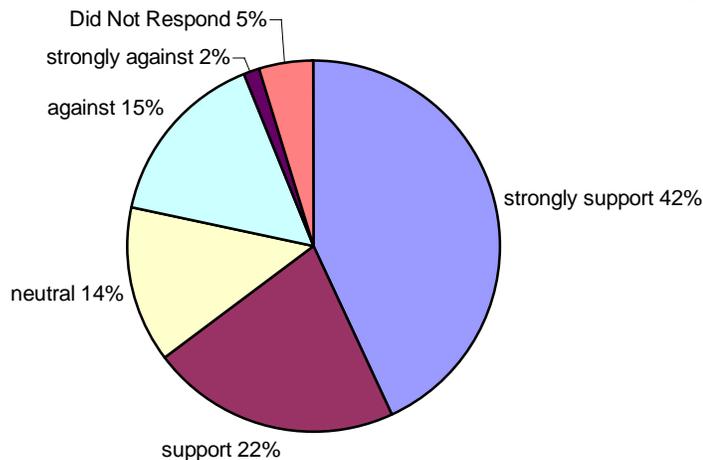


Figure 2: Respondents' Degree of Support for the Creation of a Winter Commons Rink

¹¹ For Complete Williamstown Winter Recreation Survey Data, see Appendix.

Of the 42.4% who indicated that community gathering spaces were “very important,” 71% indicated that they supported or strongly supported the creation of a rink, and of the 22% who valued community gathering spaces as “important,” 87% indicated their support.

All respondents suggested an outdoor skating rink be at the center of the Commons. Respondents indicated their support for picnic tables, benches, a fire pit, a warming hut, or other amenities.

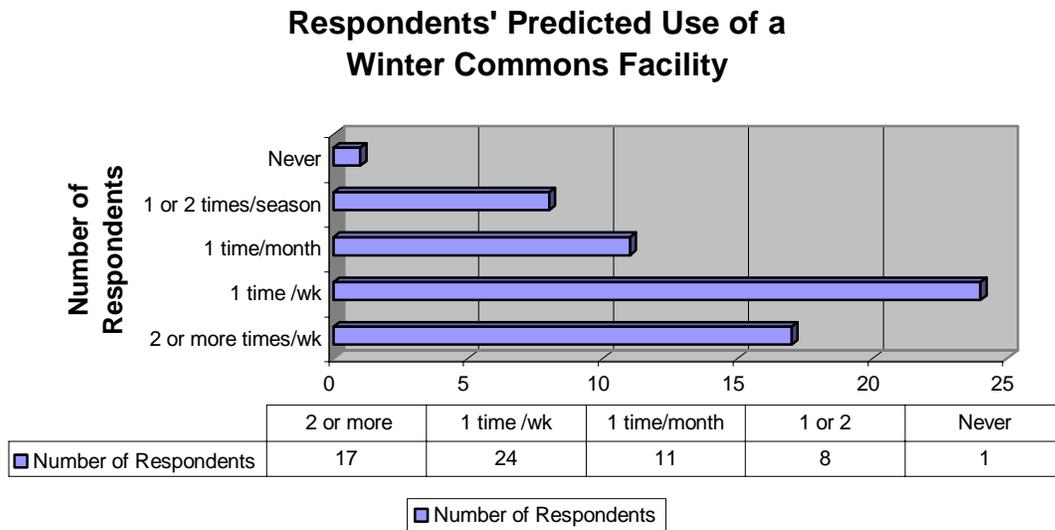


Figure 3: Respondents' Predicted Use of a Winter Commons Facility

Of the respondents who supported the rink, 43% estimated they would use the rink 2 or more times per week, 36% once per week, and 14% once per month. Out of those respondents who strongly support the creation of a Williamstown Winter Commons ice rink (45%), 50% indicated that they were willing to pay \$4-6; 14% \$6-8. Of those respondents who supported the rink, 43% were willing to pay \$4-6.

5. POTENTIAL SITE FEATURES

In order to ascertain the features that should be included in a Winter Commons design, we performed a basic cost-benefit analysis of potential site amenities. These included things like picnic tables, benches, a warming hut, and a fire circle. For each factor, the relative cost and benefit to the community (as expressed in survey results) were rated. Those amenities which exhibited relatively low-cost and were of high benefit to the community are considered to be priorities. In order to make a Winter Commons into a true community space, high priority items, such as benches and a fire pit, should be incorporated into this facility's site design.

Table 1: Cost-Benefit Analysis of Potential Site Amenities

| Features | Cost | Benefit | Priority |
|------------------------------------|------|---------|----------|
| <i>Rink type</i> | | | |
| Refrigerated rink - large | H | H | M |
| Refrigerated rink - small | M | H | H |
| Unrefrigerated rink - large | L | M | L |
| Unrefrigerated rink - small | L | L | L |
| <i>Amenities</i> | | | |
| Picnic tables | M | M | M |
| Benches | L | H | H |
| Fire pit | L | M | M |
| Portable propane heaters | M | H | H |
| Warming hut | H | H | M |
| Lights | M | L | L |
| Trash receptacles | L | H | H |
| Concessions | M | H | H |
| <i>Maintenance & equipment</i> | | | |
| Boards | H | M | M |
| Hockey equipment | M | M | M |
| Skate rental | L | H | H |
| Portable zamboni | H | M | M |
| Skate monitor/maintenance staff | M | M | M |

5.1 RINK TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS

Many different options exist for outdoor ice rink construction, from purchasing a small “backyard” kit for several hundred dollars to an Olympic size, fully refrigerated year round site. The main constraints on the type of rink are site, funding, and climate. However, meeting the needs of our clients is also a priority. Both Janette Dudley and David Rempell emphasized the rink as a recreational facility for Williamstown residents. Since we have not precisely determined the location, size, and cost of the facility, going over a variety of technologies and options will allow us to make choices based on our clients’ needs. At this point, the ice rink should serve the needs of community members rather than serving as a way to attract tourists or as an economic asset,. Our technology options will focus on this use.

Permanent

Many communities around the country have “permanent” ice rink sites, but they fall into two categories. Some are used year-round and fully refrigerated, such as the Winter Lodge, in Palo Alto, California¹². This rink opened in the mid-1950s and has served residents year-round for the past half century, offering a full program of skating lessons and facilities. The rink costs seven dollars for entrance and three dollars for skate rental, although the yearly maintenance costs are not available.

Other options are semi-permanent. These rinks have concrete foundations but are converted to other uses such as tennis or basketball during the summer when

¹² <http://www.winterlodge.com/>

temperatures prevent ice skating. An example of this type of rink is Steinberg Ice Skating Rink in St. Louis, Missouri¹³. The rink operates during the winter season only, from November until March 1st, and originally cost 935, 000 dollars to build. Constructing this type of rink would be the most costly to the community, as it would require hiring a contractor and purchasing refrigeration materials. It would entail substantial upfront costs--likely \$500,000 to \$1 million--based on a survey of existing rinks. However, the quality and consistency of this rink type would allow revenue to be generated from admissions and user fees. Maintenance would also be a significant issue, as our Department of Public Works staff are already overtaxed.

Temporary (refrigerated)



Municipal Temporary Rink, Ontario Photo from Custom Ice Inc.

Hundreds of rinks of this type exist throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. Typically, a community, business, or organization pays a rental company to

¹³ <http://stlouis.missouri.org/citygov/parks/forestpark/ice.html>

construct a rink and install the necessary refrigeration equipment. First the company lays down an impermeable mat on any flat surface including grass, a parking lot, or even a rooftop. They next lay tubing over it, which is connected to a refrigeration unit, and the ice is frozen in layers on top of this system. A community can either purchase the equipment or rent it year by year, depending on their needs.¹⁴ The community can either purchase the components, hire a separate contractor to install them, learn how to install them on their own, or hire a company to install and even operate the rink for the whole season. Rinks of this type range from a \$125,000 seasonal project in Ocala, Florida to a \$4 million, 17,000 square foot rink in New York City¹⁵. A middle-of-the-road option is the \$700,000 70' x140' rink in Greenport, New York¹⁶. Determining the cost of such a facility in Williamstown will require further decisions regarding site and size, but a temporary refrigerated rink appears to provide the best option for technology and cost-effectiveness. Determining yearly maintenance costs on rinks of this type will also be vital to completing our feasibility study.

