Bolton • Coventry • Mansfield • Tolland

A Homegrown Approach to Strengthening the Region

Action Plan for Economic Vitality

Prepared for the Towns of Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, and Tolland
Prepared by AdvanceCT
June 2020

Table of Contents

Executive Summary **3**
Background **4**
Project Overview 5
Methodology 6
What We Learned 8
Impact of COVID-19 10
Recommendations **11**
Recommendations Overview 12
Outdoor Recreation 13
Agriculture 21
Culture and Entertainment 28
Small Business and Entrepreneurs 34
The Role of Higher Education Institutions 42
Visibility and Marketing 49
Additional Considerations 56
Implementation **59**
Managing Plan Implementation 60
Funding Plan Implementation 61
Conclusion 65
Appendices **66**
Appendix A: Implementation Matrix 67
Appendix B: Document Review Findings 68
Appendix C: Focus Group Results 77
Appendix D: List of Interviewees 94
Appendix E: Customer Satisfaction Survey 95
Appendix F: UConn and ECSU Contact Lists for Key Department Heads 96
Appendix G: Marketing Campaign Brainstorm Results 98

Executive Summary

AdvanceCT partnered with the Towns of Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, and Tolland to create the following regional economic vitality action plan. Through an extensive process of document and data review, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews, AdvanceCT developed a robust library of input to inform the plan. The recommendations that follow reflect the vision of those residents and businesses located in the region that were engaged as part of this process, and which we hope represents a broader set of ideas in the region as a whole. This plan explores new opportunities that align with that vision, and which are grounded in AdvanceCT staff's experience with and understanding of broader economic development trends statewide and nationally.

This plan is designed to better develop and promote key industry areas and to grow strategic partnerships, with the end goal of retention, expansion, and attraction of businesses to and within the region. As these businesses become more successful, the region will see job growth, increased investment, and increased tax revenue at the local level. Following are key focuses of this plan:

- **Outdoor recreation** – Outdoor recreation can drive economic growth, rather than simply act as an amenity for residents, through better identification and marketing of assets and growth of complementary businesses.
- **Agriculture and agri-tourism** – Agriculture is a valued legacy industry within the region, and there is opportunity for its growth through greater promotion of agri-tourism and by developing strategic partnerships to build the customer base for locally-made products.
- **Culture and entertainment** – The region has many unique cultural opportunities that can draw in visitors statewide and beyond, and creating strong connections between these opportunities and local businesses is critical in repurposing them as an economic driver.
- **Entrepreneurs and small businesses** – At a broader level, the region can better support its entrepreneurs and small businesses by connecting them to resources and potential clients in ways that may not have yet been considered.
- **Visibility and marketing** – The region should better promote its assets, both digitally and physically, to encourage visitor attraction and business recruitment.
- **Partnering with regional higher education institutions** – The presence of UConn and ECSU in and near the region are critical opportunities for growth of businesses, talent, residents, and visitors, and connections at those universities must continue to be developed in order to more effectively capitalize on those opportunities.
- **Plan administration** – The region needs an entity to drive implementation of this plan, which may look like a steering committee at the outset but could evolve into a 501c(3) further into the future.

Through a strong and unified effort to implement the recommendations included in this plan, the region will see economic growth that complements its character. AdvanceCT looks forward to providing ongoing guidance to the region as the next phase of this project begins.

Background

Project Overview

AdvanceCT was selected by the Towns of Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, and Tolland in the summer of 2019 to assist in the creation of an action plan for a regional economic vitality effort. The initial Request for Proposals (RFP) called for the following components for the plan:

- Identification of funding opportunities to secure grants and facilitate the action plan;
- Identification of pro-bono and/or cross-promotional marketing support;
- Identification of methods to leverage growth and the presence of the University of Connecticut;
- Identification of methods to form additional strategic partnerships with key community stakeholders;
- Focus on outdoor recreation, tourism, agri-tourism, and cultural arts support;
- Focus on themes not previously identified by the towns;
- Creation of a highly-visible regional identity; and
- Possible implementation of action items.

Through an extensive process of gathering information to inform the plan, AdvanceCT created a series of recommendations covering all these areas. Beyond the requirements specified in the RFP, AdvanceCT sought the following goals for the region through this work:

- Recommendations that are implementable and customized to the region;
- Strategic direction for economic vitality efforts within the four-town region – elected and appointed officials, community boards and commissions, and staff all working toward the same economic vitality goals;
- New business attraction and commercial grand list growth that matches the character of the region;
- Engagement and support of existing businesses – current property owners that are investing in their properties and sharing in a vision for the region;
- Community pride and engagement of residents; and
- Enhanced business-friendly reputation.

The plan that follows is a result of community-focused, collaborative effort between the four towns and AdvanceCT. Each recommendation is a piece of a larger puzzle to promote economic vitality and job growth in the region. Economic vitality goes beyond a conventional definition of economic development, which focuses mostly on the growth of the commercial sector. Instead, it emphasizes a more holistic approach to improving a community (or region) through considerations of quality of life, community interactions and partnerships, and social and economic composition. These aspects of economic vitality support development-focused drivers of job growth, business recruitment and expansion, and commercial investment by developing communities that are supportive of their local businesses and want to see their success and growth. This plan reflects the interconnected nature of economic and social prosperity within the region.

Methodology

Regional economic vitality efforts are gaining traction in Connecticut, with more economic development organizations in Connecticut demonstrating a well-informed strategy based on their region's existing strengths and opportunities for additional growth. These joint efforts allow the communities involved to pool resources, creating opportunities for larger-scale impact. For the Bolton-Coventry-Mansfield-Tolland regional initiative, determining the area's economic strengths and opportunities for growth was a priority to guide the creation of the action plan.
The first step in the creation of the plan was a review of all reports and studies relevant to economic vitality from each individual community. These included:

- Plans of Conservation and Development for each community;
- Municipal marketing studies and documentation;
- Documents highlighting key community assets;
- Zoning regulations for each community;
- Economic Development Commission information for each community;
- Coventry Cultural Arts Strategic Plan;
- Coventry Village Plan of Preservation and Development;
- Bolton/Coventry Gateway Node Development Plan;
- Economic development webpages for each community;
- Downtown Storrs website;
- Capitol Region Council of Governments Plan of Conservation and Development and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy;
- Eastern Gateway Study; and
- Route 6 Regional Economic Development Council information.

Simultaneously, focus groups were held with each individual community to determine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to inform the plan development. Key municipal leaders were engaged to provide this feedback, which, combined with the information gleaned from the document review, laid the foundation for sectors with growth potential and themes to pursue.

Once the key themes were determined, a larger focus group incorporating representatives from all four communities was held to collect more insight on these specific areas. The themes explored were:

- Agriculture;
- Entertainment and culture;
- Small businesses and entrepreneurship;
- Hiking, biking, open space, and natural resources;
- Marketing;
- UConn; and

- Water-based recreation.

At this meeting, attendees provided ideas for activities within these themes. The ideas collected were both aspirational and practical and provided invaluable detail from individuals living and working in the region as to what unique solutions would be impactful (see Appendix C).

Simultaneously, one-on-one meetings were held with key business owners and other relevant stakeholders through the region (see Appendix D). This allowed additional feedback, based largely on the needs of the business community, to ensure a plan informed by a wide range of groups and broadly supported by the community.

AdvanceCT also coordinated a small group meeting focused on the development of ideas for a regional marketing campaign. Staff and elected officials from each municipality attended the meeting and provided feedback on descriptive elements for the region that could be incorporated into logos, taglines, and other marketing materials. This meeting informed ideas for collateral that could be utilized as part of a campaign moving forward.

All this data collection was conducted over the first six months of this project. AdvanceCT then utilized knowledge and research from working in municipal and regional economic development to develop recommendations designed to strategically build upon the region's greatest assets and opportunities.

The creation of the final version of this plan required numerous iterations and ongoing review with municipal staff and elected officials. It was written and refined over the course of five months, with a final month for revisions and presentations to local decisionmakers.

What We Learned

Through the information gathering component of this report, AdvanceCT learned of assets, challenges, and opportunities within the region that informed these recommendations. Following are key themes discovered through this process and incorporated into the recommendations. All may not apply to every individual community, though they were very common overall.

Assets	Challenges	Opportunities
Engaged residents and businesses	Some resident concern about new commercial development	Capture of disposable income of those travelling to UConn or large companies
Trails and other outdoor recreation opportunities	Landowners reluctant to sell their properties	Better promotion of assets
Historical opportunities	Small commercial bases	Improved and expanded infrastructure (utilities, high-speed internet, etc.)
Small-town charm	Difficult balance between land conservation and development	Better trail connectivity
Community events	Challenging zoning regulations	More mixed-use and/or multi-family development

AdvanceCT also evaluated data from several sources to develop the most complete picture of the region. Following are some highlights from this research, with data from the Connecticut Data Collaborative's Town Profiles[1].

[1] Connecticut Town Profiles (Connecticut Data Collaborative, 2019). URL: https://profiles.ctdata.org/.

	Bolton	Coventry	Mansfield	Tolland	Four-town region overall
Population	5,637	12,249	27,141	15,037	60,064 (region total)
Median age	47	44	21	42	N/A
Median household income	$101,667	$88,562	$58,819	$112,740	$90,447
Percentage population with bachelor's degree or higher	49%	40%	54%	45%	47%
Number of employers	129	202	415	358	1,104 (region total)
Percentage population self-employed	14.5%	8.6%	5.6%	7.5%	9.1%
Unemployment rate	2.8%	3.4%	3.8%	3.0%	3.3%
Top industries by employment	• Manufacturing • Government • Professional, scientific, and technical	• Government • Retail trade • Accommodation and food services	• Government • Accommodation and food services • Health care and social assistance	• Government • Health care and social assistance • Manufacturing	• Government • Health care and social assistance • Accommodation and food services
Percentage housing single-unit	90.5%	91.3%	50.9%	93.8%	81.6%
Origin of commuters to town	• Bolton • Manchester • Vernon	• Coventry • Manchester • Windham	• Mansfield • Windham • Coventry	• Tolland • Vernon • Manchester	N/A
Destination of commuters from town	• Manchester • Hartford • East Hartford	• Hartford • Manchester • Coventry	• Mansfield • Windham • Hartford	• Hartford • Tolland • Manchester	N/A

This information, combined with more nuanced feedback obtained through one-on-one meetings, ongoing communication with regional leaders, and document review, allowed AdvanceCT to develop a strong understanding of the region's current social and economic conditions as well as possibilities for the future.

Impact of COVID-19

In early 2020, during the final stages of writing this report, the world was fundamentally impacted by the novel coronavirus pandemic or COVID-19. Thousands in the US and around the world lost their lives to the disease, and global economies were shut down for months. This report, written mostly pre-COVID, reflects the state of the world at that time, and much has changed since then. AdvanceCT recognizes that there are different critical priorities during this period and in the months and years following it, with respect to both public health and the economy.

With respect to local economies, there has never been a more critical time for municipal staff, elected officials, and volunteers to be engaging in ongoing discussions with the business community. Understanding business needs and challenges during this time is critical to be able to better serve them, and there are many actions that can be taken at the local level to help keep them afloat. Putting in place programs like "Shop Local-Win Local" or regulatory changes like facilitated and expanded outdoor dining opportunities are just a couple examples of how communities can best support their businesses at the ground level. Communities should create Long-Term Recovery Committees to formalize this support at the local level.

Additionally, municipal staff should maintain ongoing contact with regulatory bodies creating many of the policies and guidelines related to reopening the economy like the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, the Connecticut Department of Labor, and state and federal legislative representatives. This communication is critical to being able to advise these groups on the experience of the businesses on the ground and in receiving the most accurate and up-to-date information to share with the businesses.

One opportunity to arise from this pandemic for the region is the increased prevalence of remote work. The desirable quality of life within the four towns may be attractive to individuals who are no longer tied to a physical location because of work. There may be new residents coming to the region for the quality of life and small-town charm or existing residents looking to break up the monotony of working in a home office every day. This phenomenon potentially increases necessity and demand in areas like coworking spaces, outdoor recreation, and broadband. As the longer-term trends begin to reveal themselves through the duration of 2020 and into 2021, the region should engage in discussions on how to best capitalize on these changes. AdvanceCT anticipates that the region is well-positioned to learn from the coronavirus pandemic.

Recommendations

Recommendations Overview

The following recommendations are a result of an extended period of collecting information on the assets, challenges, and opportunities of the region. With a focus on promoting economic vitality, they include ideas that encourage growth in the number of businesses, visitors, residents, and employees within the four towns. By developing the economic sectors that are already supported by residents, prospective and expanding companies will experience a more business-friendly environment, encouraging them to make further investments. As these businesses grow, engagement with and promotion of key sectors will lead to new jobs and increases in local grand lists.

For purposes of clarity within these recommendations, “the implementer” refers to the entity overseeing implementation of this plan (see Managing Plan Implementation section).

Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation is a key economic opportunity within the region. With the shared values of preserving open space and natural resources and investing in outdoor amenities like trails and water sources, growing this industry to attract visitors and businesses is consistent with the character of the area and is a form of growth that the communities would likely support. From an economic perspective, for example, visitors from out-of-state who stay overnight and utilize multi-use trails spend nearly double ($332) what in-state day-trip users do[2]. Thus, promoting longer stays for visitors from around the northeast is a critical opportunity. Outdoor recreation is now further poised for growth because of COVID-19, as people are seeking recreational opportunities outdoors instead of in confined spaces with ventilation concerns.

The recommendations that follow represent ways to transform a recreational opportunity for the region's residents into an economic driver, attracting more visitors and related businesses.

Inventory Assets

In order to successfully promote the outdoor recreation opportunities in the region, each town should inventory its assets. Assets include hiking and biking trails, water resources (i.e. lakes, ponds, rivers), and public open space (i.e. forests, parks, community gardens). Municipal Plans of Conservation and Development often contain information on many of these amenities, but the Towns should engage with other partners like land trusts, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Last Green Valley, and local Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions to work toward a complete inventory. The Towns should start with their top attractions and build the inventory over time.

Once a list of assets is created for each town, a regional map showcasing their locations (including parking and access) should be created. The map should also include the locations of complementary businesses such as food service, sporting goods stores, watercraft rentals, and other recreational facilities (i.e. Adventure Park at Storrs and Matt's Paintball). As some of the Towns have completed an inventory of some key assets through the Sustainable CT certification process, staff might consider incorporating this list. Drawing the users of these amenities to local businesses is a critical opportunity for economic growth. The map should be posted on each town's website and on the recommended regional website (see Visibility and Marketing section). It should also be distributed in print form among local businesses, public institutions, and other relevant locations.

The Town of Manchester has included layers onto its online GIS mapping tool that show public open space and trails. Following this example, the implementer can use existing tools to map out these assets on a public-facing platform. Incorporating this onto a GIS platform is a good first step while more user-friendly, marketing-oriented maps and guides are created.

[2] Brown, Laura. Multi-Use Trails and Greenways as Economic Development Engines (International Economic Development Council, 2020).

Moving forward, the implementer may consider creating a smart phone app (see Visibility and Marketing section) that could include a trails and/or water resource component that houses the map and connects trail and water resource users to each other. This is an opportunity to promote discussion around the region's outdoor recreation opportunities and to create meet-up groups for those with shared interests.

The information gathered through ongoing engagement with outdoor recreation enthusiasts can also guide the implementer in creating an open space plan and, accordingly, determining which projects will be most impactful in connecting trails, water resources, sidewalks, businesses, and town centers when exploring funding opportunities. The implementer should create a list of priority projects to ensure that residents and visitors can easily reach local businesses from these outdoor amenities, capturing that discretionary spending.

The implementer should post signs at well-utilized outdoor recreation locations throughout the region that instruct visitors to take a short online survey about their experience using these amenities. This is a way to reach the most people while taking into account limited staff and volunteer resources available to collect this information in-person. The region might also consider working with the Connecticut Trail Census to determine whether there are opportunities to partner on the survey already managed by this group. There are additional recommendations for engaging smaller groups of outdoor recreation enthusiasts below, and those should also be utilized to collect information from these groups while convening individuals with shared interests.

Invest in Infrastructure

Making the region's outdoor amenities highly visible and easy to access and use is an important component of creating a recreation "destination" with repeat visitors and thriving complementary businesses. Visitors' spending patterns at businesses are most directly affected by the quality of multi-use trails and the amenities to support these users, including access to commercial areas via transit or pedestrian connectivity[3]. Thus, investing in infrastructure to create this visitor-friendly environment should be a top priority.

…visitors' spending patterns at businesses are most directly affected by the quality of multi-use trails and the amenities to support these users…

Smaller investments like purchases of benches, trash cans, trail markers, and signage in and around these locations are a great way to make an impact. Businesses are often interested in sponsoring higher-visibility items like wayfinding signs and benches, so each town should create a list of businesses to seed sponsorships from, particularly complementary businesses like restaurants, sporting goods stores, and watercraft rentals. Note that there may be restrictions on business advertising on some state- or federally-funded amenities.

Visibility and ease of use is also a critical component of encouraging returning visitors. Wayfinding signage should be installed to direct them from town center locations and other highly trafficked roads to the most utilized amenities. Local public works departments and, potentially, the State Department of Transportation

[3] Brown, Laura. Multi-Use Trails and Greenways as Economic Development Engines (International Economic Development Council, 2020).

should be engaged for support with signage installation. Trailhead markers and parking areas should also be clearly marked to ensure a seamless and enjoyable experience for visitors.

As mentioned in the "Inventory Assets" sub-section above, the process of inventorying and mapping the outdoor assets of the region and engaging the users of these amenities can help the implementer determine the most impactful projects in terms of promoting connectivity between them. That means connecting trails, water sources, and other outdoor amenities to town centers and key businesses within the region. This should be done by extending trails and sidewalks and, further into the future, creating public transportation opportunities to promote this connectivity. These types of projects are often funded through grants, and specific opportunities will be discussed further in this report (see Funding Plan Implementation section).

Grow and Attract Complementary Businesses

Business expansion and attraction can be challenging and often depend on market factors like population density, traffic counts, and demographics. However, with a growing number of visitors to the region as a result of exciting and highly-visible outdoor recreation opportunities, complementary businesses will benefit. While, on their own, some of the business types described below may struggle, creating an outdoor recreation "destination" with a critical mass of similar businesses will be key to their success and to the broader placemaking effort for the region. Expansion of businesses already existing in the region as well as attraction of new businesses tied to outdoor recreation represent a viable opportunity for economic growth and job creation as a result of promotion of these amenities.

"Being able to bike to shops and restaurants really appeals to me." – Tolland business owner

Businesses and residents interviewed for this project shared that the following types of complementary businesses are desirable and have potential for growth within the region:

- Bike sales and repair shops
- Watercraft sales and/or rental shops
- Sporting goods shops
- Cross country ski shops
- Bait and tackle shops
- Ice cream shops
- Other recreation facilities (youth summer camps, sports complexes, etc.)
- Shops containing several of the "offerings" described above (general "outdoor recreation supply" store)

Further, creating a recreation "destination" encourages additional tourism industry-related businesses to take interest in the region. These businesses include:

- Lodging

- Restaurants
- Tour companies
- Transportation companies

In New England, Stowe, Vermont is an example of a small, mostly rural community that has built a successful commercial base off of its outdoor recreation amenities. While AdvanceCT recognizes that there are some key differences between Stowe and the region, it should be used as a model for the type of economic growth that is well-suited to the area. Stowe offers a large mountain popular for skiing in the colder months and hiking, biking, kayaking, and other opportunities in the warmer months. The community contains many niche shops like outdoor supplies, clothing, souvenirs and locally-made goods, etc. because it has invented itself as a destination. The region could provide a similar experience for visitors and encourage a successful environment for small-scale, independent retail.

To achieve the same type of destination-based experience, business recruitment work needs to be undertaken. The implementer can facilitate the business expansion and recruitment process by determining common and allowable uses for key outdoor amenities. For example, the implementer should well understand the types of watercrafts and other activities associated with different bodies of water as well as the ways that different trails and trail systems are used (i.e. hiking, biking, ATVs). Additionally, through engagement with users of these amenities, the implementer may determine opportunities that are not as common but could be promoted more to engage new users with other interests (i.e. ice fishing, ice skating, birding). This knowledge will allow the towns to determine the most suitable locations near those assets for certain types of businesses. Additionally, the towns should determine key commercial real estate opportunities for the location or expansion of these businesses, particularly as they are able to create more defined opportunities for connectivity between outdoor amenities and commercial centers.

Also, as part of this effort, the implementer should approach successful businesses from outside the area that would make a good fit to determine whether they have any interest in expanding in the region. Even if not immediately interested, the implementer should develop a list of prospects and engage them periodically to learn about any future plans. This list of prospects could be developed through a number of angles, including engaging outdoor recreation enthusiasts about their favorite related businesses in the state or contacting relevant statewide interest groups and professional associations related to the outdoor recreation industry (Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association, Connecticut Forest and Park Association, Connecticut Fly Fisherman's Association, New England Mountain Bike Association, etc.). Not only are the association members helpful in providing feedback on successful businesses throughout the state, but some have specific business memberships that represent potential "leads" for the region's business recruitment efforts.

For businesses that have near-term interest, the implementer's "pitch" should highlight the outdoor recreation amenities and how they might benefit as a result, demographics of residents and visitors, currently successful complementary businesses in the region, and real estate opportunities within the four towns that fit best with the business use.

More generally, streamlined and predictable local permitting processes and continuous engagement between prospective and expanding businesses and a single municipal point of contact representing economic development is key to successful business expansion and attraction. See the Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs section for more information on this.

Engage Community

While the discussion has largely been around attracting visitors to the region's outdoor assets, resident and workers within the region also play a significant role in its economic growth. Users of these assets are drawn into the community where they spend their disposable income at local businesses. By creating more engagement around these opportunities, this economic growth can occur.

