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Skating club swaps land with Harvard to build new Allston facility

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 9, 2011 09:00 PM

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(Courtesy: Skating Club of Boston)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The Skating Club of Boston announced Thursday it will build a new "world-class, state-of-the art" three-rink indoor ice skating facility on Allston property near the Massachusetts Turnpike it has acquired through a land swap with Harvard University.

In a recently-finalized deal, the organization traded its current one-rink skating facility property at 1240 Soldiers Field Road and an adjacent plot it owns at 1234 Soldiers Field Road in exchange for Harvard's property at 176 Lincoln St., said the nonprofit club's executive director Doug Zeghibe.

As part of the agreement, the university will claim ownership of the current, 73-year-old rink on Soldiers Field Road and rent it back to the skating club during construction of the new skating facility. The Days Hotel on the adjacent plot will continue to operate under an existing long-term lease which expires in 2017, the director said by phone Thursday.

The two sites the skating organization traded are a combined 3.2 acres and sit between Soldiers Field Road and Western Avenue.

About a half-mile away, the 5.2-acre site at the corner of Lincoln and Everett streets currently houses a large, vacant, never-before-used building shell visible from the Mass. Pike, which runs parallel and adjacent to Lincoln Street.

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Harvard bought the property in late 2006 for \$16 million. The 450,000 square-foot building there, completed 10 years ago, was once-dubbed the Boston Tech Center. It will be demolished to make room for the new rink the skating club hopes to complete by the end 2014, Zeghibe said.

He said the new rink facility's square footage, cost and construction timeline will depend on how the community and city approval process pans out.

The organization, which celebrates its 100th anniversary next year, says it is the third-oldest skating club in the country. The club has grown significantly in recent years and is [faced with space constraints](#).

The new skating facility "will enable the club to accommodate expanded programming and increase ice time," the club said in a press release.

The organization added the new rink will "further its vision to become one of the world's leading ice skating facilities and training centers. The club's future home will accommodate unmet demands for ice time, expand the club's public offerings, and create additional opportunities for its competitive skaters."

The new facility will feature three regulation-sized rinks allowing the club to support training for competitive figure skaters, learn-to-skate programs, synchronized skating, theater on ice, recreational public skating, and hockey, the organization said.

"This expansion is long overdue. The Skating Club of Boston is excited to grow its organization while remaining part of the neighborhood it has called home for over 70 years," skating club president Joe Blount said in the announcement. "We envision that out of this new facility will come the next generation of star athletes, including U.S., World and Olympic champions. This agreement allows us to secure that future, provide more opportunities for Boston-area skaters, and expand our offerings to the community."

"We approached Harvard because 176 Lincoln Street offers us the perfect opportunity to solve our space challenges, improve access, facilitate future growth and remain in the community," he added.

Concerning the future of the two properties Harvard obtained in the land swap, spokeswoman Lauren Marshal said in an e-mail Friday, "Over the course of the next few years we will assess prospective future uses as The Skating Club of Boston continues its programming and while permitting and construction for their new location are underway. The Days Hotel will continue to operate uninterrupted under an existing long-term lease."

The university's Executive Vice President Katie Lapp said in the club's release: "We are thrilled that Harvard can play a role in ensuring that this Boston-based institution can continue to build on its nationally-recognized programming while remaining a part of the Allston-Brighton community."

She added in an e-mailed statement: "The Skating Club of Boston approached Harvard and we moved quickly with the Club to capture this opportunity, which enables them to stay in the Allston-Brighton community and expand

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their programming. The Skating Club of Boston's plans also align with our long-term goal of enlivening this important space, which has long been vacant despite efforts by previous owners and Harvard to find a suitable use."

The club's skating facility has been in the neighborhood since 1938 and continues to be the training ground for local skating enthusiasts as well as some of the nation's top figure skaters and Olympians.

In a public-private partnership with the city's parks department, the organization also manages the Boston Common Frog Pond, that provides public skating each winter. The club also manages summer recreational activities at the pond.

A decade ago, the skating club hosted the U.S. Figure Skating Championships at what was then known as the FleetCenter. The week-long, city-wide event generated an estimated \$25 million in visitor revenue for the city. The club is planning bids for additional national and international events with the TD Garden, including the 2014 U.S. Figure Skating Championships.

"The Skating Club of Boston is one of U.S. Figure Skating's oldest and most dynamic skating clubs, with a volunteer membership renowned throughout the skating world," David Raith, executive director of U.S. Figure Skating, said in the release. "We applaud them in this new venture, and look forward to their continued and significant contributions to the world of skating."

Architectural Resources Cambridge are the architects for the new rink project, the club said.

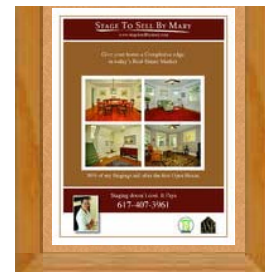
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(Courtesy: Skating Club of Boston)



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