

Hill Mutual Aid & Education Center

The proposed use for the former
Brunetta C. Hill Elementary School

Submitted to the Birmingham Board of Education

Proposed by the Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust, in collaboration with Fountain Heights Farm, Birmingham Mutual Aid, International Capoeira Angola Foundation (ICAF) - Birmingham, Healing Exchange AL (H.E.A.L), and Sustainable Water Energy and Economic Transition in Alabama (SWEET Alabama)

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Executive Summary

The Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust, in partnership with five other community-based organizations, will work together to develop the aging Brunetta C. Hill Elementary School into the Hill Mutual Aid and Community School (Hill Center).

The Hill Center will follow Community School principals¹ and will partner with the surrounding schools (Parker, Wilkerson, and Tuggle), churches, and neighborhood associations to uplift the community. With programming that includes education, agriculture, housing, food, community development, art, and healing, the Hill Center will serve as a holistic community school and resource to all residents of Birmingham. The Hill Center’s location in the historic Smithfield community and its proximity to public transportation mean these resources will be available to residents across the west and north ends of the City. These areas have been historically under-resourced, and the Hill Center will be a critical tool in addressing systemic inequalities and bringing asset-based community development to these neighborhoods at a critical time.

The Hill Center will serve as a holistic community school and resource to all residents of Birmingham.

Terms and Abbreviations

ICAF	International Capoeira Angola Foundation	H.E.A.L	Healing Exchange Alabama
SWEET Alabama	Sustainable Water Energy and Economic Transition in Alabama	Hill Center	Shortened form of “Hill Mutual Aid and Education Center”
DH-SCLT	Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust	BWWP	The Black Women Writing Project
Mutual Aid	Voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit	CLT	Community Land Trust



Above all, community members universally expressed that such a place should be owned by and be responsible to the local community.

Project Rationale & Background

The Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust (DH-SCLT), a 501(c)(3) non-profit, was founded by Smithfield residents after the passage of the City of Birmingham's Western Area Framework Plan², carrying out the recommendation to establish a community land trust in the western area. The co-director of DH-SCLT serves as the chair and official contact for the Smithfield Community's implementation committee for the Western Area Framework Plan³. DH-SCLT has been rooted in asset-based community development⁴ since its establishment in 2015 and has held many community events and conversations. The concept of the Hill Center grew and developed from the directly stated needs of the community members. Local community members do not want aging blighted properties transferred to parties without a plan for improvements, nor do they want development without community input. Instead, they want a community school and center that fosters healthy community interaction, healing, creativity, and community asset development. Above all, community members universally expressed that such a place should be owned by and be responsible to the local community and that it be located in the community.

Tax dollars from the people in the community built this school; it is imperative to keep this asset in the hands of the community. To not do so would be to continue the divestment that has historically beset many communities in Birmingham. Understanding the historic divestment of Smithfield, the community the



Hill Center will be located in, is key to understanding the imperative of this project.

Birmingham's history of systematic attacks and bombings on black citizens include at least fifty bombings between 1947 and 1966, largely occurring in the neighborhood of East Thomas. East Thomas and other Smithfield Neighborhoods were built as middle-class black neighborhoods, and are home to the family residence of Dr. Angela Davis, an internationally known human rights activist. "Dynamite Hill" became a nickname of the area in Smithfield along Center Street. Black citizens of Birmingham were moving into Smithfield after Attorney Arthur Shores overturned segregated zoning laws which allowed them to purchase land spaces and residential housing in the area in 1950. The Ku Klux Klan responded with a series of systematic attacks and bombings on black citizens, which prompted a neighborhood group known as the "Rifle Patrol" to defend their properties from attack.

These terrorist attacks, paired with decades of redlining and infrastructural neglect have stripped the Smithfield community of community assets. The fulfillment of this proposal and establishment of the Hill Center would serve to reverse some of this harm and will develop community-based assets, fight displacement, and preserve the cultural integrity of the Historic Smithfield Community.

Our organizations assert that the creation of the Hill Center and fulfillment of its proposed programming will not only address systemic inequalities, but would also be a direct implementation of the City of Birmingham's official development plans, including the 2013 Comprehensive Plan⁵, the 2015 Western Area Framework Plan, and Mayor Woodfin's 2018 Transition Plan⁶. This includes the creation and management of a tool bank^{2a}, leasing and selling vacant city properties for community use^{2b,2f,5j,5k}, supporting community fresh markets^{2c,6d}, the development of aquaponics and cooperative farms^{2d,5b,5g,5k,6d}, supporting the development of community land trusts^{2e,5h,5j,6b}, the revitalization of vacant light industrial areas with agribusiness districts^{5g}, using the development of community schools as neighborhood anchors^{5e}, increasing capacity for neighborhood development nonprofits^{5f}, using art and recreation to rehabilitate vacant

buildings^{5i,6e}, supporting energy and water efficiency programs for residents^{5c,5d,6c}, and supporting internet access at the Hill Center for community residents^{6a}.

DH-SCLT has been pursuing this project, the development of the Brunetta C. Hill Elementary School into a community center and school for the continued enrichment of the western area by neighborhood residents themselves. In 2017, DH-SCLT made contact with Bloc Global in pursuit of these efforts, but was not given the opportunity to present a proposal at that time. Since 2017, DH-SCLT has continued to build capacity, programming, and partnerships around the development of the Hill Center, as we continued working to implement other sections of the Western Area Framework Plan with our partners, faith leaders, and neighborhood officers.

With the World Games coming to Birmingham in 2022, it is more important now than ever to support community-led development. International sporting events often lead to the displacement of lower-income residents and exacerbate racial segregation⁷. The creation of the Hill Center would allow residents to develop and thrive, and bring much needed asset-based community development to the West Side of Birmingham during a critical time.

Project Goals

- Create public access to recreational and educational spaces for neighborhood youth
- Address blight and reclaim vacant properties
- Identify and develop community assets
- Decrease crime through poverty alleviation
- Increase civic and community involvement with community programming
- Decrease food insecurity through agriculture and food distribution programs
- Mitigate displacement of residents in Smithfield and neighboring communities
- Preserve culture and history
- Develop community-owned small businesses and cottage industries



Background on Organizations

The organizations partnering to develop and maintain the Hill Center have a proven track record in outreach, community education, service, and development of youth and adults.

Organized as a steering committee, we will work in partnership with community members to ensure the programming at Hill Center is grounded in community needs.

Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust

We are a 501(c)3 non-profit working to create Regenerative Urban Agriculture, Community-Centered Education, and Permanently Affordable/Regenerative Housing for low-income families in the Historic Smithfield Community and the Western Area of Birmingham, Alabama.
dynamitehillclt.com

Sustainable Water, Energy, and Economic Transition in Alabama (SWEET Alabama)

We are a 501(c)3 “just transition” non-profit organization focusing on democratic economies and energy independence within Birmingham and the beautiful state of Alabama. We are connecting people to resources to achieve these goals. This transition will be supported by popular education in cooperative economics and sustainable uses of energy, land, and water.
sweetal.org

Healing Exchange AL (H.E.A.L)

H.E.A.L offers services and facilitates classes with the focus on tools and techniques to promote holistic healing and renewal, which includes modalities such as massage (Thai yoga

and Swedish), meditation, crystal bowl sound baths, prenatal/postpartum doula services, and the use of herbs for health. We assist those that are open, on their empowering journey to finding, listening to and trusting their inner healer. thaiyogaalabama.com

International Capoeira Angola Foundation (ICAF) - Birmingham

ICAF, a 501(c)3 membership-based non-profit, is the largest Capoeira Angola organization in the world, consisting of local chapters. Capoeira Angola is an African-Brazilian art that combines many elements including dance, fight, music, philosophy, history, and acrobatics. Using Capoeira we envision fostering spaces that allow for the development of emotional, cognitive, musical, and physical skills.

