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This Designation Application was made possible through a grant from Hartford Foundation.
Farmington River Watershed Association

The FRWA is the nominating organization for the Upper Connecticut River Greenway due to its interconnection with the Farmington River. However, the Town of Windsor will be the lead in overseeing and coordinating the proposed Upper Connecticut River Greenway efforts within Windsor should State designation be granted.

The FRWA was founded in 1953 and has a proven record working for decades to protect the Farmington River, its major tributaries, its watershed and adjacent watersheds. The FRWA is a citizen-based, non-profit 501(c) (3) organization at the forefront of restoration and conservation issues such as water quality, water allocation, recreational usage, open space, and wetland and floodplain protection. FRWA works with federal, state and local governments, business and industry, and the people of the watershed’s 33 communities to protect the river and the region’s natural resources.

FRWA’s regional presence and long history of land use protection/recreational use are benefits to spearheading a regional approach to greenway designation within the Farmington Watershed, including making connections with other greenways and potential greenways, such as this proposed Upper Connecticut River Greenway. Over the long term, FRWA seeks Connecticut Greenway designation for the entire Farmington River within Connecticut, and tributaries or key inter-connections where possible. That said, FRWA will work cooperatively and in partnership with the towns and others, and will not seek greenway designation should a host town not be supportive of designation. This Greenway application is thus one step in a long-term planning effort to make greenway connections in the Farmington River Watershed. This application also recognizes the other FRWA 2014 nominations, Mill Brook Greenway - Windsor and Lower Farmington River Greenway – Windsor and Bloomfield, as these nominations play key roles in forming connections and opportunities that benefit the Upper Connecticut River Greenway.

Town of Windsor, Connecticut

Located in north-central Connecticut, Windsor is strategically located between Hartford, CT and Springfield, MA. The oldest town in Connecticut, Windsor is a diverse, amenity-rich community: a recurring theme evident throughout this plan. Windsor’s diversity stems from its variety of housing options, its broad commercial base, its racial and ethnic mix of residents, and its varied character, ranging from historic to modern and rural to urban.

Windsor is amenity-rich due to its unparalleled transportation facilities, excellent community facilities, ubiquitous utilities, wide variety of cultural facilities/events, abundant natural/scenic resources and rich heritage.
Proposed Greenway Description

This nomination application only pertains to the Connecticut River within the Town of Windsor, Connecticut.

The conceptual greenway entails the following parameters:

- The greenway “route” is generally within 500 feet from the River’s edge within Windsor’s boarders;

- Connect with existing open space parcels through the shortest route, but still near the River; and

- Right-of-ways can be used to connect with other open space parcels or trails, including cross over other waterbodies (e.g. Farmington River).

Actual routes (or trails) will be coordinated at the town level for the purposes of ensuring sound engineering and public safety. Alternative routes are acceptable especially when connection routes between open spaces are not feasible for any reason, such as, but not limited to, ownership, natural resources constraints, or economic constraints.

For detailed figures on the proposed greenway designation areas, please see Appendix A.

Designation Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the proposed designation is to promote the natural, recreational, and cultural resources of the Upper Connecticut River.

The goals of the Upper Connecticut River Greenway - Windsor proposal are:

- Natural resource protection on the west side of the Connecticut River within Windsor;
- Encourage, enhance, and promote existing and new recreational opportunities along the River;
- Promote through education the inter-connections between cultural resources and the River;
• Continue and enhance collaborations with the City of Hartford, the Town of Windsor, the Town of Windsor Locks, FRWA, and others for better coordination and planning for the Upper Connecticut River Greenway and the proposed Lower Farmington River Greenway.

For purposes of resource protection, existing entities, such as the Towns of Windsor, the Windsor Land Trust, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), or other land acquisition organizations will continue to be the primary means for protecting open space through maintenance of existing holdings, acquisition of parcels and easements, and existing municipal regulations. *Note: no new municipal regulations are being proposed as a result of this application, nor is it anticipated any new regulations would need to be created as a result of a greenway designation as key provisions are already in place.*

FRWA is able to pursue many of the goals through its existing programs and efforts, such as providing community conservation education and promotion of greenway resources; encouraging best management practices across the region that protect the greenway resources; monitoring surface water quality; conducting and assisting in plans to link and extend existing trails and other public access points; and seeking additional funding to meet the purpose and goals of the Greenway.

