

CONNECTICUT CULTURAL DISTRICTS – STANDARDS & CRITERIA

CT Office of the Arts / Department of Economic & Community Development

(updated January 2026)

CULTURAL DISTRICT LEGISLATIVE STATUTE – [An Act Concerning the Establishment of Municipal Cultural Districts](#) effective October 2019

CULTURAL DISTRICT DEFINITION

A Cultural District is a specific area of a city or town, identified by the municipality, that has a number of cultural facilities, activities, and/or assets – both for profit and nonprofit. It is a walkable, compact center of artistic and cultural activities that contribute to social vibrancy and economic health of the community. A Cultural District fosters community wealth by attracting people and businesses, so the community can profit from its own cultural enterprise. It is a special place where community members congregate. And as each community is unique, each Cultural District looks different.

REASONS TO ESTABLISH A CULTURAL DISTRICT

- Promote & encourage artists, entrepreneurs and creative businesses
- Promote tourism and increase visitation
- Improve quality of life for residents
- Strengthen the distinctive character of communities
- Create a plan to drive economic growth and expand tax base
- Highlight culture & history of your community
- Support [Sustainable CT Certification](#)
- Contribute to CT's cultural assets

The municipality must assess their readiness to establish a Cultural District.

1. Confirm if your municipality is eligible by reviewing the Standards & Criteria
2. Assess the inventory and location of cultural assets in the community
3. Submit a Letter of Intent to establish a Cultural District to your [Designated Regional Service Organization](#) (DRSO).

STANDARDS & CRITERIA

- Must be in Connecticut
- The proposed district must have defined boundaries, must be walkable and accessible, must have cultural facilities and assets, and should have public infrastructure and amenities
- The municipality must hold at least one community input meeting
- Municipality must vote to approve the Cultural District by passing a resolution following the community input meetings
- The municipality must form a Cultural District Commission
- The proposed district must meet the requirements of Cultural District definition

For Cultural Districts that span more than one municipality, each municipality must pass a supporting resolution. For municipalities that have more than one Cultural District, a single resolution is sufficient.

An inventory of cultural assets must be identified and indicated on a map. The map will show the boundaries of the proposed Cultural District and where the district is located in the municipality. Color maps are best. Include a key to the assets and define a scale of distance. Show the location of cultural assets, both for profit and nonprofit. The map should include the following:

- Cultural facilities
- Artistic spaces
- Creative businesses
- Historic sites
- Locations of cultural activities (indoor and outdoor events, festivals, etc.) If applicable, list the events and activities that take place at each location.

Applicants may mark cultural assets that are located outside the proposed district on the map.

Many municipalities have access to Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and tools. Google maps or other asset mapping software may be utilized. Your DRSO may be able to help identify and help facilitate the list of assets.

CULTURAL DISTRICT COMMISSION

The municipality must establish a Cultural District Commission. A Cultural District Commission may be established through *one of three models*, and in accordance with the municipality's governance structure and the State's statutory requirements:

1. Create new Board/Commission in accordance with local charter requirements. This requires new volunteers to serve as Commissioners. [Suggested]
2. Assign to an existing Board/Commission and create an Advisory Council subcommittee reporting to the existing Board/Commission. This creates a non-voting advisory council and could be an informal working group, where there is some fluidity in membership. This requires additional volunteers. [Suggested]
3. Assign Cultural District oversight to an existing Board/Commission, if the Board or Commission can meet the community representation requirement (noted below under "Members" section). This could be an existing entity, such as an Economic Development Commission, or it could be the municipality's governing body (Council/Board of Selectmen). This does not require additional volunteers, but places increased responsibilities onto existing volunteers.

The Cultural District Commission should be able to exercise any power and perform any duties necessary or desirable for the purpose of managing the district, including but not limited to consulting/collaborating with the CT Office of the Arts, Tourism (state and local), and the DRSO for assistance with marketing, connecting with and/or convening local arts and culture community representatives, asset mapping, advocacy, directing resources, and applying for or soliciting and accepting any grant, contribution, or other funding from any source.

MEMBERS

Cultural District Commission members should include at least one representative from each of these six (6) categories:

- Municipality (City, Town, or Borough)
- Local cultural council/arts council
- Cultural organizations (historical society, museum, ethnic heritage organization)
- At least one artist that lives and/or works in the district
- For-profit creative businesses i.e. gallery, theater
- Local business and/or chamber of commerce or business organization

The municipality may elect to include additional representatives. This will depend on the assets in the Cultural District and the district's goals. They can be from:



- Tourism
- Historic Preservation/History
- Leisure Industry (including restaurants, hotels and similar businesses)
- Educational Institutions
- Economic/Community Development

DUTIES & PROCEDURES

The Cultural District Commission will convene on a regular basis and operate in accordance with the municipality's governance structure.

