

From the Executive Director
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Asylum Hill is Ready to Move Forward Following 2-year Pandemic

In my recent columns, I have explained the many changes and new initiatives that AHNA is undertaking for 2022. In this column, I'd like to review some of the successes of the past two years and summarize the key goals and projects for 2022.

AHNA's most recent success is recently completing the Asylum Hill Neighborhood Strategic Plan. This yearlong project involved more than 70 residents and stakeholders from Asylum Hill. The AHNA Board of Directors have reviewed the Strategic Plan and identified 8 key projects that will create the foundation needed to achieve the goals in the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan will be on the March 7th General Meeting Agenda for approval by our members, we urge all AHNA members to attend and be heard. It's the plan for our neighborhood and we need everyone involved.

During the pandemic, we created three new pollinator gardens, held a neighborhood cleanup, and painted a mural at the corner of Marshall and Farmington. We assisted local churches and non-profits to get the word out to our residents about food, meals, Covid tests and vaccines, and other assistance during the pandemic. During the summer, when Covid subsided for a short while, we brought back the South Marshall Block Party. Four hundred (400) residents, families and children attended and had a great time enjoying a nice day, food, music, a petting zoo, and bouncy house. It was great to see so many children outdoors and having fun after a year of lock downs. The Cathedral of St. Joseph began their campus re-design following approval and support of their plans by the AHNA membership. AHNA reduced neighborhood blight by supporting redevelopment of 29 Ashley Street, 15 Marshall Street, 314 Sargent Street, 241 Sigourney Street, and 80-82 Hawthorn St. The new homes sold fast bringing new homeowners into Asylum Hill.

Progress on Farmington Ave. continued. AHNA worked with Speaker Matt Ritter to secure \$7 million to complete the Farmington Avenue streetscape project from Broad Street to Gillette Street. 85 Sigourney Street (the old Hastings hotel) was purchased by a developer for redevelopment. Redevelopment of the Comet Diner continues and the Diner is now listed as a historic site on both the state and federal registries. Two vacant blighted properties at 278 and 285 Farmington Ave. are being acquired by NINA for redevelopment into home ownership opportunities.

AHNA's mission statement is that we empower and connect residents and stakeholders to improve the quality of life in Asylum Hill. To accomplish the many goals in the Strategic Plan will require collaboration among our stakeholders and residents. The first four (4) projects AHNA prioritized for 2022 will move us closer to accomplishing several goals from the Asylum Hill Strategic Plan. Two goals from the Environmental and Green Initiatives include Goal 1, *Expand Our Native Tree Canopy to 30% of Asylum Hill* will require an assessment of the tree canopy in Asylum Hill to identify where trees need to be planted, therefore the Asylum Hill Tree Canopy Assessment project is a key step to accomplishing Goal 1. Goal 5: *Develop a Program to Collect Residents' Food Scraps and Turn Them into Compost*. The Food Composting project will accomplish this Goal.

Two goals for Economic Development include Goal 1: *Encourage and Support “Cornerstone” Development Projects* (such as 85 Sigourney, the Comet Diner and 278 and 285 Farmington Ave.) and the Farmington Avenue Improvement Project will support this goal, as well as Goal 3: *Support the Growth of New and Existing Businesses*, by working with our merchants to identify more ways to help support our businesses along Farmington Avenue. In Housing, Goal 2: *Remediate and Eliminate Blight* is supported by the Blighted Building inventory project to develop a comprehensive list of all properties and their conditions, enabling better coordination with the City's Anti-Blight unit.

Human Service Goals include Goal 1: *Ensure That Existing Services Are Well Coordinated, Better Known and More Accessible* is supported by our Caring for Our Neighbors project to bring together the human service providers in Asylum Hill to better coordinate and publicize services for our residents. Arts and Culture Goal 1: *Promote Asylum Hill as a Destination for Those Who Enjoy Art, Culture and History*, and Goal 2: *Provide Opportunities to Showcase the Neighborhood’s Art and Artists* will be supported by the Displaying Art on Farmington Ave. project which will coincide with the City's DominGO event to open Farmington Ave to pedestrians, bicyclists, skateboarders, etc. to come out for events and activities on June 26th. Public Safety Goals will be supported by Installing cameras near crime “hot spots” in Asylum Hill.

We had 74 volunteer residents and stakeholders involved in the Strategic Planning process. We will need lots of volunteers to achieve the above-mentioned goals in our plan. If any of these projects interest you, please reach out to me (exdir@asylumhill.org) to get involved. As you can see, AHNA has a big work plan for 2022. It may be a lot of work but completing these projects is essential so that we are ready and positioned to tackle the next projects in the plan. We will need your help to accomplish these important goals. Many thanks to the Hartford for their continued support and assistance, with a special thanks to the Hartford's communication team in producing a video that describes our vision for Asylum Hill. You can view it along with the Strategic Plan at <https://www.asylumhill.org/strategic-plan.html>. I believe this is going to be a great year for AHNA and Asylum Hill. We hope you will join us in this important and exciting work.