

# THOMPSON TRAIL TOWN ACTION PLAN





# A BIG THANK YOU!

The ideas and recommendations in this action plan were created and inspired by the many dedicated individuals listed below from Thompson and beyond. We thank you for your hard work and expertise that helped bring this project to life! This action plan was compiled with help from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program (RTCA) and was made possible thanks to a planning group that met every other week and a working group that met regularly to create a vision, gather community feedback, and refine and share recommendations for this action plan. Many of the individuals below offered helpful advice and expertise as needed. We also thank the UCONN Engineering Student team for their technical skills and the Putnam Rotary Interact Club for their helpful observations!

We acknowledge the work and contributions of the following project partners:

## **The Thompson “More Than a Train Wreck” Working Group:**

### **Thompson Trails Committee:**

Karen Durlach - Chair  
John Kochinskas  
Mike LaJeunesse  
Lucille Langlois  
Brian Loffredo  
Charlie Obert\*  
David Ostrowski  
Paul Provost\*

### **Staff - Town of Thompson**

Lesley Munshower- Director of Recreation

### **Thompson Historical Society:**

Tom Chase  
Joe Iamartino - President  
John Rice  
Mark Snay  
Stan Swanson  
\* Also members

### **Technical Advisors:**

Scott Bushee - ConnDOT  
Laura Brown - UCONN  
Laurie Giannotti - CT DEEP  
LyAnn Graf - The Last Green Valley  
Sarah Heminway- CT Audubon

### **Putnam Rotary Interact Club:**

Youth Members  
Roberta Rocchetti

### **UCONN School of Engineering Student Team:**

Joshua Connor - liaison  
Sean Doolittle  
Rebecca Feldman  
Shalini Shial

### **Planning Team:**

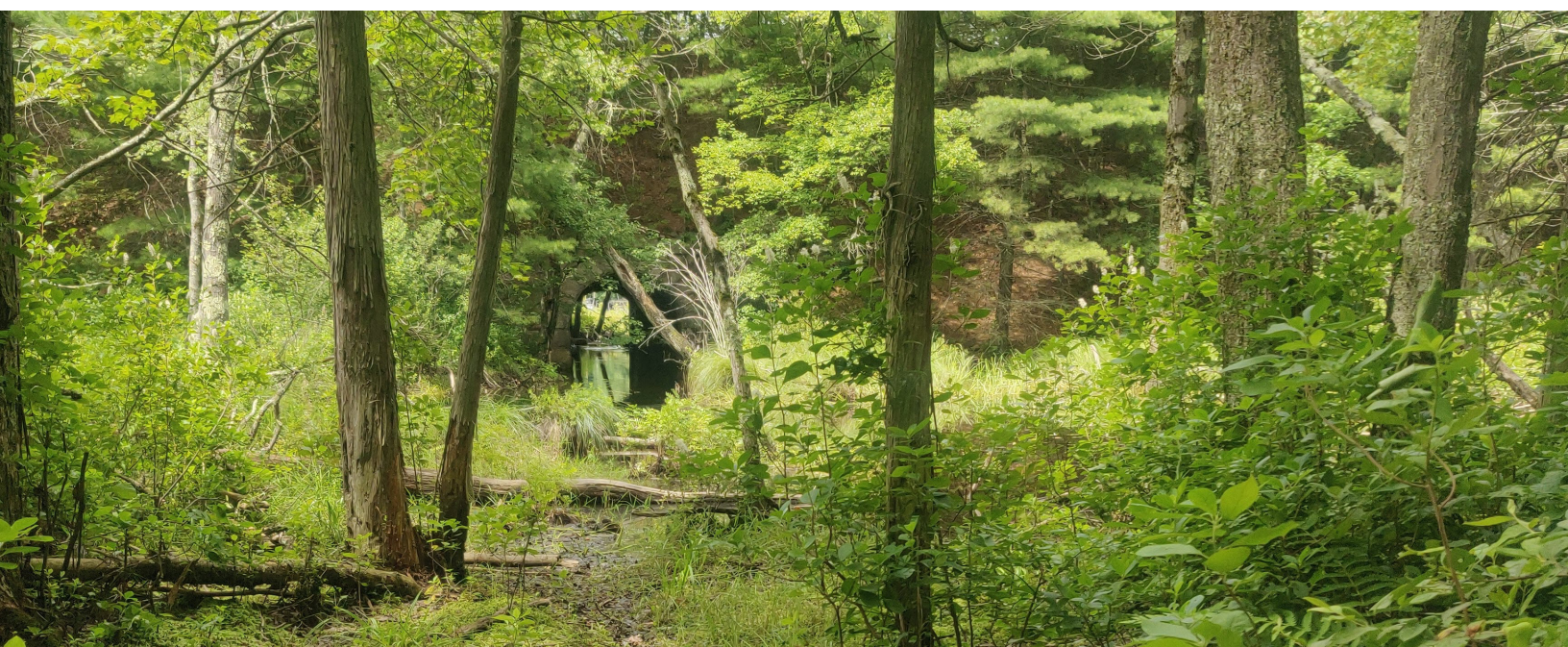
### **Staff - Town of Thompson:**

Tyra Penn-Gesek - Director of Planning & Development

### **National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program:**

Elizabeth Brown  
Stephanie Stroud  
Mallory Zink







# LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Land on which the Town of Thompson and the Air Line State Park Trail reside is a part of the homeland and territory of the Nipmuc people. We pay respect to the Nipmuc peoples past, present, and future. We thank them for their past and present stewardship of the waters, plants, and animals of this special place. Acknowledging them reminds us of the important connection to the original and present-day caretakers of the land where we live, work, and recreate.

We also recognize that this acknowledgment is insufficient. It does not undo the harm that has been done and continues to be perpetrated now against Indigenous people, their land and water.

## A Brief History of the Nipmuc People by the Hassanamisco Indian Museum:

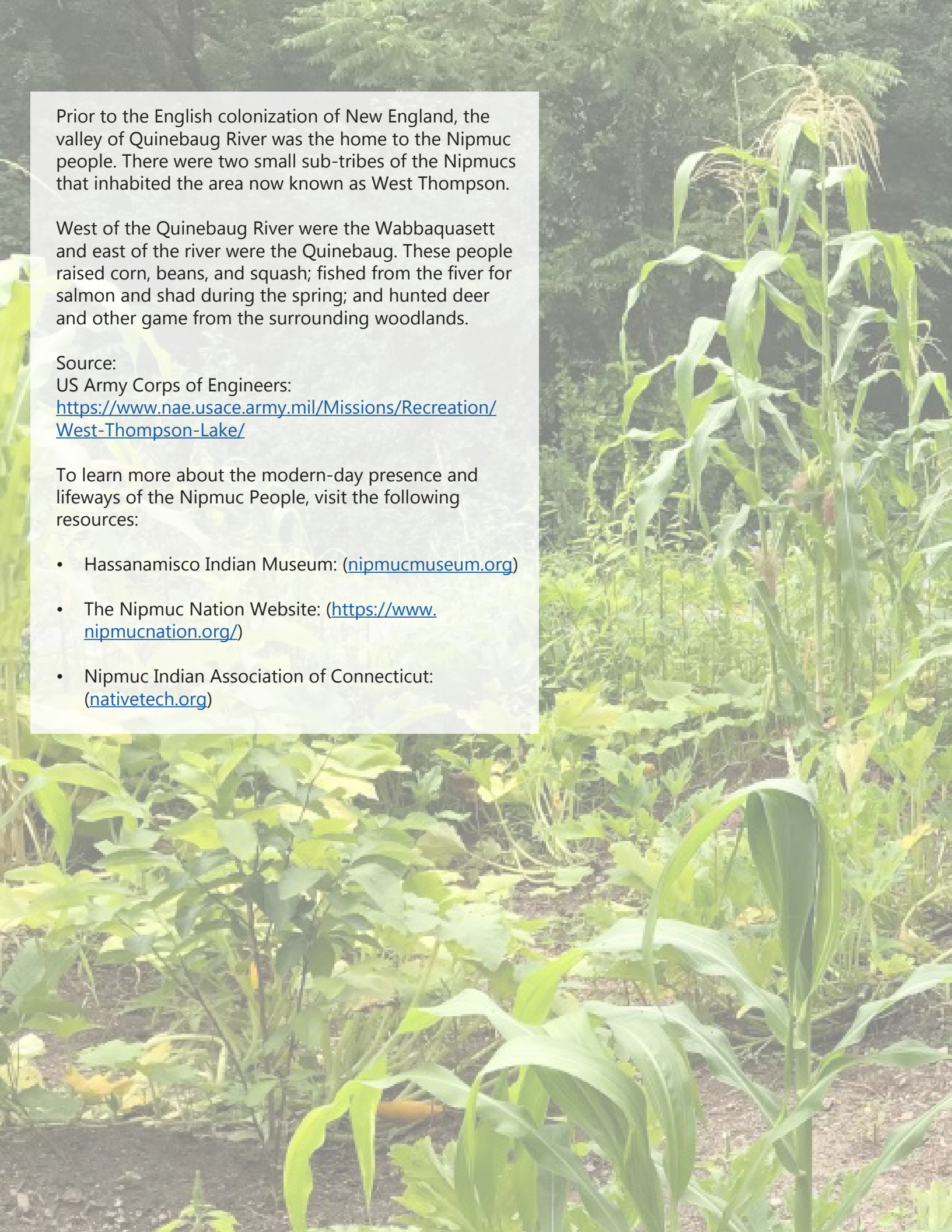
"The people the English referred to as Nipmuc, or "fresh water people" occupied the interior portion of what is now Massachusetts and parts of Rhode Island and Connecticut. The present-day boundaries of the original homelands included all of central Massachusetts from the New Hampshire/Vermont borders and south of the Merrimack Valley southerly to include Tolland and Windham counties in Connecticut and the northwest portion of Rhode Island. To the east, the homelands included the Natick/Sudbury area going west to include the Connecticut River Valley.

Source: The Hassanamisco Indian Museum: <http://www.nipmucmuseum.org/history/>



Above: "Tribal Territories of Southern New England," <http://www.nipmucmuseum.org/history/>





Prior to the English colonization of New England, the valley of Quinebaug River was the home to the Nipmuc people. There were two small sub-tribes of the Nipmucs that inhabited the area now known as West Thompson.

West of the Quinebaug River were the Wabbaquasett and east of the river were the Quinebaug. These people raised corn, beans, and squash; fished from the river for salmon and shad during the spring; and hunted deer and other game from the surrounding woodlands.

Source:

US Army Corps of Engineers:

<https://www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/West-Thompson-Lake/>

To learn more about the modern-day presence and lifeways of the Nipmuc People, visit the following resources:

- Hassanamisco Indian Museum: ([nipmucmuseum.org](http://nipmucmuseum.org))
- The Nipmuc Nation Website: (<https://www.nipmucnation.org/>)
- Nipmuc Indian Association of Connecticut: ([nativetech.org](http://nativetech.org))



## Why a Land Acknowledgment?

A Land Acknowledgment is one way of taking time to learn and understand who the Indigenous Peoples are that lived and cared for the land you are on. Often the histories and stories we hear and even learn in school begin with the colonization or settler history of the places we call home, and frequently do not acknowledge the people who were here first, who cared for the land for many thousands of years, and are still here today.

Indigenous history and modern day tradition and culture is important to acknowledge because it is often erased. Since Indigenous People are intrinsically linked to the land, taking care of Indigenous People also takes care of our land. A Land Acknowledgment is one small step we can take to learn more about the Indigenous Peoples who made it possible for us all to enjoy the places where we live, learn and recreate today.

**Further resources about different types of Land Acknowledgments can be found here:**

Acknowledging Native Homelands: <https://www.christinedelucia.com/new-page-1>

The Upstander Project: <https://upstanderproject.org/land>

The Tomaquag Museum's Guide to Land Acknowledgment, by Loren Spears: <https://www.tomaquagmuseum.org/belongingsblog/2020/3/22/a-guide-for-land-acknowledgements-by-lorn-spears>





A decorative border of black footprints surrounds the entire page, starting from the top and curving down the sides and bottom.

