

September 2024

Northwest Connecticut

Affordable Housing and Conservation Collaboration Strategy

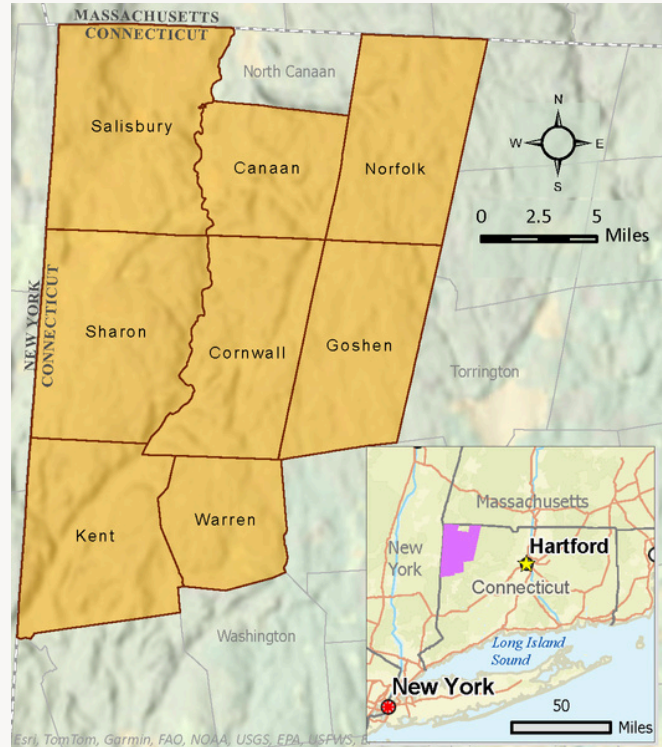


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Introduction

The Northwest Connecticut Affordable Housing and Conservation Collaboration was initiated in January 2024, with the goal of equipping participating communities with the strategies, tools, and relationships to work together to support both local affordable housing efforts and conservation efforts. This work was funded by a community engagement grant awarded to the Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative by the Foundation for Community Health and Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation and was initially focused on the service area of these foundations. Greenprint partnered with the Litchfield County Center for Housing Opportunity to co-facilitate this collaboration.



The 8 participating towns in northwest Connecticut.
Map by Stacy Deming, HVA.



Litchfield Hills Greenprint
Collaborative

The Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative is a nationally-recognized Regional Conservation Partnership of 30+ partners working in 28 Northwest Connecticut towns to conserve recreational open space, farmland, forest, and drinking water through strategic, collaborative action. Greenprint provides a forum for practice innovation that bridges geographic and municipal boundaries. It is sponsored by the Housatonic Valley Association, a tristate environmental nonprofit conserving natural character and environmental health within the 2,000 square mile Housatonic River watershed.



Center for
Housing
Opportunity
Litchfield County, CT

The Litchfield County Center for Housing Opportunity (LCCHO) facilitates a coordinated, regional response to address housing affordability in Litchfield County towns. LCCHO works directly with 15 local housing non-profits in the region to provide capacity building and shared project management support. LCCHO also works with municipalities and cross-sector partners to deliver critical financial resources, data, and technical assistance for community engagement and municipal housing plan implementation.

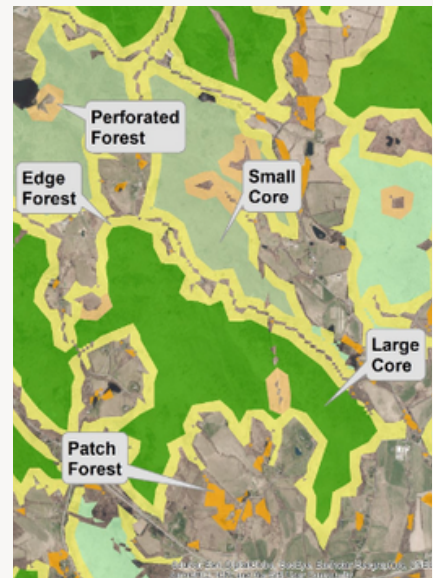
Housing plays a central role in Litchfield County's economic vitality and quality of life. We all benefit when our Main Street businesses, banks, schools, farms, town halls, daycare and healthcare providers- all our employers- have the workforce they need to survive and thrive. They can't do this without the housing options that are affordable and available to their workforce. We also all benefit when our seniors have downsizing options, young families can afford their first home, and our volunteer fire and ambulance services have the volunteers they need. We know how to create these affordable housing options in Litchfield County and have many local success stories we can point to. We can create housing opportunities that preserve and enhance the small-town quality of life so many of us enjoy.