Fountain Heights Farms

Fountain Heights Farms, a Black Indigenous People of Color-centered community farm, has always served as a safe learning space and a place where people could access fresh, healthy produce at a sliding scale cost. The mission of Fountain Heights Farms is to improve the quality of life for the current residents of the historic Fountain Heights community



of Birmingham, Alabama through long term land stewardship by community-led urban agricultural cooperatives focused on meeting the immediate and basic need for healthy fresh foods, and through culturally responsive community education programs that support and inform urban agricultural initiatives in historically underserved areas of Birmingham, Alabama.

fountainheightsfarms.com

Birmingham Mutual Aid

We are a non-funded, people powered group that endeavors to meet the material needs of folks in Birmingham. We require no ID, no proof of address, no proof of income to ask for aid so as to support people who fall through the cracks of our system. We are a catchall group; there are no needs outside of our purview if we can work on getting them met.

birminghammutualaid.com



Projects & Programs

● **Project already running with some capacity**

● **Project to be built with space**

Our organizations will partner together to implement projects and programs described non-exhaustively in this section. Acquisition of the Hill Center will allow the continuation and expansion of already ongoing successful community programs and the implementation of urgently needed novel projects and programming. All projects and programming will directly benefit the residents of Birmingham through asset-based development.

Art, Culture, and Recreation

● **Music and Language Skills*** The Hill Center will host classes to teach a variety of languages including Spanish, Portuguese, and Swahili. Additionally, the Hill Center program will include teaching residents how to make and play instruments, and to sing and improvise in Portuguese. Portuguese is the primary language used in songs and names of the capoeira movement.

● **Theater and Recreation Space** The gymnasium at the former Hill Elementary School will be used to host community art and theater events and as a public recreation space for elders and children in the community. The Hill Center will host

poetry and spoken word events, weekend open mics for neighborhood children, and community movie nights. The Hill Center will also host various dance and martial art classes, including capoeira.

● **Black History and Geography Library** The library at the former Hill Elementary School will host a rich and vibrant library available to community members that will include an exploration of Black history across the diaspora. This will also include a space to access our ongoing verbal history project with community elders in the Historic Smithfield Community and across Birmingham, with a focus on the history of the diaspora from Brazil and the USA. This library will serve as an education and learning space, community meeting space, and public space with access to wireless internet.

● **Black Women's Culture, Art and Herstory Center** This will house with prominence the stories and pictures of important black women. Some of the women to be included will be Harriett Tubman, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Angela Y. Davis, Ella Baker, Assata Shakur, and many others. A weekend (Saturday School) and an afterschool program can also be housed or facilitated here and can interface actively with Carrie A. Tuggle Elementary, Malachi Wilkerson Middle, and A.H. Parker High Schools.

● **Cooperative art studio/gallery and visitors center** The art gallery will be a place for local artists, focusing on black female artists, to create, display, and sell their art. This will be a way both to celebrate culture and art, and to build community wealth through offering the sale of crafts or the prints of the artists.

- **The Black Women Writing Project (BWWP)**

This project is a visionary service created by Susan Diane Mitchell, an alumna of Spelman College, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and former English Instructor at Lawson State Community College, to support, encourage and inspire black women to tell their stories in their own words. The inspiration of the BWWP is to give voice to the stories that black women hold inside and which they want to share with their families, friends, communities, and the wider world. Once the Hill Center opens, the BWWP programming will begin as a multiple-week experiential writing course and support service offered on a quarterly basis and which focuses on writers producing a publishable piece of writing that embodies the lived experience of black women.

Education and Resources

- **Community Education Workshops** The Hill Center will host community-based dialogues that will include workshops focused on regenerative practices for water, energy, and economy, how these practices can be effectively implemented, and what resources are available to encourage and support this transition. There will also be monthly educational movie nights and workshops on dismantling racism, including historical analysis on the role of systemic racism, and how to build the community to move forward.

- **Home Energy Retrofit (HER) Program**

According to two 2020 studies, Alabama has the highest residential energy bills in the nation, and Birmingham is ranked first in the country for energy burden (the percent of income spent on utility bills). In partnership with other community organizations, this free program will facilitate community workshops to train residents on how to fix small repairs and renovations, with a focus on energy efficiency repairs.

- **Free Resource Center** The Free Resource Center will include reading materials, computers, wireless internet, a digital literacy program, information sharing workshops on various life skills, and access to all informational resources needed in regards to assistance with housing, labor, utilities, and food.

Harm Reduction and Leadership Development

- **Healing Spaces** Healing and leadership programming will focus on conflict resolution without violence, mechanisms to resolve conflict, and harm reduction programs. There will also be a variety of healing spaces, including community circles and meditation. Many of these programs are ongoing, but by relocating to the Hill Center, it will be possible to greatly expand the capacity of these programs.
- **Harm Reduction Program** The Hill Center will provide a single location for education on harm reduction, access to harm reduction supplies (including wound care kits and sexual health items), as well as a wound care nurse on hand to provide needed health services to folks in our community.

Agriculture and Mutual Aid

● **Community Cafe and Test Kitchen**

The former cafeteria at the Hill Center will be converted to a community cafe and test kitchen. The Community Cafe will function to teach youth in the community how to cook healthy meals and manage a cafe, similar to the West End Community Cafe. On certain days of the week, the community will be able to come to the community cafe to purchase a healthy lunch on a sliding scale. On other days of the week, the cafe will support the development of a robust cottage industry in Smithfield. Residents and small businesses will be able to use the kitchen to make a wide variety of added-value products, including salsas, sauces, breads, and baked goods.

- ● **Material Resources** The Hill Center will facilitate a variety of material resources for the community. This will include a Free Tool Library and workshop, home retrofit toolkits for residents (each kit will include everything one household could need to weatherize their home), and a Little Free Closet (a no-cost clothing store, with Hill Center as a second location). The Hill Center will also coordinate free transportation to and from Hill Center (bike program, shuttle program, courier program)

- **Little Free Corner Store** The Little Free Corner Store provides groceries and other essentials free of cost. The Hill Center will house a second location that is open to the public.

- **Graymont Fresh Market** The Graymont Fresh Market is a community farmer's market currently located at Tabernacle Baptist Church, behind Smithfield Library. The Graymont Fresh Market will establish a second location at the Hill Center to provide access to fresh, healthy locally-grown produce to residents in a food desert. The Market will be a gathering of brilliant Alabama Urban and Rural Farmers and Growers, chefs bringing the best in fresh fruit, vegetables, herbs, flowers, jams, jellies, and much more!

- **Aquaponics Learning Facility** The Hill Center will serve as a regional learning site where people from low-resource and underserved communities in Alabama can learn more about aquaponics including the process and setup, how to implement the best system for their area, and other time- and resource-saving information based on the experiences of partner organizations. Residents in neighboring communities have requested help to start community farms in their own neighborhoods where the challenges of growing food are magnified due to decades of pollution. In response to these communities' needs, the Hill Center plans to expand the use and demonstration of aquaponics with an aquaponics learning facility. It will include three different options for aquaponics setups, including 1) deep water culture tanks, 2) media beds, and 3) nutrient film techniques. The aquaponics learning facility will train residents to use these techniques, provide residents resources to develop their own farms in their neighborhood, and establish a collective triple-bottom-line brand to aid farmers in marketing and distributing their produce.

Housing and Small Business Development

- **Revolving Fund for Sustainable Home Improvements** This program will provide funds for eligible participants towards addressing sustainable land, energy, or water system repairs, as well as renovation and retrofits for low-to-moderate-income homeowners. This includes sustainable home weatherization, zero energy retrofiting, whole home water filtration, water catchment, greywater systems, and compost toilets. It can also be applied toward replacing outdated and energy inefficient home appliances.
- **Small Dollar Sustainable Development Start-Up Fund** This donor-sponsored fund will be available for community land trusts (CLTs), community development corporations, and sustainable community-based cooperative businesses. It will also be available for the cooperative members to attend national or regional trainings, host community and member trainings, incorporate or apply for 501(c)3 status, engage in asset mapping and other qualitative and quantitative research, or create a regenerative housing strategic plan or master plan for community sustainability, and conduct market analysis research. These green co-ops can request up to \$5,000 to fulfill startup needs.

- **Office of Cooperative Business Development** The Office of Cooperative Business Development will host an office to support workers, tenants, and small business owners to either transform their current business into an employee-owned cooperative, or to build a cooperative business, cooperative bank, or housing complex within their community. This office will host educational sessions on asset-based community development, cooperatives, and CLTs, how they can benefit the member and the community, and how one could begin the process to start one. It will also help prospective cooperative members write business plans, engage in asset mapping, develop community master plans, and identify prospective land and capital for their cooperative or CLT.

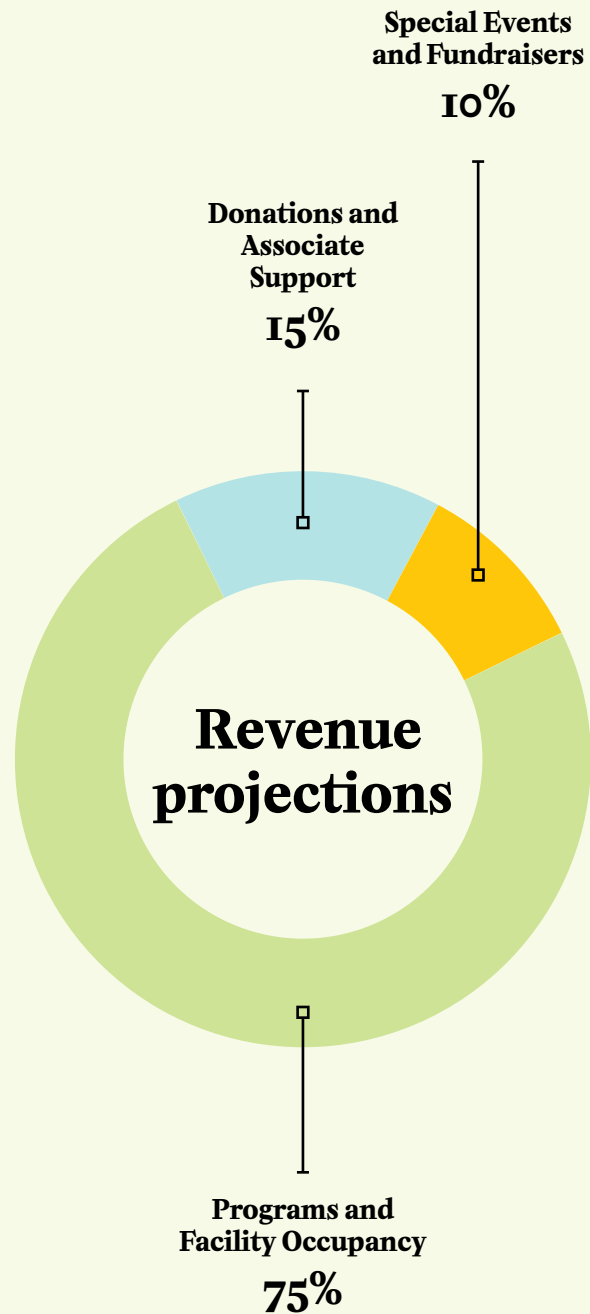
- **Office of Permanently Affordable and Regenerative Housing** This office will work with partner organizations around the city to plan, design, and develop permanently affordable low-moderate income homeownership for residents on the West and Northside of Birmingham. This will include supporting community land trusts, community development corporations, housing cooperatives, and infill housing. The office will design projects that are sustainable and regenerative for the earth and the environment.

