

ROTARY CLUB OF BELLINGHAM

2020 CAPITAL PROJECT FUNDING REQUEST

Organization:

Max Higbee Center
1210 Bay Street, #102
Bellingham, WA 98225
360-746-8724

Rotary Club Members in Support of This Project:

Jennifer Moehl (Zervas Group Architects)
Peter Theisen (Past President/CEO, United Way of Whatcom County)
Greg Baker (Superintendent, Bellingham Public Schools)

Project Purpose:

Max Higbee Center's Capital Project will remodel 1400 N. State Street to serve individuals with developmental disabilities in Whatcom County for the next 25+ years and leave a legacy of inclusion in our community.



Mission Statement:

Max Higbee Center (MHC) provides year-round access to community-based recreation, socialization, health and life-skills programs for low-income teens and adults in Whatcom County who live with developmental disabilities. MHC's mission has three broad aims: 1) provide personal enrichment through a diverse range of leisure activities; 2) promote social, physical, emotional and cognitive growth and development; and 3) help participants achieve greater independence in life. MHC's strives to disrupt the historic and ongoing discrimination and social exclusion of people with disabilities, to advance equity, education, health, and quality of life, and to create a community where people are empowered to live meaningful and self-directed lives. As a unique resource and leader of inclusion, MHC aims to be a model for other communities to follow.

Project Response to Community Need:

For the first time in its 35-year history, Max Higbee Center currently has a waiting list of 50+ individuals due to limited facility program space and significant growth over the last three years. MHC reached 307 participants in 2016 and grew to 408 participants by 2018. Families, caregivers, teachers and individuals with developmental disabilities have all requested additional program capacity at MHC to access this unique and unduplicated resource, especially since there are limited services for adults with disabilities. There is more abundant support for infants and children with disabilities, creating a "service cliff" after high school graduation. MHC offers support that starts in high school and continues through an individual's life. Nobody ages out of MHC's programs; community members with disabilities have the opportunity and support to enjoy a full life in Whatcom County.

In order to accommodate unprecedented growth, MHC is remodeling 5,000 square feet of space at 1400 N. State Street in downtown Bellingham in order to triple the Center's capacity and eliminate its waiting list to meet a growing community need for expanded recreational, social, health and life skills programs and services for teens and adults with developmental disabilities in Whatcom County. MHC's capital project will extensively remodel the facility to accommodate the diverse needs and goals of MHC's programs and members by creating an accessible, welcoming, safe, functional, and enjoyable space. This project will allow MHC to grow and continue to serve individuals with disabilities over the next 25+ years.

Max Higbee Center Programs & Services



As the only community organization of its kind in Whatcom County, MHC delivers a diverse range of year-round recreational, social, health and life skills programs and services for teens and adults with developmental disabilities. Programs run Monday-Saturdays, offering 48 hours per week of enriching activities. Educational programs build transferable life skills (how to use the bus, manage money, grocery shop, cook, build relationships, maintain appropriate social boundaries) and provide opportunities for community access (parks, museums, libraries, the YMCA), outdoor recreation

(walking, hiking, biking, kayaking), exercise classes, nutrition education, music, art, dancing, gardening and community networking. Activities take place both at MHC and at community partner organizations. MHC relies on volunteers and interns to support its programs and collaborates with more than 20 community partners annually. Programs are provided at a minimal cost (\$3/hour) and full financial aid is available to all who need it. Programs include: Healthy Lifestyles, Skill Share, Community Access, Recreation Mentor, Weekend, Winter Theater, Higbee Hikers, SPIN Dances, and an After-School program for teens and young adults that works in partnership with the Bellingham School District. In addition to group programs, MHC provides more than 80 hours per week of one-on-one support through the individualized Recreation Mentor Program designed for participants with higher support needs. The majority of MHC participants rely heavily on the Whatcom Transportation Authority's fixed and specialized routes to participate in MHC programs.

Centered in downtown Bellingham, MHC is situated near a transit hub, serves the area of greatest population density and highest need in Whatcom County, and is a tremendous community resource for individuals with disabilities, who are some of the most economically disadvantaged and marginalized individuals in our community. A visible, central downtown location allows programs to take place in social settings where participants interact with peers and engage with the community, which is important since this population is often isolated and segregated from the community. Expanded services will allow individuals who live with disabilities to have more educational and social options that promote life-long learning, quality of life, self-advocacy and autonomy.

