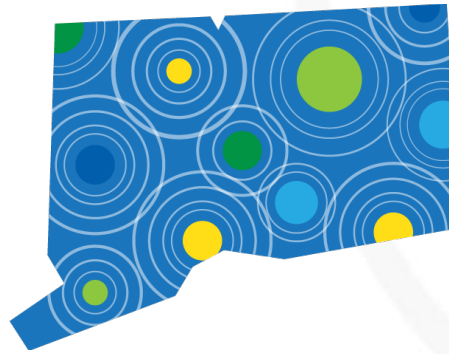


Sustainable CT

Local Actions. Statewide Impact.



Sustainable CT Municipal Learning Collaborative
Affordable Housing Pilot Project (2021 – 2022)

*Optimizing for Equity:
Empowering, Educating and Adapting
to Address Housing Segregation and
Promote Affordable Housing*

The Project

Engage Greater Hartford residents, commissions, and town staff to co-create zoning practices that reverse housing segregation and promote affordable housing, housing choice, housing quality, and pathways to more inclusive housing development in their communities.

Goals:

Learn from residents impacted by housing inequity; build relationships and trust with town planners, zoning commissions, and Sustainable CT

Co-create land use solutions to help reverse housing inequity and segregation in 3-5 towns in the HFPG region

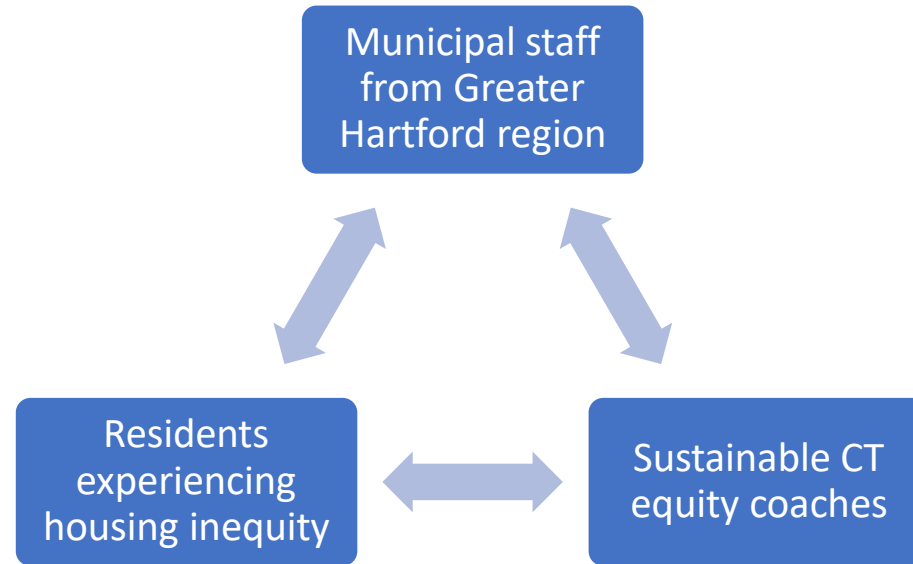
Use results to refine Sustainable CT's housing actions, educate planners statewide, and inform state policy to create systems change

