

West Hartford, Connecticut

Community Highlights

Community Description	<p>West Hartford, Connecticut, has a population of around 64,000 people. This suburban town is known for its vibrant center that combines retail and residential spaces uniquely, making it a popular local destination. West Hartford features a well-planned road network with major routes such as Interstate 84 and Route 44 facilitating easy access to neighboring cities and attractions. The town also has numerous public transportation options, including bus, bus rapid transit, and commuter rail.</p>	
Vision Zero Adoption		Vision Zero Target
2023		2033
Challenges	<p>From 2018 to 2022, the number of fatal and serious crashes in West Hartford more than doubled, and more than half of the fatal and serious injury crashes occurred on the same 17 miles of roadway.¹</p>	
Safe System Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety practices and policies • Safe design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety culture • Safety data
Funding	<p>The Vision Zero Action Plan includes a comprehensive list of projects to be prioritized and the respective funding sources (or where additional funding, staffing, or legislative support is needed). In 2023, the Town of West Hartford was awarded USDOT Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) grants to “Conduct Demonstration or Other Supplemental Planning Activities” for their Speed Management Pilot Program. The town is pursuing a 2024 SS4A grant applying actions from its Vision Zero Plan.</p>	

Lessons Learned

- If a formal plan is not in place yet, it is important to start somewhere. The urgency in addressing safety concerns in West Hartford led to the adoption of Vision Zero prior to the development of an Action Plan.
- Taking advantage of existing plans and policies related to Vision Zero helps build the foundation for a Vision Zero Action Plan. Reviewing Vision Zero plans from peer communities is also very helpful to build the framework of a new plan.
- Getting started and planning ahead can be key for success when “right place, right time” funding opportunities become available.
- Although the Action Plan is finalized, members of the Vision Zero Task Force from the town and community will continue meeting with a Vision Zero Advisory Committee to review and comment on the town’s efforts to complete the Action Plan’s recommendations.
- It takes time to implement the Safe System approach and reach the goal of eliminating road fatalities and serious injuries. However, it is important to get the community on board and explain how the Safe System approach can have meaningful impacts. Seeing change, especially in the first year of implementation of a Vision Zero Action Plan, is critical for the community to start seeing real physical changes. Quick build improvements are examples of implementing change visible to the community as you build the foundation of a Safe System.

Phase I: Getting Started

Leadership

- The Town of West Hartford had experienced an upward trend in fatal and serious injury crashes. In December 2022, West Hartford was mourning the recent loss of two pedestrians struck by vehicles in the days leading up to the holiday. The community protested for safer streets where a pedestrian was killed in a hit and run crash. On Christmas Day, a violent head-on crash took the lives of three West Hartford residents, which was a tipping point for town and police officials. That day, the mayor announced the creation of a Vision Zero Initiative in West Hartford.
- Led by the Town Manager and the Director of Community Development, town staff proposed a Vision Zero Initiative in Support of Safe, Health and Equitable Mobility with the goal of eliminating fatalities and severe injuries on West Hartford streets by 2033.
- In January 2023, the Town Council unanimously adopted the proposed Vision Zero Initiative.²

Ready Implementors

- Following adoption of the Vision Zero Initiative, the mayor appointed a Vision Zero Task Force to produce a Vision Zero Action Plan.
- The Task Force included the Town Manager, Director of Community Development, police, fire, engineering, public relations, public works, and the new town Office of Equity Advancement. The Task Force also had several volunteer residents with varying backgrounds including people with expertise in planning, media, disability rights, high school students, bicycle and pedestrian advocates, public health, and a behavioral specialist.

Action

- In March 2023, the town formed Vision Zero subcommittees to address the four key themes: practices and policies, safe design, culture, and data. Each subcommittee had a town liaison.
- In May 2023, the town selected a consultant team to help develop the Vision Zero Action Plan.
- The Vision Zero Action Plan was finalized and approved in January 2024.¹

Phase II: Building Support

Starting Simply

- There was urgency to address safety concerns in West Hartford with the upward trend in fatal and serious injury crashes. Committing to Vision Zero was the first step, even though the process to accomplish the goal of eliminating fatalities and severe injuries on West Hartford streets was not developed yet.
- West Hartford already had other plans that addressed mobility challenges, such as a Complete Streets Policy and Annual Reports,³ Maintenance and Protection of Traffic Policy,⁴ Plan of Conservation & Development,⁵ West Hartford Center Infrastructure Master Plan,⁶ Bicycle Facilities Plan,⁷ and Bicycle Friendly Community Application,⁸ Neighborhood Street Traffic Calming Program,⁹ and Sidewalk Policy,¹⁰ as well as a few transit and road diet studies.
- Instead of starting from scratch, the Vision Zero Task Force identified existing policies related to Vision Zero, which served as the foundation for the development of recommendations specific to Vision Zero.
- In addition, to develop a framework of the Action Plan, the Vision Zero Task Force reviewed plans from peer communities.
- During the development of the Vision Zero Action Plan, the Task Force identified numerous safety concerns and proposed that each should be evaluated individually. This caused town staff to become overwhelmed and slowed implementation plans. To address this issue, a simpler, more focused approach that would utilize Road Safety Audits (RSAs) and smaller roadway assessments was included in the Action Plan.
 - RSAs are an important way to assess safety conditions. The RSA team, which included town staff, community stakeholders, and a consultant team, selected the road segment along Park Road from Quaker Lane South to Prospect Avenue¹¹ to be the first location for a comprehensive RSA. Moving forward, although not having staff resources to conduct RSAs frequently, town staff committed to conduct two RSAs per year using a template developed by the consultant team.

