

Town Joins Sustainable CT to be More Eco-Friendly

by Karla Santos

The town of Marlborough has joined Sustainable CT, in a quest to become more environmentally-friendly.

Sustainable CT is an organization that runs a municipal certification program that promotes and recognizes the actions that the towns are taking or could be taking to create “more sustainable, more vibrant, more inviting communities,” said Sustainable CT’s community outreach manager, Abe Hilding-Salorio.

The Community Match Fund is one of the ways in which Sustainable CT helps towns.

According to Lynn Stoddard, executive director of Sustainable CT, the Community Match Fund provides money for community-led sustainability projects in towns. She said that if a community member has the idea of a project that provides public benefit – tree planting, a community garden, pollinator pathways or art murals – the organization would work with that individual with fundraising for the project. Then, Sustainable CT matches every dollar raised.

“We double what the community brings to a project,” Stoddard said, adding that the Community Match Fund has had “great results.”

Stoddard said that through the Community Match Fund, Sustainable CT has over 60 projects happening throughout the state.

First Selectman Greg Lowrey said the Community Match Fund is one of the things Marlborough can benefit from in being part of Sustainable CT. He said he has projects in mind

that might apply to the program such as getting an energy-efficient heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system or light-emitting diode (LED) lighting at the town hall, library, elementary school or other town buildings.

“Sustainable CT is a fabulous program that motivates municipalities, businesses and individuals to invest in practices that benefit the community,” Lowrey said.

Sustainable CT was founded in 2017 and so far 110 out of 169 towns in Connecticut have joined the organization. Forty-eight of those towns have completed the certification program.

“It’s been a lot of engagement by towns, and a lot of hard work, and a lot of great impact on their communities making them more healthy and livable,” Stoddard said.

Sustainable CT is “completely independently funded” by grants, she added. The organization is run by the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University.

While it is an independent organization, Sustainable CT is aligned with state government goals such as the climate goals for Connecticut in reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050.

“We are aligned with that and wanting to do it faster and go further,” Stoddard said.

She said Sustainable CT partners with state agencies to collaborate with sustainability

work.

Sustainable CT is free to join and it offers a variety of free services such as consulting and support services among other resources.

Stoddard said that equity is “a strong component” of the programs at Sustainable CT. The organization encourages communities to become more inclusive, and part of that is offering free equity coaching to towns.

In addition, Sustainable CT recognizes and encourages sustainability through nine different categories, including: thriving local economies; well-stewarded land and natural resources; vibrant and creative cultural ecosystems; dynamic and resilient planning; clean and diverse transportation systems and choices; efficient physical infrastructure and operations; strategic and inclusive public services; healthy housing options; and inclusive and equitable community impacts.

All of those categories have actions within them. Towns must complete at least one action per category to earn the certification.

According to Hilding-Salorio, an example of an action could be to benchmark and track energy use with goals such as to reduce energy use across municipal buildings by 10%.

The certification program works with points that are accumulated through these actions. Towns document the actions they take to earn points. Twice a year, Sustainable CT offers certification cycles. In order to get certification, a

certain amount of points are needed. Towns that earn enough points can be certified in bronze or silver levels.

Stoddard said they encourage towns take these actions because they want towns to show that they are paying attention to a broad range of issues. Town certifications are for the whole Sustainable CT program. The certification lasts three years. Towns can apply for re-certification after completing the three years.

“They have to demonstrate continued action and progress,” Stoddard said.

The certification program was built with representation from every town in the state. The actions within the categories were developed after town representatives mentioned them as important to the towns.

Stoddard said that the purpose of Sustainable CT is to help inspire, support and celebrate healthy communities in Connecticut. Also, part of their goal is to support helping towns become healthy and resilient through their programming.

Stoddard said they accomplish part of purpose by showcasing what towns have done. They help celebrate and recognize what towns are doing with the certification program.

“We want in this package of things to help move towns in Connecticut towards being more inclusive and resilient and vibrant and great places where people want to live and work,” Stoddard said.