



Connecticut's Countryside Summit

Agenda

Monday, January 30, 2023

7:00 P.M. - 8:30 P.M.

Patriots Park Lodge (172 Lake Street AKA Senior Center, Coventry)

Welcome!

1. Introductions
2. Connecticut's Countryside Presentation
3. Break-out groups
4. 10-minute break
5. Discuss findings from the groups
6. Call for volunteers to assist with committees and tasks

Adjournment



Connecticut's Countryside will seek to accomplish the following tasks:

Agriculture	Culture & Entertainment	Higher Education
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connect farmers to affordable land 2. Coordinate equipment sharing program 3. Create regional agriculture committee 4. Develop key partnerships 5. Connect farmers to crucial information and sources 6. Enact pro-agriculture regulations 7. Help get farmers connected to local farmer's markets 8. Display historic farm equipment throughout the region 9. Help coordinate and expand CSA programs 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordinate new regional events (Earth Day 2023) 2. Create an inventory of regional art and culture assets 3. Create regional arts committee 4. Connect artists to Cultural Coalition 5. Connect artists to other arts entities and potential funding sources 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connect students with internship opportunities in the region 2. Meet with department heads to help coordinate information sharing 3. Connect with tech/innovation at universities to help build start-ups in region 4. Hold annual meetings with the President's Office of both UConn and ECSU 5. Highlight the region to graduating students to convince them to stay and visit while they are at school



Connecticut’s Countryside will seek to accomplish the following tasks:

Outdoor Recreation	Small Business and Entrepreneurship	Visibility
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach out to outdoor recreation enthusiasts to visit and post/blog/video on the region 2. Create regional open space plan 3. Encourage regional cooperation between conservation commissions and recreation departments 4. Incorporate trails on online websites 5. Invest in small scale infrastructure 6. Coordinate outdoor recreational events (Earth Day 2023) 7. Create innovative web-based asset, resource inventory map 8. Connect with Eastern Highlands Health District – healthy communities initiative 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage cross marketing of businesses 2. Hold education workshops for small businesses 3. Create a business recruitment brochure/pamphlet 4. Hold meetings with growing businesses to learn of their needs 5. Coordinate a business mentorship program 6. Perform business visitation 7. Survey businesses to identify needs 8. Create business recognition program - appreciation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach out to travel bloggers who post about their experience 2. Set up booth at local events 3. Implement new directional and gateway signage 4. Create brochures, maps, and travel guides of the region 5. Create social media pages 6. Create a new website for the region 7. Create a smart phone app for the region



Completed/In Process Tasks

1. 4-Town Action Plan for Economic Vitality Created
 - a. In 2020, a regional economic plan was created to help guide the towns of Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, and Tolland on regional cooperation on economic development.
2. Steering Committee
 - a. An implementation steering committee has been formed and has met monthly for the past three years. Meetings are held every month on the third Wednesday at 2:00 P.M. via Zoom.
3. Building New Partnerships: Cultural Coalition, Coventry Arts Guild, UConn, Etc.
 - a. Building partnerships is vital for the initiative to grow and expand what Connecticut's Countryside can offer to the region. Several successful partnerships have been formed, including with the Tolland County Chamber of Commerce, University of Connecticut, Last Green Valley, and the regional tourism boards.
4. Subcommittees formed
 - a. Regional subcommittees were formed to help implement different aspects of the plan. These different subcommittees covered topics from a regional calendar to open space mapping.
5. CT Trail Finder
 - a. The region has numerous trails throughout the different towns. Uploading trail information to outdoor websites will highlight the region to outdoor enthusiasts to visit. Right now, trail information has been sent to UConn, which administers CT Trail Finder (Online Website).
6. Municipal Website Pages: uploading information about Connecticut's Countryside
 - a. Information on Connecticut's Countryside has been uploaded to all town websites. This was done to raise awareness of Connecticut's Countryside and to provide the public information about the initiative.
7. Hired Marketing firm: DKA
 - a. DKA Consultants was hired to create a regional brand for the 4-Towns, marketing plan, and regional brochure.



