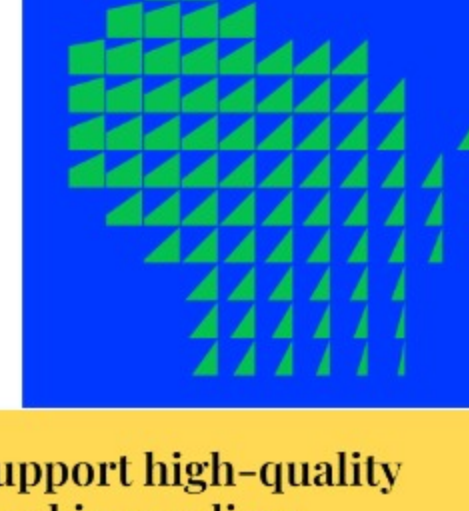




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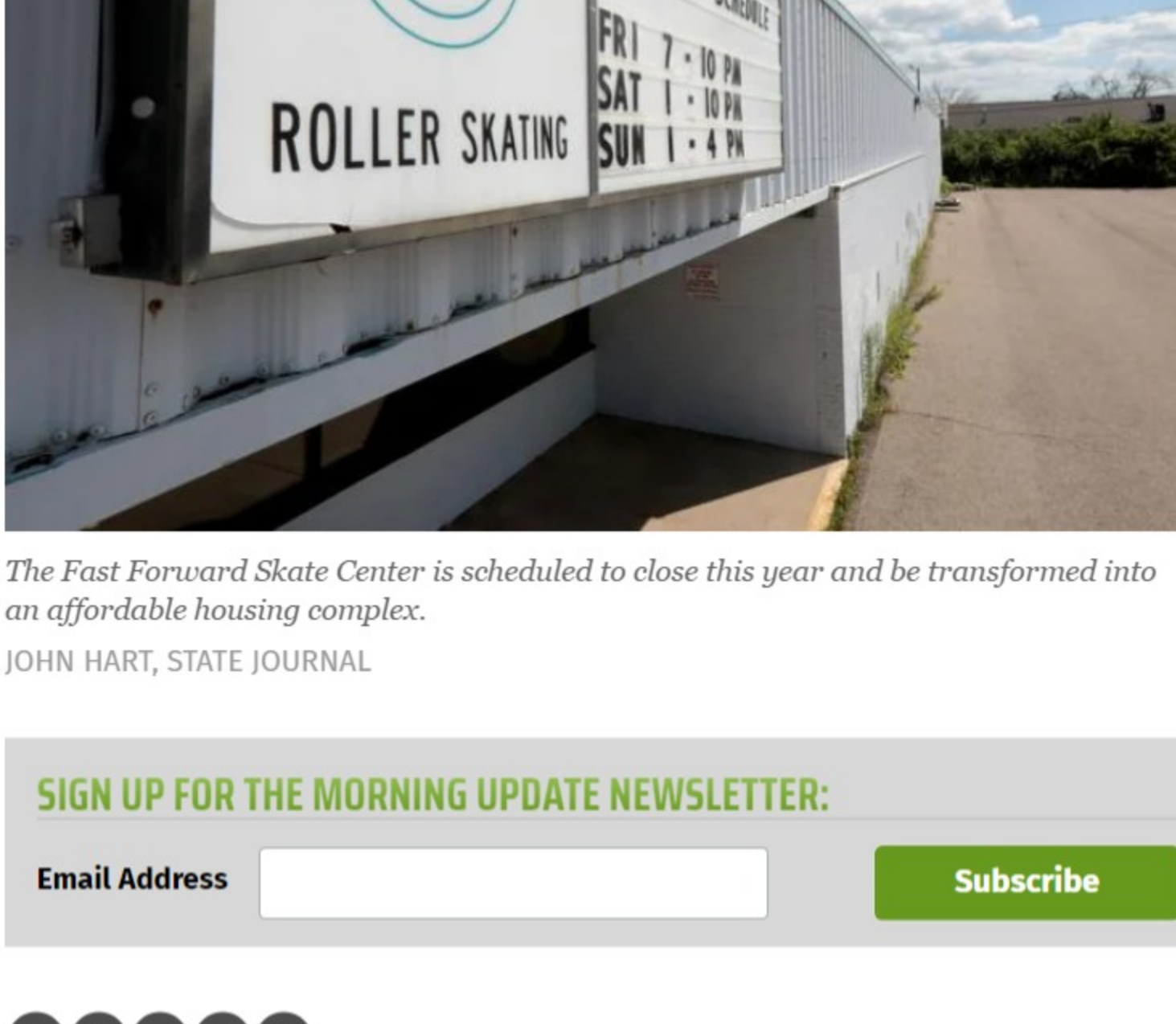
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NEWS

Madison's only remaining skating center, Fast Forward, to close

By Angelica Euseary
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The Fast Forward Skate Center is scheduled to close this year and be transformed into an affordable housing complex.

JOHN HART, STATE JOURNAL

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Madison's last standing skating rink, [Fast Forward Skate Center](#), will close permanently this year. A proposal, set to go before the Plan Commission on Monday, would transform the space into an affordable housing complex with four floors and 70 apartments.

