UConn Hartford CoLab x Hartford Public Library - Town Hall: A Dinner and Discussion Notes

October 26th, 2026

5:30pm - 7:30pm

Facilitators and Contributors:

- Keren Prescott, HPL Programming and Events Manager
- Dr. Bulaong Ramiz
- Dr. Jason Oliver Chang, Co-Director UConn Hartford CoLab
- Sara Harrington, Associate University Librarian for Academic Engagement, UConn Library; Interim Director, UConn Library Hartford
- Cana Kumi: UConn Hartford CoLab Graduate Assistant Fall 2026-Spring 2027

Executive Summary

Introduction

- Goals/Purpose of this event:
    - building a reciprocal relationship between CoLab, HPL, and Hartford Residents
    - Identifying programing priorities for Hartford residents and action steps to implement them
- This Town Hall Event as a third space was built from a Focus Group of Hartford Residents and UConn students/faculty

Icebreaker Activity: if you have lived in hartford for ___ years , keep your hands raised
Ground Rules
Residents discussed their favorite things about Hartford:

- Arts, the kind people, efforts in Early Childhood Education, Parks, memories, History, Resources, close knit community, diversity, cultural programs, its potential

Questions:

How/Where are you learning about community events with Hartford?

- Websites/online, Word of mouth, Library website flyers, HPL and City of Hartford Engagement Newsletters, Hartford Courant, Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Eventibrite), Church
- Community Comments:
    - Having a centralized location could be a way to have greater exposure.
- Relevant Links
    - HPL Branch Locations and Hours
    - New Haven Public Library - Wilson Branch
    - Waterbury Public Library - Silas Bronson Library Website
    - Sign Up Form - HPL Weekly Newsletter
    - Hartford Courant
    - One Hartford Newsletter Sign Up
    - Hartford.com Events Page

    - Faithfully Fed Eventbrite
    - Sign Up Form - Hartford Business Improvement District Newsletter

Are you connected to your NRZ (Neighborhood revitalization Zone)? Can you find information/events from that?

- Note: About half of the group knew what an NRZ was.
- Focuses on neighborhood conversations/localized issues
    - But a chairperson mentioned that they could be avenue for organizing community change
- Some NRZs are more active than others
- Can also think about other resources available to Hartford Residents
    - Library for free events, Free tickets to Hartford Stage, Transportation, 988 crisis hotline, WQTQ radio station
    - Hartford Decides - surveys to vote on what changes you want to see in the city
    - Know Thy Neighbor - Decide topics, brainstorming, action steps, community changes. - NRZ members also attend these
- Relevant Links:
    - Find Your NRZ
    - List of All NRZs and Meeting Times
    - Hartford Decides Website
    - Know Thy Neighbor Website

How do you facilitate change within your community?

- Can personally coordinate with your neighbors - NRZs as a resource for this
- Some residents go directly to city hall meetings to address issues

What are the changes you want to see in your community? What changes could you see with UConn Hartford Colab + HPL resources?

- Literacy rates low within Hartford for youth (Little Free Libraries)
- People coming into the city for resources and then going back to their town (Collaborating across nearby towns - Manchester, Hartford, West Hartford, Wethersfield, Bristol).
- Mentoring for younger generations
- Helping those with addictions, mental health challenges
- Education (Greater support for teachers- healthcare access, mental health)
- Working Families assistance, people just below or above the poverty line (Food support)
- Development of legal help and Institutional partners to reverse laws (example maybe UConn Law)
    - Sheff vs. O'Neil Civil Rights Desegregation Lawsuit
    - Having a negative impact on city, leading to lack of youth connectivity and schools no longer anchors of communities
    - Relevant Links:
        - Sheff vs. O'Neil Information and Timeline - Center for Children's Advocacy
        - Sheff vs. O'Neil - CT State Library

