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PALM BEACH GARDENS

How Palm Beach Gardens is growing: $40 million ice rink complex coming to Plant Drive Park

The grand-scaled land development, Avenues Building, a Gardens High School classmate's son was murdered in 2007. The city said it was easy to honor her memory with a park.

Jane Musselman
Staff Writer
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Palm Beach Gardens Mayor Maureen Marcus
Palm Beach Post reporter Jane Musselman covers northern Palm Beach County.

PALM BEACH GARDENS — An indoor ice rink is set for construction at Plant Drive Park, replacing its skate park and basketball and pickleball courts and sound stages at Avenues Building that honors a Palm Beach Gardens High School murdered classmate's son.

The City Council unanimously gave the greenlight on Thursday, April 4, for the Palm Beach North Athletic Foundation to build a ice rink over square feet building with two full-sized ice rinks, a restaurant, a sports bar and medical space at the park northeast between Gardens High Gardens High and Gardens City.

The facility is expected to cost $40 million — for which the nonprofit is entirely responsible for raising the funds. The city will own the land and the building and park. Its lease would last for 40 years and charge the foundation $10 a year.

Palm Beach Gardens City ice rink facility to go atop softball field at Plant Drive Park
Jane Musselman | Staff Writer | Published: 10/08/19 | Updated: 04/13/21 | Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

The agreement comes after a former plan by the foundation failed when the project ran into opposition from residents. The foundation had faced years of difficult gathering support during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The original plan was for a 52,000-square-foot facility for hockey, curling, skating, volleyball and basketball at Gardens North County District Park, something that Winter said proved to be "too ambitious."

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"It's not as easy decision to move this forward as we, but I am supportive," Mayor Maureen Marcus said. "I know that 50 people will go to this rink. If it's half right, I think it will be very successful."

City seeks ways to honor Amanda Buckley; softball field named for slain player

Rendering of the Plant Drive Gardens ice rink, a public facility with two ice rinks that the City Council approved on Thursday, April 4, 2019. The rink would be built on the site of the Avenues Building, the Gardens North Sports Complex.
Courtesy Photo

Plant Drive Park's softball field serves as a memorial to Amanda Buckley, a Palm Beach Gardens High standout player who was found murdered near Juno Beach in 2007.

The park features a sign over the scoreboard that says "Amanda Buckley Memorial Field of Dreams," a plaque and Buckley-inspired art. Some

Charlotte Pomonis, the city's leisure services administrator, acknowledged the foundation's "passion project" for the rink, but said the city staff "is already thinking about what we do to make those things right."

"We have spoken to the high school athletic director and the Palm Beach Gardens Sports Commission about what we can do to make sure that the memory of Amanda is there as well," said Pomonis during the meeting. "This is just the first day."

Pomonis said she knew Buckley and will be respectful of the memorial to do it the "right way," Pomonis agreed.

"It's cold for supporters of anything that needs to be done to educate anything related to the Buckley memorial," he said.

Read: Palm Beach Gardens to green-light Tiger Woods' 324 golf beam wins OK for some of PGC owners

Some residents say hockey too expensive for kids who use Plant Drive Park

While the council was unanimous in its support for the project, residents had questions about it.

Mike Evans, whose daughter, a Palm Beach Gardens High sophomore, plays softball at Plant Drive Park, said he thought the meeting that "selling the park to developers is bad idea." He said the park is used by many and its basketball courts are often filled with players.

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Evans noted that the non-around the high school is among the poorest communities in the city.

"(Hockey) is not affordable for the kids in that area," Evans said. "Where are they going to go? This needs to be done in a nonprofit way."

Jack Ryan, a Gardens High senior, practices his curling skills on a sheet of ice at Plant Drive Park in Palm Beach Gardens, Feb. 4, 2020. Curling is amongst the Palm Beach County's large Scottish population, and is a sport that is growing in popularity in Palm Beach County.
Lauren Ferguson | Staff Photo

After the meeting, Evans said he wasn't surprised by the vote of approval and he isn't completely against the project.

However, he wants the Amanda Buckley memorial to move to Palm Beach Gardens Park and the school's softball facilities to be upgraded, saying their field is "in ruin."

Evans said he noticed that baseball facilities in the city are well-equipped, while softball is often neglected.

"It's frustrating that they look at girls' sports and don't care," Evans said.

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Gardens ice rink complex to host hockey, figure skating, curling

The Jupiter Sinus at Plant Drive Park in Palm Beach Gardens, Oct. 8, 2019. Jane Musselman

Wayne Gretzky, perhaps the greatest player in National Hockey League history and a resident of Palm Beach County, has expressed interest in coming to host the Gretzky Hockey School. Gretzky's son is in line and had his son, Ty.

The sports complex will support a variety of ice sports, from youth hockey, figure skating, public skating and adult leagues to curling and shuffleboard. The foundation said in a prepared statement that it hopes to sell a third NHL sized ice rink at some point.

The project also comes with corporate and private partners, including Palm Beach Gardens based Carter, Lacey Robbins and the Robbins Family Foundation; the Florida Panthers NHL team; the Hospital for Special Surgery in West Palm Beach; and UPP insurance brokerage.

In terms of financing, the group has the backing of Jupiter, a privately held investment bank, according to Winter.

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Foundation director calls Palm Beach Gardens ice rink complex 'passion project'

Jack Ryan leans, shows damaged by erosion in Jupiter Inlet Colony
Lauren Ferguson | Staff Photo | Jane Musselman covers Palm Beach County and the Palm Beach Gardens City Council.

Winter stated for the first time at a meeting, thanks to his parents who opened up a rink for the suburbs of St. Louis, through a nonprofit that started called "Jiffies Athletic Association." It now runs three rinks in the St. Louis area.

Ben he has four young boys of his own who all play hockey. He wants to pay the gift of a nonby ice rink forward.

"This endeavor has been a passion project since inception," said Winter, who is president of the foundation board. "We are extremely driven on it knowing that thousands of kids are going to benefit."

Winter, who lives in unincorporated northern Palm Beach County, plans to offer discounted public skating rates to Palm Beach Gardens residents. He expects to hire 70 to ten people to work at the facility, whether the positions are part or full time.

The ice rink will be the only facility of its kind in northern Palm Beach County, said Winter, who noted that interest in playing hockey has soared since the Florida Panthers placed in the Stanley Cup Final in 2019.

The only other ice rink in Palm Beach County are Palm Beach Skate Zone at Lake Worth Casino, Boca Raton Ice House and Boca Ice Center, the Jupiter Sinus, Cooper Park Florida Mega Rink and Palm Beach Ice.

"The only constraint we have is we need ice rinks," Winter said. "As a young dad, I say anyone that does is a dearth of ice rinks is (also) sports is an inferior, sorry, sorry."

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