Sustainable West Hartford

Our Town, Our Planet, Our Future

Sustainable West Hartford Commission

REPORT TO TOWN COUNCIL – DECEMBER 2024

WEST HARTFORD

Meet the Commission

Back row: David Sagers (Vice Chair), Kimberly Hughes, Alejandro Paiuk, Jim Fishman, Bernard Pelletier (Chair), Stephen Sack, Christy Matthews, Ted Newton. **Front row:** Katherine Bruns (staff liaison), Aditee Madkekar (resigned Nov 24) Catherine Diviney (staff liaison), Rachael Virgin (resigned Aug 24), Pat Wilson**. Not pictured:** Student Representatives: Nathaniel Goldschmidt (Hall High School), Greta Fedolfi (Conard High School)

Report Contents

- 2024 Year In Review
- Challenges & Opportunities
- 2025 Look Ahead
- Requests
- Appendix – Commission Background & Town Code

2024 Year In Review

WHAT WE DID

FAIR TRASH REDUCTION

Sustainability in action.

blue back SQUARE

StudioTom

PACE
People's Action for Clean Energy

SmartPower
Let's Get Energy Smart.®

KO 1909 VINCIT QUI SE VINCIT
KINGSWOOD OXFORD

energize CONNECTICUT CT

CONNECTICUT GREEN BANK

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root2RISE

BLUE EARTH COMPOST

CONNECTICUT ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD · WESTMOOR PARK ·

Sustainable CT
Local Actions. Statewide Impact.®

WEST HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Prepare and inspire all students!

WasteZero
Save Money. Reduce Waste.

grassroots WEST HARTFORD

West Hartford Public Library

WEST HARTFORD RECYCLES

SIERRA CLUB

WEST HARTFORD 1854

The WEST·HARTFORD·GARDEN·CLUB

Partners make it possible.

Key Accomplishments

- Worked on nature-based solutions
  - Led adoption of Pollinator-Friendly Community Resolution
  - Installed Wolcott Park pollinator garden and held “Your Home is Habitat” workshops
- Advanced issues of waste reduction and food scrap diversion
  - Researched options and increased community support for Unit-Based Pricing
  - Worked with staff and Town leaders, resulting in food scrap collection proposals
- Promoted clean energy adoption
  - Ran PowerSmart West Hartford and held West Hartford Electric Showcase
  - Met with developers to incorporate sustainability features into projects
- Contributed 120 points of Town's Sustainable CT Gold Level Certification
- Organized Earth Day Family Festival

Working Groups

- Created to leverage community expertise
- Expanded commission capacity and volunteer base
- Roughly 45 people actively participated in four working groups:
  - Nature-Based Solutions
  - Waste
  - Energy & Buildings
  - Communications

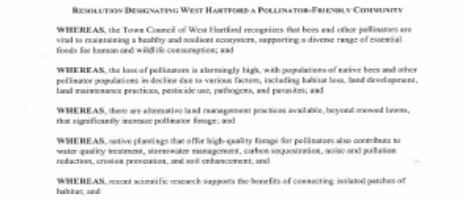
2024
Year In Review

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS WORKING GROUP

Lead: Kim Hughes

The Nature-Based Solutions Working Group grounded its work in long-term, transformative change, while gaining momentum with successful short-term projects.

- Worked with Leisure Services, WH Garden Club, Grass Roots WH and other partners to advance ARPA-funded projects. Designed and installed pollinator garden at Wolcott Park Children's Forest entrance. Assisted with site prep and facilitated the hiring of a professional consultant for design and installation of Wolcott Meadow.
- With staff and Communications Working Group, drove process to adopt a Pollinator-Friendly Community Resolution: researched examples from other municipalities, drafted language, and managed process for internal review and Town Council approval.
- Held three well-attended, action-oriented "Your Home is a Habitat" educational workshops: two in-person, hands-on workshops, at Westmoor Park and Noah Wester Library, and one virtual webinar hosted by WH Public Library.
- Conducted research and held discussions with the City of Boulder, Colorado, regarding their community-wide, climate action initiative, Cool Boulder, with a view to replicating as Cool West Hartford.
- Began drafting a Native Plant Policy, conducting research on similar policies of municipalities across CT.
- Began developing a process for evaluating and identifying municipal open spaces for suitability for pollinator pathway gardens.



