

The Dewitt Center Capital Campaign



Designed by award-winning architect David Lee of Stull & Lee

THE BACK STORY: A COMMUNITY TAKES CHARGE

A half century ago, residents of Roxbury were facing an existential challenge. Urban renewal was the embodiment of an aggressive community re-building strategy being employed by city planners—and the urban areas targeted for renewal were overwhelmingly where Boston's low income populations lived. While attention-grabbing architectural renderings were meant to inspire visions of new neighborhoods and commercial enterprises, the reality on the ground was that the city was demolishing homes, places of worship, and businesses in Lower Roxbury. Further magnifying the threat to the neighborhood was a plan to run an Interstate-95 link (the "inner belt") through Lower Roxbury.

It was 1966 and with community survival at stake, a determined group of Roxbury activists banded together to forge a wall of resistance. After the state's ill-conceived plan for the inner belt was stopped by neighborhood pressure, the Lower Roxbury Community Corporation was created [later named Madison Park Development Corporation] staking the community's claim to the land; promoting the importance of resident-led development; and communicating a new vision for the neighborhood. Before MPDC's founding, resident voices had not been heard by public officials and government agencies, but MPDC understood the importance of representation when issues affecting the neighborhood were debated. Residents learned to articulate their views on issues impacting their families, homes and community.

A guiding belief emerged that residents—many of whom had family roots extending back generations—owned their community and should play a leading role in shaping its destiny.

CHALLENGES FACING OUR POPULATION

Despite the mid-1960's victories that forged change in community decision-making and control, giving rise to MPDC and subsequently producing a notable transformation in affordable housing and community life, daunting social justice challenges continue into the 21st century.

A brief profile of the community's people and the conditions they face today is telling.

Our service population includes the broader Roxbury neighborhood and over 3,000 low income residents who live in MPDC affordable housing properties, with Orchard Gardens and Madison Park Village the largest. 54% of Roxbury residents live at or below the federal poverty line. Demographic data show 80% rent their homes and 44% of households have children under age 18, with 34% headed by single mothers.

As a population-dense neighborhood, Roxbury experiences a certain level of food insecurity, especially among senior citizens. To a large extent Roxbury bears the burden of the social determinants of health and significant health disparities compared to other neighborhoods, with higher rates of environmentally-caused illness, such as high blood pressure, other cardiovascular disease, asthma, cancer and diabetes. Roxbury also has a high concentration of people with disabilities.

In a neighborhood in which 46% of the population speaks a language other than English as their first language, ensuring that community issues are addressed in a way that is culturally responsive is also critical.

Further, many of our young people face a formidable convergence of risk factors, including social isolation, interrupted education, community violence, and job disconnection. Notably, rates of youth unemployment in Roxbury are as much as three times greater than the city's overall rate. Providing opportunities for building stable, supportive adult relationships, transitioning into post-secondary pathways, and reducing disconnection are all critical needs of our youth.

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ADDING TO THE LEGACY: THE DEWITT CENTER

MPDC is widely respected for its groundbreaking work in revitalizing and re-developing key sections of Roxbury. From the outset, MPDC has been unrelenting in pursuing its mission to “foster a vibrant, healthy Roxbury neighborhood that supports the well-being and advancement of the community.”

Most recently and as a result of a community planning process engendered by HUD’s Whittier Street Choice Neighborhood Initiative, a vision for a community center for the Roxbury neighborhood was developed. The Dewitt Center, located at the corner of Ruggles Street and Dewitt Drive in the heart of Dudley Square, Roxbury, will be an important part of Madison Park Village, a complex of multi-family buildings and townhouses, which provide affordable homes to 546 families. It is yet another important milestone in the evolving revival of one of Boston’s most historic and vital communities.



Interiors & Finishes Designed by Silverman Trykowski Associates

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The Dewitt Center will have broad impact as a 21,374 s.f. multi-purpose facility offering a wide range of expanded MPDC programs, services and activities to benefit families, youth, children and other residents of MPDC affordable housing properties and the surrounding Roxbury neighborhood. It will be a safe haven for families and youth to gather, build community and engage in a panorama of recreational, educational and cultural programs. It will be a venue to educate people, present opportunities for artistic self-expression, assure greater safety, and build grassroots leadership.

