

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Park Advisory Commission

FROM: Hillary Hanzel, Landscape Architect  
Josh Landefeld, Parks & Recreation Services Manager

DATE: November 15, 2022

SUBJECT: Resolution to recommend submitting a Spark grant application to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Grants Management for improvements at the Buhr Park Ice Arena

Attached for your review and action is a resolution recommending the submission of a grant application to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Grants Management (MDNRGM) for accessibility and sustainability improvements to the Buhr Park Ice Arena.

### GRANT DESCRIPTION:

The Michigan Spark Grants are a \$65 million grant program to help local communities that want to create, renovate, or redevelop public recreation. Administered by the DNR, Michigan Spark Grants will support projects that provide safe, accessible, public recreation facilities and spaces to improve people's health, introduce new recreation experiences, build on existing park infrastructure, and make it easier for people to enjoy both indoor and outdoor recreation. Individual grant amounts – ranging from a minimum of \$100,000 to a maximum of \$1 million – will be distributed in three rounds beginning in January of 2023.

### BACKGROUND:

The Buhr Park ice arena is an outdoor covered rink, and one of two ice arenas owned by the City Parks, the other being Veterans Memorial Park ice arena. The Buhr Park arena is open November through February (weather permitting) and offers public ice skating, drop-in hockey and rental hours, and provides locker rooms, vending machines, restrooms and skate rentals and sharpening services.

The facility is located in the southwest part of the city which is characterized by higher racial diversity and lower median incomes. It is located adjacent to the Hikone neighborhood which is one of the Ann Arbor Housing Commission public housing communities, as well as the Hikone Community Center operated by the Community Action Network which provides support to families in need.

The Buhr Park ice arena functions as a neighborhood gathering place providing outdoor recreation opportunities at low cost during Michigan's long winter season. The ice arena has experienced increased usage since the beginning of

the COVID-19 pandemic when community members sought ways to recreate and gather safely outdoors.

The Buhr Park ice arena original floor and refrigeration plant were constructed in 1991 and the chiller system is an indirect R22 system. R22 refrigeration systems were constructed from the early 1970s through approximately the year 2000, and were known for low energy usage and their capability to produce high quality ice surfaces. However, their use was effectively eliminated when the EPA determined that R-22 is a major contributor of greenhouse gas emissions and ozone depletion, and instituted regulations to curtail its use. As of January 1, 2020, U.S. production and import of R-22 ended, forcing existing systems to use recycled or stockpiled sources. The EPA noted that supply will decline over the next few years, and prices are likely to increase, making planning for replacing these systems important. While switching to alternative refrigerants can significantly improve energy efficiency, it necessitates retrofitting or replacing equipment at significant cost.

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Applying for a Michigan Department of Natural Resources Spark Grant would provide the necessary capital to replace the entire refrigeration system, significantly reducing energy consumption and operating costs. Additionally, as part of the refrigeration replacement project, the City would undertake additional improvements related to accessibility and operations. This would include work related to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, as well as going beyond those minimums towards the principals of Universal Design. The arena will be evaluated for opportunities to improve access for all to this important public ice arena. Additional improvements such as adding rubber flooring around the rink to better accommodate circulation on skates will be considered as well.

The preliminary concept for improving the Buhr Park ice arena include:

- Demolition of old refrigeration plant and new refrigeration plant \$830,000 to \$1,210,000
- New dasher boards and accessories \$ 250,000 to \$ 300,000
- Rubber Flooring around rink \$150,000 to \$ 225,000
- ADA and Universal Design Improvements \$65,000 to \$100,000
- Project contingency (20%) \$250,000 to \$350,000
- Engineering fees \$120,000 to \$165,000

Based on the scope above, the total cost of the project could vary between \$1,665,000 and \$2,350,000 depending on the options chosen and market conditions at the time of bidding.

The ice arena's role as a community gathering place, its location providing recreation to underserved populations within our city, and the necessity to transition to a new refrigeration system, have all led to this being a high priority project for the Park System. Additionally, the City is currently undergoing an

ADA Accessibility Transition Plan and has made a commitment to improving accessibility across the park system. Therefore, this project will combine necessary mechanical/refrigeration infrastructure work with improvements that will enhance the accessibility and operations of the facility.

Construction on the ice arena improvements could commence in spring of 2024.

**BUDGET/FISCAL IMPACT:**

The Spark Grant allows for an award of up to \$1,000,000 which would significantly ease the burden of the transfer of this refrigeration system. Additional funding beyond the Spark Grant award amount would be drawn from a combination of fund balance and the approved FY2023 Park Maintenance and Capital Improvement budget.

**SUSTAINABILITY:**

One of the main goals identified in the current Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan is to “ensure that the park system is comprehensive, inclusive, and engaging”. To do so the plan focuses on “providing opportunities for all” and says that “engaging the full diversity of the community is a core value developed by staff, and a goal of the Sustainability Framework Plan and of the city’s organizational strategic plan.” One of the objectives is to “Renovate and maintain parks and facilities so that they comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, while striving for Universal Accessibility.” Additionally, this project would also meet the sustainability goal of promoting active living & learning by providing recreational opportunities the improve quality of life for all members of our community.

RESOLUTION TO RECOMMEND SUBMITTING A SPARK GRANT  
APPLICATION TO THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL  
RESOURCES GRANTS MANAGEMENT FOR IMPROVEMENTS AT THE BUHR  
PARK ICE ARENA

Whereas, The Buhr Park ice arena is an outdoor covered rink open November through February and offers public ice skating, drop-in hockey and rental hours;

Whereas, The Buhr Park ice arena functions as a neighborhood gathering place providing outdoor recreation opportunities at low cost during Michigan's long winter season;

Whereas, The ice arena has experienced increased usage since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when community members sought ways to recreate and gather safely outdoors;

Whereas, The Buhr Park ice arena refrigeration system was constructed in 1991 and the R22 refrigeration is a major contributor of greenhouse gas emissions and ozone depletion;

Whereas, The U.S. EPA has instituted regulations to curtail its use including ending production and import of R-22;

Whereas, Switching to alternative refrigerants can significantly improve energy efficiency but necessitates retrofitting or replacing equipment at significant cost;

Whereas, Applying for a Michigan Department of Natural Resources Spark Grant would provide the necessary capital to replace the entire refrigeration system, significantly reducing energy consumption and operating costs;

Whereas, The City would undertake additional improvements related to accessibility and operations at the ice arena;

Whereas, The ice arena's role as a community gathering place, its location providing recreation to underserved populations within our city, and the necessity to transition to a new refrigeration system, have all led to this being a high priority project for the Park System;

Whereas, Grants are available through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Grants Management to assist in funding improvements such as this project;

Whereas, A Spark Grant would significantly ease the burden of the transfer of this refrigeration system and additional funding would be drawn from a combination of fund balance and the approved FY2023 Park Maintenance and Capital Improvement budget;

RESOLVED, That the Park Advisory Commission recommends that City Council directs the City Administrator to apply to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Grants Management for improvements to the Buhr Park Ice Arena