



# Focus Group Report

Avon Greater Together Community Funds Advisory Committee

February 1<sup>st</sup> – February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021

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# Executive Summary

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The goals of the Avon Greater Together Community Funds Advisory Committee, in collaboration with the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, are to use a comprehensive, community-oriented approach to better identify and understand town needs and develop plans to satisfy those needs.

Strategies for attaining these goals include knowledge-building exercises to help the Committee navigate where the funds will best be directed.

Five focus groups were conducted among the Avon area regarding resident knowledge and attitudes about needs in the town. The information gathered in these focus groups will be used as a basis to inform the Committee's decision on how to use the community funds.

## Key Findings

**Strengths:** The majority of the focus group participants described the quality of life in Avon as excellent because of its good schools, restaurants, small businesses, and variety of outdoor activities including hiking, biking, and kayaking.

*"I like the proximity to downtown Hartford while enjoying the beauty around and within Avon. My family and I regularly bike, hike, and kayak."*

-Focus Group #1 Participant

*"I love the library and the online programs they've started since the pandemic."*

-Focus Group #1 Participant

**Areas of Opportunity:** Along with the desire to keep the school ratings high, there is a deep desire for more events and programs that will bring the community together to make up for its lack of a town center. Participants are also very aware of the lack of diversity in Avon and want to see efforts put forth to become more equitable.

*"We're very compartmentalized. It's uplifting to see three generations walking together on the Rails Trails. The places where the town interacts is what enriches the community. Avon Day was old and stale, but maybe it needs to be revisited."*

-Focus Group #4 Participant

*"Avon has a lot of resources in terms of human capabilities, and I want Avon to be more open and have a bigger perspective of the world and communities that are on the border—and beyond that it's a part of Hartford County. A more open Avon."*

-Focus Group #4 Participant

# Background

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In 2019, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving established \$100,000 in community funds for each of the towns in its service area—including the town of Avon. The purpose of the Greater Together Community Funds program is to: Support the community in taking ownership around the needs in their towns, encourage broad and inclusive civic engagement, and anchor the Hartford Foundation in each town.

The role of the Advisory Committee is to design and lead an inclusive process to identify the needs in your community and design a grantmaking process aimed to ensure that the Greater Together Community Funds can have the greater impact for the benefit of town residents.

In 2020, Avon’s Community Fund Advisory Committee was selected. Members include:

- Vincent Blea
- Dorothy (Dee Dee) Dew
- Carrie Firestone
- Leslie Winter Gordon
- Haleigh Guerrera
- Laura Hoffman
- Gregory M. Jones
- Aaradhya Kumar
- Joan Monts
- Maya Parady
- Elizabeth Ann Pavlakis
- Ursula Pfeiffer
- Joseph Weist
- Brian Rajock

## **Criteria for Eligibility to Receive Community Funds**

- Any nonprofit registered as a 501(c)(3) organization that serves the residents of Avon.
- Nonprofits do not need to be headquartered in Avon but must serve the needs of Avon residents.
- Individuals, private foundations, and for-profit businesses are not eligible to apply.

# Methodology & Participation

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## Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited by members of the Avon Greater Together Community Funds Advisory Committee through the use of various media, including:

- Media release sent to local news sources (i.e. Patch News, Hartford Courant)
- Town-wide email blast
- Avon Senior Center newsletter
- Social media (i.e. Avon Facebook groups)
- Avon Town Council Meeting

A participation form was developed to obtain a diverse demographic profile representative of the Avon area.

## Focus Groups

Five virtual focus groups were conducted through ZOOM video communications between February 1 and February 5.

Group	Date	Time	# of Participants
1	2/1/21	6:00 p.m.	2
2	2/1/21	7:15 p.m.	2*
3	2/2/21	7:00 p.m.	1
4	2/3/21	12:00 p.m.	5
5	2/5/21	9:00 a.m.	1

\*Participants arrived late for the 6:00 p.m. group on 2/1, so a separate focus group was conducted at 7:15 p.m.

# Demographics

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Eleven people participated in the focus groups. Of this number, 64% were female, 27% were male, and 9% identified as non-binary. The focus group participants ranged in age from 40 to 70 years. Table 1 delineates these ranges.

Table 1: Participants' Age

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
40 to 49 years	18
50 to 59 years	45
60 to 69 years	27
70 to 79 years	9

The majority of the focus group participants were long-time residents of Avon. Table 2 shows the number of years the participants have lived in Avon.

Table 2: Years in Avon

<b>Years</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 5 years	9
6 to 10 years	9
11 to 15 years	9
16 to 20 years	9
21 to 25 years	45
26+ years	18

The number of children that the participants had ranged from none to four children (see Table 3).

Table 3: Number of Children

<b>Children</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
None	9
One to two	73
Three to four	18

## Demographics

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90% of focus group participants with children currently have or had children in the Avon Public School System. Table 4 shows the number of families with children who participated in various extracurricular activities in Avon.

Table 4: Involvement in Extracurriculars in Avon

<b>Avon Involvement</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Avon Sports only	20
Avon Arts Programs only	0
Both Avon Sports and Arts	80
Avon Parks and Trails	100

# Discussion Results

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## What do you like about living in Avon?

