

Hosting a Site Visit with Policymakers

Connecticut's land trusts are responsible for protecting many of our state's most cherished landscapes and connecting their communities with the great outdoors. Whether it's a new land acquisition, community outreach project, or successful working farm, now is the time to show off your achievements to your legislators by hosting a site visit.

Site visits are a wonderful opportunity not only to get policymakers out on the land but also to build lasting relationships, garner media attention, and speak to the value of the state programs and services that make your work possible. However, a successful visit requires careful planning and organization.

Here are some guidelines to help you facilitate a successful visit to a land trust property or community event.

1. **Get Permission**— Consult with your board, staff, landowners, and other community members about how best to reach your legislator and keep everyone informed going forward.
2. **Set Goals**— What points do you want to get across during your visit? What programs do you want to highlight? Consider the most important items you'd like to address during your visit, such as particular program or pending legislation you actively support or oppose.
3. **Set an Agenda**— Staying organized is key to a successful visit. Plan to give a short introduction about your organization, the area your visiting, and the related programs and/or legislation you hope to speak to on site.
4. **Invite your Legislators**— With your agenda and goals in place, it's time to invite your legislators. Draft a brief letter or email to your policymakers at least a month before the target date. Introduce yourself, describe the property or program you'd like to showcase, and explain why you're inviting them. Include specific information about the visit- suggested date, time, location, attendees, media attendance, planned activities etc. It's important to note that legislators are very busy people, so you may need to be flexible on timing to accommodate their often packed schedules.
5. **Invite the local media**— If your legislator has a staffer in charge of press activities, work with them to determine whether or not you'd like to have press coverage. If so, either reach out to local media outlets directly or publish a press release inviting them to join. Press coverage can mean bolstered publicity for the legislator as well as greater community interest in your organization and the lands you strive to protect. As you get closer to the event, be sure to follow up with local media contacts to confirm their attendance and if they're unable to come, send them a summary and photographs of the visit for them to publish.
6. **Conducting your visit:** When your legislators arrive, distribute any materials you'd like them to review- such as maps, site descriptions, success stories, and other information you feel would be helpful during the visit. Don't be too modest! Showcase your organization's achievements, how much land you've protected, how many people you serve, and how conservation has benefited your community. From there, explain why bolstered funding for an existing state program or the passage of a pending piece of legislation would positively impact your work.
7. **Invite other supporters:** Bring in a few of your most outstanding volunteers, local partners, or other community members to help you make your case.

8. **Make the ask:** Stress how additional resources could benefit your local/regional conservation efforts. If you're speaking to the value of a specific program or piece of legislation, now is the time to directly ask them for their support and propose next steps if need be.

9. **Follow up:** After a successful site visit it's important to thank your legislators and their staff for attending and reiterate your request for their support; provide them with copies of any sort of press coverage; and include a photo or some other leave behind as reminder of your visit.