

Grand Opening of the Wilton Riverwalk Gazebo – October 14, 2023

Remarks by Select Board Chair, Matthew Fish

Good morning. I'm Matthew Fish, Chair of your Select Board and it's my pleasure to welcome you to the official opening of our latest addition to the Wilton Riverwalk project. This gazebo was funded entirely by grants, private donations and volunteer labor.

It's the observation platform for the new Senior Citizen Science program where people of a certain age – or anyone really interested in Wilton's wildlife – can meet with friends, or stand alone and watch for the great blue heron, the muskrats, otters, bald eagles, turkey vultures, hawks and other creatures who frequent this portion of Stony Brook.

It also serves all our citizens of all ages, as one of the Riverwalk community amenities. We've heard all kinds of ideas about its use from residents – game nights, celebrations, small performances or just a nice shaded place to sit with your dog, your kids and enjoy lunch and watch the river go by.

Most of the funding came from an AARP Community Challenge grant, the second one awarded to the Town of Wilton. The Stony Brook Trail across the river was the first. Then the Galloway family read about the project and donated funds to make it even bigger. They also funded the great Blue Heron weathervane, and will be funding the future plaque to dedicate this gazebo to their dad, Dr. Raymond Galloway, who many of you will remember was Wilton's resident physician for over 23 years.

That formal dedication ceremony will happen as part of Old Home Days next August when you can all come and tell your Doc Galloway stories, right here in this place of peace and tranquility.

But now I want to thank those who made this possible....

Our town crews did all the site work and put in permanent footings so it could be elevated for a better view of the river.

Then volunteers; Edson Skinner, Mike McGonegal, Randy King, Michael Dell-Orto, and Frank Pavlik, who came in all the way from North Carolina, assembled the structure and shingled the roof just before the rains came again.

They said many residents came by, including the local media and applauded their work. So thank you all for encouraging them and recognizing their generosity.

We're doing some additional landscaping and the handicapped-accessible ramp and platform will be stained in the spring to match the gazebo. I want to especially thank Edson Skinner and Frank Pavlik for all the work they did, in addition to the gazebo construction, to make sure we had easy access for all our residents.

Jennifer Beck wrote this second AARP grant – and her Economic Development Team is now calling her “the long shot wonder”. We are grateful she knows how to write a winning grant application and was willing to spend her summer managing this project.

And she’s not stopping. The Select Board has approved her going after another federal grant for a 20x40 concert pavilion to sit right over there -- that can seat 100 people for concerts, outdoor plays and community center programs. That structure could also be booked by residents, free of charge, for their own special events.

So enjoy some refreshments and think about the next project you’d like to see along the downtown Wilton Riverwalk that celebrates the rivers that are such a major part of Wilton’s history.