



CHAPTER 9

**Leadership
and Implementation**

AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL LEADERSHIP

Effective leadership for the ALSPT Region and the ALSPT corridor is a critical component of establishing and sustaining implementation of the recommendations outlined in this ALSPT Region Master Plan. In the case of the Air Line State Park Trail, the single most practical and cost-effective strategy is to begin a bi-annual roundtable with CT DEEP and a new ALSPT Region organization that would represent the twelve towns and other stakeholders in the ALSPT Region.

The first step in this strategy is to create an ALSPT organization. This organization could be established by formalizing the current 130+ member ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee

into a new Section 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for the ALSPT Region. To support this effort, the ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee secured a \$75,000 grant in May 2023 with a 20% match supplied by town and trail committee volunteers. The purpose of this grant is to enact recommendations from this chapter. Parameters for structure, membership and goals for this new nonprofit organization were discussed by the ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee throughout the project planning phase of this master plan with detailed recommendations coalescing in a February 2023 roundtable. The Committee's recommendations are detailed on the next page.



East Hampton: Site Tour of Upcoming Infrastructure Project Funded by Congressionally Directed Spending with Project Sponsor, U.S. Congressman Joe Courtney

THE VALUE OF A TRAIL ASSOCIATION

“Your dues and contributions help us provide grants to the towns on the trail, funding construction and maintenance. It also allows us to provide trail amenities such as bike repair stations. Our Adopt-a-Mile Program volunteers, Trail Ambassadors and the participants in the Spring Clean-Up days help keep the trail free of debris. Board members

SOURCE: FARMINGTON CANAL RAIL-TO-TRAIL ASSOCIATION

and volunteers attend the Collinsville Farmers Market each Sunday from July to October, along with having booths at area events and trailside tables to keep you informed about the trail. Our website keeps you current on trail news, enables reporting trail issues to town officials and facilitates communicating to the Board your compliments or complaints.”

ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee Leadership Recommendations



STRUCTURE

- Create the new ALSPT Region organization as a Section 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to leverage the potential for fundraising and grant funding/oversight.
- Establish a communications network between the town departments/officials, trail committees, key stakeholders, and CT DEEP that could be funneled through the new ALSPT Region organization as moderator.
- Host yearly bi-annual meetings to coordinate ongoing strategies for maintenance, park rules, funding, and implementation of this plan's recommendations for signage, infrastructure & emergency management.



MEMBERSHIP

- The new ALSPT Region organization's membership could be designed to include stakeholders through the organization's bylaws.
- The twelve towns should appoint representatives to a Board of Directors for this new nonprofit organization with the goal of representing and coordinating town support of the trail and addressing issues and concerns in the management and maintenance of the trail.
- CT DEEP and other state agencies would participate in bi-annual meetings as ex-officio representatives.




GOALS

- Implement the recommendations of the ALSPT Region Master Plan and subsequent studies through coordinated discussion, planning and strategy.
- Work both as a region and one entity to secure funding for larger visionary projects and support grant applications for localized infrastructure projects by towns and partner organizations. Coordinate the economic growth possibilities of the ALSPT Region through land use and grant funding support for the concept of Trail Towns, trail-oriented businesses, the new ALSPT Region website and related marketing strategy.
- Coordinate with CT DEEP to ensure that signage and wayfinding, both virtual and stick-built, improve the trail user experience in the entire twelve-town region.

