South End Community Visioning Discussion

May 4, 2026



Agenda

- Why We're Here Tonight
- South End Community Challenges & Opportunities
- Initial Plans: Invest / Funding Overview
- Exisiting Data and New Survey
- Considerations for Exisiting and Future Sites
- Examples of Community and Resource Centers
- Feedback and Discussion
- Next Steps: Survey and Next Meeting on **June 22, 2026.**

Why We're Here Tonight

It is time to truly prioritize Stratford's South End, which is the Heart of Stratford in many ways:

- It has more youth
- It has the most potential for investments supporting targeted services and resources
- It is where we can make the biggest difference for the community
- Residents are ready to be engaged

Whatever we do has to be special and reflect the respect we have for our South End community.

We are here to listen, learn, and dream together.

Stratford South End Challenges & Opportunities

- Has long been neglected
- Lots of studies and unmet promises
- Chronic flooding and floodzone location, which constrains redevelopment
- South End Community Center (Bates St.) is in need of repairs and is ready for investment

- Stratford PAL, the Health Dept., and Public Works have positively impacted the South End
- Long-time residents have deep roots and are connected to the community
- New residents bring ideas and energy
- Tremendous untapped potential
- Approximately $3.7M has been secured; more funding is needed

Your input will guide what happens next

Initial Plans for South End Community Center at Bates Street – Project History

The Town's initial focus was to renovate the Bates Street building. It soon became clear that renovation was not practical, primarily due to budget constraints rooted in FEMA requirements for buildings in a flood zone (AE12). Per FEMA and under 44 CFR 59.1, "if you renovate, add onto, or otherwise improve a structure and the cost equals or exceeds 50 percent of the building's market value, **the entire building must be brought into compliance with current flood standards, including elevation to the BFE (base flood elevation)**." This will be a constraint on anything built on the property.

Once it was determined renovation costs would exceed this threshold, the project pivoted to a rebuild, which would require a new elevation of 12 ft. (BFE). The scope change from renovation to rebuild took almost six months to coordinate with the State. Since a rebuild requires a larger budget, the Town then worked to secure additional funding, including a new $500,000 allocation from the Town's Capital Improvement Plan (July 2025).

As planning progressed, the Town shared updates with residents and the community was notified that a new facility would be developed at Bates Street. These updates were also discussed during the Strategic Plan process, which included a variety of outreach including focus group meetings, stakeholder interviews, and surveys for users between 2024-2025.

Initial Plans for South End Community Center at Bates Street – Project History (cont.)

The Town continued to work on sourcing more funding to cover the budget gap. Given the limited budget, the building was designed to be 5,000 sq ft, with infrastructure to support a second-floor addition in the future.

Part of the rebuild process was to investigate what could be saved from the roof and new HVAC, coordinated by the Town in 2023-2024 and paid for with Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. This work was planned before the renovation project was determined.

The Town would be required to repay the CDBG funding ($184,669) to the Federal Government if the building is changed significantly or becomes abandoned, thereby jeopardizing the investment.

Today, under the Chess Administration, we are considering the many opportunities to expand services and resources in the South End based on the needs and desires of the community.

Initial Plans for South End Community Center at Bates Street – Funding Overview

Funding Overview:

- $2,446,463 – CT DECD. Supporting the rebuild. Currently restricted to Bates Street.
- $500,000 – Town of Stratford (Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) FY25 inclusion). Approved by Town Council July 21, 2025. Supporting the rebuild. Currently planning next CIP.
- $150,000 – Town of Stratford. *Initial* investment leveraged as a match with the $2.46M application (original renovation application).
- $205,000 – Senator Gaston. Supporting SECC integration at Birdseye Municipal Complex, where operations are currently. Funding had an expiration date, so use needed to be expedited.
- $12,000 – AT&T Technology. Supporting technology purchases and technology education. Currently restricted to Bates Street.
- $114,970 – EECBG (Federal). Supporting energy efficiency measures in rebuild. Currently restricted to Bates Street.
- CDBG (2 allocations)
    - $83,184.27 – CDBG Year 47. Exterior Painting.
    - $62,489.37 – CDBG Year 50. Supporting safety upgrades, including fire alarm system, security system, and cameras.