Northwest Connecticut towns have developed municipal housing plans to better understand the housing needs of current and future residents and workers and have developed strategies to address them. Local, volunteer-led housing nonprofits are successfully building and caring for affordable homes and apartments befitting their communities and need more support to be able to help their towns meet affordable housing goals.

Conservation also plays a central role in Litchfield County's economic vitality and quality of life. The area's beauty, clean air and water, wildlife, locally-grown foods, and outdoor recreation are compelling reasons to live, work, and visit here. Working lands and recreation-based tourism strengthen our local economies. Government and nonprofit organizations have worked to conserve these environmental benefits, yet the need for additional protected land persists.

Worldwide, the climate crisis is disrupting natural systems resulting in an uncertain future for our environment. Ambitious goals call for the permanent conservation of as much as 50% of the planet to meet these challenges, but here in Northwest Connecticut pursuing numerical goals alone is not enough: Scientists consider the forests of the eastern United States stretching from the Hudson Valley to Canada to be the most intact temperate deciduous and mixed forest region on Earth, critical for wildlife habitat and migration. Without strategic focus, the connectivity of this massive corridor will be broken - its forests eroded and disconnected.

The Follow the Forest Initiative responds to this risk. A nationally significant strategy to protect and connect forests and promote the safe passage of wildlife, the initiative is seated within The Nature Conservancy's climate connectivity modeling and is augmented by community science and collaborative conservation action.



Roads and buildings can divide core forest. Connected forest corridors support biodiversity and resilience.

How did we get here?

Greenprint partnered with LCCHO to invite representatives from town Boards of Selectmen, Planning and Zoning Commissions, conservation organizations, and housing organizations from the eight participating towns. Representatives attended 6 meetings from February to September 2024.

Together, the collaboration members agreed that:



Our communities need conserved land that supports clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, climate resilience, food production, and recreation access.



Our communities also need dedicated affordable housing options that support people in every stage of life, including those who work and volunteer in our towns.



We need to collaborate locally and regionally to work towards a healthy balance of both affordable housing and conserved land.



Participants at the February 16 meeting in Cornwall, CT.

Meeting participants discussed current initiatives and goals for their towns and ways they could support each other moving forward. The group then drafted a purpose statement and strategies as further described below and created a mapping tool to help evaluate parcels for suitability for conservation and affordable housing development. The mapping tool identifies development considerations such as water and sewer capability, zoning, slopes and wetland soils, aquifer protection areas, critical habitats, as well as where wildlife linkages between core forests are located.

What's Next

The participants plan for their organizations to endorse the purpose statement and strategies set forth herein, communicate their work together and their successes with a unified voice, pursue specific activities within their towns identified during breakout sessions, and explore future project opportunities together.

Purpose Statement

Healthy communities need both affordable housing and conserved land.

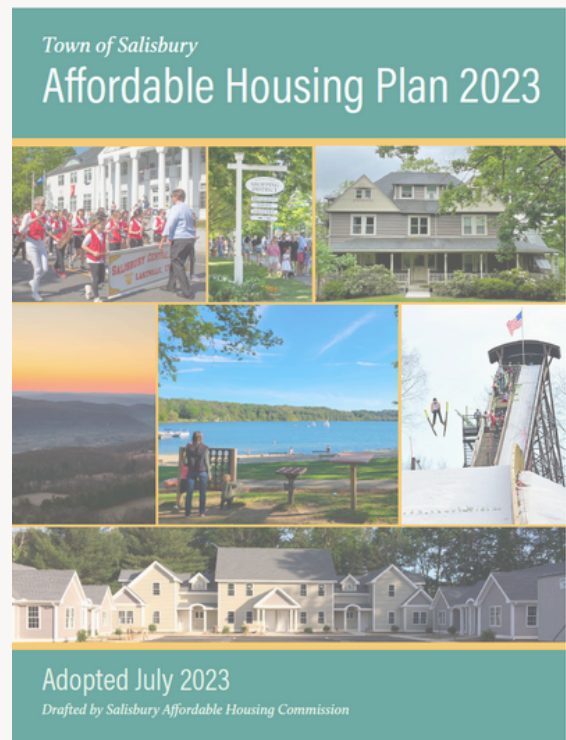
Cross sector and regional collaboration among town governments, housing organizations, and conservation organizations is vital to achieving our affordable housing and conservation goals.

Housing and Conservation Goals

Housing Goals

Housing goals for this collaboration were set by using the goals already outlined for the 5 year period in each town's adopted Affordable Housing Plan. Below are the affordable home unit goals in each town's plan and the number of homes currently underway.

- **Cornwall:** 20 homes (3 underway)
- **Falls Village:** 25 homes (21 underway)
- **Goshen:** 25 homes (9 underway)
- **Kent:** 20 homes (14 underway)
- **Norfolk:** 25 homes (16 underway)
- **Salisbury:** 50 homes (38 underway)
- **Sharon:** 20 homes (10 underway)
- **Warren:** 20 homes (8 underway)



The affordable homes currently underway in each town are being developed by the local affordable housing organizations.

Conservation Goals

Follow the Forest envisions the protection of at least 50% of the acreage of core forests (250+ acres) and at least one viable linkage between 2,637 core forests stretching across a four-state corridor including Northwest Connecticut. This could be achieved through conservation projects, including 192 opportunities within the eight towns participating in this collaboration. Important to our collaborative work, it is conceivable that undeveloped parcels need not be conserved in their entirety in order to maintain the integrity of core forests and their connectivity.

Multiple Land-use Priorities

Participating organizations agreed and acknowledged that there are often multiple and sometimes conflicting priorities for a specific parcel of land. This collaboration project was designed to equip local housing organizations and local/regional conservation organizations with the tools and relationships to be able to discuss the housing and/or conservation priorities on a parcel of land when it becomes available for one or both of these uses. This is forward looking not backward looking. Land that has already been permanently protected by conservation organizations, whether through conservation easements or commitment to a donor is not on the table for discussion for future housing development.

Participants at the May meeting at the Norfolk Hub (Norfolk, CT). *Photo by Shana Sureck.*



Strategies

Over the course of three meetings in the spring of 2024, the group refined the following strategies, with the intention and hope that each participating organization will “opt-in” to this collaboration and actively work on them.



HOUSING & CONSERVATION

Affordable housing organizations and conservation organizations will support each other and collaborate to advance projects by:

- Communicating in a coordinated and intentional manner the importance of both affordable housing and conservation in our communities.
- Building relationships among groups and keeping up to date on each others' vision and activities (e.g., attending each others' meetings and programs).
- Consulting with each other as specific opportunities arise for either a housing development or a land conservation effort.
- Encouraging private philanthropy to support the efforts of both.
- Advocating for state policy/funding to support accomplishing both goals in tandem.
- Supporting each other when town support is needed to pursue specific projects.
- Approaching potential donors together when appropriate.
- Advocating together for the expansion of municipal infrastructure (e.g., water and sewer) that would increase the feasibility of affordable housing in town/village center areas.
- Sharing successes with a collective voice.

Strategy Table continued on next page

Participants take a walking tour of affordable housing in Norfolk. *Photo by Shana Sureck.*



Strategies (continued)



HOUSING

Affordable housing organizations will:

- Locate affordable housing in or near town center areas and/or existing infrastructure, when possible.
- When planning new projects, consider the ability of land parcels to accommodate conserved land, as well as affordable housing.
- Utilize existing buildings/homes and already developed parcels to create dedicated affordable housing, when possible.
- Seek to preserve habitat for rare species and core forest areas and their connectors when building on an undeveloped parcel by utilizing the mapping tool and consulting with conservation organizations.
- Make sure newly created housing options are energy efficient and sustainable (including solar/geothermal/EV charging when possible).
- Preserve existing trees when possible and utilize native plantings in landscaping affordable homes.