Partners and Participants

Project Design and Implementation



Project Participants

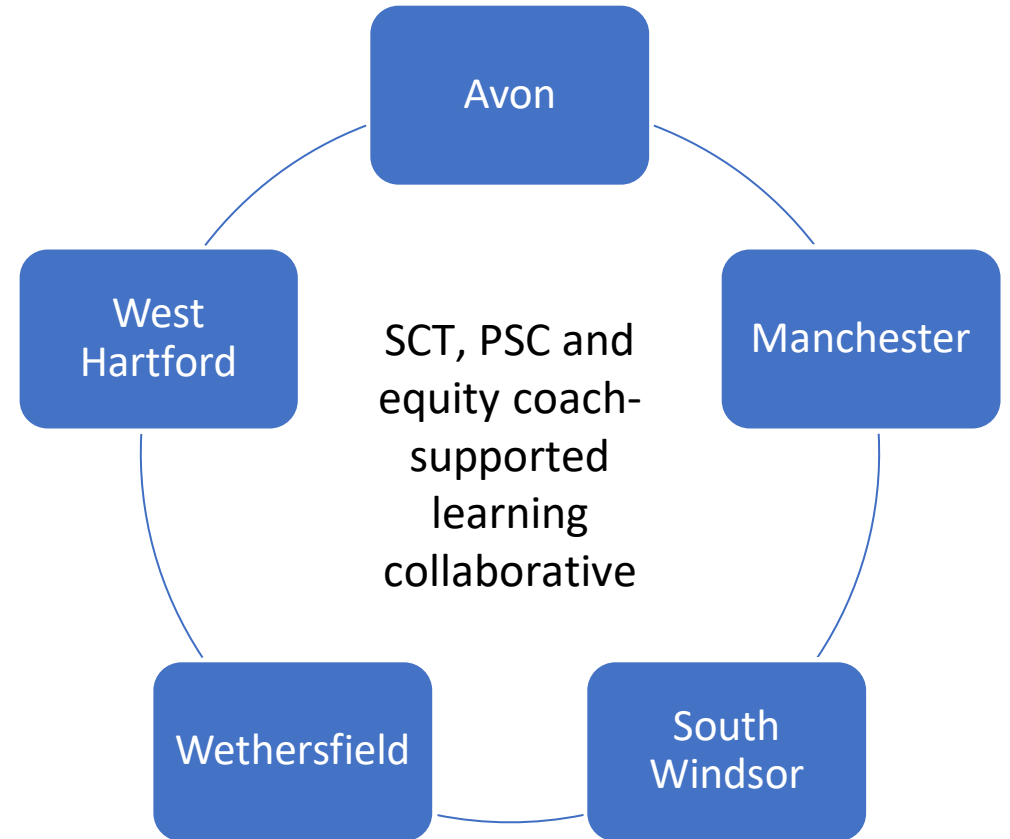


Project Funding



Municipal Participants

- Communities in the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving region
- Sustainable CT certified (trust/relationship, demonstrated commitment to sustainability, successful application of equity toolkit)
- Had begun work on state-mandated affordable housing plan
- Offered variety among municipal participants (e.g., on DOH Affordable Housing Appeals list vs. not, etc.)
- Participants included: town planners, town managers, planning and zoning commissioners, local housing authorities, sustainability coordinators, social/human services directors, nonprofit stakeholders



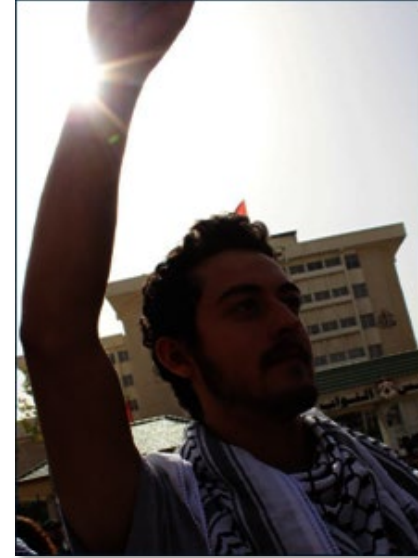
Sustainable CT Equity Coaches

Equity Coaches provided guidance in:

- Prioritizing equity
- Valuing lived experience
- Building trust and mutual respect
- Compensating resident participants
- Advancing regional collaboration and peer engagement



Ashley
Stewart



Ahmad
Abojaradeh



Esther
Jean-Marie

Residents with Lived Experience

- Sustainable CT recruited over 30 residents from the Greater Hartford region to participate in three, 90-minute, paid evening sessions
- The first sessions were with the residents, equity coach, and Sustainable CT staff only (no municipal representatives) to build trust and listen to stories
- Municipal representatives attended the final session to learn directly from the residents



HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHERE YOU LIVE?

Towns need to hear your experience in trying to find and keep safe, affordable housing.

- Help shape local affordable housing policy.
- Commit to participating in three online conversations: November 9, 18 and 22, 7:00-8:30 p.m.
- **Get paid \$150.00 for participating in all three conversations!**



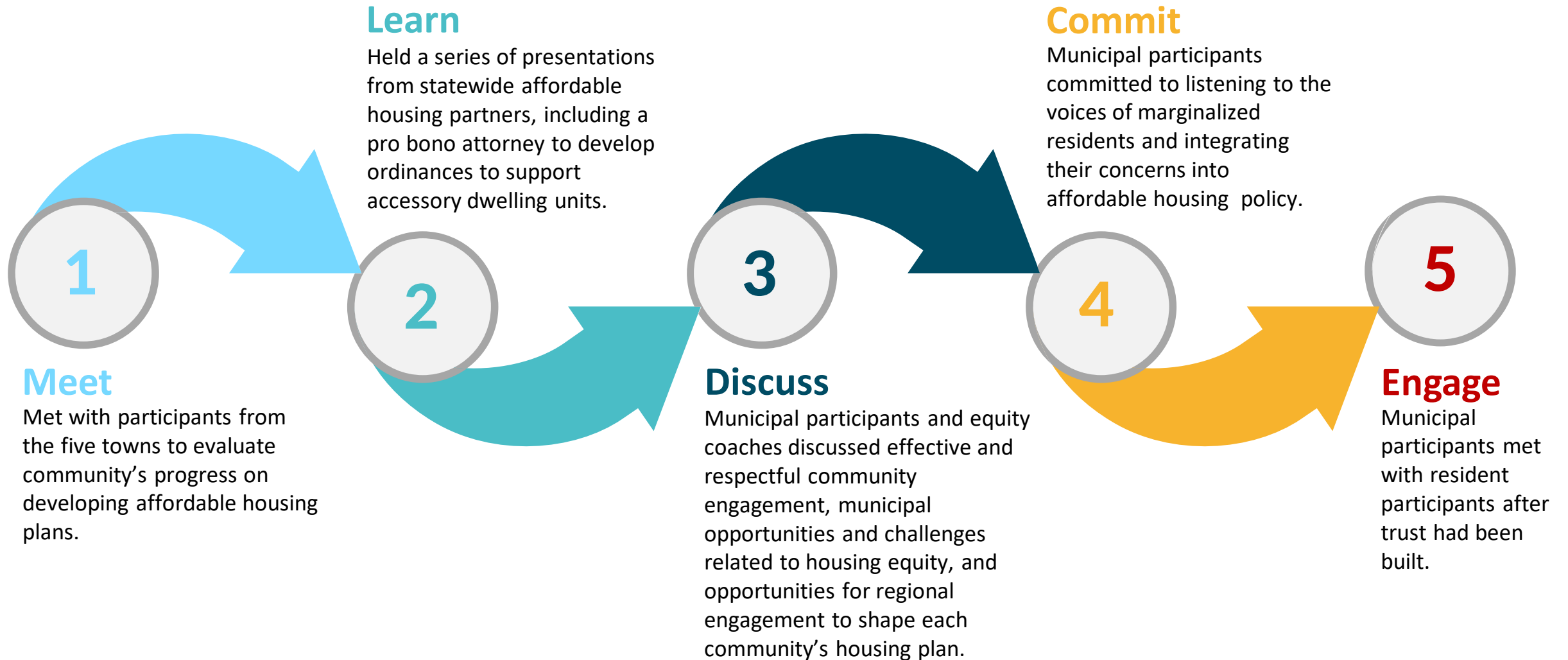
[REGISTER TODAY](https://forms.gle/Kwqgrmy9NBzrTfYj9)

(<https://forms.gle/Kwqgrmy9NBzrTfYj9>)

Hosted by [Sustainable CT](#), with support from the [Hartford Foundation for Public Giving](#).



Engaging Towns on Affordable Housing

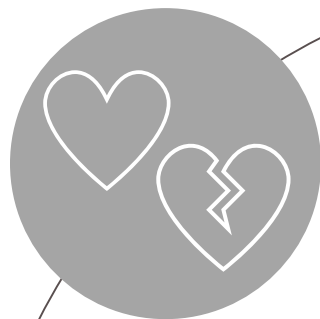


Engaging Residents on Affordable Housing

1
The first sessions were with the residents, equity coach, and Sustainable CT staff only (no municipal representatives) to build trust and listen to stories.



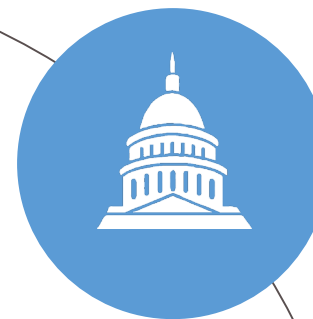
2
We asked residents experiencing housing inequity to share photos of: something you love about your housing, something you don't love about your housing, something you want to change or improve



3
We asked residents to share stories of their challenges and experiences with affordable housing.



4
We discussed the role of municipalities and zoning in affordable housing.

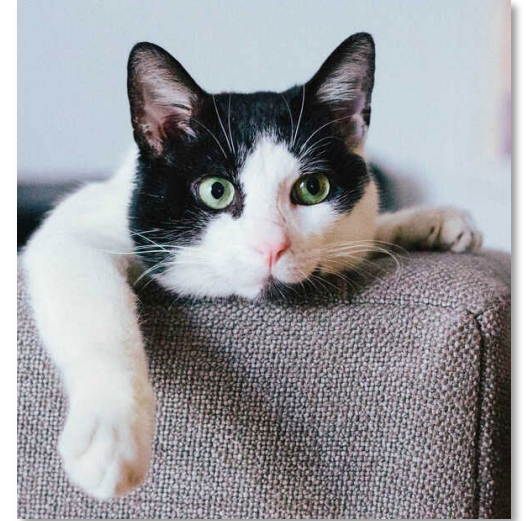
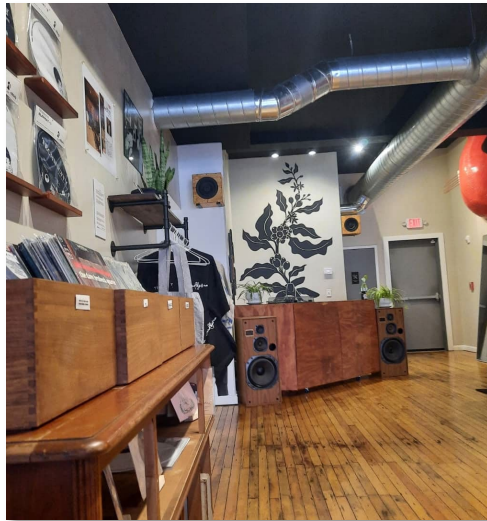


5
Residents met with municipal participants to share their lived experience and affordable housing challenges and desires.



Something You Love...

Green spaces,
community spaces
(Semilla Cafe),
pets/companionship



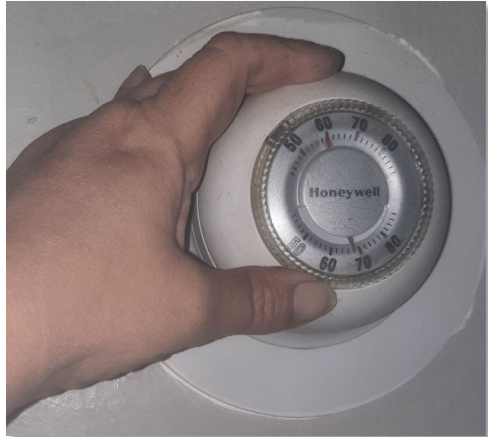
More: Something You Love...

Living close to Community Health Services, a neighbor filling the Little Free Pantry at Unity Plaza, mutual aid



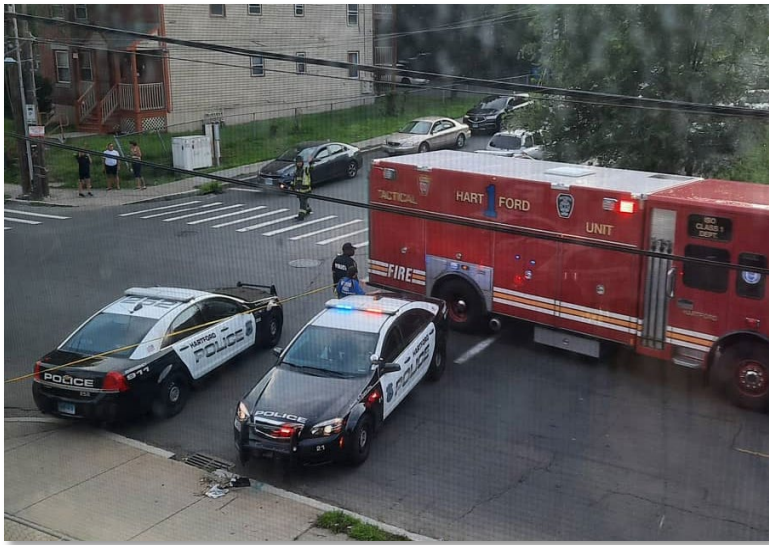
Something You Don't Love...