1Bolton Lake (source: https://www.ctfishfinder.com/bolton-lakes-14-location.html)

The implementer may consider involving local partners to create programming around the many outdoor amenities in the area. Specifically, creating guided hikes or "paddles" along trails or water sources for specific interests like history, wildlife, astronomy, or arts and culture could be a way to draw in visitors and residents alike for unique educational and cultural opportunities while enjoying the outdoors. The implementer should leverage partnerships with subject matter experts like representatives from local historical societies, university faculty, and the Last Green Valley to undertake these activities. While much of this work is being done by individual towns, there should be increased emphasis on leveraging these partnerships to enhance this regional effort.

Additionally, relevant local entities overseeing the use of open space, trails, natural resources, etc. (i.e. Parks and Recreation departments and Conservation Commissions) should work together to coordinate hiking, biking, paddling, birding, etc. meet-up groups and disseminate that information through their typical advertising channels as well as the smart phone apps Meetup and Nextdoor, which are social networking platforms designed specifically for local communities and neighborhoods. Eventually, they should share that information through the region's tourism-focused smart phone app (see Visibility and Marketing section). These types of groups are attractive to residents in particular because of their recurring nature and the opportunity to connect and develop relationships with community members who share similar interests.

The Parks and Recreation departments should also jointly coordinate educational workshops related to these outdoor amenities as a means of encouraging their proper and meaningful use and bringing the region's residents together. The departments can bring in experts on topics like safe bike path/trail/water source usage, trail maintenance, environmental stewardship, and local flora and fauna.

One statistic that should be widely promoted to engage the community around expansion of trails, in particular, is that homes near these trails, on average, have 5-10% higher property values than those not located near

trails.[4] Beyond offering community amenities, trails have a direct economic impact for homeowners, which is yet another reason to draw resident support for investment in these types of projects.

Continuous engagement of the community around the region's outdoor recreation assets can be done in many ways and will likely evolve as this plan is implemented. No matter the forum, this engagement is critical to promoting the growth of this opportunity from those that know the area best.

Partner Strategically

Identifying regional partners for collaboration on programming, technology, maintenance, marketing, and other aspects of creating an outdoor recreation-focused industry cluster in the region is essential to maximizing the impact of these recommendations. With limited staffing capacity in the four towns, it will be critical to leverage the ability and expertise of partner organizations to support this effort.

For example, organizations like land trusts, the Last Green Valley, UConn's College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources, the Nathan Hale Homestead, and others could provide support with informative programming. Chambers of commerce like the Windham Regional Chamber and the Tolland County Chamber can provide support in marketing events. AdvanceCT, the Department of Economic and Community Development, and the MetroHartford Alliance can provide support with business engagement and attraction.

Further, partnerships can also mean cost savings. The implementer should create a joint volunteer forestry and trail management team. By pooling these volunteer resources, the trails and open space in most need of maintenance can be focused on first. The towns might even consider investing in and sharing equipment to support these maintenance practices (or encourage the volunteer to bring their own) and other outdoor recreation assets (equipment related to maintaining water quality, landscaping equipment for public open space, etc.).

Developing these connections within the community and the region also supports community building, as described above. As community members are engaged to support this effort through their subject matter expertise, they will undoubtedly take interest in participating more generally in maintaining and enjoying all the outdoor recreation opportunities available in the region. There may be an opportunity for recruiting volunteers to a regional forestry and trail management team.

Desired Outcomes and Program Evaluation

To determine whether these efforts have been successful, the implementer should disseminate surveys to visitors (see Appendix E). The implementer should include a survey link on its (future) website, smart phone app, and social media and on printed postcards distributed at key local businesses like restaurants and lodging and

[4] Brown, Laura. Multi-Use Trails and Greenways as Economic Development Engines (International Economic Development Council, 2020).

events like the Coventry Farmer's Market. The implementer might also consider putting up signs at trailheads, parks, and water accessways that contain a QR code linking users to the survey.

Based on the survey results, the implementer should determine whether patronization of businesses and outdoor sites has picked up since the implementation of key activities and determine which components of the plan are the most well-received by residents and visitors alike. This feedback can guide the implementer in evolving the plan over time to best suit the needs of the users.

Additionally, the implementer should encourage volunteer involvement in the Connecticut Trail Census, which tracks information on trail usage, including spending. The results of the Census may provide further evidence of the positive economic impacts of the usage of outdoor amenities. Local conservation groups and land trusts are a possible source of volunteers.

Examples and Resources

Below is a list of additional resources to be used for implementation of different components of the Outdoor Recreation section of the plan:

Mapping outdoor assets

- The Town of Manchester has incorporated its trails and public open spaces into its online GIS mapping tool. The implementer may consider reaching out to Manchester staff for more information on the process they went through to create these map layers. See it here: http://gis1.townofmanchester.org/ParkLocator/default.htm.
- The Connecticut Forest and Park Association has some trails in the region mapped out, showing parking and trailheads. This information could be utilized for the creation of the asset inventory. See it here: https://www.ctwoodlands.org/.
- The US Forest Service's online, interactive mapping tool shows all outdoor amenities located in each of the country's national forests. It serves as a strong model for the types of recreational opportunities that should be mapped and the level of detail that should be included. See it here: https://www.fs.fed.us/ivm/.
- Maine Trail Finder is another great online tool that showcases the locations of trails across the State of Maine, with visitors to the site being able to sort trails by trail activity, difficulty, distance, etc. See it here: https://www.mainetrailfinder.com/trails.
- The Eight Mile River Watershed area in Haddam has a dedicated website with maps showcasing a number of types of open space, natural resources, and outdoor recreation opportunities. See it here: http://www.eightmileriver.org/maps/.
- The Northwest Hills Council of Governments has created a regional trails viewer that includes the towns in its area. It includes specific details about the hikes to guide user experiences like "family friendly", "destination trails", and "loop trails". See it here: https://northwesthillscog.org/nhcogtrails/.

Apps to promote social gatherings

- Meetup is an app used by individuals looking to connect socially with others with similar interests. It could be used to promote outdoor recreation-focused meet-up groups. See it here: https://www.meetup.com/.
- Nextdoor is an app used by communities nationwide to promote local events and meet-ups, businesses, and more. It could be used to promote outdoor recreation-focused meet-up groups. See it here: https://nextdoor.com/find-neighborhood/.

Regional forestry and trail maintenance

- While coordinated through a dedicated nonprofit organization on a much larger scale, the Pacific Crest Trail Association organizes groups of volunteers along various sections of the Pacific Crest Trail from California through Washington. This could be done on a smaller scale through the local Parks and Recreation departments, and, if successful, the implementer may be able to acquire grant or local funding to support some larger trail maintenance programs. See it here: https://www.pcta.org/.
- The Connecticut Forest and Park Association coordinates groups of volunteers to engage in trail maintenance statewide. The implementer should engage this organization to reach a new group to provide support for the outdoor recreation amenities. See it here: https://www.ctwoodlands.org/.

Stowe, Vermont

- Stowe is an example of community that has built a strong commercial base of small-scale, independent retail and services around its outdoor recreation amenities. See it here: https://gostowe.com/.

Connecticut Trail Census

- Additional information on the goals and methods of the Connecticut Trail Census can be found here: https://cttrailcensus.uconn.edu/.

Trail-based economic vitality

- While trails are only one component of the region's outdoor amenities, there is strong literature demonstrating their economic value. This article can be used to make the case for investment in trails. See it here: https://www.iedconline.org/documents/members-only/multi-use-trails-and-greenways-as-economic-development-engines/
- The Iowa Department of Transportation created a guide for the implementation of trail-based economic development programs. See it here: https://iowadot.gov/iowabikes/trails/web-pdf/EconHandbook/HANDBOOK.pdf.

Agriculture

Agriculture has laid the historical and cultural foundation for the region, and, as such, it should be encouraged and celebrated. There is still a large farming presence in the area, and that is a strength of the region. To build upon this presence, more emphasis should be placed on promoting agri-tourism and on the use of locally-made products in food service establishments, stores, and other related facilities, in turn making agriculture more economically sustainable.

Agriculture has laid the historical and cultural foundation for the region… it should be built up and celebrated.

The recommendations that follow represent ways to incorporate this sector into the broader plan for economic vitality. In this way, the recommendations can help farmers prosper and highlight the region's cultural heritage.

Inventory Assets

As with outdoor recreation assets, understanding what agricultural assets are located within the region is critical for strong promotional efforts. Each town should take stock of its assets by engaging farmers and farming-related groups and organizations, municipal agricultural commissions, the Connecticut Farm Bureau, the Connecticut Farm Service Agency, and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture. The implementer should then work together to map out the assets that are open to the public, highlighting organizations like the Connecticut Equestrian Center, Stearns Dairy, and UConn's agricultural facilities. Farm tours are another attraction and potential opportunity for agri-tourism, so any farms that offer them should be noted. The implementer should also consider creating a map overlaying outdoor recreation and agricultural assets for visitors and residents who may be interested in both.

As discussed within the Outdoor Recreation section, this map should be posted on the region's website and smart phone app. It should also be printed and distributed among key businesses, highlighting complementary businesses like food service, lodging, and retail.

As the implementer engages farmers, it should also connect them to the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's "Connecticut Grown" program, which highlights locally-produced goods and related events. This will allow additional exposure for the region's agriculture industry and boost visitor counts.

Develop Agricultural Infrastructure

There are many resources and opportunities to encourage agricultural growth that the implementer can become involved with and promote. Engagement with representatives from the agriculture industry to inform these recommendations revealed that there are significant cost, information, and other resource barriers to creating new farms and retaining and expanding existing farms, and the implementer can take a role in addressing these.

The four towns should work together to create a regional agriculture committee or sub-committee of the regional steering committee/nonprofit (see Managing Plan Implementation section) to ensure that progress is being made in connecting farmers and other agriculturally-oriented individuals to critical resources. Members of existing municipal agriculture committees and engaged farmers are a good source for membership.

2Lemek Greenhouse, Tolland (source: https://patch.com/connecticut/tolland/lemek-farm-greenhouse-donated-mums-300th-celebration-0)

A top priority for this committee should be encouraging provision of sufficient infrastructure to enable the success of the farming community. One specific opportunity to provide this infrastructure is equipment sharing between farmers. As large equipment can be extremely expensive, creating opportunities for cost sharing and collective financing could be extremely impactful for farmers in reducing overhead costs. The group should work to gauge interest within the agricultural community and guide the farmers in creating co-ownership agreements, schedules and other requirements for use, etc. One example that emerged during the process of creating the plan is the idea of a slaughterhouse. This slaughterhouse could be at one fixed location, open for use by the region's livestock keepers, or mobile, allowing it to be transported to different locations as needed. Because this piece of equipment does not currently exist in the area, an entire sub-industry in meat production is limited. This should be a priority for the regional committee.

Another focus of the committee should be supporting individuals, and particularly young adults looking to enter the industry, in creating new farms or repurposing fallow land in the region. One major obstacle to new farm creation is the lack of available and affordable land suitable for agriculture. The committee should closely track the area's farmland, ensuring that any parcels that come available are marketed to individuals interested in farming. Additionally, by working with local Planning & Zoning Commissions to limit land use to agriculture and other complementary uses in areas specifically desirable for farming, this may create other opportunities for these individuals. Affordability is also a significant factor in the challenges of farm creation, so ensuring that prospective buyers are aware of all the financing programs available to them is essential (see discussion above on the Connecticut Farm Service Agency). FarmLink is a resource the committee should encourage current and prospective farmers to utilize. It is a Connecticut-specific website that aims to connect land "needs" with those selling or leasing land and could be helpful to the committee in achieving this goal.

Advocate and Educate

The agriculture committee can be helpful to farmers by advocating locally and at the state level for critical resources. For example, the committee should support policies that encourage the growth of the agriculture industry, such as:

- Ensuring that zoning regulations do not impose barriers to farming;
- Facilitate creation and expansion of farm breweries[5] and wineries; and
- Financial incentives for farmland.

Members of the committee should frequently engage with local regulatory bodies like Boards of Selectmen/Town Councils and Planning and Zoning Commissions and speak on the record at meetings to ensure that the perspectives of the agricultural community are heard. Additionally, the same type of advocacy work should be undertaken with state legislative representatives for policies that may impact the region's farmers.

The committee should also connect farmers to informational resources and technical assistance that will help them grow. One particularly important resource is the Connecticut Farm Service Agency, which is headquartered in Tolland and is an excellent partner for the agricultural community. The FSA provides conservation loans to farmers to preserve their land, natural disaster assistance, and has a vast library of informational materials on topics like relevant legislation and other federal programs that farmers may not know about. The committee should work closely with the FSA to ensure that the regional agricultural community has knowledge of and access to all the federal and state programs available to it. The FSA could also work with farmers considering taking on new technologies to reduce costs and increase efficiency, such as opportunities for turning manure and food waste into energy. These types of technologies may be intimidating, and the FSA can take a role in better explaining these types of opportunities to farmers.

Engage Community

Fostering a sense of support for and pride in the agricultural community is important in promoting both agri-tourism and product sales and, resultingly, stabilizing the economic position of farms in the region. The creation of the regional agriculture committee should go a long way to show farmers the commitment of the four communities to their success. However, there are additional ways to involve the broader community in the success of this industry.

"For the most part, the community is very supportive of my business, but it could also support the industry better by buying more local products." – Mansfield business owner

To build community pride, the implementer should work with the agriculture committee to educate the community about the area's agricultural history and the importance of farming locally and globally. Speakers could be local farmers or representatives from the Connecticut Farm Bureau or even economists that discuss the economic importance of the agriculture industry. This education is particularly important for people not involved in agriculture because, as community members place more value on agriculture, they are more likely to support local farms and the policies that impact them. The committee should also consider engaging farmers

[5] Note that a farm brewery differs from a standard microbrewery in that it sells beer brewed using products grown on a farm run by the brewery owners. The brewery is often located on the farm on which these products are grown.

that have historic farming equipment and display that equipment in public places. This, again, creates community interest and involvement in agriculture and its history within the region.

The towns might also consider creating community gardens to further support interest in agriculture. These would likely be most easily executed at the local level, though they support the larger regional effort around promoting agriculture. The communities could bring in local farmers to assist residents in the planting process, further integrating them into the fabric of the community. Coventry and Mansfield have already created successful community gardens and may be able to provide guidance to the other towns around this effort.

Partner Strategically

There are numerous potential partners within the region that can help create new opportunities for the agricultural community. Restaurants are one good example of that, as farm-to-table concepts are popular with many consumers. The implementer should engage local restaurants and work to coordinate farm-to-table nights which are special events taking place periodically throughout the year that incorporate mostly locally-produced goods. This creates a special draw for customers, who would purchase tickets in advance, while benefitting both the restaurants and the farmers. The implementer should connect farmers to these restaurants so they can co-create a menu based on what is seasonally available. The implementer can also help to promote these events and offer the restaurants an additional incentive to work with farmers by highlighting them on its website, social media channels, and relevant print marketing materials. The local and regional chambers of commerce can also support the implementer in this effort. Mansfield has been holding community dinners with locally-grown foods for the past two years, and this structure could be emulated and expanded within other towns and with restaurants interested in participating.

Another potential partner for the region's agricultural community is the area's school systems. The committee should engage the superintendents to determine if there might be an opportunity for educational programming around farming to be included in lesson plans or as after-school activities. Farmers could hold workshops for students – perhaps once in the fall and once in the spring – on the work they do and how they contribute to the region. Parks and Recreation departments may also consider holding cooking classes with locally-created products. Again, this engages the community around the topic of farming and potentially creates a generation of youth interested in continuing this practice into the future.

3Coventry Farmer's Market (source: https://www.coventryct.org/422/Coventry-Farmers-Market-at-Hale-Homestea)

The Coventry Farmer's Market is another key partner in promoting agriculture in the region. It is the largest farmer's market in New England and attracts 3,000-5,000 attendees to the region over a three-hour span during 22 weeks of the year. This is an event that draws visitors from around the state, offering an excellent opportunity to market additional agri-tourism and other tourism opportunities in the region. The implementer should apply to have a booth at the market, with volunteers discussing the many agricultural, recreational, cultural, historical, and entertainment assets in the area. The booth should have promotional take-away materials as well as marketing items like a tablecloth and pull-up banner (see Visibility and Marketing section). This event is an excellent way to reach visitors already somewhat knowledgeable about the area and who are interested in many of the types of activities the implementer is trying to promote.

Beyond the Coventry Farmer's Market, there are several others than operate in the region, and the agriculture committee should ensure that all farmers can sell their products at any and all if they choose. The committee should coordinate informational sessions on getting involved in the various markets and invite the region's farming community. These sessions should occur in the months leading up to the markets' openings so that farmers have ample time to prepare. There are also retail stores in the region that could sell locally-produced goods, and the process for getting involved with these should be incorporated into these presentations. Through ongoing engagement with local retailers, the implementer can guide farmers to the right partners.

Another approach to consider in growing agricultural partnerships is coordinating Community Supported Agriculture weekly/bi-weekly pick-ups (CSAs) to maximize impact. The region currently has many CSA programs, but because there are so many options, some smaller farmers do not experience a significant financial impact. The agriculture committee could work with smaller farmers to coordinate joint CSAs between them, allowing consumers to experience a higher volume and variety of locally-grown products while creating a more predictable stream of sales for the farmers. The committee should look to connect producers of different types of goods for a unique variety. Products might include produce, dairy, meat, soaps, candles, jams, and more. A more diverse offering from a pooled CSA would likely make this offering more attractive for customers. Lyman Orchards in Middlefield offers add-ons to its CSA program for an extra charge based on specific types of locally-produced goods customers want to see (i.e. bakery add-on, cheese add-on, eggs add-on).

The committee should also consider regularly engaging with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to maintain awareness about initiatives that may impact the region's agricultural community. Working with this agency to better promote the certified "Connecticut Grown" businesses is one specific opportunity to consider.

Desired Outcomes and Program Evaluation

Success in building up the region's agriculture and agri-tourism industries might look like increased sales for farmers, an increasing number of farms in the region, and a broader awareness by the region's residents – these outcomes should be explored in evaluating the program. Like the outdoor recreation program evaluation, the agriculture efforts should also be monitored through visitor surveys (see Appendix E). The survey can be the same for both industries, simply asking respondents about their demographics, attractions visited, spending habits, and overall satisfaction with their experience. It should be posted on the website, smart phone app, and social media and on printed postcards distributed at key local businesses like farms, restaurants, and lodging and events like the Coventry Farmer's Market. The survey results should tell the implementer whether patronization of agriculture-related businesses has increased since the plan's implementation and determine which components are the most well-received by residents and visitors, guiding the implementer in making any changes to the plan over time to ensure its maximum impact.

Examples and Resources

Below is a list of resources to be used for implementation of components of the Agriculture/Agri-tourism section of the plan:

Agri-tourism map

- The State of Maine has created an agri-tourism map showcasing each asset and its sub-sector within the agriculture industry. It provides data on each location with links to its website (where possible) and contact information. See it here: https://www.getrealmaine.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/home.showpage/pageID/151/index.htm.

Connecticut Grown Program

- The Connecticut Grown program promotes goods produced in the state. This is an extra layer of advertisement possible for the region's farmers, and they should be encouraged to register. See it here: https://portal.ct.gov/DOAG/Marketing/Marketing/Connecticut-Grown-Program.

Agricultural equipment sharing program

- The Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education division of the USDA offers a number of resources related to the topic of agricultural equipment sharing. This includes co-ownership agreement frameworks, LLC operating agreement frameworks, and a detailed guide for how to implement this practice. See it here: https://projects.sare.org/sare_project/fne16-844/.

Connecticut FarmLink

- Connecticut FarmLink is a website that matches farmers looking for land with those selling land. This can be particularly useful for prospective farmers looking to break into the industry and in need of affordable land. See it here: https://www.ctfarmlink.org/.

Connecticut Farm Service Agency

- The Connecticut FSA provides innumerable resources to the state's agriculture community. The regional agriculture committee should work very closely with the FSA to ensure that all the needs of the agriculture industry are being met. See it here: https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Connecticut/index.

Community gardens

- Coventry's community garden has been very successful and well-received by the community. These plots encourage broad community engagement with agriculture. Find information on this program on page 16 of this brochure: https://www.coventryct.org/DocumentCenter/View/3883/2020-Summer.
- Mansfield's community garden, like Coventry's, has been popular amongst residents. See it here: http://www.tasteofmansfieldct.org/grow-your-own.html
- The American Community Gardening Association provides many resources to guide communities in organizing these gardens. See it here: https://www.communitygarden.org/.

Lyman Orchards CSA Program

- Lyman Orchards offers add-ons for specific types of foods (in addition to the standard produce offerings) such as bakery products, cheese, eggs, and milk. The implementer should consider encouraging similar variations as it works with the Agriculture Committee to coordinate joint CSA opportunities. See it here: https://lymanorchards.com/csa/.

Culture and Entertainment

The region's cultural and entertainment opportunities and unique businesses are another key aspect of promoting economic vitality. With so many organizations creating unique programming that is attractive to residents and visitors alike, the implementer should focus on promoting collaboration among them to ensure the maximum economic impact of this work. Experiences are a major tourism driver and should be embraced as economic opportunities.

4UConn Women's Basketball (source: https://www.theuconnblog.com/2020/1/25/21081576/uconn-huskies-womens-basketball-routs-east-carolina-98-42)

Experiences are a major tourism driver and should be embraced as economic opportunities.

What follows are recommendations designed to create a collaborative environment within the space of culture and entertainment, maximizing its economic potential.

Connect to Existing Community Activities

The region has many existing experiences and events that drive tourism, and enhanced promotion and cross-collaboration should be prioritized to ensure their continued success and exposure. Drawing visitors out into the community beyond the duration of these programs and encouraging them to spend discretionary income at local businesses is a critical component of boosting the economic impact of culture and entertainment in the region. Some key local and regional programs that should be focuses include, but are not limited to:

- UConn's sporting and arts events – basketball and other sporting events, musical and theatrical performances at the Jorgensen Center for Performing Arts, the Ballard Institute's puppetry performances and related events;
- The Last Green Valley's regional Walktober event;
- Storrs Center and Coventry Village arts and business promotional events;
- Celebrate Tolland; and
- The 300th birthday of the Town of Bolton (occurring in 2020).

