

CHAPTER FOUR: COMMUNITY NEEDS

Civic Infrastructure

Civic infrastructure is the backbone or “operating system” that gives shape and substance to a community. Civic infrastructure manifests itself in the decisions that individuals, organizations, businesses, and community institutions make over time. When civic infrastructure is strong, unified, and broadly representative, it creates a vision for a community, it provides a voice to people who live in the community, and it puts in place the leadership and resources to make the vision a reality.

The elements of civic infrastructure are the people who live and work in the community, the elected officials who govern individual cities and towns, the social and human service organizations that deliver services to specialized populations, the community-based organizations that advocate for people in different cultural and ethnic neighborhoods, the formal and informal civic organizations that focus on quality of life concerns, and the workforce and economic development institutions that nurture and enhance the community’s economy.

Few communities are able to successfully make all of these elements and parts work together in perfect order and harmony. Lack of vision, disagreement over goals, competition for scarce resources, personal animosities, differences among leaders, and turf battles all stand in the way of creating a well-coordinated and effective community civic infrastructure.

Communities do, however, fall within a spectrum in regard to the strength of their civic infrastructure. Some have a very weak civic infrastructure capacity, one that is fraught with differences and conflicts and incapable of helping a community pull together around common goals and interests. Other communities are able to overcome some of the obstacles that get in the way of an effective civic infrastructure. These infrastructures function effectively some of the time and for some of the people in the community. Still, other communities are able to create a solid foundation of cooperation, coordination, and shared-decision-making. Communities with this kind of civic infrastructure generally have a high quality of life, they create opportunities for jobs and economic growth, and they look after those who lack the means to succeed.

A critical part of the analysis of community needs in the Valley focused on this civic infrastructure: organizational capacity of civic organizations, the collaborative environment, leadership, and the effectiveness of the public sector.

Organizational Capacity

- ✦ ***The Valley has a number of extremely strong, large nonprofit health and human service organizations with considerable capacity that can serve as models for the rest of the New Haven region, as well as the state.***

For a relatively small region, the Valley has an unusual number of sophisticated nonprofit organizations that have clearly defined missions, strong management, and effective programs and service delivery. Some of these nonprofits are recognized both statewide and nationally for their innovative services and effectiveness. Examples of Valley nonprofits that can serve as models include the Griffin Hospital, the Birmingham Group, and the Valley United Way. In addition, other large nonprofits, such as TEAM and the Hewitt Organization, have considerable capacity.

- ✦ ***The Valley has a number of regional civic organizations focused on improving the quality of life for Valley residents.***

In addition to its strong health and human service providers, the Valley also has a number of regional civic organizations that involve residents and businesses in efforts to improve the quality of life and economic conditions in the region. These include:

- *Valley Regional Planning Agency (RPA):* Serving Derby, Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton, the RPA's mission is to work on common solutions to problems that transcend municipal boundaries. The RPA tends to be driven by funding sources. In other words, it responds where there are funding streams available, rather than identifying regional priorities and seeking funding that fits the needs. Since most of the agency's budget comes from federal funds that are targeted for regional transportation districts, its major emphasis is related to transportation planning. In addition, the RPA was one of the initiators of the Brownfields Pilot Project and oversees its activities.
- *The Naugatuck Valley Project (NVP):* Based in Waterbury, NVP was founded in 1984 by churches, unions, and citizens groups concerned about the rapid exodus of manufacturing jobs from the region. NVP is a broadly representative coalition that is involved in housing, brownfields, and other economic issues in the Naugatuck Valley region. NVP's mission is to empower local citizens to control the future of their community.
- *Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce:* The Valley Chamber represents businesses in Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Derby, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton. It has over 800 members and provides a broad set of services in the community that include advocacy for businesses, networking within the business community, providing business training, and staffing and supporting Valley-wide initiatives such as the Valley Alliance for Economic Growth. The 1999 Legislative Agenda of the Valley Chamber illustrates the strength of the organization. Unlike many chambers that narrowly focus on regulatory and tax issues that benefit the business community, the Valley Chamber has effectively addressed such regional issues as workforce development, welfare to work, transportation, and regional capacity and state districting. Its efforts

to create solutions to both transportation and workforce issues are particularly innovative and farsighted.

- *Healthy Valley 2000:* Healthy Valley 2000 was the state's first healthy community effort and was launched by the Valley Council in 1994 with the support of a very broad base of stakeholders in the Valley. The effort seeks to "improve the health and quality of life of the community and its residents by making the community a better place in which to live, work, shop, raise a family, and enjoy life." The project undertook an extensive and comprehensive research and visioning effort resulting in the identification of 37 key projects for the Valley to focus on. Its successes have included the successful creation of "the Electronic Valley," a web-based network of information and sites related to the region, the creation of 10 Internet public access sites, the establishment of Valley Pride Week and a community calendar, the implementation of a health risk assessment project, and the creation of a guide to Valley recreation, culture, and arts resources. Given very limited resources, Healthy Valley has been able to achieve considerable success in a relatively short period of time.

