

**Testimony in Support of SB 122,
AAC Bonds of the State for the Construction of a Community Center and Recreational
Facility in New London**

March 6, 2012

To Senator LeBeau, Representative Berger and members of the Committee:

I am pleased to submit testimony on behalf of the New London Community Center Planning Collaborative ("the Collaborative") in favor of State bond funds to support a community center in New London. The Community Center would serve all ages and populations, providing health and wellness, human service, educational, and recreational resources. The Center would function as a multi-purpose facility, serving as a focal point for effective collaboration, centralized opportunities, comprehensive quality services, responses to local needs, and a thriving community.

The development of a Community Center in New London has been a reiterated City goal over the past two decades. Since 2009, my department of Lawrence & Memorial Hospital, the Office of Community Health, Outreach and Partnerships, has been facilitating Community Center directed conversations with youth serving organizations and City Council members. Concurrently, in the fall of 2010, the Assistant Vice President of the Liberty Bank Foundation contacted New London Youth Affairs to explore the option of revisiting this goal through a public/private partnership. The Recreation Department and City Government, through the Special Advisor to the City Manager, joined their discussions. The Liberty Bank Foundation then connected with potential private funders as the City leaders involved with both these initiating streams came together, thereby integrating the L&M Community Partnerships and Youth Affairs/Recreation progress into the Collaborative.

Although the Community Center momentum has resurfaced repeatedly in New London for many years, the current New London climate of change, opportunity, and awareness is primed for Community Center realization. This is exemplified through recent media publicity (violence, academic performance, Community Center need), first concerted joining together of public and private resources, impact of economic recession further necessitating collaboration, currently increased partnering of agencies to serve teens, expanded New London base of key organizations in New London (Boys and Girls Club, Ledge Light Health District), and the transition in New London to a mayoral form of government.

The Collaborative represents over 20 widely diverse stakeholders, including decision making members from the City Council, private foundations, City government, health resources, and youth organizations. A list of these affiliations is attached. As the project progresses, individuals that will directly benefit from the Community Center and those agencies that serve them will become more actively involved in the project.

Local Needs:

The essential needs regarding this proposal relates to the gap concerning a centralized Community Center, offering comprehensive resources, within a multi-purpose, functional facility, as a focal point for community members, for a City with growing demands. The Center would contribute towards an overall healthier community. Presently, programs and services are scattered throughout the City. Thereby, it is often challenging for residents to take advantage of these resources. Transportation to services is also a critical need in New London. They would more effectively benefit from needed programs/services through a one-

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stop-shopping option. Also, the many existing New London service facilities are out of date, in disrepair, below optimal standards, and beyond the means to maintain and improve by the organizations and departments utilizing them.

In addition, New London does not have an evacuation shelter for natural or security emergencies. This is especially critical, considering New London's waterfront location (vulnerable to varied modes of access and hurricane susceptibility), proximity to national defense entities and major cities, as well as its distinction as a transportation center (train, ferry, bus, highway). Furthermore, New London does not have a large scale inoculation center, with adequate safety and capability accommodations.

On another level, with over thirty-five youth and community providers, collaboration is crucial. Funders struggle with award decisions from a plethora of competing applicants serving a high risk city. A Community Center provides a vehicle for coordination amongst agencies, amongst funders, and between the public and private sectors. Therefore, the Center would address this need to best economize limited grant monies for collaborating providers to most effectively serve community members. This project sets this process in motion, uniting Community Center development priorities and perspectives amongst individuals of all local affiliations and populations.

Overall, the need for a Community Center is exacerbated by New London's characteristics as a struggling urban center amidst surrounding suburban towns. New London has become the primary location for social services in Southeastern Connecticut, and with that, many of the related urban socio-economic concerns. The following information highlights key New London features.

