

Present: **17 Zoom Participants:**

The meeting began at 6:35 pm

Janeene Freeman – Special Assistant to The Mayor for Community Engagement and Partnerships – Gave updates on the opening of the Lathan Wider Community Center:

- 1st update was in June. It was hopeful the center would open late August or early September. Almost 1-year later there has been a soft opening. The Center was closed because of flooding issues that damaged the electrical panels and the boiler needed to be replaced.
- The last update to the group Janeene was joined by Scott Butch the Director of Facilities who was overseeing the work. The boilers and electrical switch gears have been replaced. There are a couple of agencies that are returning to the center:
 - **Children’s Learning Center (CLC)** started operating in the center in November. They had to get some approvals before they could open. The city worked with them to ensure that from the state perspective they were ready to accept children. CLC currently have classrooms that are open.
 - **The Stamford Health Clinic** is in a holding pattern until they receive approval from the state.
 - **Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut** will be returning in March. The city is making minor upgrades to the space i.e. (painting, new furniture)
 - **Connecticut Institute for Immigrants and Refugees (CIRI)** came back in December in their same space.
 - **Ferguson Library** will be returning and expanding
 - One new addition to the center will be **Emergency Management Services (EMS)** and a small police substation to the left side of the building where there is a metal gate. EMS is currently working to create the space they need.
 - **HOOPS 4 All** youth development organization that has been working closely with the city and providing programming around the city i.e. (basketball, mentoring, youth support & development).

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- **Stamford Public Education Foundation (SPEF)** will be new to the center. They will work primarily with young people from elementary through high school.
- **Stamford Cradle to Career** is a collective impact organization that works in Stamford focused on early childhood education all the way through college and career readiness for young people.

All the groups fit nicely into Education, Health and Wellness. Janeene emphasized that all organizations have a history of working together which could potentially mean activating Lathan Wider and making it a vibrant community center for everyone in the community.

Organizations not returning to the Lathan Wider Community Center:

- **Clothes to Kids**
- **DMV**
- **Pacific House**
- **South End Dental Center**
- **Urban League of Southern CT**

Al Koproski inquired about DMV not returning to Lathan Wider Center
Janeene answered the DMV is operating out of the government center.

Next Steps:

Internal the City Working Group will begin planning for phase 2 of the project:

1. 1.5 M Federal Earmark
2. Budget advocacy in the upcoming months. Community voices are critical during the budgeting process. The parameters for this pool of dollars are to make some upgrades to the center; reactivate the small gym bringing it into compliance with building code, redo the flooring, upgrade the basketball court and a retractable glass garage door.

Janeene mentioned the prospective of increasing evening hours, having longer weekend hours and Sunday. Potentially opening the center 7-days a week would require additional staffing , specifically maintenance and security.

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Question - Sheila Barney: Did you inquire about the open gym hours for the NRZ?

Answer- Janeene Freeman as part of this process, I was asked to think about having open hours for the gym. It was explained that in previous years there have been commitments made to the NRZ about being able to use the space and those were not honored. Janeene states she has been taking back and advocating dedicated nights that are for South End residents. She thinks right now the challenge is that we have now is that Stamford Park & Recreation committee has overseen scheduling the time and the hours. Once Janeene knows what their schedule is and what they are plugging into time slots she will have a better idea of what would be available. The other piece of this is around staff capacity, making sure if they do open the gym, they have people who can ensure safety and respect for the boundaries of the center. Janeene stated they are in discussion with Parks and Recreation Department to figure out how they can make it happen and what is or isn't feasible. Janeene looks forward to updating the group once conversations and discussions have taken place.

Sheila Barney mentioned that we do have community volunteers who would help with open gym.

Janeene Freeman stated that the prospective of community volunteers is helpful but not enough. Want to make sure if we have young people in the gym that there is an added sense of security. Want to be able to leverage the space and not have people monopolize so someone else other than just parent volunteers will be needed.

Question-Sheila Barney: We must wait for Parks & Recreation schedule before we know whether we will be entitled to have days for open gym?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: Yes. Parks & Recreation have been operating out of the space & they have some established programs they have been running.

Question-John Wooten: Will we be able to meet with Parks & Recreation to see what their protocols are for use of the gym? What expectations there are for a person that would be opening & closing the gym on the nights that would be open gym?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: Absolutely. Her colleague Megan who oversees the scheduling and really runs the programs for the city is open to meeting with members of the group.

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Question-Sue Halpern: Any thoughts of anything to do with the park that's there, the little playground?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: It's one of the items with the earmark; the challenge is leveraging funds. There are internal conversations about getting folks to donate i.e.(developers).

Question-Sue Halpern: Any conversation about having a snack bar in Lathan Wider?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: They have not been any conversations, but I will bring it back as something the residents would like to pursue.

Question-Sue Halpern: Will the NRZ have access to the community room to have meetings?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: Yes, the community can use the large community room

Question-Sheila Barney: When is the meeting for financing?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: The budget meetings are in March. Once she has all the dates, she will notify us.

Question-Sheila Barney: Will maintenance always be on the premises?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: Conversations are going on about hours and staffing.

Question-Wilner Joseph: If our organization wanted to provide after school programs where would they be able to assist if they had many children? The office space provided won't be big enough if they wanted to run an after-school program. Is there any potential for that room?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: The community room would be available for large group meetings, but you would have to check.

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Question-Joseph Wilner: If we are running a consistent after school program and their growing and both spaces are not available, where would they house children that need to be serviced? The office space is not big enough.

Answer-Janeene Freeman: The space is primarily administrative and wasn't meant to be for operating programs. Janeene suggested reaching out to her and she will try to accommodate him in other spaces that might not be on site if by chance all spaces have been scheduled.

John Wooten mentioned that Parks & Recreation manage manpower not scheduling of our youth. **Janeene** stated Parks & Recreation do staffing and operate programs.

Chanta Graham stated that historically Parks & Recreation has never utilized the South End Center or the PAL center in the village. The ownership has changed of the building. Now the city is standing in for operations. The liability is always going to be on the city if anything happens. Security would be run by operations.

Question-Kayla Coker: Is there a need for someone to oversee the scheduling for the center and preferably coordinate with Parks & Recreation and other organizations to be on one accord?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: That will happen it's just a question of how

Question-Sheila Barney: How many tenants are in the building?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: 2 Tenants are physically in the building.

Question-Elizabeth McCauley: Could there be seasonal craft fair where vendors would pay a fee for their table and the revenue would go toward the playground?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: No, but she will bring up the idea.

Terry Adams mentioned a Go-to-Fund for Lathan Wider Park improvements. Janeene stated they have a grants department that's always looking for funding. **Sheila Barney** suggested that every 6-months the organizations give a presentation & handouts on what they are offering so the community can stay involved.

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Question-Kayla Coker: Since they are putting up a bathhouse will they be giving back to the community?

Answer-Janeene Freeman: I don't know

Sue Halpern mentioned the negative impacts of having a bathhouse and emphasized that residents attend the public hearing on January 26, 2026@6:30 PM

John Wooten inquired about community policing, Terry Adams stated he would reach out to the Captain of the Stamford Police Department to get an update.

Elizabeth McCauley inquired about the Holy Name Proclamation for their 100 years. Chanta and Terry will check on the status of the proclamation.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 pm