

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

### INTRODUCTION

The Lathon Wider Community Center serves as a hub for civic engagement and public events in the South End neighborhood, enhancing the neighborhood's cultural and social landscape. When envisioning the future of the South End Civic Campus, there are many stakeholders, all of whom have a vested interest in its future. For this project, the range of stakeholders has been organized relative to their role in decision-making during the project process. The stakeholder outreach process involved outreach to the following three key groups:

1. **Building stakeholders:** Interviews were conducted with current staff at the Lathon Wider Center, such as the Ferguson Library, the Department of Health, Pacific House, and more.
2. **Community stakeholders:** Community input was gathered through a public survey and an interactive workshop.
3. **City stakeholders:** City officials from various departments and local elected officials were interviewed.

By incorporating the input and feedback from these stakeholder groups, the Study aimed to address the specific needs of building users, the South End community, and the broader city context to guide the design competition.



Examples of Lathon Wider Community Center Tenants

### WEBSITE AND PUBLICITY

To adequately publicize the public workshop and survey and ensure a strong level of participation from the community, the consultant team employed various strategies in addition to standard press releases, as detailed below.

#### 1. Stamford South End Civic Campus Design Study Website

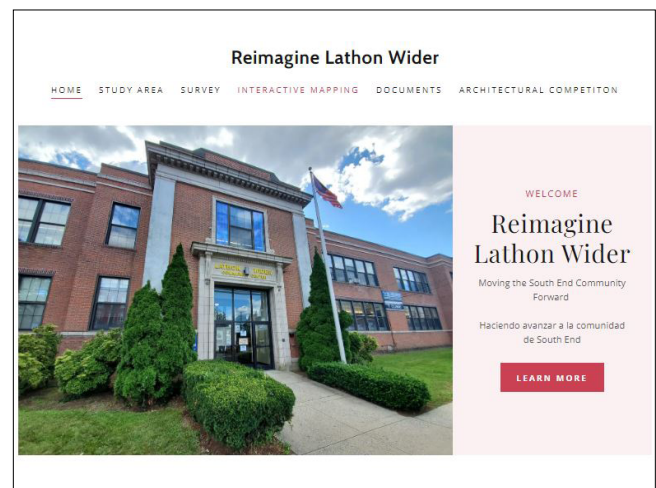
The consultant team created a Stamford South End Civic Campus Design Study website, which can be found at [www.ReimagineLathonWider.com](http://www.ReimagineLathonWider.com). The website includes information on the South End Civic Campus Design Study planning process and other engagement opportunities. All information was made available in both English and Spanish, including public workshop notes and recordings.

#### 2. Press Releases Distributed to Local News Outlets

The consultant team collaborated with the City's Communication team to publicize public workshops and other information.

#### 3. Flyers

In preparation for the public workshop, the consultant team designed flyers in both English and Spanish that were posted physically and virtually at key locations throughout the city.



Stamford South End Civic Campus Design Study Website

## PUBLIC WORKSHOP

A public workshop was held on November 9, 2023, from 7:00-9:00 PM at the Lathon Wider Community Center. This meeting introduced the project, beginning with a formal presentation in both English and Spanish where the consultants explained the Study’s purpose, background, timeline, and goals, as well as initial observations of existing conditions. The consultant team then held an informal question-and-answer session, along with an interactive exercise aimed at gathering input on issues of concern and opportunities for the future redevelopment of the Lathon Wider Community Center site.

A summary report for the workshop was uploaded to the project website in both English and Spanish, documenting the presentation and all comments received from attendees. A video recording of the presentation and question-and-answer session was made available on the project website as well.



