

WMU makes final call for development proposals for Harry W. Lawson Ice Arena

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NOTE: Find a Lawson Ice Arena fact sheet, pages 2-3.

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Western Michigan University has set a **May 31, 2026**, deadline for considering development proposals for the Harry W. Lawson Ice Arena. In February 2025, the arena was identified for divestment under the University’s master plan as part of WMU’s vision to increase density in the campus core, enhance sustainability and modernize facilities. In anticipation of the new Kalamazoo Event Center, the University will vacate the 52-year-old Lawson Ice Arena by August 2027.

“Lawson has a storied history, and we are excited to see our hockey program carry its championship legacy into the new state-of-the-art Kalamazoo Event Center,” says **Jeff Breneman**, vice president for government relations and external partnerships.

“It has also supported several ice sports in the community and on our campus, so we are open to proposals that would keep it available to the community. While we’ve had some interest, this is our open, public request for all interested parties to submit financially viable proposals. This is a last call before we finalize our plans going forward.”

Even after \$7.2 million in upgrades since 2015, Lawson carries at least \$23 million in deferred maintenance, and major building components are in jeopardy of failure. Its annual operating cost is just shy of \$850,000.

Western will accept proposals **until 5 p.m. ET on May 31, 2026**. The University will make decisions on proposals and determine the way forward for Lawson no later than **Sept. 1, 2026**. Interested parties may contact WMU’s Office of Business and Finance at (269) 387-2365 or [via the business and finance contact form](#).

Harry W. Lawson Ice Arena fact sheet

Key facts

- Built: 1974
- Square footage: 108,342 on 4 floors
- Seating: 3,667
- Includes an Olympic-sized natatorium, hibernated since 2020

Overview

Harry W. Lawson Ice Arena has been home to Western Michigan University’s men’s ice hockey team—which won the 2025 national championship—since 1974. The arena is named for longtime professor Harry Lawson in honor of his legacy as the founder and coach of WMU’s club hockey team, established in 1958. Before achieving varsity status, the team competed at an outdoor rink near Kalamazoo’s Crosstown Parkway.

Built in 1974, Lawson is a single-level, horseshoe-style venue with seating for 3,667 spectators. A concourse circles the top level, providing access to ice arena seating and concessions. The arena is part of a four-story, 108,342-square-foot complex that also houses the Gabel Natatorium. The natatorium features an Olympic-sized pool and diving well, which remained in operation until 2020.

Annual operating costs for the arena average approximately \$850,000. Despite ongoing repairs and upgrades over the decades, the facility faces significant deferred maintenance of at least \$23 million. A recent condition analysis assigned Lawson a net-asset value of 63%, placing it in the “systemic renovation” stage, where major components are at risk of failure without substantial investment. As part of Western Michigan University’s comprehensive campus master plan, Lawson was identified as a candidate for divestment in February 2025.

Recent capital investments

Year	Project Description	Cost
2015	Ice Rink Mechanical System Replacement	\$6,575,120
2016	Gabel Pool Ceiling Repair	\$19,415
2016	Gabel Pool Roof Replacement	\$214,833
2017	Lawson Exterior Caulking	\$26,640

2017	Concession HVAC Upgrade	\$20,830
2018	HVAC AHU 5 Upgrade	\$46,135
2018	Gabel Pool Repairs	\$107,574
2022	Lawson VIP Ledge Remodel	\$138,909
2022	Lawson Instant Play Upgrade	\$23,540
2022	Lawson Storm Water Detention Repairs	\$30,000

Rental revenue

FY 2025 Rental Revenue: \$279,184

Hourly rental pricing varies by season, time and whether the association is with WMU.

- General Public: \$251 - \$342
- University Rate: \$251 - \$291
- Club Sport Rate: \$160

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