¹⁴ <http://icerinkevents.com/index2.htm>, <http://www.customicerinks.com/municipal.asp>,
<http://www.calmac.com/icerinks/>

¹⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/06/nyregion/06rink.html?ex=1286251200&en=7c23d48359cde70f&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss>

¹⁶ http://www.sptimes.com/2002/12/12/Citrus/Mayor_s_ice_folly_mak.shtml

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/01/realestate/01zone.html?pagewanted=2&ei=5088&en=a73ef3f9f21761f2&ex=1293771600&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

Temporary (non-refrigerated)



Lake Onota, Hockey Rink Creation, February 2006

Although being able to construct a non-refrigerated outdoor ice rink would be preferable for its low cost and less-intensive maintenance requirements, other factors limit the feasibility of this type of rink. When winters are warm, however, it becomes impossible for those communities to fully utilize such facilities. Jim McGrath, of the Pittsfield Parks Department, reported that uncooperative weather limited the Pittsfield skating season to a total of three weeks. According to weather data for the 2003 and 2004 winter seasons, over 40% of the typical skating days in both years (between Thanksgiving and President's Day) have had high temperatures above freezing.

High Temperatures during the 2002-2003 Skating Season

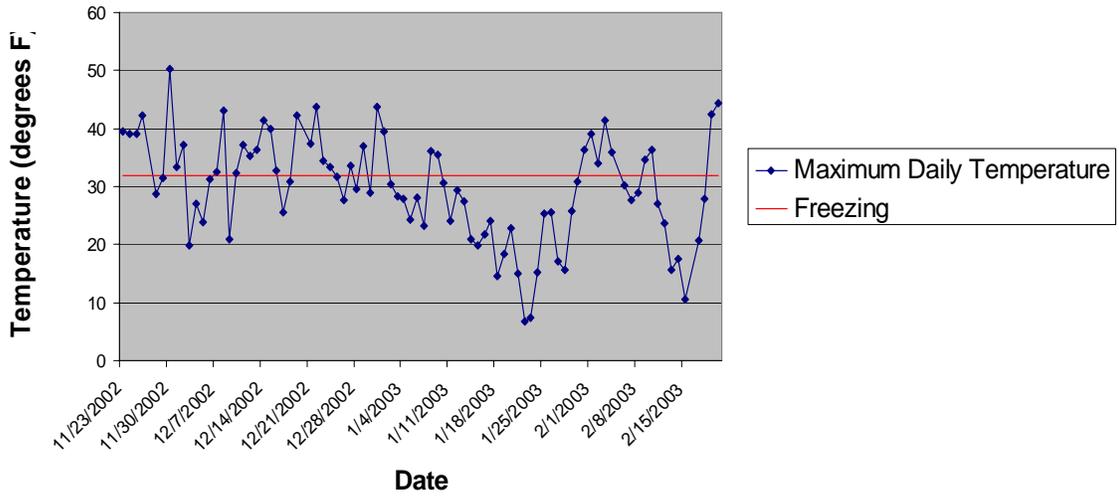


Figure 4: High Temperatures from November 23, 2002 to February 15, 2003

With such discouraging temperatures, and unlikelihood of weather patterns returning to old Berkshire norms any time soon, we do not feel this is a viable option for reliable, season long benefits.

High temperatures during the 2003-2004 skating season

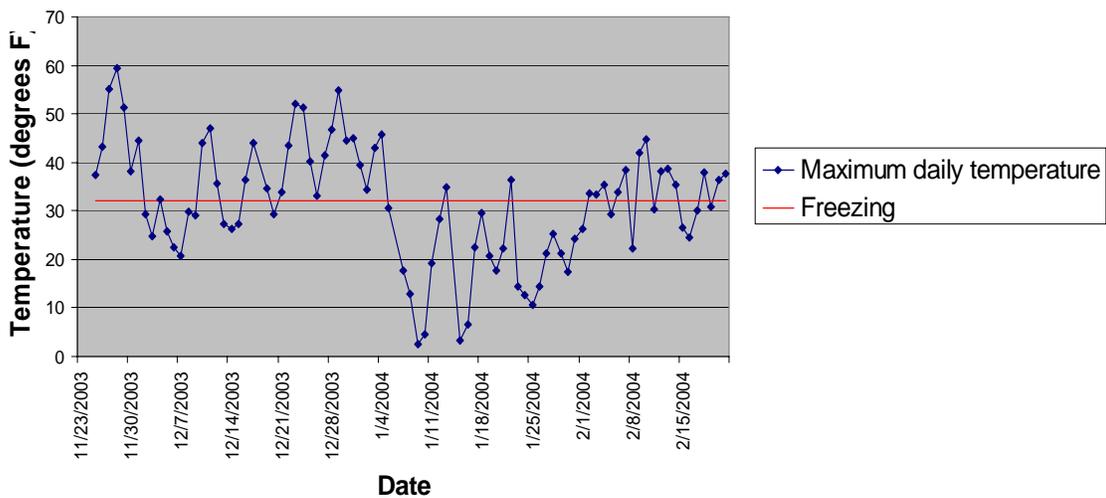


Figure 5: High Temperatures from November 23, 2003 to February 15, 2004

5.2 RINK SIZE

Rink size can determine the future uses of our facility. Potential uses for our rink fall into three basic categories: recreational skating, figure skating, and hockey. A larger rink may be best for hockey and may lead to greater revenue opportunities. It could also attract tourists and be rented to outside groups for events or competitions. However, a rink of this size has many drawbacks, namely cost. Not only are the upfront and accessory costs of a larger rink considerably higher, but over time it will have much higher maintenance costs. This could mean the difference between purchasing one or two ice smoothing units, and could even mean hiring an extra person to help maintain the ice if it becomes popular. We decided to obtain quotes for two different size rinks, 80'x180' and 60'x80', both common sizes in municipal rinks around the country. Some of our sites can only accommodate the smaller rink, while other could have either.

6. ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL SITES

Background:

One of the obstacles to this project is finding a location that is both suitable and available for development. Much of the land near the center of town (within walking distance of Spring Street) is privately owned, and little of it is in parcels large enough to accommodate a skating rink of any size. Because of this, one of the primary tasks of this project is to identify potential sites for the development of a community ice skating facility.

Our clients would like to see the skating rink located so as to be easily accessible from the center of town. The site must be level and clear of vegetation. While a permanent site for the rink would be best, it appears that most potential sites require a temporary rink that would allow alternate use during the summer months. Some potential sites, based on observation and GIS analyses, are detailed in the following section.

6.1 LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The creation of a public skating rink in Williamstown will likely fall under a recreation use and is allowed in all zoning districts only by special permit from the Board of Appeals. However, if vendors are associated with the facility, they are not allowed to provide services or retail merchandise outdoors. If retail is located indoors, it is only allowed in the Limited Business, Village Business, and Planned Business Districts (and potentially requires a permit from the Board of Appeals in the latter two).

If earth removal is required in order to level the site, a special permit is required from the Board of Appeals. The application for this permit requires that a detailed plan of the removal and subsequent landscaping.

The majority of the proposed sites for the rink do not qualify for protection under the Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act. Also, it is debatable whether the creation of a temporary ice rink in the winter months can be considered a significant alteration of area that may be under protection. When site choices are finalized, we'll look at these issues in more depth.

6.2 SITE DESCRIPTIONS AND HISTORIES

Williamstown Elementary School



Williamstown Elementary School, 2002 (www.williamstownelementary.org)

Recently redesigned and landscaped, the Williamstown Elementary School campus includes one large school building, athletic fields, a playground, garden, gazebo/community gathering space, and several large sections of lawn. The property surrounding the sight has been used as the town school since the construction of the Mitchell and Southworth School in 1898. The third Center School—The New School—opened in 1952.

The land surrounding the current site has functioned for years as a recreational space, featuring facilities for soccer, baseball, and other team sports, outdoor theater, music, and arts, a number of playground designs, and a natural ice skating space located approximately where the current WES stands now. Today, green spaces that could

potentially be converted into a winter skating facility exist on the north and west sides of the main school building. Both sites are relatively flat.

