



# Chestnut Hill Local

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Monday, February 8, 2021

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## Woodward Community Center: Aging gracefully or falling apart noticeably?



(/uploads/original/20201201-124528-Whiteboard Nov 23 2020.jpg)

### **An architect's rendering of the Woodward Community Center's plans.**

Posted Tuesday, December 1, 2020 12:46 pm

**by Debra Malinics**

A fundraiser is now on for desperately needed renovations and repairs of the Chestnut Hill Community Center, 8419 Germantown Avenue. This historically certified building has a long and rich history in our community, where it has stood proudly for more than 200 years, serving as a community center for over 100 of those years...but time has taken its toll. A multitude of upgrades, repairs and compliance issues are urgently needed to be addressed, and without these being completed, it faces permanent closure. The repairs are numerous, the needs are many, but we cannot let it down after it has given so much of itself to us over so many years.

Donated to the community by Gertrude Houston Woodward specifically for community use, the Center has served Chestnut Hill well, housing a variety of non-profit and community organizations and offering low rent space to start-up businesses. Today, it



houses Bird in Hand consignment shop, Villavillekula, a children's clothing boutique, and numerous non-profit and volunteer organizations on the upper floors. Its meeting room is open daily, 7 days a week, to meet community needs.

A capital campaign for \$1.75 million has begun to cover the cost of needed repairs and upgrades, and the William Penn Foundation has generously approved a matching fund grant. John Milner Architects, known for architectural and historic preservation, is planning needed repairs and renovations which will include reconfiguring the interior spaces to make the center self-sustaining. Mr. Milner states, "This historic building continues to reveal itself. It is not only significant, given its social and cultural past, but its architectural past as well."

Working together, we can, and will, bring the center up to code and transform it into a state of the art facility, ensuring its future, structurally and financially, as a community resource for all. The Campaign Objectives include

- Avoid closure of the building
- Make critical repairs and improvements
- Maximize use of the facility for non-profit organizations
- Create financial sustainability for the next 100 years
- Preserve historical certification
- Enliven and stimulate the retail and business environments

Gertrude Houston Woodward once asked, "who is thy neighbor?" with the response being that your neighbor is the spirit that lives within a community; that it was offering service and helping others; and that these neighborly actions, which are a part of our community, would be continued and supported by a community center. The center has supported these ideals and proven itself to be a wonderful neighbor and a continuing presence. During its many years in Chestnut Hill, it continually showed its Chestnut Hill spirit, housing non-profit organizations, supporting local businesses and offering pro bono space to community organizations. During the war, it housed service organizations and offered space to volunteers to make bandages for wounded soldiers. This community center, with its long and generous history of giving back, now looks to us for the help it needs to survive. We cannot let it down.

Let us work together to help the community center maintain its presence now, in the same spirit that it maintained its presence for us over the past 200 years. The project has strong public and community-wide support from the CH Conservancy, CH

Community Association, CH Business Organization and Woodmere Art Museum. The community center has given us so much....let us now give back to help this icon live on gracefully, stronger and renewed so it never needs to beg again. We cannot let it down.

The fund drive is headed by longtime Chestnut Hill resident Susan H. Bray, MD. Susan can be reached at [SjhBray2@verizon.net](mailto:SjhBray2@verizon.net) (<mailto:SjhBray2@verizon.net>) to answer questions on how you can help this vital restoration project and keep the Chestnut Hill spirit alive and well in our community. Donations, so needed and appreciated, can be made to the Chestnut Hill Community Fund, a 5013C organization, 8419 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118. We cannot do it alone, but we can do it together, in the true spirit of Chestnut Hill. Please help...and we thank you all.

## Comments

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