

# Editorial: Rec Center to open at last

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After years of talking about how the city should have an indoor rec facility, the Saratoga Springs Recreation Center is about to open its doors on Vanderbilt Avenue between Lincoln Avenue and Worth Street. A public open house is scheduled for 7 p.m. Tuesday. We encourage you to check it out.

It's an impressive facility, affordable and, we hope, a place city residents will really use.

When it comes to covering annual expenses, the facility is projected to become almost self-sufficient as a result of rentals and user fees. But the city must balance the need to raise money through rentals with the main purpose of the facility — to provide an indoor place for residents to play.

Who gets to use the facility, when and for how long has been mapped out, though not set in concrete. There will be tiered fees for non-city residents and for nonprofit and business rentals.

School district residents who live outside the city limits are, at this point at least, being offered free access for things like after-school use of the facility. When the Saratoga Springs City School District (which includes much of Wilton and Greenfield and a bit of Malta) deeded the property to the city in the late 1970s, it was with the restriction that the land be used for recreational purposes for school district residents. However, how to apply that deed restriction to use of the facility should be reviewed, since construction and operation costs are the responsibility of the city, not the school district.

That said, it's about time Saratoga Springs had a facility like this — for citizens of all ages.

For at least 15 years — probably longer — City Council leaders have talked about the value of an indoor Saratoga Springs Recreation Center. Pursuit of the project was perennially placed on a back burner to avoid the expense, while the city was renting space for its rec programs in Ballston Spa, Wilton and the state-owned Lake Avenue Armory, before it became a military museum.

Also, even when City Council members agreed on the concept of an indoor rec facility, they couldn't agree on where to put it. The two most pursued spots over the years were out near the city ice rinks on Weibel Avenue, which virtually no one could walk to, and at or near the West Side Recreation Field, where limited space and parking were concerns. Then-Public Works Commissioner Tom McTygue was stymied by his colleagues time and again when he tried to get something built for minimal expense.

Finally, the City Council of two terms ago — before Mayor Scott Johnson was elected — borrowed \$6.5 million for the specific purpose of building a rec facility.

Coming into office hamstrung by that commitment, Johnson, amid continuing controversy, did the only responsible thing: He got it done.

The location could be debated for another decade or two, along with the specifics of the structure and other details, with the end result being a loan and nothing to show for it.

There's no perfect place and no one correct blueprint for a rec facility. But the South Side rec field was a good choice: the field is underused, it is within walking distance for hundreds of residents and it's a hop and a skip from a CDTA bus route. The facility will offer some things the YMCA doesn't — like a racquetball court — and, unlike the Y, it is publicly owned.

Saratoga Springs focuses, rightfully so, on tourists, horses, gala-goers, entertainment and business. It's nice to be turning attention to recreation devoted especially, though not exclusively, for kids.