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City Is Lacing Up Its Skates

Plan for Bedford Stuyvesant Rink Sharpens Interest in Ice Skating

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If successful, the rink, which was built about 40 years ago, would be latest to open recently across the city.

"There's definitely growing interest... These little pop-up rinks will help generate even more interest," said Terri Levine, president of the Skating Club of New York.

The rink in Bedford Stuyvesant sits behind the headquarters of the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation at Fulton Street and Marcy Avenue. It was an element in a 1960s-era project to revitalize the neighborhood led by then-New York U.S. Sens. Robert F. Kennedy and Jacob Javits. On a recent rainy Friday afternoon, the brick ring that once contained the ice sat collecting puddles.

Locals and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who continued going there with his family after his father's 1968 death, remember a different scene. The rink was the site of an annual holiday party, where celebrities skated with local children while parents warmed themselves with coffee, hot chocolate and doughnuts.

"It was always a festive Christmas event, where a lot of the New York Giants and Mets players would come and then other local celebrities. Everybody would come and skate," Mr. Kennedy said.

Officials don't remember exactly when the rink closed, but it seemed to have been before 1989, stemming from a lack of

New ice could be in store for an abandoned skating rink in Bedford Stuyvesant, where Kennedy children once etched figure eights alongside young residents of central Brooklyn.

A local group has been awarded a \$50,000 city grant to reopen the rink next winter if it can raise additional money.

money and interest in a struggling community. As with some neighborhoods with new rinks, the Bedford Stuyvesant area has been home to a large community of immigrants who may have had relatively little exposure to ice skating.

But the area has changed in the last two decades. Local leaders hope the influx of affluent residents who might have grown up skating in the suburbs could make the rink more sustainable.

"The community is a lot more diverse. There's a likelihood that usage will be far higher," said Colvin Grannum, president of the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, which is leading the project along with the Bed-Stuy Gateway Business Improvement District.

Skating groups said they had seen growing interest in the pastime, citing a range of new venues, from a proposed rink over the kiddie pool in Highbridge Park in Washington Heights to a new facility in Prospect Park. The City Council voted Tuesday to approve a plan to create a nine-rink complex in the Bronx.

While skating's growth is hard to trace, enthusiasts said it seemed fueled by demand in a city long starved for ice time and by efforts to get more children to be active. Also resonating, they say, is the existential appeal of cutting effortlessly through space in a crowded city.

"That feeling of being able to move and be free, the gliding, it captures a lot of people," Ms. Levine said.

Local development officials estimated it would cost about \$300,000 to bring the temporary rink in Bedford Stuyvesant to life each year, with the use of cooling coils under the rink. They plan to pay for it through sponsorships, admissions, grants and concessions. They also said they would court the backing of the New York Islanders, the National Hockey League team that is scheduled to play at nearby Barclays Center.

The city Department of Small Business Services is slated to announce the rink grant Wednesday, part of a \$400,000 program to encourage neighborhood groups to pursue innovative projects.

Some Bedford Stuyvesant residents Tuesday recalled the rink fondly, while newer residents were enthusiastic about the prospect of fresh ice.

"I used to be there almost every day," said Winston Daniel, a 60-year-old from St. Croix who moved to Bed-Stuy as a teenager. "I hung out with friends there. It was more like a family spot, but a lot of people would pick up dates around there," he said.

Nora Smith, a 24-year-old barista at the Daily Press, a small cafe at 505 Franklin Ave., said she used to skate on the lake near her childhood home in South Hadley, Mass. Of the potential new rink, Ms. Smith said she "can't wait."

The City Council voted Tuesday to approve a plan to create a nine-rink complex in the former Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx.