

Sustainable CT Fellowship Report

For WestCOG Summer 2019



Photo from Norwalk, CT

Table of Contents

Program Description	1
Methodology.....	2
Additional Fellow Activities	4
Municipal Case Studies.....	5
Lessons Learned & Suggestions	8



WestCOG Offices

This report was drafted by Kendra Beaver & Chadwick Schroeder, Sustainable CT Interns at WestCOG, 2019

Sustainable CT 2019 Fellowship Report

WestCOG Region – Summer of 2019

Program Description

Independently funded and originating from the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University, Sustainable CT is a voluntary certification program that awards communities for their sustainable and resilient efforts. All towns and cities within Connecticut, regardless of population or resource capacity, have the opportunity to earn certification points within the program by aligning the Sustainable CT Actions with an event, regulation, ordinance, or other program in their community. Furthermore, the program serves as a communication tool for municipalities to bridge the gap between municipal departments, organizations, and events that are within the town.

The program provides a list of “Actions” (best practices) spread over nine categories. There are a total of 55 actions, totaling 1,645 certification points as depicted in Table 1. To receive certification, towns must complete at least one action in each of the first nine categories, provide supporting documentation, and earn 200 points for Bronze Certification (400 points for Silver). Action 9.1, the only required action in the program, requires towns to apply Sustainable CT’s Equity Toolkit to one of the actions they are completing. For Bronze certification, one Equity Toolkit is required. For Silver, three are required.

Table 1. Sustainable CT Actions and Points			
ID	Category	Actions	Points
1	Thriving local economies	6	170
2	Well-stewarded land and natural resources	11	250
3	Vibrant and creative cultural ecosystems	4	75
4	Dynamic and resilient planning	6	250
5	Clean and diverse transportation systems and choices	5	235
6	Efficient physical infrastructure and operations	8	220
7	Strategic and inclusive public services	10	295
8	Healthy housing options	3	100
9	Inclusive and equitable community impacts	1	50
10	Innovative Action	1	20
Total		55	1665

Program History

Municipal leaders, residents, business owners, and nonprofits representing Connecticut’s 169 municipalities partnered in 2016 to begin developing the Sustainable CT program. The idea and structure for this program was inspired by established sustainability programs such as [Sustainable New Jersey](#) and [Climate Smart Communities](#) in New York. After the vision of the program was established and the groundwork was set in place, municipal officials collaborated with numerous subject-matter experts to create a Master Action List. The program could not have been developed without the generous support of the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation, Hampshire Foundation, and the Common Sense Fund.

Two years after the program’s establishment, 85 towns are registered and 22 have earned certification (Either Bronze or Silver). This represents more than half of Connecticut!

Fellowship Program

The summer Fellowship program began in conjunction with the Sustainable CT Certification Cycle. In 2019, Sustainable CT contracted 15 college students, who either live or study in the state and study a relevant field, to facilitate program adoption and municipal certification as Fellows. The Fellows were

placed at each of the nine Council of Governments (COGs) in Connecticut.

The foremost objective of the Sustainable CT Fellowship is for the Fellows to work closely with municipal leaders and staff to help registered municipalities within their assigned COG to obtain Bronze or Higher certification. The secondary objective for the fellows is to recruit more towns from their assigned COG into the Sustainable CT program. Fellows also assist their COGs with relevant work as well. The duration of the Fellowship is limited to cumulative 400 hours. Two Fellows, Kendra Beaver and Chadwick Schroeder, were assigned to WestCOG in 2019 to aid 12 registered communities.



Chad and Kendra, 2019 Fellows at WestCOG

Methodology

During the 2019 Sustainable CT Fellowship, a systematic strategy was applied to target active communities and help them apply for Sustainable CT certification. The applied methodology is outlined below.

Fellow Training > Initial Outreach > Municipal Action Inventory > Ongoing Technical Support > Closing Meetings > Application Reviews > Fellowship Report

Additional details are provided below

Fellow Training

Sustainable CT Training: Sustainable CT required a training day in the early summer for all Fellows. At this training, the Fellows were introduced to each other and to staff, to the certification and Fellowship programs, and were given advice on how to work with towns and their COGs in the coming months. Training continued throughout the summer using an online forum, Basecamp, to communicate with Fellows and Sustainable CT staff. Base camp provides a central location for communication and information sharing.

COG Training: WestCOG staff provided a WestCOG introductory training: teaching the inner workings of the COG, what it is, how it works, and why it exists. Through the experience, WestCOG staff offered professional development in project management, communications, and on office resources, and protocols.

Initial Outreach

With towns in queue to receive Sustainable CT support, Fellows were able to begin work immediately.

Introductory Emails: Fellows sent out introductory emails to all known Municipal points of contact. The email introduced the Fellows and the potential resources available for Summer 2019 regarding Sustainable CT.

