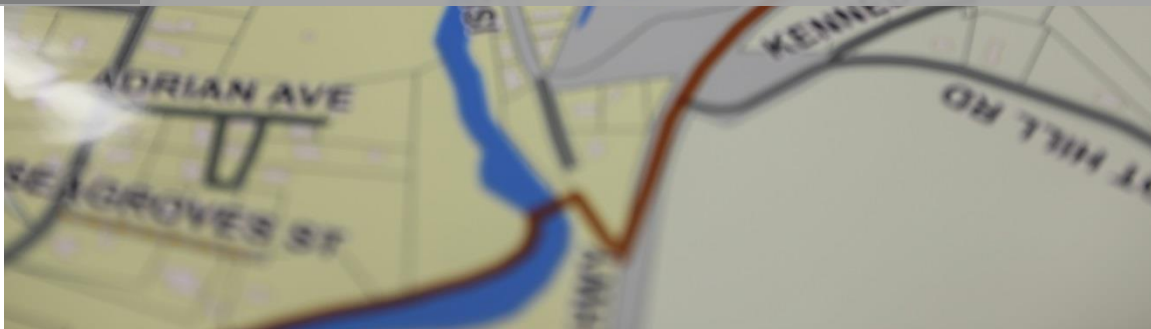


3/1/2018



EXTENDING THE STONY BROOK RIVERWALK IN DOWNTOWN WILTON



An Economic Feasibility Study | Nashua Regional Planning Commission

Project Overview

The Souhegan River is integral to Wilton's downtown identity, having powered the mills that helped Wilton grow at the beginning of the 20th century. But in recent times Wilton has lost sight of the river, and many driving through town don't even know it's there. At the 2017 Town Meeting, the Wilton Economic Development Team submitted a warrant article to use \$40,000 of the Cooley Park Fund to restore lighting, refresh existing landscaping, plant trees and seek private donations for granite benches along the Riverwalk abutting the Police Station. Phase I of the Riverwalk was unveiled on September 29, 2017 and came in on time and on budget. It was a test of public support for such an ambitious project longer term. Close to 200 people showed up for the opening, with many new faces.

The July 2017 Plan NH Community Design Charrette identified access to the river as a major tool for Wilton's economic development, as it could provide a safe pathway connecting the town's attractions from restaurants to shopping, create access to more recreation, and be an aesthetic draw. The charrette team proposed an extension of the Riverwalk including a pedestrian bridge across the river to connect the Police Station walkway with Wilton House of Pizza, and extending the pathway by the Proctor Parking lot along the street front of Main Street buildings and back through Main St Park and out to the Riverview Mill.

For the 2018 Town Meeting, the Economic Development Team is proposing a warrant article to see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate \$13,500 for design options for the next phase of the Riverwalk project adjacent to the town-owned Proctor parking area, lot J-61, including a feasibility plan for a foot bridge placement and Riverwalk design on the east side of Stony Brook, and connecting Main Street Park to the Riverview Mill. The project includes public input sessions, subsequent architectural design options, and a final report and plan for phased construction.

In addition to guiding the next phases of the Riverwalk, the resulting design plans are fundamental to Wilton's ability to apply for and secure grants that will help fund the future phases. Given the challenging topography of Wilton's street level in relationship to the river, exploring design options and creative solutions is paramount to seeking grant funding. It was written with the assistance of the Wilton Economic Development Team with funding support from Bar Harbor Bank & Trust, who purchased tax credits through the Community Development Finance Authority's L5 Capacity program.

Conceptual Ideas for the Riverwalk and Photos of Project Area

During the July Plan NH Charrette, the Design Team presented a few conceptual sketches of a Riverwalk for downtown Wilton that would better connect Main Street with the Souhegan River. These sketches below are preliminary and will help inform the design options for the next phase of the Riverwalk project. For further detail, please see the [Plan NH Final Report](#).