Air Line State Park Trail Region Roles and Responsibilities

CT DEEP	LOCAL GOVERNMENT	COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT
Encourage regional collective planning and communications for 12 ALSPT Towns and partner organizations	Support and sponsor the ALSPT Region organization including representation from town (official or resident) with goal to improve intra town collaboration and with CT DEEP	Include Air Line State Park Trail planning in Unified Planning Work Program update with specific focus on multi-town infrastructure
Plan for and provide an internal planning scope and strategy for CT DEEP management of the trail	Formally appoint 1-2 representatives to the new ALSPT Region organization	Work with new ALSPT Region organization and towns as needed to include infrastructure projects and maintenance in Metropolitan Planning Organization's Statewide Transportation Improvement Plans
Provide clarity on a yearly basis toward Passport to Parks funding toward maintenance allocation and district implementation schedule to regional organization	Review and update zoning regulations and POCDs to identify uses that are incompatible to the ALSPT and ensure that these are located at appropriate distances from the trail with buffers as needed. Consider creating an overlay zoning district along the trail	Assist with CTDOT grant funding programs or special programs for congressionally-directed spending or similar programs to support activities along the ALSPT
Advocate for additional staffing for district offices	Survey local road connections	Participate on 12 Town Regional Trail Committee
Provide single point of contact for town communications related to emergencies and adverse trail conditions	Encourage local transit to extend service or on-demand service to select trailhead parking locations for transit dependent populations	Work with state and federal in support of towns
Streamline permitting and review for infrastructure improvements for connections between town centers and the ALSPT	Consider yearly financial stipend \$1000-\$2000 (or a population-based rate) to ALSPT Region organization to help cover town/regional marketing and website, and overhead costs for meetings	Adopt, where appropriate, the ALSPT Region Master Plan and its recommendations into local Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies
Advocate on behalf of towns with CT DOT for trail to town center connections	Support local economic development commissions and business groups planning and providing information for stay and play options for visitors	Support the ALSPT Region Master Plan and its recommendations through open space planning and regional POCD recommendations to support the efforts to improve the ALSPT
Advocate with other state agencies on permitting for infrastructure projects and marketing campaigns	Evaluate options for ALSPT to be used as a commuter route and plan for land use along the trail that can build upon direct connections to business centers near the trail	Work with local rural transit districts establish connections to ALSPT trailheads for transit-dependent populations

Air Line State Park Trail Region Roles and Responsibilities

TRAIL COMMITTEES	NEW ALSPT REGION ORGANIZATION	STATE & FEDERAL LEGISLATORS
Continue to advocate and plan for improved trails conditions and experiences for trail users at the local level	Coordinate communications with CT DEEP and represent local interests in planning, maintenance and infrastructure improvements on the ALSPT Trail	Support funding for major improvements to the ALSPT and timely completion of the full trail for continuity of experience for trail users
Become active and support the new ALSPT Region organization by attending meetings as ex-officio members or by sending recommendations with representatives	Coordinate with Hop River Trail Alliance on wayfinding, marketing the ALSPT region, and advocacy with the Connecticut Office of Tourism and related agencies	Promote the ALSPT Region website as the primary source of information about the ALSPT and where one can plan for a stay and play visit in one or more of the 12 towns and the surrounding region
Advocate for coordination of events and local conservation of trail resources and scenic protection	Implement the recommendations of the ALSPT Region Master Plan including seeking continuity of experience improvements and wayfinding	Secure bond funding for a complete final buildout of the 64 miles of ALSPT corridor to ensure continuity of surface structure, draining and design
Become active with ALSPT Region website and contribute/promote stories via content and social media sharing.	Support the 12 Towns of the ALSPT Region and economic growth opportunities with updates to the ALSPT website promoting attractions and services with partner stakeholders and state tourism agencies	Learn about investments made in the ALSPT to date and how future investment can help the economy of the ALSPT Region expand
Promote ALSPT to new members to heighten awareness of ALSPT trail use and options	Provide a single point of contact with CT DEEP for arranging the date of the annual or bi-annual roundtable for town staff/officials, trail committees and partner stakeholders	Attend events like ALSPT workshops and ribbon cuttings to be continually informed and aware of new developments within the ALSPT and the ALSPT Region
Participate in training by CT DEEP for appropriate maintenance of the ALSPT and encourage additional volunteers to participate in such training	Support towns in expanding economic growth opportunities located in close proximity to the ALSPT, with a special focus on the Willimantic center hub	
Be the eyes and ear of ongoing conditions and information on the ALSPT and report back to the new ALSPT Region organization, Town Representatives and your local CT DEEP liaison	Promote strategies to increase diversity and inclusion of trail visitors with partner organizations	
	Coordinate with events organizers on the trail, starting with Tackle the Trail, the Ghost Run and other organizations	<p>▶ Work with the ALSPT website designer to expand the stay and play experience planning portion of the website by providing suggested journeys and local events on the ALSPT</p>

