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Establishing a Community Business Association operated by the Southwest and Behind the Rocks Neighborhood Revitalization Zone

Aidan Arnold '21

Community Partner: Southwest and Behind the Rocks NRZ

Faculty Sponsor: Professor Serena Laws



Abstract

New Britain Avenue (NBA) is the most concentrated area of commerce in the Southwest and Behind the Rocks neighborhoods of Hartford, CT, consisting mostly of small businesses. To better support these businesses and the community, the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) of Southwest/Behind the Rocks (SW/BTR) has founded an NBA business group with a mission to “strengthen relations and communication between businesses on NBA, the community, and the City of Hartford.” I am aiding in this project by creating specific steps for the NRZ to establish a long-term business group comprised of cooperative businesses with vested interest in the community. To do so, I have consulted the literature on best practices for interacting with, and providing resources for businesses, and interviewed a well-established administrator of a Hartford business association. Additionally, I worked with the NRZ to produce their first quarterly newsletter and created a model for future newsletters, which will facilitate dissemination of information to small businesses in these neighborhoods.

Research Aims/Questions

1. What resources should a business association provide? Which resources are most critical for SW/BTR businesses?
2. What are the essential first steps in establishing a community business association?

Research on Business Association Obstacles

Prior outreach with business owners in 2017-18 by Trinity Student Larisa Bogmolov showed:

- ✓ Business owners reluctant to contribute scarce time and resources
- ✓ Non-resident business owners feel minimal connection to the community
- ✓ Businesses along NBA are diverse, each with different challenges and needs
- ✓ Concerns discussion about change might not translate into actual change
- ✓ Hard to establish trust if no prior working relationship