Project Goals

Improve walkability and pedestrian safety in downtown Wilton

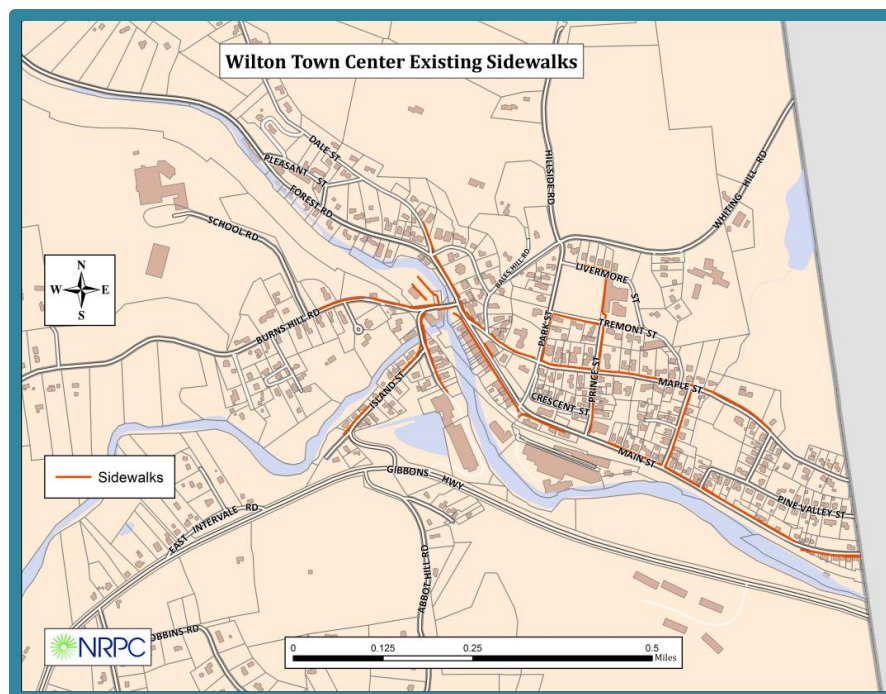
- 💧 Increase the connections between different parts of downtown and improve the safety of walking and crossing Island Street
- 💧 Change perception of parking supply in downtown Wilton by improving the experience of walking from the parking lot near the police station to other businesses along Main Street

Drive economic development

- 💧 Attract people to help build customer base for downtown businesses and reduce vacancy rates
- 💧 Attract a younger workforce that is looking for more quality of life features in places they choose to live and work
- 💧 Improve the community with rising property values and increased business opportunities¹

Reconnect Wilton and its residents with the river

- 💧 Improve river access and recreation opportunities for Wilton residents and visitors, including nearby homeowners, business people, and residents at the senior living facility
- 💧 Attract individuals and families to more outdoor activities
- 💧 Provide the community with public spaces for small and large events



¹ <http://gantdaily.com/2015/10/09/riverwalks-add-many-benefits-to-communities/>

Project Benefits

Encouraging walkability and creating greater access to the Souhegan River can result in a multitude of expected benefits for Wilton's residents, visitors, and overall economy.

Enhanced vitality, aesthetics and reinvestment that will attract visitors and businesses to downtown

- 💧 The over two hundred people who attended the opening ceremony of Phase I of the Riverwalk demonstrates the attractiveness of river access and views to residents
- 💧 Commercial and real estate executives have reported that parks and recreation enhancements are very important in attracting new business. Small business owners in particular have made this point, and rank the proximity of riverwalks, trails and parks as one of the highest priorities in choosing a new location for their business²
- 💧 Numerous case studies have identified that pedestrian improvements, as well as economic development incentives, create effective incentives for new businesses, reduction in vacancy rates and increase in downtown sales tax revenues³
- 💧 There's also potential to host a design competition for aesthetic improvements for the Proctor Parking Lot J-61 that will harness local arts community and even add some parking

Renewed identity to downtown Wilton that leverages the river as one of its major assets

- 💧 This Riverwalk would highlight and provide scenic outlooks onto the Souhegan River
- 💧 Stores on Main Street could have branded Riverview blade signs that can encourage people to come into stores that may even have decking on the riverbank, providing additional views
- 💧 Once considered a neglected polluted natural resource, reinvestment in a Riverwalk along the Chicago River activated public support and private investment. A coalition group, Friends of the Chicago River, formed leading to a multi-million dollar reinvestment plan that is currently being implemented⁴
- 💧 A greenway can serve as a hands-on environmental classroom for people of all ages to learn historical information and experience natural landscapes, furthering environmental awareness

Greater walkability which stabilizes and even increases the value of downtown properties

- 💧 A Walk Score is an Internet-based platform which calculates the walkability of a location on a numeric scale (0 to 100) by measuring the number of amenities, including restaurants, stores, and schools, within walking distance. Walk Score has been found to be an accurate measure of walkability. Wilton currently has a walk score of 39, which classifies it as a car dependent community.⁵ A study found that an increase in a Walk Score by one point is typically associated with an increase of \$700 to \$3,000 in nearby house values

