The South Middlesex Opportunity Council hopes to have the town's new "Hoops and Homework" program ready to start this spring, after being awarded a contract to operate the service for low-income families last month.

The town executed the one-year, $80,421 deal with the social services organization on Wednesday, according to Framingham's purchasing office. SMOC was the only bidder for the contract this past December.

While the agency doesn't currently run anything like the proposed after-school program for children, "they thought it was a great idea when they heard about it," said SMOC spokeswoman Jane Lane. "Especially because it targets a similar demographic that SMOC works with in its other programming," she said. "They thought this would align with those other services they already provide in town."

Lane said the organization is in the process of trying to secure three sites in the south Framingham area to host the five-day-a-week program, which SMOC anticipates will serve around 100 kids. A town advisory board is also assisting with planning the program rollout.

"SMOC is optimistic that in the next 30 to 60 days, the program will be up and running," Lane said.

Early proponents of Hoops and Homework - including resident Herb Chasan, who submitted a Town Meeting article last fall seeking funding for it - envisioned it as a service that would provide academic support and structured recreational activities for kids in one of the town's poorest areas.

The contract the town put out to bid in late November specifies the program will serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade living in Precinct 17. Lane said SMOC is looking at offering the service from when school lets out to around 6 p.m. on weekdays.

So far the agency is only planning for the one year called for in the contract, according to Lane.

"We hope the program is a success," she said. "That will help determine whether people will want to fund it for another year."

Chasan, however, is adamant Hoops and Homework will be around for the long haul.
"We are committed to sustaining this thing," he said. "It's what we promised Town Meeting."

Organizers currently need volunteers to run the program, he added, and are seeking people from outside the neighborhood in particular.

Chasan on Wednesday also submitted another citizen's petition article for Framingham's upcoming Town Meeting that would create a similar after-school program in the Beech Street area downtown.

"Again, we're talking low-income," he said. "Kids who really need help and supervision."

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