Overall: **Approximately $3.7 million. Rebuild cost <u>projected in 2025</u> to be around $5.5 million.**

Existing Community Data – Strategic Plan Executive Summary

Executive Summary 2025-2028 Strategic Plan | South End Community Center (SECC)

The South End Community Center (SECC) enters a pivotal stage of growth with the opening of a new facility, deepening partnerships, and a renewed focus on equity and impact. SECC's new strategic plan builds on its legacy of trusted programming, such as childcare, food access, and tax preparation, while expanding its reach and responsiveness across Stratford.

Our Strategic Priorities:

1. **Expand Programs & Strengthen Organizational Capacity** → Enhance legacy services and launch community-informed pilot programs.
2. **Improve Marketing, Branding & Community Visibility** → Refresh SECC's identity and broaden resident, partner, and funder engagement.
3. **Ensure Equitable Community Access & Readiness of the SECC Building** → Embed resident voice in facility design and ensure inclusive access to space.
4. **Secure Sustainable Funding** → Diversify revenue sources through grants, partnerships, and earned income.

Existing Community Data – Strategic Planning: Rapid Assessment

Rapid Assessment - *11 stakeholder interviews across Town leadership, school leadership, Recreation Department, Baldwin Center, YMCA, Sterling House, Library, Health Department, and community representatives. Resulting in directional findings.*

The assessment suggests SECC's challenge is not whether its services matter, but whether SECC has the operational capacity, coordination, and visibility to deliver those services consistently and at the scale the community needs. Stakeholders consistently identified real demand for afterschool care, tutoring, food access, teen engagement, and broader family support.

The more pressing constraints are:

1. **Limited space**
2. **Limited community awareness**
3. **Operating systems that are not yet strong enough to support consistent growth.**

The afterschool program is the clearest flagship opportunity. It is reportedly high-quality and strongly aligned to community need, but it is materially under-enrolled, with 16 students enrolled against a licensed capacity of 30.

The community food pantry is a highly valued service and currently depends on small number of volunteers and limited storage capacity.

The audit suggests that SECC's core programs align with real need. The challenge is less about program relevance and more about the operating conditions required to sustain and scale impact.

Existing Community Data – Strategic Planning: Rapid Assessment

Rapid Assessment - *Stakeholder Feedback*

- **Need is concentrated around a few recurring priorities** → strongest recurring themes include after-school care, tutoring and academic support, food insecurity, and a meaningful gap in teen engagement, especially for middle school and high school youth.
- **Access barriers are practical, not abstract** → Transportation, family time burden, affordability, and limited awareness repeatedly surfaced as the main reasons people do not participate, even when programs are valued.
- **SECC has an awareness and positioning gap** → Multiple interviewees suggested that residents, especially newer residents, do not fully understand what SECC offers or may assume it serves only one neighborhood rather than the broader community.
- **Space is a binding constraint** → Space limitations are affecting program quality, storage, tutoring, physical activity, pantry operations, and the ability to run more than one thing well at a time.
- **Coordination issues are reducing effectiveness** → There is significant opportunity for enhancement through partnership pathways and a more reliable operating rhythm.

Existing Community Data – Strategic Planning: After-School Parent Survey

After School – *Parent Survey - Nine surveys completed for 16 enrolled students.*

The primary goal of the survey: **assess parent perceptions** of the program's quality, impact, and areas for potential improvement and growth. Key findings include:

- Nearly all surveyed parents would enthusastically recommend the program to other families.
- 100% of respondents agreed their child is **engaged and excited** to attend the program, a foundational indicator of program quality and retention.
- Homework help and tutoring support ranked #1 for the program's top strength.
- More physical activity and sports time was ranked as #1 area for improvement, with more academic help ranking #2.
- Extended hours and more space/better facility tied for #3 area for improvement.

The parent feedback indicates the program is delivering a strong experience (high overall ratings and strong engagement/homework signals) **but needs enhancement through access to more space.**

Parents are highly satisfied and see positive results. **Our priority is to scale enrollment and resources so the program can deliver the same quality at higher capacity.**

Existing Community Data – Strategic Planning: Food Pantry Audit

Food Pantry – Audit Findings - *23 food pantry users responded to the Shopper Survey.*

The primary goal of the survey: program evalutation and priority of improvements for volunteer-led operation.
Feedback from users:

- *Overall Finding* - High-trust, high-satisfaction core program and **shoppers value quality and organization.**
- *Constraint* - Operational bottleneck due to shared space setup and time pressure at Birdseye.
- *Constraint* - Sustainability risk due to heavy reliance on volunteer-led operation.
- *Potential Solution* - Suggestion to formalize volunteer roles and strenghten continuity as well as funding support.

