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Preparing to Create a Neighborhood Multicultural Center

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Community Partner: Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Rasha Ahmed



INTRODUCTION

Abstract

The Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA), our community partner, would like to strengthen communication and interaction among the many culturally distinct groups in the Asylum Hill neighborhood. They believe there is a common desire for a safe communal space where immigrants and ethnic groups of all backgrounds could come together. A neighborhood multicultural center could provide such a place in the Asylum Hill neighborhood, where socialization and learning among groups can occur. This center would strengthen the neighborhood at large, and potentially the City of Hartford.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence of existing centers in the U.S. similar to AHNA's vision. Our research, of community and cultural centers with similar attributes and of case studies, revealed characteristics we believe necessary for the success of AHNA's multicultural center. In addition, our research on organizational structure and recent immigrant tendencies, led us to conclude that AHNA could benefit greatly by constructing a comprehensive needs assessment survey, by evaluating their organizational structure, and deciding on a thematic focus.

Asylum Hill

- One of Hartford's 17 neighborhoods, west of Downtown
- Population between 10,000 and 11,000, almost 30% of which are foreign born
- Over 20 languages spoken

Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA)

- **Mission:** To be an umbrella organization that empowers residents and supports connections and collaborations among all stakeholders to improve the quality of life in Asylum Hill.
- **Committee Structure:** Communications, Friends of Sigourney Square Park, Quality of Life, and Welcoming and Culture Committee.
- **Current Activities** of Welcoming and Culture Committee: free foreign language film screenings, ESL classes, parades, arts showcases, "New Voices of Asylum Hill."
- **Current Goal** of Welcoming and Culture Committee: create a neighborhood multicultural center.

Immigrant Isolation

- Close knit communities of residents of similar cultures
- Benefits for newly arrived immigrants: convenience, comfort, shared language and culture, social and professional network
- Disadvantage: Over time, limits immigrants' English language skills and social and professional opportunities