CONSERVATION

Conservation organizations will:

- When planning new projects, consider the ability of land parcels to accommodate affordable housing as well as conservation.
- If land is being donated, ask the donors if they would be interested in a portion of the site being utilized for affordable housing (when appropriate) and make introductions to the local housing organization or approach potential donors together.
- Refer prospective donors of land that is not appropriate for conservation to the local housing organization.
- Make open space available in close proximity to town centers and affordable housing, when possible.
- Provide support for housing initiatives.
- Communicate the most up-to-date conservation science and help collaborative groups incorporate science into their priorities.

Strategy Table continued on next page

Strategies (continued)



PLANNING & ZONING

Town Planning & Zoning Commissions will:

- When updating the Town Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), actively engage local housing and conservation organizations and make them aware of public hearing dates.
- When implementing strategies within the POCD, actively engage local housing and conservation organizations, and make them aware of public meeting and hearing dates.
- Host an annual POCD and/or Housing Plan implementation meeting and invite these groups to share updates and goals for the coming year. (Cornwall Planning & Zoning Commission already does this very successfully.)
- Utilize the mapping tool and Follow the Forest maps when updating POCDs.
- Communicate within public meetings the importance of a healthy balance of both affordable housing and conservation in every town.
- Examine regulations or policies that unintentionally prohibit or restrict the feasibility of affordable housing.
- Pursue/support local infrastructure improvements which strengthen town centers and increase the feasibility of affordable housing (e.g., sewer systems).



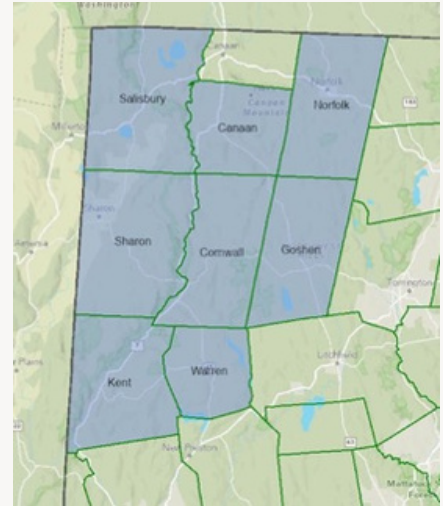
BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Town Boards of Selectmen will:

- Consider whether town owned parcels or buildings could accommodate a project that includes both affordable housing and conservation.
- Prepare letters to support funding requests for affordable housing developments and/or conserve land when requested by local housing and conservation organizations.
- Consider a town ordinance that creates a land acquisition fund to acquire land for collaborative affordable housing and conservation efforts. This could be funded through utilizing a portion of the real estate conveyance fee that comes to the town.
- Communicate within public meetings the importance of a healthy balance of both affordable housing and conservation in every town.
- Support and participate in regional efforts to plan and implement affordable housing and conservation strategies.
- Advocate for state policy/funding to support accomplishing both goals in tandem.
- Pursue/support local infrastructure improvements which strengthen town centers and increase the feasibility of affordable housing.
- Introduce appointed and elected town groups to each other to encourage collaboration. Host an annual gathering like Litchfield's "Chair Share" event (with pizza!).
- Share affordable housing and conservation successes within the community.

List of Participants

Participating towns were the eight towns in the Foundation for Community Health's and Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation's Connecticut service area that have an active housing non-profit and/or land trust. We had over 60 individual participants, representing 40 organizations or town commissions. We want to thank everyone who participated for their time, their ideas, and their enthusiasm for this collaboration.



Representatives from the following boards, commissions, and organizations participated in this collaboration project. Following the publication of this Collaboration Strategy, these representatives plan to bring the Strategy to their boards to ask them to sign on to support the Strategy moving forward. As each new board, commission, or organization signs onto this Collaboration we will update this list on our project website. We'd welcome groups from outside of these eight original towns to sign on as well.