What does the South End Community Need and Desire?

The most recent data was collected through the Strategic Plan process in 2024-2025, and **we are eager to continue this dialogue with the South End Community.**

Community input is essential:

- What programs, services, or resources are most needed in the South End today?
- Which locations feel **most accessible** and convenient for residents and families?
    - i.e. Bates Street, Birdseye, Baldwin Center
- How important is walkable neighborhood access for community services?
- **What amenities or services would you most like to see at Bates Street?**
- How can the Town best support youth, seniors, and families moving forward?
- What concerns or opportunities should be considered before any decisions are made?
- **How can we preserve the identity of the South End while planning for the future?**

Current South End Community Sites

Birdseye Municipal Complex - Now



South End Community Center at Bates Street - Now



Enhancements to Consider for Exisiting and Future Sites

Some Potential Services, Resources, and Amenities for Consideration:

- Neighborhood market / grocery / fresh food access
- Bank, ATM, or financial services
- Medical Clinic
- Clothing
- Barber / salon / neighborhood retail
- Residential apartments
    - Potential subsidized or workforce housing opportunities
- Other ideas?

- Additional community programming or multi-use space
- Early Day Care
- Summer Camp
- Playground
- Meeting Rooms / Game Rooms
- Splash Pad / Pool
- Basketball Courts
- Senior Programming