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

- Project Context..... 2
- The History of Thompson..... 4
- Thompson Today..... 5
- Thompson & The Last Green Valley..... 7
- Existing Trails and Recreation in Thompson..... 8
- The Air Line State Park Trail..... 10
- The Great East Thompson Train Wreck..... 12

## **DEFINING A VISION**

- Vision, Mission, Goals..... 14
- What is a Trail Town?..... 15
- Creating a Brand..... 16
- The Time is Now! Current Revitalization Efforts  
Happening in Thompson..... 17
- Community Engagement..... 19

## **TELLING THE TRAIN WRECK STORY**

- Starting with a Concept..... 24
- Phase One: The Train Wreck Story..... 25
- Phase Two: Creating the Space..... 34
- Phase Two: The Trail Depot..... 36
- Phase Three: The Pavilion..... 37

## **TRAIL TOWN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Recreation Recommendations..... 39
- Local Business and Marketing Recommendations..... 40
- Grant and Stewardship Resources..... 41



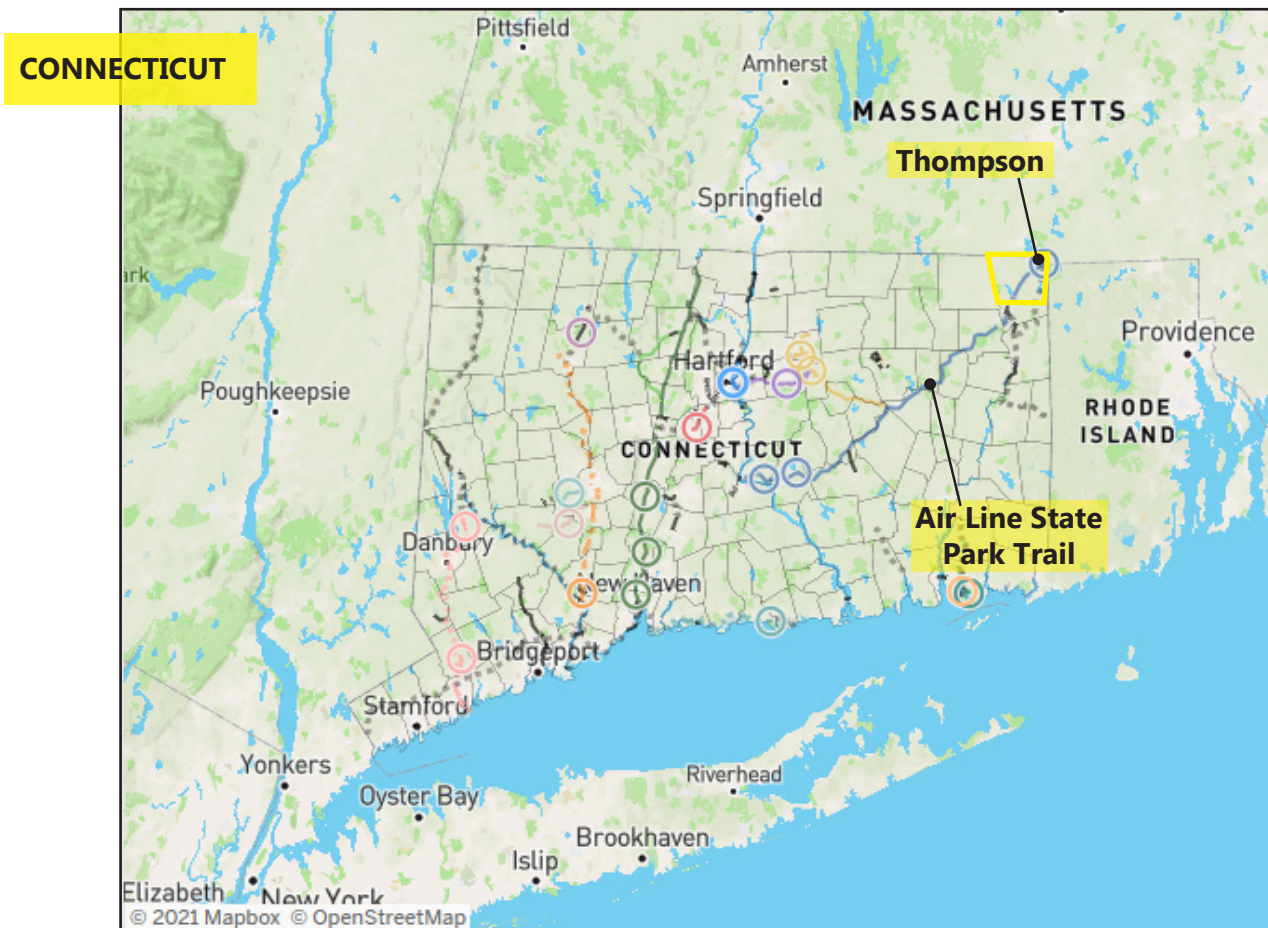
A photograph of a dirt road winding through a dense forest. In the background, a wooden bridge or overpass is visible, partially obscured by trees. The road is covered in dry leaves and leads into the distance. The forest is lush with green foliage and tall trees. The entire image is framed by a thick black border.

# **PROJECT BACKGROUND**



# PROJECT CONTEXT

Thompson is a town in Windham County, Connecticut, that lies along the Air Line State Park Trail. This trail is a discontinued railroad bed, which was once a rail line created to follow an imaginary line drawn “through the air,” illustrating the most direct route from New York to Boston. It is now a regional trail which extends from Thompson southwest to Portland, CT for a total of nearly 50 miles. The northern section from Windham to Putnam measures 21 miles with an additional 6.6 miles passing through Thompson. Here the trail has been cut back to its original width, and gravel has been installed from the Massachusetts line south to Sand Dam Road, and from the Route 12, Mechanicsville parking lot, 1 mile north to the I-395 overpass. The rest of the sections in Thompson have been rough graded and work is still in progress. Some sections still have the original rail ballast.



**Above: a map of the UCONN CT Trail Census infrared trail data collectors (circles). These data collectors count trail users on existing trails (solid lines), including the Air Line State Park Trail in Thompson, and planned trails (dashed lines) throughout the state. To learn more and see real time trail data, visit: <https://cttrailcensus.uconn.edu/>**

Thompson is located in the northeastern corner of Connecticut, bordered by Dudley, Webster and Douglas in Massachusetts to the north; Burrillville, Rhode Island to the East; Woodstock, CT to the west; and Putnam, CT to the south. Thompson is located within easy reach of the three largest cities in New England, including three state capitals: 25 miles from Worcester, MA; 32 miles from Providence, the capital of Rhode Island; 52 miles from the Connecticut state capital of Hartford; and 65 miles from the Massachusetts capital, Boston. Thompson’s unique location between three states and at the intersection of several regional trail systems provides numerous opportunities for attracting visitors.



**MASSACHUSETTS**

**Thompson**

**SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND TRUNKLINE TRAIL**

*A Trail Map of the SNETT for the Communities of Franklin, Bellingham, Blackstone, Millville, Uxbridge and Douglas*

*For More Information, Please Visit [www.snett.org](http://www.snett.org)*

**Legend**

- SNETT - Existing
- SNETT - Proposed
- Mid-State Trail
- Proposed Blackstone River Bikeway
- SNETT Communities
- MBTA Stations
- Schools
- Libraries
- Town Halls
- Town Centers
- CommuterRail
- Roads
- Water Bodies
- Open Space
- Massachusetts Towns
- Rhode Island Towns
- Connecticut Towns

**CMRPC**  
Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission  
100 Worcester Street, Suite 200  
Worcester, MA 01604

**Source:** Data provided by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), Massachusetts Office of Transportation Planning, Connecticut Resources Section and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

**Disclaimer:** Information presented on this map is for planning purposes only. This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis. Use caution in relying on positional accuracy.

**Map of Massachusetts**

[locations/southern-new-england-trunkline-trail](#)

## RHODE ISLAND



To learn more, visit: <https://visitburrillville.org/hiking/>



# THE HISTORY OF THOMPSON

**The following historic information and photo provided by Thompson Historical Society.**

The land where Thompson is located is on the traditional homelands of the Nipmuc indigenous people who stewarded the land for many thousands of years. For more information on the Nipmuc, please see the land acknowledgment at the beginning of this document. In 1785, originally constituted as part of Killingly, the Town of Thompson was established by English settlers as we see it today.

As is common in New England, Thompson is comprised of several small named villages. The villages formed organically around centers of activity, such as the mills or the small school districts. The ten villages of Thompson and their former names are: East Thompson, Fabyan (New Boston Village), Grosvenordale (Masonville), Mechanicsville, North Grosvenordale, including the North Grosvenordale Mill Historic District (Fisherville), Quaddick, Quinebaug (New Boston village), Thompson Hill, (Thompson Hill Historic District), West Thompson and Wilsonville.

The abundance of ponds, lakes, and the running water from the French, Quinebaug and Five Mile rivers drew mill operators to the region, as well as farmers. Grist and fulling mills were the first to be built, with the rivers dammed and small mill buildings of wood erected. The textile revolution, following the War of 1812 brought Thompson to prominence and even larger mills were constructed, changing the focus of the villages from agriculture to manufacturing. As many families moved west and manufacturing continued to grow, it led to the need for mill owners to bring in immigrant workers and their families.

Because of Thompson's location, directly between New York and Boston, it became noted as a transportation hub first for the turnpike companies and later for the railroads. The intersection of the turnpike road from Hartford to Boston with the Springfield-to-Providence road brought taverns and business districts to complement the different village churches.



**Photo Description: Mill workers spinning room at #2 mill, Grosvenordale Company, circa 1890.**

After the first rail line came into town in 1839, the village of Thompson Hill, long the premiere district for politics and business, gradually receded in economic power compared to the mill villages in the valleys. By 1855, the powerful mill district now known as Putnam separated from Thompson, and the current town boundaries were established. Thompson had several train lines and trolley lines serving the area until the age of the automobile. Freight train service remains today, and the old rail lines have been repurposed as part of a large network of beautiful walking trails. The town was greatly impacted as manufacturing slowed greatly after WWI and after significant flooding in 1936, 1938, and 1955. The floods resulted in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers initiated "Project Noah" to contain future flood waters. The village center of West Thompson was sacrificed for the West Thompson Dam complex and the resulting manmade lake, protecting the downstream cities. Textile manufacturing ceased and many of the mill buildings were taken down.

Thompson today is a quiet commuter town, striving to be eco-friendly and transforming itself village by village, promoting agriculture, small business and its history in the Quiet Corner of Connecticut, a proud town in The Last Green Valley.

