

McConnell Center Reuse

Steering Committee Report Dover City Council

**December 1, 2004
Dover, New Hampshire**



McConnell Center Steering Committee Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In March 2004, the Dover City Council appointed the McConnell Reuse Steering Committee to develop a plan for the McConnell Center. Funding for carrying the project forward was obtained from the *Endowment for Health, Partnership for Effective Nonprofits* and from the *Greater Piscataqua Community Foundation*. Funds were used to secure the services of a project consultant.

The Steering Committee developed a vision, mission statement and project goals. Various subcommittees were formed, engaging additional community members, to explore the feasibility and viability of the project. This report presents our findings emerging from nine months of work.

Our recommendation is based on and meets the following goals:

- The partially occupied, under-utilized building becomes fully utilized.
- Short-term risk yields long-term benefits to the city and its citizens.
- Rental income insures that taxpayers won't be burdened with long-term debt.
- Renovation provides a return on the investment.
- Preserves a historically significant building.
- Promotes revitalization in the city's urban core.
- Addresses defined community needs.
- Enables collaboration and maximizes utilization of resources.

The following recommendation is proposed to meet these goals:

- The City Council, at its December 8, 2004 meeting, will pass a \$2.5-million bond to bring the McConnell building up to code to include: a sprinkler system, electrical, plumbing, hazardous abatement and HVAC. Construction to commence in 2005.
- The tenants will be responsible for build-out of their own individual spaces.
- The repayment of the \$2.5-million bond is built into a rental cost of approximately \$8.00 per square foot. By the time the building is fully occupied in late 2006, we project that rents will cover the annual bond repayment, maintenance and a capital improvement reserve account.
- Up to an additional \$1.2-million dollars will be raised between 2005 and 2007 to complete the renovation. Options include: private foundation grants, federal aid and the development of a "Legacy" fundraising campaign.

This recommendation is a fiscally responsible approach because it creates a partnership - thereby spreading the burden - and leverages funds that the city could not otherwise obtain. The net result is transforming a deteriorating building into a vibrant community center

attracting children, older adults and families into the city's center while providing needed programs.

The McConnell Reuse project is about more than just upgrading a building. The driving force behind this project and the source of the Committee's motivation is to create an extraordinary community center with the following vision, mission and goal:

- Vision**
- A place that encourages and supports all citizens of Dover to grow, learn, connect and recreate.
- Mission**
- To create a community campus connecting educational, recreational, cultural, social and health opportunities under one roof.
- Goal**
- To effectively and efficiently serve our citizens while addressing outstanding needs and retaining a valued city asset.

Who Needs This? We all do!

The *Dover Ready to Learn Task Force*, through its Community Dialogue project found that disparities, limited access and inefficiencies exist in the current service delivery system.

The McConnell Center will remedy this by:

- Serving every age group, economic background and social strata.
- Expanding and enhancing services and opportunities through improved collaboration among nonprofit agencies and city agencies.
- Addressing Dover's childcare shortage, where currently a large waiting list exists.
- Offering a place where all family members are served and can connect, learn and grow.
- Promoting health, creativity and imagination.

Tenants

Since a significant component of this project's success hinges on who will occupy the space, we sought tenants who meet our collaborative mission and who will provide needed programs.

The following organizations have committed to this project:

- Dover Adult Learning Center
- Dover Children's Center
- HUB Family Resource Center
- Wentworth-Douglass Hospital Community Outreach
- Coheco Arts and Technology Academy (CATA)
- UNH-Social Work Internship Program.
- Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
- Avis Goodwin Community Health Center - WIC Program
- Hope's Closet
- Dover Recreation Department
- Dover Police Outreach
- Dover Human Services & Teen Center

Plus, a number of other agencies have met with the committee and are interested in pursuing this opportunity.

Tenants as Partners

Asking tenants to fund their own build-outs has several mutual advantages:

- The amount of city investment is greatly reduced.
- Tenants can access other funding sources in ways the city could not. (United Way, community foundation and CDBG funds are primary examples.)