**Proposed Greenway Connections and Assets**

The following are unique elements and assets of the Upper Connecticut River and its environment that highlight why this greenway is being proposed:

• The entire stretch of the Connecticut River has been designated as National Blueway by the US Department of Interior, and its watershed is part of Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge.

• Windsor’s Plan of Conservation and Development (2004), largely based on the State’s Natural Diversity Database, has identified a corridor along the entire stretch of the Connecticut River as “Unique Habitats and Special Areas” and as a “Wildlife Corridor.”

From City of Hartford/Windsor line to the Confluence of the Farmington River

• The area of the proposed Greenway between the City of Hartford/Windsor town line to the I-291, Bissell Bridge, plays an important part in connecting the existing City of Hartford’s Riverside Park and Riverfront Boathouse (Riverfront Recapture) trail system and its cultural assets.

This interconnection piece provides a direct link with the highly urban center of the State.
The majority of the land within this area is owned by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and is designated as Windsor Meadows State Park.

Windsor Meadows State Park offers 155 acres of Connecticut River woodlands. Its general north/south configuration is bounded to the west by railroad tracks and to the east by 1.6 miles of river frontage along the Connecticut River.

The park is divided into three sections with the southernmost section being the most visited. This south section is both the largest, measuring 88 acres, and the most popular as it is the location of the Bissell Bridge Boat Launch. The launch features a concrete ramp and 22 trailer-length paved parking spaces with much additional parking for single length vehicles. It is a popular location for boaters and fishermen. This section is also the location of the trailhead for the Bissell Bridge Walkway Trail. This 1.8 mile trail crosses the Connecticut River, separated comfortably from the I-291 highway it parallels, and is shared by diverse trail users. The Walkway connects Windsor to the large system of multi-use trails in Manchester and East Hartford. It also offers some scenic views of the state’s namesake waterway. Several picnic tables, a grassy lawn and a small handicapped accessible pavilion serve the trailhead and the parking area.

In recent years, within the forest-floodplain, a multi-use paved trail (handicapped-accessible) has been developed near the Wilson Ave/Garden Street area and crosses over Deckers Brook to run parallel along the Connecticut River to the boat lunch. This trail has overlooks and picnic spots.

- Under the Bissell Bridge and next to the bridge’s abutment is the connector path between the southern Windsor Meadows State Park parcel and the Park’s middle parcel. Currently the trail/path does not continue further north. However, the Town of Windsor has developed a conceptual multi-use trail path to run parallel to the River. Currently, the conceptual trail terminates at the Loomis Chaffee School campus (see figure below). The Town intends to work cooperatively with Loomis Chaffee to discuss inter-connections between this area and to the proposed Farmington River Greenway (under separate nomination cover).
The confluence of the Farmington River with the Connecticut River plays an important role in this proposed greenway as a key intersection between the westbound proposed Farmington River Greenway and for the Upper Connecticut River Greenway to continue north.
This area also offers scenic views of the Farmington River and Connecticut River.

- This site of the Farmington River confluence is of statewide historic significance as this site played a direct role in making Windsor the first town of Connecticut. The Podunk tribe granted land at the confluence to Plymouth, Massachusetts settlers. A small group of colonial settlers arrived at the site in September 1633 and developed a trading post\(^1\). This trading post served as a key place for the English to trade with Native Americans and from there the settlement grew. The navigable Connecticut River provided this key access between Long Island Sound and northern settlements such as Springfield, Massachusetts.

- A study conducted by The Nature Conservancy in 2008-2009 surveyed eight sites on the Farmington River, in part to identify floodplain forests with the greatest conservation value. One of sites identified with the highest value, in terms of dynamic flooding regimes that still supports typical floodplain forest communities, was the confluence of the Farmington with the Connecticut River in Windsor and includes the large island at the confluence.