MHC programs not only greatly benefit participants, but they also provide much-needed parent and family support in the form of respite care during the work week for 111 families. More than 50% of MHC participants live at home with parents or relatives. Families that include people with disabilities can experience extraordinary stress and financial strain in their often life-long role as caregivers and parents with fiduciary responsibilities, and many do not have the needed resources to balance the needs of a family member with a disability with other family needs and obligations. MHC provides a safe, supportive, enriching environment for participants to engage with peers and the community, affording family members the opportunity to go to work, take care of obligations like grocery shopping or doctor appointments, or simply take the time to rest and recuperate. Reliable, high quality respite care often improves a family's resiliency and stability. MHC programs align with the 2016 Whatcom County Community Health Improvement Plan's overarching goals to improve health, reduce disparities, and advance equity through community outreach and engagement. Programs also align with the City of Bellingham's 2018-2022 Consolidated Plan to fill "community facility needs for safe and engaging day services for adults with disabilities who are unable to function independently," and to "look for opportunities to serve priority special needs populations through community facilities."

Adjusted Service Delivery During COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

MHC has adapted its programs and services in the wake of the pandemic to ensure continuity in support during this deeply isolating time that disproportionately impacts people with disabilities who are three times more likely to have underlying medical conditions, and therefore at a higher risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19. As of April 2020, MHC shifted its daily group programs to online platforms and offers Zoom activities twice per day Monday through Saturday. Programs aim to create a safe space for participants to engage, socially connect, ask questions, keep informed on the pandemic and health recommendations, and maintain physical activity. Activities range from book club to cooking classes to yoga to coffee/tea chats about current world events. MHC developed a technology library to improve access and equity through long-term technology check-

outs to individuals who lack a device. Staff provides individual tech training for participants and families. We have received positive feedback in piloting these programs and plan to permanently offer online activities that eliminate some of the complex and ongoing barriers to access in-person programming, such as transportation.

MHC is well aware of the inequities and challenges that virtual programming presents for many participants. Barriers to access online activities include low digital literacy, lack of internet connectivity, lack of in-person support to sign-on or navigate the technology, overstimulation by the platform, or disinterest in online options. To build equitable offerings through the pandemic, MHC staff conducts weekly phone outreach and started a pen pal program to socially connect with individuals who are most isolated and cannot access virtual programs.

During Phase 2 of Washington's Safe Start Plan, MHC reinstated one-on-one programming and plans to expand this option. Group programs will resume once the new facility is complete and with guidance from health experts. The new facility will include design features that will promote a healthy and a sanitary environment, like designated handwashing sinks, plexiglass barriers at reception, automated hand sanitizer dispensers, janitorial closet with a mop basin and washer/dryer, and more space for social distancing during activities. MHC's former facility did not have any of these features and safely reopening group programs would have been extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible.

Impact Stories

Supporting Teens and Youth with Developmental Disabilities in Education: Maria's Story

The After School Program serves students with disabilities ages 13 -21 and offers an enriching, safe, age appropriate program for students to socialize with peers, engage in the community, work on homework, and relax after school while parents finish their work day or fulfill personal responsibilities. Maria has regularly attended the After School Program for years, taking the school bus to Max Higbee Center. MHC staff has supported Maria in practicing appropriate social and physical boundaries in social settings with her peers and in broader community settings. Maria has achieved incredible personal growth in this program and she brightens both the Center and our community with her gregarious and friendly nature. About a year ago, staff noticed that Maria started attending MHC full-time, and reached out to her parents to find out why she was not in school. They learned that Maria had been bullied on the school bus and did not have the verbal skills to fully report the incidents. The school bus and going to school had become such an emotional trigger that Maria refused to attend school. While MHC offered an enriching and educational alternative, everyone agreed Maria needed support to go back to school. The After School Program Coordinator worked with Maria, her teacher and her parents to create a reintegration plan, and after steady, coordinated efforts, Maria began to regularly attend school again and to use MHC after school and on weekends.