As part of the Williamstown Winter Recreation Survey, we asked respondents to name a community gathering space; the majority noted Williamstown Elementary School as their first thought. Located between School Street and Church Street north of Route 2, the school grounds command a large area. The grounds include baseball fields, soccer fields, playground space, and two large parking lots. During the summer, the fields are used extensively. However, in the winter these facilities are used less. Particularly when there is significant snowfall, the far corners of the school yard do not see much use until spring returns. Because of this, the Elementary School fields would be a favorable place for a public skating rink.

The school is already a focal point for the community, and the significant parking facilities would benefit patrons of a rink. The sheer size of the fields would allow for the creation of a regulation hockey-sized rink (85' x 200'). This could alleviate the constant need for ice time in the area. However, a refrigerated rink of that magnitude would be costly.

Any rink that was built on the site would need to be temporary. This brings up questions about the most cost-effective way to create and maintain a temporary rink. In addition, questions about the liability involved with placing a public skating rink on school property must be addressed.

If these issues are addressed adequately, the Elementary School would be an ideal place for a skating rink. It would open up the facility to increased use by children, both during and after school.

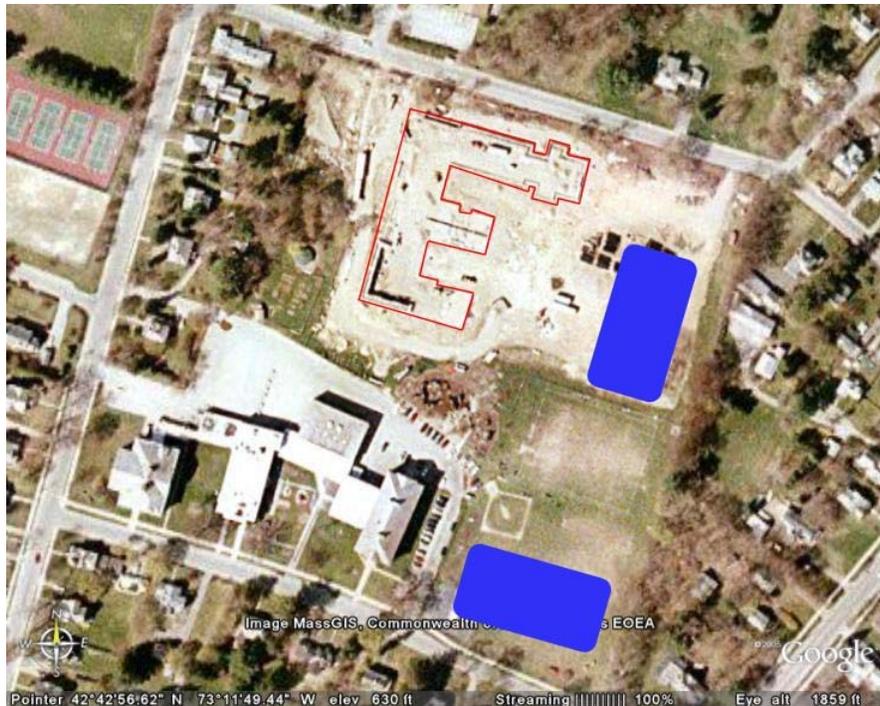


Figure 6: Williamstown Elementary School site showing the current school building outlined in red. Blue rectangles indicate two potential sites for a regulation-size hockey rink.

Taconic Golf Course/Weston Field

The Taconic Golf Course has served Williams College students, faculty, and staff, as well as its membership, as one of the finest collegiate golf course in the country since 1896. The club sits on 100 acres of land that are owned by the College, but it is, “...operated, governed, and maintained by a Board of Directors”, composed of members of the Williams community as well as club members¹⁷. The site has extensive open space, with some of it already used for recreation during the winter, particularly for cross country skiing and sledding. We selected two potential sites at this location. Our sites include the small plot of open space directly across the street from the clubhouse and a

¹⁷ <http://www.williams.edu/athletics/news.php?id=2090&sport=11&year=1999&type=general>, Taconic Golf Club History

gravel parking lot behind the bleachers at Weston Field that is currently used as overflow parking for Taconic in the summer.



Site 1: Gravel Lot behind Weston Field bleachers (140' x 80')



Site 2: small lot across from Taconic clubhouse (90' x 90')

Neither the College nor the golf course has any plans that would preclude the location of a temporary skating rink on either site. However, both sites would need to be leveled in order to install a rink. The open plot across from the clubhouse has the additional problem of its size, as even a small rink would only leave a few feet of buffer area adjacent to the neighboring property. One of the major benefits of these sites is the amount of parking available, as well as the possibility of using the clubhouse as a warming or concession area during the winter. Kent Lemme, golf course superintendent, has suggested that this would be a possibility pending further negotiations with the clubhouse manager¹⁸. With the history of this site as a recreational facility, and its lack of use during much of the year, it seems like a natural place to locate our skating rink. Dave Fitzgerald has suggested that the College had ultimate control over both of these sites, but that they would be receptive to management of a rink on either by an outside organization¹⁹.

¹⁸ Kent Lemme, personal communication, 5/12/2006

¹⁹ Dave Fitzgerald, 5/10/2006 interview with Justin Bates

Bud Anderson Little League Field



Bud Anderson Little League Field

The Bud Anderson Little League field is currently used by the Williamstown Cal Ripken Jr. Little League, a non-profit organization that leases the land from Williams College. While the baseball field, adjacent skate park, and the Williams College athletic facilities attract many area residents throughout the spring, summer and fall, the space has few visitors during the winter season.

Compatible with our idea of a Winter Commons, the site contains a concession stand, first aid area, and restrooms that could potentially all be used in the winter. It also has adequate parking and is only several minutes walking distance from the Williamstown Youth Center. While the technology we are recommending does not damage the grass surface it is placed upon, we anticipate concerns from the Little League organization. There are also potential concerns over the applicability of Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act regulations and the uncertainty about whether the site will have

access to water connections during the winter²⁰. Recently, the Little League organization was given a large grant to build new bathrooms and new bleachers. The use of extensive town recreational funds for improvements at this site is a persuasive argument for a more intensive use of it throughout the year.

Clark Art Institute



View of Clark Art Institute's Planned Reflecting Pools from Stone Hill²¹

Located on South St. in Williamstown, the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute opened its campus in 1955. Currently including three main buildings and 140 acres of lawns and trails, the Clark site is noteworthy for the flat land suitable for an ice rink on the northern portion of the property. Each year the Clark Art Institute attracts many visitors to its museum, making it one of the premier destination spots in

²⁰ Dave Fitzgerald, 5/10/2006 interview with Justin Bates

²¹ Tadeo Ando Architect & Associates, www.clarkart.edu

Williamstown. The Clark often projects itself as a space where art and nature come together and reports being know for its “intimate galleries and stunning natural environment.”²² The land surrounding the Clark includes Stone Hill, a favorite place for both warm and winter weather recreation, and is a “landscape of active and post agricultural parcels interspersed with woodlots that date back to the European settlement of the region.”²³



Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute Master Plan Map, Reed Hilderbrand Associates

While originally considering the Clark campus as a potential site for a Williamstown public skating rink or Winter Commons for its open space and consistently vacant parking areas during the winter season, the feasibility of this site

²² www.clarkart.edu

²³ Henry W. Art. 2005 Williams College course INTR 225 – Natural History of the Berkshires Website. <http://drm.williams.edu/nhb/locations/stonehill/index.htm>

may be increased by the Clark’s goals for the future. In 2003, the Institute publicized a new large scale master plan. The work of Design Architect Tadeo Ando Architect & Associate, Osaka, Japan, and Landscape Architect Reed Hilderbrand Associates, Watertown, MA, calls for an expansion and enhancement, deriving from “from a cultivated awareness of each site's history and special character.”²⁴ Noting their commitment to “reasserting the values of simplicity, beauty, serenity, sanctuary, intimacy, and mystery as components of human experience,” they propose a two phase project plan. Phase II: Exhibition, Conference, and Visitor Center Project Highlights is of main interest for our study as it includes a 1.5 acre reflecting pool that *can* serve as a public skating pond.



Clark Art Institute, Architect’s simulation of reflecting pool’s winter skating potential.

