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SCHOOL FOR
THE
DEAF

ALL ways able.

Jeffrey S. Bravin, Executive Director

139 North Main Street, West Hartford, CT 06107-1269 (Toll-Free) 1-800-244-0420 (Voice) 860-899-1217 (Fax) 860-570-2293 www.asd-1817.org

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Town of West Hartford-Department of Community Development
Town Plan and Zoning Commission
50 South Main Street, Room 214
West Hartford, CT 06107

ASD Proposal to Add Greenhouse In Support of Horticulture Program

In order to grow our Horticulture Program, ASD is interested in building a greenhouse on our campus at 139 North Main Street. Gardens remind us that the best things in life do not happen instantly but take time to grow with nurture and care. ASD has been building the Horticulture Program in incremental steps over the past several years. Students are germinating seeds in paper towels on window sills, growing plants in small classroom planters and hydroponic towers, and learning how to repurpose paper bags and other items through “sheet mulching.” They are engaging in a composting program that has inspired the cafeteria staff and maintenance crew to partner with the children to reduce landfill and repurpose food and landscaping waste. The Horticulture Program is now perfectly poised to grow, and a greenhouse classroom will allow the program to flourish year round.

According to Danielle Cohen at the Child Mind Institute, the average American child is said to spend 4 to 7 minutes a day in unstructured play outdoors, and [over 7 hours a day in front of a screen](#). Alienation from nature, a common element of childhood in 2022, creates physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges for children. For children with special educational needs, these challenges are often compounded. Furthermore, in the past two and a half years, the global pandemic has deepened this crisis for children. It is safe to say there has never been a more urgent need for outdoor education, including horticulture, gardening, and environmental studies.

Scientific meta-analyses provide robust evidence for the positive effects of gardening on health. The positive association with gardening is “observed for a wide range of health outcomes, such as reductions in depression and anxiety symptoms, stress, mood disturbance, and BMI, as well as increases in quality of life, sense of community, physical activity levels, and cognitive function” (*Preventive Medicine Reports*, Volume 5, March 2017). Gardening also engages students who may otherwise struggle during a school day. Our horticulture teacher describes one boy who has trouble focusing in most subjects but who is completely attentive for her. She reports that every time he sees her, he makes the sign for “flower class” and asks “soon?”

Gardening teaches all students skills that help them thrive in the classroom and beyond, and a greenhouse would provide benefits to the entire ASD community—all ages and all programs. From the youngest students to the oldest, this greenhouse would offer the “rich educational soil” of hands-on-learning, a calming sensory environment, the joy of working together toward a practical end (such as lettuce for the school’s kitchen), and the satisfaction of watching something both beautiful and useful flourish under one’s care.

ASD’s budding Horticulture Program is helping our students become responsible and resourceful stewards to our environment. This greenhouse classroom will allow ASD to fully embrace these goals through a Horticulture Program that can flourish year-round.

Thank you for considering our proposal.