Engaging Trails & Greenspaces for Economic Development & Public Health

Connecticut Conference of Municipalities
November 30, 2021
Laura Brown, Community & Economic Development Educator
Kimberly Bradley, CT Trail Census / CT Trail Finder Program Coordinator
We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we recreate is territory stolen from the Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Nipmuc, and Lenape Peoples, who stewarded this land throughout the generations. We thank them for their strength and resilience in protecting this land, and aspire to uphold our responsibilities according to their example.

For links to more information and a pronunciation guide, please visit our resources page. https://cttrails.uconn.edu/
Outline

• Why consider trails & green spaces?
• Implications for health, community and economic development
• COVID-19, equity and access
• Making the most of trails and green spaces
• CT Trail Finder overview, project & process
• Questions & discussion
Who We Are

9 Extension Centers
4-H Education Center at Auerfarm
Home and Garden Education Center and Soil Testing Laboratory (Storrs)
Over 2,000 Volunteers
State Office in Storrs
Who We Are

Strategic Initiatives

Agriculture & Food
Extension programs advance innovative and sustainable agricultural methods to help expand production of a safe and abundant local food supply. We work with farmers from urban and rural areas, on land and sea.

Enhancing Health
We use interdisciplinary approaches to enhance health and well-being locally, nationally, and globally. Our work strives to prevent disease in humans, animals, and the environment.

Dismantling Structural Racism
We are focused on identifying and dismantling structural racism and fostering environments that advance racial equity, inclusion, and belonging by advocating for antiracist policies, practices, and norms.

Sustainable Landscapes
We are developing environmentally aware citizens that participate in sustainable, healthy lifestyles, and improving our landscapes statewide in collaboration with partners, stakeholders, and community members.

Climate Resilience & Adaptation
We engage and educate citizens in climate adaptation. Extension programs promote resilient and well-adapted coastal Connecticut communities and economies.
Multi-Use Trails, Paths, Parks, & Green Spaces
What value is being created here?
How Trails and Green Spaces Create Value

Economic Impacts
- Direct, Indirect, Induced

Health impacts

Property valuation

Safety benefits

Environmental

Connectivity & access

Community engagement

Economic Benefits

Individual Benefits

Social Benefits

Economic Value of Trails

AS AMENITIES FOR REAL ESTATE BUYERS ACROSS AGE GROUPS
A study of 4,300 home buyers found that proximity to a park and access to walking/jogging trails were among the most desired amenities

IMPACTING REGIONAL ECONOMIES THROUGH JOBS, TAX REVENUE, AND MONETIZED VALUE OF QUALITY OF LIFE
A study from North Carolina of a $26.7 million investment in four greenways found that every $1 spent on construction yielded $1.72 in additional impact annually

PROPERTY VALUES AND CRIME MITIGATION
Several studies found either a neutral or positive effect of trails on local home values, with premiums ranging from 5-10%. Evidence suggests that green spaces have a mitigating effect on crimes such as murder, assault, and theft

INCREASING INVESTMENT IN DEVELOPMENT
A review of real estate case studies from around the world found bike lanes and sidewalks add value to development projects, the market is growing for inclusion of bike friendly amenities in residential and commercial properties and private-public partnerships will maximize the investment in Trail Oriented Development (TrOD) projects.

SPENDING AT LOCAL BUSINESSES
Factors that have the greatest effect on direct spending include trail quality, user amenities, and community connections via spurs or shuttles

https://cttrails.uconn.edu/trail-impacts-publication-series/
Demand for Active Lifestyles

Three factors that home-buyers of all age groups want are access to walking/jogging trails, proximity to a park, and desire to live in a typically suburban area

- National Association of Homebuilders (2016)

Health Impacts of Trails and Green Spaces

**SUPPORT WALKING AS A NO COST, EASY ACCESS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Walking is the most common form of exercise for people in the United States and the predominant activity on many multi-use trails and is considered a powerful public health strategy due its accessibility for people of all ages and incomes.

**REDUCE BARRIERS TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LIKE COST, ACCESS, CONVENIENCE**

The presence or use of trails appears to increase physical activity in adults in rural communities and proximity to a trail increases the likelihood of use. The benefits of physical activity for overall health include preventing or decreasing the risk of diabetes, obesity, cancer, cardiovascular disease, preventing risk of injury, increasing muscle tone, flexibility, joint and bone strength as well as immune health.

**INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG POPULATIONS AT HIGH RISK**

Those most likely to report increased activity through the use of a trail are residents who were not regular walkers, those with a high school education or less, or those with incomes of less than $15,000.

**POSITIVELY IMPACT MENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH**

Walking on trails or in parks contributes to enhanced social networking, connectivity and companionship, and an increased appreciation of nature. Additionally, exercising for as little as five minutes in green spaces increases self-esteem and mood with greater effects among young people.

https://cttrails.uconn.edu/trail-impacts-publication-series/
Step it up! Everyone can help make our communities more walkable.