- ✦ ***Like their counterparts elsewhere, smaller nonprofit organizations in the Valley have very limited capacity -- particularly in the area of fundraising and proposal development.***

An inventory of nonprofit organizations in the region found that a large number of them are relatively new, small in size, and have very limited capacity. Of the organizations that responded to the survey, about one-third had an annual budget of less than \$100,000, and another third had a budget of between \$100,000 and \$1 million. About 40 percent of these small- and mid-sized organizations were established within the past decade.

The smaller organizations were found to be much more reliant on foundation grants, fees, corporate grants, and individual donors. They note that they have limited capacity in terms of fundraising, use of technology, and management information systems.

Interviews confirmed that many of the smaller nonprofits in the Valley have very limited staff and are often unaware of the range of resources available to fund their activities or to assist their constituents. They need assistance in such areas as strategic planning, community outreach, and grant making. The limited capacity of these smaller organizations poses a barrier to the successful implementation of many of the creative ideas being developed in the Valley. It also constrains the effectiveness of service delivery.

Collaborative Environment

- ✦ ***The overall collaborative environment amongst nonprofit institutions and municipalities has dramatically improved in recent years.***

Municipalities and organizations have begun to understand the benefits of working together, sharing resources, forming strategic alliances, jointly planning, and, in general, cooperating in a substantive way. For too long, towns and organizations functioned in isolation

of each other and never realized the gains that come from more collaboration. Old barriers are breaking down and partnerships are becoming much more frequent.

The best examples of this new collaborative environment are:

- *The Valley Council on Health and Human Services* is perhaps the most visible manifestation of this new spirit. The Valley Council has generated significant excitement and has clearly captured the imagination of people in the Valley. Organizations and agencies in the social and human service network have often talked about the need for more collaboration and the avoidance of duplication of effort, and the Council is the first tangible evidence that people are willing and committed to do something about it. The Council members have demonstrated a seriousness of commitment to this effort. The Council could have been simply a forum where people from different agencies meet to share information and discuss issues. This alone would have been useful and important, but members have gone beyond just having a presence. On one level, the fact that a membership requirement is that the people who sit on the Council hold executive positions demonstrates the seriousness of the initiative. On another level, agencies and organizations have engaged in strategic alliances to be more productive and effective in their work, and clusters of task forces and working groups have emerged around specific key issues so that more critical problem-solving and resources can be brought to bear.
- *Valley Alliance for Economic Growth*: Founded in 1996 and incorporated as a 501 C3 corporation in 1998, the Alliance is a collaborative effort of business and municipal leaders in Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Derby, Naugatuck, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton. Its mission is to plan and implement development activities that bring new jobs and opportunities to the area. Membership includes two representatives from each community as well as the Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Valley Regional Planning Agency, the Regional Workforce Development Board, and the Valley Council of Health and Human Service Organizations. Projects of the Alliance have included successfully advocating for an Economic Development Corridor Zone designation from the state, organizing the regional effort to get the All American City award, establishing a transportation task force that has improved public transportation to the workplace, and developing marketing materials for the region.
- *Brownfields Pilot project*: The Valley's Brownfields Pilot project was the first in the nation that involved a collaborative effort amongst a partnership of regional entities. As initially designed, the project involved a number of communities (from Waterbury through the Lower Valley) as well as a variety of regional organizations -- most notably the Naugatuck Valley Project (NVP) and the Valley Regional Planning Agency. In addition, the project includes an innovative approach to involving local residents in the decision-making process. While the project continues to be a model of collaborative activity in the region, the initial lack of involvement of Shelton, and the current distancing of the activities of the NVP and the RPA, are issues that may require additional attention to ensure that it continues to be a truly collaborative effort.

- ✦ ***Lack of staffing at the Economic Alliance and the Valley Council limit their ability to effectively implement innovative initiatives.***

A number of positive outcomes have resulted from the formation and work of the Valley Council. A new culture is emerging in the social and human services infrastructure that fosters flexibility in addressing problems, and an openness to collaboration rather than the kind of insular and turf protection that characterizes much of the work in this field. Nonetheless, the lack of full-time staffing for the Council has been a problem. As the Council has grown and expanded the focus of its work, the need for staff has also grown. Currently, the Council relies on the goodwill and generous contributions of a few organizations. These organizations lend staff to the Council, arrange and schedule meetings, provide support for task forces and working groups, and absorb some of the costs of keeping the Council in tact. But, keeping the operations going and simply maintaining such an enterprise has outgrown the existing staffing structure. Securing additional staff support that helps the Council sustain the kind of productivity and effectiveness that it needs presents a formidable challenge.

The Alliance for Economic Growth has also have suffered from the lack of staffing resources. Both have had considerable impacts given their limited resources. However, without additional staff resources, both organizations will need to focus on a smaller set of priorities and on implementation.

