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DRA Board Approves Schmitt Island Development and Sports Complex Feasibility Study

Findings highlight opportunities for sports tourism in Dubuque; report is donated to Dubuque City Council for further consideration and possible action

Dubuque, IA – January 28, 2025 – During their regularly scheduled meeting, the [DRA](#) Board of Directors shared the findings of a Schmitt Island Development and Sports Complex Feasibility Study completed by Chicago-based [Johnson Consulting](#), which provides expertise in strategic planning, development services and advisory services for several different industries, including sports, hospitality, arts, tourism and education. The DRA board approved to donate the study to the City of Dubuque for further consideration and possible action.

Originally commissioned last year by DRA, with support from [RDG Planning & Design](#) and funding from local non-profit [Dubuque Initiatives](#), the study offers a comprehensive look at the Dubuque marketplace. Included is an overview of sports participation trends, the results of a local stakeholder survey, a SWOT analysis, a comparative market analysis, and a current market assessment – all of which point toward an evident gap in the community’s current, sports facility offerings. This, in turn, backs-up the argument that the addition of quality athletic surfaces will help negate both current and future use leakage into other regions of the Midwest.

“The findings of this report are encouraging. It illustrates opportunities for us to enhance what Dubuque has to offer when it comes to sports-related facilities,” said Lori Thielen, DRA’s board chair. “Given this, our recommendation to city staff and council is that enhancing Dubuque’s sports tourism offerings and overall footprint should be a priority when it comes to mapping out Schmitt Island’s long-term development plans.”

The study also outlines several preliminary scenarios, all geared toward the goal of enhancing Dubuque’s sports tourism offerings. These possible scenarios include expanding ImOn Arena with an additional ice sheet, upgrades to existing ball diamonds, and construction of a new, indoor multipurpose complex – all outlined in a variety of combinations. The study is available for review and can be found on the DRA website under the [Schmitt Island tab](#).

“The results of this study show there may be opportunities for Dubuque to enhance existing offerings and build new facilities utilizing public/private partnerships. Given the potential economic benefits of drawing more people to our community, it is well worth further discussion and research amongst key stakeholders here in the community,” said Kevin Lynch, President of the Board for Dubuque Initiatives.

This sports-focused study is part of a larger, ongoing effort to develop Schmitt Island into “Dubuque’s Gateway to Entertainment and the Mississippi.” These efforts have included review of the existing master plan, as well as completing detailed studies on the island’s current infrastructure, natural resources, development potential, potential economic impact, and more. To date, DRA – with support from the City of Dubuque and the [Schmitt Island Development Corporation](#) – has been a key driving force behind ongoing enhancements.

“As a community, we should always be open to looking at ways to attract people and businesses,” said Rick Dickinson, President and CEO of [Greater Dubuque Development Corporation](#). “Given this, opportunities for Dubuque to play a more significant role in sports tourism in the tri-state region is something we should give serious consideration.”

As the owner of Schmitt Island, the City of Dubuque plays an important role in the overall development of the property and directly benefits from any success and resulting growth, as the proposed improvements are designed to enhance existing amenities, attract visitors, generate tax revenue and drive growth.

“We are appreciative of DRA taking the lead on commissioning this Sports Complex Feasibility Study, as the continued enhancement of what we offer in the City of Dubuque and on Schmitt Island is important to the city’s future, especially as we continue investing in the city to ensure our long-term prosperity,” said Dubuque Mayor Brad Cavanagh, who is also a member of the DRA Board of Directors. “Progress has already been made on a number of different fronts on Schmitt Island thanks to DRA and its renovation and expansion of Q Casino + Resort. Bottom line, it is encouraging to see ideas that will provide new amenities for local residents but also help drive people and businesses to our community.”

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About the DRA

The DRA, through its gaming and entertainment facilities provides for social, economic and community betterment and lessens the burden of Dubuque city and area government, while contributing to the growth and viability of Dubuque area tourism. The organization has been a vital part of the community since its inception in 1985 and is operated by a volunteer board comprised of 21 directors who work together to guide operations of Q Casino + Resort. The DRA holds the license for casino-gaming operations of Q Casino + Resort and is also the co-licensee for the Diamond Jo Casino, both of which are located in Dubuque. For more information on DRA and its community-minded mission, visit <https://dradubuque.com/>.