How the Building Will Operate

We recommend the following steps:

- The building, called the McConnell Center, will remain city property. Maintenance and repair will be funded from rents.
- A 501c3 nonprofit, called McConnell Center Community Campus will initially oversee fundraising efforts and ultimately may manage the programming within the building.

Additional Factors and Considerations

The committee has identified the following issues for further consideration:

- The city currently spends nearly \$100,000 per year on the building. That cost will be replaced by the rental cost for the upgraded space for city departments. Rental cost will be approximately \$245,000 (including maintenance and utilities).
- If the current Senior Center were to be sold, potentially half a million dollars could be raised from the sale.
- Up to an additional 1.2 million dollars might be needed to complete the renovation in its second year. The Committee has grant funds remaining to acquire the services of an independent fundraiser to identify and generate additional funds. The committee anticipates that an additional bond might not be required.
- Senator Judd Gregg and Congressman Jeb Bradley have been approached about securing federal funds as the McConnell Center is uniquely positioned as a grant candidate from such sources as the U.S Department of Education
- Finally, the establishment of a “Legacy Fund Campaign” - with the goal of generating contributions from private individuals, particularly those who attended school in the building – could be a tremendous vehicle for promoting community enthusiasm for the project and connecting our past with the future.

Moving Forward – Requested Actions by the Dover City Council

The McConnell Reuse Committee's charge is fulfilled with the submission of this recommendation. For this proposal to be implemented, we respectfully request that the City Council:

- Commit to bond building renovations in year one and, if necessary, year two, at the level required.
- Commit to enter into long-term leases (a minimum of 5 years) with prospective tenants.
- Create a new working group and charge that group to finalize the building's design and governance plan.

History - McConnell Center Reuse Process

January 2000 – Dover Middle School closes and students transferred to new school

Spring 2001 – City identifies front portion of the building for use as a consolidated district court. The side and rear portions of the building were to be used by Dover Recreation, City Human Services and Teen Center, Healthy Universal Beginnings Family Resource Center (HUB), and Dover Adult Learning Center (DALC).

Fall 2001 – The consolidated court plans for the front portion of the building fall through because of concerns with structural integrity of the building after potential removal of load bearing walls. The load bearing walls need to be removed to provide space for courtrooms. The existing District Court site is used as an alternative.

Winter 2001–2002 – Lassel Architects reviews the potential utilization of the front and side portion of the building for a new police station facility. The concept was discounted because of the projected high cost of renovation, coupled with inefficiencies of the building layout related to internal police administrative needs. Significant funds were needed to build a new police station due to inefficiencies in the layout of the facility. Also, the District Court personnel were concerned with the proximity of the building to the new court facility.

Spring 2002 – City renames building in honor of Joseph McConnell. A subcommittee consisting of potential users including City administration, school administration, and various non-profit organizations worked with Lassel Architects in the development of master plan for the building. The master plan was presented to a joint City Council and School Board meeting on April 25, 2002. The plan called for a shared use, community facility including: Pre-school and special education classes, consolidated kindergarten classes, SAU office, Dover Adult Learning Center (DALC), Healthy Universal Beginnings Family Resource Center (HUB), Recreational uses, and City Human Services/Teen Center.

Fall 2002/Spring 2003 – A shift in the focus of general needs by the School Board leads to a change in the concept to place the SAU offices and kindergarten classes in the McConnell Center.

Winter 2003/2004 – The Ready to Learn Task Force conducts a series of community dialogues on potential uses for the building. City Council creates an ad hoc committee to once again study the reuse of the McConnell Center. The group is successful in obtaining three grants totaling more than \$32,000 to hire a consultant for assistance in the process.

Summer, Fall 2004 – Ad hoc committee spends numerous hours in the development of a multi-use, intergenerational, community center. A draft of the plan is presented in October of 2004. Final recommendation presented on December 1, 2004.

The McConnell Center

The Mission

The McConnell Community Campus connects health, education, recreation and culture to improve the well being of people in our community.