- ✦ ***While there has been progress around organizational collaboration, overlapping activities, inefficiencies, and tensions still exist, most notably in the areas of youth services, elderly services, and substance abuse services.***

There are three areas in which there are perceptions of overlapping services and tensions amongst organizations within the Valley. First, interviews with those involved in youth services, as well as the focus groups related to youth, revealed that there is some level of fragmentation in the area of youth services and programming. While there are many services for youth, the organizational infrastructure for collaboration between in-school and out-of-school services is weak. In addition, an inventory of youth service programs compiled by Mt. Auburn based upon individual interviews, focus groups, InfoLine, and Electronic Valley found that the organizations involved in youth services were providing some overlapping services. A similar concern is found in the area of services for the elderly. Senior centers in different municipalities have little interaction with one another over scheduling, activities, and shared resources -- even though many of the centers cater to seniors regardless of municipal boundaries. In terms of substance abuse services, there is a general lack of confidence in the quality and diversity of care available in the Valley.

- ✦ ***Even with the increased cooperation amongst organizations in the Valley, the system of referrals and linkages across organizations is not as effective as possible.***

Many stakeholders have noted the improvements in the collaborative environment in the Valley. However, there is still a sense that many residents with specialized needs are slipping through the cracks and no one is taking a comprehensive look at their needs. For example, as one human service provider noted, if a resident comes to one organization for job training, there is no system that would then refer him to relevant healthcare programs or housing. The system

of referrals and linkages across human service providers remains relatively weak -- even with the creation of the Council. In some ways, the collaboration and coordination is occurring at the highest levels, but has not been translated down to the staff level.

- ✦ ***With the exception of Healthy Valley, collaboration across disciplines -- human service providers, environmentalists, economic development organizations, downtown development organizations, and educational and workforce development organizations -- remains weak.***

While there are examples of collaboration across disciplines (for example, a representative of the Valley Council is part of the Alliance for Economic Growth), this type of collaboration is not very strong in the Valley. Communities have not taken an holistic approach to addressing barriers and responding to opportunities. More and more, economic development strategies need to address workforce and human service needs within a region. Similarly, with the new workforce development and welfare-to-work initiatives, business needs, transportation, and the availability of support services become more critical. Healthy Valley is the one organization that is looking at the region in an appropriately comprehensive fashion. **However, with limited resources and staffing, its capacity to build new relationships and linkages within the Valley has been constrained.**

Leadership and Volunteerism

- ✦ ***Leaders within the region's nonprofits have offered the most visible sign of leadership in the Valley.***

There has been a clear and strong movement within many nonprofit organizations and agencies in the Valley to take on an aggressive leadership role within the Valley. The Council is but one example of many where the nonprofit community has taken the initiative to create a highly visible partnership that fosters collaboration, cooperation, and strategic alliances. This leadership is trying to forge a new paradigm for doing work in the Valley and it is making a powerful difference.

- ✦ ***The Valley also has a strong history of volunteerism.***

The Corporate Volunteer Council, a program of the Valley United Way's Volunteer Action Center (VAC), provides a way for local companies to work jointly on community needs and problems that are too large for one company to handle alone. This Council is but one of the many examples of strong volunteerism within the Valley.

- ✦ ***The current cadre of leaders in the Valley is spread very thin.***

Essentially, a handful of individuals make up the real leadership core. These individuals sit on numerous boards and committees and they are active with organizations and institutions throughout the Valley. As strong as this leadership base is, it is very over-extended. Most of the leaders admit to a case of "leadership burn-out." They also note that there are simply not enough people stepping up to the table and willingly offering their talents and time to assume leadership

positions. Significant in its absence is a healthy pool of corporate leaders to help strengthen the civic infrastructure, and a new generation of younger people who can replenish the ranks of the Valley's leadership and civic infrastructure base.

- ✦ ***Corporate leaders and executives have not contributed as much to the Valley as have their counterparts in the public and nonprofit sectors.***

Because so many of the major corporations that are located in the Valley have parent companies that control them, and because these corporate headquarters are found in other cities around the country, few of the local CEOs have committed themselves to local issues and activities. This is not to say that corporations have not contributed to the community -- the Corporate Volunteer Council is an example of the time and resources corporations have invested. But, the contribution comes more from company volunteers and not from the head of the corporation. This reluctance for CEOs to engage has left a perception in the Valley that the top echelons of corporate leadership have other priorities than the Valley.

- ✦ ***The Latino community is noticeably absent from the group of people who form the leadership base in the Valley.***

Few Latinos sit on the key councils and boards in the Valley and Latino leaders have little visibility outside their own neighborhoods and communities. As a result, the Valley's civic infrastructure is missing a key ingredient -- active participation and a voice from the Latino community that articulates the community's needs and interests.