Closet doors that repeatedly break, bus shelters in poor condition, turning the heat all the way down at night to save money



More: Something You Don't Love...

Noise, dangerous intersections, gentrification/developments without affordable housing



Something You Want to Change or Improve...

Food access,
park amenities,
rent increases,
having another
bedroom to sleep
separately from
children



On Finding Decent, Affordable Housing



“I'm not from around here at all and just try to find something better that will fit where my daughter needs and for what we need to. Also, it's very hard because then you find a place like nice, but then it always has – you go inside and look and the landlord's, like, either he doesn't want to fix things or he fix things, or it takes him forever to fix things or, like, right now, for instance, I don't have no, I barely have heat. I had to go out and buy heaters for my apartment because he won't even fix the heat. And, then, like, my toilet right now, it just – it broke, so for the past two months, I've been having to fill it up with water just to make it work because the landlord doesn't want to do nothing about it. I just got my voucher, too, so I'm working on it and just try to help find a two bedroom right now.”

On Second Chances



“Earlier this year, I was in an unsafe situation where I living and I tried to move. I have two evictions on my record. So, you know, finding housing is impossible because, you know, it puts a red flag on your name and it's just, you know, no matter what – you know, I was like telling the landlords, I was like, I could pay up front. I’ll pay you here right now. Like, just ‘no.’ So you know, you're put in a whole different class bracket of, like, just undesirable because there can always be a better tenant that they can find, you know, especially with the demographic that the city of Hartford is trying to bring in...”

“It never goes away, even if you made a mistake. One of my evictions, I didn't even live – like I lived in the house for like two months and you’re, like, you're on – and just completely demolished my record.”

On Feeling Welcome and Safe



“It's one thing for municipalities to have a plan in place to have affordable housing, but they need to have a plan in place to make the affordable housing and make the town itself welcoming to people who live in affordable housing. And they need to make it accessible also transportation-wise, they need to work with transportation systems, to make it accessible... And increasing equity and everything like that, it's not going to be – nobody's going to want to live out in the city.”



“Obviously, everybody could see I'm Caucasian and I had a neighbor down the way that was also Caucasian and and her children were Caucasian, and she didn't realize that my children were not entirely. And she said something about, ‘Oh, how you like, do you like living here?’ After – our daughter was the same age as my daughter and they were like taking a bus together, and I think they were playing together after school or something, and she was asking me how I like being here. I've been here a couple of weeks at that point. And she's like, ‘Yeah, I grew up here,’ and she said, ‘the neighborhood used to be a lot better before all the blacks and the Spanish people moved in,’ and I was, like, oh, shit, my kids are Colombian. And they speak Spanish. But they're very, like, light, so they didn't really necessarily look like it. They could look like I'm Portuguese. They could look like that or Italian, or it was very nonspecific what they were. So she didn't get that, so, like – and at the time, I didn't want to make any ripples. I was in a nice neighborhood. I felt safe. I felt like I wasn't going to have a shooting or, you know, or – we didn't really have shootings on [unintelligible] Street, but there was a club across the street that was constant, like, fights coming out of the parties at night. And your kids are trying to sleep and there's all this ruckus going on. I just – it felt safer and I just didn't want to make waves, so I don't want to get up in this person's face. I was just, like, telling my daughter I was like, ‘Don't speak Spanish around her, her mom, okay? Just don't. Maybe you should just stay over here on this side of the block.’”

On Compensation



“If the town folks are looking for, how do you get people to come to the table and talk and discuss, you break down their barriers. You pay them for their time, even if it's just a gift card, a stipend, whatever. If you can't – you know, town budgets are tight, everybody's budgets tight – but providing childcare if it's an in-person meeting, because people aren't – people will often complain that people aren't invested in the community, or they are interested, or they don't give their input. They literally are too busy trying to cover all the bases and make sure the rent is paid and working to find a carve out time just to give my opinion. It's not that I don't care. I mean, I do that, and a lot of people do that, but you'll get more people if you can provide childcare, if it's in-person and give them a little stipend, a little incentive to come out.”



