

\$1M earmarked for community center

Full Senate to vote in fall for expenditure

By **Jennifer Feals**

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The mission, value and vision of Squamscott Community Commons is inspired by the \$1 million support of the Senate Appropriations Committee, representatives say.

New Hampshire's U.S. Sens. Judd Gregg, a Republican, and Jeanne Shaheen, a Democrat, announced Friday, July 31, that the Senate committee had approved \$1 million for Squamscott Community Commons. Funding for the project was included in the 2010 Fiscal Year Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill, which will be ready for consideration by the full Senate in the fall.

Carter Siegel, chair of the project's Steering Committee, said Squamscott Community Commons organizers are enormously grateful to Gregg and Shaheen for their efforts and support. They believe the Senators' support will help the appropriation pass the Senate.

"For us, it brings a lot more momentum to our campaign, because it's a huge stamp of approval for us on the mission and validity of what we are trying to create," Siegel said. "It shows that clearly there is support for this and the need has been recognized and validated through this vote of confidence.

"It's incredibly empowering for us as an organization," he said.

The 80,000-square-foot, multi-tenant community center, to be constructed on the site of the former Exeter Area Junior High School on Linden Street, will house a full-service Y.M.C.A., SeaCare Health Services, Exeter Center for the Creative Arts, Great Bay Kids Company, Richie McFarland Children's Center and Rockingham Community Action.

Squamscott Community Commons has a total fund-raising goal of \$16 million, Siegel said.

Executive Director Robin Drunsic said the organization is finalizing fund-raising for the second phase of the project and is hoping to begin demolition of the Exeter Area Junior High School within the next few months. The organization then plans to continue raising funds for the third phase, which is construction of the facility.

The center will be a model for the nation in nonprofit sustainable design, environmental stewardship, economies of scale and regional collaboration, Siegel said, which was recognized by Gregg and Shaheen.

"The construction of the new community center will provide valuable resources to families and individuals. When completed, the center's health facilities, recreational activities and other important community support services, will benefit the entire Seacoast community," said Gregg, a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "I applaud Squamscott Community Commons for their vision and commitment to bringing this facility to fruition."

Shaheen said Seacoast residents will benefit from so many valuable services housed together under one roof.

"This new, more efficient facility will truly bring the community together," she said, "and provide children, families and seniors with the services they need."

Representatives of the agencies involved with Squamscott Community Commons said it's wonderful the senators recognize the value of the community center and the collaboration behind it.

"We're really excited at the opportunity for our organization, our families and the constituency we represent to be under one roof, and the comprehensive services and support that will offer families," said Peggy Small-Porter, executive director for the Richie McFarland Children's Center. "The opportunity for us to help and support families, and get directly connected to other organizations, is pretty exciting for us."

To have the \$1 million support of Gregg and Shaheen is very "powerful" in the community center's fund-raising efforts, Small-Porter said. "We know that it's going to take us a little bit longer to raise these funds because of the

economy, but we feel the infrastructure of the organization, the vision, the work plan and the business plan are solid," she said.

"It will be a very important place for the community, not because of the bricks and mortar, but because of the collective support the organizations will bring to bear," Small-Porter said.