- ✦ ***The larger minority community in the Valley, older as well as newer immigrant and ethnic groups, is not as central a feature in the Valley's civic infrastructure as it should be.***

Efforts have clearly been made by the majority community to reach out and engage the minority community. Programs like Leadership Education Advocating Diversity (LEAD) -- an effort by the Valley Council of Health and Human Service Organizations, funded by the Foundation to provide leadership training for minorities in the Valley -- have begun to have an impact. Nonetheless, the dominant culture prevails and the ability of the minority community to articulate and bring a voice to its needs and interests is somewhat limited.

- ✦ ***The newer residents who have recently moved to the Valley have not become actively engaged in the region's civic organizations.***

The new residents who are now living and working in the Valley certainly have the potential to become part of the leadership base. Whether they will choose or can be persuaded to take on that role is yet to be determined.

- ✦ ***Unless another generation of leaders is nurtured, the leadership base within the Valley could be seriously eroded in the next few years.***

While the Valley has undertaken some efforts to create a broader and deeper crop of leaders in the Valley -- such as the LEAD project -- those involved have acknowledged that they have not yet produced this new generation of leaders. Until a more concerted effort is made to bring in younger leaders, leaders of color and new blood in general, the Valley could suffer a serious leadership deficit.

Public Sector

- ✦ ***The Valley is being split by the many different federal, state, and regional jurisdictions, constraining effective regional actions and access to resources.***

As noted, the Valley region is divided in many different ways by various federal and state departments. For example:

- the Valley Transit District only includes Ansonia, Derby, Seymour, and Shelton;
- Beacon Falls, Oxford, and Seymour are part of Waterbury Region Convention and Visitors Bureau, while Ansonia, Derby, and Shelton are part of the Greater New Haven Convention and Visitors Bureau; and
- Ansonia, Derby, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton are part of the Workplace Inc. in Bridgeport, while Beacon Falls is part of the Greater Waterbury Regional Workforce Development Board.

(See Appendix D for maps of various regional definitions.)

While organizations within the six towns have collaborated, the imposition of externally-imposed districts has often created fragmentation and limited cooperative and effective actions. This is most evident in the case of tourism where the potential for cooperation is limited by splitting the region between Waterbury and New Haven. This fragmentation also creates barriers to inter-municipal cooperation within the Valley.

- ✦ ***Many local officials do not have a deep understanding of the economic and social issues of the Valley.***

As in many small municipalities within Connecticut, there is a lot of turnover in political leadership and wide variations amongst that leadership in terms of their understanding of the community development and human service needs within the Valley. In addition, many municipal leaders have parochial views. Addressing the economic and social issues within the Valley requires political leadership that understands the realities of the “new” economy as well as the potential for achieving fiscal benefits through inter-municipal cooperation. Many of those involved in community development in the Valley believe that there is a need to further educate people who hold political office within the towns and those who sit on the many boards and commissions within each town.

✦ ***The Council of Elected Officials is a relatively weak organization.***

One effective vehicle for both education and consensus building amongst individual municipalities throughout the rest of the state is the Council of Governments (COG) or Council of Elected Officials (CEO). The Valley does not have a COG and has a very weak Council of Elected Officials. Not all of the mayors or first selectmen are actively involved in the CEO. There is no set agenda and no long-term strategy. While staff support is provided through the Regional Planning Agency, this has not been a very effective means of moving the organization forward.

✦ ***Regional planning in the region is limited.***

As noted, the Valley Regional Planning Agency tends to be a “reactive” organization. Rather than assessing the planning and development needs of the Valley and then identifying potential sources of funding to meet the needs, the RPA tends to respond to funding opportunities. As a result, there are significant gaps in the services that it provides. While regional planning organizations throughout the country have increasingly played a leadership role in addressing regional land-use planning issues such as sprawl, and promoting municipal cooperation, the VRPA has not been actively involved in this arena. Consequently, there is no entity in the Valley region that is taking a comprehensive look at growth and development and how it can affect the overall quality of life for Valley residents.

Community Development

Community development within the Valley region involves efforts to strengthen the overall quality of life in the community by promoting: a healthy economic and commercial base; quality housing available for all residents; a healthy natural environment; and a cultural environment that enriches the lives of people living in the region. Community development activities affect the lives of all residents of the Valley as well as the vitality of the businesses that operate there.

The Environment

✦ ***Industrial waste and brownfields are the most identifiable and pressing environmental problems confronting the Valley.***

The Valley is not alone, of course, in coming to grips with an industrial past -- abandoned factories, boarded up mills, and contamination of sites and waterways. Unfortunately, many of the problems are very visible and many are close to the downtowns of several communities. Cleaning up these visual eyesores and turning them into more productive use is a very serious challenge for the Valley. Some planning and clean-up has begun, but much remains to be done.