Town of Cornwall

- Board of Selectmen
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Cornwall Affordable Housing Commission
- Cornwall Housing Corporation
- Cornwall Conservation Trust

Town of Canaan/Falls Village

- Board of Selectmen
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Falls Village Housing Trust

Town of Goshen

- Board of Selectmen
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Goshen Housing Trust
- Goshen Land Trust

Town of Kent

- Board of Selectmen
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Kent Affordable Housing
- Kent Land Trust

Town of Norfolk

- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Foundation for Norfolk Living
- Norfolk Land Trust

Town of Salisbury

- Board of Selectmen
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Salisbury Affordable Housing Commission
- Salisbury Housing Committee
- Salisbury Housing Trust
- Salisbury Association Land Trust

Town of Sharon

- Board of Selectmen
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Sharon Housing Trust
- Sharon Land Trust

Town of Warren

- Board of Selectmen
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Warren Affordable Housing Corporation
- Warren Land Trust

Regional Organizations

- Habitat for Humanity Northwest Connecticut
- Housatonic Valley Association
- Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy
- Northwest Hills Council of Governments

The following text is a draft resolution of support that can be modified as needed and used by participating housing and conservation organizations to formally support this Collaboration Strategy . It is not intended for adoption of support by a Town Meeting but could be utilized by a Board of Selectmen or Planning & Zoning Commission to signal their support for this collaboration and their intention to implement the strategies recommended in the report.

EXAMPLE RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT

Northwest Connecticut

Affordable Housing and Conservation Collaboration Strategy

From February to September 2024, representatives from town Boards of Selectmen, Planning and Zoning Commissions, conservation organizations, and housing organizations in eight Northwest Connecticut communities met as part of a project to build capacity for cross-sector collaboration. This group included one or more representatives from *[municipality/organization]*.

WHEREAS the participants in the Northwest Connecticut Affordable Housing and Conservation Collaboration Strategy agreed on the common purpose statement that: **Healthy communities need both affordable housing and conserved land.** Cross sector and regional collaboration among town governments, housing organizations, and conservation organizations is vital to achieving our affordable housing and conservation goals; and

WHEREAS the participants identified points of alignment in their goals, as well as strategies and tools to pursue these aligned goals as outlined in the Strategy report dated September 2024,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the *[name of organization/board/commission]* hereby supports this Collaboration Strategy and will make its best effort to implement the strategies outlined in this report.

Date voted

Appendix

Case studies and reports on affordable housing and conservation collaborations

[Hudson Valley Alliance for Housing and Conservation](#)

This webpage details the work of the Hudson Valley Alliance for Housing and Conservation, a collaboration of land trusts and affordable housing organizations in upstate New York that began in 2022.

[Land Trust Alliance - Breaking Ground: An Affordable Housing Resource Guide for Land Trusts](#)

This report was released by the Land Trust Alliance in 2023 in order to provide a strong foundation for land trusts to gain literacy in the world of affordable housing, while encouraging cross-movement conversation and collaboration.

[Connecticut Land Conservation Council \(CLCC\) - Resources from February 2023 Summit on Housing and Conservation](#)

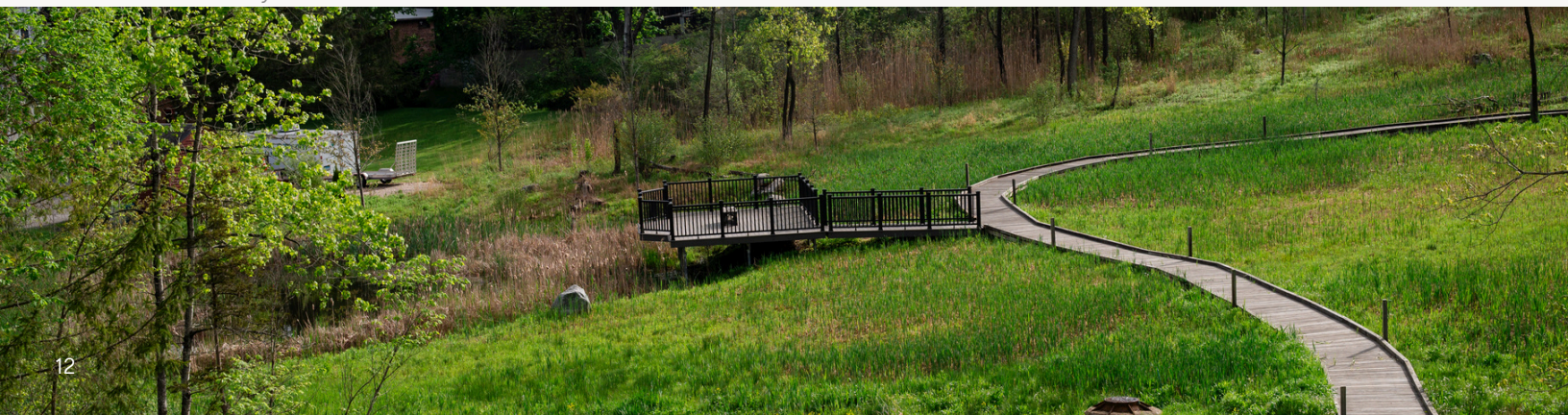
On February 1, 2023, CLCC, in collaboration with the Land Trust Alliance and Trust for Public Land, hosted a day-long summit to bring together housing advocates and conservation advocates. This page includes recordings from the day, the agenda, and presentations, in addition to other resources.

