

Port Huron council hears public's side over McMorran Pavilion purchase offers

Jackie Smith, Times Herald 11:29 a.m. EDT October 13, 2015



(Photo: Jackie Smith/Times Herald)

Though a public hearing over McMorran Pavilion purchase proposals was set for Oct. 26, some residents got their say in a little early Monday night.

After receiving proposals from both the Port Huron Minor Hockey Association and St. Clair County Community College, the McMorran Civic Center Authority last week agreed unanimously with a third-party firm's recommendation to accept SC4's offer.

During Monday's Port Huron City Council meeting, several residents shared their support for both offers.

While some, such as youngsters Nicklas and Jonathan Suisse, ages 7 and 12, asked the council's support for hockey. Others, including Marcia Haynes, of Port Huron, asked council members not to be afraid of change.

Beth Belanger, who serves on the SC4 Foundation board of directors, said her family has a history of hockey and that she's enjoyed McMorran for years. But she too called for change.

"We want to take Port Huron further ahead and advance it. The pavilion is part of this," Belanger said. "We do have the cash to buy the pavilion. We're excited about it."

SC4 offered to purchase the pavilion and McMorran Tower for \$1, utilizing the space for athletic tournaments, camps and events. Part of that deal would give the city rights to do as it wants with any future developments on land along the Black River between the fire station and 10th Street Bridge.

The Port Huron Minor Hockey Association offered \$100,000 to purchase the pavilion, with plans to maintain it as an ice hockey venue. Hockey proponents have said their activities require a facility with two sheets of ice.

Multiple speakers in public comment Monday pointed to the pavilion's history of hosting hockey in town, particularly the annual Silver Stick tournament each January, as part of the reason the facility remain available for their use.

Jason Hills, who sits on the hockey association's board, said he's volunteered for Silver Stick for more than 20 years.

He said he took issue with the amount of capital improvement funding that have been pegged to each proposal — up to \$3 million from SC4's proposal and \$415,000 for hockey. He said it wasn't an indicator of which would mean more for the community.

"The point is we don't have to put that money in because it's already an ice rink," Hills said. "Hockey's been part of Port Huron for 60-plus years, and it'd just be a crying shame to lose Silver Stick, let alone the ramifications for businesses in Port Huron."

The capital investment numbers Hills referenced came from the presentation the council received from firm Brailsford and Dunlavey — the same as the McMorran Authority heard last week.

Jason Thompson, the firm's regional vice president for the Midwest, reiterated the firm's recommendation that Port Huron go with SC4's proposal.

He said last week the SC4 plan offered greater potential for downtown development, destination value and operating performance and posed the least risk to the city.

"We think the SC4 proposal is slightly better than the hockey association's proposal," Thompson said Monday. "... The SC4's proposal has the potential to reach out into other markets. It just seems there's more diversification."

While council members thanked the firm and McMorran Authority for the effort behind the recommendation, they still had a few questions.

Councilwoman Anita Ashford asked about the Brailsford and Dunlavey's process of evaluating both SC4's and the hockey proposal, and whether some sort of compromise was considered.

It'd been determined that SC4's proposal couldn't accommodate ice needs.

Thompson said the firm attempted to bring “as many players to the table to come up with a solution.”

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