- ✦ ***The Brownfields Pilot project is an innovative and effective regional effort that offers considerable promise in addressing environmental issues in the Valley.***

The Valley's Brownfields Pilot Project is an innovative effort to assess and redevelop the many brownfield sites located throughout the Naugatuck Valley. Initiated by the Naugatuck Valley Project and the Valley Regional Planning Agency, the project has identified over 100 brownfields throughout the region and has received over \$300,000 in federal, state, and foundation funding for environmental assessment. The project has been involved in funding environmental assessment on O'Sullivan's Island in Derby, the Vest Pocket Park in Ansonia, the former Nutmeg Bakery in Beacon Falls, and the incinerator site in Ansonia. To date, the project's greatest success has been the redevelopment of the Silvermine Landfill in Seymour. This site was the first to benefit from the pilot and is currently being redeveloped by Haynes Construction for a 40,000-square-foot industrial building. The Pilot is also actively involved in managing the environmental assessment related to the Downtown Revitalization District in Derby and is proposing an innovative project in environmental reclamation at a number of sites in the Naugatuck River watershed.

- ✦ ***Sprawl and the loss of open space is becoming a major concern, and with no regional land use planning there is a threat to the long-term quality of life in the region.***

Unplanned growth and rapid expansion of housing and building lots could threaten the environmental and aesthetic landscape of the Valley. Route 8 has become, in some residents' minds, both an asset and a liability. Clearly, it has opened up the Valley in significant ways and created more opportunity. On the other hand, it allows easy access into and out of the Valley and, therefore, puts pressure on communities to build and grow. This growth, if unchecked, could spoil the rural feel of the Valley. Small town life could be transformed by traffic jams and noise pollution if precautions are not taken.

Recognizing the potential impact of development on a community, many communities around the county are involved in regional approaches to land use and developing so-called "smart growth" strategies that seek to focus development in the urban core rather than on previously undeveloped open space. While Regional Planning Agencies in other parts of Connecticut are beginning to look at regional land use planning, the Valley Regional Planning Agency has not focused on this issue.

- ✦ ***A number of small environmental organizations in the region are focusing on preserving farm land, open space, and the quality of the rivers. However, they have limited capacity and have not been very involved in regional collaborative organizations.***

Groups such as Trout Unlimited, the Housatonic Valley Association, the Kellogg Environmental Center, and the Seymour and Shelton Land Trusts are focused on key environment issues within the Valley. They have been effective at preserving farms and open space and providing environmental education to the community. However, for the most part, their leadership has not been actively involved in regional organizations.

✦ ***The Valley's rivers are a critical community asset.***

In 1998, PBS televised a program that focused on the economic revival of three communities around the country. All three made significant use of a river to bring back an economy. These communities are part of a much larger movement in the U.S. to use natural resources, such as rivers, as economic engines. Rivers can be engines when combined with appropriately planned riverfront parks, walkways, and bikeways, as well as restaurants and retail developments.

Currently, there are efforts within the Valley to focus attention on the potential of the Housatonic and Naugatuck rivers. For example, in 1999, the Foundation granted the Housatonic Valley Association funding to create a recreational trail along the Naugatuck River by redeveloping brownfields. Healthy Valley 2000 has recently spearheaded an effort to create a regatta event on the Housatonic.

Revitalizing the Region's Downtowns

✦ ***The downtowns of several municipalities present a very serious challenge to economic and community revitalization.***

Given its size and location, the Valley communities have a very weak retail and commercial environment. Each of its downtowns has suffered dramatic decline. Even with the improved economic conditions and the influx of newcomers to the Valley, the commercial and retail activity is very limited. In addition, there are a number of so-called "dead" malls and vacant buildings that are found along Pershing Drive. Residents of the region go outside the Valley for almost all of their retail and service needs.

Every municipality in the Valley has independently addressed the retail and downtown environments in their community. Seymour has met with the most success. Its focus on antiques, as well as the redevelopment of the Strand Theater, has created some new activity in that community. While there have been some improvements, overall, the downtowns of Ansonia, Derby, and Shelton continue to suffer from vacancy and decline, even with the many years of effort and financial resources focused on their improvements.

Currently, the three communities are involved in renewed efforts around downtown revitalization.

- After many years of work, Shelton's planning is beginning to pay off. The Ripton -- an elderly housing project in downtown with 36 units -- is being developed. In addition, plans call for a fishing pier, farmers market, town green, promenade, and amphitheater.
- Ansonia has used CDBG funds to renovate the Palmer Building and Upper Main Street Development Buildings. Efforts are currently focused on the Palmer Building. There will be a senior center on ground level, a youth recreational center and multi-generational computer learning center, and a 10,000-square-foot incubator on the second floor. Main Street Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the Ansonia Housing Authority, is overseeing downtown development projects.

- Derby is involved in an ambitious redevelopment effort involving the entire downtown. It has received a foundation grant for \$100,000, matched with \$45,000 in state other funding, to look at environmental issues in the downtown. The city has taken possession of most of the properties in the Central Business District (about 45 acres) and will be issuing an RFP for the redevelopment of the entire parcel. The city will convey development rights and site control in exchange for a sound development plan.

While each of these projects involves some innovative elements, none are strategically addressing the most fundamental issue -- what type of retail and commercial market opportunities to pursue.

