

Community Engagement Update

Prepared by

Launch Consulting

Date

March, 2025

Prepared for

Town of Hamden, CT



Introduction

Launch Consulting, LLC is partnering with the Town of Hamden and the residents of the Newhall and Highwood neighborhoods in a comprehensive community engagement effort to address longstanding infrastructure challenges, foster greater community connection, and rebuild trust between residents and town administration.

The engagement process was designed to be inclusive, transparent, and action-oriented. It ensures that community members not only have a voice in decision-making but also actively participate in shaping solutions.

The original engagement strategy was designed to ensure that community voices are heard, incorporated, and valued in the planning and execution of several key projects, including:

- The demolition of the former Hamden Middle School buildings.
- The planning and construction of a new community campus on the school site.
- Ongoing repairs of residential foundations in the Newhall neighborhood.
- Infrastructure improvements to address stormwater drainage issues.
- Traffic calming and street safety enhancements for pedestrian accessibility.

This report provides a summary of Phase I activities, key findings from community listening sessions, and the roadmap for Phase II.

Core Responsibilities and Focus Areas

Launch Consulting's Contracted Responsibilities

- Comprehensive community engagement
- Facilitation services in support of the Town initiatives and projects
- Build trusted relationships and tailor engagement strategies to reach residents

Engagement Focus Areas

The Newhall and Highwood Communities of Hamden, CT, (but include broader engagement inclusive of the entire Hamden community).



The final and primary expected deliverable is a **Community Plan** informed by a strategy that includes:

- Methods for facilitating community meetings.
- Methods for gathering and summarizing community input.
- Approach to collecting data and sharing data
- The Consultant(s) approach to building trust with residents while providing honest updates

The Community Plan is meant to be a document that considers the residents' priorities and goals for their community and makes recommendations to the town's leadership and administration's capacity and resources.

Community Engagement Model

Launch designed its RFP response and strategies based on this core model of Community Engagement:

Creating the conditions for residents, local leaders, and organizations to work together in order to make informed decisions and take action that benefits the community. It is not just about attending meetings; it's about creating real collaboration between the people who live in a community and the people responsible for making decisions that affect it.

This Model works when the following occurs:

1. When there is two-way conversation where residents share concerns, ideas, and feedback, leaders respond with solutions, updates, or plans.
2. When municipal leaders actively work to build trust by listening and incorporating community voices into decision-making.



Why Community Engagement Matters



It gives community members a say in decisions that impact their neighborhood about things like roads and safety.



It helps municipal leaders create better policies and projects that meet real community needs rather than assuming what people want.



It makes it easy for residents to participate through clear communication and multiple ways to give input.



It promotes transparency about decisions and how resident input is used.



It ensures follow-up – Engagement isn't just about listening; it's about taking action and keeping the community informed.

Simple Actions That Support Engagement:

- ☐ Organizing community meetings where thoughts are shared and questions asked.
- ☐ Soliciting feedback through surveys, emails, or direct communication.
- ☐ Partnering with neighborhood groups or committees to help shape projects.
- ☐ Talking with community members and encouraging them to be involved.
- ☐ Following local updates on social media, websites, or newsletters.

Launch's model of Community engagement works best when building relationships and ensuring that everyone has a voice in shaping their community.

