

## **Indoor Tennis Court Facility Proposal Adjacent to Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena**

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Turnagain Community Council (TCC) was provided information on the Alaska Tennis Association's (ATA) proposal to develop Alaska's first public Indoor Tennis Court Facility adjacent to Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena — which included the funding request of \$7.2 M to the Alaska State Legislature for the project — at our February 7, 2013, TCC meeting.

ATA representatives discussed the benefits of an indoor tennis facility at our TCC meeting. It would: allow the public to learn and play tennis more affordably, without having to join a private athletic club; benefit high school tennis teams in Anchorage and around the state for tournament play; and allow for the opportunity to play tennis year-round. *Meeting attendees seemed to be in agreement that a proposal for a public indoor tennis court facility in Anchorage would be a popular, well-used recreational asset in our community.*

**Based on the understanding that the indoor tennis court facility proposal was in the initial planning stages, and more details on the project as well as responses to questions and concerns raised at the meeting would be provided to TCC (our June 6<sup>th</sup> meeting was discussed at the time), TCC voted 10-Yes; 4-No on a motion to initially support the concept of an Indoor Tennis Court Facility in West Anchorage at our February meeting.**

**As stated above numerous QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS were expressed during TCC's February 7<sup>th</sup> meeting — and by Turnagain residents since the project proposal was announced. These issues/questions merit detailed analysis and responses before the approximately 8 to 10 million-dollar project receives full funding and approval by applicable Municipal commissions and departments; they include:**

- **Removal of Existing Parking Areas**
- **Traffic Flow Issues**
- **Impacts on WNL Roadway Aesthetics & Buffering**
- **No Rationale for Two Basketball Half-Courts**
- **Impacts on Treed Landscaping Along Western Edge of Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena**
- **Conflict with West High School/Romig Middle School 2010 Master Plan**
- **Snow Storage Impacts**
- **No Room for Expansion**
- **Future of Bonnie Cusack Outdoor Ice Rink**
- **Current Legislative & Municipal Bond Funding for Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena**

### **QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS ASSOCIATED WITH LOCATING AN INDOOR TENNIS COURT FACILITY ADJACENT TO THE DEMPSEY ANDERSON ICE ARENA:**

- **REMOVAL OF EXISTING PARKING AREAS:** Because TCC sees an indoor tennis court facility as likely becoming a very popular recreational venue that would draw users from all over the city — and includes a proposal for a 300-seat bleacher capacity — the proposed location perpendicular to Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena may not be an appropriate location due to parking constraints at this site:

- At various times during the week — and especially on weekends — the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena is heavily used, filling the areas now available for parking at the site. It is questionable whether the existing parking would accommodate vehicles for both ice rink and tennis recreational facilities — especially if high school or organizational tennis tournaments would be held during the same time the ice arena is sponsoring activities. IN ADDITION...
- In preliminary design plans, *it appears areas currently used for ice arena parking would be substantially reduced* by the development of the tennis facility.
- ATA did not provide any information regarding the reduction of existing ice arena parking and how that would impact Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena users, nor if/how substantially reduced parking could adequately accommodate ice arena **and** tennis court facility users.

**Based on current design plans for an indoor tennis facility at Dempsey, the potential lack of adequate parking to serve users of both recreational facilities during peak usage times — especially since current parking would be substantially reduced at the proposed location — needs to be addressed. If the tennis courts are built at the Dempsey site, at minimum, a Site Management Plan should be a requirement of approval of the proposed project, so that large attendance events do not occur at the same time at both facilities.**

- **TRAFFIC FLOW ISSUES:** Turnagain residents who drive W. Northern Lights Blvd. (WNL) between Minnesota Dr. and Lois Dr. are very familiar with the intensity of ingress/egress traffic flow issues in this short, heavily-used, one-way stretch of a major arterial street. Additional traffic generated by use of a new indoor tennis court facility with a 300 seating capacity during high school or other organizational tournament events in this already high-traffic area will add to traffic flow/safety issues.
  - There are currently six access points on the north side and five on the south side in this roughly one block of WNL. Existing businesses creating high traffic flow include Carrs/Safeway grocery store and gas station, Big Corner Shell gas station and car wash, Spenard Post Office and Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena.
  - To add to the traffic flow complexities in this short distance, many vehicles coming out from the access points north of WNL are crossing the two thru-lanes to get to the left-only turn lane for access onto Lois Dr.; and many times, drivers in the far left lane who do not want to turn are merging to the right into a thru-lane at the same time.

