

Study Projects Cost of Rink  
At Oak Ridge at \$8.8 Million

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

COUNTY – The first estimate for a skating center at Oak Ridge Park in Clark, which would replace the Warinanco Skating Center in Elizabeth, would cost \$8.8 million, according to a copy of a feasibility study recently completed for Union County and obtained by The Westfield Leader.

The report indicates, however, that the cost of labor, steel and other factors could cause that number to jump. In addition, the cost of financing was not factored, although construction management was estimated. Rink Management of Mechanicsville, Va., which performed the study, stated that the new Oak Ridge skating center would service a 10-mile area that would “produce enough revenue to offset the cost of construction.” Unlike Warinanco, which is a five-month facility open from October to March, the Oak Ridge rink would be a year-round, two-sheet facility. Warinanco has one ice surface. “A threat that faces the building of the facility is keeping construction costs in line due to having all-union labor construction projects. Due to economic climates, construction costs could increase dramatically with steel pricing and the rising cost of fuel and electric,” Rink Management reported. The report also said implementing a “green” energy efficient building could increase costs to implement such technology as well as maintenance, although energy costs would be reduced.

In addition, the report states the county is reviewing regulations that might require the skating center to be located “where the sides of the building will need to be able to open to create pavilions in the park.” “If this is required due to open space laws, this will add additional costs and operating challenges for the ice rinks during the spring and summer,” according to the report.

County officials have said the center would be part of a master plan to redevelop Oak Ridge as both a passive and active park. Oak Ridge had been a county golf course before being closed in 2009 after posting a \$400,000 deficit.

Rink Management envisions that construction on a new rink would take 10 months to complete. The report also projects that the facility could operate at a \$400,000 to \$500,000 annual profit by taking advantage of holding special events such as adult hockey, public skating and birthday parties, restaurant services, private events and pro shop rental. The center also would be home to seven highschool hockey teams that currently use Warinanco, as well as youth spring leagues and summer camps. “Any facility’s success is very dependent on a myriad of factors. The location makes this project feasible, but many steps would have to be taken to assure maximum revenue realization. Marketing, advertising, promotions, program mix, quality programs, the correct staff, and good management all play together to make a great facility,” according to the report. Rink Management estimates that annual operational costs would run in the

\$1.7-million range, \$717,000 of which would be payroll, with revenues around \$2.1 million. The report indicates that shutting one of the sheets of ice during the off-peak time from April through July could increase profits by \$100,000.

Rink Management reported that it reached out to the seven high schools and two hockey organizations that utilize Warinanco. Westfield, Scotch Plains-Fanwood, Arthur Johnson in Clark, Cranford, Jonathan Dayton in Springfield, Governor Livingston in Berkeley Heights and Summit all use the Elizabeth rink. According to the report, the high schools indicated they would look to increase ice time in the new center. They also said the proposed location is closer to their schools than Warinanco and, thus, would reduce travel time and allow practices to start earlier and go later.