# THOMPSON TODAY

---

## DEMOGRAPHICS:

In 2021, the **population of Thompson was 9,189**. The population of the town has decreased by 2.8% over the last ten years. **10% of residents, identify themselves as a person of color.**\*\*

The **median age of Thompson residents is 41**, with the **largest age cohort between the ages of 45-66 (approximately 34% of the population)**. There is a relatively low number of individuals between the ages of 15 - 20 (approximately 10%).\* Among the town's adults, ages 25 and up, **52% say they are in excellent or very good health.**\*\*

Reflecting trends in Connecticut, there is an implication that **households in Thompson are aging without being replaced by a younger generation** in sufficient numbers to maintain population levels. The percentage of families and households with children decreased at rates greater than the population growth over the last ten years (-4% and -9%, respectively). \*

## EDUCATION & ECONOMICS:

Out of the 3,569 households in Thompson, 78% are homeowner households. **21% of the households are cost-burdened**, meaning they spend at 30% of their total income on housing costs.\*\*

Adults with high school diplomas or college degrees have more employment options and considerably higher potential earnings, on average, than those who do not finish high school. In Thompson, **10 percent of adults ages 25 and over, or 717 people, lack a high school diploma**; statewide, this value is 9 percent. Out of the people 25 years of age or older, **28% have earned a bachelor's degree (or higher), which is lower than the State average of 39%**. 83% of high school seniors in the Thompson School District, graduated within four years (in 2019).\*\*

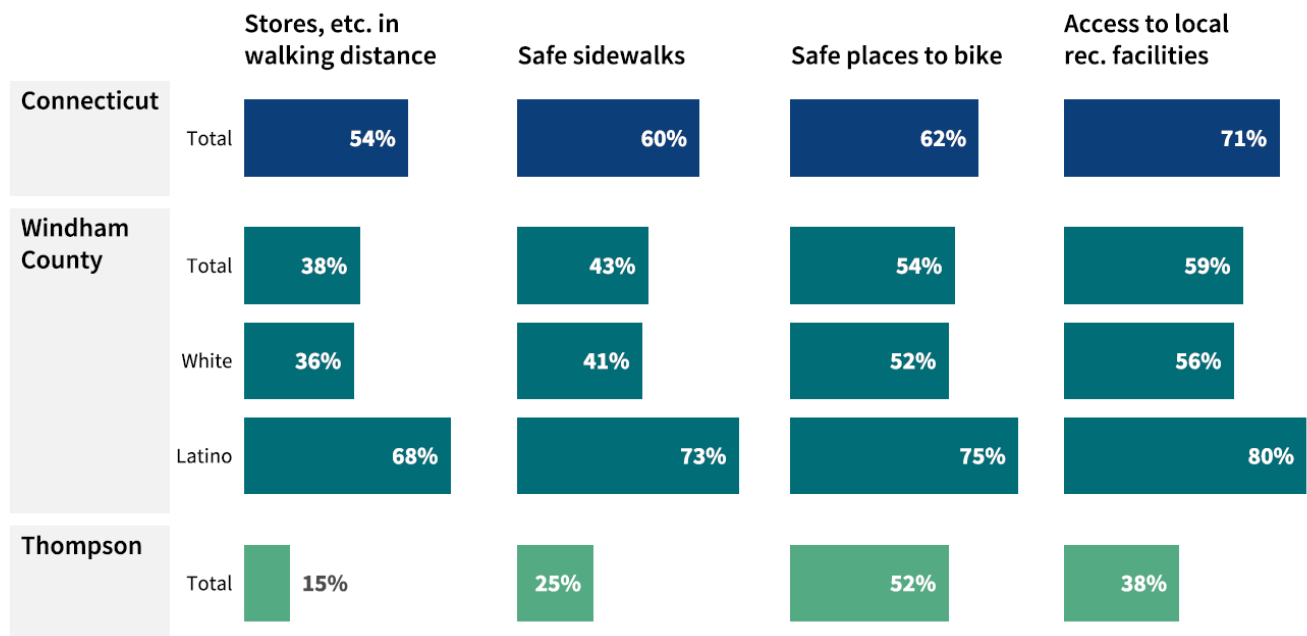
In 2021, **Thompson had 1,457 jobs, the majority were in the Manufacturing sector.**\*\*

## A NEW WORKFORCE IN THOMPSON:

There is much for Thompson to boast about, as its outdoor recreation assets and traditional small-town atmosphere remain within close reach of New England's largest metropolitan centers. There is potential that the emergent paradigm shift toward remote work can be capitalized to the benefit of Thompson. With some employment no longer tied to a choice between long commutes or the high costs of living in metropolitan areas, Thompson now presents an opportunity for those seeking a better work-life balance. Given the new comfort level that has emerged since the COVID-19 pandemic with remote work, a community like Thompson should be well-positioned to meet the needs of the working class.



**FIGURE 28: RESIDENTS' RATINGS OF LOCAL WALKABILITY MEASURES BY RACE/ETHNICITY, SHARE OF ADULTS, 2015–2018**



\*\*

## WALKABILITY:

High-quality built environment resources, such as recreational facilities and safe sidewalks, help keep residents active and bring communities together. Walkable neighborhoods may also encourage decreased reliance on cars. **15% of adults in Thompson report having stores, banks, and other locations in walking distance of their home compared to 54% average in Connecticut.** Only 25% say there are safe sidewalks compared to 60% average in Connecticut, and 52% of residents rated Thompson as a safe place to bike which is 10% below statewide ratings.

**Only 38% of Thompson residents have access to local recreation facilities, compared to 71% statewide.\*\***

**Creating access to close-to-home recreation may help improve these ratings and health and quality of life in Thompson.**

\*(Source: Thompson.pdf ([housing-profiles.s3.amazonaws.com](https://s3.amazonaws.com/housing-profiles)))

\*\* (Source: Thompson 2021 Equity Profile. CT. DataHaven. thompson\_profile\_v1.pdf ([ctdatahaven.org](https://ctdatahaven.org)))



# THOMPSON & THE LAST GREEN VALLEY

Thompson is one of 35 towns included in the **Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor**, which was designated by Congress in 1994. It is not a traditional park. Instead, citizens, businesses, nonprofit cultural and environmental organizations, local and state governments, and the National Park Service work together to preserve and celebrate the region's cultural, historical and natural heritage. There are 26 towns in Connecticut and 9 towns in Massachusetts that encompass "The Last Green Valley," which was named by airline pilots because it is the last stretch of **dark night sky** in the coastal sprawl between Boston and Washington, D.C.

The Last Green Valley is surprisingly **rural and uniquely historic**. With 1,100 square miles that are still 77% forests and farms, the pastoral landscape is interspersed with powerful rivers, mill villages, and vibrant town centers.

The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor is managed by **The Last Green Valley (TLGV)**, an organization that manages recreation opportunities such as hiking, biking, walking, star gazing, promoting historic and cultural features, wine and agricultural tours, and hosts engaging events and programs, such as:

**Spring Outdoors** brings more than 22,000 people out of hibernation to explore all the National Heritage Corridor has to offer between the Vernal Equinox and the Summer Solstice. TLGV hosts partners and members on guided walks, bikes, paddles and tours during the entire season.

From the autumnal equinox through the first week of November, there are over 300 opportunities to explore The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor. For over thirty years, **Walktober** has been a premiere fall event in Southern New England with walks, hikes, runs, pedals, paddles, climbs, stargazing and much more.

TLGV also promotes environmental stewardship through various **education and conservation** efforts, including Earth Month events, land use studies, and water and land protection. Additionally, TLGV assists with creating **trail access** for all by conducting trail audits of walking conditions to help provide information and make trails more ADA-Friendly.

On the Last Green Valley website, you can find plenty of great things to do and places to visit in Thompson, including:

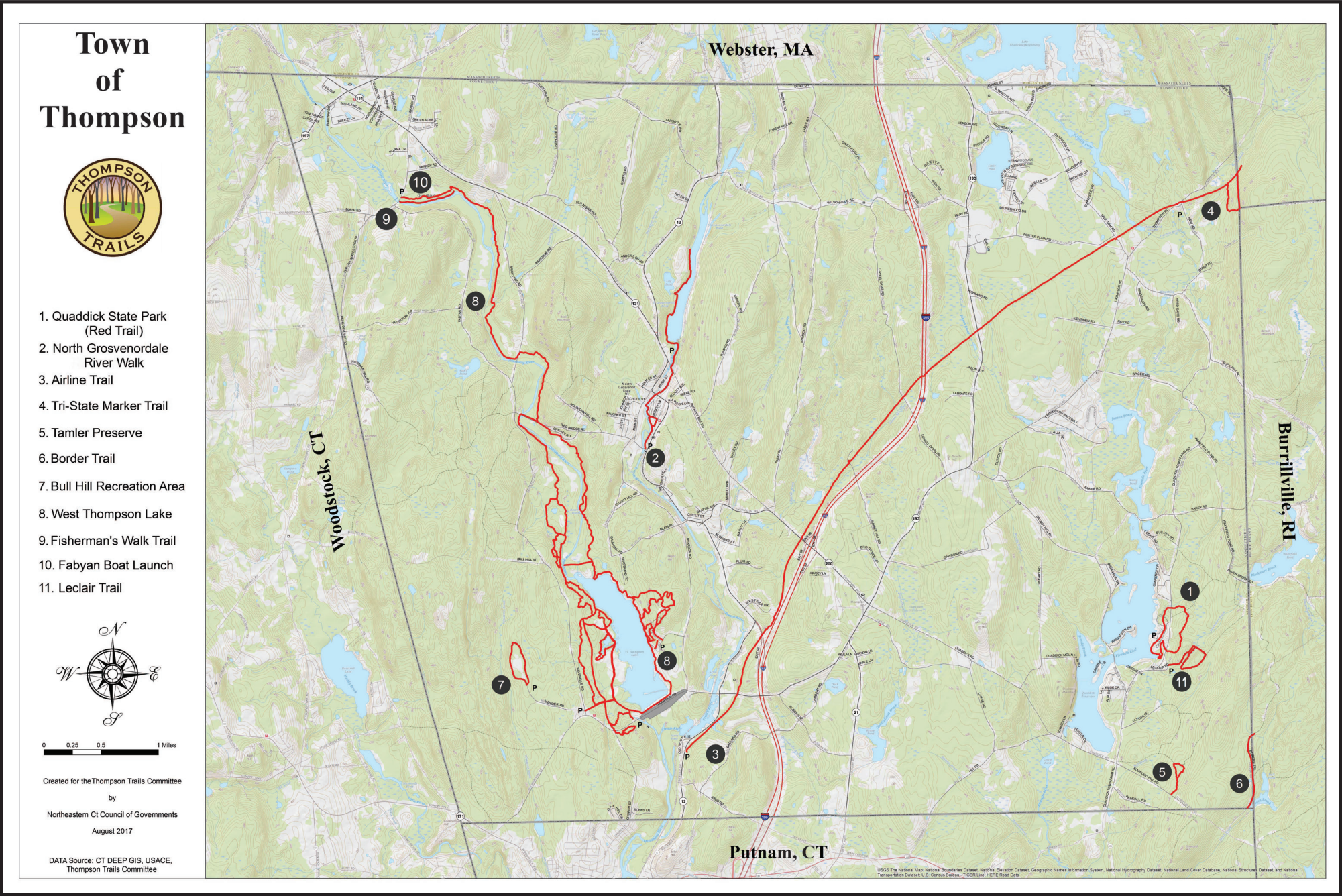
- astronomy and night sky viewing
- bicycling and mountain biking
- boating and fishing
- camping
- community concerts
- disc golf
- education
- farms and gardens
- hiking and walking
- horseback riding
- hunting
- ice skating and ice fishing
- a corn maze
- letterboxing and geocaching
- the local library
- museums and historic sites
- local nonprofits
- off-road vehicle trails
- paddling
- retail arts, antiques and uniques
- scenic overlooks and views
- local businesses
- snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and sledding
- State and Federal parks and forests
- tastes and sips
- winter activities

To learn more and see an interactive map, visit:

<https://thelastgreenvalley.org/explore-the-last-green-valley/explore-guide/>



# EXISTING TRAILS AND RECREATION IN THOMPSON







A view of West Thompson Lake, one of many beautiful places to spend time outdoors in Thompson.



# THE AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL

The maps below and on the following page are part of a recent publication and “z-map brochure” that folds to fit into a standard wallet. It has maps and information about the Air Line State Park Trail on one side (this page), and information for individual towns on the reverse (next page), with local places to park, shop, visit, and recreate.



## AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL HISTORY

In the 1960s, over fifty miles of the rail bed from East Hampton to the Massachusetts border were acquired by the Connecticut State Park System to construct a recreational linear park.

This trail has a colorful past. The “Air Line” was envisioned as a direct line between New York City and Boston. It opened in 1873 and 25 miles shorter, it offered fierce competition to the shoreline rail service from New York to Boston. The mesmerizing, white-painted express train, known as the Ghost Train, made the run between Boston and New York in six hours, a record time for 1884.

The construction of the new rail line contained ambitious feats of engineering, blasting through granite hills, navigating deep valleys and rivers along the route. The Air Line Railroad’s “Ghost Train” began in 1891 and was designed to attract wealthy travelers. Luxurious Pullman cars were painted white with gold trim, and the staff of the train wore formal white uniforms.



The catastrophic Great East Thompson Train Wreck on December 4, 1891 clouded the introduction of this fast new rail service. It was one of the greatest train wrecks in American history, and the only train accident to involve four trains. Still, over the next four years, successful businessmen and prominent citizens, including President Benjamin Harrison, rode the increasingly well-known Ghost Train. As it sped across eastern Connecticut, its luminescent cars were easily recognized, especially at twilight.