While the Institute has not released further information on the potential creation of such a facility, it does include an artist’s rendering of the site during the winter months which we feel is a positive sign. As noted above, the Clark Art Institute

²⁴ Tadeo Ando Architect & Associates, www.clarkart.edu

campus is already a site of outdoor winter recreation and regularly demonstrates a commitment to the community through its public events programming and might be a partner to consider throughout this feasibility study.

Upper Linear Park



Upper Linear Park, Town Staging Area

According to Tim Kaiser, the Williamstown Department of Public Works currently uses this section of Linear Park as the department's sole staging area. They store materials in the sheds on the property and use the open space to hold piles of dirt that will be used at other sites. It is unlikely that a skating rink could be placed on this plot of land²⁵. Additionally, the area is not flat enough for a rink, and would require significant alteration. Several large trees would also have to be removed before construction of a rink could take place. However, if the town ever stops using this land for a staging area, it could potentially accommodate an expansion of recreational activities. The site already

²⁵ Tim Kaiser, interview with Andy Stevenson, 5/6/2005

has a small amount of parking, a playground area for children, and a park area with a few picnic tables and a fire pit. The site also has a central location, near the Water Street business district as well as within walking distance of Spring Street. Many Williams College students and town residents use the park during the summer months, but very few use it during the winter. A skating rink would be a great way to encourage such winter use, but right now it seems to be an incompatible site for this project.

Lower Linear Park



Lower Linear Park Tennis Court

Lower Linear Park currently serves as a trail and recreation hub in Williamstown, containing a small network of trails near the Green River as well as the town's tennis court. In the future the trails system could be expanded to connect this area with the Photec site, but concrete plans have not yet been developed. The possible rink location at this site is on top of the town tennis court surface. The only other location for a rink is in the parking lot itself. However, placing a rink in this location would create major

transportation issues by covering the only available parking. The park remains out of walking distance for the great majority of Williamstown residents. However, one benefit of the tennis court is that the surface is completely flat, and the rink would have no danger of adverse environmental impacts. The site lies in our projected buffer for the Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act, however, so the creation of a rink in this place would require the filing of a Request for Determination of Applicability and possibly a Notice of Intent. The other major drawback of this site is the size: the tennis court could only accommodate a very small rink, as there is only about 50x80 feet of usable area. Also, there are no facilities around to use as warming huts or that fit into the rest of our Winter Commons model.

Mission Soccer Field



Mission Park Soccer Field

The Mission Soccer Field is also primarily used in the fall, spring, and summer for soccer and ultimate frisbee. During the winter months, the site has virtually no use. It

consists of a very flat, open grass field with a usable area large enough to accommodate a large or small size rink. The site also has the advantage of close proximity to the Williamstown Youth Center, as well as the Elementary School. One major drawback is that it lies on College property, but as with the Little League field there is precedent for a non-profit organization operating a facility on College land. There is some parking available at the Elementary School and near the tennis courts. It also accommodates one of our clients' main goals—to bring together town residents and College residents—since it would hopefully draw students as well as citizens. The site lacks any usable facilities, such as a warming hut, however, but it does have a fire pit. It ranks fairly low on our list of options because of these drawbacks, as well as the fact that the availability of water and electrical hookups is questionable.

Photec Site



Photec Site- Cole Avenue

The Photec site, while it has several large open, relatively flat areas potentially suitable for a skating rink, has too much uncertainty surrounding its future use to make a

good recommended site for a rink. Tim Kaiser said that although the town has plans to use the land in the future, currently they do not even own the land, so if we wanted to build a rink there in the next few years it would require an unlikely partnership with a private owner. He also suggested that a variety of plans are on the table for future use of the site, most of which could probably accommodate a skating rink as part of the design, but not as the central factor. The town wants to use the land for “something more important than a skating rink.”²⁶ The site has no history of recreational use, as it served as a major industrial site for many years. For a detailed history of the Photec Site and suggestions for future use, please see the *Redevelopment Plan for The Photec (Station Mill) Site* created for Environmental Planning in the fall of 2003²⁷. The major benefits of the site are the possibility of having a skating rink there as part of a future planned development, the large amount of residents in the nearby area, and the close proximity of the Williamstown Youth Center. Until the plans for the future use of the site become clearer, however, this site remains near the bottom of our potential options.

6.3 GIS ANALYSIS

One component of our research plan that took on a major role is the use of GIS tools for analyzing data relevant to our project. Not only will GIS be useful for creating visual representations of our site locations, but also in analyzing their zoning, land-use, and demographic characteristics. GIS analysis helped with six areas of concern: usable

²⁶ Tim Kaiser, interview with Andy Stevenson, 5/6/2006

²⁷ <http://www.williams.edu/ces/mattcole/resources/onlinepaperpdfs/papers/photech.pdf>

site area, WRPA applicability, zoning, the distance to important town landmarks, and residents within walking distance.

Usable Site Area

For this area of analysis we used 1 meter color orthophotos from the year 2000 provided by Mass GIS²⁸. We examined the entire town, looking for areas of open space that had public or institutional ownership, were relatively flat, and did not have any current conflicting land use. We used measuring tools in ARCMAP to determine exactly how much of this flat, usable space existed at each of our sites. By far the best site was the Williamstown Elementary School, with a large area of 360' x 140'. The Mission Soccer Field has the next best usable area, with a flat, grass surface of 190'x 270'. Most sites would allow either our large or small rink options, but sites such as the Taconic Square Plot and Lower Linear Park would only allow for the smaller rink option.

²⁸ <http://www.mass.gov/mgis/>

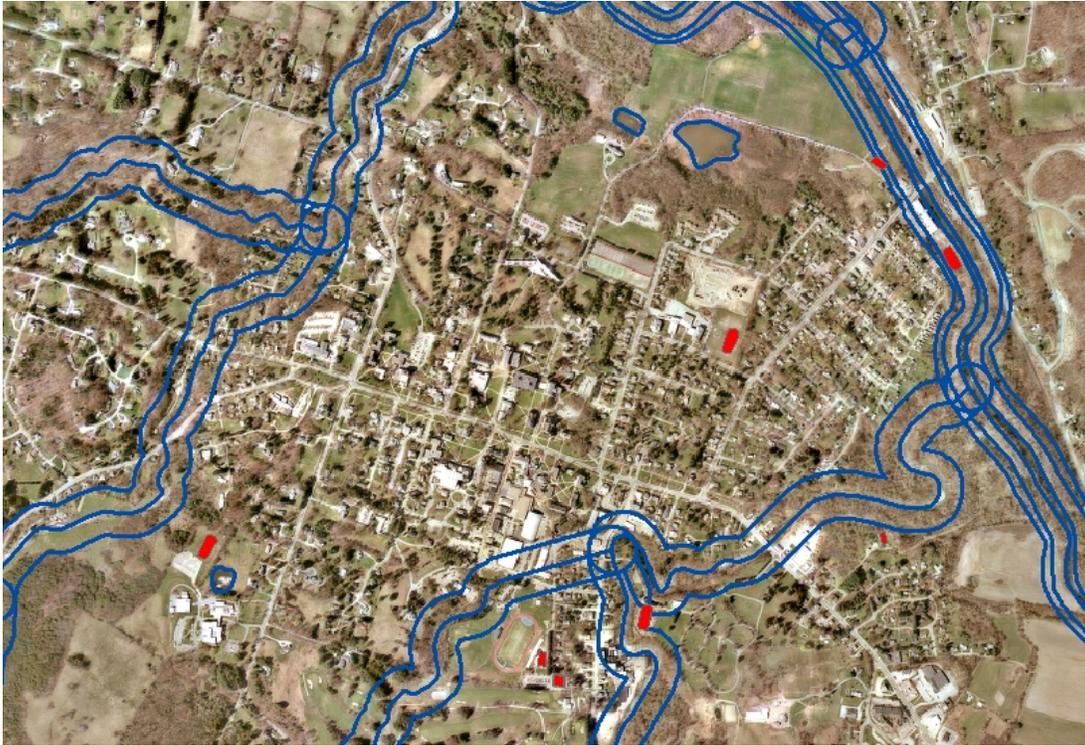


Figure 7: GIS Image of Williamstown with Sites and 100 Year Flood Zone Buffer

Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act

The Massachusetts Wetlands and Rivers Protection Acts requiring the filing of a Notice of Intent to build on any area within 200 feet of any perennial river in the Commonwealth. Since this can be a costly and contentious process, we want to avoid building in or near a river or wetland if at all possible. Using ArcMap editing tools we created a 200 foot buffer on either side of rivers in Williamstown, and found that our Photec, Little League Field, and Upper and Lower Linear Park sites would all fall under the jurisdiction of the aforementioned acts. While they may have other positive characteristics, this will work against their desirability as a location for our rink.