Research: Review of the previous Fellow Reports and research of WestCOG municipalities was necessary to become familiar with the dynamics of the region.

Introductory Meetings: In order to get municipal Sustainability Teams on the same page and up to speed on the Sustainable CT Program as well as to establish lines of communication in person meetings were scheduled within interested communities.

Municipal Action Inventory

Before each of these introductory exchanges, the Fellows created a Municipal Action Inventory document for each town. These documents were made by going through each action on Sustainable CT and researching the town to determine if they could already earn some points or if they were in a good position to pursue certain actions.



Kendra and Chad meeting with the Darien Advisory Committee on Sustainability, pictured with Chairman Craig Flaherty. Photo taken by Carolyn Bayne, member of the Committee.

Ongoing Technical Support

Regular Meetings & Phone Calls:

Reviewing Application Submissions & Documents: Provide feedback, guidance and track down answers for the municipal representatives filling out these applications.

Follow-Up with our Less-Active Towns: Consistently check in with towns on application status.

Emailing Registered Towns Upcoming Opportunities

Creating Resources for Towns: Includes a Strategy Spreadsheet, which tracked the actions towns were pursuing, who was responsible for each action, the planned and submitted points for each action, and other information. A step-by-step guide for how to

fully and properly fill out submissions in the application. A 20-page document with sample language municipalities could use to in their POCDs to earn Sustainable CT credit.

Closing Meetings

In the final four weeks of the Summer Fellowship, closing meetings were organized with interested communities to identify final steps before submitting applications for the end of August.

Application Reviews

Municipalities provided draft certification submissions for review and approval. Fellows reviewed full application submissions (e.g. Submission Information, Document Details, Partners, and Additional Information boxes) for each action in addition to the supporting documents.

Fellowship Report

Fellows document progress for communities throughout the summer. The document provides a record of achievements earned and lessons learned.

Additional Fellow Activities

WestCOG Planner's Lunch

At this informative meeting, COG staff reviewed the current situation of solar in the state and the latest draft of the COG's Plan of Conservation and Development.



July 2019 COG Planner's Lunch. Photo taken by Kristin Hadjstylianos.

COG/MPO Meetings

The COG and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) meetings were very interesting. Since the COG is split into two different planning organizations, at each of these meetings, both MPOs must have a quorum and vote to approve anything. These meetings are very useful to understand what is going on at a larger scale in the region and how the local elected officials are participating in COG work and creating change. It provides an interesting perspective and can really help the Fellows understand how our region relates to and interacts with each other.

Meeting in Essex on CT/NY Long Island Sound Dredging Conflict

Fellows attended a public presentation in Essex to get an update on the lawsuit between CT and NY concerning the disposal of dredging material from the Long Island Sound. Congressman Joe Courtney and the Attorney

General, William Tong, gave an update on the suit and its pending legal process. Fellows then reported back to COG staff.

Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) Still River Plan Meeting

HVA was developing a new plan for the improvement and restoration of the Still River which goes through multiple towns in the region. Fellows attended this meeting, comment on the Still River Plan and then to report back to COG staff.

Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) Photography

Fellows were tasked with taking pictures of the region for WestCOG's POCD. Fellows traveled to almost every municipality in the COG in about 4 days. It was valuable to get a visual understanding of the region.



Squantz Pond State Park, New Fairfield. Photo taken by Kendra Beaver.

Municipal Case Studies

As of August 2019, twelve out of eighteen municipalities are registered for Sustainable CT with Bridgewater, Danbury, New Canaan, New Fairfield, Redding, and Sherman currently unregistered. The Fellows apply a flexible approach to meet the varying needs of each of the registered communities.

Bethel

Three municipal staff worked on Bethel's Sustainable CT application. These staff were based in the Land Use, Human Resources, and Economic Development departments. Due to a late start Bethel decided that they would pursue Bronze or Silver (undecided as of now) certification in 2020. The Fellows recommended the team gets additional assistance through resident volunteers. With a more diverse team and representation from the public Bethel will be in a great position reach Bronze Certification and meet the requirements outlined in the equity tool kit for 2020.



Brookfield Municipal Center

Brookfield

In 2018 Brookfield worked with Fellows to achieve Bronze Certification however due limits in available resources at that time, Certification was postponed to 2019. Brookfield mostly worked independently in the summer of 2019

and come July had 225 points. However, they are missing Action 9.1, The Equity Toolbox. The equity tool box should be a priority for Brookfield in 2020 as that is the limiting factor for their Bronze Certification currently.



Brookfield Municipal Center

Darien

Darien achieved Bronze Certification in 2019. Darien had a 10-person Advisory Committee on Sustainability and devoted a subcommittee to meet weekly working with the Fellows to make regular progress towards their Certification. Darien was a model community in the Sustainability CT Program using existing resources, regular meetings, municipal support, and effective leadership.



