**CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PROJECT**

**WRITTEN JUSTIFICATION FORM**

**County Department:** Middlesex College

**Project Name:** Multicultural Community Complex/Venue

**Project Cost:** $20,000,000

**1. *Description of harm or need to be addressed:* Recipients should provide a description of the specific harm or need to be addressed, and why the harm was exacerbated or caused by the public health emergency. When appropriate, recipients may provide quantitative information on the extent and type of the harm, such as the number of individuals or entities affected.**

The Pandemic resulted in the complete shutdown of all businesses, schools, etc. for an extended period of time. With the lockdown, the public had the need to get out of their residences for both physical and mental health. This period extended for well over one year, and for many who decided to extend their quarantine period, extended longer and still exists for others.

The public health emergency, including necessary measures to protect public health, resulted in significant social and emotional hardship for community members, particularly those with lower incomes. Severe isolation has disproportionately affected low-income community members, amplifying the negative impacts of the crisis. The community mitigated the negative impacts of COVID-19 by promoting healthier living environments, outdoor recreation, and socialization. Playgrounds and sports fields are essential to childhood development, and are where children develop cognitive abilities, gross motor skills, and healthy sleep patterns.

There continues to be serious physical and emotional fallout from the Pandemic for children and adults of all ages. Providing increased opportunities for recreation and socialization is critically important to the rehabilitation of the Pandemic’s negative impacts.

There was also severe economic harm to the community’s businesses from the lockdowns. Providing increased opportunities for outside activities and socialization, will inevitably result in increased attendance at the businesses.

**2. *Explanation of why a capital expenditure is appropriate:* Recipients should provide an independent assessment demonstrating why a capital expenditure is appropriate to address the specified harm or need. This should include an explanation of why existing capital equipment, property, or facilities would be inadequate to addressing the harm or need and why policy changes or additional funding to pertinent programs or services would be insufficient without the corresponding capital expenditures. Recipients are not required to demonstrate that the harm or need would be irremediable but for the additional capital expenditure; rather, they may show that other interventions would be inefficient, costly, or otherwise not reasonably designed to remedy the harm without additional capital expenditure.**

The ARPA funds that are proposed for use entails the construction of a new Multicultural Community Complex/Venue. It is Middlesex College’s (the “College”) position that the use of these funds for the below described capital expenditure project is the best use of these funds, for the reasons stated below.

Note: The funds used for the Multicultural Community Complex/Venue are separate and distinct from the funds being used for the Athletic Complex, which is the subject of a separate DCA Application.

The Pandemic resulted in an increase utilization of outside facilities, like parks, outside open space, ball fields, restroom facilities, parking lots, etc. This increased reliance on parks and other outside facilities during the Pandemic sped up the need for maintenance of these facilities, both due to the end of their service lifespan and/or due to major preventive maintenance activity. While existing parks and outside facilities can be rehabilitated, they do not have the space to permit for the needed increased capacity, which the Pandemic exhibited.

The intended outcome of this project is to address health disparities and the social determinants of health, building stronger neighborhoods and communities, and promoting healthy childhood and adult environments by increasing outdoor space capacity. Parks and other outside venues are used for social gatherings and events which will assist in bringing the community back together as recovery efforts begin for the COVID-19 pandemic. Outdoor space and socialization can also assist in improving psychological health.

**Strategic Plan**

Importantly, and most timely, Middlesex County (the “County”), in partnership with the State of New Jersey, has finalized its Community, Innovation, and Opportunity (“CIO”) Strategic Investment Plan (the “Plan”).  The Plan is designed to transform and bolster the College and the Magnet School System, as well as meet the diverse needs of the entire community. Highlights of the Plan include:

* **an open-air Multipurpose Community Venue for concerts, cultural events, and multiple sports such as baseball, soccer, or lacrosse;**
* a Workforce Development & Conference Center;
* a new Community Park featuring an educational children’s amenity;
* a new Student Center which will include campus and community amenities;
* a new Middlesex County Magnet School, the Middlesex County Magnet School of the Future;
* a Destination Athletic Complex featuring 14 multi-sport synthetic fields; 16 tennis courts and a state-of-the-art recreational cricket field; and much more; and
* an expansion of the existing exterior spaces, activating these areas by adding public art, seating, and water features.

