

## Plans uncertain for Boys & Girls Club, former site

Written by By FAITH HUFFMAN, News-Telegram News Editor  
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With the collapse earlier this summer of the old Houston School building, where the Boys and Girls Club has been housed for the last few years, plans for the club and property's future are uncertain.

"Things right now are up in the air. The board had a lease-purchase agreement with the school system. We're not sure what the school plans. We can't be back in the building," Boys and Girls Club Board President Charles Dawson said Tuesday morning of the College Street facility, where the BGC has been housed since August 2007.

The Boys & Girls Club contracted with Sulphur Springs Independent School District in May 2007 to purchase Houston School for \$100,000, an amount to be paid out over a few years. The contract for the building included a provision which allowed SSISD alternative programs to remain in the west side of the building (previously the location of the special education offices) for up to five years to give SSISD enough time to find a permanent location for the program, then-SSISD Superintendent Patsy Bolton said seven years ago, when the agreement was reached.

What will become of the old BGC site has yet to be determined, said SSISD Superintendent Mike Lamb, noting that based on the information the school district has received, the building is "unsalvageable." Discussions with engineers and experts have taken place regarding the feasibility and probability of saving the older section of the structure to preserve a piece of the school's history.

"No Boys and Girls Club will be in the building as it is now. There will be some after-school program in place in Sulphur Springs by the start of school. We are not sure what is going to happen with that building," Lamb said.

With no facility to operate, the Boys and Girls Club had to shut down after the roof in the cafeteria collapsed on May 29, leaving parents to find last minute accommodations for school children who normally were bused to the BGC after school the last week of classes as well as for youngsters who normally participated in the program while parents were at work weekdays during the summer months.

Many items were retrieved for the club and are being stored until the club resumes operations in a different facility. Until then, Dawson's office at 120 Jefferson St. is serving as the temporary address for BGC.

Dawson said that funding will be key to restarting the BGC.

"The collapse came in the midst of our struggle raising funds. This gives us some time to regroup and build a stronger foundation. We are working with Boys and Girls Club organization on some things," Ayana Pryor, BGC director, said Tuesday.

"If we can raise funds, we're looking for maybe a smaller place. We're also talking about maybe working with the school. It's been hard raising funds," Dawson said.

A golf tournament held last month raised more than \$5,000 to go toward getting the club back on its feet; the tourney winners donated their winnings back to the club to help out.

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Dawson has donated a residential property at 903 Longino St., located at the corner of California and Longino streets, to be sold to help raise funds for BGC as well. Pryor said volunteers are being sought, along with supplies or monetary donations to improve the house so it can be put up for sale and hopefully draw a higher price.

To donate to or volunteer with BGC, contact BCG President Charles Dawson at 903-243-4793 or the BGC temporary office at 120 Jefferson St.; or Ayana Pryor at 903-951-8415.

“This is planting the seed so we can try to grow back. We are trying to find a way to serve the kids in the community. We appreciate any support people can give us,” Pryor said. “We have struggled for some years, as non-profits often struggle. We are going to keep pushing, regroup and focus so that we can come back bigger and better, offering more of the programs BGC offers. People can go online to [bgca.org](http://bgca.org) and see the types of things we have or would like to offer. We are more than just an after-school program.”

She noted that the BGC is for all children, not just low-income youth, although a large percentage of the students at the club are economically disadvantaged. In SSISD, less than 300 of the 4,000 students are considered car riders and the rest are bus riders or walkers — often children referred to as latch-key kids, those who go home to empty houses until parents get home from work. These especially the BGC tries to serve, to give them a safe place to go after school where they can receive help with homework and participate in various programs designed to improve their self-esteem and encourage positive choices, Pryor said.

The BGC Board is expected to meet within the next few weeks to discuss the situation and future of the program.

“It may be a different format if something is available,” Dawson said. “The school system, Mr. Lamb especially, has been very cooperative. We’ll have to see what we can do. We want to come back. A lot of kids from here have gone to college, we feel because of the program. It keeps kids off the street. Most of our kids come from single-parent, low-income families. We want to help the children. We hope to know more after our next meeting.”

SSISD is also looking into options for an after-school program to serve those students who previously were bused to the College Street facility after school.

Lamb said the district is still exploring options for a new after-school program, but school officials aren’t sure what that program will be. There will, he said, be some type of after-school program in place and available for younger Sulphur Springs students when school starts.

Possible options would be a BGC or BGC-type program, a program operated at the school by Greenville YMCA or even a YMC-type program offered by the school district.

“YMCA is a different program. I am familiar with the program from two other districts where I’ve worked. The Y would be on campus, giving parents the option of leaving students after school until almost 6 p.m. This is geared more toward parents who work in the Dallas area,” Lamb said.

If that option is selected, the YMCA would rent an SSISD facility for after-school use. The YMCA would also have to obtain all of the same required licensing as a day care facility. Parents would have to pay a fee to the YMCA for after-school services; the fee would most likely be higher than BGC fees.

“The programs the Y offers are pretty incredible. It’d be a little more cost than the Boys and Girls Club. There’d also be scholarship opportunities. If we didn’t go with them, we — the school — would likely create something a lot like that program at the school,” Lamb said. “Another option we are looking at is a BGC-type thing through the school.”