LET'S GET STARTED ON IMPLEMENTATION

- Stakeholders and town residents should share and read the ALSPT Region Master Plan and/or its Executive Summary.
- Elect a temporary Chair/ President of the ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee until bylaws are established for a new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization.
- Establish bylaws for the new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization.
- Hire or secure volunteer services of legal assistance/attorney to file incorporation paperwork to form a Section 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
- Ensure diversity and inclusion are part of the structure of the new nonprofit ALSPT Region organization.
- Establish "Friends of ALSPT Region" to help fundraise for events, workshops, marketing, staffing and matching funds for infrastructure.
- Maintain a geospatially oriented database of information about the trail and the region.
- Review recommendations of the ALSPT Region Master Plan (Appendix D).
- Arrange annual or bi-annual communications and maintenance-project review with CT DEEP.
- Consider mutual aid needs for safety and emergency management between the towns in the ALSPT Region.
- Review ongoing grant applications or funding received for new infrastructure to ensure compatibility with this Master Plan.
- Establish consistency in wayfinding signage for 50 miles of the ALSPT and coordinate signage with that along the Hop River State Park Trail.
- Meet with local Connecticut legislators to discuss developing a bond funding initiative to fully buildout consistent trail conditions along the 64 miles of the ALSPT.
- Work together with state and federal legislators to build out additional trail infrastructure to improve the trail user experience.
- Conduct an informational meeting with 130-member Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee to highlight next steps.
- Apply as a regional collaborative with towns for new grant funding opportunities that benefit the ALSPT Region trail system. Track progress in database.
- Work as one voice for ongoing maintenance agreements or memorandums of understanding with CT DEEP.
- Work across boundaries with local Influence Areas, nearby towns, and the schools of higher learning in the ALSPT Region to share information about trail progress and market the ALSPT.
- Coordinate meetings on an annual basis with the four Councils of Government along the ALSPT to ensure that the ALSPT Region and corridor are part of their unified planning work program and/or general work program.
- Preserve the conservation experience for the trail user to increase eco-tourism activities in the ALSPT Region.



- Advocate for a Trail-Town Aid Program with the support of state legislators to assist towns with funds needed to care for the ALSPT. Coordinate these efforts with CT DEEP.
- Act as one regional voice for marketing the towns and the ALSPT Region via the new website and social media outlets as noted in Chapters 6 and 7.
- Hire a part-time staff person to support the ALSPT Region initially with arranging the bi-annual roundtables and the ALSPT Region-sponsored events, coordinating updates to the website consultant and maintaining ALSPT-related databases.
- Create a diversity and inclusion strategy to maximize potential for ALSPT Region membership, business involvement and a welcoming experience to trail users of all backgrounds.
- Once the trail is complete for the full 64 miles, apply for National Recreational Trail designation and other trail designations that could possibly provide funding to the ALSPT Region in the future.
- Connect with The Last Green Valley for inspiration and potential future staffing for trail marketing and regional coordination.

Funding for the ALSPT Region

The new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization will continue to: set a vision for trail development, investment, and promotion; outline a fundraising strategy; propose policies; provide quality control for the organization; and support the efforts of the towns, trail partners and CT DEEP.

Toward that end, there are numerous avenues to raise funding to support trail infrastructure, regional marketing, events, and education workshops. One avenue is being designated as a nationally recognized area, which would make the ALSPT Region eligible for federal funding.

More research is required for this avenue. As the ALSPT Region becomes recognized, opportunities to conduct fundraising events

or sales of merchandise may provide a different source of revenue. While difficult to organize, race events or marathons have raised between \$70,000 to \$300,000 per event for some nearby Connecticut organizations. Another source of funding is derived from the rural status of many of the ALSPT communities, as designated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (see Figures 9A and 9B).

Fundraising is a skill and one that can be learned and improved upon with training can be provided by Community Trust Foundations. These organizations also provide capacity building grants for new organizations like the new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization.

While difficult to organize, race events or marathons have raised between \$70,000 to \$300,000 per event for some nearby Connecticut organizations.



FIGURE 9A

USDA Rural Development Eligibility: Business

Connecticut (MA/CT/RI Jurisdiction) Rural Development Eligible Areas for General Business Programs

This map of communities in Connecticut that are eligible for USDA Rural Development Business Programs shows that many of the ALSPT towns are eligible or partially eligible for these programs.