**Based on existing traffic flow problems on W. Northern Lights Blvd in the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena area, it is questionable whether developing an indoor tennis court facility that has the potential to generate a significant amount of traffic during tournament events is an appropriate location for the facility. ATA acknowledged at the TCC meeting that traffic IS AN ISSUE, that it “does not have all the answers,” and that a TRAFFIC STUDY would have to be done. Before the project proceeds any further, a Traffic Impact Study should be conducted to fully access the potential traffic impacts of this proposal and determine its suitability at this location.**

- **IMPACTS ON WNL ROADWAY AESTHETICS & TREE BUFFERING:** Along the southern part of the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena property, there is a naturally-tree area that serves as an aesthetic buffer between the existing Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena and Bonnie Cusack Ice Rink facilities/parking lot, and WNL (see photos below).
  - Preliminary design plans **include two basketball half-courts as well as a Fire Access Lane**. The basketball half-courts would add an additional 36 feet or so of length to the south side of the building, which, **along with the proposed Fire Access Lane (width unknown) running along the west and south sides of the structure**, locates the facility project right up against the southern edge of the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena property.
  - If the proposed indoor tennis court facility plans eliminated the two basketball half-courts and the Fire Access Lane, the project would necessitate the cutting/clearing of MOST of that buffer. With the additional 36 feet of two basketball half-courts and the Fire Access Lane running on south of the building, it appears that essentially ALL of the treed buffer would be cleared and built on (discussed more fully below).
  - ATA stated at the TCC meeting that the building would be a steel-fabricated structure. The aesthetics of a steel building along WNL replacing a nicely wooded buffer would degrade the visual experience of both motor and non-motor users along this busy, major road entering the Turnagain neighborhood.



Above & next page: Existing naturally-treed aesthetic visual buffer along WNL south of Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena and Bonnie Cusack Outdoor Ice Rink facilities and parking lot.

Below left: Existing naturally-treed aesthetic visual buffer along WNL south of Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena and Bonnie Cusack Outdoor Ice Rink facilities and parking lot.

Below right: view from parking lot looking south.



Turnagain prides itself on the aesthetics of the neighborhood, including the section of W. Northern Lights Blvd. that runs through our area. Due to the impacts on the naturally-treed buffer, if this indoor tennis court facility is not relocated to a more suitable location, the project design should be modified to 1) **ELIMINATE** the two basketball half-courts on the south side of the building; 2) **ELIMINATE** the Fire Access Lane; and 3) **RETAIN** some of the existing naturally-wooded buffering between the metal building tennis court structure and the sidewalk/road along WNL as well as **ADD** landscaped tree planting on the south side of the structure. TCC would request that we be able to collaborate with ATA on the design and footprint of the building to ensure appropriate buffering and aesthetics integral to the project.

- **NO RATIONALE FOR TWO BASKETBALL HALF-COURTS:** As stated above, current design plans include the construction of two basketball half-courts at the south end of the building.
  - ATA did not provide TCC any information or rationale as to why an indoor tennis court facility needs to include two basketball half-courts. Unlike the lack of any public indoor tennis courts in Anchorage, there are numerous indoor basketball courts available to the public —without membership or user fees — throughout the city.
  - Including two basketball half-courts to the indoor tennis court facility would have a direct result of creating MORE PARKING DEMANDS at the site and adding MORE USER VEHICLE TRAFFIC traveling to this public recreational complex. As mentioned above, parking and traffic are major concerns associated with this project proposal.
  - Also previously discussed is the impact to the naturally-wooded area serving as an aesthetic buffer along WNL that would be destroyed to accommodate the courts.

At the TCC meeting, it was recommended that ATA **DELETE the proposal for two basketball half-courts from the indoor tennis court facility,** if located at the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena location, due to traffic and parking impacts associated with these non-tennis-related sports facilities — as well as impacts on the existing naturally-treed along WNL.