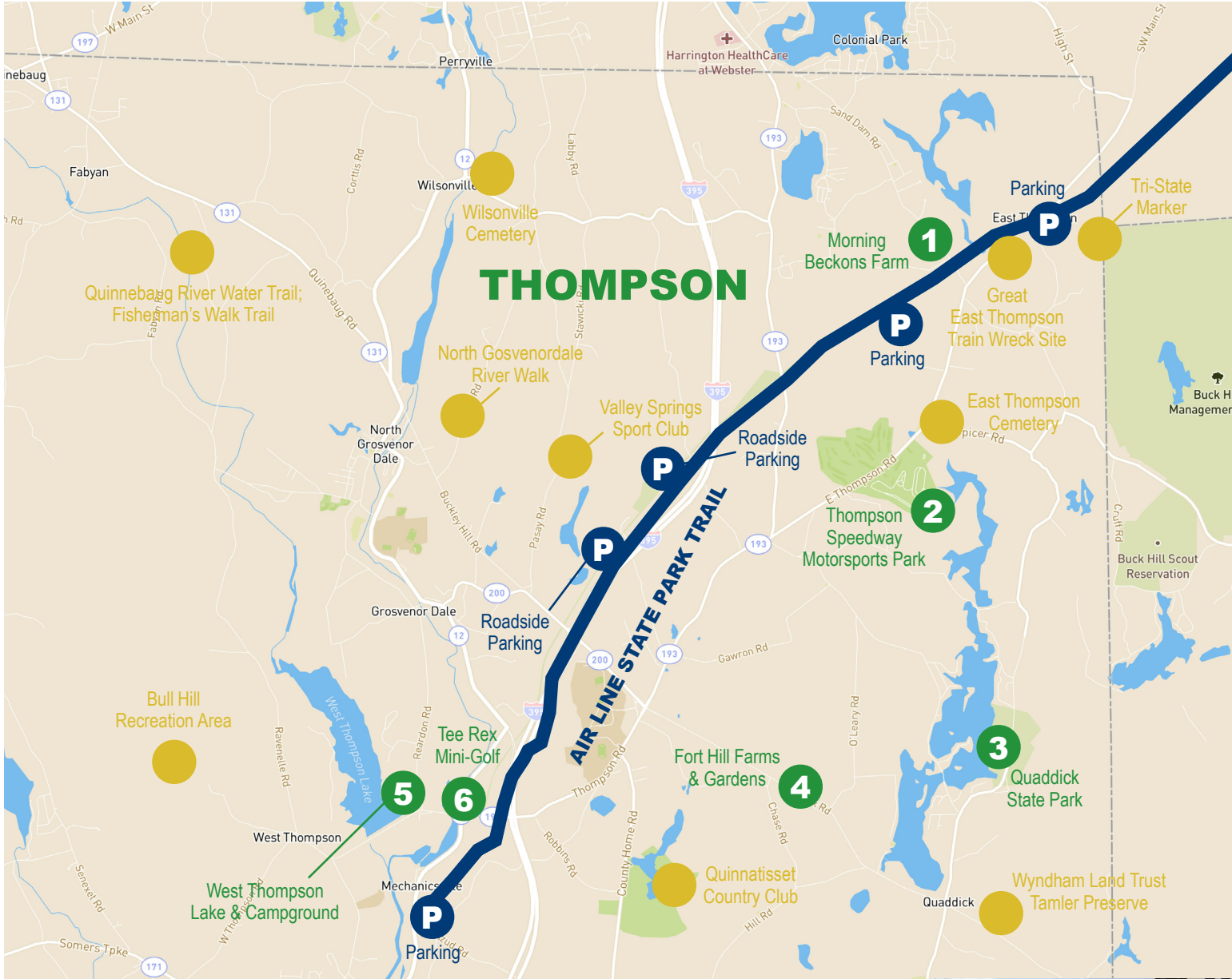
In the new 20th century, technology increased, railroad engines became faster, rail cars became longer, everything became heavier and after World War II, access to automobiles and interstate highways reduce the profitability of rail travel. The quaintness of the Air Line’s winding grades as well as the weight restrictions of the spindly trestle bridges began to show its limitations. During its construction, the Air Line Railroad was expensive and controversial, but its operational costs would lead to its ultimate demise and abandonment. Passenger service on the Air Line ceased by 1937, and the track was completely abandoned by 1965.

Today, visitors enjoy scenic panoramas, village life, wildlife, hiking trails, and the tranquility of the rural landscape. The United States Department of the Interior recognized the southern section of the Air Line State Park Trail as a national recreation trail in 2002.

For more maps in this series, email [outreach@ctrod.org](mailto:outreach@ctrod.org) or visit [ctrod.org](http://ctrod.org).







## ATTRACTIONS IN THOMPSON, CT

**1. Morning Beckons Farm**  
343A Sand Dam Road  
[MorningBeckonsFarm.com](http://MorningBeckonsFarm.com)

**2. Thompson Speedway Motorsports Park**  
205 E. Thompson Road  
[ThompsonSpeedway.com](http://ThompsonSpeedway.com)  
America's first purpose-built road course and asphalt high-banked oval. Also home to the Raceway Restaurant, Bogey's Ice Cream and Raceway Golf Club.

**3. Quaddick State Park**  
818 Quaddick Town Farm Road  
[portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Parks/Quaddick-State-Park](http://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Parks/Quaddick-State-Park)

**4. Fort Hill Farms & Gardens**  
260 Quaddick Road  
[FortHillFarms.com](http://FortHillFarms.com)  
Offering an annual corn maze, ice cream, lavender gardens, special events and more!

**5. West Thompson Lake & Campground**  
[nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/West-Thompson-Lake/](http://nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/West-Thompson-Lake/)  
A USACE property featuring 24 campsites, disc golf and extensive hiking trails. Picnic sites and canoe launch are also available.

**6. Tee Rex Mini-Golf**  
274 Riverside Drive  
Tee Rex is an 18 hole dinosaur-themed mini golf course. Group rates are available. Cool down with 25+ flavors of soft and hard serve ice cream before or after you play!

## AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL

## THOMPSON

## AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL THOMPSON

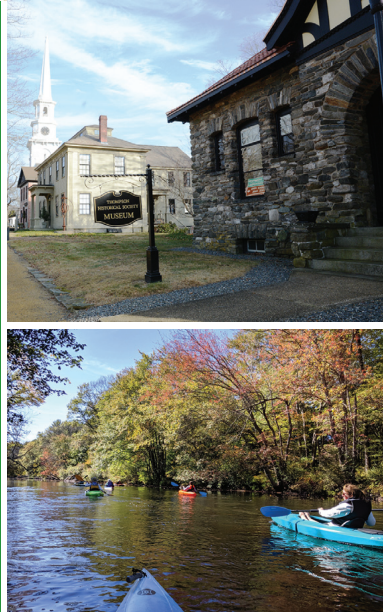
Mileage	Date
Mileage	Date
Mileage	Date
Mileage	Date
Mileage	Date
Mileage	Date

# Thompson

Home to family friendly events throughout the year, like the annual Makers Fair, Turkey Trot, summer concerts and more!

Thompson is rich in historical sites, from the Ellen Larned Museum on Thompson Common to the site of The Great East Thompson Train Wreck on the Air Line State Park Trail.

Find our calendar of events, links to the Thompson Historical Society, The Last Green Valley and all of our local attractions by visiting Thompson, CT...Find Your Way.



## WHERE TO EAT

**MILLTOWN GRILLE**

## TRAIL TIPS

- Air Line Trail Head parking is located at East Thompson Road & New Road, at Lowell Davis Road and on Route 12 in Mechanicsville.
- From the East Thompson trail head, hike east to the site of the Tri-State Marker between CT, MA & RI; or take a short walk west to the site of the Great East Thompson Train Wreck of 1894.

For additional copies of this map, please email [planner@thompsonct.org](mailto:planner@thompsonct.org)



# THE STORY OF THE GREAT EAST THOMPSON TRAIN WRECK

On a cold foggy morning on December 4th, 1981 near the site of the East Thompson Train Station, 4 trains would meet with disastrous consequences. The crash would become known as the Great East Thompson Train Wreck. It's the only wreck of its kind in the history of the railroad in the United States.

The four trains involved were: The Southbridge Local, traveling from East Thompson to Southbridge and carrying 8 small freight cars. The Boston Freight, traveling from Putnam to Boston, carrying 11 freight cars with various cargo. The Long Island and Eastern States Express, traveling from Putnam to Boston with 4 cars carrying 13 passengers, and the Norwich Boat Train traveling from Putnam to Boston, carrying about 75 passengers.

It all started while attaching the 8 freight cars to the Southbridge Local in East Thompson. The cars had to be put onto the local track and the track switch to the Westbound Mainline was left open. Meanwhile in Putnam, three trains were all preparing to leave to head towards Boston. However, the Long Island and Eastern Island Express had been experiencing mechanical issues and caused delays. The dispatcher devised a plan to get all three trains leaving for Boston quickly on their way.

The Boston Freight would leave early, ahead of the passenger trains, since it was slower and could be passed by the other trains once they reached Douglas, MA. The dispatcher had forgotten about the Southbridge Local which was still sitting on the Westbound Track.

The Boston Freight Train crashed into the Southbridge Local at 6:40 am. Cars and debris from the trains flew across both tracks. Soon the Long Island Express arrived, traveling fast, as they were trying to make up lost time from waiting on mechanical issues. It violently crashed into the wreckage of the first two trains. The engine from the Long Island Express flew into the air! Three minutes later the Norwich Boat train arrived. Traveling at 50 miles per hour, BOOM! It crashed into the Long Island Express. The giant crash resulted in about 500 feet of wreckage and debris covering the tracks.

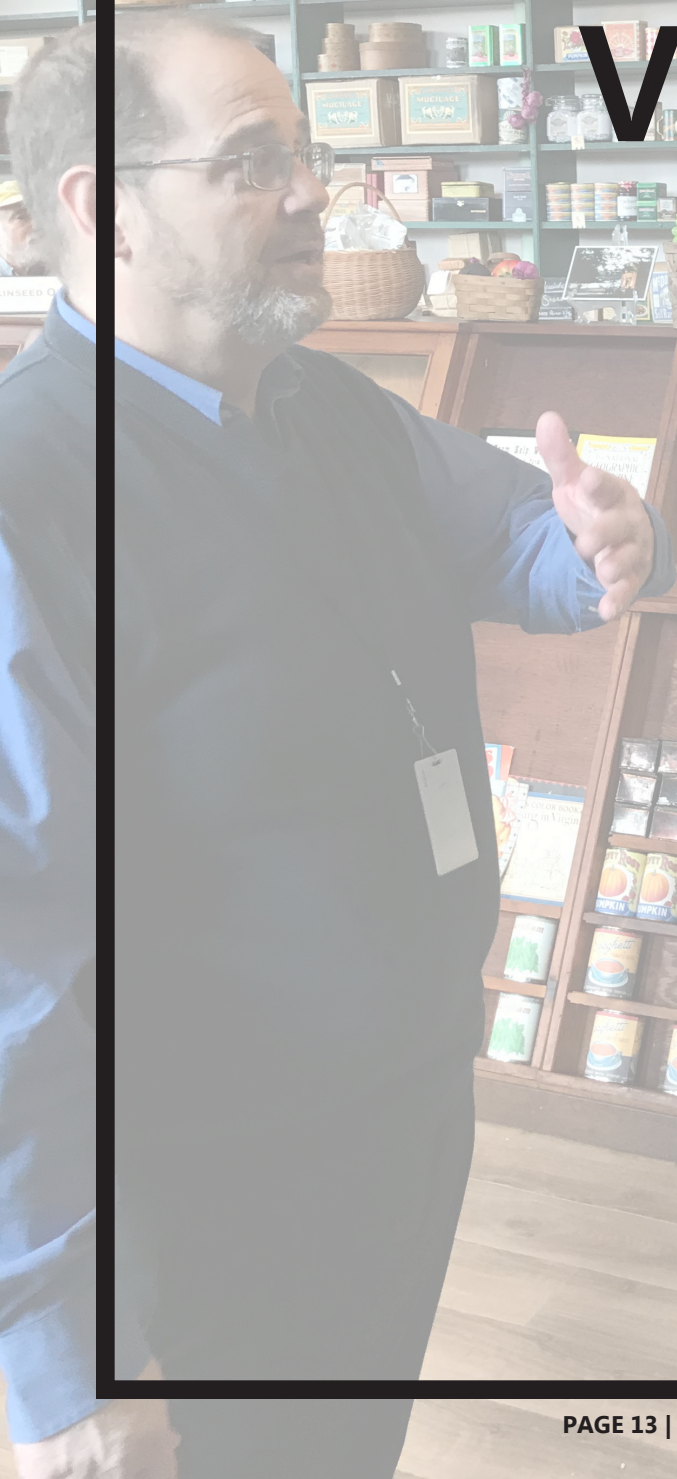
One engineer, one fireman, and one passenger died in the wreckage. The track was cleared by the next day and the railroad lost about \$10,000 after insurance. Come to Thompson to hear more local lore around the mysteries surrounding this tragic train wreck.....