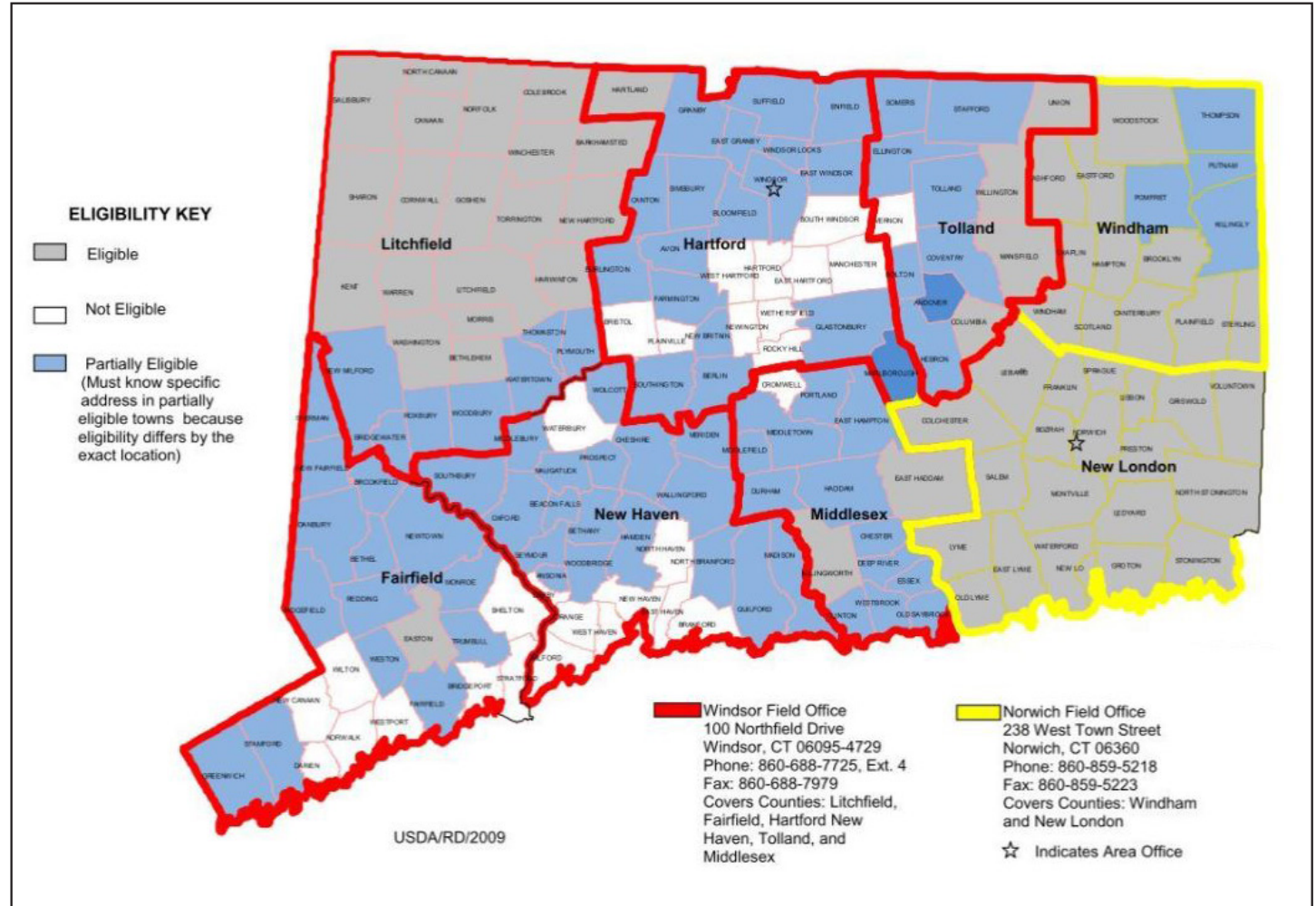


FIGURE 9B

USDA Rural Development Eligibility: Housing

Connecticut (MA/CT/RI Jurisdiction) Rural Development Eligible Areas for Housing Programs

This map of communities in Connecticut that are eligible for USDA Rural Development Housing Programs shows that all the ALSPT towns are eligible for these programs.