Zoning Bylaws

We also obtained a data-layer containing the Williamstown zoning districts from the MASS GIS site, and found that all of our sites except for the Photec site and Upper Linear Park lie in districts zoned as General Residential 1 or 2. These two sites lie in Industrial zoning districts. According to Michael Card, Williamstown Building Inspector, this type of construction would require a Special Permit to be filed in either of these districts²⁹. Therefore, this criteria did not allow us to distinguish between the different sites.

Proximity to Youth Center and Spring Street



Figure 8: Walking distance to Youth Center from three potential sites (shown in red), GIS image.

Another area of GIS analysis was measuring the walking distance between our sites and important town locations. Our clients expressed preferences for rinks close to

²⁹ Michael Card, personal correspondence, 4/26/2006

the Williamstown Youth Center and Spring Street. Therefore, we used the measuring tool in ARCMAP to determine the walking distance between these places. Proximity to Spring Street would provide economic development for local businesses, and proximity to the Youth Center would allow extra opportunities for after-school programs. Looking at all of our sites, the Elementary school comes out on top in proximity to both locations favored by our clients, with both Linear Parks and the Mission Soccer Fields at a greater distance. The Taconic Golf Course sites, the Little League Field site, and the Photec Site are both very close to one location but distant from the other. The Taconic is very close to Spring Street, and Little League Field is very close to the Youth Center, so each of our clients would probably favor one of these sites over the other. Both have ample parking available. The Clark Art site, presumably using the rink they intend to build with their new project, is fairly close to town but very far away from the Williamstown Youth Center. Its location, when compared to others, leaves a lot to be desired from the standpoint of accessibility.

Population and Census Data

Using data-layers provided by the US Census of 2000, we were also able to determine the population of residents within certain distances of each of our sites³⁰. Since each site has varying amounts of parking, we assume some of the people traveling to each site will walk. Proximity to residents will be an especially important consideration for use by children and the elderly. To select an appropriate “walking buffer” we selected census tracts that were within ¼ mile of each site. While some people may be willing to walk further than this, most census tracts encompass a fairly

³⁰ www.census.gov

wide area, so walking from one part could take considerably longer. Travel time also depends on the existence of direct routes between two places.

Table 2: GIS Analysis Matrix

| | Usable Area (ft) | Zoning | Wetlands Applicability | Walking Buffer (people) | Distance to Youth Center (mi) | Distance to Spring Street (mi) |
|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Mission Soccer Field | 190x270 | General Residential-1 | No | 899 | .75 | .5 |
| Little League Field | 132x83 | General Residential-2 | Yes | 1277 | .25 | 1.2 |
| Photech Site | 200x111 | Industrial | Yes | 1504 | .25 | 1.4 |
| Elementary School | 360x140 | General Residential-1 | No | 1022 | .4 | .7 |
| Lower Linear | 50x100 | General Residential-1 | Yes | 844 | .9 | .8 |
| Upper Linear | 200x100 | Industrial | Yes | 879 | .75 | .5 |
| Clark Art | N/A | General Residential-2 | No | 564 | 1.9 | .8 |
| Taconic Square Plot | 90 x90 | General Residential-1 | No | 879 | 1.0 | .3 |
| Taconic Behind Bleachers | 140x80 | General Residential-1 | No | 879 | 1.0 | .3 |

These results suggest that the Photec Site and Little League Field would potentially be most accessible by foot to residents of the community. However, considering the lack of current walking paths in some parts of town, these data may be a bit deceiving. Also, these sites are the furthest from Williams, removing a lot of possible users. Williamstown Elementary is also accessible to a large number of pedestrians. The school has ample parking, which would allow patrons to arrive by means of other transportation. All of the College sites clearly have the benefit of a wide base of users, but are not as accessible to a large population of community residents. The Taconic Golf Course and the Clark Art Institute are close to some residential areas and the College, but are distant from other parts of town. Determining how far residents would be willing to

travel to use the rink, as well as their preferred location, will help us draw better conclusions from these particular data.

6.4 SITE ASSESSMENT

Our biggest question in the creation of an outdoor public skating rink in Williamstown is that of siting. There is little land available for development near the center of town, and even less that would be well-suited for an ice skating rink. In order to ascertain the most fitting site for such a rink, we used an assessment matrix and ranked the suitability of 16 factors. These included things such as parking availability, water and electrical availability, and the potential for economic and tourist development. Each factor was rated on a one to 10 scale, with 10 being most conducive to the rink project. In further working on this, we will be discussing the possibility of weighting the most important factors (such as water/electrical availability and population within walking distance). Currently, some categories remain unknown. However, conversations with land owners and research into these factors are both ongoing.

We summed the scores for each site and then created an average score. We also looked at the variance amongst scores, feeling that the best sites should have a low degree of variation between categories. In doing so, we found that the Williamstown Elementary School scored highest, followed by the Taconic Golf Course and a small rink on the Bud Anderson Little League field. The lowest variance amongst these sites was seen at the Little League site. Variance was a very important number in considering each site, because we felt that those sites best-suited to this project would exhibit high scores

in most categories. Sites—like the Photec location—which showed a large variation in scores were considered less desirable.

Table 3: Assessment Matrix for Site Selection

| | Photec - large | Photec - small | WES - large | WES - small | Taconic | Little League Field - large | Little League Field - small | Clark Art | Linear park | Lower linear park |
|------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------------|
| Site amenities | | | | | | | | | | |
| Size | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 3 | 9 | 7 | 2 | 7 |
| Grade suitability | 4 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 10 |
| Water/electrical | 5 | 5 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 1 | 1 |
| Parking | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 5 |
| Compatibility of current use | 5 | 5 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 6 | 4 | 8 |
| Land ownership (cooperation) | 4 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 8 |
| Zoning compatibility | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Wetlands Protection compatibility | 8 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 9 |
| Environmental impact | 5 | 5 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 10 |
| Surrounding population | 10 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 5 |
| Distance from Spring Street | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 5 |
| Distance from Youth Center | 9 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 3 | 8 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| Economic development potential | 6 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 4 |
| Job creation | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| Tourism development potential | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 5 |
| Compatibility with survey response | 8 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| SUM | 104 | 104 | 125 | 125 | 121 | 106 | 112 | 103 | 83 | 98 |
| Average score | 7.43 | 7.43 | 7.81 | 7.81 | 7.56 | 6.63 | 7.00 | 6.87 | 5.93 | 7.00 |
| Variance | 6.00 | 6.00 | 5.36 | 5.36 | 4.13 | 3.98 | 3.33 | 5.20 | 4.16 | 6.38 |

7. RINK MANAGEMENT, PROJECTED COSTS, AND FUNDING

7.1 MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

In considering the management of our Winter Commons facility, there are three main options which we have considered. These include public management by the local Parks and Recreation Department, private management by an individual or rink-oversight company, and management by a non-profit organization. Municipal skating rinks have succeeded with each of these different types of management, and selection should be made based on the goals of the project and characteristics of the community.

Public Management

One option for maintaining and managing the rink would be to have it under the jurisdiction of Williamstown's Department of Parks and Recreation. This option generally works best in towns that already have a strong existing department that manages multiple facilities, as well as one that receives significant public funding and has a large number of employees. Examples of this type of management are the municipal rinks in Pittsfield, North Adams, and many other communities around Massachusetts. This option, however, is probably not the best one for Williamstown. The town does not have a very large or well-funded recreation department. Tim Kaiser, the Williamstown Director of Public Works, said that his employees in the parks and recreation department

are already stretched thin for funding as it is, and with the current situation they would need to hire extra people or neglect existing facilities in order to take on this type of project³¹. Without a restructuring of the department, or a diversion of resources by the Recreation Committee, this option seems unlikely to succeed in Williamstown. The town would have to significantly expand the parks and recreation department to take on such a project, and they simply do not have the will or funding at the current time.