Financial Overview

DH-SCLT is a registered non-profit with the Secretary of State of Alabama with Federal 501(c)(3) exempt status. After a lease period of ten years, during which time DH-SCLT in coordination with the five other organizations will retrofit, revitalize, and maintain the former Brunetta C. Hill School, DH-SCLT will purchase the Hill Center from the Birmingham Board of Education^{2f,5a}.

Our organizations are truly grassroots, created by community members in the neighborhoods of Birmingham that have been historically divested from. As a result, they do not have access to the capital to purchase the property at fair market value immediately. The lease of this property for ten years will be a tangible asset to the community and will provide the opportunity for them to build this capital.

Many of our organizations and organizations who have signed letters of support for this project have their own funding and currently rent space in and around Birmingham or are looking to do so. Using conservative estimates based on current rental expenses and our past fundraising efforts, combined with extensive research and in-depth discussions with facility management experts, we project that within ten years we will both fundraise the capital to purchase this property at fair market value and revitalize and maintain the facility.



A more detailed proposal including timelines, financial estimates and budgets, programming, and metrics is available if requested by the Birmingham Board of Education.

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a colorful patterned shirt, is holding ginger roots in his hands. The background is blurred, showing greenery. The text is overlaid on a light blue rectangular area on the left side of the image.

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References

- (1) Coalition for Community Schools “What is a Community School?”
communityschools.org
- (2) Western Area Communities’ Framework Plan: Final Document
imaginebham.com/uploads/1/4/4/7/14479416/western_area_framework_plan_final_document_1.pdf
 - (a) Community equipment rental/checkout system (pg. 18)
 - (b) Sell or lease city-owned, vacant properties for recreational uses (pg. 20)
 - (c) Farmer’s markets (pg. 21)
 - (d) Establish agricultural cooperatives, small aquaculture and aquaponics systems (pg. 21)
 - (e) Community land trusts (pg. 26)
 - (f) Establish a rent-to-own program, equity built through the rent-to-own lease would go towards the permanent mortgage (pg. 26)
- (3) Community Framework Plan Implementation Committees
imaginebham.com/implementation.html
- (4) Nurture Development “Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)”
nurturedevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/
- (5) City of Birmingham 2013 Comprehensive Plan
birminghamal.gov/work/birmingham-comprehensive-plan/
 - (a) Encourage adaptive reuse of existing buildings where appropriate (Ch. 6, pg. 15)
 - (b) Encourage urban agriculture focused on food production, Urban agriculture as focus of disinvested areas (Ch. 6, pg. 16-17)
 - (c) Promote water conservation (Ch. 6, pg. 21)
 - (d) Reduce emissions from buildings and energy use (Ch. 6, pg. 22-23)
 - (e) Development of community schools as neighborhood anchors (Ch. 7, pg. 11)
 - (f) Increasing capacity for neighborhood development nonprofits (Ch. 8, pg. 2)
 - (g) Urban agriculture as a revitalization strategy, Aquaponics (Ch. 8, pg. 7-8, pg. 19)
 - (h) Community land trusts as an interim or long-term mechanism for site control (Ch. 8, pg. 11-12)
 - (i) Establish incentives for artists to rehabilitate buildings (Ch. 8, pg. 16)
 - (j) Vacant city owned lots can be offered for a \$1 to transfer title, with Community Land Trusts (Ch. 8, pg. 18)
 - (k) Provide for permanent land for agriculture, giving title to City-owned land to one or more nonprofits (Ch. 8, pg. 19)
- (6) Woodfin Transition Team “Social Justice Committee Report”
birminghamal.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Social-Justice-Project-Proposals.pdf
 - (a) Birmingham Wi-Fi Initiative (pg. 13-14)
 - (b) Dynamite Hill-Smithfield Community Land Trust (pg. 23-27)
 - (c) 100% Renewable Energy and Citywide Residential Weatherization (pg. 45-46)
 - (d) Citywide Sustainable Food System (pg. 47-48)