News Articles

[Red Hook, NY, September 13, 2023: Partnership keeps agricultural land affordable for farmers, provides a suitable site for affordable housing, and will connect public parks with new trails](#)

This news article details the efforts of the Town of Red Hook, Scenic Hudson, and the Dutchess Land Conservancy to partner on two land transactions and protect 169 acres.

Trail in Norfolk. Photo by Shana Sureck.



Appendix

News Articles (continued)

Easthampton, MA, February 11, 2024: [Two big affordable housing projects in Easthampton land CPA money, 185 homes proposed in 2 projects](#)

This article details a project in Massachusetts River, titled “Growing Green: Easthampton”, in which plans call for conserving 43 acres of fields, forest and farmland, while developing affordable rental units on 10 acres alongside the road.

Easthampton, MA, July 30, 2024. [Massachusetts land trust to tackle affordable housing and land conservation in one project.](#)

This is a more recent article on the project mentioned in the article above. The Kestrel Land Trust will work with Community Builders, a national nonprofit, to both conserve 42 acres and develop 87 affordable rental units.

Mapping and Data Tools

[Housing Opportunity & Conservation Online Mapping Tool](#)

This tool was created as part of this initiative. Data is displayed for the 8 towns and includes metrics related to both conservation and affordable housing. The mapping tool identifies important development considerations such as water and sewer capability, zoning districts, slopes and wetland soils, as well as where viable linkages between core forests are located, aquifer protection areas, and critical habitats.

[Litchfield County Housing Needs Assessment tool](#)

This web-based tool contains data related to housing, incomes, and affordability for all towns in Litchfield County. It was created by the Litchfield County Center for Housing Opportunity and RPA to help communities understand and address challenges related to housing affordability.

Sarum Village affordable housing development in Salisbury. *Drone image by Pig Iron Films.*



Appendix

Mapping and Data Tools (continued)

[Follow the Forest Story Map](#) and [Online Mapping Tool](#)

Follow the Forest is an initiative of the Housatonic Valley Association to protect and connect forests and promote the safe passage of wildlife throughout the Northeast – from the Hudson Valley to the forests of Canada. The Story Map shares details of the initiative and why it is important. The online mapping tool allows users to toggle layers on and off related to core forest, habitat linkages, and other factors impacting wildlife movement.

[State of Connecticut Natural Diversity Database Maps](#)

Natural Diversity Database (NDDB) maps show the approximate location of threatened, endangered, and special concern species in Connecticut, as well as important natural communities. Any development activities that include an NDDB area must go through an NDDB review and approval process by CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

[CT Environmental Conditions Online Advanced Viewer](#)

This is an online mapping tool that contains many layers that can be toggled on or off, related to natural resources in Connecticut.

Kent, Connecticut. *Drone image by Pig Iron Films.*



Appendix

Communication Tools

[Building Community Support for Affordable Housing in Litchfield County: a Playbook](#)
[Building Community Support for Affordable Housing: a Toolkit](#)

The Building Community Support for Affordable Housing in Litchfield County Playbook details strategies for talking about affordable housing in Litchfield County, with a goal of activating new champions for affordable housing in northwestern CT communities. The Toolkit gives specific examples of ways in which people can use the playbook strategies to communicate.