This Plan, and in particular the Multicultural Community Complex/Venue, will improve the lives of so many in the community by not only expanding the educational and cultural offerings of both the College and the Magnet School System, but to turn the College campus and surrounding facilities into a multi-faceted destination for the community. The Plan will drastically transform the outdoor activities available to families and individuals across both the County and the State of New Jersey but will most importantly improve the lives of those most disproportionately impacted by the Pandemic. The Plan will further promote educational opportunities, community engagement, and the arts among Middlesex College students and residents of all ages.

With this extraordinary and transformative investment of the Multicultural Community Complex/Venue by the State and County on and near the college campus, the College can do even more to lean into and live up to its mission of providing access to a quality, affordable education for a diverse population, supporting student success for lifelong learning, and strengthening the economic, social, and cultural life of the community.

The College campus is already home to one of our County Magnet Schools – the Edison Academy Magnet School – and now it will be home to a second – the Middlesex County Magnet School of the Future. With programs like environmental technology and engineering, information communication, and global logistics, the School of the Future will leverage its location at the College campus to provide an education that is advanced both academically and practically, giving students access to college-level courses as well as the latest tools and technologies.

The College is located between two of the County’s Qualified Census Tracks (“QCTs”), thereby making it available to both communities (New Brunswick and Perth Amboy). The development of a Multicultural Community Complex will increase available space for community activities that will result in physical and mental health benefits from exercise, team sport participation, community engagement with arts and cultural events, and just being outdoors.

The proximity of the College to the QCTs, and other communities that were impacted by the Pandemic, have many other opportunities to benefit from the College, aside from the Athletic Complex. The College offers low-cost or free services to the greater County community, the following is a short list:

* Access to the College Library (at no cost for most services);
* Access to a very low-cost Dental Clinic ($20 or less);
* Full-service Early Learning Center (childcare) for children ages 2-5 (through pre-K), which serves students, employees, and the community; and
* Community Resource Hub (which includes a Food Pantry), which is currently available only for enrolled students but may be expanded once the new Student Center is constructed and renovations can be made to the existing College Center.

The College has a student population of approximately 9,700, 76% of which are underrepresented individuals. Of the 24 municipalities in the County, Perth Amboy and New Brunswick are the third and fifth, respectively, with the most residents attending the College. Lastly, it is important to point out that the College is known to the US Department of Education as a “Minority Serving Institution.”

In an effort to measure the impact that the pandemic had on the student population, the College performed a survey seeking input from the students relative to their needs, for example, food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness. They also surveyed issues like emotional impact, loss of employment, and personal experiences with COVID-19. Here are some interesting and relevant findings to the proposed project.

* 56% of those that responded to the survey (11.8% of the student population) experienced some form of basic needs insecurity.
* 34% could not afford to eat balanced meals and 38% worried about running out of food before they had money to buy more.
* 48% experienced housing insecurity.
* 10% experienced homelessness.
* 82% of those students who responded were underrepresented individuals.

While the College’s student body will be able to take advantage of the new park facilities/complex, the proximity of the College, the Athletic Complex, and the Multicultural Community Complex/Venue to the QCTs are major benefits for those communities. They can take advantage of these facilities, as well as all that the College has to offer from an educational, community, cultural, and recreational perspective.

Investments in outdoor spaces is needed to adequately respond to the needs of disproportionately impacted communities by promoting healthier living environments and outdoor recreation and socialization to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This public infrastructure Project will also support small businesses and enhance public safety during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic by providing additional outdoor capacity to facilitate social distancing and safe, outdoor patronage. The improvements are intended to increase pedestrian safety and promote use of the additional outdoor spaces in an active urban core that will support businesses, tourism, and other economic activity.

**Multicultural Community Complex/Venue**

Connecting campus and the community physically and programmatically is an important goal for both the College and the County and both agree that improving the visibility of the College would be advantageous. The northern portion of the campus adjacent to Woodbridge Avenue is considered an ideal location to incorporate facilities and open spaces that support the student population, visitors to the campus, and the greater community.