The Cultural District Commission will be responsible for developing a Management Plan and provide oversight with implementation.

- Goals, Objectives, and Success Measures for the District
- A Management Plan*
- A Cultural Assets Map & Inventory
- A Marketing Plan

*The municipality must utilize state Cultural District branding as part of any signage, marketing, promotion, and/or recognition. A minimum of two (2) signs at the municipality's expense is suggested, and the municipality shall determine the location of such signs.

Cultural District Commissions will be asked for data from DECD or the DRISO to help measure the impact of the district. The data should reflect the Cultural District's specific goals. Examples include visitation data, building occupancy rates, number of business and jobs, number of artists, box office sales, and consumer surveys. Cultural District Commissions must respond to requests for data from the state in a timely fashion.

STATE SUPPORT OF CULTURAL DISTRICTS

The Department of Economic and Community Development's Office of the Arts, and the Designated Regional Service Organizations, are committed to supporting the formation, development, and establishment of Cultural Districts. These above agencies can provide additional in-kind marketing, promotion, and resources for designated Cultural Districts.

Types of investment in Cultural Districts include: promotion of Cultural Districts by the Statewide Office of Marketing & Tourism, and recognition on the State's Tourism website, ctvisit.com; by CT Office of the Arts; and by Designated Regional Service Organizations.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

To apply to become a state-recognized Cultural District, established Cultural Districts must electronically submit the following documents to your DRSO that will submit your application for review by DECD:

- Letter of endorsement from Chief Elected Official
- Copy of Resolution from the City Council/Board of Selectmen (see sample resolution)
- List of Cultural District Commissioners and their relevant role/category as per representation guidelines
- Master Map: Please provide a map of the Cultural District
- List of cultural assets, including cultural events held at locations within the proposed Cultural District
- List of available municipal resources that would support and/or benefit Cultural District (ex. tax credit, incentives, etc.)
- Official legal documents on zoning overlaps or ordinances relevant to the Cultural District, such as existing Arts or Historic District (if applicable)
- Marketing materials, if relevant to the Cultural District

The CT Office of the Arts collects information about all its applicants. In addition to the above documents, the Office of the Arts requests that you provide the following materials. These materials will be used to develop information about Designated Cultural Districts applicants for reporting purposes. **Your responses will not be a factor in the review of your application.**

- Supporting Section/Reference in municipal Plan of Conservation and Development
- Existing complete cultural resources inventory/map, if available
- Maps of any relevant existing districts, such as an Arts District and/or Historic District
- K-12 Arts Curriculum Education information – Number of art/s teachers in the middle and high schools? Does the district have an Arts Curriculum coordinator, or a teacher that has time dedicated to fill that role?
- List of all relevant town committees and commissions that will interface with the Cultural District Commission due to the nature of their responsibilities, ex. Arts Commission, Historic District Commission, and/or Architectural Advisory Committee. Include list of members, commission budget, their qualifications, and if commissioners receive any training.

Contact your DRSO for questions and assistance with your application.

AFTER YOUR APPLICATION HAS BEEN SUBMITTED

Once the materials are submitted, your application is reviewed by your DRSO and CT Office of the Arts. If the application is complete, you will be contacted to arrange a site visit for representatives from DECD, COA, your DRSO, and state officials and arts and culture statewide partners.

Coordinating and conducting a site visit is intended to share information and build and strengthen relationships between DECD, COA, DRSOs and Cultural Districts in order to maximize mutually beneficial opportunities. The site visit includes a tour of the proposed cultural district and a meeting to discuss and highlight plans, assets and goals for the district.

The site visit has two components:

- A walking tour of the proposed Cultural District
- A meeting with the chief elected official, relevant municipal staff, and Cultural District Commission/Committee members and appropriate stakeholders to hear about the goals, objectives and plans for the Cultural District

Notice of the outcome of the review to the city or town will be sent via email. Final decisions are made by DECD's CT Office of the Arts.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Sustainable CT Alignment: municipalities participating in Sustainable CT may be able to meet the criteria and receive points for Action Item 4, Vibrant and Creative Cultural Ecosystems, through the Cultural District designation. Sustainable CT municipal participants are eligible to apply for [Community Matching Funds](#). Community Matching Funds provide one-to-one matching funds for projects that align with Sustainable CT actions and Community Match Fund projects help towns earn points towards certification.

At present, the statute that established the legislation does not include grant funds. A variety of funding opportunities may be available through the [Connecticut Office of the Arts](#), the [State Historic Preservation Office](#), and [CT Humanities](#).