

Date: November 15, 2008

To: Marlboro Community

From: Athletic Committee / Student Affairs

RE: PROPOSAL AND REQUEST FOR FUNDS FOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT

The Athletic Committee, along with Student Affairs, is asking Town Meeting to authorize a withdrawal of roughly \$15,000 from the Washer & Dryer Fund to purchase fitness equipment for the newly remodeled THC fitness center. (An itemized list of the equipment we propose to buy, with purchase price and maintenance costs, is attached to this proposal.) This is, admittedly, a large request – but the pieces of equipment we propose to buy are necessary to the function of the fitness center, and buying them now will be, in the long term, the most effective use of our resources.

We propose to replace three pieces of current equipment – the treadmill, the stationary bicycle and the universal machine – with three new commercial-grade pieces that will replicate all the functions of the old machines and add new functions as well. In all three cases, the need for new equipment is pressing: all three machines are broken – although we have been able to keep them more or less functional – and none of them (for the reasons we will detail below) is worth fixing. So they will need to be replaced: the questions now are (a) whether we will wait until they are irretrievably broken to replace them one at a time, and (b) what we will replace them with. We believe we are better off replacing them now, while we have the money and the time to plan for the future, and that we should replace them with the best and sturdiest commercial-grade equipment we can get.

How Did we Get Here? A Brief History of the Fitness Center

Marlboro has had a fitness center for about 15 years, although it's only been recognizable as such for the last five or so. Originally, the fitness center consisted of a treadmill (the one we still use), a rowing machine and a few free weights in the back of the OP. Over the years a few more pieces were added – a rack, eventually some olympic weights, a small universal machine – all of which were paid for either by small donations or through borrowing from the OP budget or specific grants. The fitness center grew again when it moved, three years ago, into the former dance studio, at which point we purchased dumbbells (through a small Town Meeting grant), an elliptical trainer and a cable-cross machine (with OP grant money), some boxing equipment, more weights, flooring and a sound system (all through private donations from community members). Since the fitness center has moved to its new space, the college has added roughly \$10,000 from the capital budget, which has allowed us to purchase a leg press, a functional trainer and an arm bike.

The recent capital budget outlay aside, the fitness center has always been a home-grown community initiative, built largely out of a few key town meeting grants and private donations. While this kind of funding has allowed us to build the fitness center, slowly, into a versatile exercise space, it has also forced us to make some bad decisions about equipment: having very little to spend, and very little experience with the equipment we

were buying, we have usually bought either used equipment or light-duty equipment designed for home use. We have made do with both for a long time, but we have spent a great deal of money and time maintaining that equipment – which, because it was used and because it was light-duty, required a lot of maintenance and, often, replacement. The three pieces we propose to replace now are some of the oldest equipment we have, all purchased because we could get them cheap. Now, as we face replacing these pieces, we are faced again with the basic dilemma: buying cheap but lower-quality equipment will cost us more, in the long run, than buying good but sturdy equipment – moreover, when cheap equipment breaks, we not only have to fix it, but we lose that function in the fitness center until we do.

Why Do We Need All This Stuff?

People often ask why we need all this fitness equipment. Why don't people just exercise outside? Or why not make do with a treadmill or two? Why do we need weights? Why do we need pulley machines? What's that big scary white thing over there?

The answer to all those questions is that a fitness facility, in order to be really functional and beneficial, has to be for *everybody*. Beginners have to be able to work out there, but so do experienced athletes. People interested in running should be able to find something to do in the facility, as should weightlifters and bicyclists and soccer players. People should be able to do offseason indoor workouts for sports if they want to, or rehabilitation exercises, or a variety of cardiovascular or total-body workouts. Right now, the fitness center has about 50 regular users that we know about. Once the snow starts falling, we can expect that number to rise. We want, as much as possible, to have something for all those users, and to be prepared for the users we don't have yet.

So the idea is to create as many opportunities as possible for people who want to exercise. If you want to just get in an hour of cardio every couple of days, the fitness center will have a variety of ways to do it. If you want to lift weights, it will have small weights for when you need small ones, and big weights for when you need big ones. If you're just starting out with resistance training, it will have machines, like the smith machine and the universal, that will allow you to control the movement at first so you can get the technique right.

