

Greenways

Greenways are linear open spaces that can help conserve native landscapes and ecosystems by protecting, maintaining, and restoring natural connecting corridors. They can provide opportunities for recreation, exercise, and alternative transportation. In addition, these areas can separate and buffer incompatible adjacent land uses and promote economically efficient and productive uses for lands which may be marginal for development. Greenways can also contribute to local tourism and to the preservation of scenic, cultural, and historic assets in the state.

The establishment of Connecticut Greenways is an outgrowth of the Connecticut General Assembly's passage Public Act 95-335 in 1995, which institutionalized Connecticut's greenways program. A highlight of this legislation was the establishment of the Connecticut Greenways Council. The Council, appointed by the Governor and leaders of the General Assembly, developed criteria for the designation of greenways, and assist and advise in the coordination of various state, local and private stakeholders in the planning and implementing a system of greenways.

The State of Connecticut Greenways Council has identified 51 Connecticut Greenways since 2001, three of which include portions of Willington.

Willimantic River Greenway (2003) The greenway includes natural resource protection on both sides of the Willimantic River to protect habitat, water quality, and scenic views. In addition, recreational opportunities will be developed both along the river for hikers and bikers and on the water for canoes and kayaks. The towns of Columbia, Coventry, Ellington, Lebanon, Mansfield, Stafford, Tolland, Willington, and Windham are participating in the effort.

Fenton River in Ashford, Mansfield, and Willington (2006) The Fenton River is a watercourse of high water quality and fish habitat, and hosts a population of wild native trout. It is one of six rivers in northeastern Connecticut that is designated by the Connecticut DEP as a Wild Trout Management Area. This river, its tributaries, and associated riparian corridor provide fishing, paddling, hiking, wildlife habitat, trapping, hunting, history, and beauty to are residents and visitors. It further supplies a portion of the drinking water for the City of Willimantic, the University of Connecticut, and local wells in the Towns of Willington and Mansfield.

Blue Blazed Trail System (2001) Working with public and private landowners, the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association has put together over 700 miles of hiking trails over the past 70 years. Today, however, many of these trails are endangered by development. The CFPA is striving to assure that new connections can be found when trail sections are interrupted.

Benefits of Trails and Greenways

Trails and greenways positively impact individuals and improve communities by providing not only recreation and transportation opportunities, but also by influencing economic and community development. Some of the many trails and greenways benefits include:

- making communities better places to live by preserving and creating open spaces;
- encouraging physical fitness and healthy lifestyles;
- creating new opportunities for outdoor recreation and non-motorized transportation;
- strengthening local economies;
- protecting the environment; and
- preserving culturally and historically valuable areas.

Greenway Criteria

In order to be considered for official greenway designation, a project must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. The corridor connects existing open space, trail segments, historical/cultural assets; provides alternative transportation opportunity; may be of varying lengths, but connects neighborhoods to schools, town centers, parks and recreation areas, transportation centers, or open spaces.
2. If the greenway is a municipal project, it must be included in local plan of Conservation and Development (or in the next revision thereof), and must be endorsed by the local government through a municipal resolution or compact;
3. If the greenway is a regional project, it must be included in plans of relevant Regional Planning Agency, or Council of Governments, with endorsements by the affected municipalities; or, an inter-municipal compact may be developed between towns;
4. If the greenway is a non-governmental project, it must be sponsored by organization with proven record of land use protection/recreational use, or with proven resources needed for project success; licensing, easements, or other agreements for use of state, municipal, or private land must be on file; it must be endorsed by the local government through a municipal resolution or compact;
5. The segment submitted for designation may be a key link in an emerging greenway, either for conservation or recreation purposes;
6. Once designated, such greenway shall be reflected in the State Plan of Conservation and Development as revised by the Office of Policy and Management and in any state-wide greenway plan developed by the Department of Environmental Protection.
7. Greenway designation may be revoked for non-performance or for development of the property for uses other than those defined for greenways in state statute.

For more information about Connecticut's Greenways contact the Department of Environmental Protection (www.ct.gov/dep/greenways).