All four train engines are visible in this image. To the left sticking out of the fog is the Boston Freight train, next to that is the Southbridge Local train. Sitting on the tracks is the Norwich Boat train, and to the far right near the telephone pole is the Long Island and Eastern States Express. In the foreground appears to be snow, but it's actually cotton that was pulled from the cargo car before it burned.





# DEFINING A VISION





# VISION, MISSION AND GOALS

---

In Fall of 2019, the Town of Thompson was awarded a grant of technical assistance from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program (RTCA). In January of 2020, The Town of Thompson met with RTCA and a committee of active stakeholders to visit the Town, walk the Air Line State Park Trail and visit the historic train wreck site, and discuss recreation challenges and opportunities. The group then met to brainstorm a shared Vision, Mission and Goals:

## Vision

Thompson is a statewide destination for outdoor recreation and compelling local history, marked by regionally connected trail networks, bustling community amenities, and a thriving Trail Town economy. Thompson is a gateway to the state, to The Last Green Valley Heritage Corridor, and to the Air Line State Park Trail (ALSPT), with an interconnected network of resources that are enriching and accessible across user groups, making Thompson a regional hub in which people at all stages of life are able to find their way.

## Mission

The Thompson Trail Town Action Plan makes recommendations to:

- Create a destination interpreting the historic Train Wreck along the ALSPT in Thompson, starting with a community-driven conceptual design for the Train Wreck Park.
- Improve access to and connectivity between the Air Line State Park Trail, Thompson, and the 12 towns along the ALSPT route.
- Build local and regional partnerships to foster collective ownership and understanding of the importance of trails and outdoor recreation in Thompson, and beyond.
- Improve services and amenities available in the Town of Thompson, ensuring that they focus on the best interest of the community and its needs.
- Promote a trail-friendly, hospitality-driven culture through environmental stewardship, community inclusivity, and the celebration of Thompson's local resources and heritage.

## Goals and Desired Outcomes

This action plan strives to identify a strategy to fill in existing gaps in services and resources, create a communication and outreach strategy to inform and engage local and regional stakeholders, and guide Thompson's specific Trail Town approach through context-driven design recommendations and models for historic interpretation in outdoor recreation and trail settings. Our approach aims to create a unified community vision and voice, create opportunities to interpret local history and heritage, create connections to community destinations, and develop accessible recreation opportunities for users of all ages and experiences in Thompson.



# WHAT IS A TRAIL TOWN?

**A Trail Town is a destination along a long-distance, regional trail** in which residents and visitors gather, recreate, and explore a community's rich character. A Trail Town is linked across the region to neighboring communities by a trail corridor, thus creating additional opportunities to use, protect, and celebrate trail resources. Individuals are encouraged to venture outside the trail to enjoy the **heritage, hospitality services, and culture** of the host town. This model not only supports trail users, but also Trail Town residents, as it **celebrates the town's identity and heritage** by leveraging the trail as an invaluable community resource.

In a Trail Town, **the trail functions as a driver of community development, creating economic growth, growing local business and job opportunities, prompting infrastructure investment and improvement, and protecting the natural environment.** These place-based assets render the trail integral to the community's sense of identity. A Trail Town not only draws people to a trail, but it also entices them into neighboring communities where they may stimulate local business through lodging, dining, and hospitality services.

## **The Trail Town model hinges on 5 KEY PILLARS for success:**

- Diverse **partnerships**
- Community assessments, asset development, and **localized research**
- Strong physical and conceptual **town and trail connection**
- Local **business and real estate** investment
- Consistent, **place-based marketing**

Image: A celebration in Titusville, Florida, a Trail Town along the East Coast Greenway. Photo credit: Adrian Stroud.



# CREATING A BRAND

In 2017 and 2018, Thompson contracted with the Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) to lead an extended branding study, with the goal of identifying the unique assets and challenges faced by the Town, in order to develop strategies for marketing the community to prospective developers, new businesses, potential homebuyers and visitors. The full report is available on the Economic Development Commission page of the Town's website, and includes an analysis and specific recommendations that the Town actively promote its wealth of outdoor recreational assets as a part of its branding strategy.

As a follow up to the NECCOG Branding workshop, in June of 2020, the marketing firm of Sullivan & LeShane was retained to craft a full marketing plan for Thompson. The following is an excerpt from their final report to the subcommittee:

**Thompson is a welcoming, green and growing community, brimming with opportunities for those who are looking to live, work, play or visit here. Nothing stands in your way when you come to Thompson.**

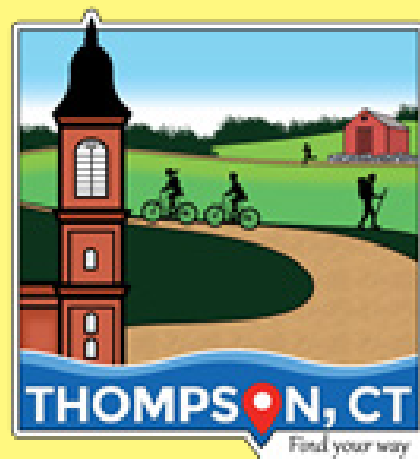
**We are:**

- **A community with a terrific quality of life**
- **Home to excellent schools**
- **A river valley trail town with numerous natural resources and amenities**
- **A business-friendly community with a favorable regulatory environment.**

**Thompson is committed to achieving growth in a way that is green, sustainable and innovative.**



Thompson has many historic buildings and rural landscapes which bring the community a unique charm. Tourtellotte Memorial High School in Thompson. Courtesy of Thompson Historical Society.



Having developed the messages and concepts, the new slogan "**Thompson, CT – Find Your Way**" was chosen and the above logo was created, encapsulating the ideas from the branding workshop.



# THE TIME IS NOW! CURRENT REVITALIZATION EFFORTS HAPPENING IN THOMPSON.....

---

The efforts to develop the Trail Town Action Plan dovetail into a series of interlocking revitalization projects throughout Thompson:

## • **“Imaginable Guidelines”:** June 2019

At a community workshop, 60+ participants in 11 teams identified priorities for community revitalization. Results were analyzed and compiled for a final project report, serving as the basis for future initiatives out of the Office of Planning and Development. The top 3 results were **Litter Management, Local Identity and Civic Branding**. Historic Landmarks was also near the top, with 82% of participants rating it “Important.”

## • **Garden By the River:** installed Oct 2019, activated April 2020

This is the first in a planned series of incremental phases to rehabilitate the town-owned building and lot at 65 Main Street. A volunteer group including staff from Thompson Public Schools, social services agency TEEG, Thompson Recreation and the Girl Scouts, along with other community members, planned and installed a system of raised beds, activated in spring of 2020.

## • **Re-write of the Zoning Regulations:** adopted Sept 2020

The Thompson Planning and Zoning Commission undertook a complete overhaul of the Town’s zoning codes to encourage adaptive re-use and infill development; support of agricultural businesses; and lowering barriers for home-based business, among other modernizations.

## • **“Nips for Holiday Cheer”:** April – Present

In response to priorities identified in the 2019 civic-planning game, volunteers from Thompson Together, supported by the Office of Planning and Development and the Thompson Economic Development Commission, subsidized buyback of single-serving spirits bottles (nips), collected by volunteers from Thompson’s roadsides. Rewards were paid out at the end of the collection period, in the form of gift cards to local retailers, at the value of 10-cents per nip. Data captured from the collections have been provided to the state legislature in support of an improved bottle bill that raises the deposit amount from 5-cents to 10-cents and adds nips to the products included for deposit. Data results: over the 5 month period, **45 volunteers captured 48,244 nips**. The collected bottles are currently being repurposed as part of a public art installation to be installed in Riverside Park.

## • **Plan of Conservation and Development:** adopted March 2021

Immediately following the update to the Zoning Regulations, a 30-member project undertook the 10-year update of the Town’s comprehensive plan. Special attention was given to Economic Development, Housing needs, Agriculture, Conservation and Recreation/Trails in describing goals for the next decade of Thompson’s evolution.

## • **Summer Camp on the Air Line State Park Trail:** Summer 2021

In summer 2021, the Town also joined a partnership with The Last Green Valley and social services agency TEEG to offer a pilot summer camp program for middle-school age youth to hike the trail and experience many unique features of the host communities.





**•The Eleventh Village seasonal retail amenity, Riverside Park: underway!**

A project of the Economic Development Commission, with input from a student design team of the UConn School of Engineering (class of 2020). A small “village” of three-season mini-shops has been proposed for Thompson’s central municipal park. When completed, 10 of the custom mini-shops will line a section of the drive into the park. In addition to offering the shops as seasonal rentals to start-up “micro-entrepreneurs,” a plan is currently being developed to draw participation from Thompson High School students.



**•Air Line State Park Trail Masterplanning Process: underway!**

Thompson’s local work on the site of the Great East Thompson Train Wreck also relates to a regional project to develop and promote the entirety of the Air Line State Park Trail. Under the project management of the non-profit CT Rural Conservation & Development Area, Thompson is part of the **12-Town Task Force** assembled under a master planning grant awarded to CTRC&D by CT DEEP. Together, representatives of the towns are strategizing on methods to promote the trail as a tourism asset, thus connecting the trail directly to local economies. To that end, Thompson has joined with 7 of the other ALSPT communities to produce a series of tourism maps and brochures highlighting recreation amenities in each town.



**Photos to left, from top: the impressive amount of nip bottles collected for “Nips for Holiday Cheer”; A prototype mini-shop for the vendor village; a bustling Riverside Park Maker Fair, where the future vendor village will be located.**



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Over the course of over two years, the Thompson Trail Town Action Plan Committee conducted community outreach and engagement which informed the recommendations in this Action Plan:

## **RTCA Award of Assistance**

In June 2019, the Town of Thompson Economic Development Commission was awarded a grant of technical assistance from the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program (RTCA) to support the development of the Air Line State Park Trail (ALSPT) along the Great East Thompson Train Wreck site and Tri-State Trail Marker. RTCA support kicked off in January 2020 with a site visit to the ALSPT and train wreck site, followed by facilitated project visioning exercises with the working group to better understand goals, project challenges, community stakeholders, and opportunities to leverage. Following economic and recreational community development research, RTCA proposed the adoption of a trail town model, which leverages the trail town connection to drive diverse partnerships, local economic growth, public health improvements, a distinct community identity, and infrastructural improvements.

## **CME Wayfinding Workshop**

During the summer of 2020, CME hosted a community workshop to inform Thompson's Wayfinding and Signage Plan and develop design guidelines that intended to improve visitor and resident orientation, safety, and sense of place. In collaboration with RTCA, CME gathered feedback about recreation preferences, Air Line State Park Trail access points, and Great East Thompson Train Wreck interpretive education interests. This feedback yielded early insights about resident recreation practices and opportunities to leverage Thompson's unique history and heritage for trail town development.



