

Community Connections Committee

Annual Report to the AHCC Congregation – June 10, 2026

Introduction

The Asylum Hill Congregational Church (AHCC) has made a bold and inspiring commitment: to transform its lower “Garden Level” into the Earl Exum Community Resource Center (EECRC), a welcoming and vibrant hub dedicated to serving the Asylum Hill neighborhood.

Building on the foundational work of the Garden Level Task Force, three committees were formed to bring this vision to life. The Community Connections Committee (CCC), chaired by Jim Grigsby, was charged with identifying community needs and building relationships with groups that could work with and through the EECRC to address them. A deeply experienced and committed team was assembled of individuals who bring both passion and real-world knowledge of the community we seek to serve. Drawing on the group's skills, energies and early discoveries, the committee expanded its focus over time to include ideas about program priorities and a possible service delivery model.

From the outset, this work has carried a sense of purpose and possibility. We are not simply developing space. We are helping to create a new and transformative ministry for AHCC.

Early Work

The Committee's early efforts built upon AHCC's longstanding relationships with community service providers through its Outreach program, which has historically administered an annual grants initiative. These trusted relationships gave us a strong and credible starting point.

To ensure our work was grounded in real community priorities, we carefully studied the Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA) Strategic Plan, which offers a comprehensive and thoughtful assessment of neighborhood needs. Strengthening this connection further, a member of the AHNA Board who also leads a local addiction recovery center, joined the Committee.

This combination of established partnerships and intentional alignment with neighborhood leadership positioned the Committee to move forward with both confidence and clarity. Our work reflects not only deep experience, but also a disciplined commitment to listening and learning.

Understanding Community Needs and Resources

Understanding the needs and the strengths of the Asylum Hill community has been central to our work. We drew insights from the AHNA Strategic Plan, the Garden Level Task Force findings, and direct engagement with residents. Committee members conducted surveys and gathered input through meaningful, on-the-ground interactions including a community event at Sigourney Park, conversations with participants in AHCC's Sunday meal program, and discussions with families at West Middle School.

We also identified a broad network of agencies to ensure comprehensive service coverage, including housing, food access, employment, youth development, health and wellness, arts and culture, and community building.

A defining moment in our work was the exploration of a "Hub and Spoke" model, developed in collaboration with the United Way. This model envisions a central, trusted point of entry where individuals and families are guided by a navigator to the services they need, dramatically improving both access and coordination. What began as a service model quickly revealed itself as something more powerful: the opportunity to create a resident-centered, integrated system that replaces fragmentation with connection. We now clearly see the potential for every Asylum Hill resident to access a single, trusted gateway to resources that support economic stability, personal well-being, and a genuine sense of belonging.

This work confirmed both the depth of need and the extraordinary opportunity to transform how services are delivered and experienced.

October 14 Summit

On October 14, 2025, the Committee convened a major summit, bringing together representatives from more than 40 nonprofit service agencies serving Asylum Hill. The session introduced the EECRC vision, presented the Hub and Spoke model, and engaged participants in small-group discussions designed to gather candid feedback. Attendees also toured the future site of the Center.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. The room was marked by energy, openness, and a shared sense of purpose. Participants expressed strong appreciation for AHCC's leadership and a genuine desire to collaborate.

From this gathering, we established a growing database of partner agencies and distributed a follow-up report capturing key insights. This summit was not simply an event, it was the beginning of a coordinated movement.

Understanding a Broader Purpose

As our work has deepened, so has our understanding of its true purpose. Meeting needs in Asylum Hill must extend beyond transactional service delivery. The

opportunity before AHCC is to help foster a neighborhood where individuals and families can truly prosper - where children are raised in stable environments and where community is experienced, not just described.

Through our outreach and conversations, a powerful theme emerged: community building. This goes beyond connecting people to services. It envisions residents and congregants learning, working, and growing together. It builds on strengths already present in both the neighborhood and the church - strengths that may simply need space, structure, and support to flourish.

The EECRC has the potential to become a place not just of assistance, but of belonging. A place where relationships are formed, capabilities are strengthened, and lives are changed through shared purpose.

Interim Report to the AHCC Congregation

In December 2025, we shared an update with the congregation during worship. We highlighted the formation of the Committee, the success of the October Summit, and the emerging collaboration with more than 40 service agencies.

More importantly, we extended an invitation. This work is not about adding programs - it is about building connections that change lives. We emphasized that AHCC members will play a vital role in this ministry, working alongside service providers and neighbors to bring the EECRC to life as a living expression of our shared calling.

Progress Report to Service Agencies and Space Use Survey

In early 2026, we re-engaged our network of more than 40 partner agencies to provide an update and invite their input through a space utilization survey. Committee members reached out personally to sustain the relationships we had begun building.

The response was both encouraging and affirming. Our partners expressed strong enthusiasm for working with AHCC, citing our longstanding reputation for meaningful service in the community. They also recognize the strategic importance of our location...right on Huntington Street, at the heart of a densely populated residential area.

While the EECRC remains at least 18 months from opening, making firm commitments to regularly scheduled space usage premature, the survey revealed clear patterns of anticipated demand.

There is strong interest in larger meeting spaces for educational programs, presentations, and community events. Smaller rooms for individual and family consultations will also be essential, with usage expected to grow organically over time.

Notably, there is significant enthusiasm for the outdoor gathering space, seen as a unique, safe and pleasant space for informal engagement, community events, and mobile service delivery - something currently lacking in the neighborhood.

Next Steps and Recommendations

As we move forward, the Committee recommends engaging a select group of partner agencies to help design and pilot a Hub-based, navigator-supported service model.

We also recommend several important next steps that may extend beyond the Committee's direct scope:

- Create opportunities for AHCC members and Ministry Teams to explore how they can personally engage in this ministry.
- Begin outreach to Asylum Hill residents through pre-opening gatherings that introduce the EECRC and build early relationships.
- Develop simple, accessible ways for residents to connect, engage, and stay informed.
- Establish an advisory group, including neighborhood residents, agency representatives, and members of the Community Connection team who wish to continue to guide the Center's long-term success.

This is important, meaningful work—and it is gaining momentum. What began as a concept is becoming a shared vision, supported by strong partnerships and a growing sense of possibility.

We are confident that the EECRC will not only enhance service delivery but will help transform lives and strengthen the fabric of the Asylum Hill community.

Respectfully submitted:

Laura Baird
Ted Carroll, Steering Committee Representative
Gary DeLong
Holly DeYoung
Pam Edmonds
Esther Gonzales-Torres, AHNA Board Member
Jim Grigsby, Chair
Betsy Hopkins
Rob Lindauer
Matt Morgan
Jon Reidel
Dayl Walker