[An Investment in the Community: Northwestern CT Affordable Housing](#)

This short documentary film was produced in 2021 by Pig Iron Films and the Litchfield County Center for Housing Opportunity to highlight the existing affordable housing in northwestern Connecticut and the people who are working to develop more.

[Housing Our Neighbors: Creating Affordable Housing in Rural Connecticut](#)

This short documentary film was produced in 2022 by Yonah Sadeh, a resident of Falls Village, in partnership with the Falls Village Housing Trust. The film highlights how a lack of housing in small towns in the northwest corner of Connecticut can impact young families, young people leaving home for the first time, and seniors on a fixed income. The film includes 24 interviews to tell a human story about the community value of housing that is affordable.

[Our Home, Our Future: Voices from the Salisbury Community about Housing Needs and Challenges](#)

This collection of stories from actual Salisbury residents was written and compiled by Mary Oppenheimer, originally for a series in the Lakeville Journal. These powerful testimonies are great communication tools to better illustrate who needs housing in our region and who is impacted by housing challenges.

Zoning tools for creating housing diversity

[Zoning and Affordable Housing Webinar \(October 2022\)](#)

This recorded webinar covers topics including: What is CGS 8-30g (the “Affordable Housing Appeals Act”) and how have groups in Litchfield County used this tool? What do the recent changes in the State’s Zoning Enabling Act mean for affordable housing (PA 21-29)? What zoning changes are being considered in recent municipal housing plans?

Appendix

Sustainable Design and Tools

[Sustainable. Resilient. Affordable. Residential and Mixed-use Sustainable Building Design Guidelines \(Published April 2023\)](#)

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) published these design guidelines in 2023, focused on sustainable building in the Greater Boston area. While this document is urban-focused, there are still many useful recommendations that could be applied to housing development in Litchfield County.

[2020 Green Communities Criteria](#), Click [here](#) for the PDF version

The 2020 Enterprise Green Communities Criteria and Certification is a detailed framework for green building techniques in affordable housing. Use the first link to tailor the recommendations to your project (e.g., new construction, rural small town), or click the second link to read the entire PDF.

[Town of Morris Low Impact Sustainable Development and Stormwater Management Design Manual \(Published 2018\)](#)

Trinkaus Engineering, LLC developed this manual for the Town of Morris in 2018, with a focus on protecting water resources. This document details stormwater management techniques to mitigate stormwater runoff and pollution from new developments.