**Above: Project stakeholders, the Town of Thompson, and NPS RTCA on an initial site visit to the Great East Thompson Train Wreck Site in January 2020.**

Community engagement in Thompson's trail town development process has been atypical over the past year and a half. The rise of the **COVID-19 pandemic** shifted our approach to outreach, and nearly **all community workshops were conducted virtually** via Zoom presentations and Microsoft Teams calls with the Thompson train wreck working group. As a result, we have fewer process photos of the collaborative work of Thompson's citizens that have been ongoing since January 2020. Despite these challenges, the thoughtful dedication of Thompson citizens has been an incredible asset to the development of the Trail Town Action Plan.



## Songwriting Competition & Winner

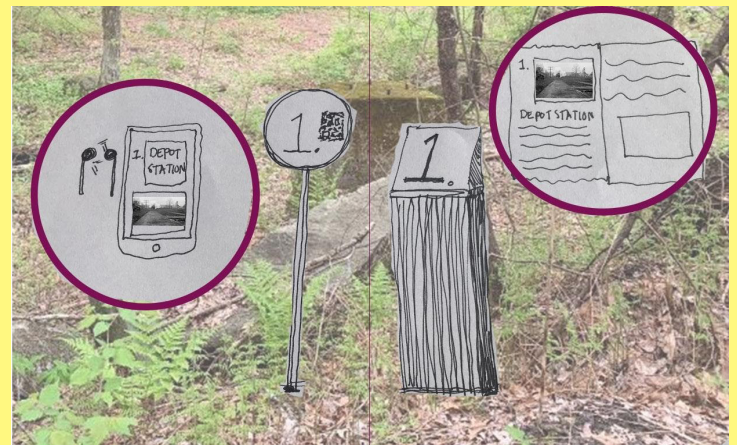
In partnership with RTCA, The town of Thompson hosted an original folk songwriting competition for the Great East Thompson Train wreck to celebrate a virtual Connecticut Trails Day in 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic response. Contestants wrote and performed original folk songs about the historic train wreck, and the winner, Mark Moriarty, was granted a professional recording of his song "Eastbound Train on a Westbound Track." This competition increased community awareness about the town's unique heritage, and the many recreational opportunities along the Air Line State Park Trail.

## "More than a Train wreck" Community Workshop

In November 2020, RTCA and the Thompson train wreck park working group, in partnership with the UCONN School of Engineering, hosted a community design workshop to share information with the community about the goals of the Thompson Train wreck Park, the trail town concept, and opportunities for historic interpretation along the trail. Webinar participants of all ages voted on their favorite design concepts. Some of the most-loved ideas were "Windows to the past," educational signage, and a trailside pavilion, to promote the ALSPT's recreational and cultural features. The interactive community workshop included approximately 30 attendees. For those who were unable to attend, the workshop was recorded and shared on the Town of Thompson municipal website. The video recording as of this writing has been viewed 105 times. Feedback from the workshop was used to create design proposals for the train wreck site.



Winners from the songwriting competition!



A concept for audio interpretation presented at the community workshop in November 2020.

## Technical Advisor Meeting

In February 2021, RTCA, UCONN Engineering students, and Thompson community partners met with Scott Bushee of CT DOT and Laurie Giannotti of CT DEEP to discuss trail design guidelines and statewide recreation improvement recommendations at the Train Wreck Park site. Both Scott and Laurie shared helpful feedback and site recommendations about traffic calming measures, sustainable restroom facilities, trail surfacing, and recreation infrastructure specifications such as bench placement, picnic table installation, and parking accommodations.



**Putnam Rotary Interact Club:**  
Putnam County Rotary proudly sponsors INTERACT Clubs at **Putnam County Junior High School and Putnam County High School...**

...passing the torch of community service and civil responsibility to the next generation ....

...mentoring tomorrow's leaders today!

On Saturday, Sept 26, 2020, the Putnam Rotary Interact Club and friends hiked a portion of the Air Line State Park Trail in Thompson to the Tri State Marker with guidance of Ranger John Kochinskas.

It was a beautiful 2 mile hike through a very picturesque part of Thompson. Ranger John gave the club background information about the trail, and the history of the area, and the history of the train wreck.



**The Putnam Rotary Interact Club at the Tri-State Marker with Ranger John Kochinskas.**

### **Thoughts on the Trail:**

#### Areas for improvement:

1. **Parking**, No clear area to park, dangerous curve to pull out of parking area.
2. **Crosswalk**: Very dangerous to cross from parking to entrance of trail. Sharp curve, Need better warning signs.
3. **Signage**: Better signage to let people know where the Train Wreck occurred, easy to drive by.
4. **Tri-State Marker**: Missing geodetic marker signifying actual point of the 3 states. It's chiseled it out.
5. **Port-a-Potty**: Should be open year round.

#### Wish list:

1. **Elevated walk-way** across the road for safer entry to trail from parking area.
2. A **small museum building** with pictures and the animated video depicting the actual train wreck so people can really visualize what happened.
3. **Restroom** included in the building. **Trash receptacles**.



**“More than a Train wreck”  
Community Presentation  
Partnership with UCONN School  
of Engineering and the Putnam  
Rotary Interact Club Youth:**

In a virtual Zoom presentation, recommendations were shared by the UCONN School of Engineering for parking and pedestrian safety improvements, suggestions were shared on behalf of the youth at the Putnam Rotary Interact Club for making the Great East Thompson Train Wreck site and the Tri-State Marker trail more of a destination, and final recommendations were shared by NPS RTCA for a phased approach to creating amenities at the train wreck site. The presentation was on May 12, 2021 and had over 30 attendees that lived in Thompson and neighboring communities.

**Various Phone Calls with  
Technical Advisors**

The planning team met with various technical advisors to create the recommendations you are reading in this plan, including economic development professionals, a Director of Parks and Recreation from East Hampton, CT (which is also along the Air Line State Park Trail), a health professional, members of the Air Line State Park Trail 12 Town Task Force, community planners from the National Park Service, and more!



**Members of the planning team from NPS RTCA exploring trails in the Town of Thompson in August of 2021. Information from site visits, research, and many conversations with community members and technical advisors informed the recommendations made in this action plan.**



A photograph of two people standing in a forest, looking at a historical marker. The person on the left is an older man with white hair, wearing a plaid shirt and jeans. The person on the right is wearing a bright orange long-sleeved shirt with the text "TAKE A HIKE" and "THOMPSON TRAIL" on the back, blue pants, and a green cap. The marker is a wooden frame containing a photograph of a train wreck and some text. The background is a dense forest with many trees and green foliage.

# TELLING THE TRAIN WRECK STORY



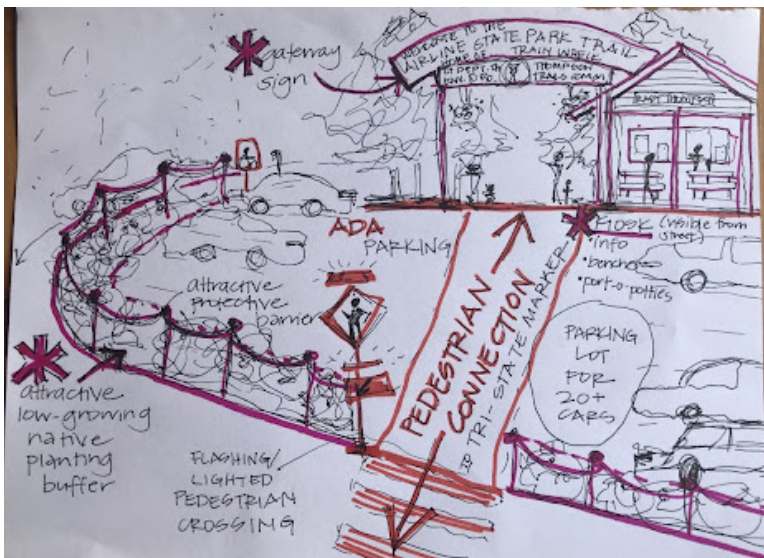
# STARTING WITH A CONCEPT



Currently, the existing parking and access to the train wreck site and popular Tri-State Marker trail floods, has a lot of pot holes, and is located off a busy road that is not safe for pedestrians.



An example of a successful visitor center/pavilion along the ALSPT in Putnam.



A rough concept sketch that was used to gather community input at a workshop in November 2020.

To create the concept for the "Great East Thompson Train Wreck Park," or Train Wreck Park, the National Park Service RTCA staff (RTCA) met with the Thompson Train Wreck Working Group, comprised of the Town of Thompson Planner, Trails Committee, Economic Development Committee, Historical Society, and other community members. The site is a great community asset and priority, and a way to create excitement for the ALSPT. The group visited the site and noted problems to the existing dirt parking lot such as drainage issues and safe access off of busy E. Thompson Road. Examples were also shared by working group members of places they loved along the Air Line State Park trail, such as the new visitor center in Putnam.

A rough design sketch (left) was created encapsulating the following goals based on the vision from the working group:

## Goals for designing the Thompson Train Wreck "Park":

- Interpret the history of Thompson in a way that the community loves.
- Promote the "Trail Town" concept, encouraging recreation and connecting to the other amenities in Thompson.
- Utilize options on public land.
- Focus on what can be done quickly!
- Focus on creating a welcoming, safe and family-friendly environment with a feeling that "you have arrived."
- Create a sense of place unique to Thompson.
- Curb appeal!



# PHASE ONE: THE TRAIN WRECK STORY

What the working group learned at the community workshop in November of 2020 is that **“Windows to the Past,”** or large-scale historic images of the train wreck, were the most-loved option for interpretation along the trail.

**Other popular options were audio tours, guided tours, and historic replicas of the train wreck.**

Taking community feedback into account, seven new signs will be designed and placed along the East Thompson portion of the Airline State Park Trail. **See the map below to see where they are located.** This map is just a guide; signs will be placed with the help of the Thompson Historical Society and the Town of Thompson to ensure that they are user friendly and represent the event accurately.

Images of the interpretive signs are on the following pages 26-29.



Above: An example of a “Window to the Past” along the Manhan Rail Trail in Easthampton, MA.



The sign’s QR codes should link to the Thompson Historical Society webpage about the train wreck:

<https://thompsonhistorical.org/great-east-thompson-4-engine-wreck/>

Additional information should be available, including a **Spanish translation of the train wreck story.**



# THE GREAT EAST THOMPSON FOUR-TRAIN WRECK OF 1891

On a cold foggy morning on December 4th, 1891 near the site of the East Thompson train station, four trains would meet with disastrous consequences! Travel the next section of trail to learn more about this historical event. Be sure to stop and look through the windows-to-the-past!

The train station in East Thompson was an important stop and transfer point on the New York & New England Railroad. The main line tracks were in front of the station and the track for the Southbridge Branch was behind it. A turntable located just west of here and another one in Southbridge allowed local trains to reverse direction between these two points.

A look at the bustling East Thompson train station in the late 1800s.



Mike Gravitas operates a handcar in the late 1800s, in front of the East Thompson train station.



Today the Town of Thompson is a welcoming, green and growing community, brimming with opportunities for those who are looking to live, work, play or visit here.

We are:

- \*A community with a terrific quality of life.
- \*Home to excellent schools.
- \*A river valley trail town with numerous natural resources and amenities.
- \*A business-friendly community with a favorable regulatory environment.
- \*Committed to achieving growth in a way that is green, sustainable and innovative.

To learn more about the Town of Thompson head to our website: [www.thompsonct.org](http://www.thompsonct.org). You can also follow us on Facebook and Instagram under the Town of Thompson!



Photos, maps, and historical research provided by the Thompson Historical Society.

Additional editorial support from Robert Joseph Beletable and Tyler City Station.

Made with support from Thompson's Economic Development Commission, the National Park Service - Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, and CT Humanities.

