

March 2026

In 2025 we shared the wonderful news that AHCC's application for a \$3.7-million Community Investment Fund (CIF) grant to support development of our Earl Exum Community Resource Center (EECRC) had been approved. You have seen little *visible* evidence of progress since then, but *significant* work has been happening behind the scenes. Church leadership has been kept apprised along the way.

Today I'm writing to share with you a detailed report on behalf of those involved in this work, principally our COO Helena Carvalho, former moderators Linda Campanella and Ted Carroll, and a steering committee whose other members are the chairs of three EECRC task forces: Building and Operations, Community Connections, and Fundraising.

What follows are several key updates of particular interest.

Building and Operations

All mold concerns related to 2021 flooding have been fully addressed. Parking lot work to divert water away from the building is nearly complete and will be finished once weather permits. Plans to resolve water infiltration on the south side of the building are being finalized so the work can go out to bid this spring. These repairs are funded through insurance proceeds (\$25K), a City of Hartford grant (\$75K), and capital depreciation funds.

When ConnectiKids moved upstairs at AHCC last year, the 3000-square-foot area it vacated became available to rent. The Village for Families & Children initially planned to move some of its programming to this space; unfortunately, construction costs proved to be too high. After six months as our tenant, The Village ended its agreement in February. We now are seeking a new tenant, and three organizations have indicated strong interest.

Work to finalize design for the 6,300-square-foot EECRC in the church's lower level will be jumpstarted when the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), which oversees CIF-funded initiatives, assigns a project manager to us. We expect this to happen very soon, at which point we will resume work with our architects. We hope to put the project out to bid this fall and begin construction in the winter. If the timeline holds, we anticipate a grand opening in Fall 2027.

Community Connections

The most exciting progress has been in the realm of building relationships with local nonprofits and community-based agencies. The Community Connections Task Force has facilitated many conversations with other organizations about our vision and plans, their missions and programs, neighborhood needs and priorities, and where all these things converge to create potential to do something truly innovative and transformative in Asylum Hill. AHCC hosted a summit last October attended by 70 folks representing 40 different organizations, all of them excited to be exploring creative ways to collaborate and establish the EECRC as a hub. The energy in the room was palpable and so inspiring!

These community connections are critical, as what we offer in the EECRC must fill identified gaps rather than duplicate what is already available or planned. Input from partners will help us shape EECRC programming plans to achieve maximum community impact. We are so encouraged by what

we are hearing and learning from other agencies! They see tremendous need for a community resource hub such as we envision, and many organizations already are eager to explore how they could use EECRC space to enhance or expand their own program offerings. For example:

- Capital Workforce Partners is interested in offering youth employment-readiness programs.
- The Urban League is interested in providing financial literacy programs at the EECRC in order to reach more Asylum Hill residents.
- The Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA) is interested in partnering to engage and support vulnerable children and families.

These are just a few of the enthusiastic expressions of interest we have gathered to date. Unquestionably there is potential to advance shared objectives by leveraging existing resources, expertise, and program offerings. And clearly, we are not alone in believing the Asylum Hill neighborhood can be elevated through investment in the people who live here—and who want to stay and raise their families here.

You can expect to hear more about these plans in the coming months as the Community Connections team starts to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

Fundraising

While the costs of *developing* the EECRC will be funded by the CIF grant, *operating* costs will be our responsibility. As we work to sustain existing operations, the church cannot absorb significant new expenses. Therefore, our plan is to launch a special fundraising campaign to establish an endowment that will operating costs (utilities, maintenance, and one to one and a half staff members) on an ongoing basis.

You can read more about this in the referenced FAQs. For now, I want to share that we completed our engagement with fundraising consultant Coleman-Peoples, whose principals were introduced to the congregation last year. We now are entering the next planning phase and are likely to engage another consultant with expertise suited to this stage. The Hartford Gives Foundation has provided us a grant to cover consulting fees.

Fundraising is never easy, but AHCC has shown time and again that when a vision is compelling, our members respond generously and encourage others in the community to join them. Our vision for the EECRC is indeed compelling. It is a clear expression of AHCC's longstanding commitment to loving and lifting our neighbors; and it honors Earl Exum, our former moderator in whose memory the EECRC is named. I believe many donors within and well beyond our congregation will be inspired to support this endeavor, knowing that their support will create both a better quality of life for Asylum Hill residents and a legacy for Earl. I hope you will consider being one of them. It's not too soon to be thinking about this exciting opportunity to make a difference.

“With God all things are possible.” – Matthew 19:26