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## **Mark Stebbins Community Center finds new location**

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Mark Stebbins

Manchester, NH After several months of reviewing options and exploring possible sites for a new West Side Manchester community center, the board of directors of the Mark Stebbins Community Center (MSCC) and the board of commissioners for the Manchester Housing and Redevelopment Authority (MHRA) said that two entities have signed a 75-year lease to build and operate a new facility for local children and residents. MHRA owns the land and has fully agreed to the project. MHRA will lease the land to MSCC for a nominal amount, and MSCC will raise the funds and build a community center accessible to children and families throughout the West Side. Feasibility studies and project planning is now underway for the site. A construction timeline is being developed now.

“This is a natural partnership and one in which everything fell into place perfectly,” said Bill Steele, chairman of the MSCC board of directors. “The Kelley Falls location already had plans developed for a community center to be incorporated into the site. The concept has already received support from the city and locals, but partners had not been identified until MSCC board members began a dialogue about the potential project. It’s like this site was waiting for us to find it.”

MSCC will be raising funds from individual donors, local and national foundations, companies, and pursuing state and federal funding. The Center is a nonprofit and will pay for all construction and operating expenses through raised funds. Taxpayers and/or residents of the city will not be paying for any aspects of the Center.

“This is an ideal next step for residents of Kelley Falls and for children of the West Side of Manchester,” said Catherine Naczas, of Manchester Housing and Redevelopment Authority. “This facility will provide both a guarantee of space for children who live at Kelley Falls as well as access to families on the entire West Side for services provided by outstanding non-profit agencies.”

The Center will focus on providing services for youth and families on the West Side, in keeping with Mark Stebbins’ lifelong philanthropic impact and deep ties to the community. Boys & Girls Club and Amoskeag Health will be providing services for youth and families through the Center here on the West Side, just as they do now on the East Side. These two organizations have been providing services in partnership for years. All services will be specifically for youth and families, such as affordable, walkable childcare, after school care, access to affordable health care, community meeting space and additional needed support services in coordination with fellow nonprofit providers.

“It’s clear that the West Side of Manchester will benefit from programs and activities offered by both Amoskeag and the Boys & Girls Club,” said Diane Fitzpatrick, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Manchester. “Many of the children currently enrolled in our activities and programs live in and around the Kelley Falls site, so this will make it easier for families to access what we have to offer.”

Site surveys and fundraising/financing will help determine the final size of the center, which will be roughly 20,000 s/f, well within the size limitations for this land site. Traffic impacts are expected to be minimal given the multiple points of access and egress to the location. In addition, the leadership team for this project will soon approach the Manchester Planning Board and Aldermanic Board for the necessary approvals for the project later this year.

“This is such an exciting step forward and we are so fortunate to have found a location that is already designed for a community center such as this one,” said Kris McCracken, president & CEO of Amoskeag Health. “This will advance our work towards bringing more children-centered health care services and programs to families on the West Side. We can’t wait to get started.”

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