✦ ***The small, downtown-oriented business organizations have limited capacity.***

Related to the downtown issues is the fragmentation and limited capacity of the many small business organizations in the Valley. There are a number of smaller, municipally-based business organizations in the Valley including Taking Care of Business in Ansonia, the Shelton Business Association, and Olde Birmingham Business Association. While these groups provide networking opportunities for the smaller, retail business owners in the region, they have not been particularly effective in providing business assistance services or a strategic vision for the region's commercial districts.

Creating and Sustaining Jobs – Economic Development in the Region

✦ ***The region's economic development efforts have focused very extensively on attracting new companies to the region and have spent limited time on retention and small business development.***

Many of the initial activities of the Alliance for Economic Growth have focused on marketing the region to outside companies. The group successfully advocated for getting state incentives through an Economic Corridor Zone designation. It also developed marketing materials and worked to coordinate regional recruitment efforts. There are some limited efforts to serve existing companies in the region through the development of a business resource center at the Valley Chamber, informal technical assistance through the Shelton Economic Development Corporation, and the state's regional economic development office; however, the resources and staff devoted to assisting existing businesses in the Valley, as well as potential entrepreneurs, are very limited when compared to other communities throughout both the state and the country as a whole.

✦ ***With the exception of the Shelton Economic Development Corporation, the small, municipally-based economic development groups have relatively limited capacity.***

In addition to the activities of the Chamber and the Valley Alliance, a number of the individual towns also have smaller economic development groups such as "Taking Care of Business" and the Old Birmingham Business Association. Many of the towns also have Economic Development Commissions that address local economic development issues. These

commissions, however, vary in terms of their level of activity. With the exception of the Shelton Economic Development Corporation, most of these groups have limited capacity and unclear missions.

- ✦ ***The Valley Alliance for Economic Growth provides a strong foundation for expanding collaborative economic development efforts in the region.***

The Alliance has proved itself to be an effective mechanism for implementing economic development efforts within the Valley communities. Its success in the All-American City process, its ability to produce regional marketing materials, and its focus on such key issues as transportation and workforce provide evidence of its importance.

- ✦ ***The lack of a Valley location for the Small Business Development Centers and other regional business resources limits their use by entrepreneurs and small businesses in the Valley.***

The Small Business Development Centers, which provide free business counseling, business plan preparation, and loan packaging, are located in Waterbury, New Haven, and Bridgeport. The New Haven Community Investment Corporation is the only available source of SBA micro loans and it is located in New Haven. In addition, there is no nearby source of technology assistance to manufacturers in the region. While the state economic development staff person assigned to the Valley provided technical assistance and information on other state and regional resources to Valley businesses, this effort was very informal and limited by time and resources. Similarly, while the chamber has some business assistance resources, it is very limited. With very little outreach, most residents interested in starting their own business, as well as existing small business owners, are unaware of the resources that are available to them outside of the Valley.

- ✦ ***Designation of the Naugatuck Valley as an Economic Development District of the EDA could provide additional federal resources for economic development investments in the Valley.***

The Shelton Economic Development Corporation worked with the Naugatuck Valley Development Corporation in Waterbury on a regional economic development strategy that could serve as the basis for designation of the region as an EDA economic development district. The strategy ranked the major infrastructure needs of the region and involved a broad base of groups in the Waterbury region (the Naugatuck Valley Development Corporation, the Waterbury Regional Planning Agency, and the Waterbury Chamber) and groups in the Valley (the Shelton Economic Development Corporation, Valley Regional Planning Agency and Valley Chamber). This effort could better position the communities in the Valley in terms of federal assistance.

The Arts and Cultural Environment

- ✦ ***The Valley's proximity to New Haven and Waterbury, where there is a critical mass of arts and culture, has acted as a disincentive to developing a more viable arts and cultural infrastructure in the Valley.***

The Valley has a number of different arts programs, theater performances, local fairs and festivals, music shows, and other cultural events and activities. However, it has not created a strong foundation in the arts that serves a regional audience and builds a critical mass of arts and cultural expression. One reason is the proximity of the Valley to New Haven and to Waterbury, where the presence of Yale and a vibrant arts community appears to serve the Valley well. As a result, the arts and cultural base in the Valley tends to be more localized.

- ✦ ***Arts programming in the schools is somewhat limited due to the lack of scale in each individual district.***

According to numerous studies, arts education not only creates our next generation of creative workers, it inspires students to learn and to increase their overall academic performance. These studies demonstrate statistical evidence for the improved performance of youth who are involved in arts education programs, and they explain the ways in which the arts augment the learning process. Based on this research, institutions as varied as the National Council of State Legislatures, the Association for Childhood Education International, and the President's Committee on the Arts and Education, support making the arts a more integral part of education.