        - Sheff vs. O'Neil - Wikipedia Page
- Youth and elder safety + pedestrian safety (pedestrian friendly crosswalks, roads)
- Specific program for CoLab to do
    - Knowledge of how to civically participate (Examples: contacting city counselors, volunteering at Hartford boards and commissions (37 total))
    - Hartford Boards and Commissions
    - Shared example of civic engagement leading to change: South End ticketing policy on specific street reversed
- What are programs within the library that assist families?
- **Youth**
    - Student skills development, life skills, college readiness
    - Building transferable skills to the labor market
    - Dream
        - Every student having a place to go after school, internships
    - Barriers to learning, education (transportation)
    - Keeping kids off the streets (programs that are open later, providing third space that is safe - maybe in library or UConn)
    - Youth mental health
    - Future action: Maybe having a teen focus group
        - Not thinking for kids but hearing from them.
        - Developing Job skills,
    - Kids and teens experiencing bullying
    - Dangers and challenges of older and younger youth coming together
        - Childcare services for families, not having children look after children
    - Midnight basketball - previously closed down, recently opened up:
        - News Article: Midnight Basketball Is Back In Hartford
        - Hartford Sports and Recreation Membership (Free)
    - Hartford Public Schools has volunteer program, sign up through list - currently 80
        - Hartford Public Schools Volunteer Page
- For His Glory Church (Funding longer term/growing programs)
    - For His Glory Church Website
- Individual → building a network of community
- Greater Hartford Gives Foundation (navigating grant cycles, leveraging community members and institution involvement)
    - Provides Community Funding through Mini grants throughout the year
    - Greater Hartford Gives: Hartford Community Fund
    - Greater Hartford Gives: Community Funds Volunteer Page
- Transparent, accessible information, not gatekept information
    - It can seem like getting funding can be all about who you know
- As an institution, using position to talk to funders
- Beyond the scope of grants: permanent policy changes (Developing strategies for short and longer term changes)
- Breaking smaller bites/(goal) towards a big dream

What is something that people in your communities don't know that would be important to have in a civic engagement course? What advice would you give to Hartford Youth?

- Kids knowing that they can have a hand in what their life can be, support, variety of vocations, empowerment, confidence
- Example of civic engagement as youth:
    - Kid governor campaign - resident's child ran, ended up getting into cabinet, built curiosity in civic engagement
- Learning about policy making, contributing to political process
    - Potential programs in UConn Hartford Colab or HPL
- Looking into the history of Hartford, capital, old state house
- Reinvestment in school system and teachers (Model UN)
- Free swim lesses at Park Memorial and Samuel V Arroyo Recreation Center (Current season is closed)

Questions Participants Asked:

- When will the next meeting be?
- How often will we be having these town halls?

Common Words



Post Meetings Action Steps:

- Press conference post Town Hall- inviting news outlets
- Conduct follow up meetings as CoLab supervisors and HPL leaders
    - Decide on main project and mini projects we will focus on
- Creating list of resources and community based organizations in the area
- Host at least 2 Focus Group→ Town Hall sequences in the Spring, potentially in the summer too

Detailed Meeting Notes

Introduction

- Goals, Purpose, and Context of this Event:
    - Goal of this event is to build a reciprocal relationship between CoLab, HPL, and Hartford Residents
    - **1st.** Hearing community needs consulting on resources/access to knowledge providing programing
    - The town hall directly follows a focus group that brought together Hartford residents and UConn students/faculty to discuss overlapping concerns and/or questions regarding residents' lives and the City of Hartford
    - Main Goal: To identify what actions might we collectively take and what are processes that would lead to solvable, authentic actions by community and for community.

Icebreaker Activity: if you have lived in hartford for ___ years , keep your hands raised

- Hartford residents that participated ranged from 1 year to 40+ years in Hartford
- Different Generations of Hartford residents, including elders, can provide knowledge
- Goal of this event is Investing in community beyond talking points
- Having a safe space, third space for people
- Leveraging Hartford Residents connections

Ground rules

- Focusing on Hartford residents
- 'Starting by Listening
- Listen to understand
- Assume good intention
- Own your words
- How curious, dreamy, exploratory can we get
- Keeping stories here, take lessons