“Yes, I thought about the money, but the most thing – the most important thing that was for me was, like, the education. I was like, oh, this is a really good opportunity for me because I want to learn about affordable housing because I'm very zero in this. So, it was the education, and I'm pretty sure there's a lot of – there's a lot of people that use it.”

On Giving Voice



“Thank you. I did like the group, I am appreciative of the group. I just want to know, too, like, for – to do some more community – like, have more community resources for people that people don't really know about. To reach out to actually help other people, like you said, the people who don't really get a chance to talk and the people they don't really listen to – the minorities – and actually get together and do something and to help out and to actually make a difference in people's housing and to make it better and to give tenants a voice and to speak.”

On Listening to the Community



“I think the region in general does a pretty great job with, like, having public parks that are pretty decent, or there's like a decent variety of them. That's really great. One thing that irritates me about my particular neighborhood – I live near Kennedy Memorial in West Hartford, and I was there on the day that they removed the porta potties. And, so, there's just a there's a disconnect between, like, what's convenient or, like, what's on the schedule for the town versus how people actually use the space. I think that goes for a lot of things. Because there will be kids playing basketball there, like, until there's snow on the ground and then the snow will melt and they will come back and play basketball. You know, people use that for walking their dog and stuff like that. So, like, it'd be nice to keep a porta potty there. Or like trash cans – there's trash blowing all over those fields because the trash can is near the entrance, not in the place where people actually use the park. So just little, like, thoughtful, like, things like that; like, don't design these services for convenience, but design them for the least powerful users that I think that speaks to, you know, a lot of comments that my colleagues here have brought up. Like, if you're designing for, you know, a disabled single black mother with children who's also taking care of her parents, then, like, you're going to create a system that works for everyone because that covers a lot of needs.”

On Being Heard



“I'm pretty sure there's a lot of people out there that they're bilingual like myself, that we don't know a lot, or we're scared to speak up, that we just stay quiet, and we don't say anything and we just, we just, just – not to lose their home, which is okay. I'm just going to continue paying the rent, but I'm pretty sure there's a lot of – that there's a lot of help that, I mean – there's a lot of information that I'm going to be able to share with people that I know that they're scared of speaking up, that there is help. There's people out there that they can hear our voices, that we're not alone. So, I'm very grateful for this class and I'm hoping that there's more classes like this because they can help so many people out there that they're just hidden in their homes because of the technology, or they don't know English, or they're just being left behind. And I want to be their voices and that's why I'm here and that's why I decided to speak up. I was so nervous, but I'm glad I did it.”

Initial Project Results

- Regional collaboration to better understand affordable housing.
- New models to build trust and engage marginalized residents to share their lived experience with municipal decision makers.
- Co-created housing approaches and municipal affordable housing plans that have been informed by residents who are impacted the most.
- A commitment to providing continued safe spaces for underrepresented residents to engage with municipal government.

Where Do We Go From Here? Scaling Statewide

Build trusted relationships and safe spaces

Connect to lived experience

Collaborate regionally

Inform implementation of affordable housing plans

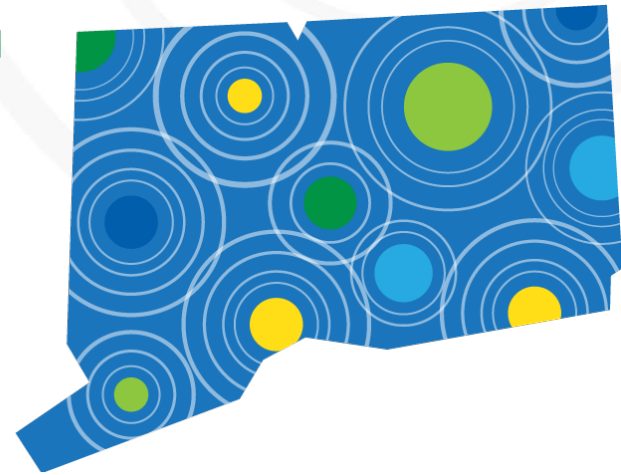
Empower residents to make change in their neighborhoods

Support affordable housing policy informed by lived experience. To get started, contact:

info@sustainablect.org

Sustainable CT

Local Actions. Statewide Impact.



www.sustainablect.org
info@sustainablect.org