Private Management

In addition to oversight by the Williamstown Parks and Recreation Department, we also considered a private management strategy for our Winter Commons. In this method of management, the individual or group who owns the facility would hire an outside rink management companies to oversee its operations. This would be an easy way to oversee the rink, but it would most likely come at a cost. Also, hiring an outside company to dictate the rink's operations would remove community control from the project. Given that a Winter Commons is designed specifically to be a community space, we feel that its operations should be managed from within the community, rather than from without. While many communities, including Syracuse, NY, have had success with this strategy, it may not be suitable for a small project like this one.

Non-profit Management

Creating a rink oversight organization managed as a non-profit would provide a number of benefits for the Winter Commons facility. This organization, perhaps touted

³¹ Tim Kaiser, interview with Andy Stevenson, 5/6/2005

as a “friends of the rink” group, would be run by members of the community and would therefore show a sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of Williamstown residents. As a local organization, it could amass a core group of volunteers to tackle the responsibilities of rink maintenance and upkeep, perhaps lessening the financial burdens associated with these tasks.

Perhaps most importantly, however, a non-profit organization will be able to solicit tax-deductible donations from individuals and businesses. Private donations already make up a significant portion of several local non-profits’ budgets, and there is hope that similar donations could support a Williamstown Winter Commons. Potential partnerships with local businesses will also be facilitated if the rink is overseen by a non-profit organization.

Due to its strong locus of community control and its potential for financial partnerships, we recommend that the rink be managed by a new or existing non-profit organization.

7.2 PROJECTED COSTS

A Winter Commons facility will impart significant benefits to the community at a moderate cost. Costs will include initial capital investments as well as the ongoing expenses of maintenance and storage.

Ice Rink Costs

Recent temperature data and conversations with our clients suggest that a temporary, refrigerated rink best suits the needs of the Williamstown community. Based on conversations with Jodi Kershaw, a sales representative at Custom Ice Inc., the cost of an 80' x180' ice rink of this nature--including all pipes, tubing, refrigeration equipment, and liner--would total \$230,000. A smaller size rink (60' x 80') would be less expensive—approximately \$130,000.

Installation of the rink is another expense. In the first year, depending on the degree of site preparation that is required, installation may cost upwards of \$10,000. In subsequent years, Custom Ice, Inc. can be hired to install the rink. However, it is more cost effective to have the company train local individuals.

The cost of boards is also quite high. Custom Ice sells them at \$65 per linear foot, equating to a cost of \$18,200 for a complete set of boards for a smaller rink. For the larger rink, this cost would total \$33,820

Maintenance Costs

According to Bill Bryce³², it takes a crew of five men about three 8 hour days to set up or take down the Lansing Chapman Rink at Williams College (an 80' x 205' rink). Custom Ice claims that it takes two men two 8 hour days to take down the rink, and that the time required for initial setup depends on the required degree of site preparation. It takes three men a further three days to get an adequate depth of ice on the rink surface at the Lansing-Chapman Rink.

³² Bill Bryce, personal communication, April 28th

Maintenance costs depend a lot on the weather, given that the refrigeration equipment is essentially a “back up system for mother nature”. If the ice is frozen naturally, the refrigeration equipment does not operate at all. However, on days when temperatures spike above freezing, the refrigeration unit will draw a considerable amount of energy. Custom Ice, Inc. gave a very conservative estimate of \$500-\$2,500 per month for electricity. This expense, according to the company, is the highest maintenance cost.

However, the ice surface will require a considerable amount of attention. Not only must the rink be cleared when it snows, but it must be smoothed and resurfaced on a frequent basis. According to Bill Bryce, the Lansing-Chapman rink is smoothed 8-10 times per day. A rink resurfacers (a small zamboni) would cost \$11,450, but specific attachments for existing lawnmowers could be acquired for as little as \$6,250.

At least one person will need to be hired to work on maintenance while the rink is open. This would provide a potential benefit to the community by creating several jobs for maintenance people. Short of hiring maintenance people, however, the rink could rely on the help of volunteers. Particularly if organized as a non-profit, “friends of the rink” organization, this facility could rely heavily on direct community involvement.

Winter Commons Equipment Costs

In order to create a true community gathering space, a Winter Commons facility must include more than just a skating rink. Equipment such as benches, picnic tables, and warming accommodations are an added expense, but their benefit to the community is great. In total, these attributes will add an extra cost of roughly \$1500. This cost,

however, can fluctuate depending on the amount of Commons equipment that is deemed necessary for the success of the project.

7.3 INSURANCE AND LIABILITY COSTS

In order to protect the owners and operators of the rink against potential lawsuits, liability insurance is necessary. We talked to the Associates of Glens Falls, a law firm in Glens Falls, NY, regarding insurance they provide to commercial facilities such as ice skating rinks. The amount and cost of insurance for a facility is based primarily on the anticipated number of users, the amount of insurance the town or operating organization currently has, and the value of the property. Some groups, such as USA Hockey, will also have their own insurance. However, they recommended that a facility of this nature purchase \$1 million of general liability coverage, as well as a \$1-5 million umbrella policy. The amount of property insurance required is dependent on the amount currently held by the operating organization. The premium will come out to about \$10-12, 000 depending on all of these factors, as well as on the experience of the staff in charge of operating and maintaining the rink.

Several potential partners, such as Williams College or the Williamstown Youth Center already have some insurance. Because of this, a Winter Commons facility will require only a supplemental liability policy.

However, the option also exists of not purchasing insurance. Currently, the town has chosen to operate their outdoor skate park as a “skate at your own risk” facility,

giving operators of an ice rink precedent if they are looking to save on costs³³. Insurance is a complicated and important issue in regard to this facility.

7.4 POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Public Funding

The Community Preservation Act (the “CPA”, MGL 44B) allows the cities and towns of Massachusetts to adopt a property tax surcharge. Revenues (and State matching funds) from this surcharge are devoted to affordable housing, historic preservation, open space, and land for recreational use. Williamstown adopted a surcharge of 2% at the Town Meeting in May 2002.³⁴ Designed to be a funding source for improvements to community character, the CPA specifically allows money to be spent on “Acquisition, creation, and preservation of land for recreational use (after the required funding commitments for the first three items).”³⁵ Janette Dudley, Chairwoman of the Community Preservation Committee, noted that the fund has approximately \$250,000 every year, of which one might expect to receive \$25-100,000 for a comparable project³⁶.

To apply for CPA funding, one must meet the requirements described in the CPA legislation (to be included in Appendix) and submit a completed application form providing information on project description, project readiness/feasibility, project task and implementation schedule, project team, and sources and uses of funds (not including potential CPA money). Applications are due by January 31, 2006 to the Local

³³ Barbara, Associate of Glens Falls, interview with Andy Stevenson, 5/4/2006, (518) 793-3444

³⁴ www.williamstown.net

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Janette Dudley, personal communication, 2/26

Community Preservation Committee which recommends how the town's CPA revenues should be spent. All CPC funding decisions must then be approved by the town.³⁷

Additional sources of state and federal funding may also be available. The Massachusetts Development Finance Agency recently allocated \$25,000 to Quinn's Legacy Foundation in order to evaluate potential skating rink sites in Pittsfield, MA. The MDFA provides "financial tools and real estate expertise needed to stimulate economic growth across the state of Massachusetts." While the scope of the Pittsfield project is much larger than our own, Mass Development may provide some funding to cover the costs of site analysis.³⁸

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation may also be a potential source of funding. According to the FY2005 Annual Report, DCR currently oversees 39 public skating rinks throughout the state of Massachusetts. Many of these rinks are currently on long-term lease and are benefiting both from state oversight and private development.

Small local grants such as the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition's Public Health and Safety Grants may be another source of supplemental funding for costs beyond the installation and infrastructure of the rink. Available to projects throughout the Northern Berkshires, this sort of grant could help equip a Winter Commons facility with appropriate safety equipment for young skaters and first aid supplies.³⁹ Modest grants, such as this one could be used to offset smaller operating or supply costs.

³⁷ www.williamstown.net and <http://www.communitypreservation.org/index.htm>.

