

BEYOND THE BULLET POINTS

DATE: February 8, 2022
TO: City of Missoula leadership, and
members of the Missoula Park and Recreation Advisory Board
FROM: Friends of Currents Center for Recreation and Creativity (CCRC), and
The Converge Foundation
RE: Missoula's Currents Center for Recreation and Creativity (CCRC)

Imagine a year-round public indoor space that gives Missoulians the opportunity to engage in shared experiences and develop the social networks necessary to reinforce a sense of community.

Community-powered public spaces are the backbone of a healthy, equitable society. Missoula is not alone in this quest. In the past few years Great Falls and Big Sky have both completed indoor community activity spaces in response to community needs. Bozeman and Billings are in the early phases of conceptualizing active common spaces that reflect the values of their respective communities.

It may appear out-of-place in the midst of a pandemic to consider approving a concept design for the CCRC. The pandemic has taught us differently. Social isolation diminishes our mental well-being, degrades social cohesion, and intensifies social conflict. The well-being of our community is enriched when citizens have equitable access to activities that further social, emotional and physical health.

The CCRC is the culmination of a community grassroots conversation that began over two decades ago when a group of local citizens discovered they shared a dream of creating an indoor cultural and recreational gathering place in Missoula. This was the foundation for a community process called "Celebrate 2000 Forums" where 150 citizens, working over an 18-month period, identified an indoor active common space as one of three visionary projects that would inspire the imagination of the community and have a long-lasting impact.

In subsequent years, two citizen volunteer organizations -- Friends of Missoula Community Center¹ and The Converge Foundation² -- have accepted stewardship of the pursuit of an indoor active common space in partnership with the City of Missoula Parks and Recreation Department. The community of Missoula has done its homework on this visionary project.

If Missoula had a superpower, it would be “a sense of community.” As Missoulians we believe in the collective goodwill of community. We believe there are better outcomes for all of us when we come together. We need more opportunities to step out of our isolated worlds and engage with members of our wider, increasingly diversified community. Now more than ever, we need to share experiences with people we may not otherwise meet in our siloed lives.

By providing the opportunity to engage with fellow citizens through wellness classes, music performances, sports clinics, or gatherings around food, the CCRC provides a neutral setting that can reinforce our sense of community. Our community is rapidly expanding in exciting ways. Meeting fellow community members, whether they are new to Missoula or have been around forever, provides the chance to share an experience and create a bond. It is essential to the long-term mental and physical health of our community. The challenge of funding a facility like the CCRC is less than the challenge of paying for ever-increasing law enforcement, mental health intervention, and community decline.

Missoula would be a very different place if we did not choose to invest as a community. Imagine no trail system, no community aquatic facilities, no library, limited open space, and very few and unmaintained parks. Who else would provide these community amenities?

It is time to approve a conceptual plan for Missoula’s Currents Center for Recreation and Creativity and afford the community an opportunity to pursue a legacy investment that will sustain our community as it continues to understand its past, engage in the present, and prepare for the future.

What makes a GREAT PLACE?³



Project for Public Spaces

1. Friends of the Currents Center for Recreation and Creativity, previously known as “Friends of the Missoula Community Center” (<https://www.missoulacomunitycenter.org>)
2. The Converge Foundation (<https://convergefoundation.org>)
3. What makes a successful place? (<https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat>)