One key opportunity for increased economic impact of these programs is the creation of "visitor's packages", tying together complementary entertainment, shopping, dining, and lodging offerings to create an incentive to stay in the region beyond the duration of any specific event. The implementer should work with local businesses to create promotions for visitors. On the next page is an example of the type of promotion the implementer should consider developing.

Planning on attending the 12pm basketball game on X DATE? After the game, show your ticket at the following locations to receive the specified discount (promotions good for game day only):

- **$100 for one night at the bed and breakfast**
- **20% off at Italian Restaurant**
- **Free appetizer at Mexican Restaurant**
- **50% off admission to the museum**

These promotions should be listed on the region's website, social media, and print marketing materials and include any graphics being utilized in the region's overall marketing campaign (see Visibility and Marketing section). Additionally, the implementer should work with the organization hosting the event to ensure that the offerings are printed in any promotional materials related to the program. In some cases, these advertisements may be free of charge. In other cases, there may be a cost associated with this advertisement. When there is a cost, there are two common options to cover it: the specific businesses being promoted can share the cost of the advertisement or the implementer can draw from a shared marketing fund (see Funding Plan Implementation section).

Where two or more events are occurring on the same date or on subsequent dates, an additional opportunity is presented to create an events-based experience, tying in local business promotions as well. Connecting multiple activities gives visitors a strong impression of the region's culture and encourages them to stay longer. These opportunities for promotion are critical.

The implementer should determine which types of cross-promotions are most effective based on the demographics of event attendees and hone them to cater to those audiences, as many of them are not currently aware of all the cultural opportunities available to them. For example, college students, families, and seniors likely have different interests in events, shopping, dining, etc. The businesses and event organizers know well which demographics they appeal to most, so ongoing communication with these groups and individuals as well as the event attendees will allow the implementer to design the most effective promotions.

"There has been an influx of millennials here – now they are looking for something to do with their families. We can offer that to them." – Coventry stakeholder

As with outdoor recreation and agricultural amenities, cultural attractions with physical locations (museums, historical sites, performance venues, etc.) should also be inventoried, mapped, and included on the region's marketing platforms (see Visibility and Marketing section). There should be a map overlaying all three types of amenities to create a comprehensive view of all the region has to offer.

Coordinate New Community Activities

In addition to building off existing programs, the implementer should consider creating new programs aimed at introducing attendees to all four towns. While the individual towns have been coordinating successful events for years, a more regional approach to coordination will likely attract additional visitors and better support this plan overall. As the implementer's capacity will likely be limited at the outset, it should start with coordinating only one or two events in the first year, potentially even growing an existing local event into a regional event. As capacity grows, it may consider doing a more ambitious event series focused around seasons, months, holidays, etc. and rotating between the communities. As information was collected to inform this action plan, the region expressed interest in the following types of events:

- Agriculture
    - Farm day/weekend: All farmers in the region open their farms for tours, tastings, and other activities. Discounts are offered on their products. The implementer may consider coordinating a "farm passport" for this day/weekend, with participants who visit a certain number of farms being eligible for a prize.
    - Farm-to-table events: Farmers partner with restaurants and farmer's markets or host catered events on their farms showcasing locally-made products.
    - Regional agricultural fair: Agricultural activities like tractor pulls and livestock judging are showcased, also offering opportunities for local vendors to sell their products and services.
- Food
    - "Taste of the Region": Local restaurants and farms come together to provide food and beverage samples to attendees.
    - Farm-to-table events: See above.
    - Restaurant week: Restaurants offer special promotions and/or prix fixe menus over the course of one week each year.
- Music
    - Wine/beer and music festival: Local musicians and wineries/brewers come together for an afternoon-long event.
    - Outdoor music festival: Local musicians put on performances for a full day event, with the implementer coordinating with local vendors to participate.
    - PorchFest: Local musicians put on performances on porches/front lawns of businesses throughout the region for a full day of activities.
- Arts and culture
    - Rotating art show: A collection of works from one (or multiple) local artist(s) is displayed publicly, with the collection rotating between the four towns over the course of a year.
    - Regional open studios: Local artists open their studios for a day or weekend each year, selling their works and offering demonstrations, hands-on activities, arts education, and more. The implementer may consider coordinating an "art passport" for this day/weekend, with participants who visit a certain number of studios being eligible for a prize. There is an existing

regional "open studios" effort already taking place, and that region should build off of it while incorporating some of the ideas listed above.
    - Summer theater: Local theater groups put on outdoor performances that rotate between the town centers of the four communities.
    - Museum day/weekend: All museums and historical sites in the region open their doors and provide guided tours and discounts on admission. The implementer may consider coordinating a "museum passport" for this day/weekend, with participants who visit a certain number of museums being eligible for a prize. Smithsonian Magazine coordinates a nationwide Museum Day and the State of Connecticut coordinates Connecticut Open House Day each year, offering two already visible platforms for better promotion.
- Outdoor recreation
    - Build-a-boat competition: Teams of participants from around the region compete to construct cardboard boats, culminating in a final boat race in a large swimming pool or lake.
    - Triathlon: Athletes enter a running, biking, and swimming competition through the four towns.
    - Charity races: Athletes enter 5ks and other types of races, with the proceeds going to specific charities/causes.
    - Wildlife walks and conservation tours: Environmental experts lead walks through scenic open space and trails, educating attendees on the importance of ecological assets within the region.

Creating appeal to different demographic groups is critical in ensuring the maximum economic impact of these events. The implementer should support the creation of events targeted toward groups like college students, young adults, families, and seniors. These events may be different, or there may be opportunities to appeal to multiple groups through the diversity of activities and participating vendors. The timing of these events is critical as well, and tying them to days where additional visitors may be in the region (UConn Family Weekend, youth sporting tournaments, etc.) is an important consideration.

Engage with Arts and Culture Organizations

5Arts on Main, Coventry (source: https://www.courant.com/hc-wm-coventry-arts-0906-20180905-story.html)

Assuming the success of any of the events the implementer chooses to organize, there may be opportunities to leverage partner organizations to take on a larger proportion of the coordination. While the implementer may need to jumpstart the events at the outset, other groups may take interest in working on them as they show success and impact. Partners could include Windham Arts, the Coventry Arts Guild, Arts of Tolland, Community School for the Arts, Coventry Village Partners, Downtown Storrs, etc. These organizations should be engaged frequently by the implementer to ensure any efforts are collaborative

and cross-promoted and to further involve them in the coordination process.

Looking forward, the towns may consider creating a regional arts and culture council or sub-committee of the regional steering committee/nonprofit (see Managing Plan Implementation section) to handle programming and create additional opportunities for businesses within this sector. The council should have a dedicated budget for organizing and promoting events (see Funding Plan Implementation section) and should be made up of representatives of the organizations mentioned above in addition to others from the agriculture, food/beverage, music, arts and culture, history, and outdoor recreation communities. As event coordination requires significant organizational capacity, creating a separate organization to manage it is sensible in that it prevents this activity from consuming the time of those driving the implementation of the plan overall.

Desired Outcomes and Program Evaluation

Some goals of increasing engagement around arts and culture programming might be to encourage participants to spend more time in the region, allowing local businesses to capture their discretionary spending dollars. Businesses being advertised through promotions related to these events should be surveyed about changes in sales on event days. Event participants should also be surveyed about their demographics, event participation, businesses and other attractions visited, spending habits, and overall satisfaction with their experience in the region. This feedback is critical as the efforts around entertainment and culture are evolved to most effectively target the discretionary spending of residents and visitors.

Examples and Resources

Below is a list of resources to be used for implementation of different components of the Culture and Entertainment section of the plan:

Examples of recommended events

- Farm weekend (CA): https://www.farmtrails.org/experience/weekend-along-the-farm-trails/
- Farm-to-table event (CT): https://maxcheftofarm.com/
- Agricultural fairs (CT): http://www.ctagfairs.org/events/filters/iso=1
- Taste of the Region event (CA): http://www.cerritostaste.com/
- Restaurant week (CT): https://www.connecticutrestaurantweek.com/restaurant-weeks-ct/new-haven-restaurant-week-2011/
- Beer and music festival (NJ): https://www.acbeerfest.com/
- Outdoor music festival (CT): https://ctfolk.com/event/2020ctfolkfest/
- PorchFest (CT): https://blackrockcc.org/porchfest/
- Artist open studios (CT): https://artspacenewhaven.org/cwos-home/about-cwos/
- Summer theater (CT): https://www.shorelinearts.org/shakespeare-on-the-shoreline
- Museum day (national): https://www.smithsonianmag.com/museumday/museum-day-2020/
- Build-a-boat competition (TX): https://riverlegacy.org/cardboard-boat-regatta

- Triathlon (MS): http://possumtowntriathlon.com/
- Charity race (CT): https://www.hartfordmarathon.com/eversource-hartford-marathon/races/5k/
- Wildlife walk (VT): https://vtfishandwildlife.com/watch-wildlife/guided-wildlife-walks

Regional Arts Council

- The implementer should consider creating an organization like the Windham Regional Arts Council for the four-town area. Windham Arts has been very successful and can provide guidance for the implementer as it looks to create a similar entity. See it here: http://www.windhamrac.org/.
- Portland, Oregon's Regional Arts & Culture Council has done excellent work across the areas of programming, education, funding, and advocacy. All these functions should be considered as the regional organization evolves beyond the event coordination component that will be its primary focus at the outset. See it here: https://racc.org/.

Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs

Most companies in the four-town region are small businesses, with over 95% having fewer than 100 employees[6]. Additionally, there is a strong potential for growth of the entrepreneurial sector because of the region's proximity to UConn and Eastern Connecticut State University. Ensuring that businesses are aware of and have access to the many opportunities and resources available to them is critical.

This section outlines approaches to best support small businesses and entrepreneurs based on the benefits and challenges of the region as expressed during the information gathering phase of this project.

Support Businesses at the Local Level

Some opportunities for enhanced retention, expansion, and attraction efforts of businesses more generally in the region fall within the domain of local government. This section covers actions to be taken to support businesses of all sizes, beyond just small businesses and entrepreneurs, because these efforts are critical to ensure business success generally. While the towns are clearly dedicated to promoting economic vitality, there are steps that elected officials, staff, and boards and commissions should continue to keep in mind to ensure a business-friendly environment.

Ongoing investments in local infrastructure are critical. One opportunity is in the expansion of utilities, where possible. As water, sewer, and gas lines are expanded to reach new areas of town, real estate that certain businesses may not have considered before becomes viable. Many businesses do not consider real estate without public utilities, so ongoing infrastructure expansion creates additional opportunities for investment.

High-speed internet is another priority for business growth. Businesses must maintain the highest level of efficiency to remain competitive in the global marketplace, and the towns must recognize the value in this as an economic development tool. There is the potential for a regional approach to ensuring high-speed internet access through the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), which works collectively with its member towns to provide support on fiber infrastructure issues. Each town should engage with CRCOG on an ongoing basis to ensure that any feasible fiber upgrades are implemented. Additionally, as a result of the increased dependency on high-speed internet due to increased reliance on remote work and online transactions as a result of COVID-19, the Office of the Governor will play a larger role in increasing access to this service. The region should monitor any announcements coming from the State on policies or programs being put in place to support this effort.

Local regulations are also a major factor in determining the region's overall business-friendliness. Ensuring that a business's experience through the land use regulatory process is predictable and consistent is one of the most important steps a municipality can take to promote economic vitality locally. One key strategy for ensuring an

[6] County Business Patterns Tables (United States Census Bureau, 2017). URL: https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cbp/data/tables.html.

applicant-friendly process is by designating a single point of contact within Town Hall (usually an economic development coordinator or planner) to guide the business owner through the process and ensure that the application reaches all the necessary parties. This point of contact should also share feedback from various departments with the business owner about his/her application so that the necessary changes can be made. Additionally, maintaining strong contact between the town's elected officials, economic development function, and land use boards and commissions about the strategic vision for development of the community will promote collaboration among these groups.

Ensuring that a business's experience through the land use regulatory process is predictable and consistent is one of the most important steps a municipality can take to promote economic development locally.

Specifically related to local zoning regulations, each community should consider implementing administrative review and approval of applications for businesses with a minimal impact (i.e. traffic, noise, appearance) on the surrounding community. Home-based businesses, small offices, and possibly small-scale retail could be suitable candidates for administrative review. Additionally, towns should ensure that regulations related to signage, parking, building design, etc. are not so stringent as to create burdensome costs for businesses working to comply.

Childcare is one zoning consideration of particular importance when engaging in economic vitality efforts. Without the presence of convenient, accessible childcare in the region, many potential business owners or employees may be discouraged from entering the workforce. Thus, the municipalities should review their zoning regulations to ensure that the land use regulatory process for these types of facilities is as smooth as possible. Additionally, childcare facilities should be permitted in general business zones, potentially minimizing the distance between parents' workplaces and their daycares. The need for reliable childcare has been further highlighted as COVID-19 has impacted essential workers' abilities to access this service. This is a need that will only grow moving forward.

Finally, local economic development staff (or other staff filling that role) should have a strong knowledge of local and state programs and resources available to the business community. These include:

- The nuts and bolts of the land use regulatory process;
- Commercial real estate opportunities;
- Town demographic, fiscal, and economic data;
- Local and state incentives;
- State and federal workforce programs;
- Business support organizations like the Small Business Administration, Small Business Development Center, and SCORE; and
- Possible non-bank funding partners like the Community Investment Corporation, Community Economic Development Fund, and Connecticut Innovations (entrepreneur-specific).

In supporting economic growth, local Town Hall staff should be able to connect businesses to these resources and opportunities. Developing this knowledge base can play a large role in growing the business-friendly reputation of a community and the region as a whole.

Understand Needs

To better support entrepreneurs and small businesses within the region, it is first critical to understand their needs. While there are several categories of broader needs related to small businesses and entrepreneurs, each individual business is likely facing its own specific set of challenges. Particularly as the impact of COVID-19 has been challenging for many small businesses, needs may look different now than they did several months ago. Remote work and the need for a stronger online presence may play a much larger role in these companies' operations, perhaps, and the region should strive to determine how to best understand and address any challenges related to that economic shift. Thus, ongoing communication with businesses is key. This communication should take the form of in-person business visitations, phone calls, emails, and, more passively, through social media and e-blasts. The implementer should plan to engage in a formal check-in with businesses at least twice per year, with one of those being in-person if possible. In this way, the specific needs of these companies can be addressed at the micro level.

However, there are some broad categories that impact small business and entrepreneur decision-making as they are looking to grow.

Small businesses looking to locate or expand in the region need to have an understanding of the following:

- Affordable real estate opportunities that suit the use of the business, with consideration given to foot traffic, parking, accessibility, possibility of expansion in the space, and technical needs (shipping/receiving, technological requirements, etc.);
- Market dynamics, including demographic information/changes, industry clusters, specific complementary and/or competitive businesses/attractions in the area, and retail leakage for the area (if applicable);
- If no expansion opportunities in current facility, other locations where expansion may be possible in the future; and
- Acquiring capital to support growth.

To address these needs, the implementer should put together a business recruitment package covering the region. This booklet should include information on key real estate opportunities in each community, market dynamics data for the region, and a list of key resources for additional business support. This should include information for local economic development coordinators, business support organizations (Small Business Development Center, Small Business Administration, SCORE, etc.), regional banks and other financial institutions, and chambers of commerce and other business groups. This booklet will support small business owners through their decision-making process by providing them with this critical information. As individual

businesses are engaged, the implementer should work with local economic development representatives to provide additional support related to individualized needs.

Entrepreneurs have some different needs than general small businesses because of the nuanced nature of this sector and the higher risk in entering the market as a start up business. Some key needs for entrepreneurs include:

- Mentorship from colleagues already in the field;
- Access to networking opportunities and peer groups;
- Understanding of marketing and sales and the ability to articulate a unique selling proposition;
- Acquiring capital to support growth; and
- Acquiring talent to support growth.

The implementer must understand what financial institutions are available to help entrepreneurs in the region. This means developing awareness of the banks in the region as well as other financial institutions targeted more toward start-ups like Connecticut Innovations, Community Investment Corporation, and Community and Economic Development Fund. Without sufficient financing, an entrepreneur will likely struggle to succeed, making this piece essential. While the implementer cannot directly provide support in this area, the various institutions should be well known.

Ways to address the other entrepreneurial needs are addressed below.

Connect to Resources

There are also several steps that can be taken at the regional level to further develop specifically the small business and entrepreneur communities. One opportunity is developing a pipeline from UConn and Eastern Connecticut State University to area companies. The students at these institutions can be assets to the business community – as interns, as potential employees, and as they look to solve real life challenges as part of projects and studies. The implementer should engage with the business community on any talent needs or possible student projects and work with the higher education institutions (see the Role of Higher Education section) to determine suitable matches. Coordinating regional young professionals events and including soon-to-be graduates is another great way of growing business connections and developing a pipeline of talent from higher education to the business community.

Another opportunity for the implementer to connect businesses and entrepreneurs to critical resources is in coordinating office hours with individuals who provide professional business services. The implementer should engage local accountants, lawyers, marketing strategists, etc. and encourage them to hold office hours around the region every month free of charge. Even if a lawyer donates two hours every month, for example, this guidance can be very useful as a business owner looks to make legal decisions and may, in fact, lead to a formal business relationship between them. This opportunity can be fruitful for both parties, and additional professional service providers should be interested as the implementer can point to examples of positive

outcomes from this program. These professionals may also consider holding free workshops to businesses within the region at libraries, community centers, or other public spaces to provide them with more general information on the areas in which they are experts. This could also bring forward business opportunities for the professionals while greatly benefitting the region's small businesses.

Specific to entrepreneurs, the implementer should also consider creating a business mentorship program. As potential entrepreneurs are engaged, the implementer can match them up with leaders from more developed businesses in a similar field. Beyond the subject matter expertise these entrepreneurs have, creating business connections and learning the ins and outs of doing business in the region is essential to their success; thus, providing them with support from experienced businesspeople will be invaluable. Again, working with the area's institutions of higher education, the implementer should create industry connections to grow the pipeline of prospective business owners. When there are successful conversions from researchers and entrepreneurs to business owners, the mentor-mentee relationship and overall success story should be widely disseminated to showcase the region as a hub of entrepreneurial activity. Note that UConn's Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CCEI) already offers student entrepreneur-industry professional mentorship support, so the implementer should engage with CCEI to determine the best ways to partner, specifically highlighting businesses in the area for mentorship opportunities.

"When there are successful conversions from researchers and entrepreneurs to business owners, the mentor-mentee relationship and overall success story should be widely disseminated to showcase the region as a hub of entrepreneurial activity."

Another entrepreneur-focused approach to promoting economic vitality is the creation of a regional coworking and business incubation hub. The demand for coworking spaces could potentially grow over the coming years as more employees are allowed to work remotely, spurred by COVID-19. Coworking spaces could offer a way for these employees to leave their home offices while staying nearby. The incubator component of a coworking space could also act as a driver for business creation, offering an inexpensive way for business owners in the region to "test the waters" without expending large amounts of capital for real estate. This hub could be the center for much of the activity discussed in this section – professional services office hours, young professionals events, mentor-mentee meetings, educational programming, etc. In this way, start-ups can get the support they require all under one roof, setting them on the path to success. In working with developers and the private sector to attract this type of space to the region, the implementer should track demand and vacancy for existing spaces that serve similar purposes in Coventry and Tolland. If there is more demand than space available, this could be helpful data to bolster the argument for the development of a coworking space. However, if there are still many vacancies in current spaces, the implementer should prioritize educating groups throughout the region like home-based workers and entrepreneurs about the existing opportunities available and work to bring the types of programming and resources mentioned above to those spaces.

There are several approaches to creating a coworking space. One is to repurpose a portion of an existing community facility (library, community center, etc.) to be utilized as a coworking space, where entrepreneurs and small business owners can rent desks or offices on a monthly basis. The implementer could also look to fund

a larger-scale project with a facility utilized for coworking purposes only. The rental scenario can also be applied in this type of facility. Finally, the implementer can work with developers looking to create commercial or mixed-use buildings and encourage them to create a coworking space. The municipality that will be home to the space might consider stimulating this effort by providing a tax incentive to the developer. Note that Coventry currently has a "rent by the hour" office complex called 1153 Main that functions in a similar role as a coworking space. The implementer should engage the owners of this facility to fully understand all its offerings, determine where additional need may exist, and make a plan to address that need. The owners of 1153 Main likely have strong insight into the coworking market and may be able to provide valuable guidance to the implementer.

Another opportunity for the implementer to support local entrepreneurs is through access to a commercial kitchen for those that work in the food industry. Nearby Windham has an existing commercial kitchen called Click. The implementer should engage those who manage the facility to determine where there may be opportunities to partner and ensure businesses within the region have access to it. The implementer should connect the appropriate entrepreneurs with the facility and also with the farmer's markets and relevant retail in the region to ensure they have an understanding of various sales opportunities.

If food-based entrepreneurship has become highly-successful in the region, the implementer might consider including a commercial kitchen as part of the coworking hub discussed above, as many business owners engaged through this project expressed an interest in this type of amenity. If a commercial kitchen as part of the coworking hub is not a possibility, then the implementer should explore other options for the repurposing of an existing commercial-scale kitchen into one that can be used by small business owners. For example, the implementer should discuss whether a public community center kitchen can be used, by reservation only, for commercial purposes. Utilizing a municipally-owned space could create liability challenges for an individual town, so the implementer should work with the municipal attorney and elected officials to determine whether this is viable. Another opportunity is for the implementer to partner with an organization like a religious or social/civic organization (VFW, Lion's Club, etc.) to offer commercial kitchen opportunities by reservation only.

Connect to Customers

The implementer should also work to create opportunities for businesses to promote themselves to potential customers. The overall marketing campaign (see Visibility and Marketing section) will help to portray the region's identity, and specific businesses should be tied into those promotional efforts. For example, the digital and print marketing should include a business directory, promotions occurring at specific businesses, and itineraries highlighting businesses to visit based on different interests.

