

Bridges... A Community Support System Inc.
949 Bridgeport Ave.
Milford Ct. 06460
203- 878-6365

Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee Hearing
Testimony by Barry Kasdan Pres/CEO
SB 833

Sec. 315. Subdivision (1) of subsection (h) of section 13 of public act 07-07

**GRANT IN AID TO BRIDGES OF MILFORD FOR PROPERTY ACQUISITION AND FACILITY
EXPANSION NOT TO EXCEED \$600,000**

My name is Barry Kasdan Pres/CEO of Bridges...A Community Support System Inc. I am here this afternoon to implore you to reinstate the above referenced bonding grant to Bridges. It is a critical and essential community project that impacts the lives and welfare of thousands of adults and children in our region. When this cut was published in the press it was implied that it was a non-essential and thus expendable in view of the current economic crisis. This is far from the truth. Let me briefly explain.

Bridges is a non-profit Mental Health & Addiction services agency serving Orange, Milford, West Haven and 19 surrounding communities. Founded in 1957 Bridges has grown into a major Behavioral Health Care agency funded predominantly by the State of Connecticut through contracts with DCF, DDS, DMHAS and DSS, providing a comprehensive range of essential community services to a population of high risk and at risk Adults, Children and Families. Over 70% our operating funds comes from state grants. Most of the services we provide are targeted to populations of adults and children with highly specialized needs that the state has responsibility for. Contracting with Bridges allows thousands of special needs individuals to remain in their community, attend school, work and stay with their families.

Some of the specialized services the state contracts for include:

- Young Adult Services -DMHAS
- Local Mental Health Authority – DMHAS
- Vocational, Case management, Social Rehabilitation, Residential, Out-patient Psychiatric Treatment – DMHAS, DDS
- Emergency Psychiatric Services & Respite – DMHAS
- Psychiatric Services for Children (Child Guidance) – DCF
- Lead agency for DCF Community Kid Care initiative
- Intensive In-Home Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Service (IICAPS) - DCF
- Intensive Family Reunification – DCF
- EMPS – Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (for children and families) – DCF
- Enhanced Care Clinic (Husky families & Children) – DSS

In 2008 over 5,000 people accessed one or more of our services.

In short we are a working partner with the State of Connecticut providing essential and critical healthcare services.

I am attaching a full explanation of the project and why it was approved in July of 2007 as part of the Bonding legislation. For the sake of brevity let me summarize the important points and data that support the critical importance of this project.

Bridges sought to secure bonding money for the acquisition of a piece of property at 925 Bridgeport Ave, adjacent to one that we acquired almost 4 years ago, 941 Bridgeport Ave.

The original plans were to develop 941 for expansion and parking. We did extensive property planning that included new facilities construction and parking. The projected costs were well over 3 million dollars. The picture started changing when the adjacent property 925 became available with a building that was usable as is. The price there was around \$1,000,000. So it appeared that would be an even better option, at far less cost than new construction and with additional property for future expansion.

We were unsuccessful in securing bonding in 2006 to purchase that property. When we tried again in 2007 the owners of the 925 property had many changes occurring in their plans, and acquisition was now uncertain within a reasonable time frame. We developed a strategy on an approach that would make dollars available for acquisition and expansion to cover both possibilities. Should the 925 no longer be available we would build and expand on 941 Bridgeport Ave. We were successful in securing the \$600,000 bonding grant, far less than the initial request for \$1,000,000. It was to be administered through DMHAS.

At this time the acquisition of 925 is no longer feasible and we can no longer leave 941 standing idle. It has a smaller building than our original plans. We have reviewed our situation and significantly restructured our plans that involve the total rehabilitation of an existing 3,000 SF structure on 941 (925 had over 9,000 sf of usable space.) We have developed plans for that structure that include a future 2nd floor expansion. The current plans also involve the development of the property for parking and needed drainage. It is important to note that the existing structure will deteriorate if allowed to stand idle any longer. One final note regarding the delay in getting this project moving. An environmental problem existed from a leaking oil tank on the property which has now been fully remediated and will allow development and construction to proceed without complications.

SUMMARY OF PRESSING NEEDS THAT SUPPORT THE IMMEDIACY OF THIS PROJECT

1. Depending on activities and weather, for any given week **600-800** people in addition to staff access our facilities.
2. Main offices at 949 Bridgeport Avenue used to capacity: Monday –Friday 8 AM – 9 PM Friday 8 AM – 5 PM
3. 40 staff and interns currently cohabitating office space – at least half of whom need dedicated space
4. We reduced the graduate social work training program in half due to insufficient space to house students
5. At least 6 treatment groups, including day programs, are on hold due to space shortage
6. Board of Directors no longer meet at our office due to space shortage
7. On Monday evenings both Adult & Children waiting room areas are converted into group rooms for Prevention our programs.
8. Part-time personnel, including Psychiatrists and Nursing staff do not have dedicated offices.
9. Medical Records room can no longer handle record storage, requiring rental of outside storage.
10. With expansion Bridges could grow services and generate increased revenue with new treatment and day programming.
11. Current volume of requests for service force 30 individuals per week onto waiting lists or are referred out due to lack of resources including adequate space for services.
12. Due to space shortage, Bridges currently leases offsite offices for numerous programs: 2,800 sq. ft. in Milford and West Haven. Annual rental costs = \$41,130

Project Detail

Background

Bridges purchased of 941 Bridgeport Avenue (adjoining property to our main site at 949 Bridgeport Avenue). This was accomplished with State Bonding in 2005.