- **IMPACTS OF INDOOR TENNIS COURT FIRE ACCESS LANE ON TREED LANDSCAPING ALONG WESTERN EDGE OF DEMPSEY ANDERSON ICE ARENA:** Along the western boundary of the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena property (adjacent to a chain link fence separating it from the Lutheran Church of Hope property) are areas of mature evergreen trees that appear to be part of the landscaping installed when the ice arena was built in 1985 (see photos below).<sup>[7]</sup>

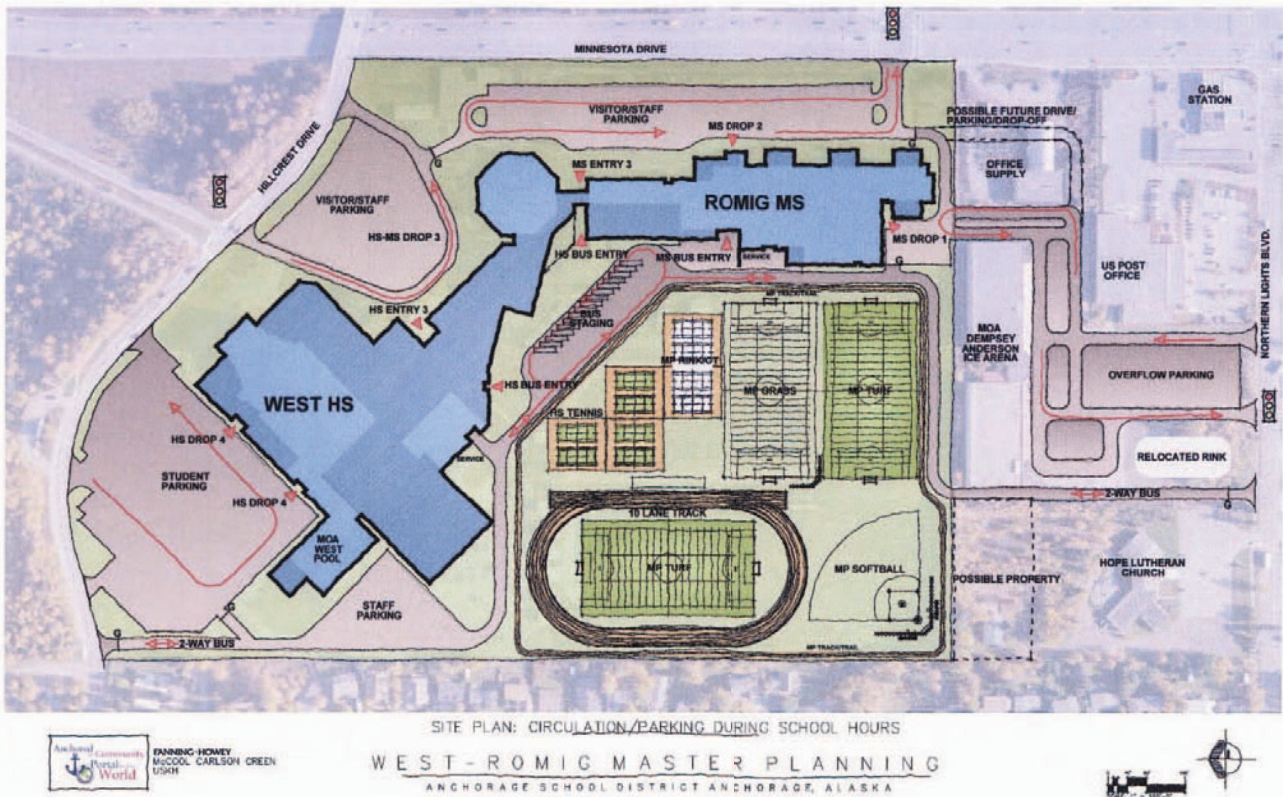


- Based on preliminary design plans, the footprint of a proposed indoor tennis court facility **Fire Access Lane** along the west side of the structure — right up to the west side of the Dempsey property boundary — would completely eliminate this mature landscaping, which likely was a site design requirement when the ice arena was built.