The Vision

The multi-faceted McConnell Community Campus will encourage a diversity of people to grow, connect, recreate and build lives of purpose and meaning by:

- Creating a collaborative environment for community-based nonprofit organizations, government, schools and volunteers to support each other's activities.
- Balancing opportunities and services to meet the interests and needs of area residents.
- Fostering creative partnerships between the McConnell Community Campus, businesses, and health-related community services.

**RESOLUTION RE: CREATION OF AD AN HOC COMMITTEE TO EXPLORE
THE REUSE OF MCCONNELL CENTER AS A MULTI-
TENANTED COMMUNITY RESOUC E CENTER**

WHEREAS: The City Council of the City of Dover, New Hampshire has set goals to encourage the rehabilitation and reuse of the former middle school (McConnell Center); and

WHEREAS: The City Council feels that the use of the building should assist in meeting needs for all ages of the community; and

WHEREAS: The City Council feels that the use of the building should expand the resources offered to the community in the areas of education, recreation, and social services; and

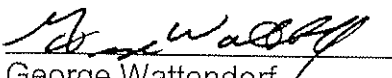
WHEREAS: The City Council feels that it would be in the best interest of the community to examine the issue further.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MAYOR AND CITY
COUNCIL THAT:**

There is hereby created an Ad Hoc Committee of 13 members appointed by the Mayor, to look at reusing the McConnell Center as a multi-tenanted community resource center. The Committee will report back to the City Council prior to December 31, 2004 with a comprehensive plan outlining the reuse option.

Approved as to Form:

Sponsored by:


George Wattendorf,
Legal Division

Mayor Scott Myers, by Request

Recorded by:

Judy Gaouette,
City Clerk

Statement of Need

In 2001, the Ready to Learn Task Force, a 12-year collaborative of 25 Strafford County organizations, conducted a series of meetings with community members and leaders to gain insight into the potential use of the McConnell Center. The need for a comprehensive and integrated approach in service and resource delivery emerged from these meetings.

Here's why:

- The 34 community leaders and nonprofit providers expressed the need for expanded and coordinated prevention services, especially for children, teens and parents.
- Many of the 120 parents interviewed expressed the need for accessible health, education and recreation programs, especially for families living just at or above the poverty level.
- The lack of transportation, coupled with fragmented services, make services difficult to access. Users with transportation often have to travel back and forth between communities to get the services they need.
- Childcare was identified as a significant need. Waiting lists are long, and not enough facilities currently exist.
- There is a lack of programs for senior citizens; programs for low income and isolated senior citizens living in subsidized housing units in downtown Dover were identified as a critical need.
- Family life is changing; more parents are working and there are more single parent families.

Supporting Data¹:

The following data from state and local sources supports these claims:

Children

- 1513 of Dover children live in a single-parent home.
- 71% of Dover children under five have both parents in the workforce.
- 6% of mothers in Dover have less than 12 years of education.
- The Division of Children, Youth and Family assessed 900 cases of reported child abuse and neglect in 2000, substantiating 61 cases in Strafford County.

¹ Sources include the ChildCare Resource and Referral Network, Dover Schools, Wentworth-Douglass Hospital, NH Department of Health and Human Services, United Way of the Greater Seacoast. .

Statement of Need - Continued

Youth/Families

- Childcare is a stressful issue for families as the number of children outpace capacity.
- Approximately 13% of Dover public school students receive special education services.
- The grade 9-12 high school drop out rate in Dover is 20%.
- 67% of high school students reported feeling depressed.
- 18% reported contemplating suicide.
- 41% of students surveyed reported using alcohol once a month or more.
- 51% of students surveyed reported binge drinking within the past month.
- Depression, family distress and other mental health problems are taking their toll on individuals in Strafford County.

Best Practices

Research on the best practices of multi-tenant sites is just evolving. Several recent studies² report that with careful planning and partnering, multi-tenant centers build capacity and reduce operating costs. One key indicator was that all reported 100% occupancy.