- In the *Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Wild and Scenic Management Plan* (NPS, 2011), Steve Gephard, DEEP Fisheries is quoted as saying, “The mouth of the Farmington River where it meets the Connecticut River is the most diverse and one of the most important areas within New England in terms of fish resources. All 12 of the diadromous fish species thought to be present in the state are believed to be present at this location...It is one of two tributary streams in Connecticut that host an annual adult Atlantic salmon run and hosts one of the best shad runs in the state (other than the mainstem Connecticut).”

- This portion of the Connecticut River and its surrounding environment within this area contains habitat for the State Threatened Species, *Leptodea ochracea* (Tidewater Mucket, mussel); State Threatened Species *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* (Bald Eagle); and State Special Concern Species *Rana pipiens* (Northern Leopard Frog).

- The expansive floodplain along the River provides important forested-riparian habitat.

- The proposed Lower Farmington River Greenway stemming from the confluence with the Connecticut River, connects with Windsor Center Trail. At this junction (the intersection of Route 159 - Palisado Avenue Bridge and the Farmington River) the National Register of Historic Places Palisado Historic District begins. It’s a hub of activity and features that connects the Windsor Center Trail system with boat lunches, a parking and trailhead area, Bart’s Restaurant, Mill Brook, the First Church of Windsor (a key stop in the Underground Railroad), the Farmington River Railroad Bridge (also listed on the National Register), and the Pleasant Street Park. Palisado Avenue offers a means to reroute the Connecticut River Greenway to the north as Palisado Avenue runs parallel to the Connecticut River.

The area directly north of the confluence of the Farmington River with the Connecticut River is a part of the historic district of Windsor, but also promotes the active agriculture uses that have been in existence for hundreds of years. At its peak, Windsor was the center of the shade grown tobacco industry in the Connecticut River Valley. Today, the long slender tobacco barns and gossamer shade tents of the shade grown tobacco industry are interwoven into the fabric of Windsor and remain a significant part of the town’s character.

Due to the expansive Connecticut River floodplain, the majority of the land use eastward of Route 159 (Palisado Avenue) remains agricultural. In fact, according to the Windsor’s POCD, this agricultural area is considered one of only four major areas for farmland concentrations.

This floodplain area has created forest habitat that supports various state listed species.

This stretch of the proposed greenway corridor and adjacent surroundings has National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), National Historic Landmark), State Register of Historic Places (SRHP), and local historic resources. The following is a list:

- Palisado Avenue District (NRHP, SRHP, and local)
- Bissell Tavern (Stage House), 1022 Palisado Avenue (NRHP and SRHP)
- Hezekiah Chaffee House, 108 Palisado Ave (NRHP and SRHP)
- Oliver Ellsworth Homestead, 778 Palisado Ave (NRHP, NHL, SRHP)
  - Oliver Ellsworth played a significant role in American history; according to the Homestead’s website:

  [Ellsworth was] Elected to state level office in 1773, Ellsworth quickly became one of the most powerful political figures and successful lawyers in Connecticut. He served throughout the Revolutionary War in many state and federal political positions, including delegate to the
Continental Congress, member of Connecticut's Council of Safety, the Governor's Council, and Committee of the Pay Table.

In 1787, Oliver Ellsworth joined William Samuel Johnson and Roger Sherman and Connecticut's delegation to the Constitutional Convention. He was one of the five men who drafted the Constitution and one of the three who proposed the Connecticut Compromise that resolved issues allowing the Constitution to be ratified.

His contributions to his country did not stop there. While serving a seven year term as a US Senator, Ellsworth drafted the Judiciary Act, defining our current federal court system. In 1796, George Washington asked Ellsworth to be the Third Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

President John Adams appointed Ellsworth as a commissioner to France to renegotiate a treaty and prevent war with France. Highly respected by Napoleon, Ellsworth was successful. Upon his return from France and in poor health, Ellsworth retired from Federal service to an active service in Connecticut. He maintained a successful law practice, authored articles and served in the Connecticut legislature as a senator until his death in 1807.²

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I have visited several countries, and I like my own the best. I have been in all the States of the Union, and Connecticut is the best State; Windsor is the pleasantest town in the State of Connecticut and I have the pleasantest place in Windsor. I am content, perfectly content, to die on the banks of the Connecticut.