**Media:**
Spread the word about walking and creating safe and easy places to walk.

**Schools:**
Implement safe routes to school and daily physical education programs.

**Individuals & Families:**
Walk with friends, family, and work colleagues.

**Worksites:**
Implement workplace policies and programs to promote walking.

**Parks and Recreational and Fitness Facilities:**
Provide access to green spaces and recreation areas.

**Transportation, Land Use, & Community Designers:**
Create accessible and connected communities for walking.

Step it up! Help make your community more walkable. Learn how by visiting www.SurgeonGeneral.gov
Who is using Connecticut’s multi-use trails?

Self Identified Race/Ethnicity of CT Trail Users Compared to General Population

2020 Survey Data n= 987

- 84.3% White
- 79.7% Black or African American
- 12.2% American Indian
- 2.6% Asian
- 0.6% Pacific Islander
- 2.0% Other
- 5.0% Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino

2020 User Survey
US Census Data 2020 ACS Estimates
Who is using Connecticut’s multi-use trails?

What is your race or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
Survey Data Comparison Chart 2017-2020 n= 971, 1081, 931, 987

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outdoor Activity is Changing

Trail use surged - up 200% in some areas - since the start of the pandemic.\(^{(4,5,6)}\) Data from the CT Trail Census measures 38% growth of trail uses between 2019 and 2020.
Making the Most of Trails and Green Spaces
Making the Most of Trails and Green Spaces

Learning from the 2018 Downtowns and Trails Multistate Grant Supported by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

Portions of this presentation and photos from some slides are the result of a multistate grant supported by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development.
Specific Recommendations - Critical Elements

Signage

Three B’s: Bike Racks, Benches & Bathrooms

Photos courtesy of University of New Hampshire Extension from the 2018 Kentucky Trail Towns visit - part of a multistate grant supported by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development.
Specific Recommendations - Critical Elements

Connectivity to Amenities

Good Design is Good Business

Photos courtesy of University of New Hampshire Extension from the 2018 Kentucky Trail Towns visit - part of a multistate grant supported by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development.
Specific Recommendations - Critical Elements

- Good Design is Good Business
- Use public art to share stories & community history
- Not just tourism or economic dev but cultural projects

Photos courtesy of University of New Hampshire Extension from the 2018 Kentucky Trail Towns visit - part of a multistate grant supported by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development.
Specific Recommendations - Critical Elements

Photos courtesy of University of New Hampshire Extension from the 2018 Kentucky Trail Towns visit - part of a multistate grant supported by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development.
Let's think about our spaces

1) Identify a trail or greenspace in your community.
2) How is this space used?
3) What is one question you need answered about this space? How could you get the answer?
4) What is one thing you could do to better activate this space?
Does your community CRaVe BIKERS?

**Connectivity**
Connectivity to the downtown

**Regional**
Work across municipal borders

**Validation**
Certification and validation programs (trails towns)

**Businesses**
Engage businesses and create ways to connect them

**Institutions**
Build institutional relationships and public engagement

**Know assets**
Understand impacts and users (counts, user business surveys)

**Engage leaders**
Engaged leadership who can navigate politics

**Registers**
Must have places to spend if spending is a measure of success

**Systems view**
Trails and greenspaces as a part of the whole community
“... set up a committee, start learning what it really takes to become a bike friendly community, and start assembling a collection of people who have very diverse skill sets. For instance, real estate, public works engineer, someone in marketing, someone that’s tied into the economic development commission so that you start getting all of these brains working in the same direction. The police, the board of education, businesses.”
Connecticut Trails Program at UConn Extension

Connecticut Trail Census
The Connecticut Trail Census consists of trail use counts recorded by infrared pedestrian counters, trail user intercept surveys administered by trained volunteers, and public education programs.

Connecticut Trail Finder
The Connecticut Trail Finder website is Connecticut’s go-to resource for discovering trails across the state. All trail postings are manager-approved ensuring that trail information is accurate and up-to-date.

Active Living (PATHS)
People Active on Trails for Health and Sustainability (PATHS) is a team at UConn committed to understanding and promoting the benefits of trails and natural resources for health, community & economic development.

https://cttrails.uconn.edu/
Outline

- Why consider trails & green spaces?
- Implications for health, community and economic development
- COVID-19, equity and access
- Making the most of trails and green spaces
- CT Trail finder overview, project & process
- Questions & discussion
Connecticut Trail Finder is a free, interactive mapping site designed to help people find trail-manager approved trails across the state. Our goal is to help people get out, be active, and explore our state’s treasures.