Public Workshop Flyers



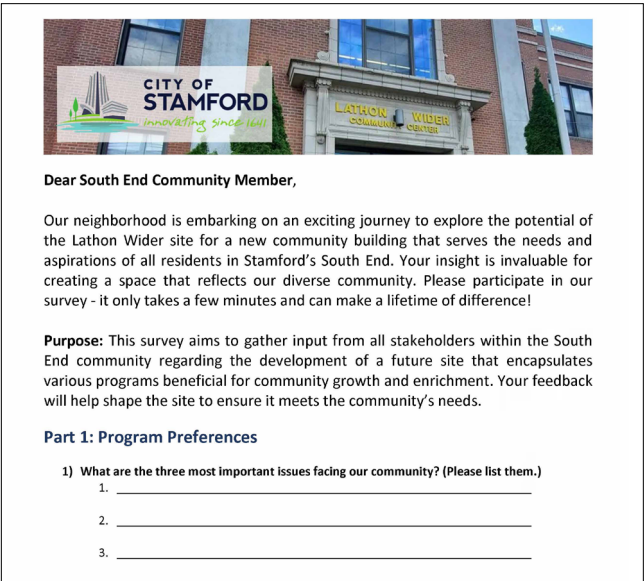
Public Workshop Attendees

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The consultant team conducted targeted focus group meetings to gather information from key stakeholders. These meetings included building stakeholders (i.e., the Ferguson Library, the Department of Health, etc.) and City Stakeholders (City departments, elected officials). The structure included an informal question-and-answer format to encourage candid, in-depth conversations about the various stakeholders’ issues and opportunities to address them. Topics ranged from identifying the Center’s physical, programmatic, and service-related shortcomings, to needed updates and potential program expansions.

## SURVEY

The consultant team distributed hard copies of the public survey at key locations throughout the community, such as the Ferguson Library, as well as online via the project website. Both online and printed versions of the survey were available in English, Spanish, French, and Haitian-Creole. The survey questions addressed community values and concerns, aiming to gather input on challenges and opportunities regarding the redevelopment of the Lathon Wider site. The consultant team analyzed both the online and physical survey results to help guide the prioritization of challenges, issues, and opportunities at the Lathon Wider site and beyond.



Public Survey

## BUILDING STAKEHOLDERS

The Lathon Wider Community Center serves as a critical resource for lower-income and immigrant communities in Stamford and the surrounding areas. Through a range of services spanning health care, social assistance, education, cultural engagement, and immigration support, the center addresses the multifaceted needs of these communities. It not only provides essential services but also fosters a sense of community and belonging, helping to integrate and uplift some of the most vulnerable members of society.

In September of 2023, a survey was conducted among the building stakeholders operating within the center. This survey included:

- **Community Action Agency of Western Connecticut (CAAWC):** Provides a spectrum of services for low-income individuals, such as energy assistance, computer classes, and rental assistance, aimed at promoting self-sufficiency.
- **Stamford Department of Health:** Offers a range of health services, including clinics for general health, infection testing, and programs focusing on public health issues, catering particularly to low-income groups.
- **South End Dental Center:** Delivers crucial dental care, focusing on improving oral health within the community.
- **The Ferguson Library:** Hosts various educational and cultural programs, enhancing learning opportunities and cultural inclusivity.
- **Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants:** Provides guidance and support to immigrants, helping them navigate the complexities of the immigration system.
- **Pacific House:** Plays a vital role in offering administrative support, which is essential for the smooth operation of their facilities nearby. Pacific House is expected to relocate out of the building, freeing up space on the second floor.

- **Urban League of Southern Connecticut:** Offers housing assistance, job training, and reentry services focused on empowering the community through skill development and economic support.
- **Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County (CLC):** Specializes in early childhood education for ages 6 weeks to 5 years, with programs in health, nutrition, and family support.

The survey questions focused on site usage, including program operations, operating hours, employee numbers, client numbers, and modes of transportation used by clients. The condition of the site was also assessed, including the adequacy of parking and the immediate need for upgrades or repairs.

The Lathon Wider Community Center, following a survey conducted by the BFJ Planning team, revealed several main themes regarding its use and condition:

1. **Space and Community Rooms:** There's a significant need for more flexible spaces and community rooms to accommodate various activities and programs.
2. **Meeting Room Reservation Process:** The current system for reserving meeting rooms is cumbersome and involves obtaining approval from Parks & Rec, which stakeholders find challenging.
3. **ADA Accessibility:** Increased accessibility for individuals with disabilities is required to make the center more inclusive and compliant with ADA standards.
4. **Parking Limitations:** Parking is generally adequate but becomes limited on Tuesdays due to the Food Pantry, indicating a need for better parking management or expansion.
5. **Technology and Office Upgrades:** Many offices within the center require upgrades, including improved technology and new office furniture to enhance functionality.
6. **Stamford Department of Health's Constraints:** This department is facing limitations due to outdated technology, lack of storage space, and insufficient exam rooms, affecting the quality of health services provided.



## COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

### PUBLIC WORKSHOP

The public workshop aimed to introduce the project, the public participation process, and further involvement opportunities. Approximately 50 members of the public were in attendance.

The workshop consisted of a presentation in English and Spanish from Thomas Madden and Christine Jimenez of BFJ Planning. The presentation covered an introduction to the project approach, socioeconomic statistics about the South End, and next steps for continued engagement.

Stephen Tilly of Stephen Tilly, Architect and Ms. Jimenez also presented preliminary design observations, including the age of existing building sections. Mr. Tilly outlined potential options for the building's future: (Option 1) Save, Renovate, and Reuse the Entire Building; (Option 2) Remove Wings; Renovate and Reuse Older "T" Shaped Structure; Open space for Additions/New Building, (Option 3) Remove All Additions; Save & Renovate Original Building; More Open space for

Additions/New Building. A fourth option was also presented, which would consider demolishing the entire building and constructing a new building on the site.

Following the presentation, attendees visited stations to discuss the following topics with members of the consultant team:

1. What do you like about the building? What building features should be saved? What building features should be rebuilt?
2. What programs would you like to see at Lathon Wider? (i.e., farmers market, recreation programs, health classes)
3. What changes would you like to see to improve the neighborhood? (i.e., more lighting, street cleaning, new sidewalks)
4. What issues should be addressed by the City to make the neighborhood better?



*Public Workshop Attendees*



Through the question-and-answer session and interactive exercise, key themes emerged regarding strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the Lathon Wider Community Center site and the surrounding South End neighborhood. A comprehensive list of all public comments can be viewed on the project website, and an overview of themes can be found below.

#### **Features of the building to save:**

- Social services, such as the health clinic, dental clinic, library, Community Action Center, CLC, and Urban League
- The façade
- The name of the building (Lathon Wider)

#### **Additions to enhance the building:**

- Flexible space for presentations, pop-ups, after-school programs, and more
- A welcome center to direct visitors to resources
- Recreation space and activity areas
- More after-school programs for youth, including sports teams, music, and art classes
- Computer, job readiness, and financial literacy training



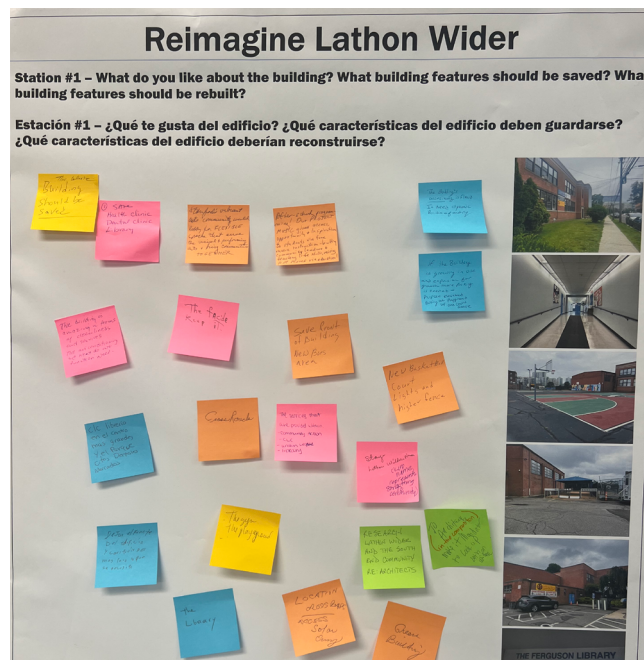
*Attendees Participating in the Interactive Exercise*