Specifically related to retail businesses, the implementer should create a "buy local" campaign, which includes representation from businesses within all four communities. The campaign can be promoted through all digital and print marketing as well as the promotional channels of the participating businesses. The implementer could purchase branded reusable shopping bags highlighting the campaign that can be distributed free of charge at the retail locations. A "retail passport" should also be printed, with businesses giving out stamps to those who visit them. Once shoppers fill their passports, they are eligible to receive prizes donated by the participating

businesses. This is a great way of connecting the business community and showcasing to residents all the local products and shops that they may not have otherwise known. The implementer may consider including this as part of a "Small Business Saturday" effort.

Desired Outcomes and Program Evaluation

Well-supported businesses and entrepreneurs are more likely to grow within the region, contributing to the economy overall. As such, increased sales, ability to acquire talent, and improved customer engagement are some key measures of the success of this component of the action plan.

Businesses should be surveyed periodically to determine any impacts from the implementation of these recommendations, and data should also be collected about their activities prior to any implementation efforts. Questions should delve into topics like experiences with local government, satisfaction with existing infrastructure, talent acquisition, understanding of and access to key resources, and changes in customer and sales numbers. Certain programs as described above should be specifically included in the survey to determine how many businesses are taking advantage of them and whether they have been helpful. Based on this feedback, the implementer can determine which projects are the most impactful and which can be altered or eliminated.

Examples and Resources

Below is a list of resources to be used for implementation of different components of the Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs section of the plan:

CRCOG broadband support to municipalities

- This page highlights several of CRCOG's IT opportunities for municipalities, with the fiber infrastructure services being most relevant for the implementation of this action plan. See it here: https://crcog.org/municipal-services/it-services-cooperative/.

Connecting university students to the business community

- Western Michigan University's "Business Connection" program is aimed specifically at connecting the local business community with the student population. In the region's case, the towns would determine business needs and coordinate with the higher education institutions on the student talent side to develop partnership opportunities. See it here: https://wmich.edu/businessconnection.
- The University of Washington's Foster School of Business offers "Applied Strategy Projects" where students are partnered with local companies to provide support with specific business challenges at no cost. See it here: https://foster.uw.edu/academics/degree-programs/full-time-mba/curriculum/applied-strategy-projects/.

Entrepreneur mentorship

- UConn's Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation offers student entrepreneur-industry professional mentorship matching. The implementer should work with the area's business community to get them involved. See it here: https://ccei.uconn.edu/mentors/.
- Valley Venture Mentors in Springfield, Massachusetts pairs mentors and mentees in the same industry, designed to turn entrepreneurs into business owners. See it here: https://valleyventurementors.org/startups/springfield-mentorship-program/.

Regional coworking hub

- Makery Coworking in New Milford is an example of a smaller, suburban/rural economy that has created a successful coworking space. The implementer should consider engaging Makery as it looks to create its own. See it here: https://www.makerycoworking.com/.
- Borough 496 in Hamden is a recently-developed incubator that focuses on helping small business attain sustainability and an adequate workforce, with a particular emphasis on micro-enterprise entrepreneurship. See it here: https://www.borough496.com/.
- Upward Hartford is a highly successful coworking space in Hartford that has grown as its reputation and demand has increased. It also hosts many programs and educational seminars and offers flexible arrangements for space usage. See it here: https://www.moveupward.city/hartford.

Commercial kitchen creation

- Click is a commercial kitchen located in Windham that has successfully supported food entrepreneurs in the city and throughout the region. The facility has both a commercial and teaching kitchen with annual memberships ranging from $150-$800 per year. See it here: https://clickwillimantic.com/.
- Two community centers in Minnesota have opened their doors to food entrepreneurs, allowing hourly or daily rentals of their commercial kitchens. See it here: https://northernwilds.com/commercial-kitchen-space-community-centers/.
- The Scadding Court Community Centre in Toronto, ON offers rentals of its commercial kitchen for food incubators, allowing simple online application. See it here: https://scaddingcourt.org/commercial-kitchen-application/#1532464973883-ea4f9725-4f2d.

"Buy local" campaign

- The organization, Connect our Future, offers an in-depth guide for the creation of a "buy local" campaign. See it here: https://connectourfuture.org/tools/buy-local-campaign/.
- The Town of Fairfield created a "buy local" campaign using a savings card to promote the program. Fairfield is a good resource for the implementer as it works to implement a similar campaign. See it here: https://www.fairfieldct.org/news/?FeedID=3231.

The Role of Higher Education Institutions

6Eastern Connecticut State University, Windham (source: https://www.wnpr.org/post/connecticut-state-university-professors-want-be-heard)

The presence of the University of Connecticut within the region as well as the nearby Eastern Connecticut State University creates a unique and desirable economic opportunity. The region benefits in many ways because of this: through a significant young adult presence, through a wealth of intellectual capital and the resulting potential for start-up activity, through the presence of two large employers, and through possible interest in government investment in the region to support these institutions, to name just some.

The significance of UConn's campus to the region is no secret. Overall, the Storrs Campus creates $2.7 billion in economic impact, employs over 13,000 people, and contributes an additional $1.2 billion as a result of labor income. The region is home to 1,400 UConn students who live in the area full-time, 1,500 faculty and staff, and 6,300 alumni[7]. Because of this local and statewide significance, the implementer must create a plan for better building off UConn's economic impact. While this data is not available for ECSU, this institution undoubtedly has a significant economic impact on the region as well.

A strong regional economy also benefits the universities. The idea of selecting UConn or ECSU will be more appealing to students, faculty, and staff, and the growth of innovative companies locally will spur a more free-flowing pipeline of ideas and resources between talent, entrepreneurs, and the private sector. Further, if graduates stay within the region for employment, they will likely be more engaged in the universities' foundations and other alumni engagement efforts.

The implementer must utilize a multi-faceted approach to capitalize on the benefits for both sides of this partnership and convert them into increased economic activity.

Formalize Regional Engagement with the Higher Education Institutions

In the past, communication between the region and higher education institutions has been limited. Moving forward, working to grow that communication is key to being able to better access these assets and will undoubtedly benefit the region. Representatives from UConn's President's Office were engaged as part of the information gathering phase of this report, and that represents an opportunity for ongoing communication. The implementer should share with the President's Offices of UConn and ECSU information on:

[7] UConn Impact (University of Connecticut, 2019). URL: https://impact.uconn.edu/.

- Large businesses coming into the area that may represent an opportunity for graduating students;
- Efforts around events and programs that may be of interest to students and faculty; and
- General ongoing recruitment of businesses that may take interest in university-owned real estate like the UConn Tech Park.

In turn, the universities should share:

- Changes or additions to academic programs;
- Events that may be of interest to residents;
- Short- and long-term planning, including ideas about student housing;
- Development plans; and
- Key job openings.

The implementer and universities should maintain regular contact with key university personnel, and the four Town Managers representing each municipality in the region should plan to meet with the university presidents at least once per year to ensure this effort has buy-in at all levels.

"Moving forward, working to grow that communication is key to being able to better access these assets and will undoubtedly benefit the region."

A strategy for further engagement with the universities is at the department level, which allows the implementer to develop a better understanding of the types of programs being offered and delve into specific student skillsets. The implementer should reach out directly to individual department heads (see Appendix F for contact information for key department heads) to discuss with them the types of skills their students are gaining and determine how those skills might overlap with the needs of the local business community. Ongoing communication with department heads should yield positive results, as both the implementer and university faculty want to see students in internships and jobs at reputable companies. The implementer can also utilize this group to market professional development events like those through the young professionals group discussed in the Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs section. The growth of these relationships should create a more fluid pipeline of student talent from higher education institution into the regional workforce.

Demonstrate Regional Support for the Higher Education Institutions

The region has many assets to offer UConn and ECSU students, staff, and faculty, and messaging around them to these institutions' leaders represents an opportunity for mutual benefit. The region's most obvious benefit to higher education institutions lies in creating connections between local businesses and the student body. Internships, for one, are critical for students to obtain work experience prior to graduation, and those located near to campus are very desirable. Further, students who have interned at a company have a high chance of being hired come graduation than students that have not interned at that company, with paid interns receiving

job offers about 65% of the time and non-interns receiving offers only 37% of the time[8]. Even for those students without internships within the region, those who are soon to graduate will be seeking full-time employment opportunities. The implementer should work to develop an in-depth knowledge of the business community's workforce needs and create connections between students and internship and job opportunities based on those needs. As business visitations take place at the outset of the implementer's work, staff should collect specific information on talent and skills needs with the idea in mind of creating connections between students and these businesses. While this process will be gradual as more businesses are engaged, the implementer should consider starting with some larger companies that likely have more job and internship opportunities available.

Additionally, there is opportunity for students to work on real business challenges as part of their coursework. The implementer can help connect faculty managing any applied independent study-style projects with local businesses. The students benefit from this real-world experience while the businesses benefit from having access to these student "consultants" free of charge (see Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs section).

To create these student-business connections, the implementer should interact with individual departments heads relevant to the industries and needs of interested companies. By building these relationships through direct and ongoing communication with department heads, the implementer will be able to create a more fluid pipeline of talent from the universities to local businesses. The implementer should also encourage companies to participate in the universities' career and internship fairs, as the nearby location is appealing to students, particularly those looking for internships.

To ensure that local businesses are especially appealing to students, particularly post-graduation, the implementer should also consider certain incentives. For one, the implementer should discuss with these companies the possibility of their offering student loan reimbursements. This would be a significant incentive for top-quality talent to vie for employment at these companies and, resultingly, locate within the region. While this is a decision made within the highest levels of company leaderships, the implementer can certainly present the idea, particularly to those companies struggling to find and retain talent.

Another opportunity to encourage students to choose companies located in the area post-graduation is to create a "familiarization tour" for university seniors and graduate students in their final semesters. The implementer should work with the universities to create tours showcasing key companies looking to hire graduates, rental and purchase housing opportunities, and recreational and entertainment opportunities. The tour should also include discussions with former university students who stayed in the region post-graduation. By demonstrating a desirable quality of life in the company of peers, students will be further encouraged to remain local. This also benefits the universities in creating more closely-connected alumni networks, through physical location and the ability to maintain these university relationships for student mentoring and engagement, as ambassadors between local companies and the student body, and for fundraising purposes.

---

[8] Crain, Andrew. Understanding the Impact of Unpaid Internships on College Student Career Development and Employment Outcomes (NACE Foundation, 2016). URL: https://www.naceweb.org/uploadedfiles/files/2016/guide/the-impact-of-unpaid-internships-on-career-development.pdf.

The implementer should also widely promote any university events to its residents and employees. Working with each university's arts and culture departments and performance spaces as well as the athletics divisions, the implementer can create a calendar of events at these institutions and promote them to new and returning attendees. Not only is this a unique amenity for residents and employees of the region, the higher education institutions benefit from increased attendance at events.

7Jorgensen Center for Performing Arts, Mansfield (source: https://education.uconn.edu/jorgensen-31953672_10155496118601765_8869677528659263488_o/)

Finally, as the implementer engages in all the economic vitality efforts outlined in this report, it will likely attract new dining, lodging, entertainment, etc. options for students, parents, staff, and faculty of the higher education institutions. This enhances the quality of life in the region.

One additional consideration for working with the universities is that, as their populations decrease during the summer months, many businesses surrounding and related to these institutions see a decrease in customers. Thus, the implementer should make particularly strong efforts to draw in additional visitors during these months.

Develop Support for the Region's Efforts from the Higher Education Institutions

As the implementer creates economic opportunities to benefit the area's universities, the universities can conversely support the implementer in its efforts. Regional economic growth will undoubtedly benefit both groups, and, as such, ongoing cooperation and collaboration is critical to this initiative's success. One key opportunity for UConn, in particular, is to provide support to the region by working with the Tech Transfer and Venture Development Office to encourage graduating incubator businesses well-suited to the region to look for real estate locally. The Tech Transfer Office should engage in ongoing communication with the implementer to ensure that it is aware of any start-ups with a high-potential for growth and suited to the region's mix of industries. One high-potential real estate opportunity for these businesses could be the regional coworking and incubation hub (see Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs section), which would allow a smoother and less capital-intensive transition into the corporate world. For start-ups requiring more space, the implementer should have a strong understanding of available commercial rental space and connect them to the appropriate real estate contacts. Throughout the process of finding commercial space, the implementer should work closely with these businesses to ensure that they are supported and have knowledge of and access to resources for start-ups in Connecticut such as Connecticut Innovations, CTNext, the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology, and the Department of Economic and Community Development. They should also be connected to the business mentorship program discussed in the Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs section.

Another way the universities can support the implementer's efforts in promoting its assets is by encouraging students, parents, faculty, and staff to visit and engage with them. The implementer should share print and online versions of its map of outdoor recreation, agricultural, and cultural sites with the universities for promotion on their websites and in their welcome centers. Additionally, the implementer should communicate information about upcoming events and programs, allowing them to be shared via email to university constituents, where appropriate. These promotional opportunities require few resources from the institutions but open up the region's amenities to a group that may not have otherwise known about them.

One long-term opportunity for university partnership with the implementer is in the development of 55+ living communities. The creation of this housing close to the campuses may appeal to alumni and encourage them to return to the area, particularly as they are interested in taking advantage of the educational and cultural amenities these institutions offer. The implementer should engage in conversations with the universities on their willingness to promote these residential opportunities to their alumni, recognizing that they would benefit financially as well, and then connect them to the developers interested in taking on these projects. Alumni that are geographically close to campus, as mentioned above, are likely to be more engaged with their alma mater through taking classes, student mentorship, fundraising activities, attending events and programs, etc. In some cases, universities are even developing these retirement communities themselves (called university-based retirement communities), creating additional financial gain. The implementer should also discuss this opportunity with the universities, particularly if there are large, university-owned tracts of underutilized land close to campus.

Desired Outcomes and Program Evaluation

Some desired outcomes of increased engagement and collaboration with UConn and ECSU might be an increase in customers visiting local businesses, an increase in university constituents choosing to live and work in the region, and improved talent access for the region's companies. As with the other sections, surveying of both businesses and residents on these topics is a critical approach to outcome evaluation. Data on employment and resident growth could further support the data collected through the survey tool, so this should be tracked as well.

Examples and Resources

Below is a list of resources to be used for implementation of components of the Role of Higher Education Institutions section of the plan:

Student loan reimbursement programs

- This article lists a number of companies nationally that provide student loan reimbursements and provides a brief overview of what those programs typically look like. Aetna, which is headquartered in Hartford, is on the list of companies providing this benefit, so the implementer may consider reaching

out to learn more about their program in its effort to provide more detailed and accurate information to local employers. See it here: https://loans.usnews.com/which-employers-offer-student-loan-repayment.

- The Employer Participation in Repayment Act of 2019 is a federal bill introduced in February of 2019 that allows tax exclusion up to a certain amount for employers providing student loan assistance. This would act as a significant incentive for additional employers to provide student loan reimbursement as a benefit to employees. While this bill has not yet been signed as law, it has been referred to the Committee on Finance. The implementer should track its status here: https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/460.

Regional familiarization tour for graduating students

- While it seems that the idea of coordinating a familiarization tour for students graduating the universities is a unique idea, many communities and regions nationwide conduct these tours for economic vitality purposes. The Greater Mystic Tourism Marketing Committee, for example, coordinated a familiarization tour to showcase the region's tourism assets to representatives from the hospitality industry (concierges, guest relations team, travel agencies, etc.). While the purpose of the tour was different, the implementer might consider reaching out to the committee for suggestions on coordination and implementation of such an event. See it here: https://info.chamberect.com/news/details/greater-mystic-tourism-marketing-committee-to-host-industry-fam-tour-feb-25.

Resources for start-ups

- The Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology is a statewide organization that provides start-ups with support in testing and validating their technologies and identifying the right talent to help them grow. See it here: https://www.ccat.us/.
- Connecticut Innovations provides venture capital for innovative growing companies statewide. See it here: https://ctinnovations.com/learn-about-connecticut-innovations/.
- CTNext, a subsidiary of Connecticut Innovations, provides technical support and guidance to start-ups around the state. See it here: https://ctnext.com/.
- The Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development administers some incentive-based programs that support entrepreneurship. See it here: https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/Business-Development/01_Type_of_Business/Entrepreneurs.

University-based retirement communities

- This article explains the concept behind these types of communities and evaluates the benefits and drawbacks. See it here: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/10/us/college-university-retirement-communities.html.

- Lasell Village is a Massachusetts-based example of this type of community. Located on the campus of Lasell University, Lasell Village offers independing living, assisted living, and short-term rehabilitation facilities for seniors looking to remain intellectually-enriched. See it here: https://lasellvillage.com/.

Visibility and Marketing

Increasing visibility of the region's assets has been a consistent theme throughout this project. Cohesive and collaborative marketing efforts are the key to making the region more visible, both within the state and outside it. Creating a regional identity assists in the development of a broader marketing campaign, determining what message should be communicated, who should receive the messaging, how the messaging should be disseminated, and reinforces those connections. Initial discussions on a marketing campaign began, and ideas were generated. However, the Towns felt that the efforts at the outset should focus on implementation of the plan and that additional work on the campaign should fall into place after this initial work. AdvanceCT looks forward to reengaging the region around this campaign at its convenience. The ideas discussed up to this point have been included, though they are subject to change as part of the final product.

Audience

In addition to determining the region's messaging and strategy for dissemination, audience is another critical piece in a successful marketing campaign. Because of its many tourism-related assets, the region can become a destination for visitors from around the state and, even, around New England. However, because of its high quality of life, family-friendly amenities, and quaint character, it may also be attractive to new residents. The tactics outlined below will encourage more visitors, with the hopes of an increase in future residents and potential business growth for the region.

Marketing Campaign

As part of these recommendations, stakeholders were engaged to inform the creation of a regional identity and associated language and graphics to be utilized as part of a marketing campaign. This effort was not undertaken to replace or recreate an identity for the communities but, instead, to represent a joint campaign that complements any individual municipal brands (logo/tagline). The results of this information gathering process can be found in Appendix G.

The implementer could reengage when appropriate to finalize the marketing campaign concepts. The above results represent ideas developed through a process of ongoing collaboration with the region. The following recommendations outline the approach to disseminating the above messaging as well as specific information on the region's assets.

Digital Marketing Opportunities

Digital marketing is likely the most impactful strategy that the region can undertake to reach a broad audience. This includes websites, social media channels, online advertisements, smart phone apps, and more. The most important component of this regional marketing effort is the creation of a visitor-focused website clearly portraying the region's identity and containing information on the region's businesses, attractions, and events

and programming. This website should be smart phone-friendly. Assuming that visitors to the region enjoy its amenities and high quality of life, this website will also assist in attraction of residents. Below are the types of information that should be included on this website:

- **Description of the region** – This page should describe the region's location, key industries, and major attractions. This should give visitors an idea of the region's identity.
- **Visit us** – This page should provide detailed information on the region's attractions that appeal most to visitors as well as an overview of lodging, shopping, and dining opportunities. Each specific business or attraction included in the narrative should be hyperlinked to its own website. The implementer should also include predesigned itineraries for day trips and weekend trips, created based on different interests. For example, an extreme sports day trip might include a visit to Bolton's mountain biking trails, the Storrs Adventure Park, and a meal at Camille's Wood Fired Pizza in Tolland, while a "friends of the farm" weekend trip might include a tour of the region's farms over the course of two days, a trip to the UConn Dairy Bar, a stay at the Tolland Inn, and a visit to the Coventry Farmer's Market. Note that attractive photos are key in exciting potential visitors and helping them understand what types of experiences the region has to offer.
- **Live here** – This page should provide information on quality of life, community services, and other unique amenities attractive to potential residents (CSAs, childcare facilities, opportunities to volunteer in the region, etc.). It should also provide links to local residential real estate offices.
- **Maps of attractions** – This page should include the full attractions map that shows outdoor recreation, agricultural, and cultural amenities. It should also include a map of all trails within the region, specifically marking parking areas and trailheads.
- **Calendar of events** – This page should include a calendar of all events happening within the region. The implementer should populate the calendar as community groups, businesses, municipalities, the universities, etc. share information about their events with the region. The implementer may also consider including a form on this page that those wanting to post their events can fill out to streamline the process of evaluating and uploading events to the calendar. There should be discussion and decisions on the criteria for events that will be uploaded to the calendar and those that will not. There should also be an option to filter events by interest (outdoor recreation, nature and wildlife, arts, food, education, etc.) to facilitate the user experience. The list of activities for each day could potentially grow very large if there is broad buy-in for this calendar as a promotional opportunity among regional constituents.
- **News and promotions** – This page should be updated frequently with news, events, business promotions, etc. in order to maintain an active online presence. Content from social media posts should be uploaded to this page, minimizing any additional effort required to maintain it.
- **List of businesses** – This page should consist of a list of businesses within the region that are relevant to the needs of visitors and residents (restaurants, lodging, museums, retail shops, recreational facilities, childcare facilities, etc.), categorized by business type to facilitate the user experience.
- **Contact us** – This page should include contact information for the administrator of this regional effort as well as information for each individual community for any local inquiries.

While the implementer not may be able to fund a new website and website consultant immediately, each town should create a separate page on its existing website including the information described above. However, the creation of a dedicated regional website should be a priority.

In the near-term, there should be a new page created on each town's website dedicated to the regional effort that includes a statement about this four-town collaboration with links to the other three communities' websites. The suggested content listed above can be added on an ongoing basis, but the most critical items include contact information, individual town calendars of events, individual town business lists, and a broad description of the region and its key attractions and amenities (can be the same description for all four towns).

Social media is a marketing necessity, and the implementer will find a significant return on its efforts if managed properly. The implementer should create Facebook and Instagram accounts and maintain an active presence on both, developing a plan for about a month's worth of posts at a time, featuring news, attractions, and stories. Asking users questions within these social media posts is a great way of engaging them around specific topics the implementer wants to highlight. Additionally, each individual community should share news of events and programs taking place in the other three towns to demonstrate this regional mindset and ensure the maximum number of residents is reached. Another strategy for engagement is to coordinate a social media photo contest where users submit their photos of certain attractions (usually based around a theme) for their peers to vote on, with the winner receiving a prize donated by a sponsoring business.

In the future, the implementer might also consider having an app developed, designed similarly to the website, to even further facilitate the user experience.

