



Norwalk River Valley Trail Routing Study Executive Summary

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PREPARED FOR:
Norwalk River Valley Trail Steering Committee

PREPARED BY:
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Acknowledgements

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1 Overview

The Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT) Routing Study report is the product of a year-long effort to study, analyze and develop routing recommendations for a trail along the Norwalk River and Route 7 corridor in Southern Connecticut. The NRVT will ultimately provide residents throughout the region with a safe pedestrian and bicycle path that will connect to neighboring municipalities. Certain sections of the trail will be designed to accommodate equestrians as well.

In most areas along the length of the alignment, the preferred NRVT route was apparent due to the relative ease of developing a trail within the contiguous corridor of Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) properties or because of existing portions of the NRVT currently in use in Wilton and Norwalk. In a handful of locations, however, routing options were presented and narrowed down based on input from the general public and members of the Norwalk River Valley Trail Committee, which includes public officials, local commission members, and community advocates.

The primary Mission of the NRVT is an interconnected multi-use trail along the Norwalk River and Route 7 corridor from Danbury to Norwalk that incorporates existing and planned trails, and connects to nearby parks, schools, town centers, train stations, and other destinations in order to promote multi-modal transportation and recreational opportunities. The individual Goals for the project include:

Goal 1: Connect Danbury, Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, and Norwalk with a contiguous multi-use trail, prioritizing links to existing sections of trail. Connections to existing train stations and commercial centers will facilitate the use of the NRVT for both recreational and transportation purposes.

Goal 2: Promote walking and bicycling throughout Southern Connecticut by connecting the NRVT with existing and planned regional trails, especially the Merritt Parkway Trail.

Goal 3: Support each community's economic development efforts by routing the NRVT and its spurs to serve their commercial districts, town centers, and unique destinations.

Goal 4: Incorporate context-sensitive design: individual sections of the trail may be designed as a rustic, natural-surface trail or as a paved, ADA accessible, multi-use path based on local conditions. Where practical, design some stretches to encourage equestrians. Throughout the corridor, trailheads, parking areas, kayak/canoe launches and rest stations will be placed strategically.

Goal 5: Create interpretive elements to reflect each community's unique heritage and culture, while using a consistent trail logo to establish a consistent identity along the entire greenway trail.

Goal 6: Preserve and enhance rare species habitat, wetlands, and riparian ecology, with Allen's Meadow as a high priority for preservation.



Figure 1: The Norwalk River in Norwalk

2 Study Methodology

The Norwalk River Valley Trail Routing Study followed a methodology that included a pair of community workshops, monthly NRVV Committee meetings, reviews of relevant planning documents and field observations to identify alternatives for development of the trail. Planning tools such as GIS-based data analysis and review of aerial photography were employed as well. Community workshops for the data-gathering stage were held in May 2011 with the assistance of the National Park Service's River and Trails group. In February 2012, routing alternatives were presented at a trio of meetings held in Norwalk, Danbury, and Georgetown. The latter was promoted to residents of Wilton, Ridgefield and Redding. Additionally, the project website was maintained throughout the duration of the Study with direct links to the previously-developed www.nrvt-trail.com site.

A core element of the Routing Study was to identify gaps in the current trail system and propose alternatives for closing the gaps and connecting existing or planned sections of the NRVV. Gaps were evaluated for:

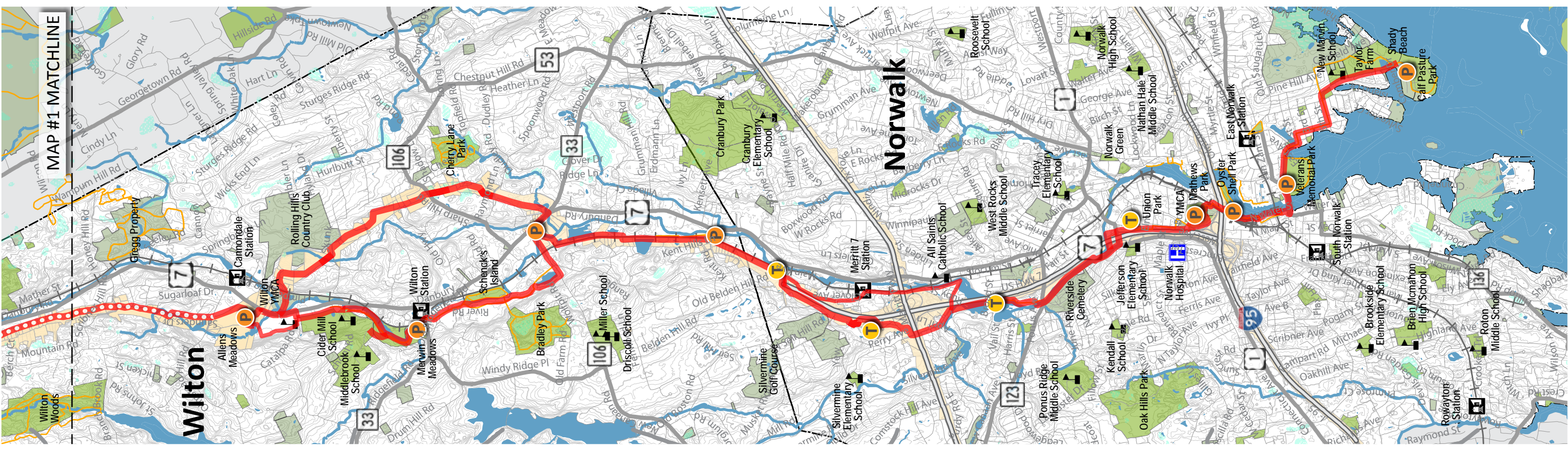
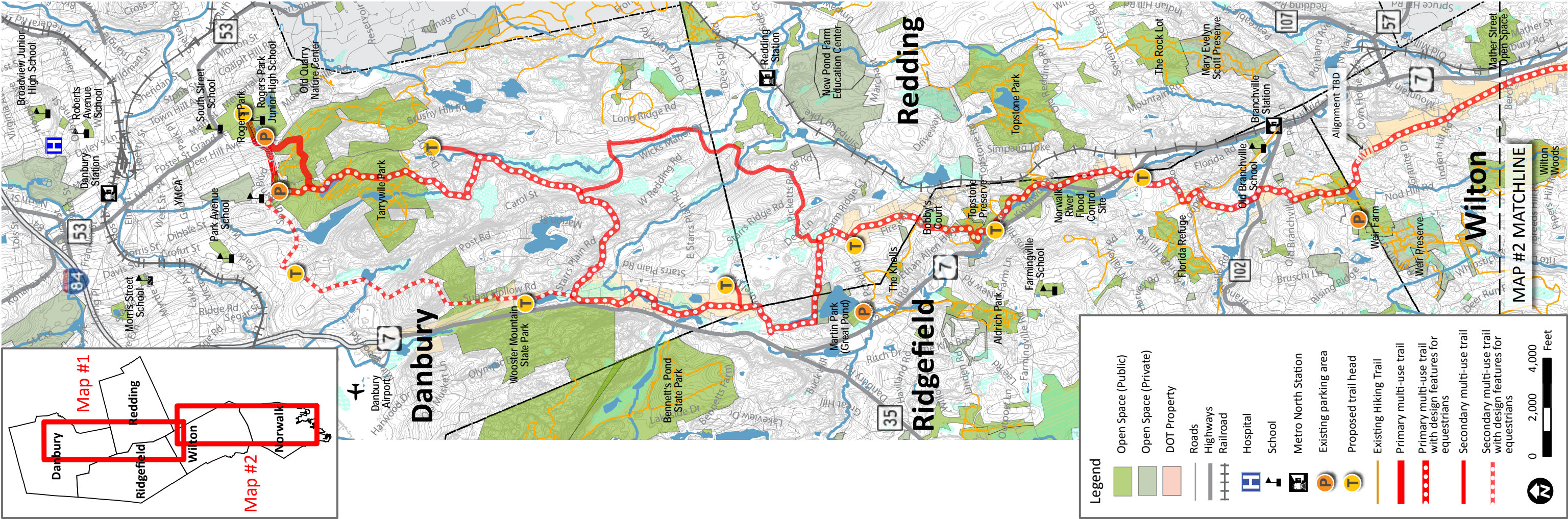
- Land ownership issues
- User accessibility
- Environmental concerns
- Physical barriers such as topography, major roads, and rail lines, etc.
- Permitability, constructability, and cost
- Adjacent planned development
- Community support or opposition
- Overall character, including view opportunities
- Adjacency to points of interest and destinations
- Potential or lack of access points

After existing conditions and opportunities and challenges were identified, a connectivity analysis of the project corridor was conducted to refine the routing alternatives. Working with the NRVV Committee, the alternatives were narrowed down to a recommended trail alignment that had the community's support. In conjunction with the routing recommendations, an implementation phasing plan and cost estimates for each phase were developed. The phasing recommendations take into account that trail planning, design, and development often occurs over extended periods of time and early successes can help maintain overall project support, funding, and momentum during the life of the project.



