

## **NEW HAVEN COMPLETE STREETS APPLICATION**

**Project Name:** Safe Routes & Community Connections in West Rock

**Project Location & Limits:** This project aims to develop safe, complete streets that connect residents of the West Rock neighborhood to each other and to the many resources within their community. This application places particular emphasis on Springside Avenue between Wintergreen Avenue and Blake Street, Wintergreen Avenue as it travels from Southern Connecticut State University to Westville Manor, and Wilmot Road from its intersection with Wintergreen to Wilmot Crossing. This project is initiated by Common Ground, which has a particular interest in creating safe access to its site, the location of a public school, urban farm, and community environmental education center. That being said, Common Ground has reached out to stakeholders throughout our neighborhood who share the goal of creating safe access and community connections throughout, especially those areas of West Rock that are currently isolated, and many have joined with us in submitting this application.

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**Brief Description of Project:** We have developed both urgent, short term goals and long term goals for this project.

Our immediate objective is to calm traffic and improve safe pedestrian, bike, and bus access around Common Ground High School, Urban Farm, and Environmental Education Center. There are several urgent safety concerns that we would like to be addressed as soon as possible.

These include:

- Students using the public bus system to come to Common Ground are being dropped off at the intersection of Wintergreen Avenue and Wilmot Road. From this location students must walk on the street as they traverse a major intersection, walk across a narrow bridge, and finally cross Springside Avenue to access our site. There is no safe pedestrian access way along this route, and cars tend to travel at high speeds both along Wilmot Rd, Wintergreen Avenue and Springside Avenue. This issue could be resolved by redirecting CT Transit bus service to come directly to Common Ground from downtown and letting students out at the bus stop on Springside Avenue before proceeding up into Wilmot Crossing.
- The signage warning car traffic to watch for pedestrian and bicycle traffic along Springside Avenue is inadequate. At minimum we would like text-based signs (in addition to the current icon-based signs) that identify the area around Common Ground as a school zone, and clear delineation of pedestrian crossings.
- Traffic is traveling at a high rate of speed along Springside Avenue. Speed bumps/humps, speed tables, or other traffic calming physical infrastructure installed between Hard Street and Wintergreen Avenue would serve to reduce traffic speeds on Springside Avenue.
- The limited shoulder space available to pedestrian walking along Springside is often overgrown forcing pedestrians out into the street. Tall grass and brush also limits visibility along the road. Regular mowing and clearing to ensure the road shoulders are

clear, signs are visible, and sight lines open, from Hard & Springside to Wintergreen & Springside would resolve this issue.

Over the longer term our goal is to create safe routes and real connections among neighbors and institutions in the West Rock neighborhood. We propose the following to address this issue:

- A paved pedestrian & bike path, or a sidewalk, that connects the public housing developments in our neighborhood (Brookside, Rockview, Wilmot Crossing, and Westville Manor), Southern Connecticut State University, Common Ground, Jobs Corps, Brennan Rogers School, the Westville neighborhood, and city and state park land.
- Re-design of the intersections at Wintergreen and Springside, and at Hard and Springside, to improve safety.
- A pedestrian bridge, or replacement of the bridge where Wintergreen Avenue crosses Wintergreen Brook to allow for safe pedestrian access.
- Safe overflow parking for public programs at Common Ground -- potentially including diagonal parking along Springside Avenue, or safe pedestrian access to overflow parking at the Hamden Transfer Station.
- Banners, signage, cameras, and other creative responses that address illegal dumping and break-ins in the neighborhood, and that improve sense of neighborhood connectivity and identity.
- Additional traffic calming strategies along lower Springside Avenue.

### **Project Impetus**

For years, Common Ground students and families have identified the development of safe routes to school and campus as a high priority and cause for concern. There are no sidewalks or bike lanes to Common Ground's campus from any direction. Springside Avenue has many curves and poor sight lines, and traffic often travels along this road well above posted speed limits. Not only do Common Ground employees and visitors bike and sometimes walk along Springside Avenue, we see neighbors in West Rock walking, running, and biking the road on a daily basis. Over the years Common Ground has witnessed a number of vehicle accidents along Springside Avenue -- fortunately none of them serious. This all changed in August, however, when Deborah Greig, Common Ground's farm director, was hit and seriously injured in front of Common Ground's campus while riding her bike to work. As a result of this incident, this project has taken on new gravity and urgency. It is critical that steps be taken to ensure the safety of Common Ground students, employees and visitors arriving at our site.

Students who arrive by CT Transit bus service -- the majority of our students -- have consistently been dropped off across the street from Common Ground, with no crosswalks across the street. Until recently, Common Ground's site didn't have slow school zone signs; currently, there are only school zone icons, not text signs.

For the last year, changes in bus routing and scheduling mean that many Common Ground students arrive late to school if they wait to be dropped off at the regular bus stop on Springside Avenue. In order to arrive on time they are often dropped off at a location across Wintergreen

Bridge and walk *on the street* across two busy intersection and the narrow bridge to get to school.

Overflow parking is also a major challenge for Common Ground. Currently, Common Ground staff must often park off campus -- in front of the Hamden Transfer Station, or on the dirt shoulder of Springside Avenue. For major events -- like the Rock to Rock Earth Day Ride, and our annual farm festival and seedling sale, each of which attract close to 1,000 people -- we borrow space at SCSU's Wintergreen Garage.

Common Ground has taken what steps we can to address the challenges outline above. We erected our own bus shelter and cut back vegetation to improve sight lines. Last year, two seniors made traffic calming and pedestrian safety around campus the focus of their capstone projects. They attempted to reach out to our alderman and city hall, but received no responses. Another student from the class of 2016 spearheaded an effort to plan and start work on a walking trail along Wintergreen Brook. And just recently a rising sophomore reached out to Common Ground staff after having initial conversations with his Westville Alder about pedestrian access to Common Ground.

In reaching out to the broader community, we have learned that our neighbors share our concerns with regard to pedestrian and bicycle safety in our West Rock neighborhood . We know that the City is currently partnering with SCSU on a transportation study, focused on supporting economic development in West Rock. When we posted on Facebook about our interest in improving access and safety around Common Ground's campus, residents at Rockview and on Springside Avenue quickly chimed in to offer their support and ask that the proposal be expanded to include their concerns. When we emailed neighbors and colleagues to let them know about this draft application, we received emails sharing stories of accidents and expressing interest in joining this application.

Now, we are reaching out to the city, in hopes that we can work together to address this issue.

### **Project Goals**

As we noted above, our immediate aim is to calm traffic and improve safe pedestrian, bike, and bus access around Common Ground High School, Urban Farm, and Environmental Education Center.

Our long-term goal is to create safe routes and real connections among neighbors and institutions in the West Rock neighborhood.

### **Estimated Cost of Project (if known)**

Common Ground students and staff have done initial, back of the envelope calculations about the cost of elements of this plan -- e.g., installing a sidewalk or multi-modal trail along the 2700 meters of road between Common Ground's campus. But we look to the city for help in identifying what is within reach.

### **Funding Sources (if known)**

- We are ready to work with the city to identify and secure funding sources for this project.
- We hope that the city can identify resources that will help us respond to the immediate need for traffic calming along Springside Avenue between Hard Street and Wintergreen.
- Common Ground has invested our own resources in site improvements to improve safety and access, and will continue to do so.
- Common Ground seniors raised \$270 as part of their senior projects, which they would like to invest in banners and signage that calms traffic, welcomes people to their neighborhood, and discourages illegal dumping. A subgrant from CT Fund for the Environment would include a modest amount of funding (up to \$500) for this project, as well.
- We believe that Community Connectivity grant funding and Safe Routes to Schools funding may be relevant to this project.
- Because of the connection of this project to environmental issues and projects -- described below -- we wonder whether Greenways-related funding, Urban Green & Community Gardens, or stormwater management funding through CT DEEP might be relevant to this project.

**Describe project context, including adjacent land uses, neighborhood character, and existing transportation system**

West Rock is beautiful, rich in natural resources, and has an almost rural character in places. It is home to a large forested state park -- one of Connecticut's largest and only urban state parks. It is also home to city park land, and to major tributaries of the West River.

West Rock is also rich in educational resources: Brennan Rogers School, Solar Youth, Common Ground, Boys & Girls Club, Southern Connecticut State University, and Job Corps.

Much of the land is publicly and institutionally owned -- state park, state university, town dump, federal property (Job Corps), city park land, cemetery (owned by Congregation B'nai Jacob) -- and there are also a number of privately owned homes and apartment buildings in the neighborhood.

West Rock is also home to concentrated poverty. It is the site of the city's largest concentration of public housing -- including 433 new units that are coming on line as part of recent re-development.

