

## From the Executive Director

David MacDonald

### Dr. Torres will speak at next AHNA General Meeting

AHNA's next General Meeting is Monday June 7 starting at 6:15pm. We will welcome a special guest, Superintendent Dr. Leslie Torres who will speak about how AHNA can better support our neighborhood schools and the students who reside in Asylum Hill. What we learn will help us develop better strategies to support the students in Asylum Hill and guide our work supporting improvements in education over the next ten years.

AHNA's Strategic Planning Task Forces are continuing with their work to develop recommendations and goals to guide the revitalization of Asylum Hill for the next ten (10) years. AHNA has recent survey data to guide our work, thanks to the Hartford's neighborhood survey of more than 300 members of the Asylum Hill community. In my last column, I summarized the work of the Economic Development and Workforce Development Task Forces. In keeping with our desire to inform the community, I summarize the work of two more Task Forces.

AHNA's **Environment and Green Initiatives Task Force** is chaired by AHNA Director Lynn Johnson, a self-described Earth activist. The Task Force has met several times and is promoting the creation of "green" jobs for Asylum Hill residents. The Task Force's vision is for the Asylum Hill neighborhood to become a model urban green community. They want to expand our native tree canopy and organic vegetable and pollinator gardens. They want to conserve the north branch of the Park River and open up access to the community. They're planning bike paths and traffic calming areas, developing a program to collect resident food scraps and turn them into compost, and encouraging energy efficiency and solarization in our homes, schools, places of worship and businesses. Asylum Hill will become a more beautiful, enjoyable, sustainable and healthier place to live. The Task Force is focusing on several areas of interest, such as supporting, protecting and increasing the number of our organic community gardens, orchards, arbors, parks, green and natural play spaces, for the benefit of all Asylum Hill residents, of every age and ability; eliminating the use of chemical pesticides, and herbicides; organizing a food composting project for residents that demonstrates the value and savings generated by removing food scraps from the waste stream, and serving as a model for our city and state. Other major initiatives include:

- Transform Turning Point Park (corner of Broad and Farmington) into a colorful meadow of native blooming plants, friendly to our pollinators.
- Conduct a count and assessment of our trees on all 40 blocks of Asylum Hill and along the east side of the North Branch of the Park River.
- Increase the number, diversity, and health of our public and private trees. Conserve and protect our mature "old growth" trees and the wooded wetlands in our northwest corner.
- Establish a "linear park" along the North Branch Park River through a comprehensive planning process that synthesizes community amenities with

floodplain restoration, green infrastructure features and conservation of the “wilderness” of the riparian zone.

- Hold an annual Energy Fair for the Asylum Hill Community, showcasing renewable energy sources and circulating information on financing to achieve upgrades. Engage with landlords and tenants on free/low-cost weatherization programs, targeting underrepresented populations. Establish residential and commercial energy efficiency projects first, then move to solarization.
- Offer “green” educational programs in area public and private schools, community centers and libraries, for youth and adults. Partner with area schools and students on environmental projects.
- Create numerous “green” jobs and internships for Asylum Hill residents of all ages, through the expansion of our native tree canopy and pollinator gardens, conservation of the Park River, development of food composting, energy efficiency and solarization programs and other conservation projects.

The Green Task Force has a large agenda. If these projects interest you, we encourage you to join AHNA’s ongoing Green Committee.

The **Arts and Culture Task Force**, chaired by AHNA Chairwoman Jackie McKinney has met and reviewed ideas on how to promote our neighborhood assets of the arts and culture of Asylum Hill. They have several recommendations including:

- Obtaining a Cultural Place or Historic District designation for Farmington Avenue inclusive of the Comet Diner, Stowe Center and Twain Museum.
- Organize a Farmington Avenue festival to highlight Asylum Hill history, the arts, and the historic district.
- More public art, especially more murals, and having art in the windows of vacant commercial property.
- There was also a proposal to erect a statue to celebrate the diversity of today’s Asylum Hill.
- Incorporating local art into the new train station that will replace Union Station.

Other Task Forces looking for volunteers includes the Public Safety, Housing, Historic Preservation and Blight Remediation, Human Services, and Youth Enrichment/Education. Please email me at [exdir@asylumhill.org](mailto:exdir@asylumhill.org) to join any of the Task Forces. Please join now if you’re interested, the Task Forces will complete their work by the end of June.