

COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND NEIGHBORHOOD STRENGTHS

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



Veeder Place at the northern border of Asylum Hill is currently undergoing rehabilitation.

The Hawthorn Center at the southern border of Asylum Hill is another industrial building, part of which is currently being renovated for a weekend collectibles market.



The Farmington Avenue Corridor area of Asylum Hill is the focus of a comprehensive corridor study that will be accomplished with a combination of public/private financing, including Urban Act Funds initiated by the West End Civic Association. This corridor study is the culmination of over a year's worth of meetings that were initiated by West End neighbors, but, now includes a healthy

number of Asylum Hill residents. The broad range goals for the Farmington Avenue Corridor long term will be as "a gateway to the City, a charming and beautiful realm that both serves the diversity of residents of the neighborhoods it passes through, and as a Grand Avenue uniting Greater Hartford's western suburbs with Downtown Hartford." (Source: Toni Gold Consulting, Hartford.) The following outlines the vision of this corridor study.

The Farmington Avenue Joint Committee seeks to realize a vision for the commercial corridor of our two neighborhoods. We envision Farmington Avenue in Hartford as a gateway to the City, as a charming and beautiful public realm, as a vital urban place that serves the residents of the neighborhoods it passes through, and as a Grand Avenue uniting Greater Hartford's western suburbs with Downtown Hartford. This renewed Avenue supports a high-quality mix of unique commercial, cultural, professional, residential, and academic activities; it is home to some of the most important institutions in the Capitol Region. The Avenue is a place where elderly people feel safe and where parents are comfortable bringing their children. It is a profitable business location. It is a center of entertainment and recreation. Streets and facilities welcome pedestrians and bicyclists. Commercial buildings and public improvements complement the architectural heritage of the adjacent residences to create a unique sense of place. The Avenue reflects the diversity of families and lifestyles that is one of Hartford's most valued features. People are drawn from around the region to this vibrant center of community life.

The Veeder Root complex, which closed in the late 1980's, is presently being rehabilitated. This project, when complete, will provide jobs in light industry, as well as some office space. Veeder Place, as it is now named, can have a major impact on the northwest corner of Asylum Hill. During the summer of 1997, the Department of Economic Community Development released funds for the project. They are requiring the City of Hartford to submit a listing of problematic properties on Homestead Avenue (between Garden and Sigourney) and their plan for them. If the project progresses on schedule from this point on, the entire project should be completed in approximately one year. However, it has been scaled back from the original concept due to cost considerations. The most dramatic of these changes is the lack of available incubator space for minority start-ups. It is important that future development, whether in the form of incubator space or not, includes job opportunities for neighborhood residents. Currently there are at least four firm tenants – St. Francis Hospital, Easter Seals, Arrow Drug Stores, and Starrtel. There are letters of commitment from tenants for approximately 90% of the space. It is also hoped that some of these tenants will include a second shift at the site, so as to offer twice the number of jobs to area residents.

The tenant of most interest to the neighborhood is Starrtel, a minority owned firm that will be assembling cellular telephones on the site. They expect to begin operations in mid 1998 and employ 200 to 250 people. The jobs are assembly, testing, and packaging of phones. The average wage will be around \$20,000 annually.

As Veeder Place borders Asylum Hill, Upper Albany and Clay Arsenal, this project will have a pivotal effect on all three neighborhoods. The City has committed housing money to rehab vacant houses along Sargeant Street. SHARP 20 (Strategic Housing and Redevelopment Project), has incorporated into its' Phase I development plan two properties on Sargeant Street and one on Garden.

However, there are more blighted properties in the immediate vicinity, which will be dealt with through the recommendations of the NRZ Housing sub-committee. An unused rail line, the Griffin Line, may be developed for light rail, with a stop at Veeder Place, adding more stimulus for economic recovery.

The Hawthorn Center, at the southern border of Asylum Hill, is a significant, largely vacant industrial building (presently, the Hawthorn has sixteen small businesses and is 10% occupied). Attempts to convert this space for a school or offices have failed. Currently, plans to utilize some of the space as a weekend flea market with approximately 80 to 100 vendors are being developed. The potential for light industrial or incubator space is there and needs to be explored as a separate project, to make it possibly eligible for Urban Act funds, such as those being utilized for Veeder Place and the Capewell Factory.

The Asylum Hill Economic Development Committee (AHED), founded in July 1995 by neighborhood residents, activists, workers, and members of the religious community with support from the Trinity College Center for Neighborhoods, is an unincorporated voluntary organization which voted in November 1995 to increase its influence by formally affiliating with the Asylum Hill Organizing Project. AHED was formed to provide a democratic forum for addressing economic development in a proactive fashion, improve the quality of life through job creation and appropriate business development, and work with nearby neighborhoods on economic projects of mutual concern. AHED negotiates with major neighborhood construction projects and institutions for jobs for neighborhood residents, has been part of neighborhood business development via the Asylum Hill/West End Economic Development Loan Fund, has been instrumental in working with West End residents and business people to secure a Farmington Avenue Merchant Coordinator, and has been exploring innovative strategies such as asset-based surveying and peer lending/microbusiness development for creating jobs in the neighborhood.

There is a Neighborhood Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund (NEDRLF) funded by the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and administered by the Hartford Economic Development Corporation (HEDCO). Its goals are to stimulate and assist in the creation and growth of small and medium-sized businesses in the Asylum Hill and West End neighborhoods. The primary focus of the fund is job creation, retention, and full utilization of commercial and residential space. The Revolving Loan Fund is designed to meet the credit needs of businesses experiencing difficulty securing financing from traditional sources. Every effort will be made to leverage NEDRLF dollars whenever possible to promote investment of private capital and expand the capacity of the funds. Eligible activities are: acquisition and/or renovation of commercial or industrial real estate in which the applicant occupies a significant portion of the available space for the operation of his/her business; purchase of machinery and equipment; short term working capital loans to assist with the acquisition of inventory, equipment or the financing of receivables. Those businesses located within the following borders are eligible: north/south from Homestead and the Westerly portions of Albany Avenue as far as the University of Hartford border, and east/west from the train overpass (Spruce Street) downtown to Prospect Avenue.

The Farmington Avenue Business District (FABD) has been an idea in progress for over three years. In 1996, the city council approved a funding request to hire a merchant coordinator for Asylum Hill and the West End. The purpose of the FABD board and its members is to improve the climate for businesses in Asylum Hill and the West End by initiating projects to promote, recruit, retain and encourage growth of businesses while developing short and long range plans to improve the economic