

## Section 8: Irondequoit Community Center



## Irondequoit Community Center

The concept of a comprehensive community center, when coupled with the updated master plan, will provide momentum for the town's continuing revitalization. This section illustrates how a community center would fit into the long-range redevelopment strategies identified within this master plan.

### Meeting a Demand

There is no question that the Town of Irondequoit is a desirable community in which to live and work. Irondequoit offers a quality of life that is rich with cultural, educational, recreational, and social opportunities. However, as Section 7 of this document shows, Irondequoit continues to face an ever-growing sophistication and demand for cultural and leisure indoor space.

For years, town leaders have been forced to engender creative solutions to address declining space availability and/or program demands that surpass the quality or carrying capacity of the space available. For example, cooperative agreements with local schools are able to address some programming needs, and staff at the Pinegrove facility have become accustomed to working around the deficiencies and covering up the faults of that building and grounds. Unfortunately, none of these efforts are able to meet the clear need for expanded recreational and meeting space, as well as a desire to create a place within the town that encourages interaction between all age groups.

The following paragraphs are intended to familiarize the reader with community center studies and related initiatives in the town. It is a general overview only and cannot possibly reflect all that has transpired to date. However, it should reflect the significant efforts made to identify and satisfy a long-standing and growing demand for a centralized indoor facility that meets the athletic, cultural, and social needs of the community:

Although the idea for a community center predates the 1985 Master Plan, the idea was specifically referenced in the master plan's Titus Avenue/Municipal Center Planning Strategy Area section. The plan identified expansion program opportunities at the Town Hall campus, including a town-wide park and a youth center.

In 2002, the Town commissioned a facilities feasibility study to assess the conditions and needs of the various Town facilities, including the town hall, highway garage,

libraries, Pinegrove Senior Citizens Center, and the overall town campus grounds. The study included an analysis of the development of a community center on the Town Hall campus. The study concluded that a community center could be accommodated on the Town Hall campus, provided additional land was acquired by the Town to relocate the Highway garage, either on- or off-site.

Following the feasibility study, a community center project was proposed for the Town Hall campus. The proposed building program consisted of approximately 51,000 square feet of indoor space and included the following facilities/amenities: senior and youth centers; indoor swimming pool; gymnasium with raised running track; health / fitness room; aerobics room; theater space; crafts room; multi-use space; and administrative offices. The project's construction was not initiated, largely due to the costs of the facility. At the time, estimated construction costs for all components ranged from the initial \$8.9 million estimate to the \$11.6 million final estimate.

More recently, a citizens task force – divided into program, finance, and site committees - recommended that the Town lease space at the Kings Park office complex on East Ridge Road. This plan was brought before the Town voters in a permissive referendum in 2008 and subsequently defeated.

As a result of that vote, the Town committed over \$500,000 to make critical but necessary upgrades to the Pinegrove facility that will make it serviceable, if still inadequate, for the next five years until a suitable and permanent solution can be found.

In November 2006, the Irondequoit Public Library Board of Trustees recommended that both branch libraries be consolidated into a new facility near the center of town.

As part of the process of updating the master plan, a community center was extensively discussed during several public meetings. In addition, the Parks and Recreation component of the master plan (Section 7) included a survey with questions regarding the development of a community center.

The survey indicated that a large majority of the respondents, 74 percent, supported the construction of a new community center. In addition, a similar majority of those who responded (78 percent) indicated that they would be willing to pay a user fee that would help offset operation and maintenance costs. Approximately 60 percent of town residents who responded to the survey reported using facilities located outside of town. Many of the programs and activities used by those respondents are typically offered as part of a

community center. The facilities that were stated as being the most used included the Bay View (Webster), Northwest (Greece), and Maplewood (Rochester) YMCAs, as well as various private health and fitness clubs.

### Next Steps

Building on the above-mentioned work, a feasibility study should be conducted to:

- Determine/confirm the nature of community arts, recreational, and social needs that might be housed in a community center. Please note that a needs assessment should not be done to collect awareness data on the proposed facility, as sufficient documentation exists in this plan and elsewhere.
- Study and recommend the most advantageous means of financing the facility.

Based on the findings of this master plan, a community center could best be a catalyst for community renewal if the following conditions are met:

- The community center should be a single complex that represents the community and its residents' present and future needs. A single complex offers the most efficient administration, public ease-of-use, and marketing of programs and services.
- It should furthermore be harmonious with the landscape and prevailing architecture. The site and building design should incorporate sustainable strategies to minimize environmental impacts, maximize efficiency, and reduce long-term operating costs. The facility should not appear institutional, but rather attain an ambiance of comfort, hospitality, vibrancy, and refinement while serving its programming needs.
- The facility should contain both dedicated and multiple use areas specifically designed to meet the needs of the arts, library, teens, seniors, civic groups, individual and group physical fitness, and other self-improvement recreational activities. A centrally-located community center would be an ideal site for a relocated Town library, providing opportunities for synergy and programming across varied age groups.