Serving Adults and Seniors with Disabilities: James' Story

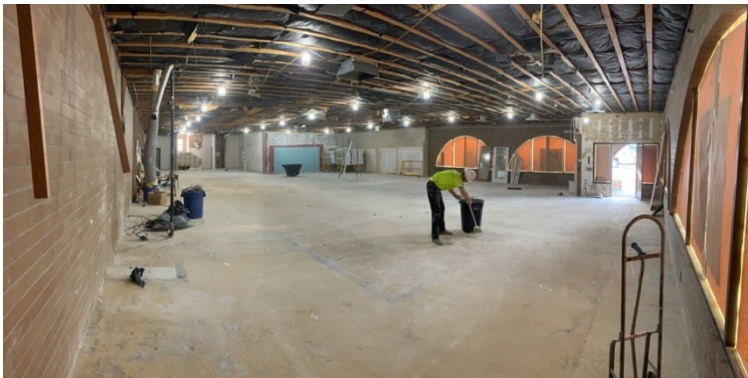
James, an individual with a disability who has attended Max Higbee Center for 30 years, was so inspired by our vision for the new Center that he personally donated \$5,000 to our fundraising campaign. James still has his laminated membership card from the 1980s and says that the Center has given him joy throughout his life; it is a place where he can be himself and connect with life-long friends. James shared that he recently learned how to read with staff support in the Recreation Mentor Program. James said that he has longed to read and join book clubs since he was young, and he feels immense pride in achieving this goal. At the annual MHC play, James proudly read his lines in front of the audience that included friends and relatives and was in tears after the performance. James' story and gift speak to the importance that this project holds for MHC and our community.



Serving a Vulnerable Population During a Pandemic: A Mother's Story

Recently LaVonne, a mother, shared her personal story and experience with Max Higbee Center's virtual programs that began due to the COVID-19 pandemic and have been a great success. She was concerned about her adult son, Ryan, who no longer had work, no longer saw his friends, and no longer went to MHC; and he did not know why this was happening. She said that her son does not have the cognitive ability to understand that COVID-19 had changed everyone's life and independence overnight; he was not the only one, but he did not understand that and felt confused, angry, and betrayed. Losing his daily and weekly routines caused his anxiety and stress levels to increase. His household's quarantine was particularly strict since his mom is immunocompromised and must follow her doctor's orders to stay home for at least 3 months. It pained her to watch her son's spirit diminish each day as she again explained why he could not leave the house. After a week of extreme isolation, she found some relief and hope for her son as she watched "light return in his eyes" when he signed on for the first MHC virtual program in April. Not only did this bring much-needed joy to their household, but it was also a turning point in his understanding of the situation because he was able to see his friends' faces on Zoom and realize that they, too, were at home and could not go to MHC. He was not alone.

Project Summary & Status



February: Full interior demolition to build Max Higbee Center's optimal design from the ground up



July: Beginning stages of drywall after completion of plumbing, electrical and framing.

Max Higbee Center has operated at 1210 Bay Street for the last eight years, and due to limited

facility program space (1,520 square feet), for the first time in its 35-year history there is currently a waiting list for all programs. In September 2019, MHC signed a 10-year lease with 3 options to renew for 5 years each on a 5,000 square foot building at 1400 N. State Street in downtown Bellingham (the building previously housed Alicia's Bridal and The Formal House). MHC began renovations in February 2020 and plans to occupy the new location in October 2020. Zervas Group Architects has provided architectural services pro bono to complete the interior design and carry the project through the permitting process. Jennifer Moehl, Rotarian Sponsor, is the lead architect on the project from Zervas Group Architects. This was a significant cost saving measure as design work was initially estimated at \$25,000. The project contractor, Ram Construction, is providing 0% mark-up on the entire scope of the project and only billing MHC for labor and supplies. VECA Electric and Technologies (a MHC partner) is giving generous discounts in their scope of work as well.

This construction/remodeling project will create: additional recreational, educational and social activity space for MHC members; meeting rooms for families, caregivers and participants to go through the intake and orientation process and receive ongoing support; a private low-stimulation room for members who need to de-escalate their behavior or simply take a break; a kitchen for program meals and where members can learn and practice basic food preparation and cooking skills; program offices with windowed-doors for adequate line of site to program participants; and four American Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible bathrooms. ADA improvements will be made throughout the building and parking lot to ensure members safety, comfort and inclusion in activities. MHC will be more centrally located in downtown Bellingham and closer to a transit hub.

Timeline:

October 2018	Project planning began
January 2019	Fundraising began
July 2019	Initial floor plans
June-Sept 2019	Negotiated lease with contingencies
Aug-Sept 2019	Hired Project Manager and General Contractor
September 2019	Signed 10-year lease with three 5-year options to renew
October 2019	Finalized design and floor plans
Nov 2019-Jan 2020	Environmental review and obtained permits
February 2020	Construction began
October 2020	Occupy new location

Project Budget:

The total capital project budget is \$616,999 to complete construction/remodel of 1400 N. State Street, for which MHC seeks Rotary support. The budget is now almost fully funded at \$516,000. Grant funding from Rotary will be used to fill the final budget gap in construction/remodeling costs, pursue additional features to promote a healthy environment in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as improved ventilation and airflow, and will go toward capitalized equipment and assets that will stay in MHC's possession such as furnishings, signage, IT equipment, and computers. Funding from Rotary will push this project to completion.