#### **Neighborhood improvements:**

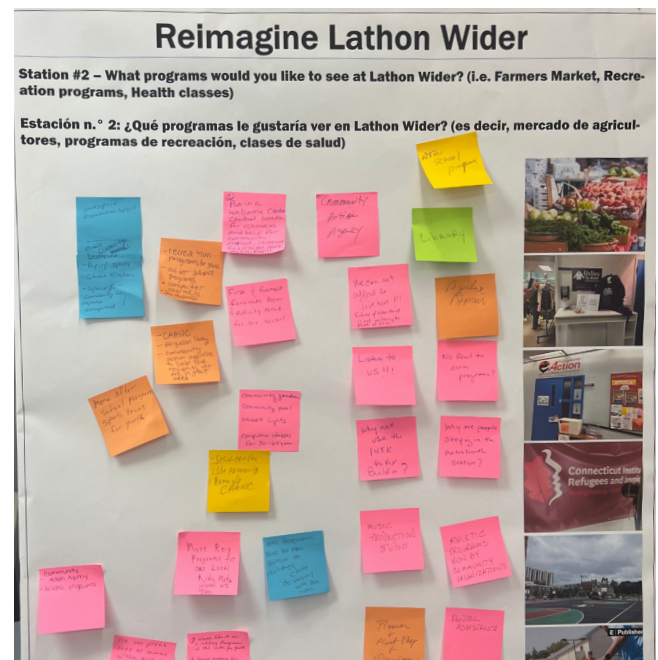
- Street and sidewalk improvements
- Better lighting
- Affordable rent for housing and commercial uses
- Accessibility improvements
- Improved parks and recreation spaces

#### **Citywide issues to address:**

- More affordable housing, rental assistance, and homelessness prevention
- Activities for youth



*Public Comments from the Interactive Exercise*



*Public Comments from the Interactive Exercise*

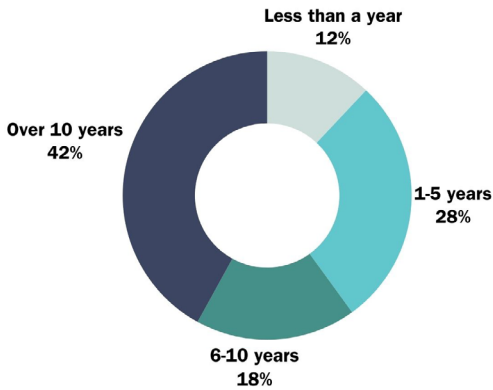
### SURVEY RESPONSES

The consultant team created a public survey to gather feedback on the current Lathon Wider Community Center site and help shape its future to meet community needs. The public survey was provided in English, Spanish, French, and Haitian-Creole in both online and hard copy formats. Approximately 70 surveys were completed by community members.

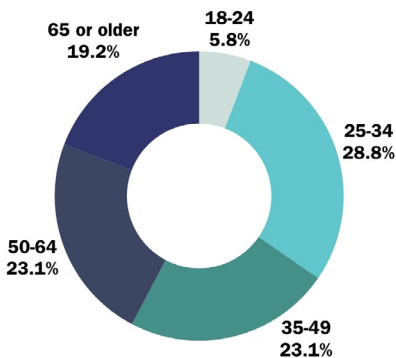
Below is an overview of key findings, encapsulating feedback on the current site and priorities for a future Civic Campus. Each section corresponds with a survey question.

Of the survey respondents, 50 live in the South End neighborhood. Many of these residents, 42%, have lived in the South End for over 10 years. Respondents spanned a range of ages, and the majority of respondents, 80.9%, were renters.