³⁸ <http://www.massdevelopment.com/press/06142002-04.aspx>

³⁹ Northern Berkshire Communication Coalition, <http://www.nbcccoalition.org>

Federal funding is also available, through departments such as the National Park Service and the Department of Agriculture. The NPS supports local action planning and the construction and/or renovation of neighborhood gathering places such as parks, playgrounds, and other recreational facilities. While a public skating rink meets the goals of The Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery program grant program—that is, enhancing recreation opportunities—Williamstown’s rural location and already high density of recreational activities will likely disqualify it from this funding.⁴⁰

However, because of Williamstown’s rural location and its small population size, this project may qualify for financial assistance through the US Department of Agriculture. The USDA has several programs, including a loan and grant program for the improvement of rural community facilities⁴¹. The grant funds may be used to purchase, construct, and improve community facilities for community and public services. Another possible source of funding may be the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development’s Economic Development Fund⁴², if the economic development potential of the project is emphasized; grants are capped at \$50,000. More research must be done into whether a public skating rink would qualify under any of these programs.

Private Funding

While public funding will likely cover a portion of the project’s capital cost, private funding will also be necessary. Many public skating rinks, including an outdoor

⁴⁰ National Parks Service, <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/uprr/pub.html>

⁴¹ Rural Development Housing & Community Facilities Programs, http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/cf/brief_cp_grant.htm

⁴² Economic Development Fund, <http://www.mass.gov/dhcd/components/cs/1prgapps/edf/default.htm>

rink in Albany, NY, are funded by partnerships with private businesses. Noting the economic development potential of our project, David Rempell emphasized the need to look for funding from businesses and organizations in the Williamstown area. Future community partners may include local banks, hockey clubs such as the Berkshire Bruins, or Williams College.

501(c)(3) Nonprofit

Creating a Winter Commons as a non-profit would allow individuals and companies to make tax deductible gifts. This may prove to be a significant portion of our budget and also encourage a variety of partnerships with local businesses. This type of organization has precedent in Williamstown— with the Williamstown Youth Center and the Little League—and community rinks across the country. Existing as a non profit may also make us more eligible as a grant recipient, particularly with sources such as the CPA Fund.

Revenue Models

While we were not able to complete an in-depth study of potential revenue models, we do expect that rink costs will need to be partially subsidized by user fees for admission, skate rentals, and possibly concessions. One case study we reviewed suggested \$5 admission or a \$50 12-visit block pass.⁴³ Recalling our survey results, this seems quite realistic for Williamstown.

⁴³ Family Ice, Maine <http://www.familyice.org/>

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Ice Rink Alternatives

After considering the costs and benefits of refrigerated versus non-refrigerated rinks, and permanent versus temporary, our group has decided that a temporary, refrigerated rink would best serve the needs of the community. A non-refrigerated rink would not really need a permanent site, as Lisa Green, Director of Communications and Design at the Clark Art Institute revealed that they already plow the pond on the north side of the building for ice skating. It has not been open, however, the past few years due to improper weather conditions. She also stated that the Clark intends to open a portion of the 1.5 acre pond that will be built with the addition by 2012-3 to public ice skating, but it will not be the whole thing⁴⁴. This would be our non-refrigerated rink alternative, forming a partnership with the Clark and promoting their rink for use by the community. It would have several advantages; particularly that it costs nothing and would be a good way to integrate the town with the Clark. The drawbacks would be that the location is far away from the town center and the Youth Center, that many people see the Clark as not for their use, and that it is subject to changing weather conditions. Due to these recent weather trends, a refrigerated rink would provide the most reliability venue for town programming and social gathering.

As far as a permanent, refrigerated rink, none of our best sites would allow for the creation of such a facility, as almost all of them are used, or could be used, for other activities during the summer months.

⁴⁴ Lisa Green, personal communication, April 24th

Based on survey results and site constraints, we recommend the creation of a 60'x80' rink. This rink size has the obvious benefits of being significantly less costly and using less energy without sacrificing the needs of the community. The larger rink would bring major benefits, but the marginal cost of spending the extra \$120,000 and the costs of maintenance would overshadow them.

Site Alternatives

Through an extensive analysis, we calculated an average suitability score for each of a number of sites. In doing so, we found that the Williamstown Elementary School ranked highest, followed by the Taconic Golf Course. Both of these locations would be ideal for the creation of a Williamstown Winter Commons. However, because of Williamstown Elementary School's location near a large population, its place as a town focal point, and the desire of survey respondents to see such a facility at this location, we highly recommend that this site serve as the future home of a community ice rink and a Williamstown Winter Commons.

A Winter Commons

A temporary refrigerated ice rink should lie at the heart of a newly-created Williamstown Winter Commons. Instead of being a simple recreational facility, it will be a true community space—a location where the town's residents, both young and old, can come together. As such, it will alleviate the social isolation that is often felt during the winter season and provide a welcoming environment to get outdoors, exercise, and meet one's neighbors.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank...

Our Environmental Planning Faculty,

Sarah Gardner, Associate Director, CES and Lecturer in Environmental Studies

and Hank Art, Samuel Fessenden Clarke Professor of Biology,

Our Clients,

Janette Dudley, Chairwoman of the Community Preservation Act Committee

and David Rempell, Director of the Williamstown Youth Center

&

Rose Ellis, Kent Lemme, Tim Kaiser, Jim McGrath, David Fitzgerald, Bill Bryce,

Michael Card, The Williamstown House of Local History, our survey respondents, and

the Center for Environmental Studies.

Appendix

- I. Williamstown Winter Recreation Survey
- II. Survey Data
 - a. Quantitative Data Spread Sheet
 - b. Open Ended Responses
- III. Cost Benefit Analysis
- IV. Partnership Notes
- V. Interviews and Personal Correspondence Notes
- VI. Project Directory



Williamstown Winter Recreation Survey

Greetings! As part of our Environmental Planning class at Williams College, we are conducting a survey about winter recreation in Williamstown. Our purpose is to find out whether community residents would like a new place for outdoor recreation during the winter, particularly a skating rink. The proposed Winter Commons area could also include picnic areas, a warming hut, and other gathering places. Below are some questions we would appreciate your feedback on. Thanks for your time!

1. How many years have you been living in the Williamstown Area?
 - a. one year or less
 - b. one to five years
 - c. five to 20 years
 - d. 20 years or more
2. Please list the ages of all members of your household, including yourself.
3. How important are community gathering spaces to you?
 - a. not important
 - b. somewhat important
 - c. important
 - d. very important
4. Please name a community gathering space in Williamstown.
5. Describe sense of community in warm months.
6. Describe sense of community in cold months.
7. Rate your satisfaction with winter social opportunities in the Williamstown area.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------|--------------------|---|---|
| Strongly Dissatisfied | Neutral | Strongly Satisfied | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

8. Rate your satisfaction with winter recreational opportunities in the Williamstown area.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------|--------------------|---|---|
| Strongly Dissatisfied | Neutral | Strongly Satisfied | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

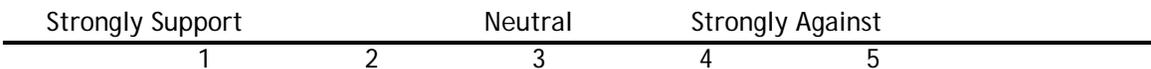
9. Please indicate all of the following you might like to see be part of the Williamstown Winter Common design.

- outdoor skating rink
- skate rental
- skating lessons
- picnic area/grill
- warming hut/concessions
- benches
- fire circle
- amenities for ice hockey
- other

10. Where would you like to have such a facility?

- a. near Spring St.
- b. near Field Park (Town Green)
- c. Williamstown Elementary School
- d. Other _____

11. Please indicate your degree of support for the creation of a Williamstown Winter Commons skating rink facility by circling a number on the spectrum below.



12. How often might you or your family use such a facility?

- a. 2 or more times per week
- b. 1 time per week
- c. once per month
- d. once or twice per season
- e. never

13. If a rink, would you and/or your family use it for

- recreational skating
- figure skating
- hockey
- other

14. If such a rink were constructed how much would you be willing to pay in the form of admission to offset the building and maintenance costs?