Figure 2 Residents comment on the draft routing recommendations at the February 16, 2012 meeting in Georgetown

On opposite page: Figure 3: Regional map of NRVV recommended route



Norwalk River Valley Trail - Recommended Route

3 Routing Recommendations

The recommended route for the NRVt is described below. This recommendation is based on field work, NRVt Committee input, feedback from public meetings, and a route option evaluation process.

Danbury

The northern terminus of the proposed NRVt route is Rogers Park in Danbury. From here the trail travels through west and south through Tarrywile Park, where it overlaps with the Ives Trail. The trail continues through woodlands south of Tarrywile and turns westward to meet Starrs Plain Road. From here, it continues south through a flat, wetland area parallel to and east of Route 7.

There are two secondary routes in Danbury. One secondary route continues west of Tarrywile Park along Southern Boulevard, then south along the Old Boston Post Road right-of-way through Wooster Mountain State Park. It rejoins the primary route at Starrs Plain Road. The other secondary route leads from the woodland south of Tarrywile to Long Ridge Road, and then connects back to the primary trail via George Hull Hill Road and Picketts Ridge Road in Redding.

Ridgefield and Redding

As the trail leaves Danbury, it crosses back and forth between the towns of Ridgefield and Redding. The primary route enters Ridgefield from Danbury just north of Martin Park and Great Pond. This marks the trail's first interaction with the headwaters of the Norwalk River. The trail bends eastward north of the Great Pond to connect across Pickett's Ridge Road to DOT-owned property in Redding. The trail continues through a wooded area until it crosses back into Ridgefield through Bobby's Court, Topstone Preserve and a Norwalk River Flood Control Site, all of which are Ridgefield-owned properties. The trail connects back into Redding briefly through a proposed redevelopment site, then crosses to the west side of Route 7 south of Florida Hill Road. This crossing will require a new, pedestrian-actuated traffic signal to facilitate safe passage from trail users. The trail continues southwest from this point, connecting across DOT-owned properties, linking to the Ridgefield Rail-Trail and through the Weir Farm National Historic Site.



Figure 4: Photo of existing trail in Tarrywile Park in Danbury to be incorporated into the NRVt. (Photo credit: Deborah Lewis, NRVt Committee)

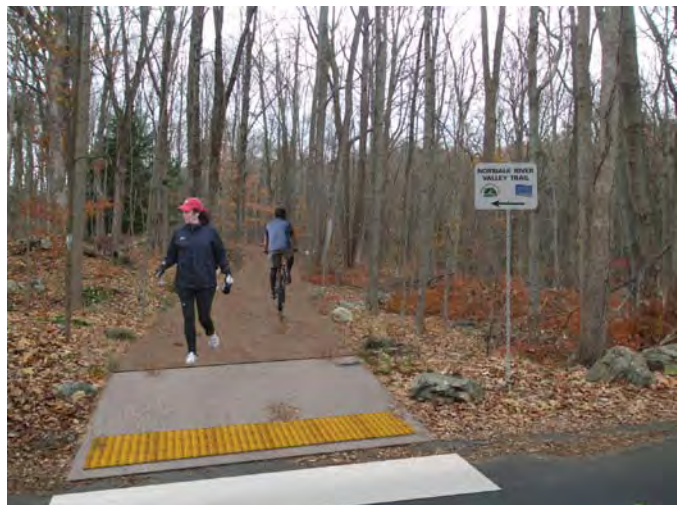


Figure 5: Photo-simulation view of the NRVt as a soft surface trail in the Topstone Preserve in Ridgefield

Wilton

South of Weir Farm in Wilton, the trail follows a long, continuous stretch of wooded DOT-owned property. Several high visibility road crossings will be necessary to bring the trail south to Allen's Meadows. Because Allen's Meadows Park is an important bird and butterfly habitat, the NRVT through this area will be designed to minimize disruption of this sensitive area.

At this point, the trail splits into two branches. The eastern branch will cross to the east side of Route 7, through the Wilton YMCA property, and over the Metro-North railroad tracks and Pimpewaug Road. From here, it will travel through wooded DOT-owned property to the Route 7/33 intersection. The western branch of the trail travels past several schools, through Merwin Meadows, and under Ridgefield Road to Wilton Center. From Wilton Center, the trail continues south, past Schencks Island Park, turning east at Wolfpit Road to the Route 7 intersection. Here, the two branches converge at a Park and Ride lot. The single trail travels south from this point along a utility corridor towards Norwalk. At one point the trail will cross from the east side of the Metro-North railroad tracks to the west side via an either above- or below-grade crossing.