-- Oliver Ellsworth

Plans of Conservation and Development and other Relevant Documents

This proposed greenway is consistent with Windsor’s Plan of Conservation and Development:

**Windsor - 2004 Plan of Conservation & Development**

- **Work To Establish a Greenway System** *(page 4-7)*

  - An isolated parcel of open space may preserve an important natural resource or maintain the appearance of undeveloped land, but it may not contribute to a meaningful open space system. If that same parcel of open space can be interconnected into a cohesive system, its value to residents and impact on the community grows significantly. Such open spaces can be connected by trails, providing increased accessibility, significant functional wildlife corridors, more opportunities for active or passive recreation, and enhanced quality of life for residents.

  - Over the long term, Windsor should work towards establishing an overall greenway/trail network that interconnects open space areas together. Such a greenway system

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Upper Connecticut Greenway – Windsor Designation Application
can build upon the efforts of Riverfront Recapture and others to create a greenway of regional or even statewide significance along the Connecticut River. This greenway/trail system should also be extended along the Farmington River. The Windsor Center Trail could be a first link in a trail system connecting the Connecticut River Trail in Hartford, the Barber Street Boat Launch, the Bissell Bridge Bikeway, Pleasant Street Park, River Street Park, Welch Park, the Rainbow Boat Launch and/or Northwest Park.

- Much of the needed land along the Connecticut River is already under State or town control and significant stretches of the Farmington River remain undeveloped due to floodplains. Windsor should work with major property owners (such as the Stanley Works) to obtain reasonable public access to their properties and integrate them into an overall greenway trail network.

- Establishing a greenway/trail system will be the most successful open space strategy for Windsor but it is also likely to be difficult, requiring dedication and effort. The following map depicts the Open Space Plan for Windsor and shows how greenways might interconnect different parts of Windsor with a townwide greenway/trail network.
Windsor Center Transit-Oriented Development, Master Plan and Redevelopment Strategy (December 2013)

TOD Master Plan contains numerous strategies, the following are applicable to this Greenway proposal:

- Circulation and Mobility (page 3)
  - Expand the walking and bicycling network throughout the Town Center, and improve and extend segments through public open spaces.
  - Improve and expand bicycle connections through signage, links to adjacent networks, shared paths or dedicated links.

- Enhancing Open Space and Amenities (page 17)
  - Expand and improve the trail systems to and through the open spaces in Windsor Center, including enhanced signage for the trail system and open space. The enhancements should include wayfinding and interpretive signage for natural and historic resources.

Capitol Region Council of Governments Draft Regional Plan of Conservation and Development 2014-2024

The Capital Region Council of Governments is nearing the completion of its Regional Plan and final adoption is pending. For the purposes of this application the draft plan is being used to show the proposed greenway is consistent from the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development.

- Expand and Protect Open Space Along Major Rivers: “Geographically, the Capitol Region is dominated by the Connecticut River. This important natural resource, along with its large tributaries such as the Farmington and Hockanum Rivers, provides extensive active and passive recreational opportunities.” (page 60)

Policy Recommendations

- Encourage linkage and the development of greenways to connect existing and proposed open space areas to riverfronts.
- Support efforts to expand access to recreational opportunities on rivers.

- Page 96: In 2008, the Capitol Region conducted a region-wide survey to help frame the discussion at Regional Roundtable. The goal of the survey and the roundtable was to determine what the region’s citizens value most about living and working in the region and what they would like to see improve. The Capitol Region followed up on the first roundtable by holding a second one in 2009 to determine specific visions for the future of the region. Out of this roundtable series came a set of priorities for the
region’s built environment and natural environment which can guide the policies related to land use and zoning at the regional level. These priorities are as follows:

Natural Environment:

- Conserve and preserve natural resources
- Connect greenways to make the natural environment accessible

**Capitol Region Council of Governments Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan (April 2008)**

The 2008 Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan focuses on the East Coast Greenway (which a portion of is part of this proposed greenway) and utilization of existing road networks. These two features/resources enhance, promote, and are consistent with this proposed Lower Farmington River Greenway.

