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Westchester Adopts a New Plan to Save Rye Playland

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Awaiting customers on the midway at Playland in Rye, N.Y., last Friday. The 86-year-old Art Deco landmark, the nation's largest government-run amusement park, lost \$4.3 million in 2013.

Donald King/Associated Press

How to save Rye Playland, the old-timey amusement park in Rye, N.Y., owned by Westchester County, has been a conundrum, and a source of local tension, for years.

The county announced on Wednesday that a blueprint long in the works was being scrapped and a new approach adopted. County Executive Robert P. Astorino

released a statement laying out a plan that emphasizes an upgrade of the Ice Casino, a skating rink at the park.

A large field house, which was intended to produce revenue to the park year round but which had engendered fierce local opposition, is “no longer on the table,” said Edwin McCormack, a spokesman for Mr. Astorino.

The new plan includes a 10-year contract with American Skating Entertainment Centers, which will become the new operator of the Ice Casino.

“The reality is that we have to figure out a way for Playland to pay its way,” Mr. McCormack said. “You have to have the resources to be in there for a long term, and right now we are trying to make sure that Playland has the financial footing so that its future will be sure.”

Last year, Playland lost \$4.3 million, including debt service, according to Mr. Astorino’s office. Attendance dropped to 390,000 in 2013 from 1 million in 2005.

Although the plans for the field house and other sports facilities have been abandoned, Mr. Astorino said Sustainable Playland Inc., a local organization that proposed the plan that included the field house, would continue to be involved in Playland’s future, taking the newly focused role of fund-raising and preserving the park’s history.

American Skating is expected to make \$640,000 in capital improvements to Playland’s Ice Casino in the first 18 months of its contract, which begins in September.

“If we stay focused on finding ways to make the whole park more attractive to more people for more days out of the year, there is still time to find a formula that can secure the future of Playland,” Mr. Astorino said in the statement.

Daniel A. Biederman, who helped restore Bryant Park in Manhattan with private management of the public space, had worked with Sustainable Playland and will continue to serve as a consultant to the amusement park.

“The riddle for solving Playland is how do you make the park relevant in 2014 and still preserve its traditions and charms,” Mr. Biederman said in the statement.