

Binder Park winter-sports area sought

But city officials cool to proposal by Battle Creek Ski Club

By DON SEVENER

In what appears to be an uphill battle, the Battle Creek Ski Club is seeking city support for a winter sports and recreation area at Binder Park.

Ski club members presented a plan Tuesday for downhill and cross-country skiing, toboggan runs and an ice-skating rink at the park at a cost of upwards of \$100,000.

The proposal received a cool reception from city officials.

Under the club's plan, donations would pay for the improvements at Binder Park for beginner and intermediate downhill slopes, cross-country ski trails, several toboggan runs, the skating rink and a warm-up shelter.

But also under the plan, the city would be responsible for maintaining

and operating the winter recreation area, although club members argued that the city might make a little money on the operation of the proposed facilities.

"We feel the area would be self-sustaining," said Don Pearce, a member of the ski club. He estimated an expense of \$12,000 to operate the recreation area, with an income projected at between \$25,000 and \$30,000 generated from charges of \$3 to \$4 for tow tickets for skiers.

Pearce said three employees could adequately operate the area for the 3½-month ski season, but Commissioner James Cleaver challenged that estimate.

"It's difficult to see how it can operate seven days a week, day and night, and only have three employees,"

Cleaver said.

"During the week, it would not be open during the day," Pearce replied.

Commissioner Ronald White, who described himself as an avid if amateur skier, said the idea intrigued him but questioned whether the downhill slopes would provide enough of a challenge to accomplished skiers to lure them away from northern ski resorts.

Diana Burdett, president of the ski club, replied that the availability of ski slopes in the immediate area would, by itself, promote considerable use of the area by local skiers.

City Manager Gordon Jaeger urged that the commissioners take no action to endorse the ski club plan until a more specific proposal, with more exact figures on the cost of operation and maintenance, is presented.

"That information should be gathered before any decision is made," he said.

"This is something that benefits the entire metropolitan area and I question whether the city should have sole responsibility for operating it."

Jaeger said one approach that should be considered is an arrangement similar to that worked out with the Binder Park Zoological Society, which operates the zoo at Binder Park on land rented for \$1 a year.

Pearce agreed that the questions raised by Jaeger deserve study, but said the ski club was looking for some positive reaction from the commission before proceeding with its plan.

"Well, you see an interest has been expressed," Mayor Frederick Brydges said.