[cthumanities](http://cthumanities.org)

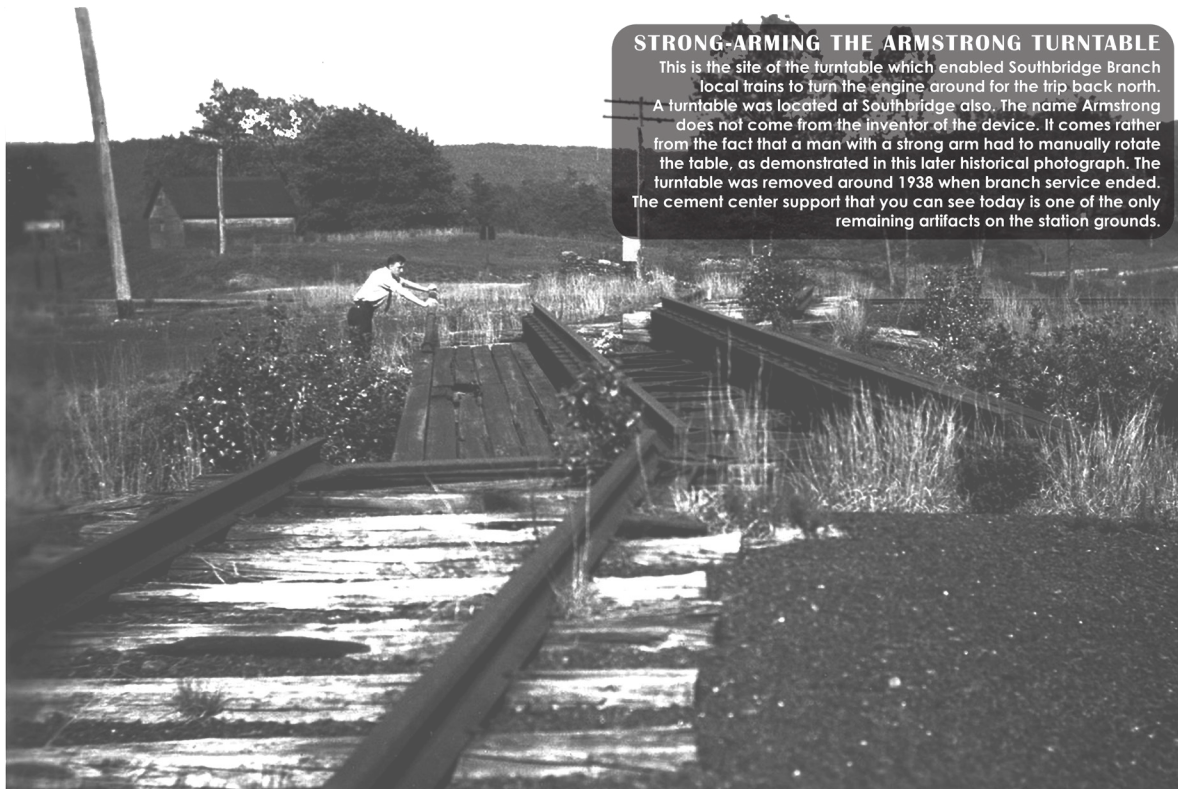
To learn more about the Great East Thompson Four-Train Wreck or hear it described, visit the Historical Society website: [www.thompsonhistorical.org](http://www.thompsonhistorical.org) or scan the QR code!



Para español escanee el código QR.

(Signs 1 & 7, the "bookends," as of 08.13.2021)

Sign two is called a 'window to the past,' it's a historical image that has been made transparent and is copied onto a strong clear sign material. This was the most popular interpretive feature that was chosen by the community workshop participants. When trail users look through the sign, they should be able to see what the site would have looked like in the past. Sign two looks at the Armstrong Turntable, which is one of the only remaining artifacts at the site today.



## STRONG-ARMING THE ARMSTRONG TURNTABLE

This is the site of the turntable which enabled Southbridge Branch local trains to turn the engine around for the trip back north. A turntable was located at Southbridge also. The name Armstrong does not come from the inventor of the device. It comes rather from the fact that a man with a strong arm had to manually rotate the table, as demonstrated in this later historical photograph. The turntable was removed around 1938 when branch service ended. The cement center support that you can see today is one of the only remaining artifacts on the station grounds.

(Sign 2, as of 08.13.2021)





(Image of the original East Thompson train depot sign.)

Sign three will be a recreated replica of the original East Thompson train depot sign.

Sign four is a window to the past, looking at the station. The picture depicts just an average day at the station, there are two trains, people milling around...and no sign that there may be a train wreck! This window does include the original East Thompson sign, if correctly aligned the replica sign can fit into the window when viewing from the other side.



(Sign 4, as of 08.13.2021)



# "FOUR TRAINS SMASHED UP;

## DISASTROUS ACCIDENT ON THE NEW-ENGLAND ROAD. TWO FREIGHT TRAINS COLLIDED, THEN TWO PASSENGER TRAINS RAN INTO THE WRECK -- THREE MEN KILLED AND SEVERAL INJURED."

THE NEW YORK TIMES, DECEMBER 5, 1891

In the early morning of December 4, 1891, the New York & New England RR division dispatcher in East Hartford, Connecticut needed to get two passenger trains and one freight train on their way to Boston as quickly as possible from Putnam CT. Meanwhile, at the East Thompson station, Southbridge Local crew members were customarily using the westbound track while they assembled their freight train. No eastbound trains were expected to come through on the westbound main line track, though they had occasionally been allowed to in the past. The dispatcher sent the Boston Freight train first, with permission to travel eastbound on the westbound main line track. The crew had instructions to run slowly so the two passenger trains could pass it by the time it reached East Douglas, Massachusetts, when it would switch back to the eastbound track. Unfortunately, the dispatcher had forgotten that the Southbridge Local train might still be sitting on the westbound main line track!

At East Thompson, an assistant station agent, walking the tracks to open the station just after 6:30 am, was horrified to see the headlight of the Boston Freight racing towards the Southbridge Local. The violent crash occurred at approximately 6:40 am. As the trains collided, cars and debris from the trains flew across both tracks. When East Thompson station personnel realized that two more trains were headed their way, they ran down the track with lanterns in hand and frantically tried to warn them to stop. It was unfortunately too late. Within a few minutes, the first passenger train, the Long Island and Eastern States Express, arrived going about fifty miles per hour and crashed into the wreckage.

The engine from the Long Island Express ricocheted off the wreckage and turned around 135 degrees, driver wheels still spinning furiously and burying it nose-first into the roadbed! Three minutes later, also traveling at fifty miles per hour, the second passenger train, the Norwich Boat Train, arrived and crashed into the rear of the Long Island Express. The monstrous crash resulted in about 500 feet of damaged track and debris scattered everywhere.



A view of the Long Island Express engine after the crash. The engine is flipped on its side and facing the opposite direction from which it was traveling.

Photo colored by AI Weave for Virtual Station.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1891/12/05/archive/https://search.proquest.com/new-england-railroad/docview/28444444?pq-origsite=scholarship&openpopovers=true>



A diagram of the trains at 6:40 am.

The image depicts a fireman extinguishing flames from the fiery crash at approximately 11:00 am, nearly four hours after the original collision.

A view of the engine of the Boston Freight after impact with the Southbridge Local. The engine's headlight is on the ground.

All four engines are depicted in this photo, amidst the chaos and rubble. The white material in the wreckage is cotton, from the Southbridge Local.

The wreckage was cleared quickly and by 2:00 pm on the day of the crash, big wreck cranes had put most of the engines and cars upright.

To learn more about the Great East Thompson Four-Train Wreck or hear it described, visit the Historical Society website. [www.thompsonhistorical.org](http://www.thompsonhistorical.org) or scan the QR code!

Para español escanee el código QR.



**PAGE 28 |** Thompson Trail Town Action Plan 2021



Sign six is the third window to the past--a photo of the actual wreckage:

**IN THE AIR AND OFF THE TRACKS...**

This is a view of the wreck of the Long Island and Eastern States Express. The engine went airborne when it hit the wreckage on the track, spun around 135 degrees, and buried itself in the roadbed. Engineer Harry Taber and fireman Gerry Fitzgerald were killed.



(Sign 6, as of 08.13.2021)

These seven signs will be designed, fabricated, and installed during the summer and fall of 2021. There will be an opening event featured as part of the 2021 Walktober calendar. The windows and three interpretive signs were fabricated by a local vendor and designed by NPS-RTCA with guidance from the Thompson Historical Society.

While the signs are prone to damage, human or nature caused, with proper care and maintenance they can last anywhere from ten to twenty years.

There are other opportunities for more signage near the train wreck including: the wood cart bridge, two wooden cow tunnels, further interpretation of the turntable, the stone culvert, and the tri-state marker.





(Images of the wood cart bridge, the tri-state markers, and the stone culvert.)

**RESOURCE:** National Park Service Guide for Wayside Exhibits: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/hfc/upload/Wayside-Guide-First-Edition.pdf>

### Guidance on writing text for interpretive signage:

- Keep your audience in mind when creating interpretive text. They will most likely not be the same audience who are attending the guided train wreck tours.
- Attention spans for an exhibit panel are shorter than we think. Placing the interpretive panels outside and having your audience actively moving past panels on foot, bikes, or horses, their attention span will be even shorter!
- Images, brief text, QR codes, and creative signage will be the way to reach trail users.
- Think of outdoor interpretive signage as a 'tool' to help tell the story of the Thompson Train wreck and the town of Thompson. They are also useful tools for the train wreck tours.
- Rewrite and rewrite, have different groups help with writing, editing, and proofing.
- Written language used should be around an 8th grade reading level or lower. This allows a broader group of people to understand the text.
- Some questions to consider when writing text and choosing images: What story do we want to tell? What do visitors want to see? What is the big picture takeaway? What do you tell people about Thompson when we meet them?



## Other general interpretive recommendations:

- The train wreck tours that have taken place in the past have proven to be very successful, continuing the walking tours with the removable signage. The more interpretation tools that are readily available along the trail, will make the train wreck walking tours even more engaging! Keep up the good work!
- Work on creating new events or tours about the train wreck or Thompson, the Historical Society has an immense amount of well preserved and available images and stories.
- We are recommending that Spanish language translations be added to at least the digital train wreck exhibition on the Thompson Historical Society website. Other languages can be added if found necessary.
- Work on connecting the train wreck and site to special places in town, like the exhibition at the old high school.
- Consider adding other accessible interpretation options at the site of the wreck, for example a metal display of the wreck that can be felt by people with vision issues, children, and the public. Accessible interpretation benefits everyone!



(Train wreck walking tour images)



(Images of special historical sites in Thompson)



## RECREATING THE RAILROAD!

The Thompson Historical Society is spearheading an effort to restore the historic railroad turntable. This re-creation will give the visitor an idea of the scale and feel of the railroad infrastructure that once was! This feature is currently being constructed and an agreement with an adjacent landowner is underway to create public access for visitors.



To the left are photos of the large stones that will be used to recreate the historic turntable.







## Phase One Ribbon Cutting!

On October 3, 2021, The Town of Thompson, Thompson Historical Society, and Thompson Trails Committee welcomed the public to a ribbon cutting for the new interpretive signs, the first phase for the Train Wreck Park! Together they celebrated with National Park Service, CT Humanities, and Elected Officials, with a guided tour from historian Tom Chase and live music from song writing contest winner Mark Moriarty!



**LOCATION MAP**  
SCALE: 1" = 1000'

**TOWN OF THOMPSON - SENIOR DESIGN PROJECT**  
THOMPSON, WINDHAM COUNTY, CONNECTICUT

**SK-1**

**This parking plan includes the following proposals:**

- An elevated, ADA-accessible raised and textured pedestrian walkway with warning strip to slow traffic
- A parking lot with thirty 9' x 18' parking spots
- Two ADA- accessible parking spaces
- Trash receptacles and restrooms
- Horse trailer parking and turnaround area
- Vegetated bioswale for storm runoff

- The elements in this conceptual plan should be refined by a **licensed engineer and landscape architect**.
- Parking and horse trailer area should be refined further by **experts from the equestrian community**.
- **Trash receptacle and restroom locations** should ultimately be decided by Thompson Trail Committee for best user experience and maintenance needs.
- A licensed engineer could consider adding **additional traffic calming measures** such as flashing pedestrian crosswalk signs.



An example of a textured and elevated walkway which slows down traffic and makes it easier for pedestrians to cross the street.



An example of a bioswale with attractive native plantings that absorbs water from the parking lot and roadway.