Darien Town Hall

Greenwich

Greenwich became Silver certified in 2018. Our contact with Greenwich was the Conservation Resource Director on the Conservation Commission. No additional action taken in

2019. Greenwich looks forward to the next available certification option.



Greenwich Town Hall

New Milford

New Milford has an active volunteer base for their Sustainability Team and has achieved Bronze certification in 2018 with prep work being done in 2019 to achieve Silver Certification in 2020.



New Milford Town Hall. Source: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/14/stars-hollow-gilmore-girls-towns_n_5570924.html

Newtown

Newtown had strong activity in 2018. 2019 activity was limited due to available resources. It is recommended Newtown pursues its equity toolkit early in 2020 for successful Bronze Certification.



Newtown Town Hall. Source: <http://www.ogind.com/portfolio/newtown-town-hall>

Norwalk

Norwalk has no reported activity for 2019. However, Norwalk shared they plan on filling a position to focus on sustainability moving forward.



Norwalk City Hall. Photo taken by Kendra Beaver.

Ridgefield

Ridgefield achieved Bronze status in 2018 with no reported activity for 2019.



Ridgefield Town Hall. Source: <https://news.hamlethub.com/ridgefield/politics/43847-tax-information-from-the-town-of-ridgefield>

Stamford

Stamford was certified Silver in 2018, reportedly with the help of a large team dedicated to their application. Stamford had no activity in 2019.



Stamford City Hall. Source: <http://www.city-data.com/picfiles/picc58795.php>

Weston

Weston dedicated three interns in its own community towards obtaining Bronze Certification. Weston is on track as they were awarded 185 points for their initial effort. Certification is likely in 2020.



Weston Town Hall. Source: <http://www.westonct.gov/about/786720>

Westport

Westport was Bronze certified in 2018, and they started working in 2019 for Silver certification. However, due to limited staff and resources efforts are postponed until 2020.

The three Equity Tool Kits necessary for Silver Certification is a substantial challenge, especially regarding housing needs. Though Westport will not certify for Silver in 2019, they are on track for certification in the future. It is

recommended Westport develops a sustainability team to support in the application process.



Westport Town Hall. Photo taken by Kendra Beaver

Wilton

Wilton had two primary contacts working on the application in 2019: a volunteer and former member of the Energy Commission, and a municipal staff member and member of the Energy Commission.

Upon request, the fellows provided recommended language on sustainability within Wilton's POCD which was in development.

It is recommended Wilton expands the size of its Sustainability team, secures a municipal staff member for support, and addresses the equity toolbox early on in 2020.



Wilton Town Hall.

Lessons Learned & Suggestions

1. Begin the Fellowship with intensive training and research on the Sustainable CT program to become familiar with the actions, program benefits, processes, and procedures.
2. Municipalities in WestCOG must prioritize completion of actions 8 and 9 from the beginning of their Sustainable CT process.
3. Towns were more successful if they convened regularly (for example, once a week phone calls) to go over their actions, update each other on their progress, and review the next steps necessary for application completion. Fellows participating in these conversations sped up the process and enabled towns to have their questions answered.
4. Category 8, which is on housing, is a challenging category for the WestCOG Region. Because category 8 is difficult to address it should be a priority.
5. Creating summary or streamlined documents for important information and application processes to share with all municipalities is helpful to them improving their understanding of the process. For example, Fellows created a Submission Guidelines document which detailed, step-by-step, how to fill out action submissions correctly and fully. Fellows also created a Strategy Spreadsheet for towns to track their action progress. Idea! These documents could be shared within a WestCOG BaseCamp.
6. Outreach to new municipalities to register should occur early in the summer so that Fellows have ample time to initiate contact and have conversations with town representatives.
7. Fellows should be prepared when attending meetings with towns with an understanding of the action descriptions, requirements, look-back periods, etc.
8. Fellows should take advantage of the resources and knowledge at your COG and from Sustainable CT staff.
9. Even for towns that feel they do not need the Fellow support, it is recommend to organize at least one meeting to ensure, Sustainable CT and the community are on the same page. It is critical to ensure their work on action 9.1 and category 8 is properly planned for.
10. Fellows should highly encourage municipalities to work with Equity Coaches and attend useful opportunities for feedback and information, such as the Sustainable CT Q&A Sessions in each COG and other presentations.
11. The lessons learned document should be started by Fellows early in the summer. This document is for fellows to write your comments and suggestions for improvement of SCT to share with Staff at the end of the summer.
12. Use the introductory period to send an email out to unregistered towns.
13. A collaborated approach, attending meetings together and assignments has proven successful approach for previous Fellows.