8. Hired UConn MPA Intern

- a. Every year UConn runs internships for their School of Public Policy to give students interested in government service experience. To help aid in the implementation of the 4-Town Action Plan for Economic Vitality, an MPA intern was brought on in August and will work to May 2023.

9. New Logo: Connecticut's Countryside

- a. As a result of the survey that was sent out to the general public, Connecticut's Countryside was selected to be the regional brand. This brand highlights the rural character of the region, while also mentioning that the 4-Towns are more than just farmland.

10. New Events: Summit, planning Earth Day 2023

- a. In early Fall 2022, the Connecticut's Countryside Steering Committee decided to hold a Summit in January 2023. This event seeks to give an update on what has been going on and to get members of the public involved. Another event will be held on Earth Day 2023 to raise awareness of the outdoors.

11. Partnered with Nichols College to build a website

- a. Nichols College has agreed to build a regional website through their web development class in the Spring 2023 semester. This is a one credit class that will give students hands on experience in website development and be free of charge for the 4-Towns.
- b. Nichols College prepared an analysis on bloggers/influencers who can be contacted to assist in highlighting various regional assets.

12. New Regional Brochure:

- a. DKA is working on a regional brochure for Connecticut's Countryside. This brochure will promote the region to outside visitors and highlight the region's assets.



Summit Notes

1. Introductions

- Connecticut's Countryside staff took two minutes to give introductions. Staff are the following: Cynthia Van Zelm (Mansfield Downtown Partnership Director), David Corcoran (Tolland Planning & Zoning Director), Eric Trott (Coventry Land Use Director), Patrice Carson (Bolton Director of Community Development), and Josh Hull (UConn Masters of Public Administration Intern).

2. Connecticut's Countryside

- Connecticut's Countryside staff provided a 15 minute presentation on the different themes of the 4-Town Regional Action Plan for Economic Vitality.
- Presentation is attached in separate file

3. Breakout Groups

- Staff asked all attendees to sit at the six different breakout tables. The six tables covered a different theme of the 4-Town Plan. Each table had one staff member lead in discussion, one table was staffed by Coventry Wetlands Agent Mindy Gosselin and Coventry Zoning Enforcement Officer Manuel Medina. Each table had three questions relating to the topic for the attendees to respond to, ten minute per question.
- During the 30 minute session, staff members recorded attendees' responses on white poster paper. Results from each group are listed under Breakout Group Results.

4. Held a Short Break

- Cookies and water were provided for attendees.

5. Held Discussion of Results from Groups

- After the short break, staff returned to the front of the room and presented the results of each group's findings.
- These results will be added to the task list of Connecticut's Countryside.

6. Call for Volunteers to Serve on Committees

- Connecticut's Countryside staff asked for volunteers to serve on regional committees to help implement the tasks mentioned tonight. \
- Staff acknowledged that many who attended are already serving on several municipal boards and commissions. Hope is that many will find the time to serve.

7. Any Questions and Final Comments



- There were several questions that people had at the end.
 - One question that was raised was concerning the logo and trying to identify the 4-Towns in Connecticut's Countryside. Attendee was concerned that visitors would not be able to identify where the towns are.
 - Staff responded that they will look into ways to display the 4-Towns to help solve this issue.
 - Another question was concerning the time frame of creating a 501©-3 organization. Attendee mentioned that the state is trying to get funds to the eastern half of the state.
 - Staff responded that Connecticut's Countryside is not currently ready for a stand-alone organization. Goal is to have one created in the next three years.
 - A question was raised concerning dedicated staff that would eventually work solely for Connecticut's Countryside.
 - Staff responded that eventually Connecticut's Countryside will need dedicated staff that will work solely for the organization. However, that is a long ways away.