**Due to impacts on mature treed-landscaping along the western boundary of the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena facility, if this indoor tennis court facility is not relocated to a potentially more suitable location, the project design should be 1) reassessed to determine if the Fire Access Lane is a necessary part of the project; and 2) ATA should collaborate with TCC on the design and footprint of the all project-associated developments to ensure RETENTION of ALL existing landscaping at the ice arena facility site — including the trees adjacent to the chain link fence along the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena western property boundary.**

- **CONFLICT WITH WEST/ROMIG 2010 MASTER PLAN:** In addition to a conflict with the existing landscaping along the western boundary of the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena and the naturally-wooded buffer along W. Northern Lights Blvd., the location of the indoor tennis court facility, including the Fire Access Lane, conflicts with recommendations in the West High School and Romig Middle School 2010 Master Plan regarding the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena property.
  - Under the Site Access Section of the West/Romig Master Plan (page 80), it states, “The Master Plan includes a number of options to develop a mid-block intersection on Northern Lights Boulevard... This controlled intersection would provide access to the school via improved drives at Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena for westbound traffic.” It goes on to provide the following recommendation: “Develop a new access drive just west of the mid-block intersection to provide dedicated bus egress and entry and access to the bus staging area.”

- A recommendation under the Site Circulation Section of the West/Romig Master Plan (page 81), states, “Improve the drives and parking at Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena so that they provide an additional student drop-off area for Romig Middle School...Cooperation with the Municipality of Anchorage regarding the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena site...may be necessary to fully maximize the use of this additional campus access point.”
- The West/Romig Master Plan “Site Plan: Circulation/Parking During School Hours” (page 86) shows a 2-Way Bus Lane along the western boundary of the Dempsey Ice Arena property. It also shows relocation of the outdoor ice rink to the same area as the indoor tennis court structure is proposed to be built in its preliminary site design plan. (See West/Romig 2010 Master Plan Site Plan on page 6).



**Coordination/discussion/considerations need to take place between ATA, the Municipality of Anchorage Parks & Traffic Departments, TCC, the Anchorage School District and West/Romig school staff regarding the inherent conflicts that the proposed indoor tennis court facility project poses with West/Romig Master Plan site and circulation recommendations involving the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena property.** (Please note that TCC has not endorsed the access and circulation proposals in the West/Romig 2010 Master Plan and has expressed concerns with these proposals because of W. Northern Lights Blvd. traffic flow issues similar to those stated above in this letter.)



- **SNOW STORAGE IMPACTS:** Part of the existing parking lot at Dempsey is used for snow storage during winter months; the inside of the outdoor ice rink is also being used for snow storage (see photos below).
  - Based on preliminary design plans, it appears the proposed indoor tennis court facility would completely eliminate the outdoor rink and encroach on a significant portion of the parking lot currently used for snow storage during winter months.
  - TCC assumes it would be much more expensive for the Municipal Parks Dept. to haul away snow from this recreational complex area than to store it onsite, as is the current practice.

**Based on the current design plans that would eliminate the outdoor ice rink and a significant portion of the parking area currently used for snow storage, snow storage impacts, including the costs associated to haul snow off-site, need to be addressed.**



Above: Current Snow Storage at Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena southern area of parking lot.

Below: Current Snow Storage in Bonnie Cusack Ice Rink directly south of Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena



- **NO ROOM FOR EXPANSION:** Because TCC sees an indoor tennis court facility as becoming a very popular recreational venue in Anchorage, a very valid point was brought up at our meeting: the proposal to build Alaska's first indoor tennis court facility next to the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena leaves NO ROOM FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ADDITIONAL COURT FACILITIES AT THE SAME LOCATION.
  - Current design plans for the proposed project squeeze this facility between Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena and the edge of the property butting up to W. Northern Lights Blvd. It already necessitates removal of the Bonnie Cusack Outdoor Ice Rink, a portion of the parking lot, and all current, naturally-wooded buffering along WNL (see buffer discussion on pages 2 & 3).
  - There is no room for expansion at this location, to maximize the benefit of having Municipal indoor tennis courts all in one facility and at one location to accommodate future city growth and usage demands. As one TCC member put it at our February meeting, the location may be too small for need: "It looks like ATA is trying to fit a large foot into a too-small shoe."
  - Developing six indoor tennis courts at the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena location, then at some point in the future, constructing a completely separate facility to provide additional indoor courts would NOT provide the best cost/benefit to ATA or the Municipality.