One additional online resource for free tourism-related marketing for businesses is CTVisit.com, which is the State's tourism website managed by the Department of Economic and Community Development. Representatives from individual businesses and attractions are able to create and manage their own profiles and listings, and, once live, those profiles are featured on the site. The use of this website requires few resources from the implementer other than some effort around more widely promoting this resource. In return, local businesses have access to free statewide promotion on a highly-trafficked and dynamic website.

Print and Other Physical Marketing Opportunities

There are a variety of opportunities for physical marketing of the region's assets. Print materials are a common approach, and the implementer should plan to create documents to be distributed in public spaces, at events, at businesses, etc. Materials should include:

- "Visitor's guide" highlighting attractions, dining, lodging, shopping, etc. within the region;
- Attractions map and trails map described in the above "Digital Marketing Opportunities" sub-section; and
- Upcoming events guide highlighting upcoming events in the region – should be updated on a monthly basis.

The documents should reflect the regional branding (completed as part of this report). They should be available at each community's Town Hall, community center, and library and at local businesses that are interested in promoting the region. They should also be distributed at large community events. Mansfield is in the process of creating a guide for new residents and businesses, and this could be used as a model for a similar regional brochure.

To improve the region's impact at events, in particular, a tablecloth and pull-up display should be created to ensure that attendees' impressions of the region are of professionalism, organization, and top-quality experiences. Because the Coventry Farmer's Market is such a well-visited event, the implementer should consider setting up a booth there at least once per month. Other promotional events could be the Connecticut Tourism Conference, UConn sporting events, and the Last Green Valley's Walktober events.

Bolton, Mansfield, and Tolland act as entrances to the region from different major roads. Another marketing opportunity exists in the creation of obvious and attractive physical gateways for these towns, including landscaping, signage, lighting, and other aesthetic enhancements to create a warm welcome for visitors. Visitors should have a clear idea of the region's boundaries and identity. These towns have plans and/or regulations in place to support these streetscape enhancements and should continue to seek grant funding to allow their implementation.

Beyond these three gateways, wayfinding signage containing the region's logo should be placed in strategic locations within all four towns. This signage should direct visitors to key attractions and businesses. The implementer may also consider coordinating specific streetscape components to maintain a cohesive feeling within the entire region beyond the wayfinding signage. For example, the towns may consider using the same street lighting fixtures and banners attached to these fixtures. The goal of these efforts is to create a sense of place and identity for the region, and every step the towns can take toward cohesive efforts with regard to infrastructure and streetscaping is critical for reaching this goal.

Business Recruitment Marketing

Because this report has largely focused on expanding the region's strengths in tourism-related businesses, the marketing campaign described thus far has the overarching goal of increasing visibility of these assets to new and returning customers. However, there are undoubtedly opportunities throughout the region to attract new businesses, both within and outside the realm of tourism, that would not fall under the umbrella of this marketing campaign.

"The region's location is great. We've been able to attract talent from UConn, Boston, and other out-of-state locations." – Tolland business owner

The implementer should engage frequently with the MetroHartford Alliance and AdvanceCT to ensure that those organizations are aware of any large pieces of commercial real estate prime for the location of a new

business. These two organizations are currently taking the lead on marketing the state (AdvanceCT) and, more specifically, the Greater Hartford region (MetroHartford) to prospective businesses at national and international levels. Working with these two organizations allows the implementer to leverage the capabilities of those organizations while conserving the significant resources that are put into large-scale business recruitment work.

However, for smaller businesses likely under the radar of those two organizations, the implementer should prepare data to create a business case for the recruitment of these smaller companies. This data should include information on:

- Key industries – businesses like to know that they are locating in an area where there is already success within their industry;
- Location – businesses like to have an understanding of distance and drive time to larger metropolitan hubs like Boston and New York;
- Transportation options – businesses like to know what options exist to transport their goods (where applicable) as well as commuting options for employees;
- Workforce – businesses like to know what skills and education levels the workforce in the region has so that they can ensure it will meet their requirements; and
- Commercial real estate – without an appropriate building or site, efforts to recruit a business to the region will fail. It is critical that the implementer has an understanding of the amount and characteristics of available commercial real estate.

All this information should be compiled into a concise document presenting a convincing case for recruiting any business to the region. See the Small Business and Entrepreneurship section for additional information on this package.

Cross-Promotional Opportunities

The implementer should leverage the networks of strategic partner organizations to maximize the impact of these marketing activities. Working with the Tolland County and Windham Regional Chambers of Commerce, for example, the implementer can cross-promote community events as well as business news and promotions. The implementer should engage frequently with these chambers to ensure that business retention and promotional efforts are cohesive and collaborative.

The implementer should also reach out to travel bloggers from around Connecticut and within the northeast to encourage them to visit the area's attractions. Based on those experiences, the bloggers can write articles promoting the region to their followers, opening it up to a group that may not have otherwise known about all that it has to offer. Also, local and regional media outlets should be engaged to feature information like events, news, and other announcements.

Desired Outcomes and Program Evaluation

The desired outcome for the region's marketing efforts is increased visibility for the region, drawing in additional visitors and businesses. Surveying is the best approach to evaluating success. Questions should focus on how these constituents learned about the region and their opinions on the effectiveness of the marketing collateral.

Examples and Resources

Below is a list of resources to be used for implementation of components of the Visibility and Marketing section of the plan:

Tourism marketing websites

- The Town of Washington, Connecticut has created a tourism-focused website showcasing the assets and opportunities for visitors in a small town. See it here: https://explorewashingtonct.com/.
- Florida's "Palm Beaches" have pooled resources to create a tourism website featuring 39 beach-focused communities in the state. The website is called "Discover the Palm Beaches, Florida" and highlights the obvious similarities between the beach communities as well as the different experiences and atmospheres of each. The four-town region should consider taking this approach with its own website, showcasing the commonalities while demonstrating "niche" areas for each. See it here: https://www.thepalmbeaches.com/.
- The State of Michigan has an engaging and user-friendly website, and its "Pure Michigan" logo is well-known nationwide. See it here: https://www.michigan.org/.
- Travel Oregon's website is also very attractive to visitors. One interesting concept it features is that visitors can choose a "feeling" they want to pursue (silly, adventurous, nostalgic, etc.), which leads to several different activities and attractions to explore. See it here: https://traveloregon.com/.

Tourism smart phone app

- New York's Pass App combines attraction information and tickets, maps, itineraries, and additional trip planning information all in one place. See it here: https://www.newyorkpass.com/how-it-works/new-york-pass-iphone-app.html.
- This article makes the case for investment in the creation of a smart phone app, as they are growing in popularity. See it here: https://tech.co/news/tourism-apps-primed-reshape-app-indusry-2016-01.

CTvisit.com

- CTvisit.com is the state's tourism website, with listings for attractions and businesses being managed by the individuals representing them. This is a free service, and the implementer should encourage its constituents to explore it. See it here: https://www.ctvisit.com/.

Visitor's guide

- The State of New Jersey has a magazine-style visitor's guide, which is in print as well as online in a user-friendly format. See it here: http://digital.milespartnership.com/publication/?m=44722&i=643038&p=0.
- The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo's visitor's guide, while focused on an event and not a place, is well-designed and user-friendly. It includes maps, program information, a schedule, and a business guide. See it here: https://www.rodeohouston.com/Portals/0/Content/VisitShow/VisitorsGuide/Downloads/VisitorsGuide.pdf.

Additional Considerations

To realize the maximum potential of these recommendations, there are a number of additional considerations the implementer should address.

Inventory of Businesses and Real Estate Opportunities

Each community in the region should have a strong understanding of its economic vitality assets and opportunities in order to help existing businesses expand and prospective businesses locate in the area. Thus, it is critical to track the numbers and types of businesses and commercial real estate opportunities. Each town should create a list of businesses that includes industry and contact information so that ongoing communication can be facilitated and data on specific industry growth can be tracked. Beyond any existing business lists, the Connecticut Secretary of State's Office and the local Assessor's Offices are excellent starting points for discovering existing businesses. A fully complete inventory is difficult to attain because of changes for small and home businesses that are often unbeknownst to municipal staff. Business visitations are another way to add contact information to this list. This inventory is an ongoing effort, and the communities should work to complete it to the best of their abilities.

Additionally, commercial real estate inventories should be created for each community so that municipal staff can best support expanding or prospective businesses in locating properties suitable for their needs. Large online commercial real estate databases such as LoopNet and CoStar are a strong source for a large number of listings. AdvanceCT's SiteFinder is another source of Connecticut real estate information. Ongoing engagement with key property owners is also a key component of fully understanding commercial real estate opportunities, as these individuals may be willing to sell or lease their properties under certain circumstances but may not have them formally listed for sale or rent.

For businesses that cannot find suitable spaces in one community, municipal staff should recommend they reach out to the other three towns in the region. The growth of any individual town will benefit the region by creating a concentration of economic activity which will eventually spill beyond the borders of that one community.

Business Engagement

To build off the concept of better understanding the region's economic vitality assets and opportunities, ongoing engagement of local businesses is critical. The implementer should prioritize visitation of businesses, particularly those in the industries highlighted in these recommendations. These visitations can help businesses better understand this regional effort and help the implementer understand what businesses' challenges are and how they can be addressed. They also allow the implementer to learn about opportunities for existing businesses to expand. Key businesses should be visited (or at least engaged by phone) twice per year, with ongoing communication of the implementer's economic vitality efforts being sent out periodically via email or mail. This could be in the form of a quarterly regional newsletter.

Additionally, while some business owners may not often communicate with the towns, opportunities for engagement can exist in drawing them out through free events and workshops, offering to make business connections for them whenever possible, and requesting they serve on the regional steering committee for the implementation of these recommendations as well as other local boards and commissions. Communicating to these businesses the benefits of engaging with the community is an important part of convincing them that this is a worthwhile use of their time. Benefits include:

- Increasing brand awareness and visibility within the community;
- Developing relationships with potential customers, suppliers, and employees; and
- Related to support for implementation of this plan, these recommendations are designed to help grow the regional economy, which will likely bring in additional customers.

Keeping businesses aware of the implementer's efforts to promote them and grow the overall economic base – and demonstrating results – is critical for developing their buy-in when their engagement and/or investment may be requested as part of certain projects. Without the engagement of the business community in these efforts, the implementer will be greatly inhibited in its ability to produce results.

Attraction of Additional Lodging Opportunities

As many of these recommendations are focused on promoting visitors to the region, additional lodging would support extended visits as the region grows into a destination for those from outside the state. The implementer should, first identify potential sites for hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, etc. and determine whether local zoning regulations support this use. If not, municipal staff should work with local Economic Development Commissions to engage the Planning and Zoning Commissions and propose a regulation change.

Beyond that effort, the implementer should reach out to hotel chains to better understand their requirements for opening a new facility and pitch the appropriate properties. If larger hotels are not willing to locate in the area in the short-term, the implementer should reach out to successful bed and breakfasts or small, independent hotels located within the state or in the northeast to determine whether the owners might have interest in opening a second location. Individuals attending events and conferences at UConn and ECSU will utilize this additional nearby lodging. Proactive efforts around attraction of lodging opportunities is important in creating a New England destination of this four-town region.

Bed and breakfast owners in the region have expressed concern that short-term rentals through websites like Air BnB and Home Away are negatively impacting their business. In addition to recruiting new establishments, the implementer should highlight existing establishments through its website, social media, in print ads, cross-promotions, and the other methods described in the marketing section of this report.

Community Education on Regional Assets

The implementer should create a program designed to educate business owners, community leaders, and engaged citizens on the attractions and amenities that exist beyond the borders of their individual communities. Through the process of engaging stakeholders to inform this plan, it became clear that many key stakeholders are unaware of all the regional assets that exist. Thus, the implementer should coordinate biannual meetings open to stakeholders from all four towns where information on key attractions and events is shared. Presenters can be representatives from the towns as well as key business owners. Additionally, the event should provide written informational materials describing these updates so they can be shared beyond the attendees at the meeting. This is also a good opportunity to distribute other marketing materials like maps and events calendars to be distributed to visitors, residents, and employees.

Implementation

Managing Plan Implementation

In order for this plan to be implemented in an impactful way, significant time and energy are required, particularly in the first couple years as the initiative gets off the ground. Thus, an entity must be created to manage its implementation.

In the short-term, a steering committee comprised of representatives from each community involved in the creation of the plan should be formed, with meetings being held at least once per month. Discussions on the creation of a 501c(3) nonprofit to oversee implementation should commence within the first year. Assuming the steering committee is successful in addressing some short-term goals at the outset, the nonprofit could be created to take on the implementation role for many of the larger-scale efforts. The steering committee members should then transition to become the nonprofit's board of directors.

One example of a regional economic development strategy that has a strong approach to implementation is the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and Implementation Plan for Virginia's Region 2000 (see here: https://www.cvpdc.org/images/Regional-Initiatives/CEDS-and-Implementation-Plan_FINAL.pdf). This plan outlines a strong structure for an implementation steering committee. While it does not call for the creation of a separate nonprofit to manage implementation past the first year, it notes the importance of staff dedicated to this project and repurposes an existing entity, the Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance, to lead these efforts.

The State of Louisiana created a guide for the creation of economic development organizations, which is likely the type of organization the regional nonprofit would be (see here: https://www.opportunitylouisiana.com/docs/default-source/info-for-partners-and-allies/establishing_edos.pdf?sfvrsn=852fa805_2). This document delves into many of the details of creating such an organization, from structure to staffing to funding. This is another excellent resource for the implementer as it looks to fully implement these recommendations.

Funding Plan Implementation

There are undoubtedly costs associated with an effort of this scale, and, given the reality of slim municipal budgets, the region must prioritize the projects it deems most valuable and which will be most widely accepted by the broader community. However, there are many opportunities for no-cost and low-cost activities as well. In fact, most of the recommendations included in this report do not require dedicated funding but, instead, require staff or volunteer time for coordination.

In the Implementation section of this report, the creation of an entity to oversee the implementation of these recommendations was noted. In the short-term, a steering committee is appropriate to initiate this effort, but a group of volunteers has limited time to coordinate activities. Hence, the creation of a staffed 501c(3) nonprofit organization is the optimal solution for plan implementation. While the no-cost activities included as part of this section can all be completed by existing staff and volunteers without additional funding, the region must evaluate the capacity and willingness of those individuals. Thus, funding a potential 501c(3) is a cost to be considered as an administrative expense of the overall implementation of this plan.

Additionally, as this plan is implemented, the region should see economic growth in the form of new residents, which can lead to new housing, as well as new and expanding businesses and tax revenue.

Below is a discussion of approaches to funding, ranging from no-cost to large-scale investment.

No- and Low-cost Activities

While there may be cost associated with the overall administration of this plan, the following activities can be completed without funding, coordinated by the implementer:

- Inventories of regional assets, businesses, and commercial real estate;
- Mapping of regional assets – note that a graphic designer may be required to create a user-friendly, interactive, digitalized version of these maps, which would have an associated cost;
- Creation of an open space plan to help determine priority open space and outdoor recreation projects;
- Wayfinding signage and other small-scale infrastructure – note that this is contingent upon businesses having interest in sponsoring signs, benches, planters, etc. but could also be funded by the implementer;
- In-person engagement with amenity users for feedback on their experiences and suggestions;
- Matchmaking between business, property owners, developers, and investors;
- Creating connections between businesses, key regional stakeholders, and resources (i.e. UConn and businesses, farmers and technical support entities, businesses and regional chambers of commerce)
- Coordination of certain types of events (guided hikes, restaurant week, buy local campaign, networking events) – note that some events may require funding from the implementer;
- Equipment sharing between the municipalities (i.e. trail maintenance equipment, mobile slaughterhouse, other agricultural equipment where appropriate);

- Creation of agriculture and arts/culture committees/entities;
- Efforts to streamline local land use regulatory processes;
- Efforts to make local zoning regulations amendments – note this could require Town Attorney involvement, which is a potential cost;
- Connecting food-based start-ups to Click commercial kitchen in Windham and working with them to sell their products at various farmer's markets and shops in the region;
- Allowing food-based start-ups to rent commercial kitchens (hourly or daily) in public facilities for production purposes – note this could act as a revenue generator for the implementer;
- Creation of social media channels for the region;
- Posting of promotional content on existing municipal websites;
- Business visitations and other engagement efforts; and
- Proactive business recruitment work – collecting and packaging data and reaching out to companies that may have interest in the region.

Because these are the least costly opportunities for implementation of this plan, the implementer can act on many at the outset of this effort. Appendix A further outlines those that should be prioritized in the short-term, medium-term, and long-term.

Anticipated Costs

There are three key types of activities to be funded to ensure full implementation of this plan, with some additional smaller projects to be considered for funding as well.

First, the implementer should consider creating a fund dedicated to marketing efforts. This fund would cover expenses related to:

- Creation and maintenance of a regional website;
- Creation and maintenance of a regional smart phone app;
- Creation and printing of marketing collateral;
- Tablecloth and pull-up display for events;
- Attendance of key staff and/or steering committee members at tourism-focused and other relevant conferences and events for promotion of the region; and
- Advertisements of the region on travel websites and blogs.

Funding for this promotional work could come from several sources. Businesses interested in being featured through these efforts can pay an annual fee for this opportunity, as a type of marketing co-op. Additionally, as the implementer coordinates events, it can recycle half the revenue earned from events back into the marketing fund. Finally, each municipality might consider allocating a small amount of funds through the annual budgeting process toward this work.

Events are another activity that should have a dedicated fund. Eventually, event coordination should be headed up by the Arts and Culture Council (see Culture and Entertainment section), which would have access to this fund. Many events should be partially or fully sponsored by local businesses and other community organizations in exchange for exposure, but the council would likely have to contribute some funding to ensure success. From any revenue generated from these events, half should be put back into the events fund, while the other half should go toward the marketing fund, which helps promote the events. The Arts and Culture Council should also coordinate the familiarization tours of the region for soon-to-graduate university students, encouraging them to stay by showcasing all the area has to offer. The universities might consider co-sponsoring the tours, as retention of these individuals within the region benefits the institutions through increased alumni engagement.

The final type of activity to be funded as part of the implementation of this plan is infrastructure improvements. These are, on average, the costliest activities for the implementer to undertake but are critical to supporting the foundation of economic vitality. The following recommendations fall under the category of infrastructure improvements:

- Water and sewer line extension;
- Expanding high-speed internet access;
- Streetscape enhancements (includes Tolland, Mansfield, and Bolton gateway designs), wayfinding signage, and other small-scale infrastructure;
- Connecting trails to each other and other regional assets; and
- Creating a co-working space.

State and federal grants can be a source of funding for many of these projects, though relying solely on grant funding will delay the implementation of this plan due to the infrequent nature of grant rounds. However, some specific grants the implementer should track for these announcements are:

- CT OPM's Small Town Economic Assistance Program;
- CT DECD's Urban Act Grant Program;
- CT DOT's Town Aid Road Grant Program;
- CT DOT's Transportation Enhancement Program;
- CT DOT's Community Connectivity Grant Program;
- CT DOH's Community Development Block Grant Program;
- CT DEEP's Urban Green and Community Gardens Grant Program;
- US DOT's BUILD Discretionary Grants;
- USDA's Agriculture Innovation Center Grant Program;
- US EDA's Regional Innovation Program: Build to Scale Program;
- US EDA's Planning and Local Technical Assistance Programs;
- USDA's Rural Development Loan and Grant Assistance; and
- USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program.

Grants.gov is a good source for obtaining information on federal grants, with content being updated frequently. The implementer should check this site often.

The implementer should more fully vet these grants to determine which local projects may be suitable. As grant applications are generally made by individual municipalities, the implementer should discuss priority projects in each town that fall into the abovementioned categories and apply accordingly. While this regional discussion will surely not be the only factor in a municipality's decision to pursue a grant, it should play a role.

Other opportunities to fund infrastructure projects include the municipal budgeting process and municipal bonding. Neither of these sources are ideal, as they require tax dollars to be spent, but, in many cases, they improve quality of life for the community as a whole. For utility and high-speed internet expansion, in particular, these funding sources are viable.

With respect to the coworking space specifically, it would likely be a challenge to obtain grant funding or municipal funds for such a purpose. Thus, the implementer should work with incoming developers creating new housing or commercial space to see if this type of space could be incorporated into a new development. The municipality in which the space will be located might consider providing a local tax incentive to a developer willing to incorporate it.

Additionally, if a developer is constructing a new building that is not connected to a utility line, but is near to it, he/she may consider paying for the expansion of the line. This is another opportunity for municipalities to leverage a tax incentive for a project that will benefit the community.

Some other projects to be considered for funding are the creation of community gardens and the purchase of survey software to ensure strong program evaluation efforts.

Community gardens would develop community interest and engagement in agriculture, which would lead to greater support for local farmers. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is currently accepting grant applications for the Urban Green and Community Gardens Grant Program to support communities in creating these gardens. The municipalities should consider applying for this grant for this round of funding or, at least, monitor the grant and be prepared to apply next time funding is announced.

As was noted through this action plan, program evaluation is a critical component of ensuring the successful implementation of this plan. The implementer must collect feedback on the opinions of those businesses, residents, and visitors experiencing the new activities occurring as a result of this implementation process. If some components of this plan are not changing the behaviors of these key groups to the benefit of the region's economy, then the plan should be amended to address that. Consider using an online survey instrument like Survey Monkey to collect and analyze this data. Without program evaluation, the implementer cannot know if its efforts are successful.

Conclusion

The recommendations outlined in this economic vitality action plan are the culmination of significant research and outreach regarding the existing conditions and future opportunities for the region. The region's greatest strengths in promoting economic vitality are its engaged community, opportunities for tourism promotion, proximity to UConn and ECSU, and small-town charm. On the other hand, residents' concerns with economic growth, development limitations (i.e. zoning regulations, available real estate, utility infrastructure), and resource constraints with respect to implementing these recommendations are potential challenges. However, the region can grow to thrive in a way that residents and businesses alike will support if sufficient resources are dedicated to the implementation of this plan and growth respects the traditions and heritage of this four-town region.