Understanding Others' Perspectives

- To create a transportation system and culture that supports safe, enjoyable mobility options for all, especially the most vulnerable members of the community who experience disproportionate injury and death on roadways, the town has adopted Safe System approach principles.
- The different perspectives of the Vision Zero Task Force made sure to add layers of interest and expertise to assist with the partnerships of the Safe System approach.
 - During the development of the Vision Zero Action Plan, discussions strived for agreement, but consensus was not needed to move forward.
 - For the purposes of the Vision Zero Task Force, “consensus” was defined as the point where all members agreed on the best option for the group even if it was not each member’s personal favorite.
 - During the meetings, Task Force members used green, yellow, and red cards to indicate stance of support, neutral, or object. It is important to note that the consultant team did not provide feedback, just collected it. They did not steer the Task Force’s decisions.
 - If consensus could not be reached, then 2/3 of Task Force members present must have agreed on a decision for it to be considered a group recommendation. Any members who did not support the recommendation could prepare a separate written statement. All opinions were part of the meeting summary.

Engaging the Community, Celebrating, and Sharing Success

- Public engagement was a key element during the development of the Vision Zero Action Plan, focused on the following:
 - Raise awareness of Vision Zero and the town’s approach to traffic safety, building the foundation of a positive safety culture
 - Gather input from the community regarding traffic safety issues
 - Build consensus around recommendations and momentum to implement through shared responsibility; an important element was that the Vision Zero Task Force included a mix of Town of West Hartford staff and residents, people who are both impacted by and responsible for implementing Vision Zero policies and actions, which gave each member ownership of actions
- During the development of the Action Plan, the following strategies were used to engage the community:
 - A multilingual public survey
 - A web map where participants could identify locations where they felt safe, unsafe, or have an idea related to roadway safety
 - Two public meetings, including a final meeting to present the recommendations and solicit feedback
- The project team developed digital resources introducing the Vision Zero Action Plan and opportunities for community input. The main channels for distributing marketing materials were email and social media.
- The Town also developed a Vision Zero webpage² that includes information about the town’s Vision Zero Initiative, schedule to develop the Action Plan, as well as the town’s Vision Zero meeting agendas, presentations, and minutes.
- Local media attended public meetings and published articles¹² about the project.

Phase III: Institutionalizing the Safe System Approach

Building a Sustainable Coalition

- The Vision Zero Action Plan was developed as a roadmap to achieve zero roadway fatalities and serious injuries in West Hartford by 2033. It identifies a list of over 70 projects, mostly quick builds, to be completed by 2025. The Vision Zero Action Plan incorporates Vision Zero Focus Areas (VZFAs) to strategically determine where improvements in the street network are most needed. These areas are outlined in two distinct maps: VZFA Streets—which targets major roads—and VZFA Neighborhoods—which focuses on residential streets within neighborhoods. The prioritization of these areas is based on their presence on the High-Injury Network, areas that have garnered significant public input via the Webmap Survey, and locations within Transportation Equity Zones.
- The Vision Zero Task Force was tasked with developing the Action Plan from May 2023 through January 2024 through the following activities:
 - Act as a liaison to organizations and agencies, sharing information and soliciting feedback to inform the Action Plan
 - Identify actions specific to members' organizations or agencies
 - Conduct community engagement
 - Develop the vision, goals, policy-recommendations, actions, performance measures, and recommendations to get to zero
 - Continue as ongoing champions for implementation of the Action Plan actions within Task Force members' organizations or agencies, as applicable
 - Attend 9 out of 12 meetings from May 2023 through January 2024
- A subgroup of the Vision Zero Task Force, the Town Project Management Team (PMT) continuously ensured populations most impacted by traffic crashes (i.e. youth, seniors, transit-dependent) and key governmental entities were involved in the development of the Action Plan. The PMT served as facilitator of public meetings and provided opportunities for brief public comment or announcements relating to agenda items at the end of each meeting.
- Task Force members were always encouraged to interact and share outside of formal Task Force meetings.
- Although the Action Plan is finalized, the coalition will continue to work together and will continue the collaboration, coordination, and commitment to achieve the goal of eliminating fatal and severe injury crashes on West Hartford's roadways by 2033. Members of the Vision Zero Task Force from the town government and the community will continue meeting with the Vision Zero Advisory Committee, which will act as a steering committee to review and comment on the town's efforts to complete the Action Plan's recommendations.
- Continuous collaboration with the Capital Region Council of Governments and the Connecticut Department of Transportation are also important aspects of a sustainable coalition in West Hartford.