Group #1	Group #2	Group #3	Group #4	Group #5
Schools	Schools	Schools (and teachers)	School system	Schools
Rails Trails	Rails Trails	Fisher Meadows	Friendliness	Nature
Scenic beauty	Neighborhood	Sub-Edge Farm	Natural beauty; cleanliness	Suburban feel (balance between rural and urban)
Overall quality of life		Space – not too crowded	Access to shops	Land preservation/ conservation
Proximity to NYC/Boston			Location	
			Not congested	

## What have you seen improve during your time in Avon?

Group #1	Group #2	Group #3	Group #4	Group #5
Library expansion		Rails Trails	Building the Rails Trails	Not necessarily an “improvement,” but shifts in use of land
Library Farmers Market		Food Truck event		
Sub-Edge Farm		Boat Launch		
High School track upgrades		High School athletic fields		
		Town Center area (although it took a long time to happen)		



**What are the things you feel are well serviced in Avon?**

<b>Group #1</b>	<b>Group #2</b>	<b>Group #3</b>	<b>Group #4</b>	<b>Group #5</b>
Schools	Schools	Town services a little sparse but they do what they do well	Library has done a good job creating events and trying to bring people together	Quality of roads
Rails to Trails		Transfer Station		Rails to Trails has seen some improvement
Library				Delivery and quality of water
Recreation facilities (e.g. Sycamore Pool)				Public Works
Registrar of Voters				Plowing
Avon Police Department				
Transfer Station & Exchange				

**What have you seen decline during your time in Avon?**

<b>Group #1</b>	<b>Group #2</b>	<b>Group #3</b>	<b>Group #4</b>	<b>Group #5</b>
Roads	Lack of community events	Nothing major	Hard to meet people	Business turnover (mostly due to pandemic)
Sycamore Park Playground		School budget has been a challenge that results in class cuts, etc.	Still no sidewalks on well-traveled roads	Equitable use of funding – where should you truly invest so that you can consider all residents?
		Need more thoughtful budgeting process	Networking has become increasingly difficult for people with no school-age children (a general withdrawal from community)	
		More focus on how to maintain what we have— e.g. bike trail		

**What groups of people would you think could use more community support?**

<b>Group #1</b>	<b>Group #2</b>	<b>Group #3</b>	<b>Group #4</b>	<b>Group #5</b>
Visibility of LGBTQ & Women’s Rights issues	All residents – there are not enough community events	In general, we should be more welcoming to everyone – there is diversity on the Rails Trail, but we should consider affordable housing to increase diversity in residents	New options for activities for teens	Not sure, but there is most likely a lot of hidden need
			Programs to help seniors (e.g. helping seniors shovel their driveways; one elderly woman was living in a home without power and no home upkeep— now it’s repaired – more of this)	Race equity is important - How can those who don’t look like the majority feel welcome?
			Programs to keep people in town once they no longer have school age children	
			Creating a sense of community between trail system (in lieu of town center)	
			More education around the trails – including using the trails	
			Year-round Farmers Market	

**Are there obvious identifiable areas of need in Avon?**

<b>Group #1</b>	<b>Group #2</b>	<b>Group #3</b>	<b>Group #4</b>	<b>Group #5</b>
Lack of sidewalks	More community-oriented aspect to town website	Car theft issue is concerning	Little funding to improve Rails Trails (e.g. fencing)	Planning & zoning commission or some group that is responsible for use of land, it would be great for them to assess use of land over time (e.g., why are certain businesses perpetually failing in a particular spot over time)
Plowing not very good	Create events located in open spaces off of the bike trail to encourage community building (e.g. tai chi, ice skating)	Traffic is madness and drivers speed	Would like to see funds go to new initiatives and would hate the funds going to the school system – funds should go to building community	Land fill could see some improvement – e.g. Winsted has better recycling program
Lack of a Town Center	Food insecurity (idea to use garden starter kits and commit to give back % of produce to food pantries)		Organizations and programs are lacking connection to the day to day living in town and in creating wellness—and that gap is most likely why people leave	Utilizing food scraps (from schools?) for composting – e.g. Litchfield has a program
More historical/cultural events	Environmental incentives		No news on Avon website or in local newspaper supporting town spirit	Better knowledge around renewable energy (solar panels, etc.)
Affordable housing	More bike lanes			Avon is significantly underrepresented in diversity of race and ethnicity – let's fix this
Increased diversity				

## What is the future that you want to see in Avon?

Group #1	Group #2	Group #3	Group #4	Group #5
High visibility (via Town Committees, etc.) for DE&I issues and/or racial profiling – are churches working on this?	Stronger community – more events (program and for profit) for all ages that encourage close community and friendliness	Increase DE&I	More of a sense of community (more connection outside of school)	Very proud of the wonderful BLM protests that happened in Avon. However, the community appears a little divided on these topics (e.g. Trump signs). How can funds be used to support organizations that work to create community, build ties, connect people?
More Park & Rec programs		Retain open spaces, oldness, and quaintness	Community clubs that bring community action and involvement	Robust, sustainable business and also conservation: attract small, independently owned businesses that are also sustainable (using existing property, filling empty spaces)
More special needs facilities (e.g. Special Olympics)		More access and connections across town so you don't always have to drive		Expand into the arts more – how can we prioritize existing arts programs?
Outdoor meeting spaces		Outdoor concerts to gather people together		
Summer school and help for kids that are falling behind		Make sure that all kids have an opportunity to be successful in life (scholarships, etc.)		
Make Open Choice program kids feel welcome and included in Avon		Make schools as strong as they can be		

## Conclusion

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The focus groups that were conducted presented an opportunity to comprehend the ways in which the participants view the town and how it can be improved. Although these groups were not representative of all Avon residents, the opinions obtained provide a foundation for the development of a grant-making process that successfully meets the most critical needs. The information obtained in the focus groups is vital to the development of the grant-making process because it provides insight into areas that are not well understood. More importantly, it gives an awareness of the issues most relevant to the Avon population.

Overall, these focus groups were well received by the participants. Many participants expressed their appreciation of having the opportunity to vocalize their opinion on this subject.

These findings indicate that there are several existing strengths we can build upon, and that there is opportunity to make the town better by directing the funds to programs or organizations that will help increase resident retention and diversity.

## Disclaimer

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