Name, connection to Hartford, Favorite things about Hartford

- People mentioned:
    - Arts (wadsworth, bushnell)
    - Kind people, connections ___
    - Efforts being done in early childhood education
    - Parks within hartford
    - Memories, lesson
    - Home. History of hartford and impact on the world
    - Resources of know thy neighbor
    - The potential of Hartford, seeing it grow
    - Big city with close connections

    - Offerings, opportunities, community, seeing growth throughout the years
    - Beauty of connections, close knit community
    - The people of Hartford, diversity, food, community
    - Hartford as a livable City. accessible and also parks (Bushnell)
    - Feeling like a home. Coming to events and seeing friends and families
    - Safety at sometime, now level of danger
    - The programs in Hartford, places for Latin Americans, library programs, people will help you, having a good community
    - Can see that the history is still here. Barberstreet library

How/Where are you learning about community events with Hartford?

- Individual online websites
- Word of mouth (ie. friends, community members)
- Television
- Flyers on Library Websites
- Looking at the Hartford Public Library Downtown, but also going to branch libraries
    - **Albany Library**
    - **Barbour Library**
    - **Boundless Library @ Rawson** (note: no hours posted)
    - **Camp Field Library**
    - **Dwight Library**
    - **Park Street Library @ the Lyric**
    - **Ropkins Library**
- Libraries Outside of Hartford:
    - New Haven Public Library - Wilson Branch
    - Waterbury Public Library
- Personal and professional development events
- HPL Weekly Wednesday newsletter
- City of Hartford engagement newsletter
- Note about Newsletters
    - First going to events that interested person, then joining newsletters
- Hartford Courant
- Eventbrite
- Fairs
- Social media: Facebook and Instagram
- Events promoted through church - for example Faithfully Fed Organization
- Other Parents
- Community Comments:
    - Having a centralized location could be a way to have greater exposure. Example learning about hartford jazz on sundays
    - Noted no central area/centralized information or media
    - Not having free internet systems across Hartford
    - There is always something to do in hartford, workshop, newsletters associated , word of mouth

- Relevant Links:
    - HPL Branch Locations and Hours
    - New Haven Public Library - Wilson Branch
    - Waterbury Public Library - Silas Bronson Library Website
    - Sign Up Form - HPL Weekly Newsletter
    - One Hartford Newsletter Sign Up
    - Hartford.com Events Page
    - Faithfully Fed Eventbrite
    - Sign Up Form - Hartford Business Improvement District Newsletter

Are you connected to your NRZ (Neighborhood revitalization Zone)? Can you find information/events from that?

- Note: About half of the group knew what an NRZ was.
- Facilitator noted that people didn't name NRZs as a place they could find information
- List of NRZS:
    - Asylum Hill Neighborhood Assn. (AHNA)
    - Blue Hills NRZ
    - Clay Arsenal Revitalization Association (CARA)
    - Coalition to Strengthen the Sheldon/Charter Oak Neighborhood (CSS/CON)
    - South Downtown NRZ (SODO)
    - Southend Neighborhood Revitalization Association
    - Southwest/Behind the Rocks NRZ
    - Frog Hollow NRZ
    - Maple Avenue Revitalization Group (MARG)
    - Northeast Revitalization Association (NERA)
    - Parkville NRZ
    - Upper Albany Revitalization Zone Organization (UARZO)
    - West End Civic Association
- Focuses on neighborhood conversations/localized issues, not necessarily resource for what is happening within the city
- Emphasis of *Our City* rather than the smaller settings
- Some residents didn't use NZRs, mostly finding information through community advocacy.
    - Hasn't been effective (at least yet), wasn't able to join online meeting
- Hartford can at times be clique, has many little sections, little pockets of information
    - Obstacle or opportunity
- Some NRZs are more active than others
- Could be impactful to have an informational portal that connects multiple communities
- Resources that are available to Hartford Residents
    - Library used for free events
    - Free tickets to Hartford Stage as a Harford resident
    - Transportation
    - Having 988 crisis hotline as resource
    - WQTQ radio station

    - Hartford Decides - surveys to vote on what changes you want to see in the city
    - Know Thy Neighbor - Residents decide topics of discussion, then conduct brainstorming, action steps, and implement community changes
        - Members from NRZs attend these meetings, and they also have professional come in

Specifically mentioned NRZs:

- Blue Hills NRZ - having different departments within the city unless very local
- SODO NRZ
- Chairperson for nrz mentioned that it can be great tool to organize change

Links:

- Find Your NRZ
- List of All NRZs and Meeting Times
- Hartford Decides Website
- Know Thy Neighbor Website

How do you facilitate change within your community?