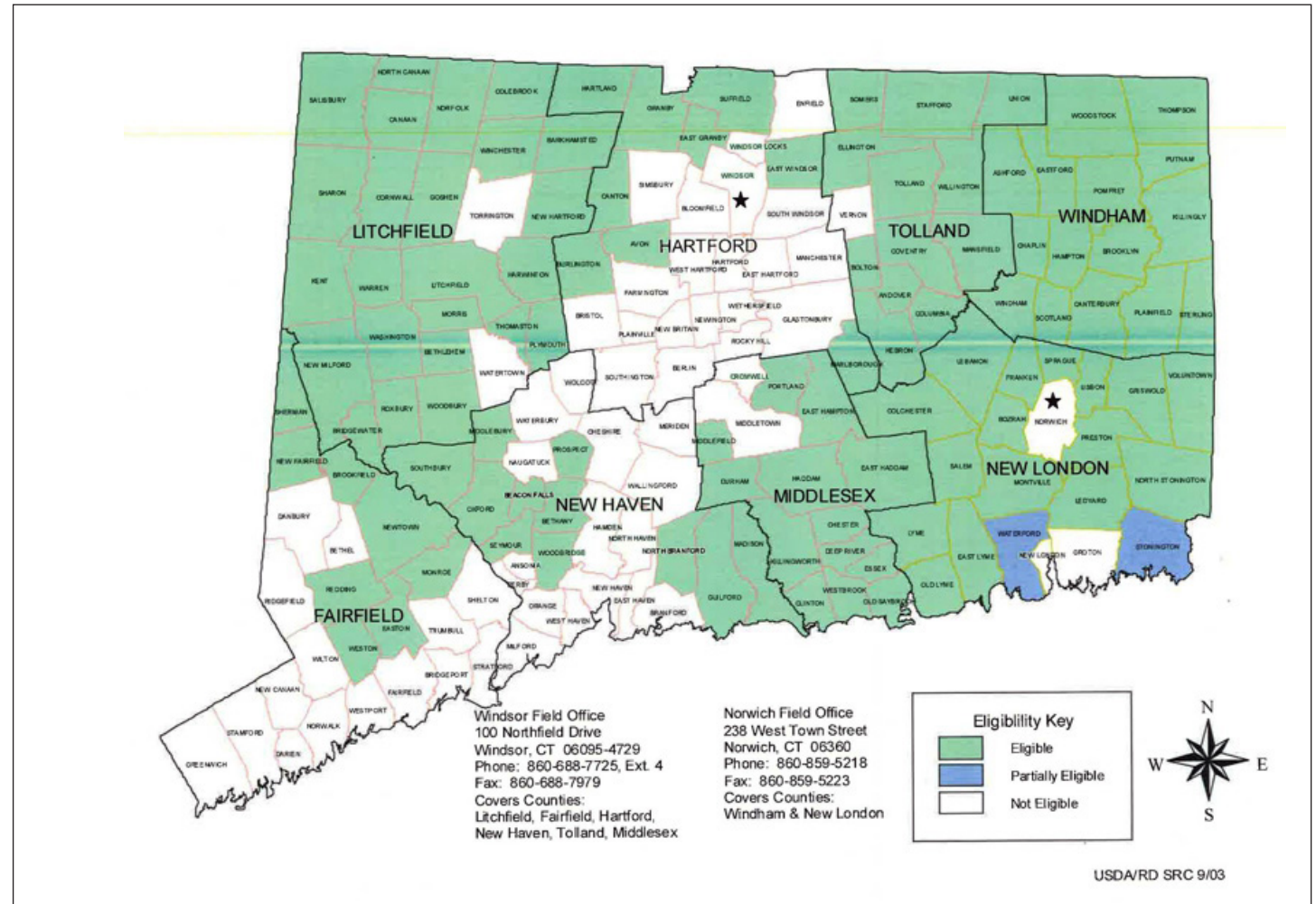


FIGURE 9C: Public Expenditure Through Grant Funding for the ALSPT*

Colchester	Colchester Design of Link Trail to Air Line State Park Trail (SPT) Connection to the Goodwin trail in Babcock WMA then to the system of trails in Day Pond which in turn connects to the Air Line SPT	\$43,200
East Hampton	East Hampton/DEEP State Parks ALSPT Phase 2 ALSPT connection to Portland to extend from Phase 1 funded by last grant round	\$583,800
Portland	Portland Air Line State Park Trail Extension 2.27 mile extension of this State Park Trail with 10 car parking lot.	\$685,932
Hebron	Hebron Church St Park - Air Line SPT connection design universal access trail to link to existing trails in Burnt Hill Park; first phase (not an actual connection) in connection to ASPT; includes a bridge	\$62,000
The Last Green Valley	The Last Green Valley Improving Trail Access for All Abilities using upgraded High Efficiency Trail Assessment Process equipment, plus training new volunteers and hosting new events, to improve accessibility on many miles of trails including the ALSPT	\$15,330
Thompson	Thompson Trail Maintenance Equipment Town's volunteer Trails Committee will purchase equipment for use in ensuring proper maintenance of the Town's large trails system, much of which includes portions of state and federal trails systems.	\$9,704
Colchester	Construction of a link between the Goodwin Trail and the Air Line SPT	\$47,776.00
CT Audubon & Pomfret	Preparation of construction documents for an ADA shelter, restroom, and interpretive exhibit observation deck.	\$53,491
CT RC&D	Master Plan to include resource inventory wayfinding, economic opportunities, bike to work assessment, increase safe routes to schools, maintenance plan	\$188,522
Hebron	Connector trail will include boardwalk, a bridge and a 12 car parking lot	\$228,320
Putnam-NECCOG	Develop a shovel ready plan to complete the ALSPT connection to the Putnam River Trail and the YMCA/Technology Park system.	\$64,200
Thomaston	Planning and design of an additional section of the NRG in Thomaston.	\$140,400
Thompson	Planning/Design	\$16,000
Windham	Maintenance, Amenities	\$86,525
ALSPT CTDEEP Rec Trails Grants Since 2015		\$2,177,424
New 2023 ALSPT Rec Trail Funding Awards		\$707,500
Funding from CT DEEP prior 2015		\$4,419,560
Side Grant from Community Connectivity		
Colchester	Colchester Town Green Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Project	\$397,030
Hebron	Hebron Center/Air Line Trail Connector	\$399,033
Total CC Grants		\$796,063
Congressionally Directed Spending		
2023 - Courtney - East Hampton		\$1,400,000
Total CDS		\$1,400,000
TOTAL ALSPT INVESTMENT		\$9,500,547