Examples for Brainstorming

Community Center: Wakeman Boys & Girls Club – Madison Avenue, Bridgeport







Fire Cadet Program





Examples for Brainstorming

Community Center / Resource Center Examples



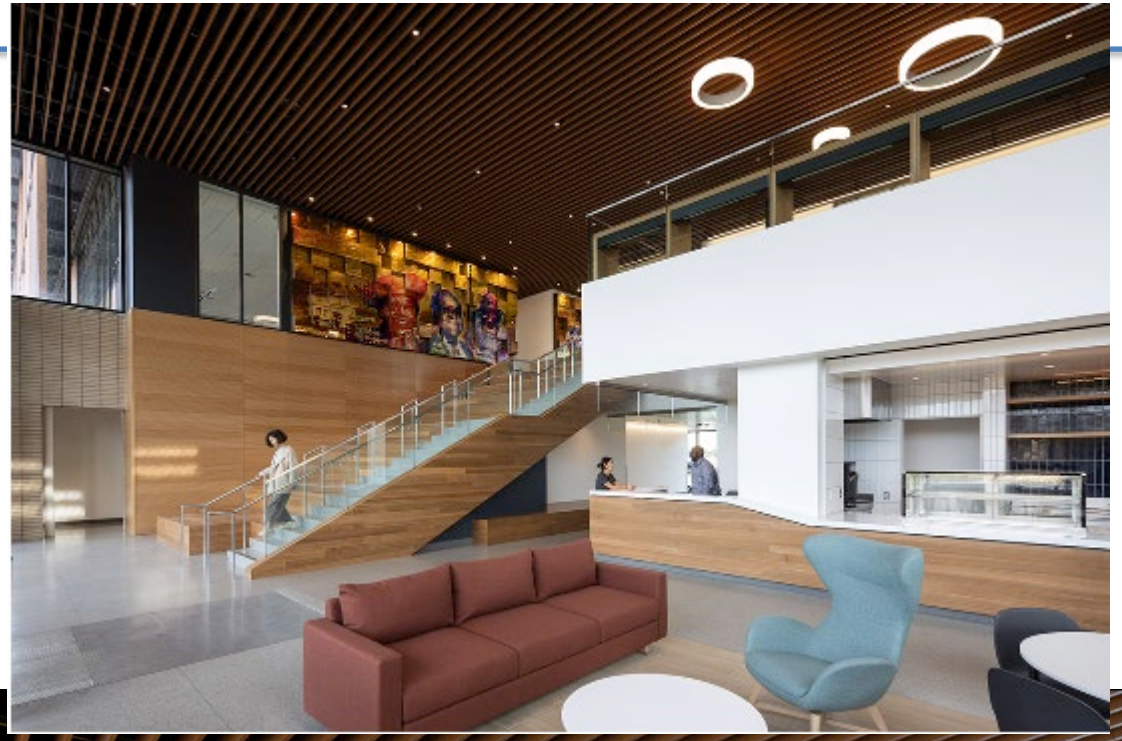




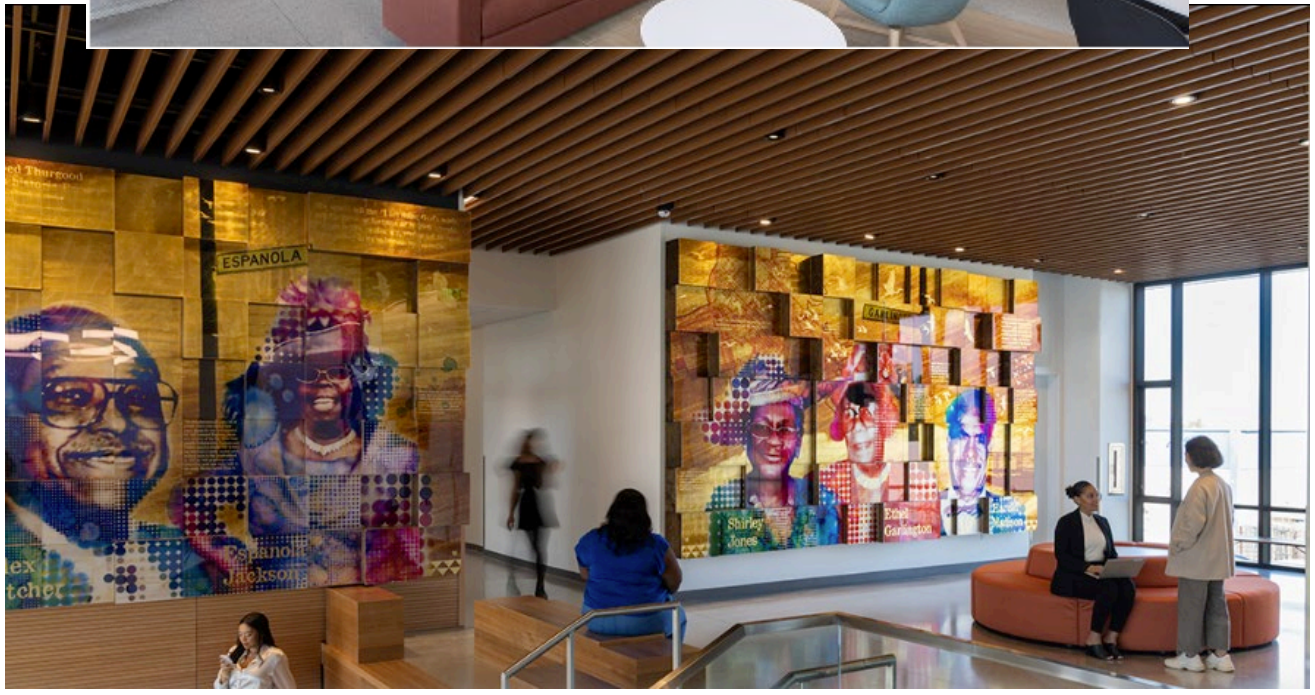


Examples for Brainstorming

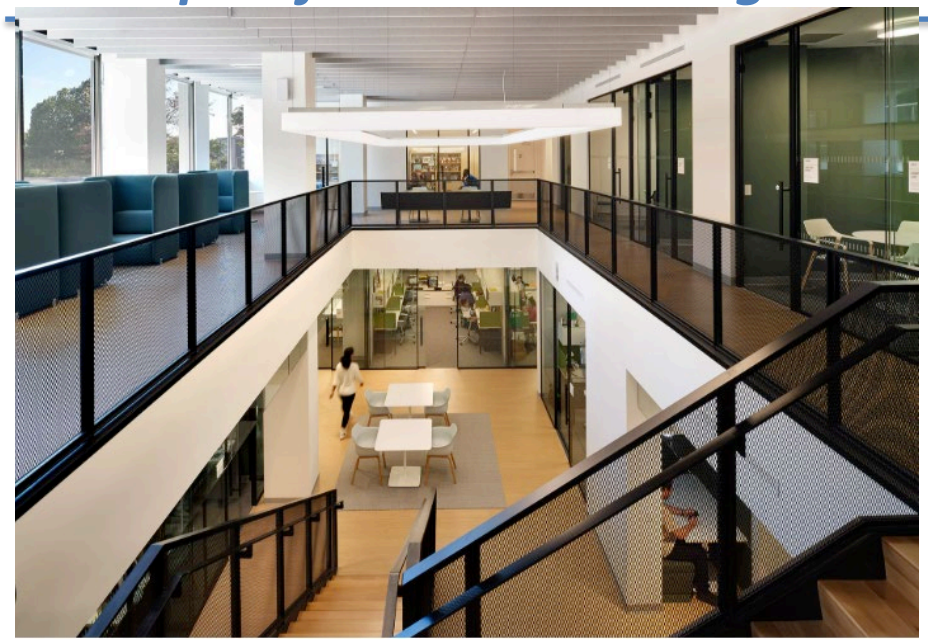




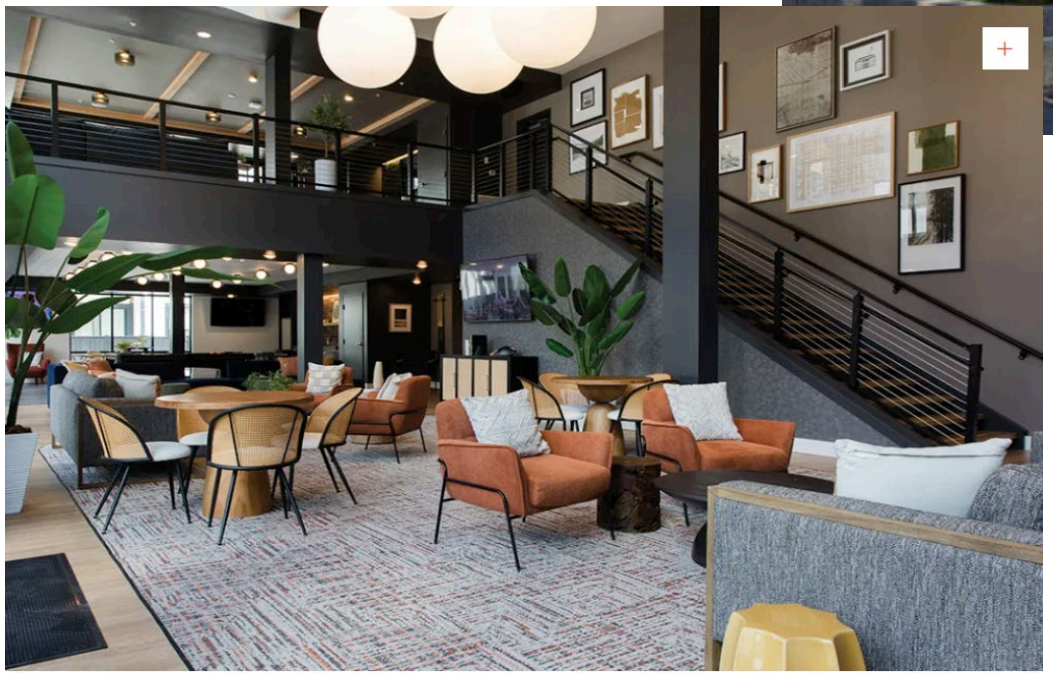




Examples for Brainstorming









We've done a lot of sharing – now it's YOUR turn!

We want to hear your thoughts…

Next Steps

Tonight's discussion focused on listening and learning to shape ideas and opportunities **together.**

1. Presentation Materials and Survey on the Mayor's page on the town website – make sure to **respond by May 22nd!**
2. Help us spread the word to your neighbors and friends about the presentation and survey, we want to capture as much feedback as possible!
3. Join our next meeting on **June 22, 2026.**
    - Info will be shared on the town website, Facebook, the Mayor's email newsletter, and flyers at Birdseye and Baldwin Center.

We want to hear from you, so please be sure to respond to the survey by May 22nd.

The survey is also available in Spanish.

The survey includes a section for questions we were unable to get to tonight, so please participate!

Thank you for participating at the South End Community Visioning Discussion!

Now, it is time for the District 3 Neighborhood Association Meeting, so be sure to stick around.