

BLUE HILL AVENUE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

THE DECISION TO SERVE

I. Introduction

In 1986, Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston (BGCB) commissioned an independent study on the effectiveness of BGCB's city-wide services. The study noted that the Charlestown and South Boston clubhouses were serving their communities near capacity (700 members are served per day), but that the Roxbury/Dorchester area could benefit greatly from increased programming either by expanding services at the Roxbury Clubhouse or by establishing a new clubhouse in Dorchester. The study found that these areas would benefit for several reasons:

- High demand for services throughout targeted area;
- Available youth services cannot meet demand;
- High household density and high population concentration.

In early 1989, BGCB undertook a capital campaign feasibility study to determine whether BGCB could raise funds to build and staff a new clubhouse. The feasibility study results were very positive, and BGCB committed to establishing a clubhouse in North Dorchester and initiated a full-blown capital campaign.

In 1991, the City of Boston reached agreement with BGCB, the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) and the Massachusetts Legislature to build the new clubhouse at the site of former MDC rink at Blue Hill and Talbot Avenues. The George Robert White Fund agreed to commit \$4 million to build the facility, and contracted with BGCB to manage the property and deliver clubhouse programs for 99 years a \$1 per year.

II. The Need

North Dorchester. Blue Hill Avenue. Mattapan. Roxbury.

Within this population resides the highest concentration of school-age children in the state: over 17,000 people below the age of 18 live within one mile of the Blue Hill and Talbot Avenues intersection. The 1990 Census demographic trends predict that the heightened birth rate and school age population in the neighborhood will continue well into the 21st century.

The local economy, however, has declined dramatically; and, the neighborhood is now one of the poorest in Boston. The housing stock includes 930 Boston Housing Authority (BHA) units and over 1,100 Section 8, low-income, federally-subsidized housing units. More than one-half of these units are within walking distance of the new clubhouse.

However broad the range, BGCB's siting study found, "current services in this general area are insufficient in scope to have a significant impact or mediate the extent of the potential demand identified." A breakthrough in the scope of services available and the number of youth served is required to begin making a difference in the neighborhood. It is estimated that a clubhouse in this area will serve a minimum 1,500 young people between the ages of 6 and 18 annually.

III. The Decision to Serve Blue Hill Avenue

The decision to build and operate a Boys & Girls Club on Blue Hill Avenue was not an easy one. A new clubhouse would require significant investments of both financial and personnel resources. Beginning services in a new neighborhood would also require BGCB to build relationships within the community, demanding significant staff and agency resources.

Through a series of meetings, BGCB began building the solid relationships of cooperation and trust which distinguish its services. BGCB and area leaders, parents and agency professionals discussed its experience operating effective, facility-based youth services and how the organizations could work together for the fullest benefit of the North Dorchester area.

BGCB's commitment to serve the youth and families of North Dorchester, as well as provide program and facility resources to other agencies operating there, has been met with a strong and very positive response. BGCB will continue to ensure its close association with the community by developing a Blue Hill Avenue Club Community Advisory Board, including parents.

IV. The Blue Hill Avenue Clubhouse

The former MDC site at the corner of Blue Hill and Talbot Avenues, adjacent to Franklin Field, has several positive attributes, including: facilities for many summer outdoor activities; a large outdoor pool; and, a basic structure within which the clubhouse can be built.

During the formal community meetings, BGCB solicited a broad spectrum of design suggestions to provide for both BGCB and unmet community needs. This dialogue was appreciated and highly successful within the constraints of available construction funds.

The process yielded several important recommendations for programming and for how the new building should be structured. Neighborhood residents and local agencies emphasized the importance of the outdoor pool, both for community swimming and summer camps which are run by many agencies. The community also requested that space be devoted to educational purposes. A flexible multi-purpose room, library (which will include an instructional computer program), social recreation rooms for each age group, an art center, kitchen and a rehearsal space with sound studio will also be offered at the club. The community information process did strongly suggest that adult and family services might be offered during school hours.

VI. Financial Resources--and Need

Developing and operating the Blue Hill Avenue Club presents a significant challenge to BGCB. The substantial support by the George Robert White Fund in committing \$4 million demonstrates the challenge is timely and worthwhile. Contributions by many individuals, corporations and foundations during the Capital Campaign also attest to its importance.

With the construction, equipment and some operational costs covered, BGCB now must raise the balance of the annual \$500,000 in operating funds for the new club. BGCB has pledged totalling \$600,000 over three years (approximately \$200,000/year) from the Charles Hayden Foundation and other generous contributors. Thus, BGCB must raise an additional \$300,000 per year for the first three years, and \$500,000 per year thereafter, to fund the new services at the Blue Hill Avenue Boys & Girls Club.