- Can personally coordinate with your neighbors
- NRZs as a resource for this
- Some residents go directly to city hall meetings to address issues

What are the changes you want to see in your community? What changes could you see with UConn Hartford Colab + HPL resources?

- Literacy rates low within Hartford for youth
    - Working on having Little Free Libraries throughout Hartford
    - Little Free Libraries as a way of reading beyond physical building (library, school)
- Source of frustration: People coming into the city for resources and then going back to their town.
- Opportunity: Coming together across nearby towns. For example, Manchester, Hartford, West Hartford, Wethersfield, Bristol
    - Youth collaborations. Coordinating homeless centers/centers for unhoused populations
- Mentoring: young girls, women, young boys (previous avenue - mens workout group)
- Helping those with addictions, mental health challenges
- Education
    - More support for teachers in Hartford schools (low pay, mental health days, access to healthcare)
- Incorporating existing programs from other communities into Hartford
- Working Families assistance, in addition to those just below or above the poverty line, those who struggle to get ahead
    - Example: Food support
- Development of legal help and Institutional partners to reverse laws
    - for example maybe UConn Law
- Sheff vs. O'Neil Civil Rights Desegregation Lawsuit

    - Lawsuit and subsequent CT Supreme Court Case about desegregating Connecticut schools and providing equal education across the state.
    - Hartford Resident perspectives:
        - This civil rights and school desegregation case having a negative impact on the city
        - Kids being bused out to different schools outside of Hartford
        - Lack of connectivity between youth, no longer having place where you can meet and connect with each other
        - Schools as an anchor for community
        - Has led to a lack of neighborhood cohesion
        - Transportation considerations: In some cases students have long bus commutes, get back very late
    - Relevant Links:
        - Sheff vs. O'Neil Information and Timeline - Center for Children's Advocacy
        - Sheff vs. O'Neil - CT State Library
        - Sheff vs. O'Neil - Wikipedia Page
- Drug use throughout the streets
- Having programs that prioritize younger people and elder safety.
- Concerns for not having pedestrian safety
    - Wanting to install pedestrian friendly crosswalks and roads
- Specific program for CoLab to do
    - Helping Hartford be civically engaged and civically educated
    - Knowledge of how to civically participate
    - Example: how to contact city counselors, volunteering at Hartford boards and commissions (37 total)
    - Hartford Boards and Commissions
    - Example of civic engagement leading to change:
        - South End - Lots of ticketing within a street because residents could only park on one side of the street, and residents complained that there weren't many other parking opportunities in the area. Went to the city commission → Now you can park on both sides of the road, and the tickets that were handed out were canceled
- What are programs within the library that assist families?
- **Youth**
    - Student skills development
    - Building transferable skills to the labor market
    - Dream
        - Every student having a place to go after school
        - Learning beyond the school ours
        - Every student having an internship (CVS, Aenta, summer programs)
    - Barriers to learning, education
        - Example grant towards bus passes for youth the visit the library
        - Bike racks and scooter ranks, renting a lock
    - Keeping kids off the streets.

