

## Hillcrest community center moving forward

Planners say that next steps are lease agreement and finding funding for project

by Erica L. Green | Staff Writer

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The Frederick Alliance for Youth's community center is entering its next stage of planning.

Planners of the center, slated to bring a state-of-the-art hub of social services and extra-curricular activities to the youth of the Hillcrest area, said that they are ready to move forward with the lease agreement with the Frederick County Board of Education.

Representatives from the Frederick Alliance for Youth's Board of Directors laid out the center's progress to the mayor and Board of Aldermen at their weekly workshop last week, presenting for the first time features of the center it plans to build on 1.6 acres next to Hillcrest Elementary School.

The Board of Education approved the organization's use of the site in November, and a 99-year lease is up for approval in the next three months. Then, the center can move into its design stage.

Among the features planned for the center are a gym, a stage, 10 "flexibly used" classrooms, a music room, a multi-sports fitness room, and computer lab.

"Our goal is to provide state-of-the-art programming based on developmental needs and make it universally acceptable," said Scott Alexander, president of Frederick Alliance for Youth.

The center will house several agencies that can provide services to the Hillcrest community, including health and educational needs, Alexander said. The center will be non-discriminatory and carry a "no eject, no reject" philosophy.

The design plans for the \$4 million building have yet to start, and the building won't begin construction until it is fully funded, Marvin Ausherman, of the Ausherman Family Foundation, told the board.

"A facility like this has a difficult time sustaining itself just operationally," Ausherman said. "If it carries debt, we're really worried about that."

The Ausherman Family Foundation will fund 25 percent of the center's construction costs, leaving 75 percent of the costs to be funded by federal and state grants, and public and private partnerships.



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The center plans to be able to keep afloat even if only 20 percent of the people who use its services can pay for it.

This is different from other community and recreation centers, which rely on 80 percent of their clients to pay, Alexander said.

Alexander called this a challenge that lends itself to spearheading a program model that could lead nonprofit agencies

across the country. But it will also require the board to work extra hard to secure partnerships and leases with service providers who bring in revenue, he admitted.

"As we look at what we need to do, we need to flip that on its ear," Alexander said. "Our emphasis is that whoever comes through that front door, we're going to provide services regardless."

While Alexander admits that some residents in the Hillcrest area have expressed opposition to the project because they believe that it will attract and concentrate undesirable people and behavior in the western end of the city, he believes that the center will have a positive effect on the area.

"The challenges that exist in Hillcrest are already there — we want to be a part of the solution," he said.

Frederick Police Chief Kim Dine, who also serves on the board of directors for the Frederick Alliance for Youth, said that from a juvenile crime standpoint, the city could use a center like the Alliance's in the western end of the city.

"It's not meant to bring people from around the county and region. It's addressing the concerns of that community," Dine said. "We view it as an array of different programs that's going to help the city's youth have a positive impact."

E-mail Erica L. Green at [egreen@gazette.net](mailto:egreen@gazette.net).

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