**Looking long-term, ATA and the Municipality should look at potential alternative locations to develop a public indoor tennis court facility that could accommodate future city growth that likely would generate increases future demand for more than six public-use indoor courts.**

- **FUTURE OF BONNIE CUSACK OUTDOOR ICE RINK:** The Bonnie Cusack Memorial Outdoor Ice Rink at Dempsey, which has been inoperable due to lack of repair funding, would be directly impacted by the addition of the indoor tennis facility, as the conceptual design presented to TCC shows the facility footprint overlaying part of the outdoor rink footprint.
  - The outdoor rink has been used for additional onsite parking and snow storage. TCC has been told that is because no funding had been put toward repair and maintenance of this facility.
  - The outdoor rink has now been removed from the Dempsey site.
  - The rinks at Mulcahy will be reconstructed this summer and will be renamed in honor of Bonnie Cusack.

**TCC views the resolution of the future of the Bonnie Cusack Outdoor Ice Rink between the Cusack family and Parks and Recreation Dept. as an appropriate way to handle the memory of a long-time, community hockey supporter. However, this does not address the issue that the outdoor rink area provided additional onsite parking and snow storage for the Dempsey facility and the addition of the indoor tennis facility developed over part of the outdoor rink site area will reduce areas for parking and snow storage.**



- **DEMPSEY ICE ARENA LEGISLATIVE & MUNICIPAL BOND FUNDING:** Previous funding has been allocated to the Dempsey Ice Arena facility to upgrade this area:
  - 2012 Legislative Funding — \$250,000 to fund exterior upgrades, including parking lot expansion and improved lighting. To TCC’s knowledge, none of these upgrades to the existing ice arena facility have yet been done.
  - The fact that some of this funding was for parking lot expansion for the existing ice arena indicates a problem with adequate parking BEFORE ANY ADDITIONAL FACILITY WAS PROPOSED FOR THE SITE.
  - 2013 Municipal Parks & Recreation Bond — \$800,000 was approved by voters to fund park facility improvements, including Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena. According to the Parks Dept., first priority for that funding will go to Oceanview Park and Pop Carr Park. Once the scope of work and costs will be determined for those two parks, Dempsey will receive funding. (Nowhere on the Bond did the language include funding for an indoor tennis court facility.) Based on a \$10M grant application initially submitted by the Municipality to the Legislature for FY2014 State funding, the Dempsey Ice Arena is in need of deferred maintenance renovations and the applications included an extensive list of projects.
  - 2013 Legislative Funding for Project ‘80s — \$37M was approved to upgrade facilities, with an indeterminate amount for the Dempsey Ice Arena or a new indoor tennis court facility.

**TCC distinctly remembers Mayor Sullivan stating during his first campaign for office that a high priority for his administration would be to focus on care and maintenance of our existing parks and recreation facilities before spending money on new ones. Clearly, the existing Dempsey Ice Arena facility should fall into this category.**

**TCC would request that no legislative or Municipal bond funding go toward the addition of an indoor tennis court facility until the above issues have been resolved AND all necessary renovations/repairs of the EXISTING infrastructure at Dempsey Ice Arena be addressed.**

### **Turnagain Community Council Request:**

A public indoor tennis court facility should be located in an appropriate location within Anchorage to best serve not only the users of the proposed facility, but also other surrounding uses (such as those provided at the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena and West/Romig schools), the neighborhood where it is located, and the community at-large. If the proposed indoor tennis court facility is located in Turnagain adjacent to the ice arena, it is imperative that efforts be made in a collaborative manner to ensure the facility is a positive addition to our community, rather than contribute to already existing problems in our neighborhood.

Before planning for an indoor tennis court at the Dempsey Ice Arena property continues any further, **TCC would request a meeting(s) with relevant parties to meet and discuss how the above-identified concerns/issues associated with this proposal can appropriately be addressed. TCC has requested Sen. Berta Gardner and Rep. Harriet Drummond, who represent the Dempsey area within Turnagain, to facilitate this effort, on behalf of TCC. Support from the Municipality of Anchorage and all other relevant parties on this request would be very much appreciated.**

