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# Portsmouth's next steps on Community Campus: Close $10M deal and make plan for future use

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PORTSMOUTH — The City Council voted unanimously this week to allow City Manager Karen Conard to negotiate a purchase-and-sale agreement for the city to buy the Community Campus facility and 34 acres of land around it.

City officials reached a tentative deal recently to purchase the property for $10 million from the Foundation for Seacoast Health.

When the deal was announced last week, city and foundation officials said the tenants that operate out of the Community Campus off West Road will be allowed to stay after the sale goes through.

**Previous story:** Portsmouth reaches deal to buy Community Campus for $10 million

Conard said she expects to close on the sale by the end of January.

The property, she said during Monday's council meeting, "should serve a variety of uses for the city."

"It's truly an opportunity of a lifetime, as has been said before," Conard said.

## How the deal to buy Community Campus came together

Discussions about the sale have been going on with the Foundation for Seacoast Health since May, Conard said.

"We're extremely proud to be at this point, we're excited to work as a partner with the foundation," she said. "I think the best thing that works for both of us is that we share a common mission in working to promote the needs of the community."

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"They've been doing that as landlords of that wonderful building, and we would pledge to continue that with the tenants that they have in place," Conard said.

Foundation for Seacoast Health Executive Director Deb Grabowski stated, "We very much share the view that we are in a partnership on this transaction."

The foundation initiated a "strategic planning process" about its future "a good four years ago," she said during Monday's meeting.

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They talked "with a number of parties," she said, adding, "Our patience has certainly paid off because we do indeed believe that the city is the perfect party for us to sell this property to and will continue our legacy and continue to serve the community."

"For us what this means as a private foundation is that more of our community investment will go out in the form of grants, rather than supporting the facility," Grabowski said.

## How will Portsmouth pay $10 million for Community Campus?

During an interview Wednesday, Conard stated the City Council and city staff are working to develop the best way to pay for the purchase.

"We have several ideas for that. The council and I will work together on that to determine the best allocation," Conard said.

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Some of the $10 million needed, but likely not all of it, could come from federal monies the city received through the American Rescue Plan and funds the school district received through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, Conard said.

In addition, the city could use existing recreation land and facility funds that have been set aside from previous years, Conard said.

"Our first hurdle was where we could get to the place to negotiate the purchase-and-sale agreement," she said.

## How will the property be used by Portsmouth?

"That's the exciting part and that's where we will certainly develop a community driven process to address that," Conard said. "Really everything is on the table and that's what makes it such an enticing and appealing" opportunity.

Mayor Rick Becksted credited Conard and City Attorney Robert Sullivan for helping reach the tentative deal.

“We were really in hopes of making this actually come true and we are one step closer to really providing something for Portsmouth that will provide for a very long time in the future,” he said during Monday’s council meeting.

City Councilor Esther Kennedy said, “We are going to make this, I’d like to say, the people’s campus.

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“The people will have an opportunity to speak on what this should look like moving forward and I think lastly you need to know that we are looking into our options with federal money so we are not attacking the general fund,” Kennedy said Monday. “I think this is a win for everyone but I really think people need to realize that this is going to be all of our place to have activities for the community.”

City Councilor Deaglan McEachern said he is “super excited to be able to support this. This is a pretty big deal for the future. Seacoast Community School and all the great nonprofits that exist there today will continue to exist.”

The existing Community Campus tenants also include Child Advocacy Center, Portsmouth Adult Basic Education Program, the Krempels Center and Families First Health & Support Center.

Families First previously announced it is moving to a new location by the end of the year.

Assistant Mayor Jim Splaine said, “We should be and all are very delighted that this has become a reality. This is a gift for the future on behalf of the citizens and the residents and the taxpayers who are here now for decades and decades to come."