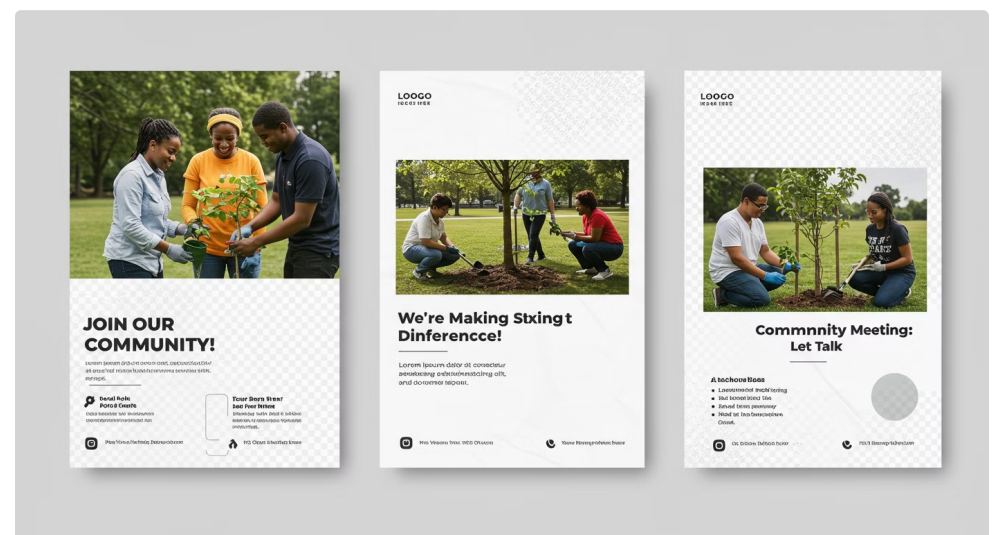
RFP Scope Deliverables and Progress

Proposed Deliverables

1. Coordinate interview sessions with ten (10) Newhall and High Wood residents, stakeholders, and elected officials.
2. Convene and facilitate up to sixteen (16) public meetings with Hamden residents, stakeholders, and interested parties.
 - 8 information gathering sessions before the community plan
 - 8 implementing sessions regarding the community plan
 - Lead pre-community meetings and a post-community meeting with Hamden Staff.
3. (1) Project Kick-Off Meeting and (1) Project Close Out Meeting
4. Develop any flyers, meeting notices, and social media posts associated with any planned public meetings.

Progress To Date

- 7 Interview sessions: Tina Harriet, Yvonne Jones, Justin Farmer, Laurie Sweet, Caitlin OBrien, Aisha Elm, Donald Moses
- Public meetings: September, October, November, January
- June 25th Kick-Off meeting (day long) Erik, Carol, Stephen
- Flyers, Facebook, Instagram Website, email communication



Engagement Methodology



Open Community Dialogue and Listening Sessions

Launch Consulting has facilitated multiple community dialogue and listening sessions to provide residents with opportunities to voice their concerns, share ideas, and contribute to shaping the future of their neighborhoods. These sessions were held in July, September, October, and November, creating a structured yet open space for ongoing engagement. Through these conversations, residents have expressed their experiences, priorities, and perspectives, helping to inform municipal decision-making and community-driven solutions.

January was a review of work completed to date and a purposeful pause to encourage feedback on people's experience with the community engagement process to date.



Stakeholder Interviews & One-on-One Dialogues

To gain deeper qualitative insights into community needs and concerns, stakeholder interviews and one-on-one dialogues were conducted with key community members, local leaders, and residents. These discussions helped capture individual experiences, systemic challenges, and opportunities for collaboration, ensuring that diverse perspectives were considered in shaping policies and initiatives.



Participation in Town-Wide Community Events

Engaging the community where they naturally gather is essential for building trust and inclusion. The Launch Consulting team actively participated in major town-wide community events, including:

- Heart for Justice: A community-centered event focused on social equity, advocacy, and civic empowerment.
- Hamden Night Out: A town-sponsored event fostering community spirit, public safety awareness, and local engagement.

Attending these events allowed for organic conversations with residents, offering an informal yet meaningful way to connect, listen, and share information about ongoing initiatives.



Door-to-door canvassing for Direct Resident Engagement

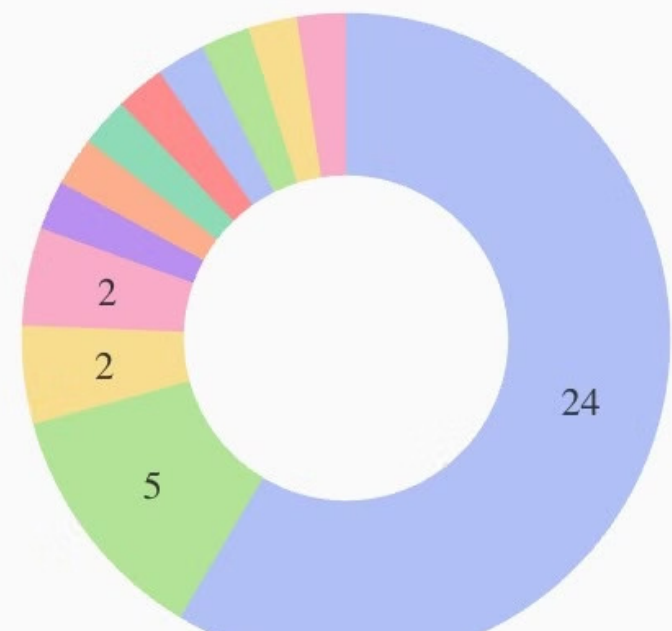
Recognizing the importance of face-to-face interactions, Launch Consulting conducted door-to-door canvassing to directly engage with residents. This grassroots approach helped:

- Establish personal connections and build trust with community members.
- Ensure that all voices, including those who may not attend public meetings, are heard.
- Gather firsthand insights into the challenges, priorities, and aspirations of target residents impacted by the project.

To ensure a comprehensive and intersectional approach to addressing community concerns, Launch Consulting partnered with Haley & Aldrich to make connections with homeowners and residents challenged by contaminated soil and crumbling foundations.

Engagement Type Distribution

- Engineering Assessment
- Meeting with Ambassadors
- Meeting @ Keefe
- Doorknocking/Flyering for Meeting
- Virtual Meeting
- Meeting with Mayor & Ambassadors
- Meeting @ The Lab
- Meeting @ Breakthrough
- Flyering for Meeting



- Doorknocking/Flyering with Mayor Garrett
- Doorknocking/Flyering
- Doorknocking/Flyering
- (blank)

[TableVersion of Mary's Community Engagement](#)

Initial Outputs

1

Visioning & Goal Setting

Provided support for the town's leadership and administration in setting clear and objective goals for how they want the town to change or improve based on this work.

Topic-based working group

Focused groups addressing specific community concerns and developing targeted solutions.

2

Stakeholder Engagement

Created an opportunity for open dialogue connection for listening and for the sharing of power in the town's hierarchy for decisions that have long-term and lasting impacts on the residents of focus in this community engagement project.

Systems of accountability

For communication and information sharing, including social media communication and website development.

3

Action Planning

Informed by themes that emerged and stories shared by community residents, as well as the limitations and capacity of this town's leadership, certain action plans have been proposed to move forward toward decisions, resolutions, or agreements.

Preferred communication channels

Based on what we've learned and the feedback from residents, we found that they prefer print media and word-of-mouth over online platforms, social media, and email for receiving information sharing.

Early Themes and Key Findings

1. Urgency and Action

Residents have emphasized the need for immediate and concrete action on critical infrastructure issues, particularly flooding, traffic safety, and building repairs. Delays in addressing these concerns have heightened community frustration.



2. Transparency in Governance

Community members have expressed deep frustration over past inaction and a perceived lack of follow-through from town officials. There is a strong demand for clear, transparent communication and accountability in decision-making processes.

3. Community Empowerment and Ownership

Residents want a direct role in shaping policies and projects. They seek greater participation in decision-making and more opportunities to influence town priorities that directly impact their neighborhoods.

4. Addressing Historical Neglect and Environmental Racism

The community views this initiative as an opportunity to redress systemic disparities and foster a more equitable future by ensuring historically marginalized voices are included in planning and implementation efforts.

Reflections and Critical Questions



Some residents and municipal leaders still lack a clear understanding of the purpose and scope of community engagement.



Some stakeholders initially expected Launch Consulting to directly address the crumbling foundation crisis, *rather than to facilitate broader engagement efforts.*



Town leadership is stretched thin, especially due to staffing turnover in the Economic Development Office, which creates challenges in sustaining engagement.



Concerns about home foundation deterioration have taken center stage in discussions, redirecting the focus of engagement efforts.