Once fully implemented, the region can expect to see new residents, visitors, businesses, and employees as well as increased investment in each community. The voluntary and proactive effort of the Towns of Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, and Tolland to create this plan already demonstrates a strong drive to see its successful implementation. This plan represents one of the first partnerships of its kind across the State of Connecticut – one that maximizes each community's resources while allowing for a larger impact. AdvanceCT is proud to have collaborated on this effort and will continue to provide guidance to the implementer as the next phase begins.

Appendices

Appendix A: Implementation Matrix

Attached separately.

Appendix B: Document Review Findings

Bolton Findings

POCD

Key Issues – Conservation

-maintain character
-protect water quality and lakes
-preserve open space/farms/scenic views
-promote community engagement
-encourage volunteers/public participation

Key Issues – Development

-promote business development/grow tax base
-simplify regulations
-simplify approvals process
-review zone locations/boundaries
-placemaking
-create a focal point in Bolton Center
-continue managing residential development through increased housing diversity and encouraging open space subdivisions

Key Issues – Infrastructure

-maintain/enhance level of community facilities and services
-determine which community facilities can be recycled/reused for other purposes
-encourage walking and biking

ROUTE 6 HOP RIVER CORRIDOR TRANSPORTATION STUDY

-area studied: approximately 11 miles of US Route 6 and 2 miles of Route 66 East located between Notch Road in Bolton and the Willimantic River at the Columbia-Windham town line

Existing and Future Conditions Assessment

-high speeds
-inefficient intersections cause traffic delays
-danger for drivers and pedestrians/bikers because of inadequate infrastructure
-anticipated increase in traffic volumes means these problems will only get worse

Focus Area Recommendations

-Bolton Notch: improve connectivity between Bolton Center and Routes 6/44 via Notch Road and pedestrian/bicycle connectivity via a shared use path that would connect Route 44/6, Notch Road, and the Hop River Trail
-Bolton Crossroads: create a small network of local streets and physical changes to Route 6 that will accommodate and support the community's long-term vision for a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly mixed-use village; changes include access management and speed mitigation measures and streetscaping to create a sense of arrival
-Lighthouse Corners: replace the existing signalized intersection with a two-lane roundabout to improve safety and maintain village character

Other Recommendations

-improve side road intersections
-improve access management
-implement safety measures on Route 66
-consider diversion route planning for Route 6 (related to accidents)
-make pedestrian and bicycle improvements

-make improvements to the Hop River Trail
-improve transit access and improvements
-implement green infrastructure

ROUTE 44 HOUSING AND ECONOMIC GROWTH FORUM
-new zoning proposed to allow for/promote mixed-use, an incentive housing overlay zone, low-impact development, and improved signage
-create design guidelines

ROUTE 44 STRATEGIC CORRIDOR PLAN
Land Use Management Recommendations
-implementation of a mixed-use neighborhood zone allowing a mix of residential and non-residential; a civic mixed-use zone allowing a mix of residential, heritage/tourism, and civic/institutional uses; a neighborhood residential zone preserving the existing cohesive neighborhoods; and an open space conservation zone allowing low-density residential, traditional farming/agri-business, and passive recreation
-implementation of design guidelines addressing design standards for proportions and massing of buildings; public views of properties and maintenance of vistas; lighting and fencing; preservation of existing mature trees, stone walls, and distinctive rock outcroppings; natural buffers among the clusters and between the clusters and preservation zones; landscaping standards; etc.
-implementation of development incentives like allowances for greater intensity/density of structures on a lot, parking flexibility, reduction/waivers of fees associated with development applications, and allowing certain uses by right
-implementation of additional incentives such as offering matching funds to pay for off-site improvements necessary to mitigate a project's impacts; offering matching funds for site amenities such as landscaping and pedestrian facilities; offering tax credits, TIF, and tax breaks or deferrals for desirable projects; etc.
-creation of public-private partnerships to promote desirable land use through shared responsibility for parking facilities; public access to open space within a private development; sidewalk and bicycle path connections from private to public facilities; brownfields redevelopment; etc.

Economic Development Recommendations
-creation of a public-private partnership organization to conduct marketing and promotions specifically within the corridor (i.e. merchants association, development corporation, or business improvement district)
-collaboration with nearby Chamber of Commerce or community-based organization for general promotion and business attraction campaign
-discussion with state tourism district regarding programs, website, and other promotional opportunities available for local businesses, particularly agri-businesses and tourism services
-development of a brochure to promote Bolton's recreational destination and build upon its agricultural assets to tie in "Connecticut Grown" promotion
-development of a publicly-supported, regularly-scheduled outdoor farmer's market
-develop and maintain a matrix of existing businesses and contact information
-create a regular schedule for business contact
-convene an economic summit at least once per year for the business community
-create a link to available commercial real estate on the Town's website
-develop an attraction strategy for specific, desirable markets
-develop a niche strategy for outdoor recreation and heritage tourism, identifying specific business types that would be the focus

Transportation System Recommendations
-consolidate commercial driveways at the Post Office Plaza and align with Quarry Road
-align the access to Bolton Lake Boat Launch with South Road at its intersection with Route 44
Install aesthetic gateway signage to alert motorists to the potential for slow, turning vehicles and/or pedestrian activity at key points on Route 44
-install signage to direct motorists to natural resources and pathway access points
-enhance streetscape aesthetics and create traffic calming measures

-strengthen off-street bicycle/pedestrian network
-increase continuity of multimodal network along streets
-explore feasibility of a link between the Valley Falls greenway and Notch Road for multimodal connection to the Bolton town center
-use land use/zoning strategies for public-private partnerships in providing sidewalks, bicycle access, and trail linkages with new developments

ROUTE 6 HOP RIVER CORRIDOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND MASTER PLAN STUDY
Recommendations for re-visioning the Route 6 Hop River Corridor through the use of public input and consensus building
-install new gateway signs at Bolton Notch, Columbia East, and the Route 6/66 intersection
-continue to contact property owners to act as advocates for the proposed new Corridor Zone, Unified Zoning, and a simplified review process
-establish a banner program welcoming new businesses and/or announcing major events for exsting companies
-establish a Hop River Days Festival which would include such events as a trail run, sidewalk sales, craft fair, and other festivities
-establish a four-town chamber of commerce

Recommendations for the creation of a master plan of the corridor that provides targeted areas of development for each town
-continue to refine the ideas and designs in the master plan, individual site plan, and before-and-after pictures to encourage CONNDOT to improve safety, aesthetics, and developability of the corridor
-prepare text for a corridor zone that has a consistent form in all four towns
-generate architectural guidelines for future growth and retrofit of existing buildings for the entire corridor based on the input from the public during the public workshops
-implement streetscape guidelines for the corridor based on preferences for light fixtures and poles, sidewalk width and treatment, and their locations within the DOT right-of-way
-coordinate review, approval, and implementation of a common and consistent corridor text including the architecture guidelines in each of the four towns

Recommendations for the preservation of historic, scenic, and environmental resources of the corridor in a manner that identifies those resources s potential positive elements
-encourage farmland preservation by the transfer of development rights to the corridor development agency or a similar organization
-open the Hop River trail from Bolton Notch to the Willimantic River
-encourage businesses that support/enhance the use of the Hop River Trail (i.e. sporting goods, bicycle shops, kayak sales and rentals, ice cream, restaurants, etc.)
-install light poles and banners at significant points along the corridor
-encourage existing auto uses to expand green islands along their road frontage and reduce curb cuts
-establish a long-term street tree planting program
-avoid construction on steep slopes and large-scale removal of trees
-avoid new construction in residential areas where possible and encourage shared driveways
-preserve significant views through use of limited building envelopes or more positive programs which reward the preservation of these properties through increased density or reduced setbacks at targeted locations
-place larger buildings/density off the road served by a single driveway or street

Recommendations for balancing the investment potential and costs among the four towns
-expand the role of the Route 6 Regional Economic Development Council to include the ability to review land use applications, create and implement new business parks using a cost sharing model, control and/or hold property, submit grant applications, and enter into agreements with towns/property owners/etc.
-work with CRCOG and/or MetroHartford Alliance to be classified as an EDD
-identify one area in each town to be developed as a shared cost/benefit project guided by the corridor EDC

Recommendations for identifying "kick-off" projects that should be done first and will provide the foundation for future projects
-establish new streetscapes for key areas with sidewalks added

-contact the State to transfer ownership of a large parcel on the north side of Route 6 at Bolton Crossroads – it is critical to the development of Four Town Corporate Park
-continue with the CRCOG Transportation Study, which should establish CONNDOT endorsement for the gateway signs, planted raised medians, signal location new intersection at Bolton Crossroads, streetscape improvements in the right-of-way, and Bolton Crossroads Corporate Park boulevard-type road between Routes 6 and 44

Coventry Findings

POCD
Fundamental values:
-agriculture
-community
-neighborhoods
-volunteers
-vistas
-open space
-waterways
-mobility
-villages
-businesses
-history

Goals:
-rural character: preserve and maintain the essential rural character of Coventry as change and growth occur in future years
-cultural and historical: maintain and improve those aspects of community development important to the quality of life
-environmental and open space: (1) provide adequate protection and preservation of the town's natural resources while providing open space along with passive and active recreational opportunities for all town residents; (2) formally protect a minimum of 20% of the town's land area as open space, considering farm soils, river aquifers, and unfragmented forest as high priorities, and striving to make open space contiguous; (3) protect the water quality of Lake Wangumbaug
-agriculture: preserve farmland and support farming activity, both crops and livestock, for their economic benefits and their educational/recreational opportunities
-municipal facilities: continue to provide existing municipal services facilities and programs to best serve citizens' needs and expectations and encourage their use, retrofit existing facilities to reduce energy usage
-parks and recreation: (1) provide quality recreational opportunities for all town residents and strengthen the community image and sense of place; (2) preserve and promote those factors that help define the Town of Coventry as a unique community and creating an inviting, accessible, and safe family atmosphere; (3) provide quality opportunities by encouraging positive youth development, the inclusion of special populations, and promoting healthy lifestyles, enrichment, and lifelong learning opportunities for adults
-trails and sidewalks: (1) develop an interconnected system of trails that serve transportation and recreational needs and accommodate a variety of skill levels; (2) guide implementation by developers, public agencies, and others; (3) increase the number of trips made by foot and bicycle for both transportation and recreation; (4) make pedestrian use and bicycling safer and more convenient for residents and visitors
-human services: provide the necessary human services and educational opportunities to Coventry residents
-housing: encourage housing, both rental and homeownership, in an acceptable quantity and quality to meet the economic and social needs of the town's population, the design and location of new housing should blend with the surrounding and respect the natural landscape
-transportation: provide for adequate circulation within and between all sections of the town, dead-end roads or cul-de-sacs in new development should not preclude strategically located through-streets that would improve traffic flow
-Coventry Village: preserve the historical and architectural resources in Coventry Village in addition to increasing its economic and functional vitality
-North Coventry Village: preserve the historical and architectural resources in the North Village in addition to increasing its economic and functional vitality

-economic development: provide a stable, diversified economic base; provide high quality jobs; provide the goods and services needed by the community; reduce the distance traveled for work, shopping, and recreation; improve the balance between the commercial/retail and the residential components of the grand list

MARKETING MATERIALS
-logo: "Our past can be your future"
-"birthplace of Nathan Hale"
-underserved population in retail, medical and commercial services, and jobs
-limited competition
-high median income
-affordable housing
-streamlined and predictable land use process
-proximity to educational and recreational resources
-"the gateway to Connecticut's quiet corner"

CULTURAL ARTS STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN
-Opportunities for growth: drama, dance for adults and/or performances, "trendy" things for 13-21 year olds, grant and/or corporate funding, establish Community Art Guild, use of existing facilities in town, target market, more formal coordination efforts, Connecticut Arts Commission, library facility, community-centered planning
-strengths: music opportunities, many local artists in community, strong community interest in arts, strong school program in arts, good cooperation among municipal departments, commitment to history and tradition, successful concert series, high school auditorium availability, town green availability, growing market for the arts, strong volunteer base, within a bus ride to many cultural events and activities
-future challenges: identifying dedicated space for the Guild, need working capital for operating and event support, getting artists involved, promotion to the public about arts community, Guild administration support, follow through on great ideas
-past successes: art exhibitions, Guild logo created, directory of Coventry artists started, Facebook page created for Guild, Guild membership due received, artist email list developed, calendar and membership plan developed, Arts in the Park event planning underway, by-laws created with 501(c3) status being pursued

Recreation Commission Goals
-reorganize and expand the Commission to garner additional input and support
-enhance coordination and communication efforts among various community groups and residents
-encourage and support new and existing organizations, activities, and events
-seek alternative and innovative sources of funding the arts
-create and expand spaces for the arts through use of existing facilities, nontraditional facilities, and construction
-encourage and support the initiation of cultural art opportunities not currently available to residents which will help the Commission fulfill its goals

Arts Guild Goals
-increase communication and awareness of the arts among Coventry artists
-increase general public's awareness of the arts in Coventry
-identification of venues and artist workspaces
-exploration of expanding town-wide arts events
-form a group to spearhead identified initiatives
-explore funding opportunities for artists, organizations, and programs as well as funding for participation in arts programs and events
-vision: To become a primary resource for the diverse artistic community of Coventry educational institutions, organizations, and the general public.

SOUTH COVENTRY VILLAGE PLAN OF PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT
Goals for Coventry Village
-preserve, protect, and enhance the historic character of the Village

-develop a framework to allow for future economic growth while ensuring historic preservation
-protect natural assets and environmental quality
-increase public awareness of Coventry Village's resources
-adaptively reuse Coventry Village's historic mills as center for new growth and more effective use of underutilized resources consistent with the first and third goals above
-initiate public actions to improve the appearance of the village, calm traffic, and provide sidewalks and parking

Economic Development Potential
-there is limited opportunity for development of new convenience commercial space because of the small population of Coventry and the different orientations of the north and south parts of town
-the ability to attract any significant new uses to the center will require improving curb appeal of the Village and a coordinated preservation, development, and marketing program
-there will continue to be significant potential for sales housing in a variety of ownership and physical types
-the potential for conventional rental housing is limited, with the exception of university-related student housing, particularly as upward pressures mount on for room and board rates
-there is a need for entry-level housing which can be developed through a variety of mechanisms such as tax credits (historic and low-income) and state loans and grants
-there is a potential for UConn-related starter business development activity in one or more mill structure
-there may be an opportunity to attract one or two large business activities to the mill structures
-continue to communicate with local and regional developers, realtors, and property owners to better understand the ability to retain and attract appropriate economic development
-implement methods to connect the thousands of Coventry Regional Farmer's Market visitors with the village businesses

Mansfield Findings

POCD
Natural Systems Recommendations
-Mansfield residents and officials actively participate in conserving and protecting the Town's natural resources
-Mansfield has healthy watersheds with high-quality ground and surface water resources and aquatic habitats
-Mansfield's soil, plant, and wildlife habitats are healthy and diverse
-the Town is taking steps to moderate or adapt to the impacts of climate change
-Mansfield has increased community resilience and mitigated the impacts of natural hazards
-Mansfield's land use regulations promote the protection and enhancement of natural systems
Open Space, Parks, and Agricultural Lands Recommendations
-natural resources within Mansfield's public and private open spaces are protected and well-managed
-Mansfield has more land being used for agriculture
-Mansfield's park and preserve system, including natural and active recreation areas, provides access to residents and meets the needs of the population
-Mansfield's land use policies and regulations for public and private open spaces protect natural resources, preserve scenic views, and expand opportunities for agriculture and active recreation

Community Heritage and Sense of Place Recommendations
-Mansfield honors and preserves its historic resources by protecting them for future generations
-Mansfield's land use regulations maintain rural character in the majority of town, protect historic resources, and accommodate future growth in smart growth, compact patterns in designated mixed-use centers and compact residential areas

Community Life Recommendations
-Mansfield provides high-quality services that connect residents to each other and the community
-Mansfield is a lifelong learning community and continues to provide high-quality public education for children and youth
-Mansfield public safety services – police, fire, and EMS – protect life and property through a robust program of education, enforcement, and preparedness
-Mansfield is a healthy, active community

-Mansfield maintains high-quality public facilities that support town goals
-Mansfield's policies, program, and land use regulations support community service and health/wellness goals

Diversifying the Economy Recommendations
-Mansfield has balanced economic development efforts with sensitivity to preserving the town's unique blend of rural character and college town amenities to create an attractive location for businesses, workers, and residents
-Mansfield has an entrepreneurial environment that supports business formation, expansion, and retention
-Mansfield has a growing and diversified economy that helps to maintain the high-quality services desired by residents
-agriculture is valued by the community and expanding with increased acreage, higher production, and growing market opportunities
-Mansfield's land use regulations are farm-friendly and support business retention and expansion efforts while protecting community character

Housing Recommendations
-Mansfield's housing options include housing affordable to low- and moderate-income individuals and families
-Mansfield's senior citizens have housing options that allow them to continue to age in their community
-Mansfield maintains high-quality living conditions throughout the town
-Mansfield's land use regulations support development of a wide range of housing options to meet the needs of residents at all ages of the life cycle, including singles, families, seniors, and students

Future Land Use and Community Design Recommendations
-Mansfield has maintained the low-density, rural character of the majority of town while accommodating growth in walkable mixed-use centers, compact residential, and institutional areas
-Mansfield's land use regulations and development review procedures help to achieve the vision and goals identified in this plan and promote high-quality design appropriate to the area context

Infrastructure Recommendations
-Mansfield has a balanced, integrated transportation system that provides residents with viable options in getting from one place to another
-water and wastewater infrastructure improvements conserve natural resources and support smart growth patterns to help preserve rural character
-Mansfield is working toward carbon neutrality and reducing reliance on the grid by conserving energy and increasing use of renewable energy sources
-Mansfield promotes waste reduction and resource conservation
-Mansfield's land use policies and regulations ensure that infrastructure systems support smart growth, protect rural character, and promote resource conservation

Stewardship and Implementation Recommendations
-the Mansfield POCD is periodically reviewed and updated to address changing conditions and trends
-the Mansfield POCD is integrated into decision making at multiple levels
-Mansfield's long-term financial stability underlies implementation of the POCD
-Mansfield advances Town sustainability objectives through POCD implementation, public education, and partnerships
-Mansfield is a model of inclusive, transparent government
-Mansfield collaborates with area communities and UConn to achieve common goals and develop regional service sharing models for mutual benefit

POSITIONING AND MARKETING DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE TOWN
-need greater utilization of email and social media communications
-need marketing materials like visitor and information guide, business/economic development brochure, booth banners/displays/promotional materials for use at event where Town is represented
-consider creating a marketing video
-build on/create additional signature special events

-areas suggested for additional focus of marketing work: outdoors, arts and heritage, business-friendly, family-friendly

POSITIONING AND MARKETING DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN STORRS/MANSFIELD DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP
-need dedicated Downtown Storrs website to market the destination and promote visitor experiences
-promotional materials needed for Storrs Center development kiosks
-implement wayfinding signage
-update/create Downtown Storrs visitor literature
-develop new events that increase frequency/ritual visitation and directly benefit businesses (i.e. small street fairs, farm-to-table events, wine tastings, restaurant week, etc.)
-develop targeted e-newsletter to be sent quarterly for visitors
-increase participation in local tourism efforts
-increase media relations and outreach like targeted articles to regional media and growing informal relationships with media sources
-develop Downtown Storrs welcome package for new business tenants, residents, real estate agents, etc.
-key motivators: dining, shopping, special events, hiking/biking/walking
-visitors would be increased through more convenient parking/wayfinding signage, more shopping options, more variety in dining options, and more things to do that appeal to a broader audience than college students
-downtown property/business owners expressed interest in special events, joint marketing and promotional opportunities, and collaborative marketing opportunities with UConn events
-downtown property/business owners suggested the following to promote foot traffic/visitors: more marketing and promotional support from the Partnership and UConn, better traffic and parking controls, expansion of "downtown" area under Downtown Storrs brand, and general return on investment for businesses under Downtown Storrs brand currently

Tolland Findings

POCD

Natural Resources
-shift development away from preservation areas and otherwise minimize environmental impacts
-balance resource protection, fiscal viability, and character protection during land use application review and regulation updates
-improve water quality
-approach stormwater/drainage/wastewater/erosion control measures in a sustainable way
-promote and facilitate use of pervious surfaces
-identify areas for restoration projects
-encourage and facilitate LEED and solar/other renewable energy projects in the appropriate locations
-protect Atlantic White Cedar Forest
-encourage inclusion of sustainability into school curriculum

Open Space
-acquire land to preserve as open space in a focused way
-explore creative approaches to preserve open space
-consider town-owned properties for conservation use
-continue supporting land stewardship program
-update trail maps for entire town
-preserve greenway connections

Community Character
-preserve the historic integrity, cultural value, and scenic attributes of Tolland Green
-promote historic and cultural assets
-incorporate Tolland's living cultural assets into town projects
-preserve scenic roads and stone walls
-reduce light pollution
-implement high design standards for gateway areas
-inventory and engage with farms periodically

-promote agricultural use of land
-encourage agri-tourism and agriculture industry overall

Economic and Commercial Development
-modify or re-adapt approaches to the TVA/TCZ
-encourage build out of parcels in business zones
-encourage a streamlined land use process
-encourage upkeep of existing commercial buildings
-encourages regulations reflective of community wants and emerging development trends
-engage with businesses regularly to ensure their retention
-address crumbling foundations in commercial and industrial buildings
-create an image and brand for Tolland
-expand the Town's capacity to do economic development
-be proactive versus reactive in terms of economic development

Housing
-maintain rural-suburban development patterns
-stay abreast of demographic trends and support housing development, particularly affordable and multi-family housing, that reflects them
-reflect housing needs in zoning regulations
-consider providing financial incentives for desired types of housing
-provide financial support for maintenance of housing stock, particularly for low-income and elderly residents
-work to mitigate effects of crumbling foundations

Infrastructure, Transportation, and Community Facilities
-continue to expand utility access within approved areas, searching for funding to do so
-consider additional areas for utility expansion that could be approved
-encourage implementation of new technologies to promote greater efficiency within the Town
-maintain safe and healthy roads that reflect the character of the community
-promote smart parking and alternative/sustainable modes of transportation
-connect roads to trails
-work regionally to ensure additional transit stops when events are held at UConn
-develop town-wide community facilities and properties plan
-identify opportunities to meet recreational demand

