

# COMMUNITY ISSUES



## Overview

To begin updating the Plan of Conservation and Development for the community, the Wilton Planning and Zoning Commission sought to identify issues that should be considered as part of the planning process by reviewing the 1999 Plan; holding a special workshop for Wilton residents; and surveying local boards, commissions and department heads.

The Commission held additional meetings to obtain input from local officials and other boards and commission prior to drafting strategies. Then, before creating a first draft of the Plan, the Center for Research and Public Policy conducted a telephone survey of 400 Wilton residents (see sidebar). Overall, residents are very pleased with their quality of life in Wilton – 96% of residents felt that their quality of life was very good or good.

### Telephone Survey

When this Plan refers to a specific percentage of residents, it is referring to the telephone survey results. The survey results are based on a representative sample of Wilton residents with a margin of error of + / - 5% with a 95% confidence level.

Input from Residents



THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH & PUBLIC POLICY

WILTON COMMUNITY SURVEY  
December 2008

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time start: \_\_\_\_\_ CE: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time end: \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, I am calling on behalf of the Town of Wilton. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am a research assistant at The Center for Research and Public Policy. The town is considering long-range planning

Input from Local Officials



WILTON  
2009 Plan of Conservation and Development

BOARD / COMMISSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Board / Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

The Planning and Zoning Commission is updating the 1999 Plan of Conservation and Development. The updated Plan will look 10 to 20 years into the future and suggest policies and actions that will enhance the town and improve the quality of life for residents. You are being asked for your insight as to issues that will face Wilton during this period.

OVERALL ISSUES

1. What do you particularly like about Wilton and how it has developed?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Is there anything about how Wilton has developed that you do not care for?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Visions and Goals

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At a public workshop, residents were asked to identify their top issues of concern that might be addressed in a Plan of Conservation and Development. Conservation-related issues (protect what we have) received the most attention, with development and infrastructure-related topics tied in second place.

The telephone survey also asked residents to provide their priorities for overall policy direction and on specific projects. The results confirmed what was heard at the public workshop – top responses focused on protecting open space and character, but also on addressing traffic and “other” transportation concerns.

While Wilton’s “character” may be amorphous and mean something different to each resident, it is evident that preserving character is an overarching community goal. Preserving character may mean protecting Wilton’s natural resources, preserving open space and greenways, maintaining historic buildings, ensuring that Wilton Center remains a vibrant activity center, providing quality schools, and so on. Preserving character means protecting features that make Wilton unique and ensuring that when change does occur, it happens in ways that enhance community character.

Another prominent consideration when developing the goals and strategies in this Plan is housing. Residents expressed concern that elderly residents and workers may not be able to find housing in Wilton. Residents also expressed concern about seeing smaller houses torn down and replaced with larger houses. Strategies for addressing the housing needs for current and future residents without compromising Wilton’s character are important components of this Plan.

As conditions and trends indicated, Wilton greatly depends upon property taxes to pay for Town services. Residents appreciate the high quality of Town services and these services contribute to the overall high quality of life in Town. The ability to continue to provide these services requires a healthy tax base. Residents and local officials expressed a desire to continue to encourage business development to increase the tax base.

It became clear that a number of other issues needed to be addressed in this Plan, including traffic, promoting other forms of transportation, and becoming a “greener” community.

**“Community Character” means many different things to residents....**

**Scenic Landscapes:**

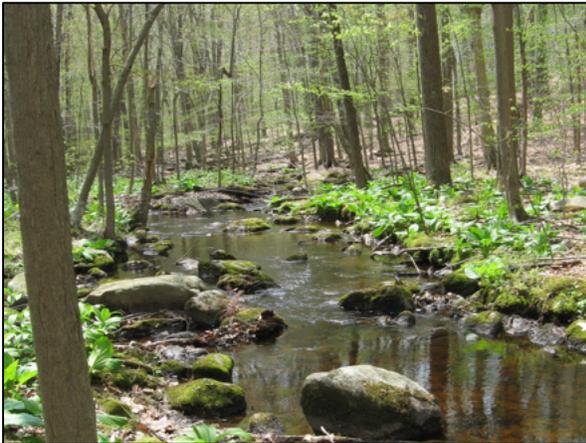


*Photo by Paula Byrdy.*



*Photo by Patrice Gillespie.*

**Natural Resources:**



*Photo by Patrice Gillespie.*



*Photo by Naomi Dempsy.*

**Special Places:**



With these considerations in mind, the overall vision (or Plan Philosophy) in Wilton’s 1996 and 1999 Plans of Conservation and Development continues to resonate:

**Provide an attractive environment for all ages in which to live, work, play, learn, enjoy, and raise a family.**

**Preserve and enhance Wilton’s semi-rural and residential character.**

**Blend the heritage of the past with the potential for the future.**

**Contribute to the economic, social, natural, and cultural environment that makes up the Town.**

To achieve this vision, the goals for Wilton are:

<b>Goals</b>	
<b>Conservation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Protect natural resources to promote environmental sustainability and to ensure public health and safety.</i></li> <li>• <i>Protect, preserve and acquire open space and greenways.</i></li> <li>• <i>Preserve features that contribute to Wilton’s character.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Retain the low density pattern of housing while encouraging housing choices to address current and future needs.</i></li> <li>• <i>Enhance existing villages and encourage development in village-type patterns in appropriate areas.</i></li> <li>• <i>Allow for business development along Route 7, while managing the character and impacts of development.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ensure that community facilities are located in areas that meet the needs of residents and the Town and that facilities and utilities meet desired levels of service.</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide transportation options to meet Wilton’s needs, while minimizing impacts to the environment and town character.</i></li> <li>• <i>Improve the viability of walking and biking.</i></li> </ul>

# CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

# 4

This chapter provides strategies to protect those things that make invaluable contributions to Wilton’s character, ecological health and community spirit.

While this section provides separate sets of strategies for protecting natural resources, preserving open space, and preserving Wilton’s character, these topics are linked. Wilton would have a much different look and feel if its rivers, ponds, forests, and fields were to disappear.

Protecting natural resources, open space and character have been important goals for many decades in Wilton and continue to be important. Becoming a more “sustainable” community in terms of energy consumption is an emerging issue that is also included in this chapter.



Photo by Patrice Gillespie.



## Protect Natural Resources

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Wilton's natural resources support a diverse ecology, protect public health, and define and contribute to the community's character. From an ecological perspective, natural resources provide habitat, soil stability, filtration and absorption of precipitation, and floodwater storage, among other attributes. These natural resources have value — value that Wilton residents continue to attribute to a high quality of life.

It is no surprise that protecting Wilton's natural resources is widely supported by residents. Residents and Town officials continue to express concern over the loss of trees and overall land disturbance, the quality and quantity of ground water, drainage concerns, quality of and access to the Norwalk River, and overall public education.

In addition to protecting natural resources in Wilton, residents want Wilton to serve as a role model for overall sustainability.

**Goal – Protect natural resources to promote environmental sustainability and to ensure public health and safety.**

**Strategies include –**

- **Preserve and conserve important natural resources**
- **Protect the quality and quantity of surface waters and aquifers**
- **Reduce the amount of storm water runoff**
- **Protect habitat**
- **Protect and preserve trees**
- **Reduce Wilton's energy consumption and carbon emissions**