Securing Resources

- Planning ahead can be key for success when “right place, right time” funding opportunities become available.
- The Vision Zero Action Plan recommended camera enforcement and demonstrated that there were several areas where fatal (K) or severe injury (A) crashes occurred that could have been prevented with speed reduction.
- A few weeks prior to the USDOT SS4A grant solicitation deadline, the State of Connecticut passed legislation allowing camera enforcement.
- The town spent about three weeks working with its Vision Zero consultant to develop a SS4A grant application. Support from the Capital Region Council of Governments was important during the development of the SS4A grant application.
- In 2023, the Town of West Hartford was awarded SS4A grants to “Conduct Demonstration or Other Supplemental Planning Activities” for their Speed Management Pilot Program. The grant covers installation of cameras and additional staff needed to manage the program.
- The Town is pursuing a 2024 SS4A grant applying actions from its Vision Zero Plan.

Phase IV: Sustaining the Safe System Approach

Use an Evidence-Based Approach

- Developed by community and agency leaders and led by a team of consultants, the Vision Zero Action Plan is data-driven, human-inspired, bold, innovative, and action-oriented. Crash data from Connecticut's Statewide Data Repository was used to inform strategies and actions in the Action Plan.
- In addition, the Action Plan includes recommendations on how West Hartford will improve and diversify its data sources, collection strategies, analysis, and data reporting to make better decisions about roadway safety.
- For the speed management pilot program, the Office of the State Traffic Administration will provide guidance to the town regarding determination of appropriate locations for the camera installation. Need for camera deployment must be demonstrated based on data.
- Transparency is a key element of West Hartford Vision Zero efforts. The Town developed a Vision Zero Crash Dashboard¹³ to display locations of crashes and relevant statistics to the public.

Prepare for the Long Haul

- Since the early stages of Vision Zero adoption in West Hartford, the mayor said "nobody wants this implementation done more than the elected officials" and "I wanted things done tomorrow." The mayor followed with "it's systemic... there's a big picture."¹⁴ The Vision Zero Task Force worked with the understanding that the process for eliminating roadway fatalities and serious injuries takes time since the town does not control all of the roads, data needs to be provided, the community needs to be engaged, funding needs to be secured, and actions need to be implemented.
- The Vision Zero Action Plan is intended to be a living document and may change over time as the town implements the actions. The Annual Report may steer decision making for changes to the Action Plan.

Commit to the Safe System Approach

- The Vision Zero Action Plan was developed with the Safe System approach as a foundation. The Task Force focused on a holistic solution that does not seek to prevent all collisions, but rather serious and fatal crashes. It assumes people will not have perfect behavior, and it will be proactive about it. Members of the Vision Zero Task Force mentioned that the Vision Zero Initiative in West Hartford follows the data, "not just the loudest and most powerful voices" and that creating plans based only on the loudest voices, "traditionally that has not resulted in a reduction of fatalities and serious injuries."

Overcome Resistance to Change

- Although most West Hartford residents were happy with the Vision Zero Action Plan recommendations, there was frustration from a few community members. Many residents had the perception that the town can change roadways quickly and eliminate roadway fatalities and serious injuries quickly.
- The final planned Vision Zero Task Force meeting occurred two days after a pedestrian was fatally hit by a car in West Hartford. Since the community had been involved in the development of the Action Plan for the previous year, they found it unacceptable that someone was still dying on the town's roads. The meeting was filled with residents' frustration about the town's "inaction."
- To address these concerns, West Hartford activated one element of the Vision Zero Action Plan for implementation within the first year: planned quick builds, mostly related to crash response, speeding, and bicycle or pedestrian issues. The Town convened a crash response team to examine the factors involved in any serious incident to prevent a recurrence. The crash response team of representatives from various town departments – including police, fire, engineering, public works, and public relations – met the week following the fatal crash to discuss immediate quick-build improvements.

Additional Resources

- The town just adopted their Vision Zero Action Plan, and they know there is a lot of work ahead. The Town staff is excited about making positive changes and works well together. Their goal is to improve safety through a transparent process, always engaging the community. Although the SS4A grants will ensure the first months of the Speed Management Pilot Program are funded, the long-term goal is to use revenue from the program to make it self-sustained.
- The town hired a new full-time Civil Engineer to assist with planning and implementation of the Plan's Engineering Actions.
- Additional resources for [West Hartford, Connecticut](#)

References

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