Appendix C: Focus Group Results

8/13/19 Bolton Individual Town Focus Group Notes

BEST OF BOLTON

- Recreation and entertainment
  - Trail system (rails to trails)
  - Two restaurants with banquet facilities
  - Ice rink
- Culture
  - Strong agricultural tradition
  - Community events
    - High school plays and concerts
    - Summer concerts on the green
    - Farmer's market showcases agricultural community/traditions – tied-in with antique tractor and vehicle show
    - Holiday celebrations
    - Political parties "cook off"
    - Events being planned for 2020 for Bolton's 300th birthday
    - Annual art show benefits Land Trust
  - Historical assets
    - Many historic homes
    - Historic district
    - Heritage Farm
    - Town Hall and other government buildings
  - Strong community organizations
    - Bike-Walk Bolton does events and advocacy work
    - Friends of Bolton Lakes protects, preserves, and encourages enjoyment of the lakes
    - Land Trust holds interactive community events for fundraising efforts
    - Local and regional Lion's Clubs are very active
    - Active PTA
    - Women's Club raises and donates money for enhancement of the community
    - Bolton Historical Society holds talks at the library regularly
    - Active Boy Scouts
    - Active Recreation Department
    - Bolton Boosters Club supports youth sports
    - Volunteer Fire Department holds fundraising events and fire safety workshops
    - CVC is Bolton's local TV station
- Business and industry
  - Munson's Chocolates
  - Bolton Vet – major animal ER clinic "east of the river"
  - Cropley's Garden Center
  - Country Carpenters makes antique-style homes
  - Businesses are part of Tolland County, Manchester, and Greater Hartford Chambers
- Quality of life
  - Rural character – shared appreciation of small-town life
  - Strong sense of community
  - Strategic location close to everything but without challenges of urban life
  - Location near UConn means access to UConn's amenities (i.e. sports, performances, Storrs Center)
  - Many UConn faculty/staff are residents

    - Strong education system
        - "private school atmosphere in public school environment"
        - Allows fostering of student talents
        - Attractive to young families
    - Reasonably-priced housing attractive to young families
    - Permissive and easy residential land use regulations
- Local government
    - Not overly-regulated
    - Land use applicants can informally interact with land use boards and commissions in planning out the content of their applications

BOLTON'S ROLE WITHIN THE REGION

- High-quality education system attractive to young families
- Very rural
- Attracts smaller businesses (vs. larger)
- Trail network for biking
- Gateway from the west

BOLTON'S BARRIERS TO DEVELOPMENT

- Relationship with UConn lacking
- Small business district and limited commercial real estate opportunities
- High cost of construction
- Potential for agricultural land to be purchased for residential use
- All commercial land use applications require special permits
    - Creates additional time/challenge for businesses to go through the land use regulatory process
    - On the flip side, it allows the Town to have more control over the type of development going on and maintain a small-town feel
- Balancing conservation and development
- Lots of wetlands limit additional development
- Lack of service businesses
- Promotion of key assets has been lacking
    - Locational benefits
    - Trail system
- Limited utilities access – not economically feasible for expansion
- Poor traffic patterns at the end of I-384 (Bolton Notch)

AREAS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN BOLTON

- Implementation of infrastructure incentives for businesses
- Bike shop
- Better promotion of assets
    - Recreational/historical
    - Location
    - Trail system
- Additional trail connectivity – biking to hiking
- Assist in growth of Bolton Vet
- Lots of commuters going through town
- Smaller, independent businesses are desirable

8/1/19 Coventry Individual Town Focus Group Notes

BEST OF COVENTRY

- Recreation
    - Coventry Lake
        - Water skiing clubs

        - Boat parade
        - Bass and ice fishing tournaments
        - Home rentals for visitors
    - Trail system
    - Creaser Park
        - ADA-accessible disc golf course
    - Shooting ranges
    - Two 18-hole golf courses
- Agri-tourism
    - Farmer's market – forward-thinking and highly-dedicated staff have allowed the market to thrive and become a major tourist attraction
    - Cassidy Hill Winery
- Arts and culture
    - Coventry Fest
    - Christmas in the Village
    - Arts on Main
    - Antique Trail/District
    - Car shows
    - Two bed and breakfasts
- Historical tourism
    - Nathan Hale Homestead
        - Weddings
        - Field trips
        - Example of adaptive reuse
    - Capriland's Herb Farm
- Proximity to UConn and ECSU
    - Dairy Barn
    - Sporting events
        - For residents to enjoy
        - Promote tourism within town
    - Campus tours
    - Faculty/staff/students live in town
    - Storrs Center
- Business and industry
    - Teleflex
    - Strong sense of entrepreneurship
    - Home businesses highly encouraged
    - Recently-expanded natural gas
    - Sewer expansion around lake has led to higher property values
- Quality of life
    - Strong sense of community – very engaged
        - Lion's Club
        - Nonprofits
    - Youth sports
        - Tournaments draw visitors to town
    - School system
        - All-day kindergarten
        - Vocational tech school
    - Library programs
    - Community garden
    - Walkability

        - Adding sidewalks downtown
    - Natural beauty, wildlife, open space
        - Nathan Hale Forest
        - Trail system
    - Near to Hartford/Boston/NYC
    - Shared vision for direction of town – small town values
- Local government
    - Low taxes – fiscally-sound
    - Innovative culture
        - Sustainability efforts
        - Understand that significant change takes a long time
    - Staff continuity

COVENTRY'S ROLE WITHIN THE REGION

- Innovation
    - Try things before other communities – other communities often borrow ideas from Coventry
    - Sophisticated and forward-thinking land use regulations
- Housing that is more affordable than some surrounding communities
- Hub of home business activity because of regulations that facilitate this
- John and Eric are leaders within their industries in the state – very knowledgeable and willing to try new things
- Strong equestrian community

COVENTRY'S BARRIERS TO DEVELOPMENT

- Sewers lack capacity
- Need to consider what retail will look like in the future
    - How can Coventry adapt?
    - How can we promote economic vitality without such a large focus on retail?
- Need stronger relationship with UConn
    - Opportunities in agriculture, labs, and entrepreneurship that are unrealized
    - Potential for stronger relationships related to workforce needs
- Limited commercial space for business growth
    - Proximity to UConn is a big incentive for businesses
    - Limits to building uses
        - Lack of fire protection in the Village prevents certain commercial uses
        - No loading docks in town
- Naysayers – strong social media presence
- Limited multi-family housing and entertainment/nightlife options catering to young adults and empty-nesters
- Crumbling foundations
- No commercial developers in town
- Land owners reluctant to sell
- Maintaining an acceptable balance of conservation and development

AREAS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN COVENTRY

- Attractive rural atmosphere for certain types of developments
- The Village could benefit from more mixed-use development
- Land near Public Works garage could be used for an industrial park
- Innovative development concepts that could work in town
    - Barn farm as a type of co-working space
    - Equestrian community ("barndominium")
- Need more dining and entertainment
    - Capture UConn students, faculty, and staff
    - Mirco-brewery/distillery
    - Breakfast restaurant

- Hemp farming is a good opportunity
- Expand medical industry
- Community services could be expanded to include a pool and group fitness classes (group fitness classes could also come from a private business)
- More service-based businesses are needed – residents leave town for many services

COVENTRY'S BRAND

- Small town
- "Lake life"
- Country town ("cow town")
- Gateway to quiet corner
- Close to Hartford but without the bustle of the city
- Want to be quiet but too quiet currently
- Perception that Coventry is further from Hartford than it really is

9/12/19 Mansfield Individual Town Focus Group Notes

BEST OF MANSFIELD

- Recreation
  - 58+ miles of trails
  - Adventure park
  - New website has listing of all trails
  - Lots of rivers and lakes with different water uses (boating, kayaking, fishing, etc.)
- Agriculture
  - Family farms are common – maintains agricultural tradition
  - Lots of preserved farmland
  - Farmer's market
  - Creates sense of place and identity
  - Strong equine industry that attracts visitors
- Arts and culture
  - Jorgensen
  - Puppetry museum
  - Summer theater
  - Other UConn arts/culture opportunities
- Proximity to UConn
  - PILOT funding coming from UConn means high level of services for residents
  - Allows Storrs Center to thrive during school year
- Business and industry
  - Resident access to services
  - Thriving town center with low vacancies
- Quality of life
  - Rural/agricultural lifestyle
  - Family-friendly with engaged schools
  - Good quality of life
  - Natural beauty
  - Strong community engagement
  - Close to Hartford/Boston/NYC as well as airports
  - Affordable given quality of school system
  - Diversity
  - Public transit
  - Good sidewalk connectivity
- Local government

    - Well-utilized community center (visitors from outside town)

MANSFIELD'S ROLE WITHIN THE REGION

- Knowledgeable and professional Town staff
- High level of services (40% of parks and rec users are non-residents)
- Employment center
- Lots of businesses
- Cultural arts
- Sporting events
- Activities for kids/families
- Hub of "vibrancy"
- Movie theater/drive-in
- UConn/ECSU

MANSFIELD'S BARRIERS TO DEVELOPMENT

- Downtown has high commercial rent (or is this just perceived high rent?)
- Lack of rent variability
- Lack of business diversity – monopoly of restaurants and service businesses without much retail
- Most jobs are part-time
- Declining public school enrollment
- Many businesses are seasonal (based on UConn academic calendar, which only accounts for about 6 months of the year) – many don't have full-year business plan
- Fear of development within community
- Lack of lodging for events and conferences
- Younger people move to denser communities
- Need to attract people from the area back (young adults and older people) via denser, low-maintenance housing options and rentals
- Need updated housing stock
- UConn usually opposes multi-family development
- UConn's student housing stock is outdated causing students to want to move off-campus
- All land use applications require special permits
- Limits on liquor permits
- Bad press related to Storrs Center
- Land use process can be challenging
- Limited budget for trail maintenance

AREAS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MANSFIELD

- Show seasonal businesses the opportunity cost of not operating year-round
- Capture residents from surrounding towns to make up for seasonal population changes
- Development opportunities at Four Corners
- Developer interest in multi-family
- Relationship/proximity to Windham should be better utilized
- Agriculture is under-actualized and lacks proper infrastructure to be a real economic driver
    - Mobile slaughter house
    - Commercial kitchen
- Could improve marketing and connecting work of outdoor recreation opportunities
- Improved biking opportunities
- Kayak rental business could do well
- Change state law limiting liquor permits

MANSFIELD'S BRAND

- A good place to grow
- UConn – Huskies

- Cow country
- Storrs vs Mansfield (people don't know the difference)
- "Storrs" has nationwide recognition
- Basketball capitol of the world
- Lower taxes
- Landscape/nature opportunities
- Good place to raise a family
- Inclusivity, shared values, diversity
- Attentive schools
    - Teachers/faculty engaged and responsive
    - E.O. Smith students have access to UConn classes
- Surprise about what Mansfield really is

8/15/19 Tolland Individual Town Focus Group Notes

BEST OF TOLLAND

- Recreation and entertainment
    - Trail system
    - Mountain biking
    - Agri-tourism is gaining popularity
    - Star Hill Sports Complex
    - Largest soccer club in Connecticut with state-of-the-art stadium
    - Crandall Park
    - Disc golf
- Culture
    - Community events
        - Walk-tober
        - Christmas tour and parade
        - Tree lighting
        - Historic day on the green for kids
        - Farm-to-table events
        - Volunteer fire department events
        - Celebrate Tolland annual event
    - Poet laureate and arts and culture liaison for the town
    - Arts center
    - Historical assets
        - Five museums
        - Historical buildings/homes
        - The Green – social and historical center
    - Strong community organizations
        - Youth theater
        - Tolland Community Women's Club
        - Lion's Club
        - Knights of Columbus
        - Youth sports
        - Boy/Girl Scouts
        - Special Olympics
        - Conservation Corp.
- Business and industry
    - 2 large farms – "farm culture" town wide
    - Camille's

    - Big Y
    - State police headquarters
    - Many home-based businesses
    - CNC Software
    - Gerber Scientific
    - Eversource
    - Woodlake Nursing Home
    - Pratt & Whitney "built" Tolland
    - Tolland Inn
- Quality of life
    - Small-town feel
    - Proximity to highway and airport
    - Proximity to Boston and New York
    - Proximity to UConn – graduate students, faculty, and staff live in town and opportunities for recreation/arts and culture/sporting events
    - CSA opportunities
    - Lots of open space

TOLLAND'S ROLE WITHIN THE REGION

- Bedroom community
- Gas, pizza, and liquor
- A place to live with good schools
- Trails and eco-tourism

TOLLAND'S BARRIERS TO DEVELOPMENT

- Lack of signage
- Zoning for commercial and industrial areas not ideal, limits retail
- Lack of public utilities in key areas
- Government properties/buildings are in prime locations
- Key property owners resistant to sell or develop
- High commercial/industrial vacancies – scare away potential tenants
- Community engagement is difficult
- NIMBYism
- Don't have traffic counts
- Don't have much retail
- Out-of-state and uninvolved landlords
- High socioeconomic disparity
- Bedroom community
- Crumbling foundations
- Residential over-development
- High taxes
- Historical opposition to large commercial developments

AREAS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN TOLLAND

- Capture UConn-related traffic through town
- Capture visitors coming to town for sports
- Enhanced marketing efforts for the town
- POCD update underway
- Public utilities coming to some commercial areas
- Demographics, traffic counts, etc. are favorable
- Bakery
- Pharmacy
- Trader Joe's

- New town manager
- Upper-income
- New restaurants
- Brewery
- Improved relationship with UConn
- Activities for younger children
- The Green is underutilized
- Need additional services
- Development acceptable on 195 and 74
- Lots of land available
- Zoning regulations will be updated soon
- Additional housing for younger adults, mostly for families at this point

TOLLAND'S BRAND

- UConn's "exit"
- "Tolland Triangle" – bet. 67 and 68
- "Tolland Cares" based on 180-person clean-up day in town
- Red and white penny candy

9/30/19 Regional Focus Group Notes – Agriculture

**Note that the numbers in parentheses next to each major bullet point for each category discussed during the 9/30/19 focus group represent the number of individual votes for that topic as a focus area for the plan. There were approximately 80 participants in this focus group, and each participant was given eight votes (one for each category discussed, plus one extra).*

- Infrastructure to support farms (10)
    - Slaughterhouse for larger animals (not just mobile)
    - Grain – sources for organic grain
    - Sharing large equipment
    - Land
    - "farm link"
- Regional farmer's market (10)
    - Coventry is already "regional"
    - Tie to CT Grown promotions
    - Farm-related products
- Beer production (8)
- Local restaurants (7)
    - Promote use of local foods
    - Help connect them to farms
    - Create opportunities for new restaurants that do farm-to-table
- Connecticut Equestrian Center (6) – draw people with money to spend
- Commercial kitchen (5)
    - Identify a facility in the region
    - Rent space for a certain amount of time to use to prepare goods
    - Explore the possibility of getting grant funding for this (joint grant application?
- Education on farms (5)
    - When people move next door to farms, educate them on sights, smells, etc.
    - Benefits of buying local
    - Hand-outs, presentations, web page
    - Moving lecture to different towns
    - Get land trusts involved

    - Arts angle
    - Schools
    - More than just produce (meat, honey, etc.)
    - Forestry
- Marketing (4)
    - Post events through State tourism organization(s)
    - Post events in newspapers, on social media
    - Joint website for farm-related tourism opportunities
    - Tailored "availability chart"
    - Promote "agri-tainment"
- Create regional identity for agri-tourism (3)
- Schools (3)
    - Farming at schools
    - Sustainability
    - K-12
    - Encourage senior projects
    - Facilitate seasonal help for farmers through student jobs
    - Regional program – schools communicate with one another
    - School culinary programs to utilize local products
- CSA (3)
    - Educate people on what it is
    - Coordinate with farmer's markets
    - Recruit more farms/coalition of CSAs
    - Link to schools
- New farm technologies (3)
    - Manure and food waste to energy
    - Need support because new technology is scary and overwhelming
    - Year-round farming
- Farm tours (3)
    - Open to any farms in the region, though might not be right for all
    - Involve residents and historical societies
- Regional mobile slaughterhouse (2) – UConn partnership?
- Producers guide for restaurants and schools (2)
- WWOF (2)
    - Visiting farms to lean more
    - People
    - Organic
- Map of all farms
    - Who, what, when
    - Farmer's markets
    - Passbook
- Address generational changes – match landowners to farmers
- Coordinate bringing people in to help farmers
    - Convene farmers
    - Bring in experts
    - Collective financing
    - Group financing and insurance
- Agricultural history – preserving old practices and equipment
- Recruit farmers
    - Shared equipment and guidance

    - Support groups

9/30/19 Regional Focus Group Notes – Entertainment and Culture

- Regional wine and music festival (16)
- Weekend/all-day athletic events/tournaments (12)
    - Biking
    - Running
    - Triathlon/marathon/road race
    - Qualifying event for Hartford Marathon?
    - Snowshoeing
    - Cross country skiing
    - Pond hockey
    - Horse show – utilize UConn equestrian center
    - Ice sports festival
    - Fishing/ice fishing
- Do events that cross town borders – shared and/or rotating (8)
- Need a hotel for events (6)
- More outdoor music events (5)
- Create website that speaks to visitors with lots of photos (4)
- Regional "Taste of…" event (4)
- Capitalize on B&Bs (3)
    - Make them attractions unto themselves
    - Tie in events to make an entire weekend itinerary (package deals)
    - Create a consortium
    - Inventory
- David Hayes sculpture outside – Coventry (3)
- Create a regional arts council (3)
    - Be careful not to duplicate efforts
- Mimic Hartford's "Porch Fest" (1)
    - Green in Tolland
    - Bands perform on porches
- Tour of farm to table
- Regional art shows that rotate between the towns (1)
- Need events to attract families (1)
- Tie in activities for big weekends at UConn (1)
- Expand UConn museum offerings to other towns
- Promote rural attributes to city dwellers
- Communication between towns to connect available sites with needs
    - Need to have a better understanding of what is developable in the whole region
    - Advertise on a regional webpage
- Promote each town's activities regionally (i.e. bring all towns into Tolland Conservation Commission's photo contest)
- Regional arts budget
- Better marketing so people know what is there
    - Event/history brochure
    - Budget for this
    - Digital aspect
- Summer theater productions at the regional level
- Museum tour day
- Folk festival
- Duck boat tour

- Best sledding hill competition among towns
- Four-town fair
- Local newspaper/magazine promotions for events – pick them up at local businesses
- Summer music education program
- Indoor concerts
- Food/wine/entertainment indoors showcasing restaurants
- Regional event budget

9/30/19 Regional Focus Group Notes – Entrepreneurship and Small Business

- Need a regional branding effort that represents the region, not individual towns (11)
- Invest in infrastructure to support businesses (17)
    - Regional high-speed internet to draw more tech businesses/professionals
    - Loading blocks
    - Utilities
    - Co-working space(s) and/or incubator(s) with conference rooms, desks, computers, printers, etc.
        - Could be in an existing community space (library, community center, etc.)
        - Include/coordinate time with business resources/counselors
- Need online directory of businesses (4)
- Partnership with UConn students/interns to help small businesses (4)
- Need better understanding/promotion of resources available to businesses for marketing, business operations, etc. (3)
- Work to provide additional financial resources to small businesses (2)
- Incentives (2)
    - Tax incentives for small and home businesses
    - Incentives for hiring local professionals
    - Friendlier zoning regulations for small businesses
    - Streamlined permitting processes
- Inventory home-based businesses (1)
- Business mentorship program (1)
- Make town staff and board/commission members more accessible to businesses (1)
- Childcare opportunities for business owners – perhaps connected to work spaces/offices (1)
- Regional "sounding board" organization for businesses
- Towns can be marketing these small businesses
- Help home businesses find commercial space
- Become more tourist-friendly
- Help small businesses find higher-quality employees
    - Provide education
    - Train up high school-aged youth
- Create a regional young professionals group like HYPE
- Create a "buy local" campaign
- Need more diversity in business/entrepreneurs
- Increase participation at networking events
- Increase collaboration between home businesses and small businesses in commercial spaces
- Commercial kitchen for rent
- Utilize CT Main Street Center resources on a regional level

9/30/19 Regional Focus Group Notes – Hiking, Biking, Open Space, and Natural Resources

- Inventory and map existing trails, open space, and natural resources (23)
    - Create physical maps for hikers to use
    - Differentiate trails that might be appealing to different groups/demographics

    - Explore a regional approach to GIS mapping
- Create greater connectivity between trails and open space (13)
    - Connect Coventry, Tolland, and Mansfield to the East Coast Greenway Trail
    - Bring together land preservation groups to discuss plans for future use
    - Create more "dense" clusters of open space to provide more dense clusters for development
    - Make trails a vacation destination where you can camp for several days (like the Appalachian Trail)
    - Better identification of trailheads
    - Clear up confusion between town/state/land trust property
    - Expand Nathan Hale Greenway and Hop River Trail to all four towns
    - Expand Mansfield's rails to trails system
- Create an app showing all trails in the region and connecting trail users (7)
- Joint/volunteer forestry/trail management team (6)
    - Less expensive on a per town basis
    - Use student volunteers needing community service hours
    - Build off statewide trails cleanup day
- Do events/races around hiking and biking (6)
    - Tie trails into youth cross country/track events
    - Mountain biking races/events
    - Triathlon
- Better promotion of hiking/biking opportunities (5)
    - Work with State for promotion of businesses along trails (perhaps through ctvisit.com?)
    - Improve promotion of fishing (opening day) and tie into lodging options
    - Create outdoor recreation "itineraries"
    - Create cohesive branding
    - Create a website showcasing all things outdoor recreation in the region
- Promote hot air balloon opportunities (4)
- Guided hikes (based around certain themes?) (4)
- Create a "living history" destination like Sturbridge Village or Mystic Seaport (2)
- Bike repair/rental shop (2)
- Do guided tours incorporating themes like history, wildlife, astronomy, and arts/culture (1)
    - Tie hiking/biking events to local libraries (educational seminars)
    - Nighttime lantern tours of historic houses
- Food and beverage locations along/near trails (1)
- Improved trail amenities (1)
    - Put up informational signs on wildlife, history, geology, etc. along trails
    - Put up informational kiosks along trails
    - Put up restrooms along trails
    - Put bike storage in commuter parking lots
    - Set up bed and breakfasts/other lodging options along trails
- Specific business concepts
    - Large sporting goods store
    - Cross country ski shop
    - Kayaking shop
- Greater equity for trails
- Promote community gardening as a way of preserving open space
- Create hiking/biking "meet up" groups
- Educate people on bike path usage
- Create new mountain biking trails