The commission meeting is scheduled for 5:30 p.m., and a subsequent City Council hearing is scheduled for Sept. 6 at 6:45 p.m.

Kevin McDonell, vice president and regional project partner for [Lincoln Avenue Capital](#), the team of developers working to create the affordable housing complex, began working on the project after hearing about Fast Forward's struggles during the pandemic. McDonell thought the location would be ideal for a workforce housing development, which is housing for those who make too much for affordable housing, but can't afford luxury apartments.

"The process has really been going very well," McDonell said. "We've heard a lot of support from the community. We've been working on the financing aspect of it since the end of last year. The development was awarded [Dane County Affordable Housing \(Development\) Funds](#), which is a very key financing gap filler that allows us to provide more affordable housing."

Last spring, the developers received an award from the [Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority \(WHEA\)](#) for the tax credit, which provides a tax incentive to construct affordable rental housing for low income residents. This is the biggest piece of financing that allows affordable housing to be built not only in the Madison area, but across the country.

McDonell said they are working through finalizing design approvals through the city and hope to have them done by the end of this year. They plan to start construction in early 2023, with a goal of completion by early 2024.

The apartment complex will have both market rate and low-income units, with prices ranging from \$500-\$1,500 a month for rent. The apartments range from one to three bedrooms, and most of the three-bedroom units have individual entries, so tenants "can enter right to the outside and have more of a feeling of it being a home of their own."

McDonell said one of the things he's most excited about for the affordable housing complex is a job training partnership with the [Latino Academy for Workforce Development](#), which will provide job training classes for the community and residents.

The Latino Academy provides a plethora of employment training programs including bilingual construction, commercial driver's license (CDL), bilingual customer service program, forklift training, ServSafe training and workplace safety. McDonell hopes complex residents and community members will benefit from these opportunities and programs.

"We're very excited that the Latino Academy is providing that training for the community," McDonell said. "We really think it has the potential to be a model that can be used for other workforce, affordable housing developments. Not only locally, but hopefully throughout the country, because it is a pretty unique partnership."

Skating community says goodbye to Fast Forward

Fast Forward Skate Center general manager Justin Alling has worked there since 1998. He started visiting the rink to play roller hockey when he was eight years old.

Alling said his friends would go skating on Friday and Saturday nights — mostly at Fast Forward, but sometimes at other rinks.

"We always just had a good time. You get friends together, you get music, you get a nice open space, a safe atmosphere, and people are going to have a good time. I started working there, as soon as I could, after I got my (work) permit," Alling said. "The biggest thing is that we're losing the skating rink, the only rink that's left in Madison."

Alling is determined to prevent that from happening.

"Whatever we need to do to create a new (rink) is going to happen. It's our job, it's our responsibility," Alling said. "It's our destiny to own and operate a skating rink. Not just a roller skating rink, it's roller hockey, as well."

Alling owns a roller hockey league that has competed in tournaments for the last 15 years. He said he is looking to create a facility for both roller skating and hockey. Alling is currently working on crowdsourcing funds to create a new Madison skating rink, Mad Town Skate.

Alling's team hopes to raise \$75,000 to create a facility that will offer public skating, group events, birthdays, youth and adult roller hockey, and the option for a monthly subscription program for frequent skaters.

Wendy "Allie Gator" Wilbur and Cory "Slam Chowdah" Hamilton are members of the [Madison Roller Derby Team](#). Wilbur said she was sad to hear that Fast Forward was closing, but since she joined the derby team in 2007, there was always talk of the rink being redeveloped.

"That's always been on the table in the back of our minds," Wilbur said. "It's been kind of looming around. So in a lot of ways, it's like, 'Oh, it's finally here.'"

The derby team is currently working to find a new home for practices and tournaments. This includes a lot of fundraising efforts to help the Madison Roller Derby Team find a space to enjoy their sport as they resume practice and competition.

"We have some folks working on finding sponsorships," Hamilton said. "We have folks working on grant writing, which is new to a lot of us. So a lot of us are in learning mode, but also it's kind of exciting, seeing people working together on these things. We have some folks working on searching for the venue."

The derby team is not the only part of the Madison community that will miss Fast Forward.

Rebecca "Mouse" Hill has owned and operated [608Skate](#), a skating supplies shop located in Fast Forward Skating Center, since October 2014. Hill is focused on getting the word out about the plan commission meeting hearing.

"I would love to hear more from people about the realities of what is being touted as affordable housing," Hill said. "I think people are excited about that prospect, but it's not what it claims to be. That's a really big part of this conversation, because people are just accepting the loss of this other really important space for people to gather, play, be physical and have fun and build memories, form new friendships and connections to learn things."

Having a communal recreational space is important, Hill added.

"Calling housing affordable if it's almost \$1,000 for one bedroom is just not honest, it's upsetting," Hill said. "I want people to be aware of the misleading language around these kinds of things in order to gain public approval sometimes, and just to dig a little bit deeper and to know that we still have a chance to speak up about it."

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