*20% match not included

FIGURE 9D: Formation of 12 Town ALSPT Region Association Two Years

BUDGET BY CATEGORY OF EXPENSE	FUNDING REQUEST
Bylaws (Legal Review and Application for Non Profit Status)	\$5,000.00
Newsletter - Social Media Promotion	\$2,000.00
Special Event (Promotion of Trail with CT Latino Outdoors Concept) Diversity & Inclusion	\$5,000.00
Website Management, promotion and updates	\$15,000.00
Collaborative 12 Town Project (Wayfinding or to identified by 12 Town Organization)	\$8,000.00
Coordination with CTDEEP Trail Finder and Cell based website information (DX Labs -UConn)	\$5,000.00
Part time Staffing to 12 Town ALSPT Region Organization for project	\$20,000.00
Regional Promotion Video: Edits of existing footage to 2-3 minute video	\$6,000.00
Overhead - Support Host Fiduciary CTCRC&D	\$9,000.00
Total Grant Funding Request	\$75,000.00
Total Project Costs with In Kind Match of 20% (match could be higher)	\$93,480.00

FIGURE 9E: Examples of Funding Sources

ORGANIZATION	TYPE OF GRANT
USDA	Rural Development Grant - RBDG
USDA	Community Facilities Loans/Grant
USDA	Community Connect Grants - Broadband
CTDOT	Connectivity Grants
CTDOT	STIP Funding for Road Improvements
CT Rec Trails Grants	Infrastructure and Planning Grants
Councils of Government	Planning Assistance for connectivity (roads, trails, transit) and GIS Mapping
Economic Enterprise Regions	Loans for trail oriented business startups
Corporate Funding	Various corporations invite applicants to submit for funding (highly competitive)
Fundraising	
Community Foundations	Organization capacity building or educational
Eastern Regional Tourism District	Marketing and tourism promotion
Congressionally Directed Spending	Programmatic funding for special projects including infrastructure through federal legislators



Fundraising Example: Draft logo design for merchandise fundraising. Trailside interviews indicated interest in t-shirts and hats with this logo.

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR THE ALSPT CORRIDOR & REGION



- Multiple jurisdictions and governing agencies along the length of the trail
- Lack of a staffing at both the local and state levels to denote a single trail manager or maintainer for the entirety of the trail
- Informal awareness by state governing entities of the efforts by towns and trail committees to improve trail conditions and the challenges in formalizing the relationship between the towns, trail committees and the state governing agencies
- Lack of resource- and information-sharing among various managers and maintainers of the trail
- Limited long-term funding to support trail operations, trail maintenance, and the establishment of related policies and plans at the local level
- How to engage many supportive jurisdictions, residents, trail users, and partners along the length of the trail
- How to access information about the local volunteer base, local advocacy groups, trail users, participants in Air Line State Park Trail events and programs, and how best to share email-marketing databases
- Reducing conflicts between trail uses through good design and proactive management, and resolving user conflict by having trail users involved in the decision-making processes, especially for special events and trail days
- Establishing a trail corridor that represents a welcoming, diverse and inclusive environment
- Securing dynamic, action-oriented leadership for new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization



