



Strategic Plan 2025-2029

**Adopted by the Board of Directors:
November 20, 2024**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 2
Mission & Vision Statements	Page 3
Guiding Principles	Page 4
Strategic Goals	Page 5
Conclusion	Page 11

STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. (ALC) is a regional land conservancy active in southeastern Connecticut. Incorporated in 1968, Avalonia has been a strong partner for the State of Connecticut's open space and passive recreation goals and for those of our local communities. Avalonia is a non-profit, nonpolitical, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization with a 50-year plus history of strategic conservation and conscientious stewardship of the land. Avalonia obtained Land Trust Alliance (LTA) accreditation in February 2017.

In 1969, the land conservancy received its first land donation: since then, Avalonia has acquired, by donation, purchase and easement, over 110 parcels, comprising over 5,000 acres in total. Avalonia is the largest regional land conservancy active in southeastern Connecticut. Properties now held by Avalonia represent a wide range of diverse habitats, from salt marshes and freshwater wetlands and streams to fields, forests, and rocky uplands and two islands in eastern Long Island Sound. In recent years, Avalonia has developed and adopted a plan of strategic conservation and community outreach to identify and to preserve in perpetuity those lands of highest conservation value and with the greatest benefit to the population of southeastern Connecticut for out-door recreation. Avalonia's membership currently extends to approximately 300 households and organizations. Our volunteer roster includes more than 200 individuals and numerous community organizations that support our mission. Avalonia is largely a volunteer organization supported by a small number of key staff; stewardship maintenance activities such as trail clearing, boundary posting, habitat improvement and outreach are coordinated by our Stewardship Committee and executed by a corps of volunteers. The overall management of the organization is overseen by a Board of Directors supported by a full-time Office Manager, a part-time Office Assistant, a full-time Director of Stewardship and a part time Director of Philanthropy. The Board meets monthly throughout the year. More information about the Avalonia Land Conservancy can

be found at our website: www.avalonia.org. Scientific predictions indicate declines in general ecosystem health, catastrophic impacts to environmental wellness due to climate change, including loss of wildlife habitat and degradation of natural resources leading to loss of biodiversity and severely hampered resiliency. Avalonia understands that undeveloped, natural land has a role to play in protecting native ecosystem and enhancing the human environment. We believe that engaging all people in learning about and caring for the environment will help to withstand and possibly even reverse some of these anticipated harms. The following articulates our organization's mission and vision and lays out a five-year implementation plan for pursuing our strategic goals. Our success depends on strong organizational leadership and motivated staff and volunteers.

MISSION

We preserve natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.

AVALONIA VISION STATEMENT

- To be the primary regional and leading best-practice land trust in Southeastern CT, protecting and conserving natural resources including threatened and declining habitats;
- Work collaboratively with other land trusts, preservation groups, political entities, not-for-profits, etc. in the southeastern Connecticut area to conserve key habitats;
- Create a Strategic Conservation Plan with fully integrated mapping to allow proactive identification of priority acquisition parcels and partnering opportunities;
- Grow our Town and Standing Committees to become more robust, fully staffed, and functioning Committees to meet stewardship, acquisition, and other organizational requirements;

- Complete and maintain Accreditation with a Board of Directors fully versed in Land Trust Alliance Practices and Standards;
- Steward fee properties in accordance with individual management plans and develop public recreational and educational opportunities where appropriate including compliant ADA trails where feasible;
- Monitor all Conservation Easement properties as required by law and best practices;
- Maintain and/or return arable lands to productive farming where appropriate through innovative partnering;
- ▣ Strengthen financial support of conserved lands while controlling costs and maintaining transparency.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Recognition of the rights and needs of living things including all people and wildlife and the importance of the natural environment.

Working collaboratively with other New London County land trusts, preservation groups, governmental entities, and not-for-profits creates economies of scale and makes us collectively stronger. We seek to engage with potential partners with aligned goals.

We know there are places where few or no partners exist in New London County. We will seek out and work within those geographies which are under-represented by conservation groups.

We aspire to be held in the highest regard by our stakeholders and the broader public. To this end, we are committed to a strong ethical and moral code and maintain transparency and accountability across all aspects of our work.

Our organization is most vibrant and sustainable when we practice continuous review for risk management, compliance, and best business practices; operate in compliance with the Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices; and maintain our Land Trust Accreditation.

Through these guiding principles we seek to be a model for conservation practice everywhere.

STRATEGIC GOALS

Strategic Priority 1: Protect land to sustain clean water and air, provide climate resilience and mitigation, and support diverse wildlife habitat.

Outcome(s):

- Permanently preserve natural lands including at least 2000 acres of land with freshwater or saltwater rankings of high importance or better and/or ecological rankings of high priority or better in the mission area. Align Avalonia’s acquisition and stewardship goals in the region with the approved State of Connecticut Green Plan for conservation.

Implementation Actions:

- 1.1 Create a strategic conservation plan with fully integrated mapping to allow proactive identification of priority acquisition parcels and partnering opportunities.
- 1.2 Quantify percentage goal and integrate the plan with municipal goals seeking greenway connections.
- 1.3 Coordinate plan and actions with ALC standing and town committees.

Strategic Priority 2: Demonstrate Excellence in Stewardship and Land Management

Outcome(s):

- Steward Fee Simple and other properties over which we have responsibility in accordance with individual management plans or easements and assure safe access for passive recreation where allowed and appropriate. Support sustainable agriculture and agricultural use on Avalonia properties where permissible and feasible.

Implementation Actions:

2.1 Use and develop Landscape software to improve land management efficiency and to define and rank priorities across managed properties. Increase use and understanding of use of this software by volunteers.

2.2 Continue to monitor all Fee Simple and Conservation Easement properties at least annually, noting issues and future work needs on the former and ensuring compliance with the conservation restrictions on the latter. Improve efficiency in management by fully inventorying land project records, management plans for fee-owned preserves, and ALC's obligations to properties owned by partners.

2.3 Create organized volunteer maintenance teams (in addition to the established Tree Team) for fee-owned properties led by a committee member or other volunteer as possible based on available volunteer skill and interest and needs of the organization.

2.4 Continue to fund the full time Director of Stewardship position and plan to fund additional part time stewardship help, possibly via support of Intern positions.

2.5 Develop a data-based understanding of more of our properties and habitats, and the resident and transient species therein. Partner with appropriate Nature or conservation-focused organizations to encourage more research on Avalonia properties.

2.6 Encourage public use of fee owner properties when appropriate and continue to develop alliances, partnerships, and other forms of outreach with, for example, land conservancies, watershed groups and municipal, state, federal and tribal governments.

2.7 Work with the organization to devise and support funding campaigns to enable purchase of equipment to support and enable larger and more complex stewardship projects.

2.8 Protect quality farmland as defined by state and county plans and federal, state, and local funding sources. Maintain and/or return arable lands to productive farming where appropriate through innovative partnering. Support local farmers to promote successful and sustainable stewardship of farmland to ensure the resource

remains in active use through low-cost agricultural leases and partnerships on appropriate Avalonia land.

Strategic Priority 3 — Communicate, educate, and engage the public in understanding land stewardship and Avalonia’s role in land conservation in SE CT

Outcomes:

- Enhanced public understanding of the importance of acquiring and conserving land
- Increased brand awareness (who we are, what we do)
- A thriving membership pool of informed, engaged, and active supporters, including the general public, as well as Avalonia members, financial contributors, and volunteers.

Implementation Actions:

1. Review and evaluate Avalonia’s current marketing initiatives and ROI
2. Develop a cohesive marketing plan

Identify:

- Objectives
- Target audience for each objective (i.e., current members, abutters, students, community, organizations, municipalities, marginalized communities (i.e., people of color, disabilities, low income))
- Tactics (i.e., website, social media, print collateral {brochures, inserts, print/digital newsletter, signage, radio, TV, PR, government affairs, direct mail, events, email and content marketing, editorials, PSAs, contests})
- Timeline
- Budget
- Key Performance Indicators (i.e., increase mailing list to contacts, increase social media followers, increase number of members to support stewardship and bolster fundraising.

3. Engage and identify volunteers/personnel for the Communications Committee who can actively take on projects (identify projects/tactics)

4. Leverage/build partnerships and collaborations to engage community, co-host events, and cross-promote shared objectives

· Nonprofits

· Schools (i.e., tie into curriculums and actively solicit field trips; develop junior ranger program; stewardship)

· Community Businesses

· Municipal offices

Strategic Priority 4: Public Access. Ensure that Avalonia properties are available for a diversity of uses, and used by people of all economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Outcome(s):

- All people can benefit from time in nature. When people from different backgrounds feel welcome in nature, they are more likely to participate in preservation, maintenance, and educational efforts. Build community through enhanced public access to preserved resources making the availability of lands open to wide range of people.

Implementation Actions:

4.1 Ensure all preserves, as deemed appropriate, have clearly marked public access with signage and materials (e.g. map guides) to advertise such to the public, including availability of tactile maps and other materials that increase access for people with different disabilities.)

4.2 Implement the Bond Preserve site plan to fully utilize it as a model of the cultural landscape and a community destination for education and recreation.

4.3 Seek open space opportunities in or near designated distressed municipalities.

4.4 Develop public recreational and educational opportunities, where appropriate, providing maximum accessibility to land and programs according to the resources of the organization and the feasibility of the site

4.5 Ensure organizational compliance with both the structural and non-structural provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other disability-relevant laws, guidelines, and codes. Work with disabled constituencies to go beyond legal requirements when appropriate, affordable, and in conformity with the organization's Mission and Vision.

4.6 Diversify the Board to reflect the population of New London County to include race, ethnicity, age, disability and socioeconomic status.

Strategic Priority 5: Provide mission-area regional leadership and collaboration.

Outcome(s):

- Align with SECOG plans.

Implementation Actions:

5.1 Identify and assess potential collaboration and merger possibilities with other mission-area land trusts that are not currently accredited. Aim to complete 1-3 mergers/consolidations over the 5-year period.

5.2 Prioritize work in communities lacking conservation capacity and coordinate conservation, stewardship and education with local and tribal governments and community groups; consider collaborations with unaccredited land trusts; work with SECOG; collaborate with indigenous groups.

Strategic Priority 6: Strengthen financial position of ALC. Increase annual support while controlling costs.

Outcome(s):

- Provide adequate financial oversight and control. Increase the balances of the Endowment Fund and Reserves for Stewardship and Defense Funding. Increase the Endowment Fund level to \$1,800,000. by 2031.

Implementation Actions:

- 6.1 Update and implement the fiscal and accounting policy.
- 6.2 Provide adequate internal financial controls through staffing and volunteer assignments.
- 6.3 Seek additional financial partnership activities with municipalities, State, Federal and other entities.
- 6.4 Partner on OSWA grants with additional towns and water companies.
- 6.5 Develop Forest Management plans for wooded properties to properly evaluate potential harvests for healthy forests and revenue potential (all plans created by 2029)
- 6.6 Increase individual and corporate giving, as appropriate and necessary, to support and sustain operations, stewardship and acquisition.
- 6.7 Increase fundraising activities; conduct capital campaign; create major gifts program; diversify annual fundraising sources; seek additional fundraising partners.

Strategic Priority 7: Build Organizational Capacity and Sustainability

Outcome(s):

- Focus on making our Town and Standing Committees robust, fully staffed, and functioning to meet stewardship, acquisition, and other organizational requirements with a Board of Directors fully versed in the Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices. Reflect local diversity; hire paid personnel; meet accreditation requirements; educate Board on accreditation requirements; institutionalize ongoing risk management.

Implementation Actions:

- 7.1 Add at least 10 individuals to committees and/or the Board to meet needs as identified by the Governance Committee.
- 7.2 Hire a Director of Philanthropy and evaluate the rationale and financial feasibility of hiring an Executive Director

7.3 Maximize functioning of town and standing committees by encouraging and training volunteers to take on leadership roles.

7.4 Implement succession planning on Board and committees. Designate individual Board members for specific compliance requirements.

CONCLUSION

Land conservation in Connecticut is at a pivotal moment. With a strong record of achievement, a commitment to cooperation and partnership, and passionate and dedicated professional and volunteer leadership, Avalonia is uniquely suited to collaboratively lead and serve the needs of the land conservation community in New London County. Avalonia aims to address the threats to Connecticut's land and elevate land conservation as a critical solution to the challenges society faces today and into the future. With the adoption and implementation of this Strategic Plan, Avalonia is committed to accelerating the rate of land conservation, building a stronger land trust, including more people along the way. We wish to acknowledge the consulting services of Connie Manes, Manes Consulting LLC., for her patience, leadership, and facilitation of the development of this plan. We also acknowledge the leadership and input provided by members of our Board of Directors, our Governance Committee, and our staff, who have all provided significant input to the current plan.

APPENDIX

1- Implementation Plan of Action and Milestones (POA&M) -TBD