#### Duration of Residence in the South End

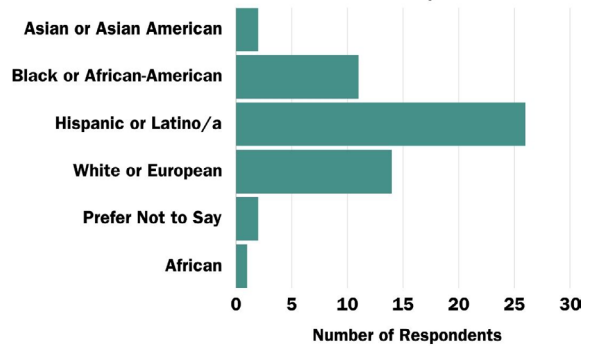


#### Age



Respondents were able to select multiply race/ethnicity categories or write in their own answer. Almost half, 47.3%, of respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino/a. About a quarter of respondents, 25.5%, identified as White, and a fifth of respondents, 20%, identified as Black or African- American.

#### Race/Ethnicity



#### Potential Programs

Respondents ranked potential programs at the Lathon Wider site by how important they are on a scale of 1-5 (5 being very important, 1 being not important). The list below is ranked by the average response rating, beginning with most important:

- 1 After School Programs
- 2 Day Care
- 3 Library
- 4 Clinic
- 5 Workforce Development/Adult Education
- 6 Affordable Housing
- 7 Playground
- 8 Offices for Community Improvement Corporation
- 9 Athletic Facilities
- 10 Green Market/Urban Agriculture
- 11 Affordable Retail
- 12 Performance Space
- 13 Exhibition Space
- 14 Maker Space

Respondents wrote in other programs or facilities not listed previously that they would like to see included in the future community site. These include:



- Technology literacy and access
- Community Action Agency
- Job skills and training
- Support for domestic violence victims
- Elderly services
- Welcome center
- Language education
- Immigration services
- Mental health services



- Food pantry
- Supermarket
- Coffee shop
- Outdoor seating space and community garden



- Music and arts programs
- Music/producing room
- Recreational facilities

In terms of the greater South End neighborhood, respondents also listed the types of businesses they would like to see more of around Lathon Wider. These include:



- Affordable grocery stores
- Restaurants
- Food pantries



- Locally owned businesses
- Clothing/department store
- Post office
- Pharmacy



- After-school programs
- Daycare centers
- Improved parks



- Shelter assistance
- Employment resources/job search assistance
- Mental health support
- Health-related resource



*Basketball Court at Lathon Wider Community Center*



*Bulletin Board in Lathon Wider Community Center*



*Examples of Services Offered at Lathon Wider Community Center*



The themes below emerged from answers to the open-ended question “What are the three most important issues facing our community?” These are ranked by frequency of mention.

### Most important Issues Facing the Community

- 1. Housing Affordability and Insecurity:**  
Affordable housing, rising rent prices, and the associated challenges, including homelessness and displacement.
- 2. Gentrification and Displacement:**  
Gentrification, overdevelopment, and displacement of residents from their homes.
- 3. Economic Disparities and Employment:**  
Unemployment, differing economic needs between neighborhoods, and a lack of employment opportunities.
- 4. Community Well-Being and Social Services:**  
A range of concerns, including food insecurity, mental health, access to healthcare, and the need for social services to support community members.
- 5. Infrastructure and Public Spaces:**  
Parking concerns, need for accessible public spaces, importance of an inclusive community environment.

The priorities below were determined by analyzing answers to the open-ended question: “What goals do you think the community should prioritize for the next 5 years?” These goals are ranked by frequency of mention, many of which align with the issues listed previously. Recurring themes include housing affordability, employment opportunities, social services, and infrastructure.

### Goals to Prioritize in the Next 5 Years

- 1. Housing and Community Development:**  
Affordable and inclusive housing, homeownership programs, workforce housing initiatives, addressing overcrowding, limiting expensive housing complexes, and protection of local neighborhoods and communities from displacement.
- 2. Community Services and Programming:**  
Central, easily accessible location for social services, quality after-school programming and educational services, mental health resources, and services that benefit children and families.
- 3. Healthcare and Social Services:** Accessible and affordable healthcare and medical centers, support for the immigrant community.
- 4. Economic Support and Jobs:** Lower rents and affordable housing options, support for displaced individuals, job placement, and training programs.
- 5. Infrastructure and Environmental Concerns:**  
Access to recreational activities and public parks, clean environment (water and air), public transportation and well-maintained roads, energy assistance, community gardens, and food security.

