

Riverwalk/Pedestrian Bridge Study

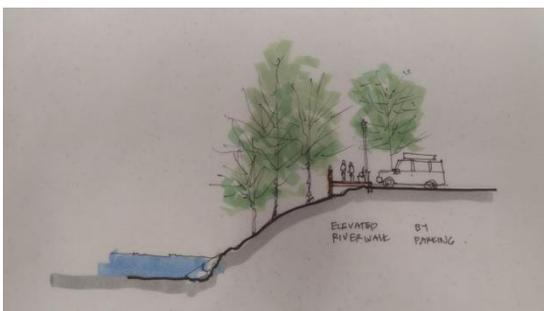
Project Description

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 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.



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

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 Wilton

- 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.

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

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>

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 implemented.⁴
- 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.
- 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 values.⁸

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

⁴ January 2013 Planning Magazine

⁵ www.walkscore.com

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

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

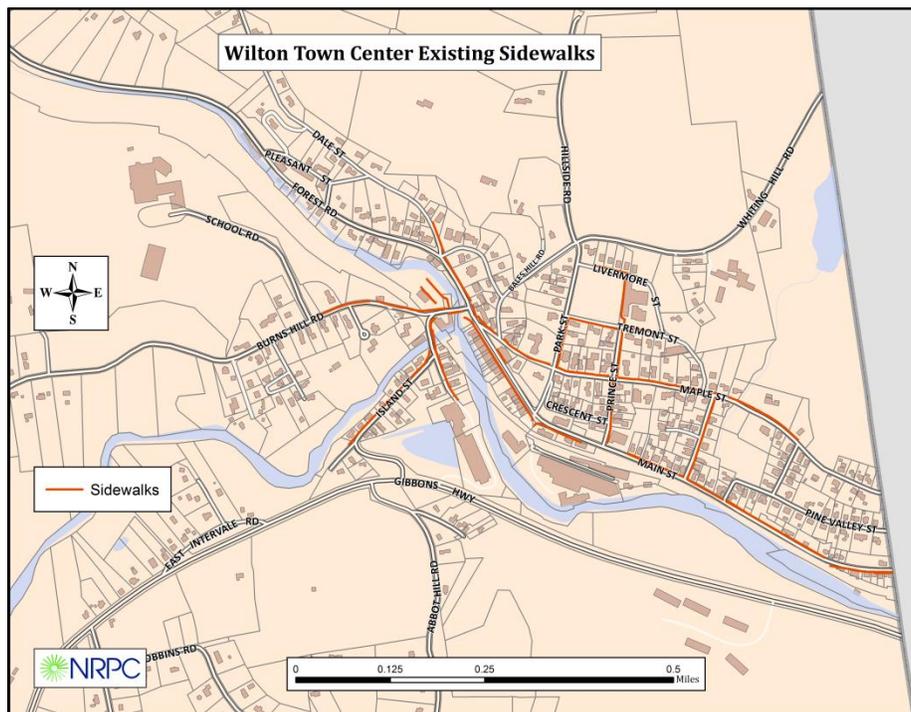
⁸ <http://www.vtpe.org/walkability.pdf>

as sites with sidewalks on both sides of the street.⁹ Raised crosswalks are effective at slowing travel speed thus improving pedestrian safety.¹⁰

- 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 activity.¹¹
- 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.



Funding Sources

- **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

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/partnerguide.pdf>

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.

Short case studies

Littleton, NH – Pedestrian Bridge

- Population: 5,918 (2016)
- 2004: Riverwalk Pedestrian Bridge over Ammonoosuc River
 - HEB was engaged by the Town of Littleton to design the 8-foot wide, 368-foot long pedestrian Warren Truss covered bridge over the Ammonoosuc River. This bridge, the Riverwalk Bridge, connects the new Riverwalk Trail, which circumnavigates downtown Littleton and gives the local senior center access to downtown. It was designed to carry service vehicles as well as pedestrian load.
 - funded by a \$1.1 million Transportation Enhancement grant administered by the NHDOT¹²
- 2012: Plan NH Charrette¹³
 - Recommended extending Bridge St bridge, which had to be torn down
 - Envisioned River District Redevelopment Commission to fund multiple projects, including sidewalk redevelopment
- 2012-2016: River District Redevelopment Commission (includes other projects besides ped bridge)¹⁴
 - obtaining some \$2 million through several CDFA initiatives, including the tax credit program that will help pay for the pedestrian bridge, as well as the Community Development Block Grant and the Community Energy Fund
 - NH Bureau of Labor and Statistics did an economic impact study of the River District project and issued a report that the project will create 500 jobs in the region.¹⁵
 - There is a \$7.5 million dollar goal for the completion of the project.¹⁶
 - A bond was passed at the last Town Meeting for \$900,000
 - Federal EDA department gave Littleton \$1 million dollars to do the Saranac and Ammonoosuc Street reconstruction
 - A few months later we received notice from Northern Borders awarding us another \$100,000 from a federal grant program.
 - State Department of Transportation that the Town has received an \$800,000 grant to do downtown sidewalk work