If MHC is not selected, the organization will need to pursue other capital grants, although the capital grant opportunities that align with this project have been thoroughly exhausted. If this project does not receive support from Rotary, it is likely that MHC will need to pursue a loan, which will add financial strain in this already challenging economic time.

CAPITAL BUDGET	
Revenue	
City of Bellingham Public Facilities Improvement Grant	\$280,000
First Federal Community Foundation Grant	\$50,000
Whatcom County	\$100,000
Individual Gifts	\$51,000
Foster Foundation Grant	\$10,000
Chuckanut Health Foundation	\$25,000
Rotary Club (requested)	\$100,000
Total Revenue	\$616,000

Expenses	
Leasehold Improvements, taxes, insurance & contingency	\$547,739
Architect Fees (\$25,000)	pro bono
Preliminary Architect Fees (Cornwall Site)	\$2,000
Furnishings	\$19,900
Appliances	\$4,000
Wave Fiber Optic	\$1,500
IT – Modems, routers, switch, UPS, etc.	\$2,000
Computers	\$3,000
Project Manager	\$18,000
Project Audit	\$2,000
Environmental Assessment (Asbestos)	\$800
Parking Lot Survey for ADA Parking Stall	\$760
Legal Fees	pro bono
Marketing - Start-up Promotion, Signage, Donor Recognition	\$3,000
Permitting Fees	\$4,300
Administrative & Bookkeeping	\$8,000
Total Expenses	\$616,999

Project Outcomes:

Programs are projected to grow from 408 to 469 members, and respite care will grow from 108 to 124 families. Outcomes include:

- Create a functional, accessible, enjoyable, and welcoming space to meet the needs and preferences of participants with developmental disabilities
- Triple MHC's facility space to eliminate program waiting lists, allow more individuals to access programs, and fill an unmet need in the community
- Increased capacity to serve 61 additional individuals and 16 families (15% increase)
- Design features will allow programs to run multiple, diverse activities simultaneously and improve MHC's ability to honor participants' needs, preferences, and autonomy
- Design features such as windowed doors, a participant quiet breakroom, and front desk check-in area will allow staff to better support participants' physical and emotional safety, and well-being during programs

- A more robust kitchen to improve cooking classes, workshops on food preparation, healthy food choices, and nutrition education
- The ability to serve more of Whatcom County's developmentally disabled population to build life skills and level of activity will improve quality of life and increase independence

Rotary Recognition & Volunteer Involvement

Naming rights will be available for several areas of the newly constructed/remodeled space. As a key and final contributor, MHC would like to offer naming rights to Rotary for the main Recreation Room. Rotary will also be prominently recognized on MHC's donor wall at the entrance of our new facility. MHC plans to pursue vinyl signage to display on the windows of highly trafficked State Street for exterior promotion. The Rotary logo and a descriptive narrative will appear on the MHC website and social media accounts, in our widely-distributed monthly newsletter, and will be announced at large community agency gatherings, including an open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate project completion (once gatherings are possible). MHC will welcome Rotarian hands-on involvement and service projects such as help in creating safe and enjoyable outdoor spaces, and other projects as Rotarians are inspired and qualified to support. Rotarians are also welcome to volunteer in the broad array of programs that MHC offers, or with the annual April Brew's Day fundraising event. This important project will leave a lasting legacy of inclusion for people with disabilities in the Bellingham-Whatcom community.

TOTAL CONSTRUCTION/REMODELING COSTS: \$616,999

AMOUNT OF REQUEST: \$100,000

PROJECT CONTACT: Kait Whiteside, Executive Director
 Phone: 360-746-8724
 Email: kait@maxhigbeecenter.org

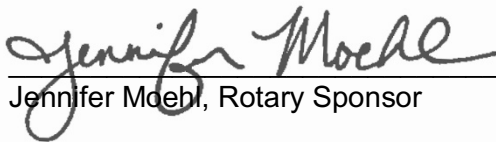
SIGNED:



July 30, 2020

Kait Whiteside, Executive Director

Date



July 30, 2020

Jennifer Moehl, Rotary Sponsor

Date