



**Town of Wilton, N.H.**

**Riverwalk Public  
Workshops**

**Summary Report**

**Economic  
Development Team  
June 28, 2018**

## **Riverwalk Public Workshops 2018**

On June 12<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Wilton Economic Development Team sponsored two public input workshops to gather residents' feedback on the plans for the future phases of the Wilton Riverwalk. The objective was to develop a set of ideas and desires as input to the architects/planners who will be hired to work on the overall plan.

These workshops were a follow-up to the project that began in 2017 with funding from the town to implement Phase I of the Riverwalk along Stoney Brook, a subsequent Design Charrette with Plan NH which sketched out a possible expanded Riverwalk, a detailed Riverwalk report from the Nashua Regional Planning Commission that included case studies and possible funding sources, and finally, additional funding from the town to move forward with a phased design.

The format of the workshops included a guided walk down Main Street along the potential route of the Riverwalk, with stops along the way to look at key areas that could be used and potential river-view vantage points. The walk was followed by a workshop to discuss residents' ideas and suggestions.

26 people in total attended the workshops, and submitted ideas in writing. Conversation was lively, and residents had a lot of passion and enthusiasm for what could potentially be done. Not surprisingly, the discussion often veered off to other aspects of improving Wilton's downtown, but this report specifically focuses on the input relative to the Riverwalk itself. The Economic Development Team is now considering a broader resident survey to further prioritize some of the ideas.

The feedback fell into four broad areas: 1) Access and views; 2) Activities; 3) Informational kiosks and signage; and 4) Incorporation of the arts.

### **Access and views**

The biggest challenge to a successful Riverwalk is the overall topology – the river is not generally at street level and access to it is treacherous at best or nonexistent at worst. In addition, the river is largely hidden from public view due to years of vegetation overgrowth. Most people driving through downtown

Wilton are not even aware a river is there. Lastly, the bulk of Main Street property along the river is owned by private landowners and businesses and is not readily available for public use.

Following are some of the comments and ideas on this topic:

- Cantilevered walk could go around willow tree off town lot near Wilton Falls building
- Clear view of river especially at convergence with steps down to river - also a platform viewing space and wheelchair access
- Riverwalk, should be “disabled-friendly” and ADA compliant – smooth surfaces to walk on, lots of places to sit, hand-rails for all steps
- Area at Riverview mills is one of the nicest areas to see the river and should be utilized
- From parking lot - gradual steps with landing down to the water edge (versus a cantilevered terrace)
- Carve stairs from stone behind Wilton Falls
- Steps down to river opposite Mills at bridge
- Improved access to Memorial Park
- Trim overgrowth of vegetation all along the river which obstructs views everywhere (behind Edgewater, the Main St Park, the parking lot at the bridge area)
- Connect municipal parking access from the library
- Foot bridge off the side of the Wilton Falls building across the Souhegan to Proctor parking lot running parallel to auto bridge

## **Activities**

Residents view the Riverwalk as not just an isolated feature – they see it as a backdrop to develop community gathering spaces and places for people to spend more time downtown. The Planning Charrette run by Plan NH in Wilton in 2016(?) and sponsored by the Economic Development Team identified a potential Riverwalk as a major driver of economic development – a vehicle to attract visitors, businesses and residents to the downtown area.

Some of the activities the residents would like to see:

- Children’s area, something for kids to do
- A post & beam building for covered picnic tables in the park
- Outdoor seating in back of Wilton House of Pizza
- Bike trail, walking trails
- Fishing docks/platforms on either/both sides of river
- Some place to sit by the river and have something to eat and drink
- Fun activities/interactive displays
- General gathering spaces for town events

## **Informational kiosks and signage**

Residents recognize that the Riverwalk is a great opportunity to inform the public (including school children) and educate them about river ecology and the history of the river in Wilton. When the time comes, Wilton’s Conservation Commission and Heritage Commission can be involved in helping craft information to be used in engaging ways. Some ideas:

- Educate folks about the river ecology (flora and fauna) and historic events - e.g. floods, the high water mark
- Historic overview of the mills and the old ice skating pond behind where police station now stands, use old photographs
- Can any signage be interactive in some way, e.g. press a button to illuminate something on a map of the river, or press to hear a recording
- Maybe develop an app that could provide a self-guided tour

## **Incorporation of the Arts**

Wilton has a thriving arts community – artists’ studios in the Riverview Mill and spread throughout the town, Andy’s Summer Playhouse which intends to engage in year-round programming downtown, the Local’s Café for music, the Town Hall Theater, etc. We believe an emphasis on the arts is another way to increase the vibrancy of downtown. In the first phase of the Riverwalk along Stoney Brook, we conducted a contest for local artists to submit artwork for the banners that now hang from the light posts, and the residents clearly want to continue to incorporate art into the expanded Riverwalk. Some ideas:

- Incorporate murals on buildings – at Nelson's and Wilton Falls
- Outdoor sculptures along the way
- Public art/performing arts space
- Outdoor musical instruments people can play with, like those at Littleton's Riverwalk

### **Other considerations and ideas**

- Clean and paint the green bridge over river
- Install low sturdy fence in the Proctor parking lot to stop cars from pulling up to edge of parking lot – make it a walkway.
- Where can we put solar?
- What about the other side of the river on 101?
- Basement potential of the buildings on Main Street