1. This crisis of crumbling foundations has harmed homes, weakened community trust, and heightened safety concerns among individuals residents.
2. In response, Launch Consulting temporarily paused its core engagement strategies to work on addressing this critical structural issue while ensuring broader community engagement continues efforts.
3. More work is needed regarding representation and inclusivity, especially concerning whether the core group of participants accurately reflects all affected residents.
4. An unexpected and welcomed outcome has emerged from the consistent group of engaged residents, leading to the formation of an independent neighborhood association that represents a positive community-driven result.
5. Launch consulting is continuing to expand outreach efforts to ensure the widest possible participation from residents in both target areas neighborhoods.

Challenges & Important Notes

Challenges

Managing Expectations

- Many stakeholders anticipated that Launch Consulting would resolve the foundation crisis, instead of fostering discussions and collaboration.
- Residents have strong expectations for immediate action but need a clearer understanding of municipal processes and constraints.

Strengthening Government-Community

Dialogue The town leadership faces challenges in receiving feedback from residents and acting on their insights. However, by fostering continuous transparency and encouraging open communication, we can work together to rebuild trust and address long-standing frustrations and issues thoughtfully.

Community Mediation and Rebuilding Trust

The broken trust between residents and the local government has consistently been communicated and repeated, emphasizing the need for ongoing conflict resolution, relationship building, and proactive communication. Implementing more structured community mediation initiatives in place of community engagement could repair the bridge the divides between residents, town officials, and external partner organizations.

Important Notes

Energized Municipal Leadership Partnership

Town leaders might redirect some emphasis on community priorities, actively rebuilding relationships and presenting a clear, inspiring vision for everyone's future.

Patience and Pacing in Community Building

- The process of trust-building and resident engagement requires time, consistency, and sustained effort.
- A scaled-down, focused approach to community engagement may ensure measurable progress without overwhelming stakeholders.

Communication and Messaging Support

A structured, proactive communication plan is needed to keep residents informed and create a consistent feedback loop.

Capacity Building for Local Leadership

- Strengthening resident-led leadership is critical for ensuring sustained engagement and long-term solutions.
- Consultants serve as facilitators, but community members must take active ownership in addressing issues and implementing solutions.

Proposed Next Steps for Consideration

Phase II (January – June 2025)

Expanded Outreach and Engagement

- Increased door-to-door outreach to engage more residents directly.
- Ongoing one-on-one stakeholder interviews to collect deeper insights.

Launching a Collaborative Accountability Task Group

Establishing a formalized structure for resident concerns to be addressed transparently and efficiently.

Continued Working Groups on Key Issues

- Home Foundation Repairs: Partnering with engineers and housing experts to develop solutions.
- Community Campus Development: Advancing the vision for a multi-purpose space for residents.
- Traffic Safety Enhancements: Implementing road and pedestrian safety measures.

Comprehensive Communication Strategy

- Developing a resident-centered information-sharing plan in partnership with The Narrative Project.
- Collecting and amplifying community stories through a neighborhood newsletter and creative engagement tools.

March Intensive Outreach Plan

Community Drop-In Sessions

Date	Time
Wednesday, March 12	6:00 - 7:30 PM
Wednesday, March 19	6:00 - 7:30 PM
Monday, March 24	6:00 - 7:30 PM
Monday, March 31	6:00 - 7:30 PM

Door-to-Door Canvassing

- Mondays & Wednesdays: 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM and 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM
- Saturdays: 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM
- Sundays: 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Phone Banking

- Saturday Mornings: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Reevaluation of Responsibility



Launch Consulting LLC's role in the community engagement process may no longer be effective or aligned with the values of the Town.

While Launch remains committed to equitable, transparent, and impactful community engagement, the previously identified priorities may no longer be relevant, increasing the difficulty of delivering meaningful and sustainable results.

Launch Consulting believes in the power of engaging residents directly, fostering trust, and collaborating to create excellent solutions.

Launch focuses on nurturing long-lasting relationships and empowering grassroots communities. Which may at times create implementation challenges if a more transactional approach is preferred.

At Launch Consulting, we stand by our core belief of "Do No Harm" in our engagement endeavors. We recognize the significance of preserving the trust residents have in our work, especially when faced with conflicting priorities.

Since emerging community-led efforts are growing through a neighborhood association formed by residents . It has developed organically, exemplifying ideal local ownership in advocacy and decision-making. This change suggests that Launch's facilitation role is now neither needed nor effective.