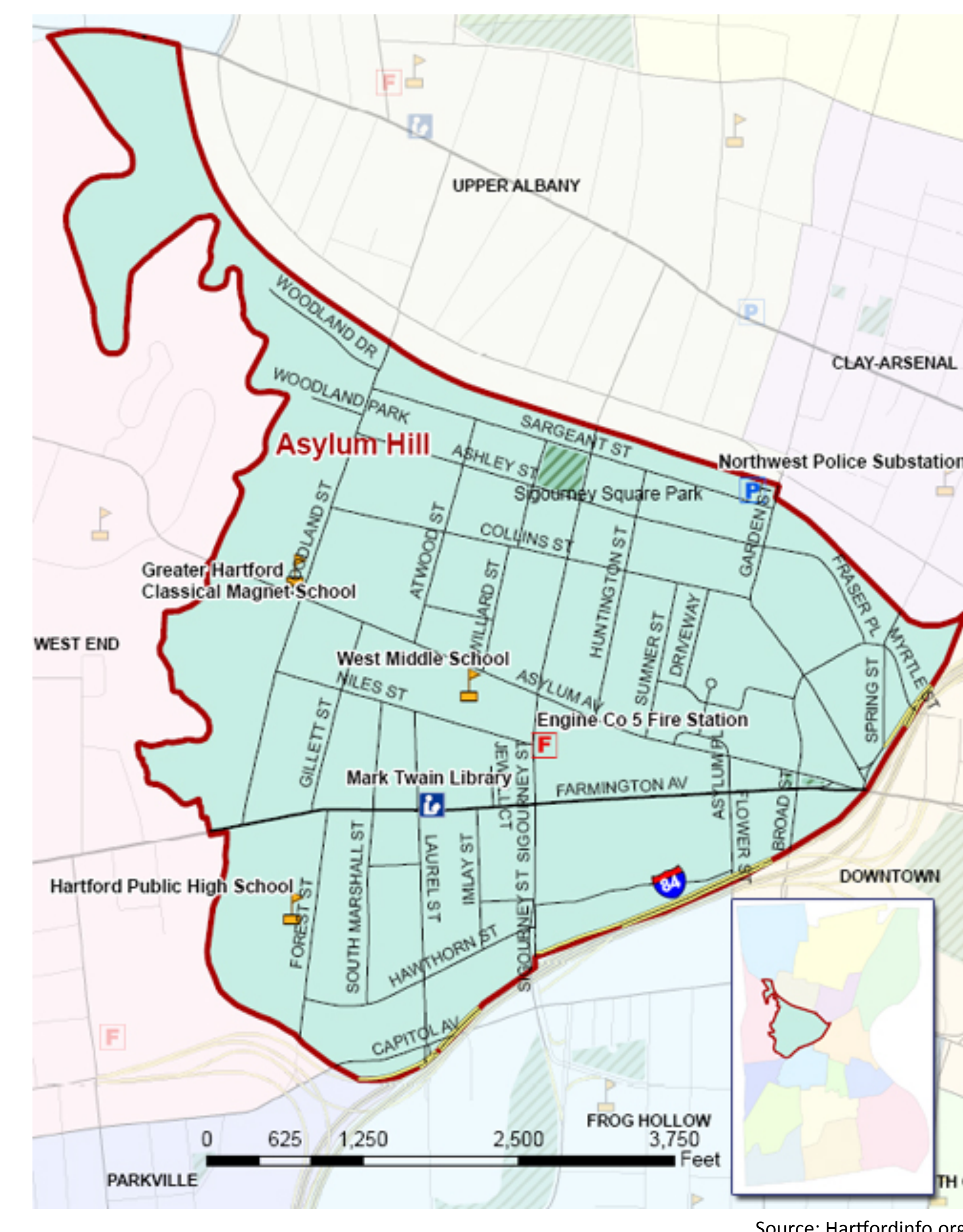
RESEARCH QUESTION

What steps need to be taken before creating a neighborhood multicultural center in the Asylum Hill neighborhood?

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

- Observed AHNA Welcoming and Culture Committee and Multicultural Center Steering Committee meetings (observations allowed us to determine AHNA's existing knowledge about creating a multicultural center)
- Gathered cases studies using Google Search and Lexis Nexis
- Evaluated data from multicultural center topic Focus Groups conducted by AHNA in the Fall of 2014
- Analyzed four cases studies from the the Northeast to the West Coast, and identified similar characteristics of organizations operating centers and characteristics of centers
- Complemented case study analysis with literature-based research focused on organizational structure and need assessment surveys



Source: Hartfordinfo.org

CHALLENGES TO CREATING A CENTER

Need To Clarify Thematic Focus

The proposed neighborhood multicultural center is without a specific thematic focus, and the Welcoming and Culture Committee is divided on what programming the center would have.

Recommendations

- Make the proposed neighborhood multicultural center an identity based organization with a thematic focus
- Conduct a needs assessment survey to quantifiably determine the themes community members desire (more information below)

Support For Recommendations

All four centers found in case studies have a thematic focus, such as arts, education and literacy, or youth. Having a thematic focus gives community centers the opportunity to access grants and funding specific to that focus. For example, the Charter Oak Cultural Center receives grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign.

Community Center	Location	Thematic Focus
Charter Oak Cultural Center	Hartford, CT	Arts
Corvallis Multicultural Literacy Center	Corvallis, OR	Education and Literacy
Eastside Cultural Center	Oakland, CA	Arts
Rider Street Community Center	Brooklyn, NY	Youth

Need to Strengthen Organizational Structure

AHNA is not a registered nonprofit, and is exploring the status of a Disregarded Entity LLC. They also do not have the organizational structure and management in place to operate a center.

Recommendations

- Consult a lawyer about Disregarded Entity LLC status and if it is an appropriate status to have
- Seek a technical assistance grant to aid in organizational management
- Contact Connecticut Association of Nonprofits and attend their workshops on leadership and management
- Pursue an alliance with an established nonprofit to assist with the creation of the center

Support For Recommendations

The community centers yielded from the case studies feature similar organizational structures. All the centers were a public-private partnership. Each center has an Executive Director, a management role AHNA does not have.



Performance at Asylum Hill Artist's Present (2015)

NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

A needs assessment survey is a way to ask specific questions of community members about what they see as the most important needs for their community. It could provide evidence to the community and potential stakeholders that there is a problem--immigrants are very limited in their social networks, which affects their quality of life and opportunities. It would also provide evidence that there is a demand for a solution to the problem of immigrant isolation. In order for a neighborhood multicultural center to be successful in its goal of facilitating the collaboration of different cultural groups, cultural groups must want to collaborate with others. See our handout for suggested questions.

CONCLUSIONS

To establish a multicultural center AHNA must strengthen and solidify their organizational structure and management. This will make them an organization attractive to stakeholders, possible partner nonprofits and the community they seek to serve. It will also facilitate the equally important need to conduct a comprehensive Needs Assessment Survey of the Asylum Hill population. The Focus Group findings yielded inconclusive desires for a permanent space from the Asylum Hill population. A clear and quantified understanding of the wants and needs of the Asylum Hill population will enable AHNA to approach the appropriate stakeholders and allow them to articulate to stakeholders or other nonprofits why they should become involved in the creation of a neighborhood multicultural center.

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