To address concerns about illegal ATV use and vandalism on the trail, the design team recommended adding **welcoming signage, such as wooden gateway**, that create a sense of ownership and a feeling that you are being watched by other trail users.

The design team also recommended **installing removable bollards** that do not allow an ATV to pass through, but are removable in case an emergency vehicle must access the trail.



**TOP: Proposed gateway entrance sign and removable bollards at the Air Line State Park Trail at the train wreck site. Ideally the gateway sign could be created by a local craftsman to celebrate the heritage of Thompson. BELOW: Removable wooden bollards along the East Coast Greenway in South Carolina.**



# PHASE TWO: THE TRAIL DEPOT

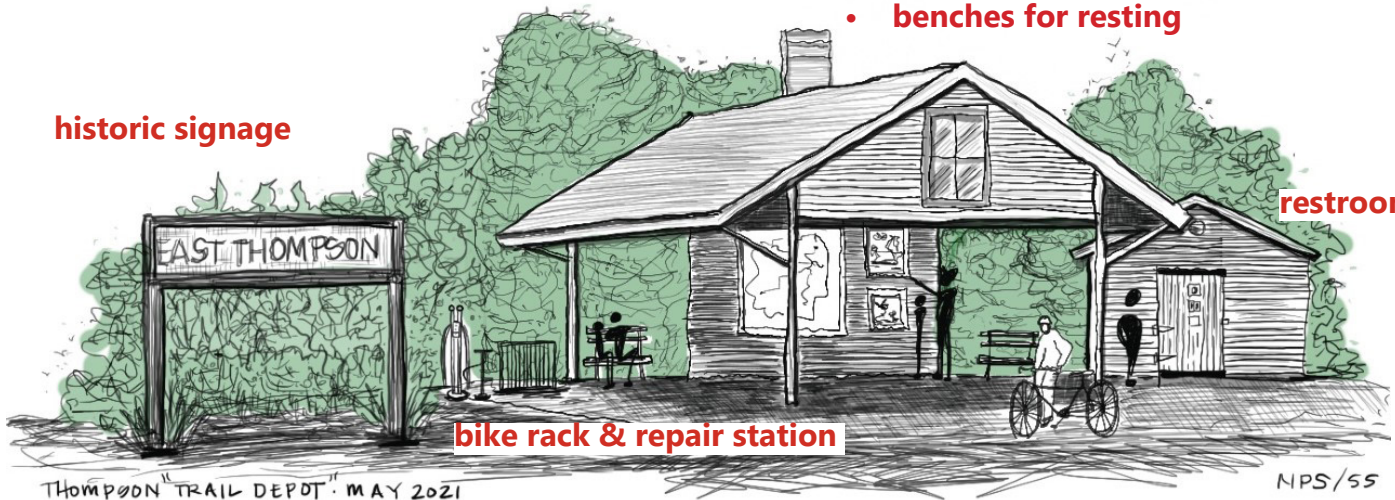
## HISTORIC TRAIL DEPOT

- recreated historic train depot
- info kiosk
- benches for resting

historic signage

restrooms

bike rack & repair station



The inspiration for the Thompson Trail Depot: The Putnam trail pavilion (top) and the historic East Thompson train depot (bottom).

Results from the Train Wreck Park community workshop in November 2020 for **most-loved amenities** were 1) **historically-accurate train depot** and 2) **restrooms**.

In response, for Phase II, the design team recommends recreating the historic train depot into **a place for visitors to spend time and find information about the trail**, including trail rules and information, maps of the trail and information about Thompson, and historic information. This "trail depot" would serve as a hub for trail visitors the way the historic train depot served train passengers! The design team also recommends **creating a place for people to rest and use the restroom** (a **year-round composting toilet** would be best!).

To accommodate trail users, **bicycle racks and repair stations** are recommended. Adding replicas of the **historic signage** and creating a **historic trail depot** based on the East Thompson Train Depot will help give the park a feeling that the visitor is stepping back through time, while getting all of the information and services that will make them want to return again and again.



# PHASE THREE: THE PAVILION



Community stakeholders expressed a desire for a quiet place to eat and enjoy the Air Line State Park Trail. In response, the design team recommends installing a **Pavilion**, which could serve to host events, tour groups, or simply be a quiet, protected area to enjoy the scenery.

The pavilion could also include movable benches, which is important for allowing visitors to arrange seating and tables based on the size of their party. Trash receptacles could be provided, as well as a built-in grill.



One great example of a covered picnic area/pavilion is at Quaddick State Park in Thompson.



The image features a wooden historical marker for 'WEST THOMPSON VILLAGE'. The marker has a gabled roof and three panels of information. The left panel is titled 'Early West Thompson' and includes a map of the area. The middle panel is titled 'West Thompson Village' and shows a historical illustration of a village. The right panel is titled 'Places of Historical Interest' and lists several locations. The entire image is framed by a decorative border of black wagon wheels. The text 'TRAIL TOWN RECOMMENDATIONS' is overlaid in large, bold, black capital letters across the center of the image.

# **TRAIL TOWN RECOMMENDATIONS**



## RECREATION RECOMMENDATIONS

### SHORT-TERM GOALS (0-6 MONTHS)

*Complete by January 2022*

- Install **interpretive signs** at the site of the Great East Thompson train wreck & hold a celebratory ribbon cutting! **COMPLETE!**
- Complete and establish a MOU with the property owners of the **former turntable site**, allowing storage of the historic stone components to recreate that element of the East Thompson Depot
- Write and submit a grant to the **CT DEEP Recreational Trails Grant** program for additional improvements to the Train Wreck site, including: Final engineering, design and implementation for improvements to the parking area, traffic calming elements, trail depot, turntable and pavilion.
- Write and submit a grant to the **CT DOT Community Connectivity Program** to seek funding to fabricate and install the town-wide wayfinding system designed by CME/CHA in 2020.
- Create an inventory of GIS data with **all recreation amenities** in Thompson (The Last Green Valley has great information on their web site!) that is accessible to the town planner.

### MID-TERM GOALS (0-2 YEARS)

*Complete by Fall 2023*

- Construct the restored historic **turntable**.
- Begin construction of recommended **parking area improvements and traffic calming measures**.
- Being fabrication and installation of **town-wide wayfinding elements**.
- Install **bike racks and repair stations** at entrances to the Air Line State Park Trail and downtown.
- **Plan one or more new public events** to be hosted at the Train Wreck site, as part of CT Trails Day, Walktober or other high-profile programs.
- Coordinate with Putnam, Douglas, and other neighboring towns to work on a **pedestrian connectivity plan**.
- Install **trash cans** along the Air Line State Park Trail.
- Create a sustainable **trails maintenance plan, incorporating feedback from DPW and CT DEEP**.
- Create a **Thompson litter removal program such as Litter League**, engaging young people and families.

### LONG TERM GOALS (2-5+ YEARS)

- Identify opportunities for **bike lanes/complete streets** to connect recreation and cultural destinations and services such as schools, libraries, etc.
- Complete installation of the **Trail Depot**.
- Install **year-round composting toilet facilities** along the Air Line State Park Trail.
- Install a **covered picnic area** at the train wreck site.
- **Create a gateway, or visitor center, in Thompson to the regional trail network** encompassing the Southern New England Trunk Trail and Mid-State Trail in MA, North-South Trail in RI, and Air Line State Park Trail in CT. Connect with the Titanic Rail Trail in Southbridge, MA and coordinate efforts with the East Coast Greenway. Provide information for surrounding trails and encourage using Thompson as an entry point for accessing the regional trail system.





## LOCAL BUSINESS & MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS

### SHORT-TERM GOALS (0-6 MONTHS)

*Complete by January 2022*

- Improve the **landing page for the z-fold brochure**.
- **Create an inventory and reach out to owners of all available existing lodging:** camping, Hip Camp, Air BNB, Bed and Breakfasts, VRBO, etc.
- Launch **entrepreneurship program** for the 11th village with TEEG and Thompson High School.
- **Add trail information to the CT Trailfinder website.**
- Highlight **opportunities for fishing** on social media.
- **Highlight the historical points of interest** and exhibits at the old high school through social media.
- Photograph the creation of the **Train Wreck Park** and share on social media.
- Promote **recreation opportunities along the river.**

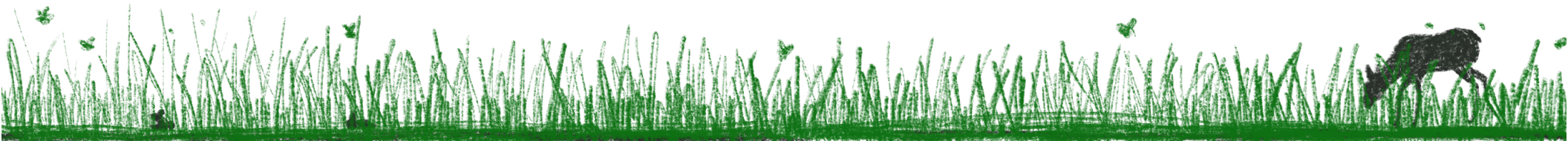
### MID-TERM GOALS (0-2 YEARS)

*Complete by Fall 2023*

- Apply for assistance from and/or adopt the **EPA's Local Foods, Local Places Toolkit** to support development and growth of local food systems: <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places-toolkit>
- Coordinate with TLGV to market on **recreation opportunities that are trail adjacent**, such as agritourism, disc golf, etc.
- Promote **renovating historic homes** into lodging accommodations and event venues.
- Market the **trails as spaces and venue for every day activities** such as walking meetings, yoga classes, social gatherings, meditations, etc. and **hold regularly-occurring weekly or monthly events.**
- Develop a strategy to attract **recreation-focused businesses**, third spaces, etc.
- Continue hosting and developing events to **feature and promote local businesses.**

### LONG TERM GOALS (2-5+ YEARS)

- Create an update to the existing **z-fold brochure, and coordinate to include remaining towns along ALSPT.**
- **Hire someone** who can consistently post and monitor social media and **create a communications strategy** for the Town.
- Connect to **mill revitalization efforts.**
- **Attract a large developer** who can address greater needs.
- Establish a **bicycle repair shop or pop-up station.**
- **Prioritize broadband internet** (see EPA's Cool & Connected program: <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/cool-connected>)





## GRANT AND STEWARDSHIP RESOURCES

### LOCAL

- **EASTCONN:** a public, non-profit, Regional Education Service Center, which has been serving the education needs of northeastern CT schools and communities since 1980: 860-455-0707; <https://www.eastconn.org/>
- **Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce:** <https://chamberect.com/>
- **The Chamber of Commerce, Inc. Windham Region:** <https://windhamchamber.com/>
- **Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments:** NECCOG offers member initiatives and services, transportation planning and project assistance, engineering support, land use planning expertise, economic development, emergency preparedness, and transportation coordination services. <https://neccog.org>
- **CT Humanities:** CT Humanities is an independent nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The organization connect individuals and communities to the humanities through programs and initiatives, grants, partnerships, and collaborative programs. <https://cthumanities.org/>

### STATEWIDE

- **CT DEEP'S CT Recreational Trails Grant Funding:** funding provided for Planning, design and construction of new trails (motorized and non-motorized); maintenance and restoration of existing trails (motorized and non-motorized); access to trails by persons with disabilities; purchase and lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment; acquisition of land or easements for a trail, or for trail corridors; operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection as related to recreational trails. <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Outdoor-Recreation/Trails/CRT--Funding>
- **CT Dept. of Transportation Funding Opportunities:** There are several available grant programs including: Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program; Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTICIP); Community Connectivity Program; and National Recreational Trails Program. <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Outdoor-Recreation/Trails/CRT--Funding>

### NATIONWIDE

- **Grants.gov:** <https://www.grants.gov/>
- **National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA):** <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Grant-Fundraising-Resources/>
- **U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA):** American Rescue Plan Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Program: <https://eda.gov/arpa/travel-tourism/>
- **USDA Rural Development:** Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program: provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program>
- **EPA's Smart Growth in Small Towns and Rural Communities:** A suite of technical assistance programs and tools geared towards strengthening rural economies, provide better quality of life, and build on local assets: <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-small-towns-and-rural-communities>