For over 10 years Bridges was using the next door property for overflow parking at no cost. Bridges had a compelling need to prevent the loss of that critical parking space to another party along with expanding professional office space.

The 3,000 sq. ft. building on that site was an important need, offering the potential to expand facilities to meet a dramatic growing demand for services.

Over 3 years ago, the Connecticut Center for Child Development, owners of 925 which are adjacent to 941, approached us about purchasing their property. They were looking for a larger piece of property and facility to accommodate their growing program.

The possibility of acquiring the next door property became most attractive, in view of our growing space needs and the fact that the facility was in move-in usable condition.

A review of our current situation addresses the critical facilities needs that have developed along with the intervening events.

Main Offices and Facilities

1. 949 – 957 Bridgeport Avenue owned by Bridges.
 - 2 buildings
 - 949 Bridgeport Avenue – Main office 18,500 sq. ft.
 - 957 Bridgeport Avenue – Social Rehab program and Open Door Social Club – 3,000 sq. ft.
 - Parking for 50 + cars.
 - Both buildings fully occupied
 - Parking lot fully occupied by Bridges staff, clients, visitors and agency vehicles
 - Bridges employs over 160 full and part-time staff

2. 941 Bridgeport Avenue owned by Bridges (as of January 27, 2006)
 - Parking lot fully occupied by Bridges staff, clients and visitors (overflow from 949-957 Bridgeport Avenue)
 - 1 building 3,000 sq. ft. – unoccupied. Could be renovated or demolished for a larger structure attached to main building.
 - Current space needs indicate 9,000+ SF needed to accommodate current and future growth.

Property that was under Consideration

1. 925 Bridgeport Avenue owned by Connecticut Center for Child Development
 - 1 building 9,500+ sq. ft. for offices, classrooms and meeting rooms
 - Building currently meets code and usable as is.
 - 35+ parking spaces

- Property value placed at 1 million dollars, in property appraisal done by Bridges in January 2006
- Current owners were in negotiations to purchase new and larger property and facility in Milford.
- As of January 2007, they have secured a new site and planned to sell this property.
- **Since Bridges was unable to secure needed bonding for the acquisition of this property, plans were on hold and became less feasible due to changing plans of CCCD.**
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Previous Site Planning and facilities development.

With the likelihood that 929 Bridgeport Ave would not be an option we secured formal site planning and a comprehensive review of our space needs from Antinozzi Associates of Stratford Ct... This resulted in:

- The determination of current and future space requirements to accommodate growing service needs exceeded the available space in 925 Bridgeport Ave.
- Current projections indicate over 9,000 SF could be needed.
- A creative architectural plan indicated that an addition could be added to the existing facilities at 949 Bridgeport extending out over the 941 site.
- The new facilities would help cut operating costs by centralizing access and waiting areas for clients, thus maximizing use of clerical and support staff.
- In addition it would provide for a new centralized medical records facility, group rooms and urgently needed space for specialized day programs, Adolescent IOP treatment programs, and prevention & education classes and expanded to counseling and treatment interview rooms that would help generate increased revenues.
- Cost projection indicated that the total project would have cost from 2-3million dollars, which included the necessary rehab of space in our 949 Bridgeport Ave main site.
- The project included development of parking and a new elevated 2nd floor addition on 941 Bridgeport Ave. connected to our current structure.
- **These costs became prohibitive and not a wise direction in the developing fiscal environment, moving us to redevelop plans around the current bonding grant of \$600,000 for facility expansion.**

Current Situation & Plans

- **Develop 941 Bridgeport Ave property including site development, parking, renovation of existing structure to immediately add 3,000 square feet of office space attached to main building at 949 Bridgeport Ave.**
- **Engineering study has been completed on 941 building verifying that it is structural sound. A complete renovation of the building could accommodate the infrastructure to handle a 2nd story that would expand the current space by over 3000 SF.**
- **All building and parking plans meet city zoning and property development requirements.**
- **Initial plans are complete and we are contracting for Design and Construction Documents.**

Summary Points

- Bridges has been serving the greater Milford, Orange, and West Haven area for over 50 years. It has grown into a major health care provider, serving over 5000 individual annually in our region, serving some 22 towns for emergency and home based services.
- With over 160 staff Bridges provides critically needed mental health and addictions services to a growing a population of adults and children in our region.
- Bridges operating budget exceeds \$11,000,000 over 70% is state grants and contracts.

- The population of Milford Orange and West Haven is close to 135,000 residents.
- A \$600,000 bonding investment equals about \$4.50 per capita for this core service area.
- To rent the needed professional medical space over the next few years could reach \$180,000 per year.
- In 5 years that would well exceed by hundreds of thousands the bonding request.
- Those rental dollars would be covered by grant funds, thus drawn away from direct services.
- **Leasing space is very problematic since it will decentralize services and result in duplicative efforts and resources to administer and coordinate care for thousands of clients.**
- If we are forced to rent space this would become a fiscal albatross on Bridges and State grant dollars.
- Bridges has been a partner with the State of Connecticut for over 50 years delivering care in a cost effective manner to some of our neediest and at risk population.

The proposed property development is prudent, cost effective, essential and critical to Bridges' ability to continue providing Behavioral HealthCare services to our area residents. It is a plan that has been in the pipeline for a number of years with State dollars already invested in the property. It is a sound investment not only in our healthcare system but the promotion of local construction, jobs and community investment which is so urgently needed in today's economy.

This is ready to go and we have already spent considerable time and money on its development. Too many services along with the wellbeing of thousands of adults and children are dependent on its completion.