Our neighborhood is served by the CT Transit B1 (soon to become 243B) bus line. The CT Transit bus system is the primary source of transportation for students coming to Common Ground, as well as for students attending Job Corps. In addition, Yellow school buses transport students to Brennan Rogers.

Because of relatively low population density, and lack of pedestrian and bike infrastructure, the neighborhood is currently isolated from the rest of the city, and disconnected internally. There are currently no sidewalks, shoulders, bike lanes, or other pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure in large areas of our neighborhood. Yet we see many residents walking and biking, SCSU students running, and our own students arriving on foot and on bicycle.

### **Classification of affected street(s)**

All roads included in this proposal are classified as local, according to the 2010 complete streets manual.

## **PROJECT INFO**

### **CONSISTENCY WITH COMPLETE STREETS POLICY & GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

**Describe how proposed project supports Guiding Principles for Complete Streets. See page 16 of this Manual for descriptions of each principle.**

#### **Safety and slow vehicle speeds**

Safety is front and center in this proposal. Cars regularly travel at speeds far above the speed limit along Springside Avenue, Wintergreen Avenue, and Wilmot Road. Winding roads, a complete lack of pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure, an absence of traffic calming strategies, the presence of many children and young people, and regular pedestrian and bicycle use make this a pressing concern.

#### **Connectivity**

Residents in public housing should be able to safely walk and bike to Common Ground, Southern, and downtown New Haven -- for education, recreational opportunities, and jobs. High school students and families in Westville should be able to walk and bike safely to Common Ground. Students at Brennan Rogers, Common Ground, Jobs Corps, and SCSU should be able to safely and easily travel between their campuses for volunteer opportunities, early college courses, mentoring relationships, etc. Places and people that are currently isolated from each other should be connected into a coherent, resilient, vibrant neighborhood.

#### **Human health**

This proposal promotes greenspace and natural world access -- a critical resource for human health -- for city residents, and for West Rock residents in particular. It also builds access to healthy food from Common Ground's urban farm, and to health-related educational opportunities on our campus. It opens up opportunities for active and passive recreation -- on the trails of West Rock, through new cycling infrastructure, etc. These resources are particularly significant in a neighborhood that, according to research by the Community Alliance for Research and Engagement, has significantly elevated rates of diet- and exercise-related diseases.

#### **Livability/Context**

West Rock has the resources to be a vibrant, connected neighborhood with a strong identity: unique natural resources and rich open space, a racially and economically diverse resident base many with deep roots in the community, strong educational institutions and anchor community organizations, a rich history going back to ancient Native American settlements. Recently renovating housing, a new grocery store, a soon-to-open health center, and new construction at SCSU and Common Ground are all bringing new physical resources to the neighborhood. But these assets are currently literally disconnected from each other and from

the larger city, and there's nothing raising the profile of these assets as a coherent whole. One small example of how this proposal could build community identity: our students have suggested that we hang banners along the streets that welcome visitors to West Rock, include photographs of community residents and neighborhood resources, and ask people to take care of our neighborhood.

### **Equity**

Throughout its history, West Rock has been isolated from the rest of New Haven. In part because of the large concentration of public housing, it is one of New Haven's most economically disadvantaged and food insecure neighborhoods. This combination of isolation from economic and educational opportunity, and concentrated poverty, is a major equity concern. We have made progress: a new grocery store, a health center arriving soon, dismantling the apartheid-style wall that separated residents in public housing from their neighbors in Hamden. We need to keep building these connections.

### **Aesthetics**

This proposal enhances and builds access to West Rock's natural beauty, and slows people down enough to enjoy it.

### **Economic development**

Residents in Rockview and Brookside -- many of whom don't have cars -- should be able to safely bike or walk to jobs in Westville or other parts of New Haven. City residents should be able to access educational opportunities at Job Corps, Common Ground, and SCSU without paying city bus fare. The new grocery store and health center at Wilmot Crossing would get more business if members of the Common Ground and SCSU communities could get there safely on foot.

### **Environment**

West Rock residents and the city as a whole should have safe access to the extraordinary natural areas found in West Rock -- Common Ground's 20-acre site, West Rock Ridge State Park, West River Watershed Scenic Greenway. New Haven Urban Refuge Initiative. New Haven's plan for conservation and development identifies improved access to West Rock Ridge State Park as a priority.