RESOLUTION DESIGNATING WEST HARTFORD A POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

WHEREAS, the Town Council of West Hartford recognizes that bees and other pollinators are vital to maintaining a healthy and resilient ecosystem, supporting a diverse range of essential foods for human and wildlife consumption; and

WHEREAS, the loss of pollinators is alarmingly high, with populations of native bees and other pollinator populations in decline due to various factors, including habitat loss, land development, land maintenance practices, pesticide use, pathogens, and parasites; and

WHEREAS, there are alternative land management practices available, beyond mowed lawns, that significantly increase pollinator forage; and

WHEREAS, native plantings that offer high-quality forage for pollinators also contribute to water quality treatment, stormwater management, carbon sequestration, noise and pollution reduction, erosion prevention, and soil enhancement; and

WHEREAS, recent scientific research supports the benefits of connecting isolated patches of habitat; and

2024
Year In Review

WASTE
WORKING GROUP

Lead: Rachael Virgin & Ted Newton

Prior to the Sustainable West Hartford Commission, waste did not have an identifiable “home” within any Town board or commission. Waste has become an increasingly critical topic for Connecticut, and the Waste Working Group met almost weekly from September 2023 to June 2024.

- Learned about different program options to reduce waste and save money.
- Gathered primary research (e.g., resident feedback, participation rates, waste audits) from the Town’s voluntary Morley Neighborhood food scrap + unit-based pricing (UBP) pilot.
- Conducted extensive outreach campaign to provide general education about the waste crisis in Connecticut and to adopt a 1-year town-wide mandatory UBP and food scrap collection program funded by CT DEEP.
- Focused outreach and education with an eye to equity. Created educational materials and videos; presented at churches, ESL classes, libraries community events, and farmers markets; walked neighborhoods with door hangers; spoke to Town Council committees, organized booths for Earth Day Family Festival and Celebrate! West Hartford; and gathered over 600 letters from residents in support of the program.
- Culminated in August 7, 2024, Town Council decision – as a “Committee of the Whole” – not to pursue UBP, but to explore options for food scrap collection only.

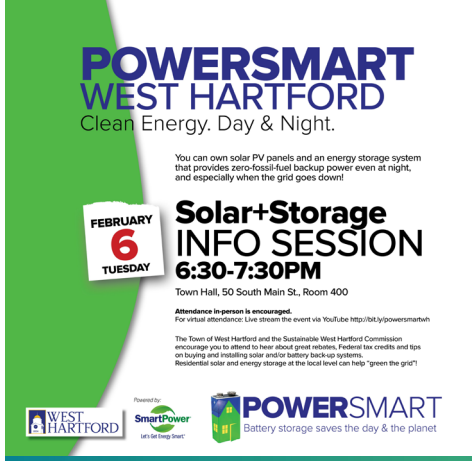
2024 Year In Review

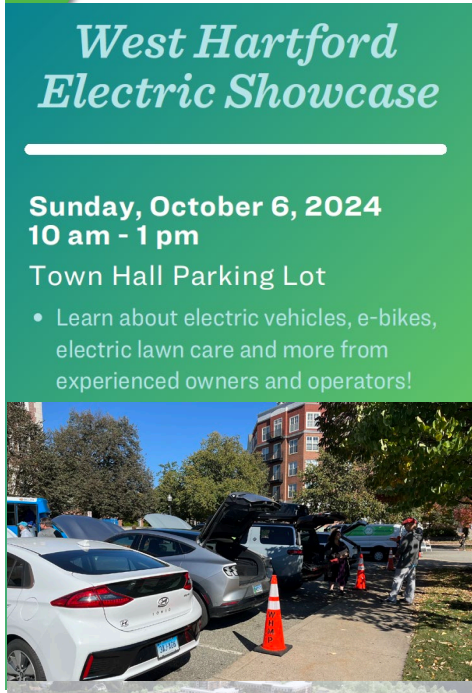
ENERGY & BUILDINGS WORKING GROUP

Lead: Bernie Pelletier & Jim Fishman

The Energy & Buildings Working Group continued the ongoing work of the former Clean Energy Commission. It also began exploring ways to accelerate implementation sustainability-related policy and practices as outlined in the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD).

- Ran PowerSmart West Hartford, a 20-week residential community energy campaign with several in-person and virtual workshops to educate and promote solar and battery storage programs.
- Held a successful West Hartford Electric Showcase with Sierra Club of CT, on October 6, 2024, which promoted electric vehicles, e-bikes, lawn equipment and heat pumps, and included participation from Kingswood Oxford students.
- Designated one member to participate in review and selection of architect for the new Elmwood Community Center.
- Held discussions with Town Planner to explore ways to better integrate and accelerate implementation of energy and sustainability concepts into the Town's policy, planning, and review process – e.g., checklists or working with the Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC).
- Monitored progress of 1800 Asylum Ave development and met with architects on August 15, 2024, to get a better understanding of project's sustainable design elements, encourage additional action, and share information on resources and incentive programs.





2024
Year In Review

COMMUNICATIONS
WORKING GROUP

Lead: Christy Matthews & staff liaisons

The Communications Working Group was created to help raise awareness and engage the community in sustainability initiatives by elevating the Commission's profile, supporting other working groups, and exploring more professional marketing strategies with additional tools, resources, and budget.