Overall Socio-economic Condition:

- 16% poverty rate (more than double state and county averages)
- 67% of dwellings are not owner occupied
- crime rate is 4,348 per 100,000 residents (versus 2,981 statewide)
- 21% of the adult population does not have a high school diploma
- minority population just below 50%

Community Health:

- chronic disease burden is higher than surrounding communities, with 25% of New London residents reporting 3+ chronic diseases
- 28% of adult residents report a sedentary lifestyle and 27% report being told by a health care provider that they are overweight or obese

Early Childhood:

- 40% of New London Public School kindergarten students did not have a preschool experience
- 29% of children under age 6 are living in families with incomes below the federal poverty line (11% statewide)
- 60% of births are to mothers with a high school education or less (37% statewide)
- 54% of children under age 6 live in single-parent households (25% statewide)

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Youth/Teens:

- 94% of public school students are eligible for free/reduced meals
- 21% of public school students are not fluent in English
- 82% minority population amongst public school students
- 15% of 10th grade public school students meet the CAPT (Connecticut Academic Performance Test) state goal in reading
- less than 5% of 4th graders pass physical fitness tests (32% statewide).
- nearly 40% of 4th grade girls are overweight or obese and 31% of 4th grade boys are overweight or obese
- the rate of births to teens is three times the statewide rate
- highest number of juvenile delinquency court cases for southeastern Connecticut towns/cities
- 1,325 disciplinary offense incidents at New London High School during 1 year
- 21% of 7th-8th grade surveyed public school students self report having been suspended or expelled from school
- 83% of 9th-10th grade surveyed public school students self report that they are not involved with an after-school club/program
- 11% of 7th-8th grade and 19% of 9th-10th grade surveyed public school students self report that they carried a weapon in the past year
- Police records for youth crime in 2008/2009 indicate 106 arrests for 16 and 17 year olds and 91 charges/71 arrests for 13 and 14 year olds

Senior Citizens:

-with regard to senior citizens served by the Senior Center-

- 47% are identified in the extremely low income category
- 706 income eligible senior and disabled applications were taken for Rental Rebate
- 400 income eligible persons applied for farmer's market coupons
- top health concerns reported: 17% high blood pressure, 15.5% diabetes, 10.7% heart problems, 10.2% hypertension, and 10% arthritis

Proposed Facility and Program:

The mission of the Collaborative is to promote a Community Center vision whereby positive health and wellness, cultural enrichment, and active living are cornerstones for both programming and facility development. The Collaborative aims to benefit New London residents of all ages (preschool through senior citizens), diversified and representative populations with emphasis on those not presently served, as well as those in neighboring towns. Accordingly, a modern, multi-purpose, accessible, sustainable facility will offer year round, week round, early morning through nighttime public availability. Based on the goals of the Collaborative, New London seeks to create:

- A lifelong learning, social, health and wellness, and fitness facility, to meet the needs of a diverse and changing community;
- A valuable community asset and important anchor for the community, a hub of recreation activities and social programs for the City of New London, serving residents of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those previously inactive;
- A community focal point that offers activities that strengthen the family unit, enhance skills and self esteem, reduce isolation and facilitate social and cultural interaction promoting healthy, vibrant, and productive lifestyles;

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- A facility that promotes strategic partnerships with community and business organizations that have a similar mission and goals that enhance the quality of life; and
- A facility that could serve as an emergency evacuation site of public health emergency intervention site.

Facility spaces under consideration include (but are not limited to): competition and therapy pools, indoor track, gymnasium, theatre, exercise and weight center, meeting rooms, classrooms, offices, art rooms, computer lab, kitchen, daycare center, gallery, children's book bank, community bulletin boards, and eating areas. The facility would also function as an emergency shelter, evacuation site, and inoculation center, as well as house private nonprofit and for profit health/wellness operations. The facility would likely be constructed in phases.

Program options would span the areas of arts, health, wellness, mental health, education, recreation and leisure, childcare, life skills and prevention, academic assistance, career/workforce development, civic venues, social services, and senior citizen services through a senior center with a separate entrance. Offerings would range from instructional series, workshops, special events, performances, athletic competitions, community networking opportunities, agency sponsored activities, counseling, and health screening/care.

