

Groups Studying Sports Redevelopment of Towne Mall in Middletown

LOCAL NEWS

By [Ed Richter](#), Staff Writer

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Warren County will help fund a development feasibility study for a proposed Middletown sports and entertainment venue at the Towne Mall site.

County commissioners on Tuesday approved about \$73,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funding toward a feasibility and marketing study to determine the size and scope of the project, said Martin Russell, deputy county administrator and executive director of the Warren County Port Authority.

One of the goals would be to bring a North American Hockey League Tier 2 junior hockey franchise as a tenant at the proposed sports and entertainment facility, Russell said.

“This is the first step of the project to size it right,” Russell said.

The contract with Community Center Partners, LLC, also was scheduled to be discussed by Middletown City Council on Tuesday, with emergency legislation on their agenda. Council approved the emergency ordinance 5-0 after lengthy discussion.

City staff requested emergency approval to allow work to begin immediately on the feasibility studies, due diligence, economic structuring and preliminary design. Officials want to make a “go/no-go” decision this fall to pursue the financing, design, and construction of the sports and entertainment venue as a destination anchor to the Towne Mall redevelopment.

Middletown City Manager Jim Palenick in his staff report to council, said the contract would be for a pre-development planning, evaluation, economic structuring and design effort by Community Center Partners.

The city and its partners — the Warren County Port Authority, Warren County and the mall property owners — would use that report to make a final decision on the multi-purpose sports and entertainment venue, according to Palenick.

Last year, the city contracted RINKA to do a comprehensive redevelopment plan for the Towne Mall property located just off the Interstate 75/Ohio 122 interchange, the city’s front door.

The total cost of the first-phase feasibility and marketing study to be conducted by Hunden and Associates is \$211,500. In addition to the county’s contribution, the city also will be contributing \$73,350 plus up to \$5,000 in expenses, from the city’s ARPA funds if approved by council.

Some of that work was completed and there is a hockey tournament organizer and an elite youth academy who have submitted letters of commitment. That work was pre-funded by the Warren County Port Authority, who paid the full \$64,800 plus \$3,000 in expenses cost of the Hunden feasibility study.

If the agencies decide to move forward, the second phase of the contract will cost another \$263,500 in total, according to Palenick’s report.

The city and Warren County Port Authority would each pay \$118,575 and the owners of the NAHL junior hockey franchise would pay \$26,350. The total of the city’s overall total contribution if both phases are completed would cost \$191,925.