- Drafted Communications Plan to initiate discussion with Town about new marketing and outreach ideas, website, communications channels, and protocols.
- Expanded outreach and engagement via social media (Facebook/Instagram); supported commission and working groups with content creation and regular posting.
- Ran successful Sustainable CT Community Match Fund fundraiser, resulting in donations of $8,050 for Earth Day Family Festival.
- Held Earth Day Family Festival on April 20, 2024, in partnership with Blue Back Square – with thousands of attendees this was an extremely successful event with live entertainment, family-friendly activities, local vendors, educational booths, and speakers.
- Began creation of "network" of Town sustainability webpages.

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Website
Facebook
Instagram
Email

Impact: 120 Sustainable CT points

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Sustainable CT + Sustainable CT

Gold Certification **Climate Leader**

The Sustainable West Hartford Commission played a pivotal role in completing actions which helped the Town achieve Sustainable CT Gold-level certification and Climate Leader Designation in 2024. These actions accounted for 120 of the 1,085 points that the Town earned.

Action #	Sustainable CT Action
1.1.1	Optimize for Equity – paired with Action 9.2.2
1.1.1	Optimize for Equity – paired with Action 7.7.1
1.2.1	Attend in Sustainable CT Equity Training
3.12.1	Provide education to enhance pollinator pathways
3.12.2	Create native pollinator gardens
3.12.3	Pass a Pollinator Friendly Community resolution
6.4.1	Host a zero-emissions vehicle event
7.7.1	Implement a community energy campaign
8.1.1	Hold a sustainability event
8.4.1	Complete a Community Match Fund project
9.2.1	Build a Unit-Based Pricing Task Force
9.2.2	Conduct Unit-Based Pricing research, analysis & education

Challenges & Opportunities

WE LEARNED A LOT

Progress on sustainability involves balancing many factors.

Perspective

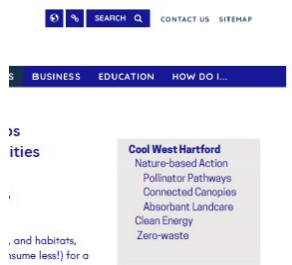
- No roadmap to implementation of existing plans
- No central Town sustainability office or budget
- No regular commission interaction with elected officials or Town leadership
  - Lack of clarity of stakeholder alignment on sustainability
- Identifying challenges allows the opportunity to meet and resolve them

2025 Look Ahead

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

Commission Priorities

- **Cool West Hartford** – launch a "branded" climate action-based resident education and engagement initiative
- **Sustainable CT** – build on prior success by supporting implementation of actions
- **Sustainability Action Plan** – develop a long-term plan with professional facilitation and community stakeholder and Town leadership buy-in



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1854

Requests

OF TOWN COUNCIL & TOWN MANAGER

5 “asks”

1. Fill vacancies so commission can operate at full strength
2. Provide Town leadership input to current initiatives and long term planning
3. Commit Town resources to:
   - current initiatives (e.g., website support for Cool West Hartford)
   - long-term planning process (e.g., professional facilitation)
   - implementation of existing plans (e.g., POCD, Clean Energy Plan)
4. Develop structure for engagement with Town leadership; options could include:
   - designation of Town Council liaison
   - quarterly informal check-ins with the Public Works, Facilities & Sustainability Committee and Town Manager
5. Identify or rotate staff liaison to support policy/planning and nature-based solutions

Appendix

COMMISSION BACKGROUND & TOWN CODE

Background

CEC

Conservation & Environment Commission* established by ordinance.

1972

WEST HARTFORD CLEAN ENERGY TASK FORCE

Clean Energy Task Force created by resolution. First Energy Plan adopted in 2009.

2005

WEST HARTFORD CLEAN ENERGY COMMISSION

Ad hoc Clean Energy Task "converted" to Clean Energy Commission by resolution. Second Energy Plan adopted in 2020.

2017

SAG

Sustainability Advisory Group created by resolution and tasked with making recommendations to Town Council, which included creation of a Sustainable West Hartford "team."

2021

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Sustainable West Hartford Commission established by ordinance, ostensibly merging Conservation & Environment and Clean Energy Commissions.

Chapter 5, Article XVI

2023

*Note: Planning & Zoning Commission is designated as West Hartford's Inland Wetlands & Watercourse Agency (IWWA).

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Chapter 5, Article XVI § 5-72

The Town Council established a Sustainable West Hartford Commission consisting of 11 electors of the Town for the purpose of:

- promoting practices that lead to greater environmental, social and economic sustainability;
- ensuring a high quality of life for present and future generations by fostering an inclusive, resilient, and thriving community; and
- encouraging the responsible use and conservation of energy and natural resources.

DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

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- Identify and prioritize concerns and issues
- Advise and make recommendations
- Collaborate and serve as a resource
- Develop and encourage efforts, relationships and resources for education and action
- Serve as community liaison
- File an annual report

Chapter 5, Article XVI § 5-77