Sustainability:

Sustainability strategies presented at Collaborative meetings entail rent from non-profit organizations, city departments, sliding scale user fees, partnering with national organizations (YMCA, Boys and Girls Club), incorporating long-term construction efficiencies, hosting state-wide athletic events, availability of federal FEMA funds if the Center also functioned as an emergency shelter, consideration of "green" building components which also expands eligibility for related government funding streams, regionalization to become more attractive to state and federal sources, monies for Center through sale of aging City buildings, and housing corporate businesses (i.e., food, recreational). Furthermore, potential federal funding could be available to support the senior center component, requiring a separate entrance for senior citizens.

Projected Numbers:

The following projections outline the framework for the bond funds request. It is anticipated that this information will be modified, based on the contracted consultants reports, and as the project progresses.

Participants served: 6,500 general memberships, including at least 20% in scholarships
500-600 Senior Center participation
2,500 Youth City Recreation Programs
Private health facility partnership – Physical Therapy/Cardiac Rehab, etc.

New jobs: 100 new construction jobs over a 2 year period
135 new operational/administrative jobs for regular Community Center facilitation

Building dimensions: 25,000 to 50,000 square feet

Construction Budget: \$15 million to \$20 million

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Construction Expenditures Budget Breakdown:

Wellness Center	\$ 650,000
Gymnasium/fitness studios	\$ 2,000,000
Sports courts	\$ 300,000
Multipurpose Rooms/childcare	\$ 200,000
Senior Center Entrance/Meeting Rooms/Administration	\$ 1,000,000
Kitchen/Cafeteria/Emerg Shelter	\$ 1,000,000
Specific Use Spaces	\$ 300,000
Natatorium (8 lane competition lap pool/4 lane therapy pool)	\$ 3,700,000
Locker Rooms	\$ 1,200,000
Administrative Areas	\$ 750,000
Furnishings and Equipment	\$ 600,000
Site Development	\$ 2,200,000
Architectural/Engineering Fees	\$ 600,000
Fundraising Costs	\$ 500,000
TOTAL COST	\$15,000,000

Possible Facility Additions at Later Phases

Theatre-90 seat	\$500,000
Additional classroom space	\$500,000
Additional office space	\$500,000

Bond Funds Request and Projected Income:

To facilitate construction of the New London Community Center, the Collaborative seeks:

- **\$8 million from the State of Connecticut, bond funds request**
- \$.5 - \$4 million from the City of New London
- \$4-\$6 million from private partners (foundations, businesses, and individual contributors)
- \$.75 - \$2 million from Federal Grants
- Additional opportunities to be explored to include: Federal Tax credits, NDC, CHEFA

The City of New London's commitment toward the project relates to the existing need for the municipality to dedicate capital funds for the aforementioned swimming pool, as well as facility spaces currently housed within the municipal Martin Center building, presently in severe disrepair. (The Martin Center is the site for the Recreation Department, Senior Citizens Center, Youth Affairs, gymnasium, auditorium, and related office/program spaces, Water Department, and Center for the Blind.) These required capital expenses are expected to require at least \$8 million. In conclusion, the Collaborative looks forward to partnering with the State of Connecticut to bring this vital project into fruition. We are eager to learn of your feedback concerning subsequent steps in the bonding process.

Respectfully submitted,
Laurel Holmes, MSW
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Lawrence & Memorial Hospital

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New London

Community Center Planning Collaborative

-Jan 2011-Dec 2011-

Regular Partners:

1. Boys and Girls Club of Southeastern CT
2. Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT
3. Community Foundation of Eastern CT
4. Connecticut College
5. Dime Bank Foundation
6. Dominion Foundation
7. Hygienic Theatreworks
8. Lawrence and Memorial Hospital
9. Ledge Light Health District
10. Liberty Bank Foundation
11. Lindsay Liebig Roche Architects
12. New London City Council
13. New London Community & Campus Coalition
14. New London Community Outreach
15. New London Office of Development & Planning
16. New London Recreation Department
17. New London Senior Center
18. New London Youth Affairs
19. Ocean Community YMCA
20. Peoples United Bank
21. United States Coast Guard Academy
22. United Way of Southeastern CT

Other Representation:

1. Bank of America
2. New London Law Office
3. Office of Congressman Joe Courtney
4. Pfizer, Inc.