² https://jefferson.uwex.edu/files/2010/09/The_Benefits_of_Parks_and_Riverwalks_in_Downtown.pdf

³ <https://fyi.uwex.edu/downtowneconomics/files/2012/07/economic-benefits-of-a-walkable-community.pdf>

⁴ January 2013 Planning Magazine

⁵ www.walkscore.com

- 💧 Trends in real estate show that home buyers are more likely to move to (and pay more for) a home in a community with greater walkability⁶
- 💧 Greenways and pedestrian trails have been shown to increase the value of adjacent properties by as much as 5 to 20%⁷
- 💧 An analysis of Washington DC neighborhoods found that as the number of urban design features that facilitate walkability and attract pedestrians increase, so do office, residential, and retail rents, retail revenues, and for-sale residential values⁸

Increased connectivity in downtown as well as improved pedestrian safety

- 💧 If all phases are implemented, this Riverwalk could provide a connection from the Wilton House of Pizza to the Riverview Artist Mills
- 💧 It would encourage people to park at the municipal parking lot by the Police Station to help address the perceived parking issues in downtown
- 💧 It would help fill in the gaps in the pedestrian network by providing alternative routes and pathways. Roadways without sidewalks are more than twice as likely to have pedestrian crashes as sites with sidewalks on both sides of the street.⁹ Raised crosswalks are effective at slowing travel speed thus improving pedestrian safety¹⁰
- 💧 Providing walkways for pedestrians (such as a pedestrian bridge) dramatically increases how well pedestrians perceive their needs are being met along roadways. If pedestrian facilities are more comfortable, there is usually an increase in the number of trips made by walking, particularly in areas with mixed land uses

Provide the infrastructure to promote health and fitness

- 💧 Only half of American adults and about a quarter of American high school students get the recommended amount of aerobic physical activity¹¹
- 💧 Walking is an easy way to start and maintain a physically active lifestyle in order to get the daily amount of physical activity recommended by the Center for Disease Control

⁶ The Value of Walkability <http://marketurbanism.com/2013/10/17/the-value-of-walkability/>

⁷ <http://www.wisconsincentral.net/LandTOC/Land/GlacialRiverTrail.html>

⁸ <http://www.vtpi.org/walkability.pdf>

⁹ https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/tools_solve/walkways_trifold/

¹⁰ <https://www.cabq.gov/neighborhood-traffic-management-program/documents/raised-crosswalk.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/walking/call-to-action/pdf/partnergide.pdf>

Funding Sources

Due to the Stony Brook Riverwalk's potential as an economic driver and transportation amenity, there are various funding sources from which the Town of Wilton can draw to construct all phases of the project.

-  **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Economic Development Funds.** All eligible municipalities and counties can apply for up to \$500,000 in CDBG funds per year. Funds can be used to build or upgrade publicly owned infrastructure which will support the for-profit businesses in their need to expand, resulting in jobs for low and moderate income people.
-  **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Planning Grants.** The maximum amount awarded to a municipality for a planning grant is \$12,000 a year. Applications are accepted on the last business day, Monday through Friday, of April and October each year. Eligible activities include income surveys, preliminary architectural and engineering design, cost estimates, and market analysis. The objectives of a feasibility study grant are to determine whether or not a proposed CDBG project is feasible and/or to recommend specific action(s) to be undertaken and that at least 51% of the intended beneficiaries will be of low or moderate income.
-  **Economic Development Administration (EDA) Public Works Program.** This program empowers distressed communities to revitalize, expand, and upgrade their physical infrastructure to attract new industry, encourage business expansion, diversify local economies, and generate or retain long-term, private sector jobs and investment. Past awards have ranged from \$100,000 to \$3 million. There is a matching requirement.
-  **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ).** A flexible funding source to State and local governments for transportation projects and programs to help meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act. Funding is available to reduce congestion and improve air quality for areas that do not meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, or particulate matter (nonattainment areas) and for former nonattainment areas that are now in compliance (maintenance areas). Funds may be used for a transportation project or program that is likely to contribute to the attainment or maintenance of a national ambient air quality standard, with a high level of effectiveness in reducing air pollution, and that is included in the metropolitan planning organization's (MPO's) current transportation plan and transportation improvement program (TIP). Eligible projects include Transportation-focused (non-recreational) bicycle transportation and pedestrian improvements that provide a reduction in single-occupant vehicle travel. The federal/non-federal match ratio is 80:20.
-  **Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP).** Created under MAP21 (Moving for Progress in the 21st Century), TAP combines a number of individual federal programs into a single, more flexible program. The formerly separate programs include Transportation Enhancement (TE), Safe Routes to School (SRTS), and Scenic Byways. The federal/non-federal match ratio is 80:20, where the federal amount requested must be between \$200,000 and \$800,000. The design, if funded by Town Meeting, can be used as part of this application.