To learn how to be part of the Dewitt Campaign contact:

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DEWITT CENTER PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:

Youth Development and Education

A cohort of young people described their vision for the Dewitt Center, calling for a place to “hang out” and enjoy activities in a supportive environment. Dewitt’s Teen Center will offer that and more. In addition to social “down” time, the Teen Center will offer self-care workshops, with trained staff helping young people build self-esteem and make healthy life choices.

Workforce Development and Employment Skills Training for the Future

MPDC and partner agencies will provide trainings for youth and adults covering a range of job readiness skill development while organizations like Jewish Vocational Services will offer ESL classes for job seekers. Groups such as Roxbury Innovation Center, Resilient Coders, New England Culinary Arts and BEST Corp will hold regularly scheduled information and resource referral sessions.

Technology Center

In partnership with the Timothy Smith Network, MPDC will provide an expanded free-access technology center called the PIC (Public Internet Center), which has operated at Madison Park Village for ten years. At its new home in the center, the PIC will double its current size, serving 200 young people and community members annually.

After-School and Summer Camp Programs

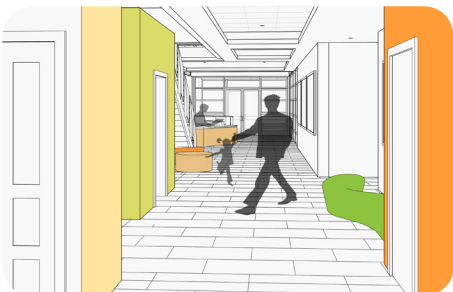
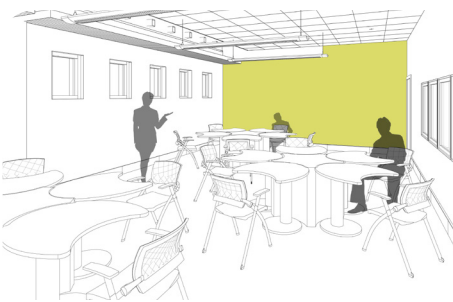
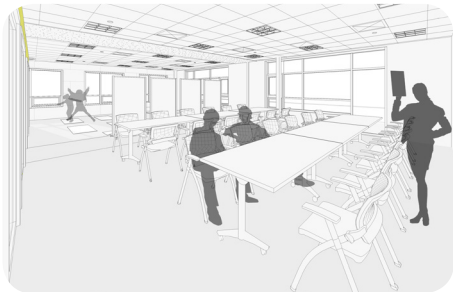
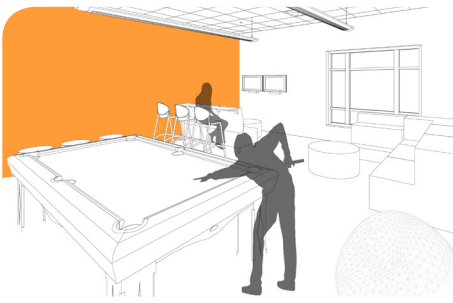
Ellis Memorial is a long-standing MPDC partner, offering after-school and summer camp programs for children ages 6-12. It will expand its services at the center from 26 to 52 children from low-income families. In addition, Ellis Memorial hopes to add a K-1 program at the Center in fall 2018.

Health Equity and Community Wellness

MPDC partners with Dana Farber Cancer Institute, Boston Medical Center and Whittier Street Health Center to provide access to wellness activities. In a community with significant health disparities, these programs serve a critical need. The Dewitt Center’s gym will be an ideal place for Roxbury families to take dance and physical fitness classes (Yoga, Zumba, Pilates) and engage in informal exercise and recreation. Nutrition workshops will be offered by MPDC partner Cooking Matters and MPDC will convene community meetings to help resident leaders address health equity issues on a public policy level.

Arts and Culture

Dewitt Center will be home to a wonderful array of arts activities inside and outside the building. Hibernian Hall, the arts and culture division of MPDC, plans art classes, performances, gallery exhibitions and public art projects on center property. The vision is to strengthen the creative life of the neighborhood by making the arts an ongoing and truly accessible experience.



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