No single person, probably, will use every piece of equipment in the fitness center on a regular basis. But *everybody*, taken together, will -- and in a good fitness facility everybody will also have the opportunity to try new things every once in awhile, too. A fitness center the size of Marlboro's obviously can't have as many specialized pieces of equipment as a large urban gym: but to fulfill its function – to provide a safe and enjoyable workout for a lot of people with a lot of different experience levels and tastes – it should try to meet as many exercise needs as possible within the space available.

Why Don't We Just Fix What We Already Have?

The short answer: because we can't. Both the treadmill and the bike are more than five years old – and both were purchased used -- which means they are not covered by warranties and are difficult to find parts for. The treadmill was made by Trotter, a

company that has since disappeared (some part of it was purchased by Cybex): most of the treadmill's parts – including the electronics, which are currently giving us trouble – are simply not available anymore. Even if we could find parts for the treadmill or the stationary bike, we would probably spend as much fixing them as we would replacing them. If we do replace them, though, we can have new machines with warranties and service contracts. If we fix them – if we *can* fix them – we will only have what we have now, and we will find ourselves in this same position in a year or two.

The universal machine is in less dire straits than the cardio equipment – it's a newer machine – but it is broken, too: one of the plates in the weight stack is cracked in half (both a functional and a safety problem), and its cables are stretched and showing definite signs of wear. Again, we could probably find a way to keep this machine working for another year or two, but we would, again, be throwing good money after bad. Unlike the treadmill and the bike, which were at least designed for heavy use, the universal machine was designed to be in somebody's basement. It will not last, given the demands that are currently being placed on it. The universal is the third machine of its type we have owned: the total amount we have spent on these machines already exceeds what a good commercial-grade machine would have cost.

Why Buy *This* Equipment?

There are two grades of fitness equipment: home and commercial. Home equipment generally looks a lot like commercial equipment – the basic designs are similar – but home equipment is built less robustly than commercial equipment. In a cardio piece like a treadmill, this means a less substantial deck, a cheaper plastic frame, a smaller motor, plastic gears and pulleys instead of cast iron, etc. A commercial treadmill has to be built for continuous use by anybody – from a 100 lb. distance runner doing speed drills to a 400 lb. beginner trying to lose weight. All treadmills take a beating – running is a high-impact activity for both the runner and the treadmill – so it pays to buy the heaviest one you can get.

In resistance equipment like universal machines, the difference between home and commercial grade equipment lies in bolted joints vs. welded ones, light-gauge steel vs. heavier stock, plastic pulleys vs. steel pulleys, cheap vs. robust cables and connections, plastic bushings vs. sealed bearings, and the number and quality of weight stacks. Moreover, the design of home equipment must always make compromises for space, since the home user is usually trying to do everything at once in a corner of his or her house: home machines are designed to fit into basements with 7-foot ceilings, and most home universals (like the one we currently have) incorporate very complex cabling systems in order to make one weight stack available for any number of uses.

So What Should We Buy?

With all these things in mind, we propose to buy these commercial grade pieces:

- **Matrix T3x treadmill** (\$3,360 + freight, installation and maintenance contract)
 - 5 year motor, 3 year parts and labor warranty
 - 3.2 hp motor, polymer deck, ready for regular use by any user up to 400 pounds.
 - Built-in heart-rate monitor
 - Service and preventative maintenance contract with Peak Fitness covers 4 site visits
 - 40% discount off MSRP from Peak Fitness with bulk buy



- **Matrix H5X Hybrid Bike** (\$2,516 + freight, installation and maintenance contract)
 - Brushless generator drive (very low maintenance)
 - 7 year frame, 5 year generator, 3 year parts and labor warranty
 - Step-through entry and 45-degree seat (more comfortable than other upright bikes)
 - Built in heart-rate monitor
 - Service and preventative maintenance contract with Peak Fitness covers 4 site visits per year
 - 30% discount off MSRP from Peak Fitness with bulk buy

- **Cybex MG 500 Multigym** (\$7,534 + freight and installation)
 - In only a slightly larger footprint than our current machine, provides a range of upper- and lower-body functions: leg extensions, leg curls (not possible on our current machine), a full range of rowing and pulling exercises, pec flies, pressing through an entire range from decline press to military press.
 - Includes a heavy-duty flat-incline-decline bench detachable from the unit
 - Heavy-gauge welded steel construction throughout
 - Cast pulleys and heavy-gauge cable throughout
 - Three weight stacks (0 – 200# in 5# increments) allow three users to exercise simultaneously. Our current machine, with only one weight stack, allows only one user at a time.