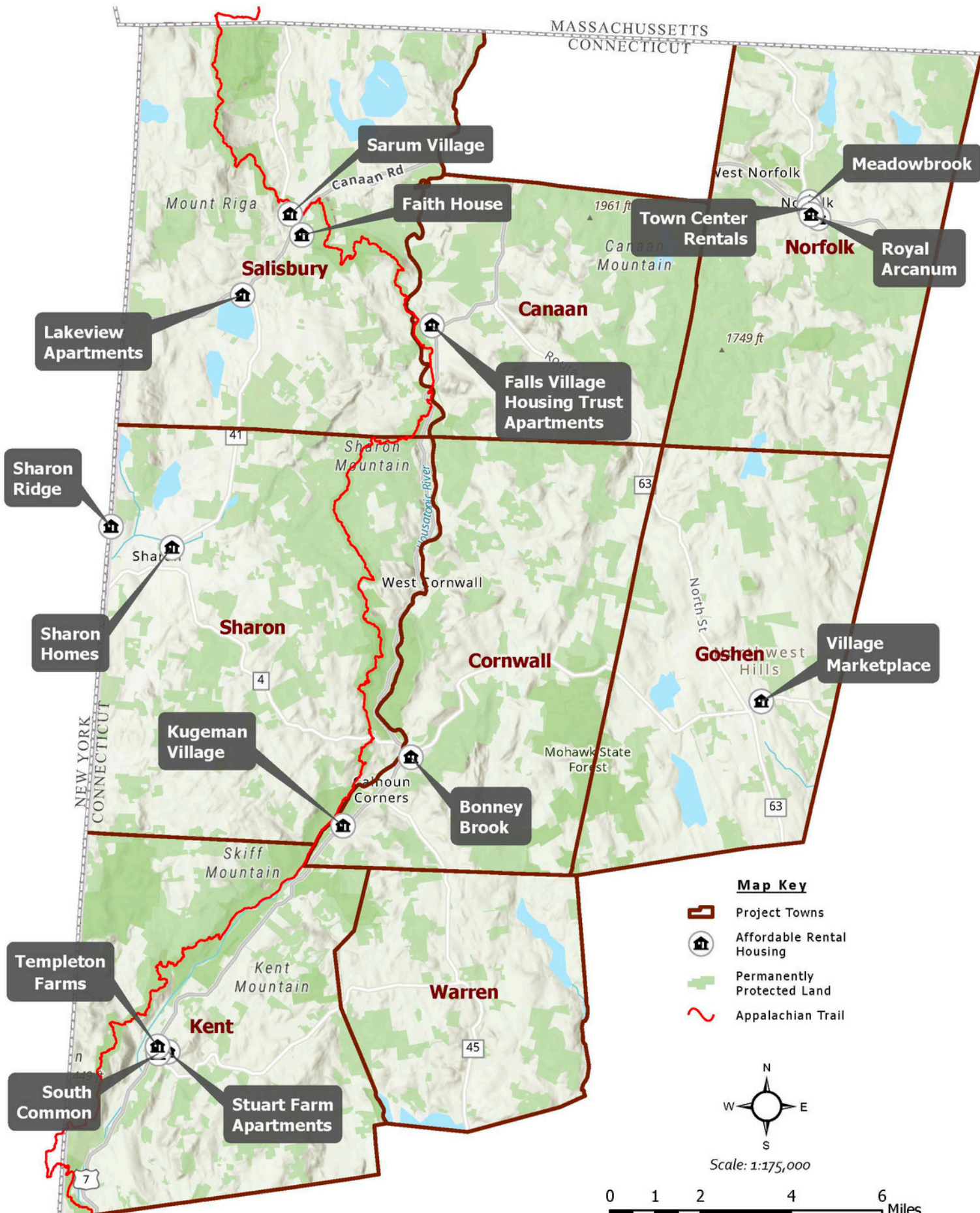
Funding for Affordable Housing in Litchfield County

[Funding for Affordable Housing in Litchfield Housing](#)

In 2022, the Litchfield County Center for Housing Opportunity created this fundraising toolkit to outline a variety of techniques that small housing non-profits can use to fund operations and housing projects. Funding sources include large federal and state programs, private fundraising strategies, town housing funds, and small grants from local banks and community foundations.

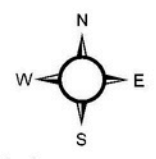
[Affordable Housing Development Resources](#)

This searchable tool was put together by LISC Connecticut and the Partnership for Strong Communities, with support from the Connecticut Project. It is a comprehensive list of state and federal funding resources for housing development in Connecticut.



Map Key

- Project Towns
- Affordable Rental Housing
- Permanently Protected Land
- Appalachian Trail



Scale: 1:175,000



Acknowledgements

We want to thank all the volunteers, town leaders, and regional groups who gave their time to be a part of this effort. We also want to acknowledge the following staff contributions to this strategy report:

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Jocelyn Ayer, LCCHO

Project management and report design:

Lindsay Larson, LCCHO

GIS mapping:

Stacy Deming, HVA

Supported by

Berkshire Taconic
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation strengthens communities through philanthropy and leadership. Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation responds to regional priority issues while addressing their root causes, expanding the role of philanthropy as a force for change.



Foundation for Community Health (FCH)

Serving the greater Harlem Valley of New York and the northern Litchfield Hills of Connecticut, FCH works to create the conditions required for health, well-being, and equity. To accomplish their mission, FCH makes grants, conducts research, provides technical assistance, and supports collaboration and advocacy.



The Housing Collective

The Housing Collective is a CT-based nonprofit agency that applies a Collective Impact framework to deliver solutions to the most pressing housing problems. Focused on ending homelessness and creating equitable housing opportunities for all, the Housing Collective provides the leadership and support that enables productive, regional collaboration across organizations and sectors and drives systems change.

Future site of Haystack Woods affordable homes in Norfolk. *Photo by Shana Sureck.*