### Location

A master plan, by definition, deals primarily with the best use of a community's land. This is especially important in Irondequoit which has little available land for development. All parcels must be used wisely.

The process of updating Irondequoit’s master plan provided guidance for locating a new community center:

- New civic, nonprofit, and other tax exempt properties – including a community center – should not be located to sites on or with immediate access to East Ridge Road. The East Ridge Road corridor should be developed in a way that maximizes tax base growth. The town should work with existing tax exempt entities, including the library, to relocate to central locations.
- The Town Hall campus – with DPW facilities relocated elsewhere - offers the optimal site for a community center. The Town Hall campus provides a central location, convenient vehicular access, shared parking, architecturally significant buildings, public ownership, and no loss of tax base. It already hosts numerous community events. The conceptual site plan at the end of this section illustrates how the Town Hall campus location could accommodate new community center facilities.

Other possible locations that have been mentioned in the past, such as the 590/Plateau site, have been evaluated as part of the planning process and found to have higher and better uses for the town. Additionally, this site is owned by multiple jurisdictional entities and it may include development and use stipulations as it is also the last remaining site in the County that can be utilized for storm debris storage. Alternative sites, including the 590/plateau site, are discussed elsewhere in this plan.

Sites that are currently unavailable may become options in the future, or conditions may change, necessitating a reconsideration of existing sites that currently appear less-than-ideal. All potential locations for a community center should be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Site size and availability
  - a. Open area and expandability
  - b. Centrality (geographic relationship to town)
  - c. Ownership and cost (cost to buy land; cost to develop infrastructure)
  - d. Location and amenities (proximity to compatible/appropriate uses)
2. Transportation and circulation
  - a. Vehicular access (major roads versus neighborhood streets)
  - b. Pedestrian linkages (feasibility of access)

3. Neighborhood impact
  - a. Scale impact (are there other civic/community buildings and uses nearby?)
  - b. Traffic impact (can existing street infrastructure support new demand generated by a community center?)
  - c. Site displacements (loss of playing fields, general recreation/parkland, green space)
  - d. Relocation strategy
4. Intangibles
  - a. Prominence of location
  - b. Ability to share/enhance existing facilities (parking, public venues)

### Relocation of the DPW Facility

It is important to note that constructing a community center on the Town Hall Campus is dependent upon the relocation of the DPW facility. Various structural and programming analysis' of the current structure have indicated that costly upgrades, expansion and modifications are required in order for the Department to continue to function efficiently and provide dependable, high-quality service to the Town. Topographic and sub-soil conditions at the facility's current location present various obstacles for new or expanded structures according to engineering and geotechnical reports.



*The DPW's main garage fronts Kings Highway and has been expanded over the years as needs arose. Continuity among departments in the building and flexible space is lacking.*

The ideal location of the DPW facility would be the "Plateau" site (see Section 6 - Waterfront) adjacent to Route 590. However, if this site cannot be utilized, specific criteria should be met to locate the DPW facility to an appropriate location. These criteria include:

- A minimum area of four acres for structures and access roads with additional space for expansion if required in the future.
- Site should be publically-owned to the greatest extent feasible to minimize taking additional developable lands off of Town tax rolls.

- Infrastructure readily available on site or within close proximity.
- Preferred location would be near commercial, industrial or high-density residential areas and be adequately buffered from adjacent uses.
- Access to arterial roads (non-residential roads)
- Limited environmental constraints

### What about a YMCA?

Over the years, and especially during the comprehensive master plan process, the Town has pursued the development of a private or non-profit facility. Residents and town leaders have been particularly interested in the idea of a YMCA branch in the Town of Irondequoit.

The map image on this page illustrates that several existing YMCA branches are located within 5 miles of the Town of Irondequoit. According to the YMCA’s membership records, Irondequoit residents are currently well served by existing locations, particularly the Bay View (Webster) and Maplewood (City of Rochester) branches. The YMCA recently completed a \$1.5 million aquatic center at the Bay View location. YMCA’s current and future plans include a \$5 million capital improvement program at the Maplewood branch, which will significantly enhance amenities and programming.

Given the organization’s short and long-term programming and capital investment goals and the town’s proximity to and service from existing YMCA facilities, it is very unlikely that the YMCA would construct a branch location in Irondequoit. However, future partnership opportunities for programming and/or operations between the Town and YMCA may be possible and should continue to be explored.