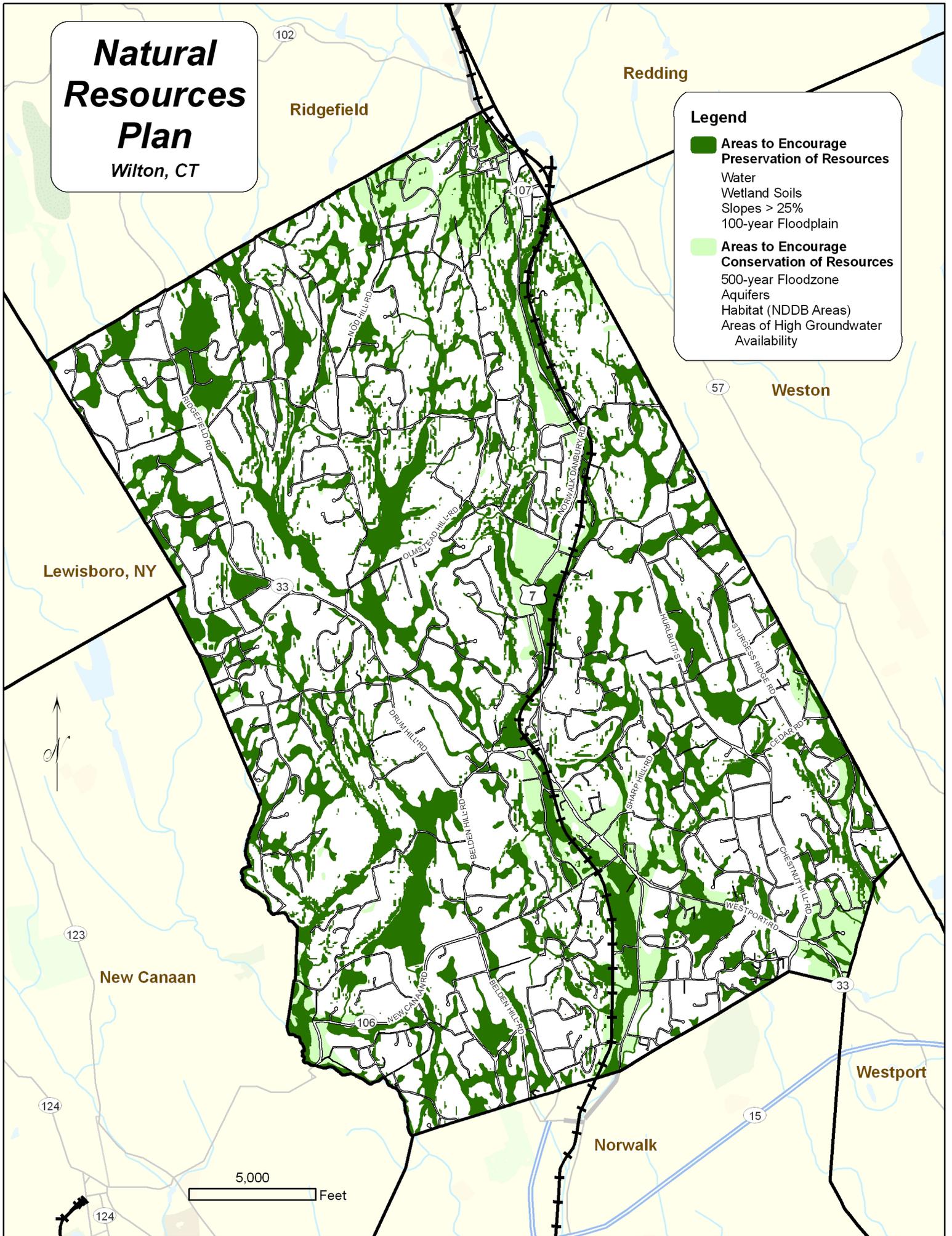
*Photos by Henrick Teraszkiewicz, Woodcock Nature Center.*

# Natural Resources Plan

Wilton, CT

## Legend

- Areas to Encourage Preservation of Resources**
  - Water
  - Wetland Soils
  - Slopes > 25%
  - 100-year Floodplain
- Areas to Encourage Conservation of Resources**
  - 500-year Floodzone
  - Aquifers
  - Habitat (NDDDB Areas)
  - Areas of High Groundwater Availability



## **Preserve and Conserve Important Natural Resources**

Some natural resources are so important to environmental quality, public health or character that alterations should be avoided to the extent feasible; i.e., they should be preserved. These resources include (see Natural Resource Plan on page 27):

- Watercourses
- Wetlands
- Very steep slopes (>25%)
- Floodplain (100 year)

Other resources have important functions that might be able to be maintained (i.e., conserved) while compatible activities take place, if such activities occur in an environmentally sensitive way. These resources include:

- Floodplain (500 year)
- Areas of high ground water availability
- Identified aquifers and recharge areas
- Unique or special habitat areas

To preserve and conserve resources, Wilton should guide growth away from natural resources and, when development does occur, ensure that buildings, roads, yards, etc., are kept away from natural resource areas, and that measures are employed to minimize ecological and character impacts. To carry out these measures, it is important that the Town retain expert staff and educate the public on the value of natural resources and how to protect them. The cumulative impact of many small actions or decisions that tend to occur on lot-by-lot basis can have unintended consequences. Public education can help residents put individual actions into a larger context.

### **Actions to protect natural resources:**

1. Maintain professional staff to implement the strategies recommended in this Plan, to ensure compliance with local regulations, and to proactively seek appropriate approaches to protect natural resources.
2. When important resource areas cannot be protected as open space, ensure that development on “greenfields” (i.e., undeveloped land) protects natural resources by keeping buildings, roads, yards, etc., away from the site’s resources. When warranted, require subdivisions to be conservation subdivisions.
3. For previously developed sites (“greyfields”), ensure that site conditions are improved over current conditions when redeveloped.
4. Continue to provide and enhance public education.
5. Re-evaluate regulations to enable Wilton to guide its development towards the policies in this Plan.

## Protect Water Resources and Reduce Storm Water Runoff

Improving water quality is a key concern of both residents and local officials, in large part because Wilton residents primarily rely upon ground water for drinking water. Concerns are focused on water quality of the Norwalk River and other surface waters and ground water. Addressing drainage concerns and ensuring ground water is adequately replenished in order to continue to meet drinking water needs are also important.

Because surface waters are visible and can provide recreation and aesthetic value, residents can easily grasp the need to protect those resources. It can be more difficult to understand the need to protect ground water and it can also be difficult to fully understand how activities on land can impact ground water quality and quantity. Protecting Wilton's ground water is critical because of its current and potential future role in providing drinking water.

Ground water that does or could likely provide drinking water is often referred to as an "aquifer." In Connecticut, the State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) labels aquifers as those ground water supplies that are currently used for a public supply. This means that only a small area of Wilton is a state-defined aquifer. The Planning and Zoning Commission serves as the Wilton's aquifer protection agency, under this state program.

In addition to the public aquifer located in southeast Wilton, other areas of potentially abundant yield are located in an Aquifer Protection Zone, which runs parallel to the Norwalk River. In fact, Aquarion holds the rights to a future well in this area. This Plan includes these areas when referring to "aquifers."

### Storm Water Runoff Quality

Managing storm water runoff can reduce the amount of pollution reaching water resources and help alleviate drainage problems (as discussed in the next section).

The quality of runoff is degraded as precipitation passes over land and picks up pollutants such as nitrogen, phosphorous, heavy metals, bacteria, and sediment. As a result of impacts from storm water (and other pollutants), the Norwalk River no longer meets its state-designated Class B, fishable / swimmable standards and DEP has issued a Total Daily Maximum Load (TDML) for bacteria in the Norwalk River and Silvermine River. This issuance requires Wilton and other communities to focus storm water efforts on these rivers.

Storm water runoff can also create thermal pollution (artificially elevated water temperatures). The loss of shade along ponds and waterways leaves water bodies unprotected from sunlight, increasing water temperatures. Warmed water supports a narrower assemblage of aquatic life, from insects up to fish species — especially the numerous trout that the DEP helps to raise to stock the river. Warmer water also holds less oxygen and better supports algae blooms. Therefore the preservation of trees and

## Low Impact Development

Low Impact Development (LID) is a comprehensive approach to reducing development impacts. A main tenet is mimicking natural drainage processes rather than piping water off-site as quickly as possible. LID has been proven effective at protecting water quality and reducing runoff volume. Often, LID is less costly than conventional approaches.

LID generally sets new standards for how to handle drainage in zoning and subdivision regulations.

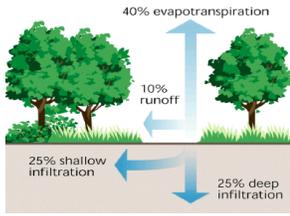
Implementing LID can entail a change in mind-set of how storm water is handled. Fortunately, more communities are adopting LID and they can serve as models to communities that are finding that traditional approaches for managing storm water no longer meet needs.

For an overview of LID see [www.epa.gov/owow/nps/lid](http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/lid)

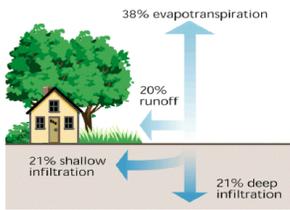
## Total Daily Maximum Load

According to DEP: "A TMDL is a tool Water Quality Managers use to address water quality problems. TMDLs provide the framework for restoring impaired waters by establishing the maximum amount of a pollutant that a water body can take in without adverse impact to fish, wildlife, recreation, or other public uses."

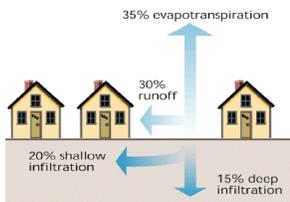
**Groundcover and Runoff**



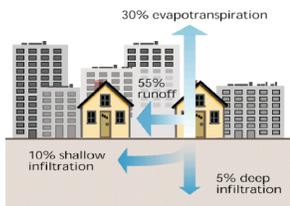
*Natural ground cover*



*10 - 20% impervious surfaces*



*35 - 50% impervious surfaces*



*75 - 100% impervious surfaces*

overall reduction in runoff volume are important components in minimizing thermal pollution.

Fortunately, wetland systems can help ameliorate impacts. Wetlands retain pollutants in the plants and soil. Storm water held in wetlands recharge the ground water table, which in turn supports a cool base flow in the nearby watercourses. Wetlands hold storm water and release it slowly, decreasing property damage and ecosystem degradation that can result from storm flows.

The federal government has also recognized the seriousness of storm water pollution. As of 2003, many municipalities including Wilton, are required to take additional measures to minimize storm water pollution. This program is referred to as NPDES Phase II (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System). Communities are required to develop a storm water management plan outlining best practices the community will undertake to reduce storm water pollution.

One comprehensive approach to better managing storm water is “Low Impact Development” (LID). LID aims to mimic natural drainage patterns and encourage infiltration. Some communities incorporate these principles into their zoning and subdivision regulations while others employ LID on a site-by-site basis. Incorporating LID into municipal practices (e.g., natural drainage rather than piped drainage) can also be an important step in addressing storm water.

Storm Water Runoff Quantity

To date, the Town has done the following to address drainage issues:

- Through the South West Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA), Wilton has adopted a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan.
- Wilton’s land use regulations require a storm water analysis for subdivisions and uses requiring a site plan. While the regulations address peak run-off, they do not limit total volume of runoff.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in addressing drainage issues is trying to grasp the cumulative watershed impacts caused by seemingly minor changes on individual lots. Wilton is not alone in dealing with this issue; a number of communities have adopted practices from which Wilton can tailor its own approach. Boards, commissions and Town officials have expressed concern that the Town does not currently have the tools or the specialized staff to manage drainage impacts from smaller-scale construction projects. As a result, property owners are seeing localized drainage problems.

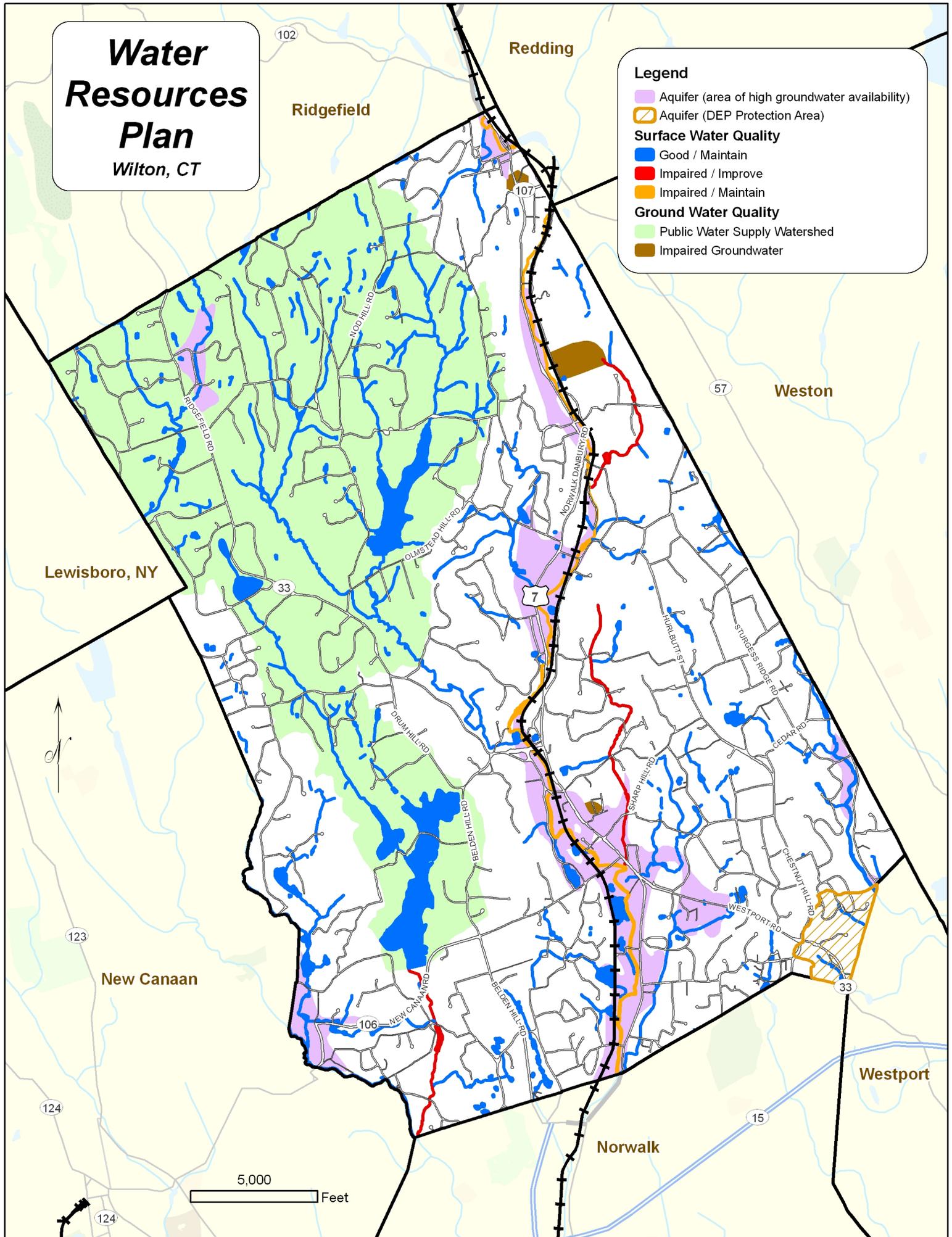
Many areas, particularly along the Norwalk River, were developed before current limits on coverage were put into zoning. As a result, there are vast areas of impervious surfaces where little on-site infiltration can occur. Because there is little vacant land in Wilton, redevelopment will play an important role in the future. The Town should ensure that redevelopment improves conditions by reducing storm water runoff. A proactive approach to flood management and mitigation is important. Having a local action plan, in conjunction with regional and state coordination, can help in these efforts.

# Water Resources Plan

Wilton, CT

**Legend**

- Aquifer (area of high groundwater availability)
- Aquifer (DEP Protection Area)
- Surface Water Quality**
- Good / Maintain
- Impaired / Improve
- Impaired / Maintain
- Ground Water Quality**
- Public Water Supply Watershed
- Impaired Groundwater



### **Septic Management Ordinances**

A Septic Management Ordinance requires mandatory inspection and maintenance of septic systems. The ordinance sets how often maintenance must occur. Contractors provide proof of maintenance to the local health department.

### **Alternative On-Site Sewage Treatment Systems (ATS)**

An ATS is an on-site sewage treatment system that pretreats effluent before it is discharged. This type of system is used in place of a conventional septic tank and leaching fields.

### Sewage Disposal

Sewage disposal systems can pose threats to water quality. Some 90% of Wilton's residents are served by private wells and a similar number have individual subsurface sewage disposal systems (septic systems). Improper use or a lack of maintenance of a septic system can pose a risk to water quality. Septic failures contribute to pollution problems in the Norwalk and Silvermine rivers.

There are a range of options to address failing septic systems, from improved maintenance to extending sewers. However, the presence of public sewers can spur growth in areas intended to remain rural.

To avoid such extensions of sewers, it is important that septic systems function properly and do not threaten water supplies. To ensure proper maintenance, some communities have passed a septic management ordinance, requiring residents to pump out their systems on a regular basis. Wilton should consider adopting such an ordinance.

Some developments in Connecticut are using a new technology called "Alternative On-Site Sewage Treatment Systems" (ATS). Environmental organizations are developing guidance for communities to ensure that if an ATS is proposed, the community has the tools in place to conduct an adequate review, ensure proper monitoring and determine accountability should a failure occur. Wilton should review the guidance, once it is available, to determine if measures should be adopted.

### Additional Threats to Water Quality

Another threat to ground water quality is related to the Town's former landfill. The Town has installed bedrock and surface water wells to monitor water quality and monitors water quality of some residential wells near the landfill. Mitigating impacts, such as by extending public water infrastructure, results in costs to the Town. Future development in the impacted area should be minimized.

Improper disposal of toxic substances can impact water quality. This includes household wastes and medical waste (a source that is beginning to receive more attention). Research is finding that pharmaceuticals in waterways impact aquatic life. The exact impacts on Wilton's water bodies is not yet known, but this emerging issue may warrant attention.

Finally, activities outside of Wilton's borders impact water quality in Wilton, just as activities in Wilton can impact downstream communities. Cooperation among neighboring communities is crucial when addressing water quality issues.

### Ground Water Availability

With few exceptions, Wilton is fortunate to have an adequate if not ample water supply from wells drilled into bedrock or stratified drift that lies below lots. This is a condition that is not universally found and, given the dependence on ground water, it is a condition that should not be taken for granted.

In the past several years the Town has been faced with drought conditions leaving some fearful about the viability of their wells to serve the needs of their homes or businesses. According to Town officials and board / commission members, some homeowners experience periods of low and no flow, leaving them to wonder how their use patterns and those of the surrounding development may contribute to the situation.

Regulating ground water usage for single family homes is challenging. How water moves through bedrock and stratified drift is not readily apparent from the earth's surface. Consequently, the justification to limit use even in periods of drought may be difficult without hydrogeologic information to establish a cause and effect correlation between different ground water sources.

Protecting existing and future drinking water sources is critical to the Town. Two factors could stress the amount of ground water available over the long term: the amount of water used by each household and the amount of water available to recharge ground water levels.

A prudent first step may be to monitor the situation by annually reviewing well permit data and logging complaints about well water levels. If a trend becomes evident, additional measures to encourage infiltration and reduce the number of irrigation wells could be the next step. Educating residents about how their water use can impact neighbors may also be an important step. The Town might explore whether a drought ordinance would help minimize impacts should future droughts occur.

#### **Actions to protect water resources:**

1. Reduce storm water pollution:
  - Ensure that the Town is up-to-date in its storm water management (NPDES) requirements.
  - Consider requiring Low Impact Development (LID) techniques for all new development, including Town projects and road projects.
  - Assist property owners along the Norwalk River with retrofitting properties using LID principles.
  - Ensure that redevelopment incorporates measures to improve storm water quality and quantity.

2. Reduce the amount of storm water runoff:
  - Ensure expert engineering review of projects with potential storm water impacts.
  - Adopt regulations or incentives to decrease runoff by reducing the clearing of woody vegetation.
  - Require drainage review for all projects that exceed a certain threshold of land clearing or a certain percentage of impervious surface.
  - Reduce impervious surfaces by adopting impervious coverage allowances for all zoning districts and / or amending regulations to decrease the need for impervious surfaces.
  - Ensure that redevelopment reduces runoff from current conditions.
  - Encourage landowners to reduce storm water runoff, such as with rain gardens, rain barrels and other measures.
3. Minimize other potential pollution sources:
  - Ensure that development over aquifers incorporates measures to protect the aquifer.
  - Consider adopting a septic management ordinance.
  - Investigate measures to reduce the presence of medical wastes in water resources.
  - Continue to assess the ecological and health implications of winter road salting and investigate alternatives.
  - Continue to monitor surface waters to maintain accurate assessments of pollution risks, to determine if additional regulations are needed to reduce sources of pollution, and to measure progress.
4. Continue and expand public education efforts:
  - Educate the public on the Norwalk River's TDML criteria so that individuals can make informed decisions.
  - Educate on the benefits of riparian and wetlands protection.
  - Promote school curricula that focus on the Norwalk River.
  - Educate residents on how their well water use can impact neighbors.
5. Continue to participate in regional efforts to implement the *Norwalk River Action Plan* and to assess future cumulative impacts on the river due to development in the region; work with the State to gain their assistance in protecting the river.
6. Monitor well water quantity issues by establishing a database based on information submitted to the local health department for each new well and complaints received; review data annually.
7. Explore the need for a drought ordinance.

## Protect Habitat

Landscapes that provide habitat include meadows, forests, and water bodies. State-designated natural diversity areas (approximate locations of endangered, threatened and special concern species and significant natural communities) are located in the northern part of Wilton and in spots along the border with Weston. Allen's Meadows is known to support numerous bird species along their lengthy migrations and has been included in a book listing the top 25 birding sites in Connecticut and Rhode Island (*Birding in Connecticut and Rhode Island*, by Frank Gallo Rapoza). Woodlands provide habitat that is equally valuable and much more prevalent in Wilton. Through its open space protection efforts, Wilton has made progress protecting some areas of important habitat.

Threats to habitat, particularly native forest associations, include non-native invasive species, over-abundant deer populations, and human activities. Invasive species, such as Asiatic bittersweet routinely climbs trees at the forest periphery and eventually kills the tree. Forest understories are frequently dominated by winged euonymus and Japanese barberry rather than native shrubs. Less understory diversity means fewer wildlife species live in such areas.

Deer overabundance and human activities can diminish the extent of native woodlands. Larger homes, driveways, and lawns fragment habitat and convert productive forests and fields to impervious surfaces or lawns. Lawns support undesirable species such as non-migratory Canada geese and also often require greater water use and the use of fertilizers and pesticides.

As indicated in the Conditions and Trends chapter, roughly 90% of land in Wilton is committed to some use. This gives added importance to managing habitat on existing open space and promoting habitat creation and enhancement in already-developed areas.

### **Actions to protect habitat:**

1. Protect areas identified on the Natural Diversity Database.
2. Minimize the clearing of forest habitat when sites are developed by ensuring sites are designed to place development away from habitat areas and by minimizing land clearing during construction.
3. Encourage the creation of backyard habitat and recognize efforts.
4. Determine appropriate methods to manage nuisance species.

## **Protect and Preserve Trees**

Wilton's tree-lined roads play a crucial role in defining the Town's character. However, the trees and vegetation found throughout the Town also play a critical role in protecting the environment and public health and safety. Residents have expressed concern over current and potential impacts due to tree clearing in Town. Among the many benefits, trees serve to: filter air pollution, sequester carbon, decrease storm water runoff, reduce erosion, and provide habitat. As discussed earlier, storm water issues are of particular concern in Wilton.

Determining a reasonable and effective approach to either encouraging or requiring landowners to retain tree coverage might be challenging. It is not clear how much authority a community may have in regulating clearing practices. A multi-prong approach may include education, some level of drainage review when trees are cleared, and exploring additional regulatory options.

In terms of education, some landowners may not be able to easily connect their action of clearing vegetation with impacts on neighboring properties. The Town may wish to educate residents on these impacts.

As discussed earlier, some communities do require a drainage review if a certain amount of land is cleared. While this does not prevent the clearing of trees, it can help ensure that proper measures are put in place to minimize potential impacts. Longer term, the Town should monitor potential tools that might become available to help communities address the impacts of removing trees and monitor approaches being used by other communities.

### **Actions to preserve and protect trees:**

1. Continue to raise public awareness of the importance of trees and encourage landowners to plant more trees.
2. Consider requiring drainage review when a certain amount of land is cleared of vegetation.
3. Explore other mechanisms to minimize the clearing of trees.
4. Conduct a town-wide inventory and assessment of street trees.
5. Continue to implement the Wilton Center Tree Plan.
6. Continue to commit capital funding annually for public tree maintenance and plantings.

## **Reduce Wilton's Energy Consumption and Carbon Emissions**

The Town, like the State and Nation as a whole, faces a number of energy related challenges. Currently, Connecticut is one of the highest per-capita energy consumers in the nation. As of 2008, according to Connecticut Light and Power (CL&P), Wilton has the unfavorable distinction of being one of the top ten per capita energy consumers in the State.

Given the growing importance of energy to the quality of life in our community, the Wilton Board of Selectmen formed the Wilton Energy Commission in September of 2007. The mission of the Energy Commission is to provide guidance to the Town government, local businesses and residents regarding energy conservation and sustainability.

Over the past year, the Town of Wilton has undertaken a number of proactive steps to address these challenges:

- Membership in the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI)
- Designation as a Connecticut Clean Community
- Formation of the Wilton Energy Commission
- More than 200 Wilton households have signed up for the CT Clean Options program
- Energy assessments and re-lamping initiatives across the school buildings and town facilities which have yielded greater than \$100,000 in annual savings
- Oil burner assessment and replacement at Wilton High School delivering approximately \$50,000 in annual heating oil savings
- Procurement of hybrid vehicles for Town use
- Incorporation of Wilton Energy Commission representatives in each major Town building project
- Benchmarking the carbon footprint of municipal buildings (including schools) to compare Wilton with comparable peers (i.e. other small northeast towns) and to establish a baseline to measure improvements in the reduction of energy use over time.

As an official Connecticut Clean City, Wilton has resolved to become a leader in Energy Conservation and Sustainability. To become a leader, Wilton should address building energy standards in the public and private sectors, establish and publish energy-related benchmarks, reduce peak energy consumption, and promote energy-efficient patterns of development and transportation options.

These issues are discussed on the following pages (strategies related to transportation are outlined in Chapter 6).

In addition, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Conservation Commission should continue to work with the Wilton Energy Commission to develop a more detailed action plan to address these energy related challenges.

## **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)**

According to the U.S. Green Building Council:

“LEED certification provides independent, third-party verification that a building project meets the highest green building and performance measures. All certified projects receive a LEED plaque, which is the nationally recognized symbol demonstrating that a building is environmentally responsible, profitable and a healthy place to live and work.”

Connecticut recently enacted legislation (Public Act 07-242) requiring that certain buildings must meet LEED standards including:

- Certain state-funded projects
- Buildings that cost \$5 million or more
- Renovations costing \$2 million or more

Communities are beginning to encourage development to meet LEED standards, without requiring developers to undergo the extensive LEED certification process.

## Energy Efficient Buildings

Wilton should consider adopting green building standards, such as LEED (see sidebar), for construction and rehabilitation of public buildings and develop incentives to encourage the commercial and residential sector to do the same.

Adopting such standards would:

- Encourage resource conservation.
- Reduce the waste generated by construction projects through recycling.
- Reduce water runoff and resulting erosion and stream pollution.
- Increase energy efficiency.
- Reduce green house gas emissions.
- Promote the health and productivity of residents, workers and visitors.

## Benchmarks

To gauge the Town’s energy conservation efforts, it will be important to have data on where Wilton is and to establish benchmarks representing where Wilton wishes to be.

The Wilton Energy Commission has completed the process of benchmarking the energy usage by municipal offices, schools and the library. This will allow for the measurement and tracking of a variety of energy conservation initiatives. It is also important to publish the data so that residents, businesses and local officials can monitor progress and update goals and benchmarks as needed.

## Energy Consumption

The Town’s energy strategy should be two-pronged, focusing on using less energy than today (conservation) and ensuring that the energy used is clean, renewable, and efficient (sustainability).

Wilton should work to reduce its peak energy consumption and corresponding carbon emissions by 20% by the year 2020 through conservation and implementation of sustainable energy alternatives and by promoting the development and implementation of sustainable energy alternatives across municipal, commercial and residential applications throughout the community.

Residents, businesses and non-profit organizations and the Town Government, including schools, must take a proactive approach and be given education, tools, and incentives to help them reduce their energy consumption and carbon emissions.

One of the best ways for homeowners and businesses alike to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels is to install alternative energy sources (wind and geothermal turbines, solar panels, etc.). The Town should encourage the installation of appropriate alternative energy sources.

By way of example, Berkeley, California recently adopted a program whereby property owners, using city-approved contractors, can obtain photo voltaic (solar) systems from the City and pay for them through a 20-year property tax assessment. The assessments are structured to approximate the expected savings in energy costs. Future owners of the property inherit the unpaid tax, along with the solar panel system.

**Actions to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions:**

1. Work with the Wilton Energy Commission to develop a more detailed action plan.
2. Require all Wilton municipal and school buildings to be designed and constructed to meet or exceed a LEED Silver standard, or the prevailing comparable international standard, including those which do not fall under the state requirement.
3. Explore incentives to encourage the private sector and residents to invest in the energy saving and environmental benefits of LEED certified design and construction.
4. Update the energy usage for the Town's municipal offices, schools and library on a regular basis and use the information to manage energy consumption and recognize outstanding accomplishments.
5. Encourage the municipal purchase and use of equipment and appliances with the EPA Energy Star designation.
6. Continue to provide local property tax incentives for installation of alternative energy sources and provide clear documentation that such installations will not increase the tax assessment of a property.
7. Review regulations to identify appropriate opportunities for alternative energy systems.
8. Promote and communicate these incentives to encourage similar installations.
9. Establish an annual recognition program for residents and businesses that have employed sustainable energy efforts.
10. As the Town milestone of purchasing 20% of its power from clean renewable sources by 2010 is reached, increase this commitment by 2% each year.

**Greenway**

A Greenway is linear open space often established along a natural corridor or along abandoned rights-of-ways that have been converted to open space or recreation use.

A greenway may include paths or trails and may connect specific destinations.

## Preserve Open Space and Greenways

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Thoughtfully planned open space acquisitions and preservation:

- Conserve natural resources,
- Provide opportunities for passive recreation,
- Strongly contribute to the semi-rural character of the Town,
- Provide fiscal benefits through reduced service demands and stabilized property taxes, and
- Enhance the quality of life.

Protecting and preserving open space and connecting open space with greenways were important goals in previous Plans and remain important today.

**Goal – Preserve open space and greenways.**

**Strategies include –**

- **Create greenways**
- **Continue efforts to acquire open space**
- **Explore funding mechanisms**
- **Manage existing open space**



## Create Greenways

Wilton has the opportunity to build upon its successful efforts to preserve open space by focusing on the creation of a comprehensive open space and greenway system. The Town should identify and seek opportunities to tie together open space, neighborhoods, community facilities and destinations with a system of greenways and pathways. In addition to environmental benefits, such a greenway system increases the ability of residents to get around on foot or by bicycle.

An appropriate use for the State Right of Way for Route 7 (i.e., the former “Super 7” corridor) is a greenway. Creating a greenway with trails along this right of way and along stretches of the Norwalk River would help to establish important linkages. For more detail on desired pathways in Wilton Center, see pages 64 to 66.

## Acquire Open Space and Explore Funding Mechanisms

There are various types of open space with different levels of protection from development (see sidebar). The Town has made great efforts to preserve a number of parcels as protected open space, since this has been a priority for Wilton. Since the 1996 Plan, Wilton has successfully protected an additional 12 properties, totaling 400 acres. The properties were protected through below market purchases of the land in fee simple or through purchases of development rights. In total, almost 1,900 acres or 11% of Wilton, is permanently protected as open space.

There are various ways to preserve open space. Selecting the appropriate method requires determining whether the intent is to have public or private ownership, preserve a specific resource or an overall area, or provide for a particular need or linkage.

Methods include:

- Public Fee Ownership – This can be accomplished through purchase or donation. Public ownership is most likely to ensure public access, facilitate resource protection, and preserve character.
- Private Fee Ownership – Private land trusts are instrumental in protecting a significant portion of open space. Ownership can occur through donation or by raising funds to purchase. Generally, land trust lands are open to the public for passive recreation in addition to serving other valuable open space functions.
- Public Easement – Public easements are typically donated to or purchased by a public entity for public access and / or resource protection. Easements are a cost-effective way to provide for trail linkages or resource protection.
- Private Easements – Private easements are like public easements except that they are granted to a private entity.

In terms of public ownership, the Town, with voter approval, has been able to fund acquisitions through bonding requests made for each parcel or bundle of parcels. Wilton also has received grants for preserving open space.

## Public Support for Open Space Acquisition

- The voter approval rating for purchases has been exceptionally high, ranging from 70% to 90% approval for bond requests.
- 82% of residents support continued purchasing of open space.

## Types of Open Space

Open space generally falls into the following categories which are not always mutually exclusive:

**Protected Open Space** - preserved in perpetuity as open space.

**Unprotected Open Space** - set aside for some other purpose, such as golf course or water supply land, but provides some open space value. Public use is not always allowed. In many cases, this land could be developed at any time.

**Perceived Open Space** - looks or feels open, but is privately owned and not preserved as open space. Examples include farms and undeveloped land.

### Land Acquisition Fund

CGS 7-131r states that: "Any municipality, by vote of its legislative body, may establish a special fund, which shall be known as the land acquisition fund. There shall be deposited in said fund, annually, an amount, not to exceed the amount which would be generated by the imposition of a tax of two mills against the property subject to tax in such municipality pursuant to chapter 203, as may be appropriated by the municipality. Such fund shall be used by the municipality for the acquisition of land to be used for open space, recreation or housing. Such fund shall not lapse at the close of the municipal fiscal year."

In addition, an Open Space Fund was established with funds added annually. Given the high cost of land or development rights, the Open Space Fund was not envisioned to be the primary funding mechanism, but to be used as seed money, to partner on smaller projects, to finance accessory costs (such as surveys and legal fees), and to use as matching funds for grants. This fund has worked well, but is depleted and annual contributions have not been made in recent years. The Town may need to investigate other funding options, such as a Land Acquisition Fund (see sidebar).

Today, some priority parcels identified in the 1996 Plan remain unprotected. Of those, land owned by South Norwalk Electric and Water, an entity of the City of Norwalk, is the largest land owner. Fortunately, state legislation gives municipalities the right of first refusal to purchase decommissioned water company land. Given the financial will, those 1,000+ acres could be obtained by the Town if they become available.

### Manage Existing Open Space

The management of existing open space is important. As mentioned earlier, nuisance / over-abundant wildlife species, such as deer, can impact the quality of open space. Also, open space with trails require regular maintenance.

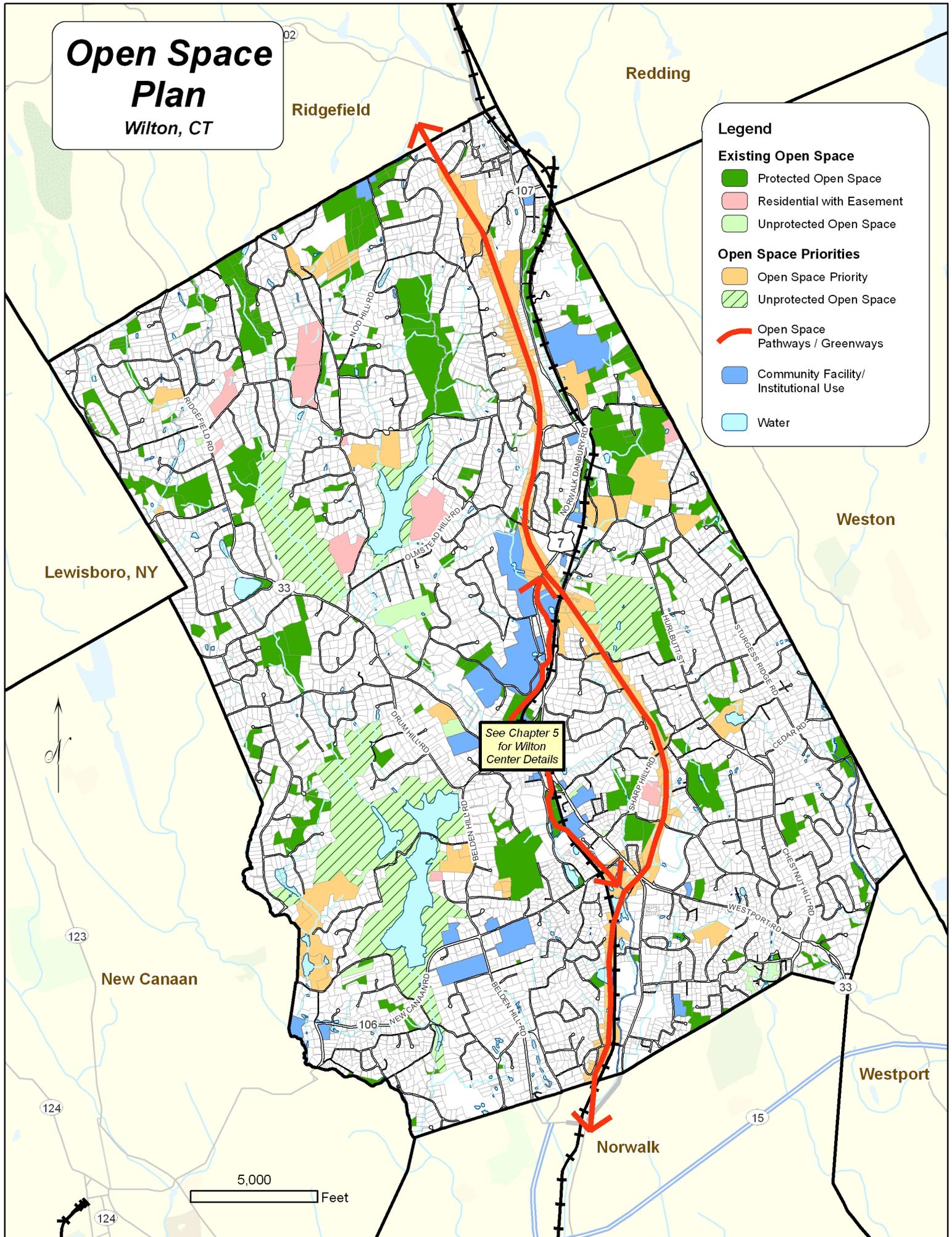
As the Town sees an increase in older residents, the Town might see demand for providing accessible trails in appropriate locations. Exploring options for making some trails ADA-accessible can expand the enjoyment of open space to a wider range of ages and physical abilities.

The Town has successfully created trails and pathways around the Town including near the Norwalk River. Improvements of these pathways should continue.



# Open Space Plan

Wilton, CT



**Actions to protect, preserve and acquire open space and greenways:**

1. Create greenways to link destinations and increase recreational opportunities in Wilton:
  - Continue to investigate the feasibility of trails within the State Right of Way for Route 7.
  - Create the Norwalk River Walk (see page 66).
  - Identify other greenway opportunities.
  - Look for opportunities along railroad rights-of-way.
  
2. Continue efforts to acquire open space, focusing on important parcels identified on the Open Space Plan map:
  - Maintain / develop relationships with large land owners to encourage preservation of their land.
  - Maintain strong relationships with land trusts to facilitate partnerships in preservation.
  - Revise subdivision regulations to require open space set asides to reflect the upland to wetland ratio of the entire parcel.
  
3. Explore appropriate open space acquisition funding mechanisms:
  - Reestablish annual contributions to the Open Space Fund.
  - Amend the subdivision regulations to allow fees in lieu of open space and place the fees in the Open Space Fund.
  - Investigate the suitability of establishing a Land Acquisition Fund.
  - Continue to use bonding; supplement with grants.
  - Continue to support federal legislative initiatives that provide tax incentives for owners willing to offer protection at below market values.
  
4. Manage existing open space:
  - Continue to utilize the Town's GIS to create accurate trail maps of existing open space.
  - Update the Open Space Plan map and trail inventories annually.
  - Continue annual funding for the maintenance of the open space.
  - Where feasible and appropriate, upgrade paths to be ADA-accessible.
  - Continue to improve the function and appearance of existing trails, including along the Norwalk River.

## Preserve Wilton's Character

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Character is difficult to define and each resident has his or her own view of what contributes to Wilton's character. Some elements did emerge at public workshops. These include open space and the overall feel of "open-ness", roads lined with trees and stonewalls, historic buildings, and scenic vistas.

Some character-defining features, such as natural resources and those relating to villages and building aesthetics, are addressed elsewhere in this Plan.

**Goal – Preserve features that contribute to Wilton's character.**

**Strategies include –**

- **Preserve Historic Resources**
- **Preserve Wilton's Scenic Roads and Scenic Views**
- **Minimize Light and Noise Pollution**



## Preserve Historic Resources

Residents are proud of Wilton’s historic villages and buildings and recognize that the loss of these resources could threaten the community’s historic character. Historic resource protection strategies generally include recognition programs, regulatory protection, and ownership of important resources.

National and State Historic District and Place designations recognize areas with historical merit. These designations affect activities involving federal and / or state funding and may prevent unreasonable destruction of historic resources. Local Historic District designations give local historic district commissions the authority to regulate the construction and demolition of structures and the alteration of architectural features. In Wilton, the Historic District and Historic Properties Commission carries out this function.

The following table lists Wilton’s National, State, and Local designated historic districts and places; most are shown on the map. Since State districts coincide with National and Local districts, they are not shown separately on the map. The only State Register structures shown on the map are those located outside of a local or national district.

Districts	Recognition Programs		Regulatory Protection
	National	State	Local
Cannondale Historic District	✓	✓	
Wilton Center Historic District	✓	✓	
Georgetown Historic District	✓	✓	
Lamberts Corner Historic District		✓	✓
Old Town Hall Historic District		✓	✓
Wilton Historical Society Complex		✓	✓
Hurlbutt Street Schoolhouse District		✓	✓
Georgetown Neighborhood District		✓	✓

Places*	National**	State
Weir Farm	✓	✓
Lambert House	✓	✓
Sloan-Raymond-Fitch House	✓	✓
Marvin Tavern / House	✓	✓
Stewart-Wescott House		✓
Elijah Wescott House		✓
Old Town Hall (in Town Hall District)		✓
Nathan Comstock House (in Town Hall District)		✓
Matthew Gregory House		✓
Betts House (in Historical Society Complex)		✓
Gaylord House		✓
3 residences with no addresses		✓
Cannon General Store (in Lambert District)		✓
Hurlbutt Street Schoolhouse	✓	✓

\*Places located in local historic districts have local regulatory protection also.

\*\*Many buildings located in National Districts are also National Historic Places. Because of the large number of these buildings, they may not be listed or may not have a “✓” in the National column.

# Historic Resources Plan

Wilton, CT

**National Historic Districts** ▭

- A** Cannondale Historic District
- B** Wilton Center Historic District
- C** Georgetown Historic District

**Local Historic Districts** ▭

- D** Lambert Corners
- E** Old Town Hall
- F** Wilton Historical Society Museum Complex
- G** Hurlbutt Street Schoolhouse
- H** Georgetown Neighborhood

(National and Local districts are also on the State Register)

**National Register of Historic Places\*** ★

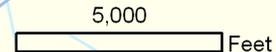
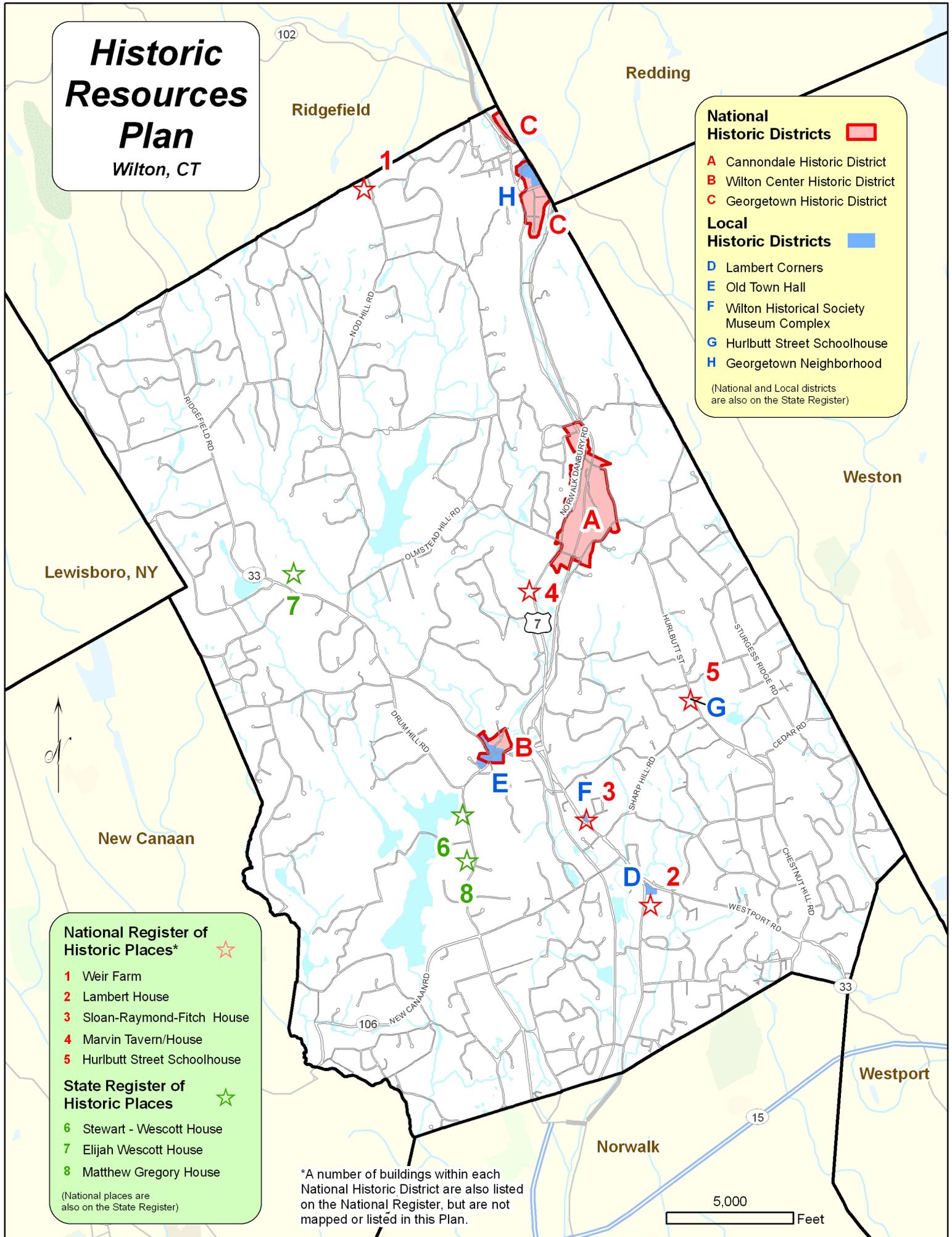
- 1** Weir Farm
- 2** Lambert House
- 3** Sloan-Raymond-Fitch House
- 4** Marvin Tavern/House
- 5** Hurlbutt Street Schoolhouse

**State Register of Historic Places** ★

- 6** Stewart - Wescott House
- 7** Elijah Wescott House
- 8** Matthew Gregory House

(National places are also on the State Register)

\*A number of buildings within each National Historic District are also listed on the National Register, but are not mapped or listed in this Plan.



### **Tax Abatements for Historic Properties**

CGS Sec. 12-65e authorizes communities to fix assessments during rehabilitation and / or phase in increased assessments resulting from the rehabilitation of properties within a designated rehabilitation area.

CGS Sec. 12-127a authorizes communities to abate taxes for buildings of historic or architectural merit. The statute reads in part as follows: "Such tax abatement shall be available to the owners of real property which is so classified if it can be shown to the satisfaction of the municipality that the current level of taxation is a material factor which threatens the continued existence of the structure, necessitating either its demolition or remodeling in a manner which destroys the historical or architectural value."

The number of historic districts and structures in the table indicates success in ensuring that Wilton's historic resources are recognized. Additional steps taken to preserve and protect these and other historic resources include:

- Adoption of a demolition delay ordinance.
- Successful re-use of buildings for public and private purposes.
- Allowing flexibility of certain zoning provisions to encourage adaptive use and continued use of historic buildings.
- The Wilton Historical Society created the *Architectural Survey of Wilton* in 1989. The Town is fortunate to have a thorough compilation of information about important buildings.

Challenges remain, including finding adequate funding to carry out preservation activities. The Certified Local Government program (a joint effort of the National Park Service and the State Historic Preservation Office) is one way to expand funding opportunities for historic preservation (see <http://www.cttrust.org/index.cgi/142> for more information).

There are many other older buildings and structures in Wilton that are not designated as historic resources, yet play an important role in the Town's historical character. The zoning provisions may help keep these in active use, but it is important to ensure that adequate flexibility is allowed to meet modern needs. Also, the cost of maintaining older structures may be a hardship to owners. State statutes do allow tax abatements for historic structures (see sidebar).