- a. less than \$3
- b. \$4-6
- c. \$6-8

15. What would you like about having such a rink in town?

--Thank you for your time and feedback.--

Survey Data Continued

Table One: Winter Commons Amenities

| Elements of the Winter Commons | Respondents, n=54 |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Outdoor Skating Rink | 53 |
| Skate Rental | 35 |
| Skating Lessons | 28 |
| Picnic Area and Grill | 29 |
| Warming Hut/Concessions | 36 |
| Benches | 36 |
| Fire Circle | 30 |
| Amenities for Ice Hockey | 22 |

Table Two: Winter Commons Site Preference

| Where would you like to have such a facility? | Percentage of Respondents |
|---|---------------------------|
| Spring Street | 36% |
| Williamstown Elementary School | 46% |
| Field Park | 17% |

Table Three: Current Community Gathering Spaces

Top Five Community Gathering Spaces

1. Williamstown Youth Center
2. Williamstown Elementary School, School and Recreational Facilities
3. Williams College, Cultural and Athletic Facilities
4. Tunnel City Coffee
5. Upper Linear Park

Table Four: Preferred Rink Use

| Preferred Rink Use | Percentage of Respondents |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| recreational skating | 82% |
| figure skating | 18% |
| hockey | 21% |

Open End Survey Question Data

Note: Below are selected responses to the open ended portion of the survey. We have admitted repetitive responses, and those that did not directly address the question. Bold emphasis is added to stress key sentiments.

Q. What would you like about having such a rink in town?

A.

- “Community **relationship building**, community gathering space.”
- “The chance to gather and enjoy outdoors **exercise** together, with little planning or preparation.”
- “**Socialization** with community—Family **bonding**.”
- “It would help **get folks out of the house**.”
- “Something fun to do in winter outside—even if no snow...a way to **see people**, to have fun.
- “A great activity for **all ages**.”
- “What’s not to like?!”

Q. Describe the sense of community in Williamstown during the winter months.

A. *Active, strong, great, vibrant, busy*

- “Very active.”
- “Centered on Spring St.”
- “Wonderful: people are outdoors, see each other.”
- “Cheerful, accessible, sunny, open.”
- “Amazing! So much to do.”
- “Lots of out of town people; core community is scattered.”

Q. Describe the sense of community in Williamstown during the summer months.

A. *“Poor, less strong, isolation, not much, hard, little, quiet, dark”*

- “You don’t have that same ability to see people.”
- “Poor no where to congregate.”
- “People aren’t out as much...I tend to hibernate naturally in the winter.”
- “Extremely strong sense of community with Williams events.”
- “None, except for Christmas Walk.”
- “Not nearly as wonderful.”
- “Fine, As much as one wants.”
- “Centered on schools, lack of community for people not involved in schools.”
- “Everyone inside—need more to do—ie. Outside skating rink.”
- “Much harder to find a place to meet and people don’t go out as much.”

Cost Benefit Analysis

We also included a cost-benefit analysis of different site facets in order to assess the costs and benefits of rink type and size, as well as things like benches and picnic tables. This is shown below:

| Features | Cost | Benefit | Priority |
|------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <i>Rink type</i> | | | |
| Refrigerated rink - large | H | H | M |
| Refrigerated rink - small | M | H | H |
| Unrefrigerated rink - large | L | M | L |
| Unrefrigerated rink - small | L | L | L |
| <i>Amenities</i> | | | |
| Picnic tables | M | M | M |
| Benches | L | H | H |
| Fire pit | L | M | M |
| Portable propane heaters | M | H | H |
| Warming hut | H | H | M |
| Lights | M | L | L |
| Trash receptacles | L | H | H |
| Concessions | M | H | H |
| <i>Maintenance & equipment</i> | | | |
| Boards | H | M | M |
| Hockey equipment | M | M | M |
| Skate rental | L | H | H |
| Portable zamboni | H | M | M |
| Skate monitor/maintenance staff | M | M | M |

Depending on funding, many of these options should be included. However, when deciding which options to include in the site design, low-cost, high impact should be given preference. Things such as trash receptacles or a fire pit can have a significant impact on the use of the site.

Partnership Notes

Community support from Williamstown Elementary School, Pine Cobble School, Youth Hockey Leagues, Figure Skating clubs, and other area non-profits such as the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition will be integral to this project. Adventures in Learning, an afterschool enrichment program for students in grades 2-6, sample classes may include ice dancing. Our most involved partners are likely to be the Williamstown Youth Center--which coordinates an afterschool program, athletic programs and leagues for area children, and functions as a community center for children to come together—and the Williamstown Elementary School's Physical Education program. While the above partners may not be able to support the project on a large scale monetarily, their involvement in the promotion of such a plan is key.

Personal Correspondence Notes

February 27, 2006 Personal Correspondence at Williamstown House of Local History

Annette Jenks says Bridges pond and Frog pond on Stetson Rd. were the 2 big places in town, with some on the pond on the Buxton school property as well.

Phyllis Oleson (South Williamstown) said that in her childhood (c. 1934-5), they skated on Fritz Phelps' pond on Sloan Rd. and in her son's time(c. 1960) at South Center School where they flooded the blacktop to make a rink.

Nancy Burnstein, Williamstown Historian- offers couple of pairs of old ice skates- wooden ones without boots attached, to photograph and use.

March 13, 2006 Personal Correspondence at Williamstown House of Local History

Maury ____ and **Annette Jenks**, recall skating on college property, beside the young faculty housing barracks in back of the tennis courts. Annette mentions her husband used to play hockey at the pond near Buxton School on Gale Rd. Maury remembers skating on Christmas Brook “way way back”, he says that “Everybody skated up there, it was a very democratic pond, even the president of the college.” He also skated near the RRR Brooks Ice pond when he was little. He says they used to skate just about “where the school is now” in a depressed area that flooded, near the 4th of July Carnival sites.

April and May 2006 Ongoing Personal Correspondence with Kent Leme (Taconic Golf Course), Dave Fitzgerald (Williams College Grounds), Jodi Kershaw (Custom Ice), Bill Bryce (Lansing Chapman Rink), and Barbara(Glens Falls Associates).

May 8, 2006 Interview and Project Briefing with Rose Ellis, Superintendent of Williamstown

Elementary School, Rose expressed her support of the concept of the Winter Commons.

May 9, 2006 Begin Revenue Model Correspondence with Lance Curran of Tri State

Management, LLC Annapolis, MD, (443-995-4002), Lance encourages us to contact him once project is further along for more specific details about revenue models and rink management. Lance manages several outdoor skating facilities in Virginia and Maryland.

May 18, 2006 Personal Correspondence, **Rose Ellis** suggests the Williamstown Elementary School Physical Education Program could benefit from having the rink on site at the school.

May 19, 2006 Interview with **Karen Gardner** of the *North Adams Transcript*

Project Directory

| Department/Commission/Board/Title | Telephone/Email | Contact Person |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Williamstown Youth Center | (413) 458-5925 | David Rempell |
| Elementary School Superintendent | (413) 458-5707 | Rose Ellis |
| Williamstown Dept. of Public Works | (413) 458-9345 | Tim Kaiser |
| Taconic Golf Club Superintendent | (413)458-3997 | Kent Lemme |
| Williamstown Board of Appeals | (413) 458-9344 | Michael Card |
| Williamstown Elementary Schools | sjohnson@mail.williamstown.net | Steve Johnson |
| Vice President for Facilities | (413) 597-2303 | Irene Addison |
| Pittsfield Parks and Recreation | (413) 499-9343 | Jim McGrath |
| Community Preservation Act Committee | kesslerdudley@verizon.net | Janette Dudley |
| Custom Rink Inc. | (Toll Free) 1 866 887 8840 | Jodi Kershaw |
| Williams College Grounds Supervisor | (413) 597-3304 | Dave Fitzgerald |
| Board of Selectman | jballen@adelphia.net | Jane Allen |
| Williamstown House of Local History | (413) 458-2160 | Nancy Burstein |
| North Adams Transcript | (413) 663-3741 | Karen Gardner |
| Lansing Chapman Rink | (413) 597-3132 | William Bryce |
| Associates of Glens Falls Insurance | (518) 793-3444 | Barbara |
| Tri State Management | (443) 995-4002 | Lance Curran |