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.townoflittleton.org/meeting/123/River-District-Redevelopment-Commission-Minutes-Jul-9-2015>

¹⁶ <http://www.townoflittleton.org/2017/03/Board-of-Selectmen-Minutes-January-9-2017>

- Create a connection from the suspension bridge, the Curran Bridge to what will be the Rail/Trail. The \$800,000 grant will be matched by \$200,000 local funding.
- New investor just bought one of the old buildings along the river with the intention of renovating that

Glacial River Trail, Fort Atkinson, WI

- Population: 12,541 (2016)
- Downturn in the economy since 2008 has handed Fort Atkinson its share of business losses, including prominent retail space on Main Street. Properties that housed businesses — including Velvet Lips Lounge Bar & Grill, the Nest, Soap & Pepper, Ravenwood Furniture and others — suddenly were empty.
- New downtown housing is being constructed adjacent to the new riverwalk and Glacial River Biketrail over the Rock River.
- New retail and commercial property redevelopment has occurred downtown since the addition of the new riverwalk.
- An old manufacturing plant is being redeveloped adjacent to the Glacial River Trail.¹⁷
- 8.6-mile former rail bed bike trail running south from downtown Fort Atkinson to the Jefferson/Rock County line. The northernmost 4.5 miles are asphalt paved, the balance is crushed limestone. This spectacular recreational attraction features an archway, bronze sculptures, rest areas and fountains, making it a relaxing and scenic walk or ride through Fort Atkinson.¹⁸
- Red Covered Bridge: bridge itself will cost just over \$26,000. It will be 51 ft. long, with 3 ft. overhangs at both ends, 14ft wide, and have a clearance of about 9ft. It will be a four span bridge with king trusses. I have decided to incorporate a cupola on top to go along with the barn theme,. to protect the supporting structure from the elements, to give shelter to citizens who might get caught in some bad weather while on that section of the trail, and since the bridge would be easily visible from State Hwy. 26, it will bring with it, a lot of positive attention not only to the trail, but also to the Jefferson Co. parks system and the surrounding community. The bridge will also have a historical impact. Not only because it will be made out of an almost 100-year-old barn, but if maintained, it could stand for another 150 years!¹⁹
- "Built in the summer of 2000 and taking 3 months to build, this Glacial River Trail Covered Bridge was made of recovered wood from a barn built in the year 1906.
- "Labor to build this bridge was provided by Craig Roost, his family, friends and the Jefferson County Parks department." The project was funded by the State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources grants, donations by local civic groups, corporate organizations, private individuals and Jefferson County."²⁰

¹⁷ https://jefferson.uwex.edu/files/2010/09/The_Benefits_of_Parks_and_Riverwalks_in_Downtown.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.travelwisconsin.com/linear-bike-trails/glacial-river-bike-trail-200141>

¹⁹ <http://www.gojefferson.com/coveredbridge/>

²⁰ <http://virtualglobetrotting.com/map/glacial-river-trails-covered-bridge/view/google/>

- Sculpture and art along the trail²¹

Clearfield Borough, PA²²

- Population: 5,976
- 1 mile track around the river, connecting the Nichols and Market Street Bridges. There will be a public park at the former Novey property
- \$5 million Redevelopment Capital Assistance Grant for the riverwalk project
- Clearly Ahead Development of Clearfield as developer for the project after dealings with a prior developer fell through
- Anticipated outcomes: more walkable, safer community, boost health, improving the overall look around the river, bring people to downtown, create a hub from which other tourism can bloom
- Example of Riverwalk near a functioning railroad
- Built sidewalks and retaining walls
- Opened April 2016 with celebration that will become annual event
- Phase II of downtown development plan



²¹ http://www.dailyunion.com/news/article_21ff169c-8765-11e3-9434-001a4bcf6878.html

²² <https://gantdaily.com/2015/10/09/riverwalks-add-many-benefits-to-communities/>