- An interactive website of trails across the state
- Manager approved = authorized trails only
- Many partners
- Administered by UConn Extension with Center for Community GIS (CCGIS)

Funded by Connecticut Energy and Environment Department of Transportation
Partnering Organizations

And growing!
Connecticut Trail Finder - Goals

• Provide Statewide Resource for Information on Trails and Outdoor Resources
  ♦ State Parks & Forests (CTDEEP)
  ♦ Municipal Lands
  ♦ Land Trusts
  ♦ Connecticut Forest & Parks Association (CFPA)

Reliable Trail Manager approved information
Education about lesser known trails
Connect Trail Users with Trail Management Organizations
Focus on new users, and providing access to local events and trailside services related to trails

www.cttrailfinder.com
Connecticut Trail Finder:

- Interactive website
  - Mobile-responsive design
- Searchable Interface
- Detailed Trails Pages
  - Direct link to Trail Management Organizations
- Advisory Capacity
- User Accounts
Project Timeline

Project Initiated - Summer 2020
UConn Extension - CT Trail Census/ Trails Team
Funded by CTDEEP (Rec Trails) and CTDOT

Initial Website Launch - June 5, 2021
40 Trail Systems
- Geographic spread
- Range of Trail Types/Uses
- Land/Trail Management Organizations

June- Spring 2022
- Promote use of Trail Finder
- Expand Trail Postings ~ 95 - November 2021
- Events Calendar
- Build Trailside Services
- Develop User Interface
Data Collection Process

1. Outreach - Email contact Presentation/Zoom
2. Data Collection
   - Narrative
   - Geographic Data
3. Website Trail Posting Development
4. Trail Manager Review & Approval
5. Publish Posting
6. Follow-up, Advisory Notifications, Updates
Anatomy of a CT Trail Finder Trail Posting

Components outlined in the Trail documentation guide:
https://cttrails.uconn.edu/trailfinder_add/

- Graphics
- Photos
- Logos
- Narrative documentation
- Mapping/ GIS Data
Choose your own adventure!

You have GIS data?

What's GIS data?

GIS = Geographic Information System. How we work with geographic data (maps) using software on a computer. GIS is also a tool and a profession.

Call someone who might have it. Town hall? COG? State agency like DEEP? Land trust? Local hiker fanatic?

Is it relatively up-to-date and accurate?

Yes

No

Can it be edited to be acceptable? (bring brownies to your GIS friend)

Yes

No

Yes! Is it an acceptable format? Gpx, kml, shapefile, geodatabase

Yes

No

Yes (bring cake too)

No

Collect it.

No luck.
Workshop Outline

• Why Trails?
• Impact of Trails & Greenspaces
• Trails Program at UConn Extension
• CT Trail Finder Overview, Project & Process
• CT Trail Finder and Municipal Partners
• Coming Soon!
• Stay Connected
• Questions & Discussion
Why is it worth your time?

**GIS Data**

• All CT Trail Finder trails will be part of a statewide trails GIS layer and map service
  • Accessible online and in map viewer(s)
  • Many uses and applications
  • Updated periodically
  • *Literally* connect trail resources

• Download gpx or kml data from CT Trail Finder

• We are happy to give you processed GIS files
  • Make your own maps
  • Print, etc.

---

It’s a win win!
Why is it worth your time?

- Get some GIS work out of it
- Ability to turn on trail alerts
- Notification when there is a problem
- Spread the word out your local areas
- Distribute use
- Societal and community benefits
- Tourism and economic activity
- Advertise events and local businesses (coming)
Have a Trail to Add?

- Narrative
  trails@uconn.edu
- Instructions and documents (work in progress)

https://cttrails.uconn.edu/trailfinder_add/
What’s Next - Events Calendar

- Develop guidelines for events that can be promoted on the page
- Submit events through user accounts
- Coordinating with the Connecticut Outdoor Recreation Alliance (CORA) on Events Calendar
What’s Next – Trailside Services

- Connecting Businesses to Trail Users
- Trailside Services Module will be developed over fall/winter 2021.
- Listed businesses/ “every day destinations” on Trailside Service will have their own page.
- Listings will appear on detailed trail pages based on their proximity to each trail.
- All services will also appear on a fully searchable interactive map.
Trailside Services

- How does your community currently promote your outdoor resources & trails?
- What features would be most relevant/applicable for your community?
- What features would most benefit businesses in your community?
Pathways to Health

- Opportunities to connect Health Practitioners & Departments to CT Trails
- Simple ability to link website to Health Facilities
  - ME Trail Finder: An Icon posted on Western Maine Health Center Locations websites that link to interactive map with trail posting in vicinity of the center
- Coordinating with CT Department of Public Health to provide outreach to Local Health Departments
- Community outreach and engagement focused on wellness using CT Trail Finder
Social Connection

Instagram: @cttrailfinder

Facebook: @CTTrailFinder
Resources

- CT Trail Census Infrared and Survey Data
- Trails 101 Video Series
- Anti-racism in the Outdoors
- Trails Impacts Series - Heath, Communities, Economies, Resilience

https://cttrails.uconn.edu/
Thank you

Kimberly Bradley
kimberly.bradley@uconn.edu

Laura Brown
laura.brown@uconn.edu

Visit us on the web: cttrailfinder.com and https://cttrails.uconn.edu/
or trails@uconn.edu