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# New Norwalk Ice Rink Skates to Approval

by Nancy Chapman 09/22/11

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At left is an artist's rendering of the proposed SoNo Ice House. At right is Eric Lind.

Photo Credit: Nancy Chapman

NORWALK, Conn. — Meryl Streep, move over. Here come [Eric Lind](#) and Ryan Hughes. The two longtime hockey players met while teaching children the sport. Now they are poised to turn a long-derelict Norwalk building into what they say will be “the best ice skating facility in Connecticut.” The plan to convert 310 [Wilson Ave.](#) into the SoNo Ice House has been working its way through permitting process since June 23. On Wednesday night, it was presented to the zoning commission and approved, with some stipulations.

The most recent use of the building was as a [movie set](#) for “[Great Hope Springs](#),” a comedy starring Streep, Tommy Lee Jones and Steve Carell. The huge warehouse was formerly used by [ShowMotion Inc.](#)

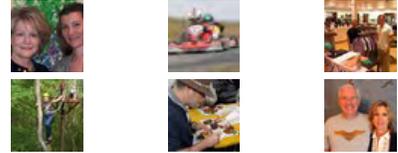
Hughes, a Stamford resident, said the location and high ceilings are part of the draw. “We looked for 2½ years, all over Fairfield County, and parts of Westchester,” he said. “This one had what we need in terms of ceiling heights and the location, being in Norwalk, the demographics of Norwalk and Fairfield County in general. There are other rinks going up, but they’re not going to have the ceiling heights and the sort of grand entrance that we’re going to have.”

Lind said that will make it “the best ice skating facility in Connecticut.” He then clarified his comment to say, “The best ice rink and training facility. Education is a key component. We don’t just sell ice, we educate kids.”

Getting through zoning was not a breeze, though, as neighbors took the lectern at the hearing to voice their concerns. That included the light, the noise and the

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traffic that would come from the facility.

Amy Jimenez, a resident of Split Rock Road, said she had recently been woken up at 2:30 a.m. by dumpsters being emptied at Grasso Construction, a neighbor to the proposed ice rink, which she said was "ridiculous." Nevertheless, she thought it was "a very interesting idea." "I'm delighted to see some reuse of this building that has been vacant for some time."

Elizabeth Penn, a Village Creek resident, said she was worried about light reflecting off the water, the possible noise and the effect of water runoff on the wildlife of Village Creek, which the property borders. "It's been a quiet area," she said.

Gerry Byrne, who lives on Lockwood Lane, spoke of a different "quality of life." "My son was the captain of the hockey team for three years. He had to go to Darien to play. That was our home rink, Darien; we never had a home game. I think it's about time quality of life came back to Norwalk in the sense that we have a hockey rink. It's a great sport, and it deserves its place here in Norwalk, it has a history here in Norwalk."

David McCarthy, secretary of the zoning commission, said the residents' concerns were taken into consideration. "We voted on the ice rink and with five or so added conditions, related to screening, placement of dumpsters, hours of operation, etc., it was approved," he said in an email. "I think the Village Creek people will be much happier with the ice rink than a rundown factory."

During the hearing, landscape architect Eric Rains said the parking lot will feature a canopy of trees, planted much more densely than zoning regulations require, and making a "park-like setting." Vegetative swales will capture storm runoff before it goes into the storm system, in effect treating it twice before it goes into the creek. Lights in the parking lot will be done with fixtures that direct downward "like dome lights," with no light leakage, and the maximum pole height of 12 feet means that the light will be hidden by the trees.

Other features include heavy insulated metal panels on the exterior to keep in noise.

Lind, who grew up in Norwalk, has a long family background in ice skating. His grandfather came here in 1958 from Canada as a Hall of Fame figure skating coach and European champion figure skating. His famous pupils include Dorothy Hamill. Lind went to the University of New Hampshire on a full hockey scholarship and played for the Pittsburgh Penguins organization. His mother was a figure skater.

"We know there is a need for a rink in Norwalk and around this area," he said. "I think it's died out, but when I was a kid. I remember Norwalk having a team and it kind of drifted off."

Hughes said the SoNo Ice House should be open next summer. Lind said, "It's going to be beautiful, a top of the line facility. We're going to have three on three training facilities; it's going to be awesome."

Contact reporter Nancy Chapman at [nchapman@TheDailyNorwalk.com](mailto:nchapman@TheDailyNorwalk.com).

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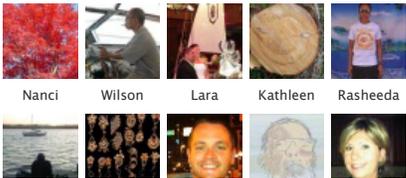
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