

BLUE HILLS NRZ NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE

The Blue Hills Civic Association



Founded in 1992, the Civic Association is, as its bylaws describe it, “a non-profit, community-based organization whose sole purpose is the betterment of its neighborhoods and the lives of its members, and representation of their interests”. Its officers and board of directors are elected at an annual meeting in June. This meeting is open to all residents of Blue Hills and those working and having a substantial interest in the welfare of the Blue Hills community.

Originally created in response to local zoning issues, the Civic Association played a key role in maintaining tranquility during the demographic transition of the late 1960s from a predominantly white to a predominantly African-American population. After a period of quiescence that began in the late 1970s, the Civic Association was revived in 1988 with help from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

Since its revival, the Civic Association has identified block clubs, built on the Police Department’s concept of Block Watches, as a key element to engage residents in rebuilding a sense of community purpose. There are currently about 30 such block clubs whose members participate in the annual City “Hartford Cleans Up!” and “National Night Out” as well as meeting periodically to discuss areas of local and community concern.

The organization sponsors regular “Blue Hills Town Meetings” to give residents an opportunity to hear and question City officials and candidates seeking public office.

In addition, the Civic Association manages directly a wide variety of programs:

- Sponsors an annual Summer Youth Employment Training Program that places youngsters in job sites in Blue Hills non-profit agencies and also provides counseling/training.
- Manages a Blue Hills Summer Basketball League for boys and girls ages 9 to 16, which includes an educational component on sportsmanship, drug avoidance, completion of schooling and avoidance of teenage pregnancy, as well as a pro-active program to improve parents’ child-rearing skills.
- Developed a database of more than 700 senior citizens in Blue Hills.

- Developed a pioneering pilot program, “Junior-Senior Partners”, to pair Weaver High school students with elderly residents, aiming to overcome seniors’ fear of young people, help young people appreciate the contribution the older generation has made, and have each junior partner escort his or her senior partner to a few events.
- Provides Blue Hills schools with a unique “Tele-Reminder” service, employing people in the community to telephone parents on the eve of PTO or other school events to encourage greater parental participation.
- Collaborates with the University of Hartford to provide student opportunities for community service.
- Sponsors an annual “Blue Hills Housing Opportunity Day” designed not only to provide the usual educational component of other housing fairs, but also to stimulate interest by responsible homeowners in home ownership in Blue Hills.
- Publishes a tabloid newspaper distributed to all residents, as a vehicle to share information and promote community spirit.

This work has been accomplished almost entirely with volunteer effort. The Civic Association has three full-time positions – a block organizer, funded by the City of Hartford, an Executive Director and an office manager – and a total budget of about \$100,000 a year.

The Civic Association is the beneficiary of rent-free office space on the campus of CIB/Oak Hill, but covers its own costs of mailings, office equipment, and telephones. The Association is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt organization, and by the State of Connecticut as a non-profit corporation.