## CITY DEPARTMENT STAKEHOLDERS

### OVERVIEW

The consultant team interviewed City of Stamford department stakeholders to identify any physical, programmatic, service-related, or other shortcomings of the Center. Input gathered on necessary updates and program expansions is crucial to addressing the needs of both community members and City staff effectively through the design competition study.

Representatives from the following City departments were interviewed:

- Department of Health
- Department of Social Services
- Stamford School District
- Police Department
- Office of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Strategies
- Parks and Recreation Department
- Office of Operations
- State Representative David Michel

Interviews focused on recent projects and actions, issues at the Lathon Wider site, priorities for the future, and any other considerations. A full summary of each City Department interview is included in the appendix.

### MAIN THEMES

#### 1. Community Services and Engagement

The departments are actively engaging in community outreach and programming, aiming to foster stronger connections with the residents. The concept of setting up the building as a resource and welcome center for immigrant populations was consistent throughout the departments that provided services within the building. The study should also look at how the center could enhance community involvement in events in the neighborhood and become a focal point. This would help underscore the City's commitment to inclusivity and the provision of essential services to all community members.

#### 2. Healthcare and Safety Enhancements

Healthcare facilities should be expanded on the site, along with the City looking at the potential development of an emergency shelter on the site that would work due to accessibility improvements to the building. Security concerns within the building are being addressed through enhanced measures, including new security cameras. These initiatives reflect the commitment to improve health services and ensure the building provides a safe and welcoming environment for the public.

#### 3. Educational Initiatives and Infrastructure:

The school district is focusing on integrating educational services with community facilities, including new constructions and program spaces for after-school activities throughout the city. Transportation challenges for students need to be addressed in front of the building.

#### 4. Infrastructure and Accessibility Improvements

Upgrading outdated infrastructure is a priority, with a particular focus on improving accessibility for disabled individuals. These improvements include modernizing facilities with better lighting, HVAC systems, and more inviting spaces.

#### 5. Environmental Sustainability and Social Welfare

There's a strong push towards environmental sustainability with any redevelopment scenario for the building, including green infrastructure and energy efficiency. Addressing affordable housing shortages and providing varied community services are also critical concerns in the neighborhood. These plans highlight the focus on creating a socially responsible and environmentally sustainable community.

#### 6. Operational Challenges and Security Concerns

Departments are encountering operational difficulties, such as limited staffing and funding constraints for building maintenance and upgrades. In any development plan, it's crucial to incorporate improved security protocols to address potential crime issues in the surrounding area. Additionally, plans for expanding and modernizing facilities should prioritize ensuring efficient service provision by the current tenants while simultaneously upholding public safety and security standards.

### 7. Strategic Planning and Community Involvement

A strong focus was noted for sustainable development, coupled with the active solicitation of community input, to ensure that facilities adapt to the changing needs of the neighborhood. This strategy encompasses thorough financial planning for the long term and the exploration of various funding sources. Such measures demonstrate a strategic and thoughtful approach to community development, aiming to create facilities that meet current demands and are prepared for future challenges and opportunities.

### 8. Transportation and Accessibility Issues

It is important to address navigation and parking challenges in the redevelopment scenarios. Enhancing the accessibility of crucial services remains a primary objective, highlighting the importance of creating public spaces that are convenient and user-friendly. This focus on improving access facilitates easier navigation inside and outside the building. Still, it ensures that essential services are readily available to those who need them, thereby enhancing the overall functionality and inclusivity of public facilities within the building.

### 9. Diversity and Inclusion Focus

Recognizing the changing demographics, the departments are working towards services catering to diverse populations. This could include cultural festivals on the site, reflecting a commitment to celebrating multiculturalism and fostering an inclusive community within the South End.

### 10. Resource Management and Redevelopment

Balancing the need for preserving historical value with modernization is key. Efficient resource management in the face of aging infrastructure is crucial, as is considering the impact of new developments surrounding the site. The design competition respondents will need to demonstrate a thoughtful approach to redevelopment, balancing past and future needs.



*View of Lathon Wider Community Center from Henry Street*