9/30/19 Regional Focus Group Notes – Marketing

- Proactive social media marketing (14)
    - Ads – targeted at people interested in residential real estate
    - Groups
    - Videos
    - Quizzes
    - Events
    - Lodging
    - Local businesses
    - Create/use hashtags
- Brand slogan/ID (8)
- Market the region to remote workers (close to Boston and NYC) (6)
    - Professional organizations
    - Schools
    - Tech organizations
- Create a website for attracting residents/visitors/businesses (6)
    - Trails and other activities
    - Schools systems
    - Existing local businesses and what they do
    - Economic development contacts
    - Available properties and brokerage firms
    - Open space
- Road signage that is changeable for announcements (5)
- Map of regional trails (4)
- Branding for fall (3)
- Regional chamber of commerce (3)
- Engage with UConn (2)
    - Connect with marketing students
    - Market to students and faculty – free food, things to do, etc.
    - Better take advantage of events like opening weekend and basketball games
    - Coupons for students
    - Expo at UConn
- Incubator space (2)
- Get bloggers/influencers to write about the region (2)
- Publications (1)
    - Email and print flyers
    - Welcome brochure with postcard of web resources
- Networking opportunities with others who want to start businesses (1)
- Market unique assets like grocery store, farmer's markets, and arts (1)
- Self-guided tours
    - Leaf peeping
    - App
    - Game
- Market to younger generations – get them involved in this process
- Market restaurants – best of…
- Connect bus stops with things to do
- Leverage other statewide marketing opportunities
- Ambassadors
- Transit ads
- Involve local realtors in this process

- Market to families – affordable region
- Local radio
    - Guests
    - WILI from area
- Additional staff to help market
- Improve reputation for not being business friendly
- Promote utilities
- Assistance with technology
- Welcome committee
- Calendar of activities
- Billboards
- Competition with awards
- Themed "trail" event

9/30/19 Regional Focus Group Notes – UConn

- Opportunity to work more closely with new UConn president (13)
- Encourage incubator businesses to locate within the region (7)
    - Towns have to provide opportunity/infrastructure for these businesses
- Cultural activities not being utilized within region (7)
- Integrate students while in school and afterward (3)
    - Student teaching
    - Students in business
    - Placement in rural education
    - Engineering – engagement on topic of trails will encourage engagement from other departments
    - Use leadership/mentoring skills of athletes
- Use student ability/education to benefit the region
    - State support needed
    - Utilization of student talent is a great way to attract state support
- Central community liaison for small businesses (2)
- Increase lodging/dining options in the region for visiting parents (2)
- Get UConn to think more collectively and less in a "silo" (2)
- Connect students with seniors/senior centers to "learn life lessons" (2)
- Better transportation access to campus (2)
    - Expand to include I-384
    - Add spurs
    - Bus service expansion
    - Expansion of non-motorized (biking/trails) options
- Better utilize tech park resources (1)
- Need for a greater year-round presence related to UConn (1)
- Create a value proposition to support UConn (1)
- Need regional positivity about UConn (1)
- Regional invitation to meeting to discuss opportunities in a small group setting
- Create a map of all stops and amenities in between UConn campuses
- Address traffic/effects of drive-thru nature of students, faculty, staff
- Changes in funding and leadership create issues with involvement in the communities
- UConn's institutional plan doesn't involve the region – region is focused to use plan without much input
- Key players
    - Campus planner
    - Police/fire

    - HR
    - Orientation Office
- UConn is active in trail census department
- Increase interaction between UConn and region to improve the intellectual standard of living
- Need liaison between the region and UConn to help match students and companies post-graduation
    - Business mentorship options
    - List of what students/abilities are available to businesses
    - Increase internship expectation/system within the region
- Work with UConn's community services coordinator(s) to disseminate information on entertainment and food
- Coordinated 55+ housing with UConn to draw alumni back to the area
- Need a more positive image of Spring Weekend – has gotten better

9/30/19 Regional Focus Group Notes – Water-based Recreation

- Rails to trails connection to water (17)
- Regional event ideas (6)
    - "Build a boat"
    - Triathlon
    - Ice skating
    - Competitive events drive a spectator base
    - Charity races
    - Duck race on rivers
- Calendar/locations of events (4)
- Identify regional partners and improve collaboration (4)
    - Connections with "like" businesses
    - Give more reason to stay and return
- Ice cream shop (3)
- Out of town usage – perceptions – "all are welcome" (3)
- Pool resources shared between towns (2)
    - Lifeguards
    - Grant funding support
    - Specialized rentals/dealers
- Craft rentals (2)
- Create webpage of things to do on the water (1)
    - Ice skating on the lake
    - Paddleboard yoga
    - Riverside hiking
- Wildlife conservation walks – eagles and herons (1)
- Guides for wayfinding (1)
    - Swimming location guides
    - Skill level/age identification
- Branding opportunities for the region (1)
    - Desirability of location
    - Image/perception
- Key assets
    - Willimantic River
    - Coventry Lake – Mill Brook
        - Kayak and canoe
        - Boat rental
    - Mansfield Hollow
    - Bolton Lake

    - Crandall Pond
    - Fenton River
    - Mt. Hope River
    - Bicentennial Pond
    - Notch Pond
    - Hop River
    - Creaser Park Pond
    - Eagleville Lake
- Visibility of assets
    - Education signage
    - Use of highway rest stops for advertising
    - Advertise to UConn students
- Regional entity clearing house
- Watershed associations – spark interest in activities
- Water body asset protection – maintenance
- Motor vs. non-motor crafts
    - Quiet hours
    - Sailing – boards/boats
- Boat maintenance equipment
- Support for fishing
    - Ice fishing
    - Identify locations to stock fish
- Paddling event on Willimantic River
- Identify locations for pets
- River tubing
- Supportive transportation
    - Buses
    - Commuter options
- Identify parking locations/access
- Communicate with users n ice thickness for skating
- Focus on attracting youth
- Incorporate lodging – B&Bs and Air B&Bs
- Fishing/tackle/bait store
- Non-motorized access
- Mini-golf
- Leaf peeping – water views
- Increase amenities – seats/benches
- Boating lessons

Appendix D: List of Interviewees

Bolton

- Barbara Amodio, Bike-Walk Bolton
- Jim Florence, Munson's Chocolates
- Mark Kershaw, Simoniz
- Matthew Mecca, Bolton Veterinary Hospital

Coventry

- Ann Marie Charland, Nathan Hale Homestead
- Deb Masso, Teleflex
- Erica Pagliuco and Jean Nelson, Coventry Farmer's Market
- Matt Minor, Meadowbrook Plaza/Highland Park Market
- Nancy Brown, Coventry Village Partners

Mansfield

- Cara Workman and Sean Vasington, University of Connecticut
- Emily Wicks and John Bell, Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry
- Jim Morrow, Parks and Natural Resources Committee
- Rod Rock, Jorgensen Center for Performing Arts
- Stacy Stearns, Stearns Dairy Farm

Tolland

- Mark Summers, CNC Software
- Mary Pat Soucy, Tolland Historical Society
- Sheri Sullivan, Tolland Red and White Store

Regional

- Kyle Gregoire, Last Green Valley

Appendix E: Customer Satisfaction Survey Example

The questions below should be altered based on the group being surveyed.

1. What is your age?
    a. 0-18
    b. 19-29
    c. 30-39
    d. 40-49
    e. 50-59
    f. 60-69
    g. 70+
2. Do you live in Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, or Tolland? If not, where do you live?
    a. Yes
    b. No, I live _____
3. If you do not live in the region, why did you come here?
    a. Open-ended
4. What did you do while you were here?
    a. Open-ended
5. If you live outside the region, would you return?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Maybe
6. Is there anything you would change about your experience in the region? If so, what?
    a. Yes _____
    b. No
7. If you live outside the region, how did you find out about us?
    a. Open-ended
8. Has your opinion of the region changed based on your most recent experience here? If so, how?
    a. Yes _____
    b. No
9. Would you be interested in providing a testimonial of your experience here?
    a. Yes
    b. No
10. If providing a testimonial, please provide us with your contact information.
    a. Name
    b. Location
    c. Phone
    d. Email

Appendix F: UConn and ECSU Contact Lists for Key Department Heads

UConn contacts

Department/Division	Name	Title	Phone	Email
Agricultural and Resource Economics	Kimberly Rollins	Department Head	(860) 486-2836	kimberly.rollins@uconn.edu
Biomedical Engineering	Ki Chon	Department Head	(860) 486-4767	kchon@engr.uconn.edu
Center for Career Development	Jim Lowe	Executive Director	(860) 486-3013	james.r.lowe@uconn.edu
Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering	Ranjan Srivastava	Department Head	(860) 486-4020	rs@uconn.edu
Civil and Environmental Engineering	Maria Chrysochoou	Department Head	(860) 486-3594	maria.chrysochoou@uconn.edu
Computer Science and Engineering	Sanguthevar Rajasekaran	Department Head	(860) 486-2428	sanguthevar.rajasekaran@uconn.edu
Electrical and Computer Engineering	John Chandy	Department Head	(860) 486-5047	john.chandy@uconn.edu
Finance	Chinmoy Ghosh	Department Head	(860) 486-4431	cghosh@business.uconn.edu
Management	Greg Reilly	Department Head	(860) 486-6418	greilly@uconn.edu
Marketing	Robin Coulter	Department Head	(860) 486-4133	robin.coulter@business.uconn.edu
Materials Science and Engineering	Bryan Huey	Department Head	(860) 486-4620	bryan.huey@uconn.edu
Mechanical Engineering	Horea Ilies	Department Head	(860) 486-8813	horea.ilies@uconn.edu
Natural Resources and the Environment	Jason Vokoun	Department Head	(860) 486-0141	jason.vokoun@uconn.edu
Office of the President	Cara Workman	Senior Director of Operations	(860) 486-4077	cara.workman@uconn.edu
Operations and Information Management	Suresh Nair	Interim Department Head	(860) 486-1727	suresh.nair@uconn.edu
Plant Science and Landscape Architecture	Richard McAvoy	Department Head	(860) 486-2925	richard.mcavoy@uconn.edu

ECSU contacts

Department/Division	Name	Title	Phone	Email
Biology	Elizabeth Cowles	Department Chair	(860) 465-4385	cowlese@easternct.edu
Business Administration	Chiaku Chukwuogor	Department Chair	(860) 465-5393	chukwuogorc@easternct.edu
Center for Internships and Career Development	Clifford Marrett	Director	(860) 465-5577	marrettc@easternct.edu
Computer Science	Sarah Tasneem	Department Chair	(860) 465-0389	tasneems@easternct.edu
Environmental Earth Science	Dickson Cunningham	Department Chair	(860) 465-4321	cunninghamw@easternct.edu
Health Sciences	Yaw Nsiah	Department Chair	(860) 465-4524	nsiah@easternct.edu
Mathematical Sciences	Marsha Davis	Department Chair	(860) 465-4592	davisma@easternct.edu
Office of the President	Katherine Atkinson	Assistant to the President	(860) 465-4484	atkinsonk@easternct.edu
Physical Sciences	John Toedt	Department Chair	(860) 465-0182	toedtj@easternct.edu

Appendix G: Marketing Campaign Brainstorm Results

Note that the concepts listed below were the favorites among a longer list of options.

Regional name options:

- **Connecticut's Real Region** – It just feels more "real" here… less pretentious, more authentic. This direction would lend itself well to rolling out other sub-variations (Real people, Real growth, etc.).
- **Farm to Future Region** – Playing off "farm to table", this direction has a natural, healthy, local feel to it while also getting across a forward-looking, progressive outlook. It's wide open spaces and wide open opportunities.
- **Connecticut's Lakes Region** (**note this came from an internal recommendation outside the focus group*) – This name ties into the fact that each town within the region has one or more major lakes within its borders and touches on the scenic and outdoor recreation attractions.

Regional tagline options:

- **Uniquely Nearby** – This region somehow manages to be its very own place, while being close to so much. You can feel like you're away from it all without actually being far from anything.
- **Home. Grown.** – This region feels like it's been raised with care, by locals and people who love the area. Separating into two words lets us give each its own emphasis and meaning. This is a place where you want to raise a family, start a business, etc.
- **The Neighborhood Next Door** – This is another one that communicates both a tight-knit community and a convenient location. It's a friendly place that feels like home but is never far from everything you'd like to do.

Action Item	Timeframe	Cost	Partners Involved (Implementer takes the lead)
Apply for grants to fund project implementation	Ongoing	None	Municipal staff
Connect farmers to information and technical assistance to ensure their success	Ongoing	None	Regional agriculture committee
Connect potential farmers to affordable land	Ongoing	None	Regional agriculture committee
Continue developing connections to potential partners/customers on behalf of the farming community, presenting new ideas for collaboration	Ongoing	None	Regional agriculture committee
Coordinate equipment sharing among farmers	Ongoing	None	Regional agriculture committee
Create visitor package "promotions" - this initiative can be started by reaching out to businesses that may be interested in participating in these shared promotions and packaging individual promotions together around a certain "theme" or event, then marketing using digital and print media (see Visibility and Marketing section for more detail)	Ongoing	None	Business owners
Develop partnerships in key focus areas to share ideas and ensure cohesive and collaborative initiatives	Ongoing	None	
Encourage a regional view – cross marketing, cooperation with businesses, coordination with both regional chambers of commerce	Ongoing	None	Municipal staff, chambers of commerce, EDCs
Engage complementary businesses outside the region to encourage them to expand in the region - reach out to outdoor recreation ethusiasts and interest groups/professional associations to develop "leads" (see "Outdoor Recreation" section for more information)	Ongoing	None	Municipal staff and EDC members
Engage in business visitations and other forms of interaction	Ongoing	None	Municipal staff, regional chambers of commerce, EDC'S
Engage relevant municipal boards and commissions around enacting additional pro-agriculture policies and regulations	Ongoing	None	Regional agriculture committee and municipal staff
Insert new logo and/or tagline on promotional materials	Ongoing	None	Municipal staff
Land use regulatory process streamlining, as necessary	Ongoing	None	Municipal staff, Planning & Zoning Commissions, EDC
Outreach to businesses about workforce needs and increasing attractiveness to graduating UConn and ECSU, monitor those needs for overarching trends as more businesses are engaged	Ongoing	None	Universities and business owners
Outreach to UConn and ECSU department heads about connecting students with specific employment opportunities of companies in the region	Ongoing	None	Universities and business owners
Outreach to UConn and ECSU President's Offices to discuss sharing of information on general workforce needs, events, educational offerings, etc., ensuring periodic follow up throughout the year	Ongoing	None	Universities and business owners
Provide small business educational workshops and information on resources	Ongoing	None	EDC, staff, CT Small Business Center, other local and regional business specialists
Reach out to travel bloggers to encourage them to visit and write about the region	Ongoing	None	Businesses, chambers of commerce, municipal staff
Set up a booth the Coventry Farmer's Market and other relevant events to promote the region	Ongoing	Vendor/registration fees	Businesses, chambers of commerce, municipal staff
Create and implement an educational program about the region's assets for business owners, community leaders, and engaged residents - these are the region's "ambassadors"	Ongoing - 2x per year	None	Business owners and other constituents related to key attractions and amenities
Community/user surveys and engagement for program evaluation	Ongoing - create survey(s) in year 1	Survey software fee	
Implement infrastructure investment projects - guided by prioritized list	Ongoing - long-term	Implementation costs - depends on project	Municipal staff and elected officials
Implement Mansfield, Bolton and Tolland gateway enhancement projects	Ongoing - long-term	Implementation costs - depends on project	Municipal staff and elected officials
Review zoning regulations for business-friendliness	Ongoing - once every 2 years	Potential cost in municipal attorney fees	Municipal staff and Planning & Zoning Commissions

KEY

= General

= Outdoor Recreation

= Agriculture

= Involving Higher Education Institutions

= Culture and Entertainment

= Small Business and Entrepreneurship

= Visibility and Marketing

Action Item	Timeframe	Cost	Partners Involved (Implementer takes the lead)
Coordinate a new event	Ongoing, with one new event in year 1 and adding more in subsequent years as capacity grows	Potential event coordination/logistics costs	Participating organizations - depends on event
Highest and best use studies for key parcels (if warranted)	Phase 2	Hire consultant	Consultant, municipal staff, EDCs
Commercial real estate inventory	Year 1	Hire consultant	Consultant, municipal staff, EDCs
Coordinate a "kick off" meeting with relevant President's Office staff for UConn and ECSU for general information sharing purposes	Year 1	None	Universities
Coordinate individual meetings with department heads representing desirable skillsets (based on conversations with companies about talent needs) - could be engineering, computer science, etc.	Year 1	None	Universities and business owners
Coordinate professional service provider office hours	Year 1	None	Business owners
Coordinate resources for farmers on getting involved in the local farmer's markets	Year 1	None	Regional agriculture committee
Create a business recruitment booklet that includes relevant data, resources, contacts, and other information helpful in the business decision making process	Year 1	Minimal printing costs	
Create a regional agriculture committee - will take the lead on connecting farmers to technical assistance, funding, land, etc.	Year 1	None	Agricultural Commissions, local farming community, market masters
Create an inventory of cultural arts stakeholders and organizations	Year 1	None	Municipal Staff, cultural entities, other relevant stakeholders
Create and dissemminate regional logo and/or tagline as part of marketing campaign	Year 1	Possible consultant fees	Consultant, municipal staff, EDCs, elected officials
Create and print physical marketing collateral (brochures, guides, maps, calendars etc.)	Year 1	Printing and graphic design costs	Consultant, municipal staff, EDCs
Create implementation steering committee	Year 1	None	Municipal staff and elected officials
Create social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) for the region	Year 1	None	Municipal staff, EDCs, town social media coordinators
Determine where needs exist in relation to demand for existing shared workspaces (coworking, commercial kitchens, etc.) by engaging owners off existing facilities to gauge demand	Year 1	None	
Engage innovation/technology arms of UConn and ECSU to determine whether any start-ups are prepared to move into commercial and/or coworking space and work with those companies to ensure their success	Year 1	None	Universities
Establish a relationship with the Workforce Investment Boards that cover the four towns (Capital Workforce Partners and Eastern Workforce Investment Board)	Year 1	None	Municipal staff, EDCs
Initiate meetings with key groups of potential partners/clients for farmers (restaurants, retail, farmer's markets, school systems) to begin a conversation on opportunities for collaboration	Year 1	None	Regional agriculture committee
Inventory assets - includes outdoor recreation, agriculture, and cultural assets	Year 1	None	Municipal staff and relevant boards and commissions
Inventory businesses	Year 1	None	Municipal staff
Map assets and upload maps to website	Year 1	Potential cost in engaging graphic designer to create user-friendly map	
Purchase a branded tablecloth and pull-up display to support promotional efforts at events	Year 1	Associated cost	Municipal staff
Set up individual meetings with growing businesses throughout the region in a number of industries to see where talent/skillset needs might exist	Year 1	None	Business owners
Upload marketing content to existing municipal websites	Year 1	None	Municipal staff
Coordinate a "buy local" campaign	Year 2	Minimal printing costs	Business owners

Action Item	Timeframe	Cost	Partners Involved (Implementer takes the lead)
Coordinate a business mentorship program	Year 2	None	Business owners
Coordinate CSA "pairings" so that farmers can work together on these, versus competing against each other	Year 2	None	Regional agriculture committee
Coordinate the display of historic farm equipment around the region	Year 2	None	Regional agriculture committee
Create a new website dedicated to the region	Year 2	Consultant fees	Consultant
Create an open space plan	Year 2	Potential consultant fees	Municipal staff, land use organizations, engaged residents
Create implementation nonprofit	Year 2	Organizational costs	Municipal staff and elected officials
Create list of economic development-related priority infrastructure investment projects	Year 2	None	Municipal staff and elected officials
Engage municipal Parks and Recreation departments to create outdoor recreation meet up groups, educational workshops, and a joint trail maintenance team	Year 2	None	Parks and Recreation departments and Conservation Commissions
Incorporate trails (and other relevant outdoor amendities) into online GIS maps	Year 2	None	Municipal staff and/or CRCOG
Invest in small-scale infrastructure (benches, trash cans, etc.) to support outdoor amenities	Year 2	Potential associated cost, though business sponsorships could cover most or all expenses	Business owners and municipal staff
Offer coworking and/or commercial kitchen services where appropriate, based on needs determined through actions described above	Year 2	Potential maintenance costs, though there is an opportunity for revenue generation through rental fees	Municipal staff and elected officials
Coordinate small-scale agricultural education workshops for community members	Year 2, with events occurring 2x per year	None	Regional agriculture committee
Coordinate small-scale outdoor recreation events (i.e. informal guided hikes and paddles)	Year 2, with events occurring periodically	None	Conservation Commissions, land trusts, Parks & Recreation departments, staff, local and regional conservation organizations
Coordinate student familiarization tour of the region	Year 3	Event coordination/logistics costs	Universities and business owners
Create a regional arts and culture council to take on event coordination and other programming and advocacy related to this area.	Year 3	None	Some Parks & Recreation departments, existing local and regional art organizations/stakeholders
Create a smart phone app for the region	Year 3	Consultant fees	Consultant
Create community gardens	Year 3	Potential associated cost if no grant funding	Municipal staff, elected officials, and conservation organizations/associations
Implement branded wayfinding signage throughout the region	Year 3	Potential associated cost, though business sponsorships could cover most or all expenses	Municipal staff and UConn