A multi-tenant nonprofit center creates the opportunity for systematic change in a number of ways. It provides an opportunity for:

- Resource sharing.
- Coordinating client and community services.
- Creating a one-stop point of entry system.

² The Third Sector New England – Concept paper, May 2002, from conference on multi-tenant centers.

User Profile of a Typical Dover Family

McConnell Center is uniquely positioned to benefit all citizens in the City from children to older adults. The Center is envisioned as a gathering place where multiple resources can be accessed for a variety of reasons. The location in the City's urban core allows for easy access to transportation, the library, local restaurants and a variety of city services. Here are examples of what this means for our citizens:

A 75 year old woman can read to children in the childcare programs, take a computer course from the adult learning center, do yoga with the recreation department and have a relaxed card game with her peers.

A 35 year old mom can join a parenting group, leave her pre-schoolers off for childcare while she exercises or volunteers as an adult basic education tutor, and volunteer her time to help older adults prepare their taxes.

A 13 year old boy will build his computer skills in the Tech for Teens program in the computer lab, participate in Dover Police Youth-to-Youth programs, play recreational basketball and serve as a volunteer tutor for adults in the computer lab.

A 4-year-old little girl will enjoy quality childcare, meet other children from all sectors of the community, participate in expanded story hours and play with her adopted grandparent.

Tenant Profiles

Dover Adult Learning Center (DALC)

Dover Adult Learning Center helps adults in the Strafford County area enhance their life-coping skills and improve their lives through basic education, job training, high school completion, and enrichment classes. DALC supports students in becoming more effective lifelong learners, family members, workers, and citizens.

Description:

Each year, more than 2,500 adults take advantage of the educational services that Dover Adult Learning Center provides. It is the adult literacy agency for Strafford County and is the community education provider for Dover. Offerings include: Adult Basic Education classes in Dover, Rochester, Somersworth and at the Strafford County House of Corrections; high school credit courses in Dover; a G.E.D. testing center; life skills classes for clients of Behavioral Health & Development Services of Strafford County and vocational skills class for teens who have dropped out of school and for people on public assistance.

History:

Dover Adult Learning Center grew out of Dover's first Adult Basic Education classes, which began in 1968. The Center incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1972 and acquired its current facility in Dover in 1978. In 1988, the U.S. Secretary of Education recognized the Center as one of six outstanding programs in the nation. In 1995, the Center opened its first Adult Basic Education classes outside Dover. In 2001, the on-site computer lab was established in the Dover facility.

The HUB Family Resource Center

The HUB Family Resource Center provides families with educational programs and support services to enhance their ability to raise healthy children in caring homes.

Description:

The HUB provides parenting support and education programs which may be either on going or for a defined period of time (4-10 weeks). For many of these groups, childcare is provided on-site, which allows parents to attend, while providing an important early learning and socialization experience for the children.

The HUB also offers 3 different home visiting programs. The Even Start program targets families where the parent wants to complete or improve upon their education in order to be a better role model for the children. Healthy Beginnings targets young parents either during pregnancy or shortly following birth and works with them for up to three years to model the importance of nutrition, medical care, money management, discipline, and educational play. The Family Wellness Project targets families who may be at risk for abuse or neglect based on stresses the family may be experiencing. All three programs are preventative and strength-based in nature.

History

The HUB Family Resource Center began in 1994 as a result of an effort by the Dover Ready to Learn Task Force. The Task Force sought to identify barriers to children entering school "ready to learn". Since that time the agency has enjoyed a close relationship with the Dover School Department, which has provided fiscal services as well as administrative oversight. In 1999, the agency applied for and was awarded 501c3 status, which broadened the funding possibilities for which it was eligible.

The HUB has had 4 homes since 1994, moving most recently in December 2001 into their own house, purchased with support of a Dover Community Development Block Grant.

Dover Children's Center (DCC)

Description

DCC is a non-profit organization providing full-time childcare, as well as before and after school childcare, and school-age summer program. It is licensed for 77 children. Programs include a breakfast, hot lunch and snack, prepared by a full-time cook. There are also pre-school and kindergarten components. The teachers work closely with the Dover Public School's Preschool Dept. in the Early Intervention Program. This helps to identify at an early age children who may have developmental or learning delays.