While schools in the Valley are providing arts programming, and the Foundation has supported such efforts as funding Young Audiences of Connecticut to bring artists in resident and arts programs to Valley Schools, some local educators and stakeholders are concerned that arts education is somewhat limited by the small size of some of the school districts in the Valley. Because each district is relatively small, the range of opportunities in arts programming is somewhat limited. Arts education could potentially have a bigger impact in the schools and in the Valley if there was more cooperation amongst the communities in their arts education programming, if programs were jointly undertaken by different school systems, and if strategic investments were made in facilities and programs.

- ✦ ***The Sterling Opera House presents opportunities for the Valley, if proper planning and development are undertaken.***

The Opera House has been in a state of disrepair and neglect for decades. Efforts to renovate the building have been undertaken in the past but have not borne fruit. The current mayor of Derby has state funding for making improvements, and a feasibility study is planned to determine the best approach for bringing the Opera House back to life. If the process moves forward, this facility and whatever programs are developed there, could be a focal point for building a strong foundation for the arts in the Valley.

- ✦ *The new arts and culture brochure created by Healthy Valley 2000, along with the cultural planning study currently being undertaken, are important steps in developing a strategy for the Valley's arts and cultural environment.*

The new brochure developed by Healthy Valley is a good first step in increasing awareness of those cultural resources that are available in the Valley communities. The cultural plan that is currently being funded by the Foundation could also provide critical insights into the potential of further developing some of the arts and cultural resources within the Valley.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS ON FOUNDATION GRANTMAKING

Information from stakeholder interviews, interviews with Foundation staff, the survey of nonprofit organizations, and focus groups provided a broad range of input into the grantmaking activities of the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven in the Lower Naugatuck Valley. In addition, data on the grantmaking activities of The Community Foundation over the past five years were analyzed. This research effort resulted in a set of findings about the Foundation's grantmaking in the Valley.

It is important to note that many of the findings are based upon discussions that predated the presentation of the "new directions" of the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven to the Valley community. While recognizing that the Foundation has developed a new strategy and new grantmaking process, the past history and perceptions continue to affect the current relationships.

- ✦ *Everyone viewed the Foundation as a very valued asset and resource and acknowledged the Foundation's outreach efforts in the Valley.*

Clearly, the Foundation has made a significant contribution to many large and small organizations in the Valley -- and most people are quick to acknowledge this. Social and human service organizations, conservation groups, recreational groups, civic organizations, and businesses all recognize that the Foundation's resources have made a profound difference to life in the Valley. Without the Foundation, some organizations would not have succeeded in their work, others would have had a marginal impact, and still others would not exist at all. There is a widely held consensus that the Foundation's efforts in the Valley have made a significant contribution to improving its quality of life.

- ✦ *Staff turnover has affected the communication between the Foundation and the Valley.*

Staff turnover at the Foundation has been one of the reasons why people have felt that communication has not been as effective as possible. Relationships have been developed between a staffer and a community group or organization and when the staff leave, the transition has not always been smooth. In addition, there has been a history of problems related to the grantmaking process and interactions with Valley groups.

- ✦ *On the other hand, many of the key stakeholders and survey respondents in the Valley have been impressed with the increase of funding to the Valley and the outreach efforts of the Foundation.*

Many of those in the Valley noted that they feel that the Foundation is making a good faith effort to increase its funding levels in the Valley. While there is some concern with the drop-off in 1999, overall, the sense of most in the community is that significant progress has been made in meeting the Valley's expectations of the use of the Gates fund.

Moreover, many of the survey respondents had a positive experience with the Foundation. Three-quarters had applied to the Foundation at least once, some several times. The average for those who had applied was 2.8 grant applications and two grants approved.

- ✦ ***The VAC could be more effective in directing promising organizations and projects to the Foundation.***

The VAC has been relatively passive in identifying and promoting projects for Foundation support. In the past year, the committee has experienced sporadic attendance by some members, so there is less continuity and opportunity to discuss promising opportunities with the Foundation. With this study, the committee will have more information on the needs and priorities in the Valley and may want to take a more active role in advising the Foundation about directing grant opportunities.

- ✦ ***While there is a perception that the Valley feels a sense of “entitlement,” there is, in fact, agreement that the Foundation should not be funding poor proposals just because they are located in the Valley.***

There was consensus amongst those interviewed that the goal of the VAC as a committee of the Foundation Board should be to help develop quality proposals from the Valley. No one on the VAC wants to see bad projects funded. The issue for those in the Valley is to expand the number of well developed projects and programs seeking grants from the Foundation.

- ✦ ***There is belief among some in the Valley that regional grants have limited value to the Valley.***

There are a number of larger, regional grants that the Foundation has funded through the Gates Fund that are intended to benefit the Valley. However, interviews with some of these grantees have found that they have limited impact in the Valley. In addition, some of the regional grantees did not have a full understanding of how the needs within the Valley differ from those within the city of New Haven.