        - At night, after school hours
        - Not a lot of programs that are open late at night for kids that are older (older teens- 16,17)
        - In the 1980s and 90s, had Pool Halls, but no longer exist as meeting spaces
        - In the past, midnight basketball led to decreased crime rates
        - Social media revenues - question of what are environments that children will actually enjoy and like and engage with?
        - Safe and welcoming atmosphere
        - Providing safety net - for teenagers, young adults, etc
        - Monetary considerations
        - Third spaces for teens
            - maybe having teen spaces within library, within uconn,
    - Future action: Maybe having a teen focus group
        - Not thinking for kids but hearing from them.
        - Developing Job skills, life skills, college readiness
    - Kids and teens experiencing bullying
    - Dangers and challenges of older and younger youth coming together
        - how it can provide a space for abuse
        - Older youth lose childhood experiences because of caretaking
        - Childcare services for families, not having children look after children
    - Know thy neighbor meeting - asking what are we concerned with regarding our youth
        - Mental health
    - Midnight basketball - previously closed down
        - But recently opened back up:
        - News Article: Midnight Basketball Is Back In Hartford
        - Fridays 8pm-12am, in North End (at Parker Memorial Community Center Gymnasium) and South End (at Arroyo Recreation Center Gymnasium)
        - Hartford Sports and Recreation Membership (Free)
        - Volunteering based programs - willing to stay late for teens
    - Hartford Public Schools has volunteer program, sign up through list - currently 80 people
        - Having more community members get involved in this program
        - Hartford Public Schools Volunteer Page
- For His Glory Church
    - Programs for kids, youth skill development (laundry, typing etc.), but issue of funding as the program grows
    - For His Glory Church Website
- From being an individual that has information to building a network of community
    - Mobilizing as individuals, and as groups
- Greater Hartford Gives Foundation
    - Provides Community Funding through Mini grants throughout the year

    - Question of how to navigate this process, grant cycles, and how to leverage community members in applying for these grants
    - Greater Hartford Gives: Hartford Community Fund
    - Greater Hartford Gives: Community Funds Volunteer Page
- Transparent, accessible information, not gatekept information
    - It can seem like getting funding can be all about who you know
- As an institution, using position to talk to funders
    - For example: From Focus Group and Town Halls, these are what are Hartford residents are saying, these are their concerns
- There are specific program problems, but also problems beyond a specific grant
    - Beyond the scope of grants: permanent policy changes
    - Developing strategies for short and longer term changes
- Looking at smaller scale/ breaking smaller bites (goal) towards a big dream can be a momentum movement

What is something that people in your communities don't know that would be important to have in a civic engagement course? What advice would you give to Hartford Youth?

- Kids knowing that they can have a hand in what their life can be
- Knowing that someone believes in them
- Knowledge of variety of vocations
- Empowerment and instilling confidence
- Example of civic engagement as youth:
    - Kid governor campaign - resident's child ran, ended up getting into cabinet, built curiosity in civic engagement
- Finding ways to learn about policy making. contributing to political process
    - Potential programs in UConn Hartford Colab or HPL
- Looking into the history of Hartford, capital, old state house
- Reinvestment in school system and teachers
    - Model UN within Hartford Public Schools, previously teaching how to swimming, lifeguarding at schools
- Free swim lesses at Park Memorial and Samuel V Arroyo Recreation Center - youth and adult classes
    - Current season is closed

Questions Participants Asked:

- When will the next meeting be?
- How often will we be having these town halls?

Post Meetings Action Steps:

- Press conference post Town Hall- inviting news outlets
- Conduct follow up meetings as CoLab supervisors and HPL leaders
    - Decide on main project and mini projects we will focus on
- Creating list of resources and community based organizations in the area
- Host at least 2 Focus Group→ Town Hall sequences in the Spring, potentially in the summer too

Contact Information

Hartford Public Library Coordinator:

- Keren Prescott, HPL Programming and Events Manager
- kprescott@hplct.org

Facilitator:

- Dr. Bulaong Ramiz - www.solservices.org
- solservices@bulaongramiz.com

UConn Hartford CoLab Co-Directors:

- Dr. David G. Embrick
- Dr. Jason Oliver Chang
- Sara Harrington: Associate University Librarian for Academic Engagement, UConn Library; Interim Director, UConn Library Hartford
- Cana Kumi: Graduate Assistant Fall 2026-Spring 2027
- colab@uconn.edu

For Future Events Hosted by HPL and UConn Hartford CoLab, check these webpages:

- Hartford Public Library Events Calender
- UConn Hartford CoLab Webpage