#### **Actions to protect historic resources:**

1. Provide funding for historic preservation:
  - Provide annual funding for the activities of the Wilton Historic Districts and Historic Properties Commission.
  - Become a Certified Local Government to expand funding opportunities for historic preservation.
2. Consider updating the demolition delay ordinance to allow up to a 180 day delay.
3. Amend adaptive use regulations to allow expansions that are greater than 10% of the total gross floor area.
4. Continue to allow flexibility in dimensional requirements for historic and architecturally significant buildings. Monitor the success of this provision and consider expanding eligibility or increasing dimensional flexibility.
5. Explore providing tax relief for inhabitants of historic structures.
6. Support the creation of local historic districts, where appropriate.

## **Preserve Wilton's Scenic Roads and Scenic Views**

Wilton has taken the following measures to preserve its trees, scenic roads and scenic views. The Town has:

- Developed stonewall preservation guidelines.
- Amended development regulations to require the preservation of important character-related features on site plans such as scenic views.
- Designated four local scenic roads: Tito Lane, Seeley Road, Huckleberry Hill Road, and Nod Hill Road (Ridgefield Road is a state-designated scenic road). The local scenic road designations help to ensure that road improvements do not impact character.
- Subdivision regulations require the planting of street trees, outline tree-protection measures during construction, require utility wires to be placed underground, and encourage the protection of scenic views.

There are many potential threats to some of these important character features. Perhaps one of the most visible threats to Wilton's character is the loss of trees during construction, including trees along roads, on steep slopes and along ridgelines. In addition to detracting from character, clearing vegetation can also exacerbate or create drainage problems (see earlier recommendations).

While the Town worked closely with the State in designing the landscape plans for the Route 7 corridor, until construction is completed and landscaping is installed, it is difficult to fully understand what the character of the Route 7 corridor will be. This is an important matter since Route 7 forms what some call "the spine" of Wilton and residents have reiterated a desire to maintain and enhance greenery along the entire corridor.

One issue emerging in some communities is the loss of character along roads when tall, solid walls and fences proliferate. The cumulative effect can create the "canyonization" of the road. Communities have confronted this issue by requiring larger setbacks for taller fences. The Town should ensure that its zoning regulations have measures in place to address this issue.

Many of the features that contribute to the Town's character or detract from it occur on private property. Balancing the rights of property owners with the community's desire to maintain its character may require incentive approaches. Continuing the open space Use Assessment Program (PA 490) is one such incentive for preserving perceived open space. The Town's current PA 490 Open Space policy is that those parcels identified as important priorities in the POCD and any parcel that is at least twice the size of the minimum acreage for the zone it is in is eligible for a reduced tax assessment.

**Actions to preserve scenic roads and scenic views:**

1. Update the zoning regulations to strengthen protection for ridgelines and ridge tops.
2. Promote the designation of additional local scenic roads.
3. Strengthen the existing stonewall guidelines to better ensure the preservation and restoration of stonewalls along roadways.
4. Review zoning regulations to ensure that solid fences, walls, and alterations to stonewalls will have minimal impact on public safety and roadway character.
5. Continue the open space use assessment program (PA 490) to retain perceived open space for as long as possible. Continue to define eligibility as those parcels identified as important priorities in the POCD and any parcel that is at least twice the size of the minimum acreage for the zone it is in.

**Minimize Light and Noise Pollution**

Quiet neighborhoods and a lack of bright lighting at nighttime contribute to Wilton’s character. The Town should ensure that both light and noise pollution are minimized. Wilton has provisions in its zoning regulations to require lighting on commercial sites to not trespass off site. Also, by requiring a special permit for many land uses, Wilton can address noise issues that could result from those uses. The ability to regulate outdoor lighting on other properties is limited, but the Town can encourage property owners to retrofit fixtures and provide information on suitable types of fixtures.

**Actions to Minimize Light and Noise Pollution:**

1. Encourage property owners to retrofit lighting to reduce light pollution.
2. Continue to ensure that adequate buffers are provided between commercial and residential uses.
3. Continue to require a special permit for those uses that may create noise.

# Scenic Resources Plan

Wilton, CT

Redding

## Legend

- Scenic View
- Significant Ridgeline
- Local Scenic Road
- State Scenic Road

Ridgefield

Weston

Lewisboro, NY

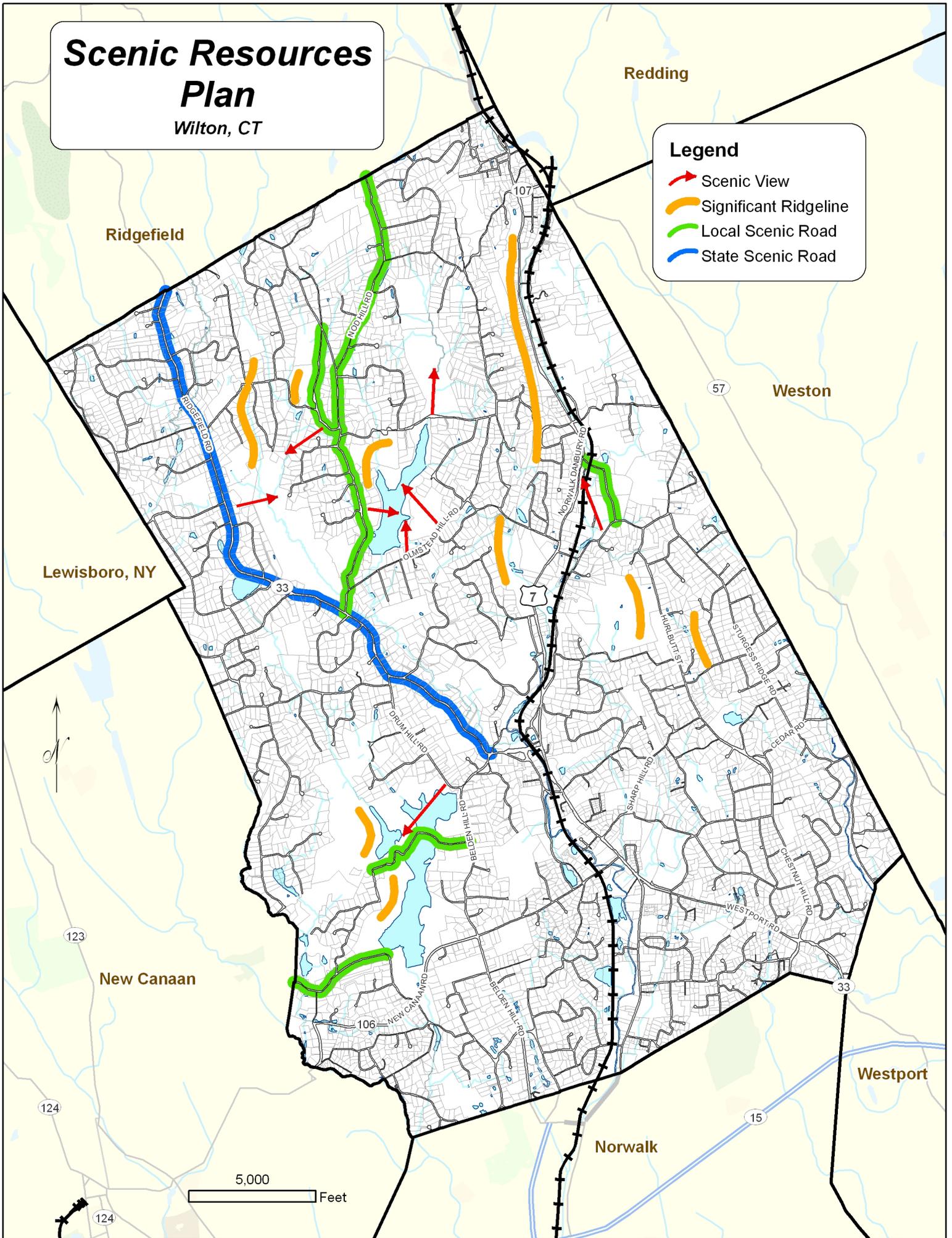


New Canaan

Westport

Norwalk

5,000 Feet



Intentionally blank