

## Big challenges

Multi-use project faces funding issues

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## Article Photos



OBSERVER Photo by Michael Rukavina

Dr. John Earshen, President of the Mattison Group LLC, presents his Multi-Use Sports Facility campaign feasibility study findings to a small group of people Thursday evening at Fredonia High School.

The future of the Multi-Use Sports Facility was presented Thursday evening, revealing all sorts of different shades of gray.

Interested individuals came to Fredonia High School to listen in as Dr. John Earshen, President of The Mattison Group, discussed his campaign feasibility study results, which will ultimately direct the committee down the line should they choose to accept the recommendations.

"I have to be optimistic. I've been at this six and a half years and I could have quit several times. We've had junctures along the way where we were ready to throw the towel in and then we got some optimism," said Multi-Use Sports Facility Committee President, Don Horton of the report findings. "We look at this as a challenge that we've been issued and we have to see if this is something we can pursue."

Prior to the start of the presentation, individuals were able to pick up all of the recent information that was a part of the campaign feasibility study process. A four-page packet was distributed with information on what the committee's goal is, what the community benefits are by having a sports facility, the financial particulars and the models for which the committee could emulate - the Cortland Model and the partnership model between the Olean YMCA and JCC.

As part of the study Earshen also interviewed 50 individuals, which included private and commercial business leaders, government officials and prominent community members most of whom shared the optimism for the project, but questioned matters such as fundraising, location, project substance.

"There were a lot of people willing to support the project to an extent and I did find enough money out there to make me think we could raise \$1-\$1.3 million," Earshen said. "As I plowed through these interviews it occurred to me that if you had a partner you'd be able to emulate something like the Olean YMCA did with JCC. I started to get raised eyebrows then, people welcoming that idea a little bit. My assessment of it was that folks would like to see that explored and the people who represented those potential partners were very encouraging to that notion."

According to Earshen, the project would have to range a fundraising effort somewhere between \$4 million to \$6 million to be able to complete Phase I of the project, which would also be dependent on the amount of money raised, should the committee move forward.

"If you were to just go out and declare a goal, trying to raise that amount of money, you may get there and you may not. You only get one chance to ask the question for real, so the smart thing to do is to test the waters without forcing anyone to commit," Earshen said. "It's like a Charles Dickens tale ... it was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was enthusiasm, but there was a reality check, too. While the idea of the facility has a lot of merit people said, again, probability of raising that kind of money in this community is kind of low."

In the end, Earshen quoted Winston Churchill stating what we have in the end is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. His final recommendation also was that this project can succeed, but only through a partnership approach with the greatest scenario being a partner who can underwrite the loan and help significantly with the financial aspect of the project.

"At this stage in the game moving forward with a campaign as a sole entity is going to be very difficult for them because the money they can raise is not going to be much of a facility," he said. "That's the sticking point. Now that they virtually have no war chest to fund even the next steps in the planning process they need to partner up with someone who can bring some working capital to the planning process and move it ahead. In short, my recommendation is they need to hold their horses for a little while."

When asked if he could decide one way or another to make the ultimate decision for the committee to move forward with the recommendations or not, Horton said he has to read Earshen's conclusions over again and has to talk with some of our board members to get their opinions.

"Obviously I don't want to throw the towel in. I've worked awfully hard at this. We have some energy in our core members so I'm not ready to throw the towel in. I look at this as a challenge that hopefully we can make work and continue on it," he said. "If John has identified \$650,000 locally, it will be our job to ask how we can make up this difference. And if we can't, can we downsize the project to make it work? These are things we'll discuss during our October meeting. At least in October we have to rehash the results of the study and determine that our group is committed to move forward and make something happen over the next six months."

The committee is recruiting new members and anyone interested in the becoming a member, or anyone who has questions, is encouraged to call Don Horton at 640-7457, or check the

committee webpage at [www.cmusf.com](http://www.cmusf.com). The committee meets the second Wednesday of every month at 7 p.m. at the JCC North Campus.

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