Value of Business Associations



Reciprocal community support



Inter-business cooperation and support

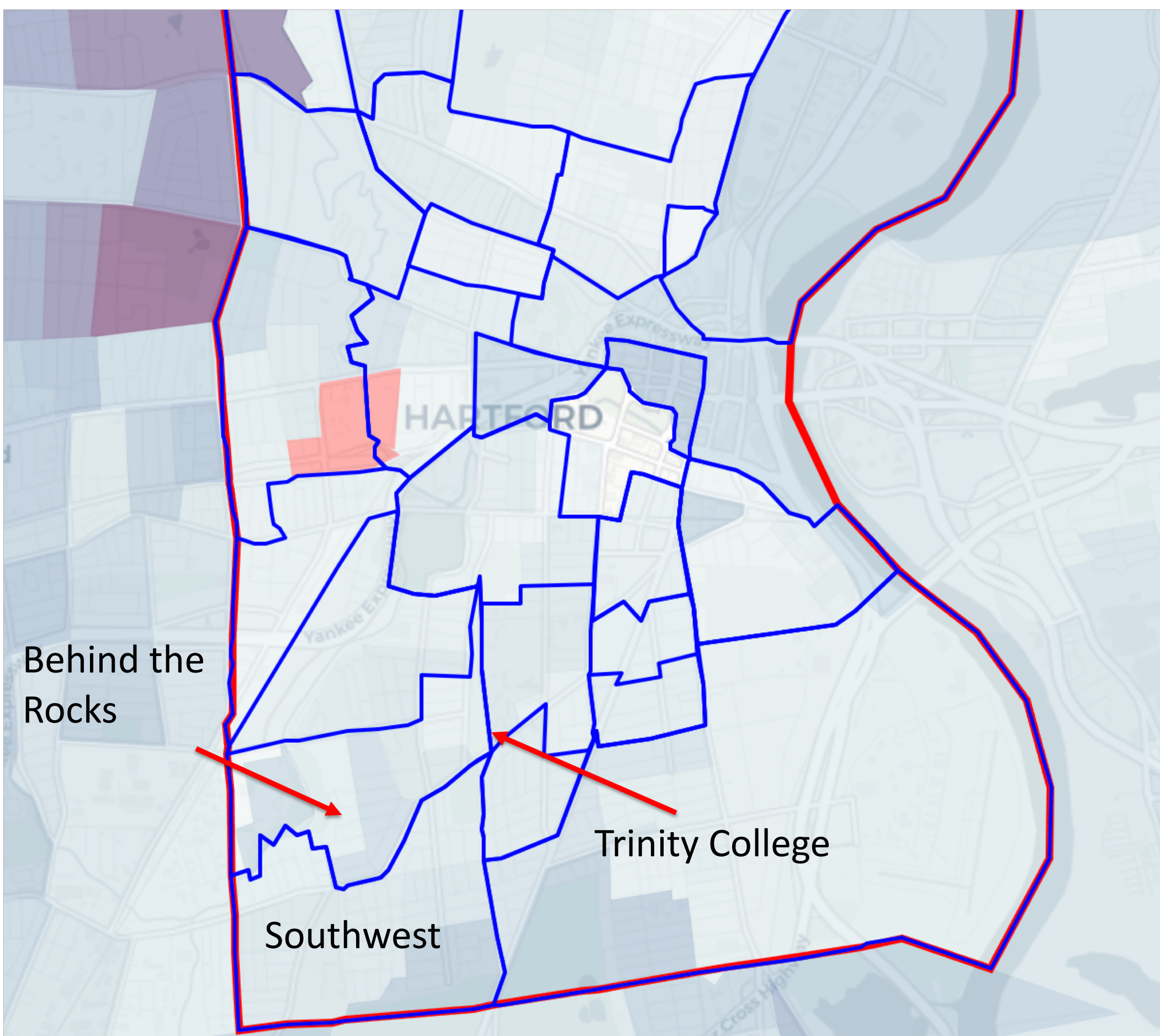


Better access to municipal and community resources



Group advocacy

Location of the SW/BTR NRZ

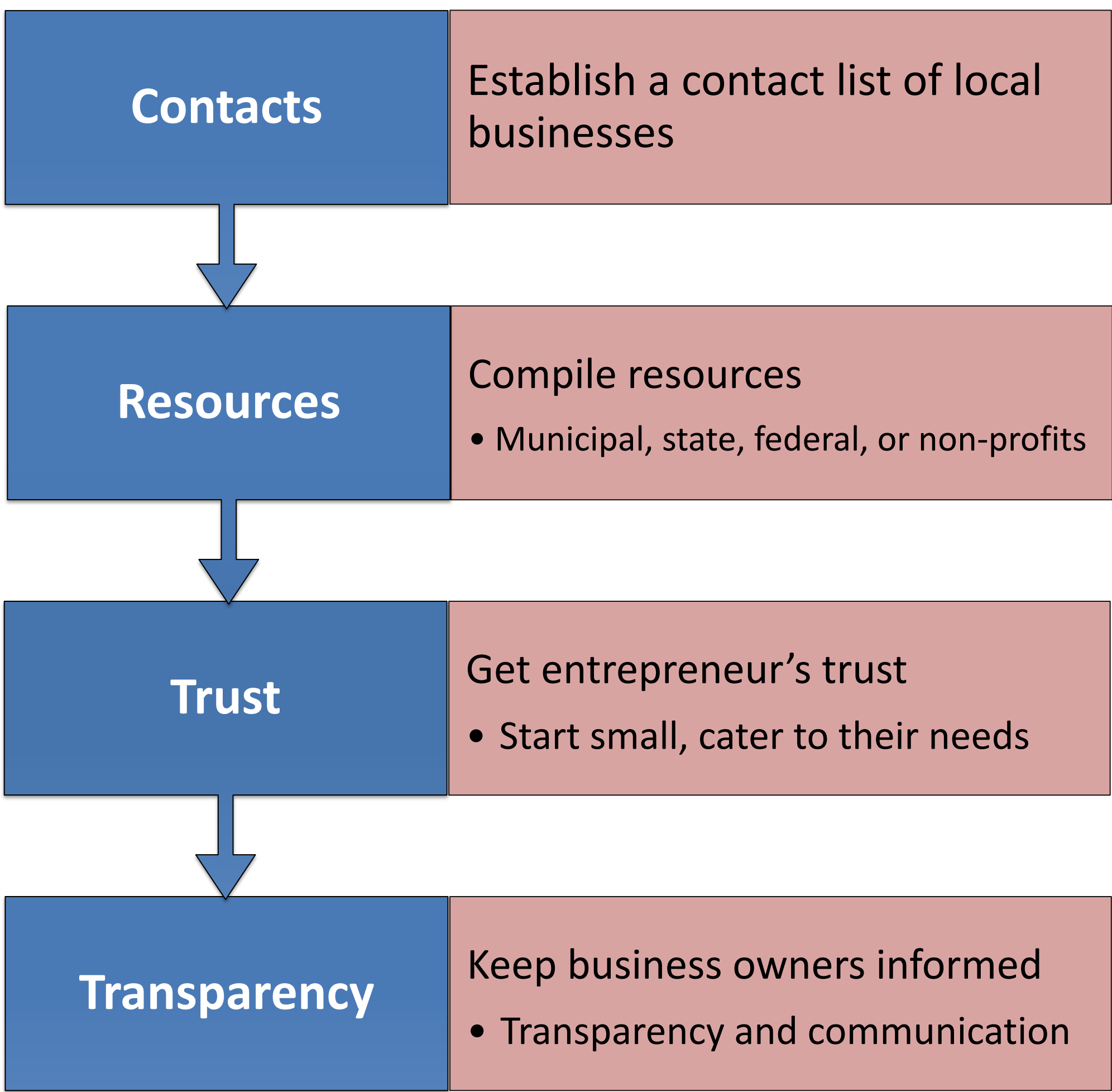


Key Findings from Informant Interview & Literature Review

- Understand the schedule of business owners; be patient and willing to meet on their time
- Learn from them--the business should dictate how you work with them, not vice versa
- Understand the skills needed to run a business
- Meta-level skills: *adapting, delegating, information gathering and analysis, action-taking, industry knowledge, people skills, and motivation*
- Functional-level skills: *management, marketing, finance, organizational development, and personal maturity*

