

BNA Report on the Dorothy Hamill Rink User Committee for Design and Planning July 2021

As many of you are now aware plans are in the works for a new Dorothy Hamill Skating Rink (DHSR). The BNA is fully supportive and excited for a new rink for the Greenwich community. We are asking for input from residents, property owners, and business owners in Byram on this project as the original plans of renovating or replacing the rink in its current location have changed dramatically in size and scope.

Liz Eckert, BNA Vice Chair, has recently been added as BNA representative to the “Rink Users Committee” and to date has attended the three meetings that have occurred since the BNA was granted a seat on the committee.

At the first meeting a vote was taken to prioritize not losing a skating season during construction. Liz was the sole vote against not losing a season of ice time being the #1 priority of the new rink’s construction plan over and above the interests of the community.

The BNA’s position has been that renovating or rebuilding on the current location is the only option that make sense and is the only option that should be considered. As a municipal facility, the rink should cater to the entire Greenwich community and be sensitive to the surrounding residential community rather than focusing solely on the desires of hockey teams and skating clubs.

The design plan for this new rink is a 42,000 square foot building, 30% larger than the existing facility, with a new roadway cutting through the middle of the park. The larger rink and roadway mean reconfiguring the entire property by moving the rink location and Strazza Field. The plan includes taller lighting, additional parking, and tree removal - all taking place in Byram’s very limited green space. No cost estimates have been provided for any of the proposed options and the committee has refused to consider options for keeping the rink in its current location.

Rinks of the size proposed by the committee are usually located in industrial areas - think Chelsea Piers, Sono Ice House, or Stamford Twin Rinks – and serve a larger regional area than would be appropriate for a municipal, taxpayer funded rink. Residential neighborhoods are rarely home to 42,000 square foot ice rinks. Not only would a much larger rink have a serious negative impact on the abutting neighbors’ quality of life but would also have a negative impact on their property values.

At the first committee meeting in May, there was also a vote to add a new access road off Western Jr. Highway. While the BNA did not oppose the new road in its entirety, there was a discussion about closing off Sue Mertz Way, which would cut off the neighborhood’s current walkable access to the park. Bill Drake, Chair of the committee, made a motion that the committee would not rule out closing Sue Merz Way. Mr. Drake suggested that the town could sell Sue Merz Way as a buildable lot for \$600,000, which would go toward the cost of the rink project. The BNA did not agree that this plan was

in the best interest of the Byram community and Liz, along with fellow committee member, Byram resident, and Board of Parks & Recreation member Mike Bocchino, were the only “no” votes on this motion.

The other two meetings held to date had less than half of the committee in attendance and the lack of a quorum meant that the committee could not take votes on any motions or agenda items at either meeting.