- Recommendation 4.3 (page 32): Extend other existing trail systems.
- Recommendation 4.4 (page 33): Continue local trail development.
- Recommendation 5 page 34): Create an on road bicycle network.
The State C&D Plan only applies to state agencies and is advisory to municipalities and regional agencies, however, the following relevant sections of the State Plan are included with this greenway application as they indicate any future state actions with regard to this proposed greenway would be consistent:

- Growth Management Principle #2: State Agency Policies (page 13)
  
  o Encourage and Promote access to parks and recreational opportunities, including trails, greenways, community gardens and waterways, for affordable and mixed-income housing.
• Growth Management Principle #3: State Agency Policies (page 15)
  o Encourage a network of pedestrian and bicycle paths and greenways that provide convenient inter- and intra-town access, including access to the regional public transportation network;
Appendix A: Potential Greenway Corridor Figures
Appendix B: Municipal Resolution and Support Letter
RESOLUTION
TO ENDORSE THE TOWN OF WINDSOR’S PARTICIPATION IN THE NOMINATION OF THE LOWER FARMINGTON RIVER, MILL BROOK AND CONNECTICUT RIVER AS STATE GREENWAYS

WHEREAS, the Lower Farmington River, Mill Brook, Connecticut River, related tributaries, and adjacent undeveloped land provide significant benefits to our community and state, including surface and ground drinking water, fishing and other recreation opportunities, critical wildlife habitat, connections to hiking and biking trails, and protection of our landscape and cultural heritage; and,

WHEREAS, the Town of Windsor’s 2004 Plan of Conservation and Development recommends establish a greenway system to provide increased accessibility, significant functional wildlife corridors, more opportunities for active and passive recreation, and enhanced quality of life and,

WHEREAS, the Town is actively engaged in the protection of open space along the Mill Brook and Farmington River, and in the interconnection of existing trails on the Farmington and Connecticut Rivers and,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Windsor Town Council supports the concept of working regionally to link and protect undeveloped areas and natural resources by endorsing Windsor’s participation in the nomination of the Lower Farmington River, Mill Brook, and Connecticut River as state greenways; and,

FURTHERMORE, BE IT RESOLVED to authorize Windsor’s Town Manager to submit this endorsement of the greenway nomination to the Farmington River Watershed Association, which will coordinate this initiative with the other Lower Farmington River corridor towns.
April 29, 2014

Ms. Laurie Giannotti, Liaison
CT Greenways Council
c/o CT DEEP
79 Elm Street
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Laurie:

On behalf of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA), I am writing to support the addition of all of the following trails to the State Greenways system:

- Lower Farmington River Greenway – Windsor and Bloomfield
- Mill Brook Greenway – Windsor
- Upper Connecticut River Greenway – Windsor
- Upper Farmington River Greenway – Canton

As you know, CFPA is Connecticut’s first conservation organization (1895) and CFPA volunteers maintain 825 miles of Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails in 88 towns that are also considered to be State Greenways. We take this designation seriously, so in reviewing these proposals I revisited the criteria for Greenways as put forward in P.A. 95-335. I am convinced that all of these proposed Greenways clearly meet the requisite criteria.

I served as the Executive Director of the Farmington River Watershed Association from 2003 - 2008 and know these areas in and adjacent to the watershed very well. Through that experience, I understand the synergy between these proposals and the ongoing efforts to have the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook designated as Wild & Scenic Rivers due to the outstanding recreational, historical, and natural resource values these areas support.

If that wasn’t enough, the Greenways are consistent with the town Plans of Conservation and Development; the Greenways traverse significant woodland and riparian habitats that are compatible with usable “water trails;” the Greenways connect neighborhoods, business parks, town parks, and urban/suburban areas; and the Greenways complement CT DEEP and town priorities to conserve critical conservation lands in perpetuity.

I strongly support these Greenway proposals! If you have any questions about these proposals or other matters, please feel free to call via (860.346.2372) or email (ehammerling@ctwoodlands.org).

All the best,

Eric Hammerling
Executive Director