

[https://www.meadvilletribune.com/news/community-space-being-discussed-for-former-meadville-club-location/article\\_45f82766-fda1-11e8-9db4-d3422993be82.html](https://www.meadvilletribune.com/news/community-space-being-discussed-for-former-meadville-club-location/article_45f82766-fda1-11e8-9db4-d3422993be82.html)

TOPICAL

FEATURED

## 'Community space' being discussed for former Meadville Club location

ARC says parking lot will not fill the opening

By Mike Crowley Meadville Tribune

Dec 12, 2018



Mark Weindorf, executive director of The ARC of Crawford County, talks about the event possibilities that may come to the lot on Market Street that was once the home of the Meadville Club. The ARC purchased the building and demolished it to expand the organization.

SHANNON ROAE/Meadville Tribune



When the former Meadville Club building was demolished late last month, interest immediately sparked concerning what would become of the location at 951-955 Market St.

The social club's building was purchased by The ARC of Crawford County in February for \$61,000 at a judicial sale held by the Crawford County Tax Claim Bureau.

Executive Director Mark Weindorf does not yet have a definitive answer on what the space will be, but he was crystal clear on what would not be going where the club once stood.

"It's not going to be a parking lot," Weindorf said this week. "We want to make it a community space."

The exact form the community space takes will depend largely on what community members would like to see there.

Stakeholders from throughout the community, including the individuals and families served by The ARC, will be able to participate in meetings early next year to formulate a vision for the space that serves both the needs of The Arc and its clientele while also serving a larger public function, according to Weindorf.

"It's going to be some type of activity space," he said. "It's going to be something that can be functional and where we can have community events or do things."

With The ARC's parking lot conveniently located at the corner of Market and Arch streets, immediately south of the former Meadville Club, future programming on weekends when the lot is empty could be a possibility at the location as well, Weindorf said. As an example of the kinds of events that might make sense, he pointed to the Second Saturday Night Live parking lot concert series, which has previously been held atop the Market Square parking garage and more recently in the Mill Run parking lot.

The community meetings that will shape the space will be organized by Allegheny College art professor Amara Geffen in conjunction with the final capstone class for Allegheny's Art and the Environment minor.

Geffen has plenty of experience combining with students and diverse community partners to transform public spaces. Past efforts of her Art and the Environment Initiative have produced the well-known "Read Between the Signs" and "Signs & Flowers" installations of reclaimed road signs at Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's Meadville headquarters as well as murals on Park Avenue, at Shadybrook Park and elsewhere.

"First and foremost, it's an ARC site," Geffen said, "but there's so much happening in the community, and Mark's ideas (for the space) dovetail with so much that's already happening."

The former Meadville Club location offers a rare opportunity, Geffen said. Normally such a spot would wind up being converted into a parking lot without much thought going into the process.

"We just want to gather all the things people are thinking about and work collaboratively with the folks who are already on this," she said, "and think about what we could do to make this into a unique place."

Geffen launched Allegheny's Art and the Environment Initiative 21 years ago. Over the past two decades her capstone classes for students minoring in the field have helped transform the face of prominent locations throughout Meadville.

Geffen's class in the spring will be the last version of the course offered at the college. The minor is being discontinued, Geffen said, and the students currently completing their courses will be the last ones enrolled in it.

But while there will no longer be a formal course of study, it won't mark the end of Allegheny students and Geffen herself being involved in community art projects.

"I do anticipate continuing my work and, to whatever capacity I can, bringing Allegheny students into it," she said.

The final version of the course will continue a trend. Several of the Art and the Environment Initiative projects, like the mural at the entrance of the Meadville Medical Center Medical Arts building completed in 2017, have been associated with Mill Run. The former Meadville Club property will join the list as well: a subterranean section of the stream runs directly beneath the concrete slab that is all that remains of the building.

The stream's presence likely contributed to mold issues in the building, Weindorf said. Combined with the decades of use as a social club, such issues made demolition more preferable than trying to renovate the structure.

The future of the property is bright, Weindorf said. The ARC is working with a corporate partner that is expected to provide a five-year commitment to support the development of the community site. Once that arrangement is officially finalized, Weindorf said, the identity of the corporate partner will be announced.

The ideas being kicked around for the space at this very preliminary stage include incorporating the presence of Mill Run, perhaps even opening up part of the property to reveal the stream below.

While something like that could be a long way off, Geffen is optimistic that less elaborate changes could make a significant impact in the short term. What those changes look like will depend on what she and her students hear from community members.

The meetings will begin as early as February, Geffen said, and will be advertised in a variety of venues.