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Federal support for Squamscott Community Commons is only the beginning

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Opinion

August 18, 2009 2:00 AM

For the past three years I have been a volunteer for Squamscott Community Commons (SCC). "The Commons," as we affectionately call it, will be a model for the nation in nonprofit sustainable design, environmental stewardship, and economies of scale and collaboration. My name is Carter Siegel, and currently chief among the SCC volunteer positions I have held is that of chairing the Steering Committee for the group's fund-raising effort.

The Commons is one of the most exciting community efforts to ever hit the Seacoast. I decided to attach my name and effort to this endeavor because I believe in supporting smart solutions and I am a firm believer in working to improve the quality of life for the communities in which we live. What really got me excited was the idea of combining so many social, cultural, and wellness opportunities under one roof. How inspiring and intelligent it is to co-locate services that inherently compliment each other. I work with a dedicated team of professionals and volunteers whose mission is to raise the funds to make this vision a reality.

This past April I travelled to Washington, D.C. with The Commons' Executive Director Robin Druscic, to request federal appropriations for The Commons. We left at the crack of dawn and spent a long, but incredibly educational and fruitful day in our nation's capital. We had been able to secure meetings with Sens. Judd Gregg and Jeanne Shaheen, as well as Congresswoman Carol Shea-Porter. We intended to gain support in the Commons' mission and ultimately some funding for bricks and mortar. Because of the stimulus money available and being distributed, The Capital was abuzz with groups like ours. While we were able to meet Sen. Gregg in his office, two of our meetings were relegated to the hallway because office space was so tight. We stood in a small cluster and made our case to the "powers that be." To make a very long story short...; we requested \$ 1 million and were told to expect \$200,000 ...; if we were lucky.

On Friday, July 31, Republican Sen. Gregg and Democratic Sen. Shaheen announced the Senate Appropriations Committee approved the entire \$1 million through the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill for the fiscal year 2010. Sen. Gregg stated, "the construction of the new community center will provide valuable resources for families and individuals. When completed, the center's health facilities, recreational activities, and other important community support services will benefit the entire Seacoast community." "Thousands of Seacoast residents will benefit from housing so many valuable services together at the Squamscott Community Center. This new, more efficient facility will truly bring the community together, and provide children, families and seniors with the services they need," said Sen. Shaheen. Especially now, given the state of our economy, job losses, debt and insecurities that families face it's nice to know that our voice has been heard. As a volunteer for this effort and one who carries a passion for its mission, it's hard to express how important this achievement is to all those who have invested a lot of time, talent, and treasure.

The Commons capital campaign has been invigorated with this incredible show of support and belief. It seems ironic that as the need for the support and services of The Commons and its partnering agencies increases exponentially, the nation finds itself in one of the most difficult fund-raising climates in history. Will this deter us? Are we intimidated by this? No way. We just need to keep doing what we are doing and "stay the course" as they say. Now, more than ever, communities need to be seeking ways to streamline services and reduce costs for non-profits. This project offers a solution as it will provide comprehensive access to social, health, recreational, cultural, and educational services under one roof. Sens. Shaheen and Gregg's bi-partisan support of this mission is timely and fortuitous. Their backing of Squamscott Community Commons' mission

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Carter W. Siegel

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and vision is a valuable testament to the project's worth and will be an inspiration to all of us as we continue to raise funds for the community center.

Carter W. Siegel is the chairman of the Squamscott Community Commons' Steering Committee. For more visit www.squamscott.org.

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