8. The event was recorded and can be watched on any of the town websites.



Break Out Group Results

Agriculture

Recommendations

1. Implement Right to Farm Ordinance – Coventry and Mansfield have already done this
2. Local Education Program – educate the public about where their food comes from and farming benefits
3. Include Agriculture Section in local Planning and Conservation Development Plans
4. Coordinate with Local Farmer’s Markets
5. Broaden Membership on Existing Committee to include members of the Agriculture Community
6. Collaborate with the towns on Agriculture Programs
7. Farm to Table Events

Things to Look At

1. Look into the towns’ regulations – see areas for improvement
2. Look at Agri-tourism more – need to be a unique choice per farm. Each farm would be different and bring something new to the table.

Business & Entrepreneurship

Recommendations

1. Business visits – ongoing visits by Connecticut’s Countryside
2. Business Website List – helps highlight businesses on website
3. Conduct Business Surveys – use to identify business needs
4. Promote Cross Marketing between Businesses
5. Create Business Contact List
6. Business Mentorship Program
7. Share Links to Resources – information sharing
8. Technical Support for Local Business – potential work with local high schools to get students involved

Areas to Look At



1. Housing Needs – group pointed to the cost of housing, which can hinder the economy
2. Need to look more into whether we have virtual businesses in the region

Culture & Entertainment

Recommendations

1. Survey to find out about local art activities
2. Share information with UConn and ECSU
3. Use Museums for Art Shows
4. Include Restaurants on Culture Trail
5. Connect with the State and discuss Connecticut's Countryside
6. Connect Artists to Funding Opportunities
7. Put Regional Calendar in Local municipality reports
8. Art Rental Space – Businesses can rent art and display art at locations
9. History Walks
10. Include Museums on Regional Website – potential search by time period museum covers
11. Calendar should Avoid Conflicts between Towns
12. Public Art Trail

Areas to Look At

1. Get local schools involved – there are plenty of plays, art shows, and more at the local k-12 schools
2. Look into the Need for Art Space – not enough art galleries and display options in the region
3. Look into bringing Different Cultures into the region
4. Look into Regional Art Rhemes – example is Autumn in the Country

Higher Education

Recommendations

1. Connect with UConn's Daily Digest – Daily Digest is local news and events that are sent to all UConn students
2. Connect Outdoor Clubs - Plenty of outdoor assets in the region
3. Establish Presence at Career Fairs at Storrs – a regional booth that has information on local jobs for students will help local businesses and students



4. Connect with Alumni Association and local Alumni in the region
5. Provide certification information for local jobs
6. Establish a Presence on Campus – Fliers, have a person at UConn, etc.

Areas to Look At

1. Transportation – need to address student transportation issues, UConn bus services are limited to Mansfield and Willimantic.
2. Bringing on ECSU – they have not been involved yet

Outdoor Recreation

Recommendations

1. Coordinate Conservation Efforts in Planning and Conservation Development Plans
2. Coordinate local recreation leagues – kid sports, etc.
3. Help local Summer Camps
4. Connecticut's Countryside kayak/watersport fleet
5. Coordinate on Water Activities
6. Hold Paddle events
7. Create Trail passports – partner with local businesses
8. Partner with DEEP on kid's programs
9. Create Connecticut's Countryside Conservation Commission

Things to Look At

1. Multi-town outdoor grants
2. Summer Concerts
3. Land Conservation

Visibility & Marketing

Recommendations

1. Regional Website
2. Smart Phone App
3. Have Regional Brochures & Booths – create QR code
4. Create Regional Signage – major roads, trails, destinations



5. Create Connecticut's Countryside Merchandise
6. Partner with Visit CT
7. Have a presence at UConn and Eastern Events – Parent's Weekend

Things to look At

1. Potential YouTube Channel – have videos of interviews, social media posts
2. Ads for the Region – whether it is YouTube, social media, etc.