- ✦ ***Limited applications from the Valley is a serious concern.***

There are many questions about why there are not more applications for funding from Valley organizations. First, the VAC could be playing a more active role in encouraging applications from Valley organizations. Second, prior to the Foundation’s recent outreach efforts in the Valley, many organizations were unclear about the Foundation’s grantmaking process and criteria. Finally, and probably most importantly, as noted, many of the Valley’s nonprofits have relatively limited capacity in the area of grantwriting and fundraising. The VAC has not undertaken any systematic community outreach to ensure that Valley organizations know about the funding available through the Foundation.

- ✦ ***The Foundation, like other funders, is not perceived by small organizations as accessible or helpful enough.***

Smaller organizations that have minimal staff or are limited in their fundraising sophistication find the Foundation to be intimidating and not very nurturing of them. They feel the Foundation has not been as effective as possible in reaching out to them or providing them with assistance in the application process. A smaller organization said, “Our problem is twofold: understanding what can be asked for and then finding someone to write the grant and follow-up.”

✦ ***The Neighborhood Initiative Program in the Valley does not have a clearly defined mission.***

In addition to its standard grant process where decisions are made by the board quarterly, the Foundation has designated a Valley Neighborhood Program for small grants to “individuals, grassroots groups, and others working to support their local communities.”³⁵ The Foundation board allocates an annual amount of the Gates Fund for these small grants and a Valley Program Advisory Committee reviews applications from local groups and makes grant recommendations to the Foundation's Board.

The Neighborhood Initiative grants in the Valley are primarily for civic associations and grassroots organizations rather than established agencies. The grants are limited to a maximum of \$3,000 and the application process is far less demanding than for a larger grant. The past two years have seen a substantial increase in the funds awarded for the Neighborhood Program. In 1999, 40 awards were made for small grants in this program.

Table: 12				
Percent of Gates Funds Used in the Valley’s Neighborhood Grants Program				
	1996	1997	1998	1999*
Total Neighborhood Grants	\$41,960	\$63,747	\$101,234	\$100,667
Percent of Gates Grants in Valley	9%	10%	11%	23%
through 3rd quarter only				

Unlike in New Haven where the Neighborhood Initiative was clearly developed as a community building effort, there is no clear focus for the Neighborhood grants in the Valley. The largest proportion of the Neighborhood grants fund youth programs (40 percent) (and, of that, more than one-third goes to Boy Scout troops). Other main uses of these grants are for community development (16 percent), education (14 percent), and for seniors (9 percent). Grants for the Arts, Economic Development, Environment, Health and Human Services, and Leadership were relatively small proportions of the Neighborhood grant totals.

There is also a perception that certain groups have learned about the program and have aggressively used it while many other groups in the Valley are still unaware of the program and

³⁵ Foundation Annual Report 1998, p. 21.

the process for accessing the grants. Moreover, as a small grants program, many have found that a once a year funding process does not work. Unlike the Foundation's usual process of quarterly grantmaking, the Neighborhood Program awards grants annually. Applications are made available on April 1, and they are due on April 30. Often, the small funds are for one-time expenses that cannot wait for a long-term process.

✦ ***The survey of grantees found that local nonprofits had a number of capacity building needs.***

As part of this study, Mt. Auburn Associates conducted a survey of nonprofit organizations in the Valley. The survey brought in responses from 48 nonprofits across the spectrum of organizational size and services. The responses provided useful data on the agencies' organizational capacity, identified their priorities for capacity building, and assessed their experience with the Foundation.

It is clear from the survey that smaller organizations are more reliant on foundation support for their operations. Smaller organizations (with budgets less than \$100,000) reported 40 percent of their budgets come from foundation grants, while medium and larger organizations reported grants comprised only 6.5 percent and 4.3 percent of their budgets, respectively. Smaller organizations have less capacity with fewer staff, smaller boards, and less access to and use of technology.

On average, fundraising ability was the organizational area with the least capacity. The groups also reported the greatest need for capacity building, leveraging resources, and training and skill building for staff. Strategic planning, community outreach, and grantwriting were the three top training priorities for these organizations. The biggest obstacles to getting training were the cost and the time required by staff.

The overwhelming majority (83 percent) of the organizations said there were gaps in support for nonprofit organizations. The biggest gap was for general operating support and special project support. Less than half of the respondents had participated in training or technical assistance programs provided by the Foundation. Of those who had participated, a third had found the programs very useful.

✦ ***Applicants to the Foundation generally were positive about the grantmaking process.***

The results from the survey indicate that organizations applying for Foundation funding found the grant process understandable and Foundation staff responsive. Of the organizations responding to the survey, 91 percent reported the grant process understandable, 75 percent reported that the program officer was responsive, and 88 percent found the application requirements reasonable.

★ *The Foundation has developed a new, streamlined grantmaking process.*

The Foundation has shortened the grant review process from 5.5 to 3.5 months and has adopted the “common grant application” form developed by the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy. The Foundation revised its grant guidelines and plans to strengthen monitoring and include more emphasis on evaluation and best practices. Applicants are encouraged to submit a pre-application for initial review. Those that pass the initial review are invited to submit a full application. Grant proposals are accepted all year round. Decisions are made on a quarterly basis.