Proposed Action Plan

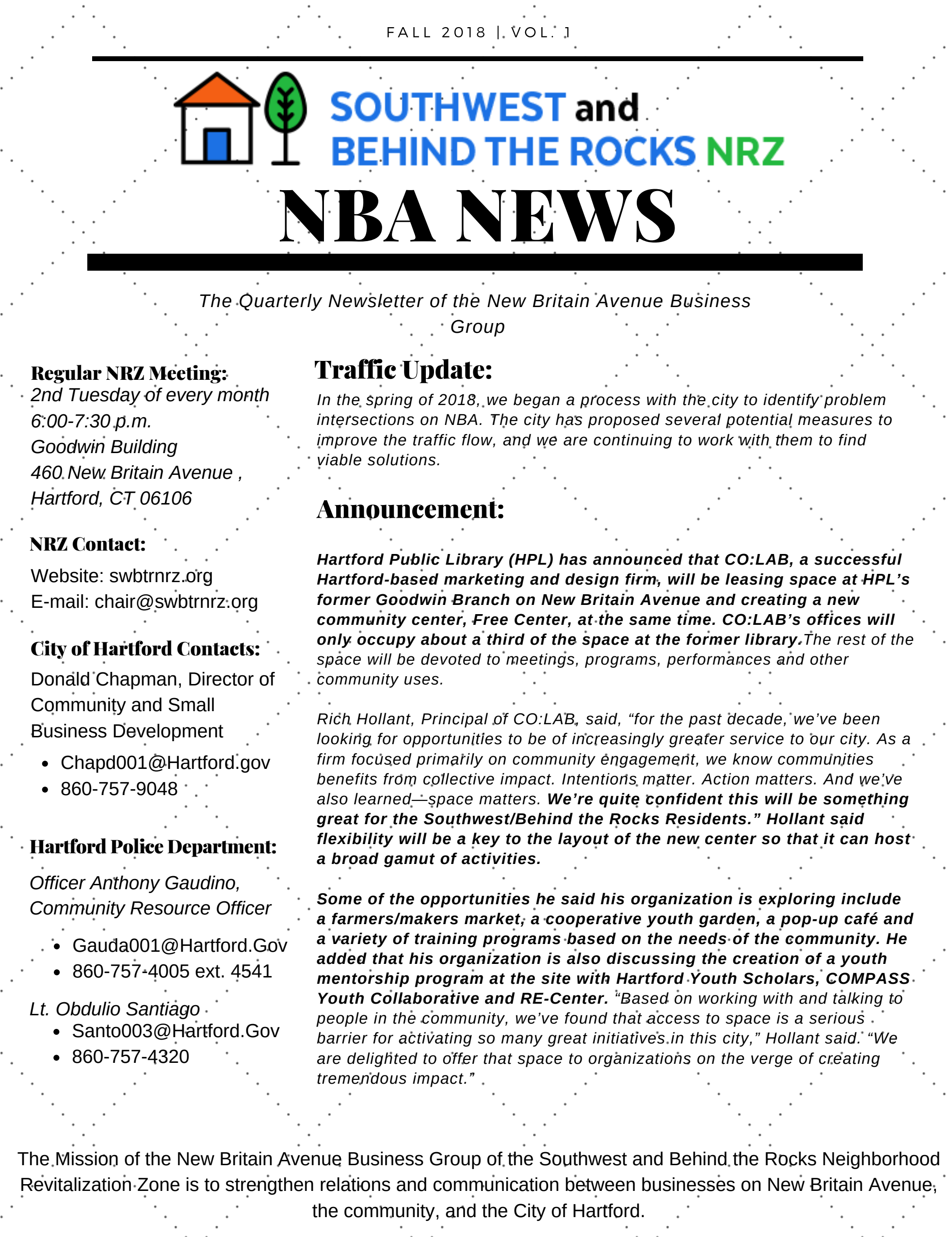
Action plan has four parts that are sequential, but have blurred edges and flexible timelines to accommodate the limited resources of the NRZ, allowing them to undertake the most immediately achievable projects.



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NBA Newsletter

- New Newsletter will be delivered to businesses quarterly and can serve as a template for future
- In-person distribution to businesses will allow the NRZ to collect contact information



Opportunities for Further Collaboration

Several additional areas for growth remain, including:

- Further research into best methods, especially around **marketing** the business association
- **Researching, compiling, and organizing** local resources available to small businesses
- Webpage design to help make the group's resources more **accessible** to businesses

Acknowledgements

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