An open-air, multi-purpose recreation facility with 4,500+ seats is envisioned on the northern portion of the campus near the intersection of Woodbridge Avenue and Mill Road. This prominent site is highly visible from the two well-traveled roads attracting passersby as well as the College’s students and faculty. The venue would be designed to accommodate a diverse variety of activities for both the community and the College such as concerts, cultural events, and multiple types of sports, either professional or semi-professional, such as baseball, soccer, or lacrosse.

This new facility, which would be maintained by the County, has the potential to generate revenue for the County and the College as well as create potential partnerships with outside groups.

An initial program is expected to include:

• Synthetic field sized and lined to accommodate baseball, soccer and lacrosse

• Protection netting

• Performance lighting

• Video board

• Seating for 4,500-5,500

• Concourse with concessions

• Dugouts

• Back-of-house support functions

• Club lounge suites with prep kitchen and restrooms

• Press box

• Home and visiting team facilities

• Coach and administration suites

• Parking area for 1,000 cars

• Hardscape design of approximately 250,000 SF to accommodate

a variety of supporting activities

• Landscape design

With New Jersey being the ‘Garden State’ and the County’s emphasis innovation in agriculture, it is fitting the to host a weekly Farmers’ Market on the campus grounds and an ideal location would be the new facilities supporting the Recreation Venue. This would serve to draw the community to the College campus as well as providing an important wellness component for students and local residents.

**3. *Comparison of the proposed capital expenditure against alternative capital expenditures:* Recipients should provide an objective comparison of the proposed capital expenditure against at least two alternative capital expenditures and demonstrate why their proposed capital expenditure is superior to alternative capital expenditures that could be made. Specifically, recipients should assess the proposed capital expenditure against at least two alternative types or sizes of capital expenditures that are potentially effective and reasonably feasible. Where relevant, recipients should compare the proposal against the alternative of improving existing capital assets already owned or leasing other capital assets. Recipients should use quantitative data when available, although they are encouraged to supplement with qualitative information and narrative description. Recipients that complete analyses with minimal or no quantitative data should provide an explanation for doing so.**

* 1. **a. *A comparison of the effectiveness of the capital expenditures in addressing the harm identified.* Recipients should generally consider the effectiveness of the capital expenditures in addressing the harm over the useful life of the capital asset and may consider metrics such as the number of impacted or disproportionately impacted individuals or entities served, when such individuals or entities are estimated to be served, the relative time horizons of the project, and consideration of any uncertainties or risks involved with the capital expenditure.**

After numerous site planning studies, it was determined that the 32.25-acre portion of the campus could be reconfigured to support amenities such as a multi-use recreation venue, athletic complex, and a community park.

**Alternative 1:** We examined placing the Multicultural Community Complex/Venue on an available US Department of Environmental Protection property located adjacent to the southeast of the College campus. However, following were the negative impacts:

* 1. Access to the property through the existing county property required:
     1. A long, expensive road
     2. Required a new crossing of a railroad spur
     3. Loss of existing green area
  2. Acquisition of federal land;
  3. Likely requires significant environmental remediation, formal arsenal site;
  4. The lack of visibility of the stadium from a major roadway reduces the financial viability of the project; and
  5. Upgrades required to Mill and Patrol Road.

**Alternative 2:** We examined placing the Multicultural Community Complex/Venue on a site located on the south side of the College campus. However, following were the negative impacts:

* 1. The lack of visibility of the stadium from a major roadway reduces the financial viability of the project;
  2. Upgrades required to Mill Road; and
  3. Loss of needed campus parking requiring the building of an expensive parking structure
  4. **b. *A comparison of the expected total cost of the capital expenditures.* Recipients should consider the expected total cost of the capital expenditure required to construct, purchase, install, or improve the capital assets intended to address the public health or negative economic impact of the public health emergency. Recipients should include pre-development costs in their calculation and may choose to include information on ongoing operational costs, although this information is not required.**

The current total cost of the Multicultural Community Complex/Venue is estimated at $75M. The ARPA funds that are being provided to the College by the State would be used towards the total cost of the project.

The funds used for the Multicultural Community Complex/Venue are separate and distinct from the funds being used for the Athletic Complex, which is the subject of a separate DCA Application.