The mission is to provide affordable, high quality childcare to all persons in the city of Dover and surrounding communities, for children 6 weeks to 12 years. Large majorities are from low to very low-income families.

History

Dover Children's Center moved to Back River Road in November of 2000. Previously DCC operated at 107 Broadway in Dover as Dover Day Care Learning Center. DCC operated there for over 30 years, serving about 40 children ages 3-10.

Wentworth-Douglass Hospital – Pete's Place

Description

The Wentworth-Douglass community helps individuals and their families attain their highest level of health. Pete's Place, a grief support center for children & families, is a community project sponsored by Wentworth-Douglass Hospital. Its mission is to offer ongoing services for grief support for family members coping with illness or death.

Avis Goodwin Community Health Center (AGCHC)

Description

Avis Goodwin Community Health Center provides comprehensive quality healthcare to a diverse population, without regard to their ability to pay.

The Agency has been providing services in Strafford County for over 30 years. They initially offered Prenatal and Family Planning services in Dover and then in Rochester. Services that were later added include Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), Health Education Services, Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening and Dental Services. In 1995 AGCHC transitioned into a Community Health Care facility providing a continuum of care from prenatal to geriatric through a multi-disciplinary approach that includes providers, nursing staff, social workers, nutritionist, WIC & CSFP staff.

Cochecho Arts & Technology Academy (CATA)

Description:

Cochecho Arts and Technology Academy, a state-authorized charter school, will open its doors to any high school students serious about attending an arts and arts-related technology high school. Most students will likely come from the immediate Dover area.

The Cochecho Arts and Technology Academy offers:

- A basic academic program in mathematics, science, English, humanities, and other subjects.
- Arts and technology offered as majors as well as be integrated into the whole curriculum.
- An educational program built around and including the diverse cultural resources in the community.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)

Description:

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association's mission is to speak for the best interests of abused and neglected children who are involved in the juvenile courts.

CASA works with state and local CASA and volunteer guardian programs to promote and support quality volunteer advocacy to help assure each child a safe, permanent, nurturing home.

History:

Concerned over making decisions about abused and neglected children's lives without sufficient information, a judge conceived the idea of using trained community volunteers to speak for the best interests of these children in court. So successful was this Seattle program that soon judges across the country began utilizing citizen advocates. In 1990, the U.S. Congress encouraged the expansion of CASA with passage of the Victims of Child Abuse Act. Today more than 900 CASA programs are in operation, with 70,000 women and men serving as CASA volunteers.

Department of Social Work at the University of New Hampshire

Since its inception, the Department of Social Work has sought to identify and meet the need for social work education in New Hampshire and the region. Many graduates working in the field serve as field supervisors, employers, or mentors of students in the program. Students stay connected to the community through field internships and an active Department Advisory Board. Community involvement connects students with many sectors of the field—politics, hospitals, criminal justice, mental health, child welfare, schools, and rehabilitation services.

The Department of Social Work at the University of New Hampshire has a strong history of service to the state:

- The program, begun in the mid-1960s, now has about 1,800 alumni who have completed one or both social work degrees at UNH. Most of them continue to practice social work in community and agency settings as well as in private practice.
- Current enrollment includes about 112 undergraduate majors, 115 M.S.W. students in Durham and 42 more at UNH Manchester.
- Each year, approximately 35 social work majors earn a B.A. degree in Social Work, and 45 graduates earn their M.S.W. degree.

Students serve annually in more than 100 programs and agencies in the state and region, calculated at a total of 59,000 hours of service during the 2002-2003 academic year. That's roughly equivalent to 30 full-time employees.

The Child Welfare project is one example of how students both learn and serve state needs. A federal grant through the Division of Children Youth and Families provides tuition and stipend support for a number of undergraduate and graduate students each year who agree to pursue employment in public child welfare in the state when they graduate.