- 💧 **Bond established through Town Meeting.** This is authorized by ballot of 2/3 majority. RSA Chapter 33 lists the protocol Wilton must adhere to in order to accept a bond. There are additional procedures specified in RSA 33:8-a if the bond amount is greater than \$100,000.
- 💧 **Cater to philanthropists for donations of cash or land.** Within your community, there may be individuals with resources or tracts of land. By appealing to individuals' sense of community pride, public goodwill, or other goal, you may be able to form a partnership that results in the donation of cash or land area that can go toward active recreation development.
- 💧 **Utilize a Public Benefit Corporation.** Companies that choose benefit corporation status pledge to make a tangible, positive impact on the environment and the community, which can include park development and maintenance. New Hampshire adopted an act authorizing it in 2014 and details can be found in RSA 293-C.

Case Studies

Pedestrian Bridges and Sidewalk Improvements in Littleton, NH

Population: 5,918 (2016)

In 2004, the Town of Littleton constructed the Warren Truss Covered Bridge over Ammonoosuc River, which connected downtown to a Riverwalk Trail and the local senior center. The bridge was 8-feet wide and 368-feet long and designed to carry service vehicles. It was funded by a \$1.1 million Transportation Enhancement grant administered by the NHDOT¹²



In 2012, Littleton hosted a Plan NH Charrette,¹³ which recommended reconstructing and extending Bridge Street Bridge, which had to be torn down in the 1990s. Through this process, Littleton created a River District Redevelopment Commission to fund multiple projects, including sidewalk redevelopment.

From 2012 to 2016, the River District Redevelopment Commission has worked on several projects including building another pedestrian bridge.¹⁴ Funding for the \$650,000 Bridge Street bicycle-pedestrian bridge came from the New Hampshire Community Development Finance Authority, the Northern Border Regional Commission and more than a dozen local companies which invested in it by purchasing tax credits. This bridge is one mile away from the Warren Truss covered bridge. The town's River District Redevelopment Commission has worked since 2012 on a comprehensive improvement of the downtown on both sides of the Ammonoosuc and has proposed cumulatively spending \$7.3 million, including \$3.2 million on roads; \$1.6 million on sidewalks; \$1 million on sewer systems improvements; \$900,000 for water upgrades; and the pedestrian/bicycle bridge.¹⁵

Investment in downtown Littleton is expected to have substantial economic impacts for its surrounding region. The New Hampshire Bureau of Labor and Statistics did an economic impact study of the River District project and issued a report that concludes the project will create 500 jobs in the region.¹⁶ Furthermore, new investors have purchased old buildings along the river with the intention of renovating them.

¹² <https://www.nh.gov/dot/media/documents/newsletter-spring2006.pdf>

¹³ http://www.golittleton.com/riverdistrict/plan_nh_riverdistrict_report.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.golittleton.com/riverdistrict/>

¹⁵ <http://www.unionleader.com/article/20161207/NEWS09/161209545>

¹⁶ <http://www.townoflittleton.org/meeting/123/River-District-Redevelopment-Commission-Minutes-Jul-9-2015>

Clearfield Riverwalk in Clearfield Borough, PA

Population: 5,976 (2016)

As one of their phases for their downtown redevelopment plan, Clearfield unveiled its Riverwalk in April 2016. It is a one mile track around the Susquehanna River, connecting the Nichols and Market Street Bridges. This project was funded with a \$5 million Redevelopment Capital Assistance Grant. It involved constructing a Riverwalk along an active railroad. The Riverwalk necessitated retaining walls and sidewalks. Clearly Ahead Development, an economic development corporation, was the developer for the project.



In conjunction with the Riverwalk, Clearfield is constructing a public park at the Novey property, which was a former recycling plant. The town has embraced this Riverwalk as part of its heritage by hosting an annual celebration of the Riverwalk's opening.

There are several anticipated outcomes of this project including making downtown more walkable, increasing the safety of the community, boost health, improve the overall look around the river, bring people to downtown, and create a hub from which other tourism can bloom.¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://gantdaily.com/2015/10/09/riverwalks-add-many-benefits-to-communities/>