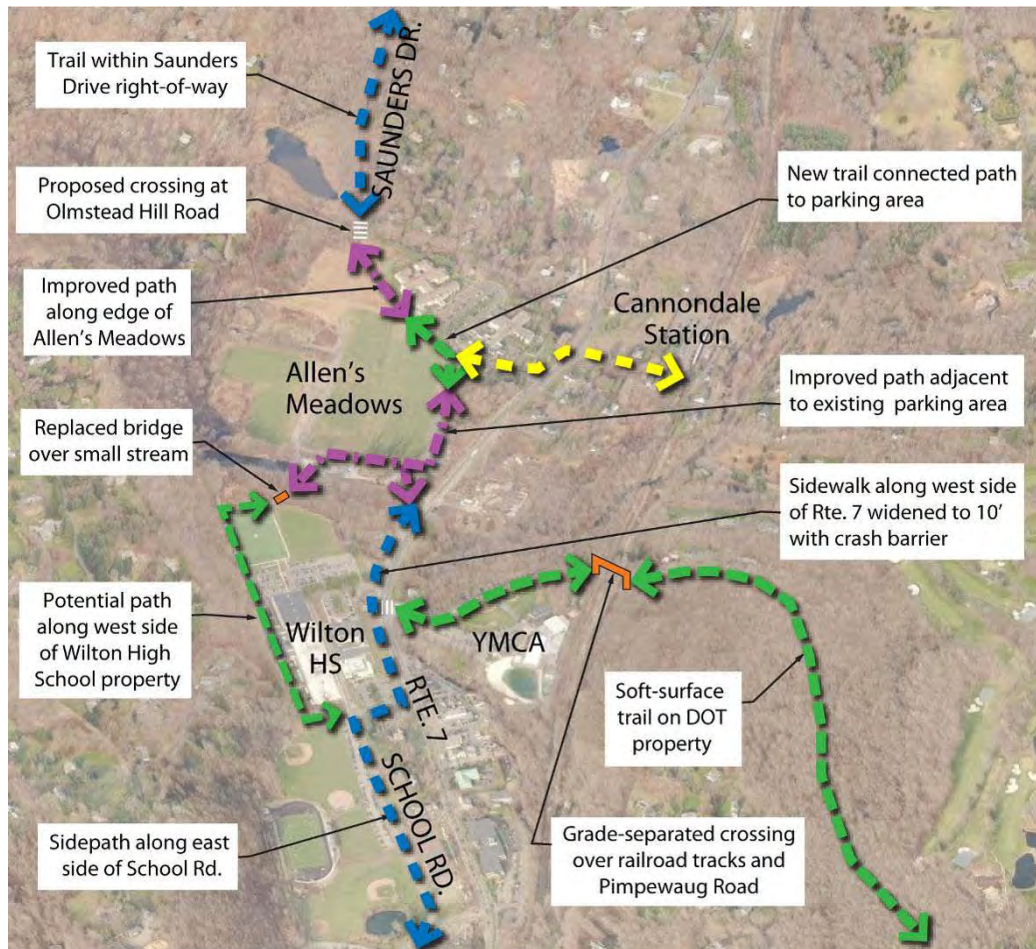


Figure 6: Juncture of two branches of NRVT at Allen's Meadows in Wilton

Norwalk

In Norwalk, the primary route follows the west side of Route 7 within the right-of-way southward to the Merritt Parkway. Here the trail may pass under the parkway via the existing or a new underpass. From the underpass, a path along the east side of Perry Avenue will bring the trail to the Perry Avenue/Route 7 underpass. A secondary route exists that runs east of Route 7 and connects to the Merritt 7 Metro North station. This route requires the trail to utilize an existing rail tunnel under the Merritt Parkway. From the tunnel, the trail will continue south along the river dike to Perry Avenue, where it will turn west, following within the Perry Avenue right-of-way to the Route 7 underpass. Both the primary and secondary NRVT routes overlap the proposed Merritt Parkway Trail.

From Perry Avenue, the NRVT continues south along a utility corridor west of Route 7, connects an existing segment of the NRVT, then crosses under Route 7 to the east side. Here, an existing portion of the trail brings it through Mathews Park and Oyster Shell Park to the Maritime Aquarium. South of the Maritime Aquarium, the trail will connect eastward to Veterans Memorial Park using the Stroffolino Bridge. Connections will be made to the Norwalk Harbor Loop Trail on the east bank of the river through Constitution Park. Veterans Memorial Park can serve as a tentative southern terminus of the trail. The continuation of the NRVT south of Veterans Memorial Park to Calf Pasture Beach is contingent on final review and coordination with City of Norwalk Public Works for any roadway changes in the East Norwalk neighborhood. In the long term, Calf Pasture Beach can become the southern terminus of the NRVT.



Figure 7: Photo-simulation view of the NRVT as it passes along the Norwalk River next to the Maritime Center in Norwalk

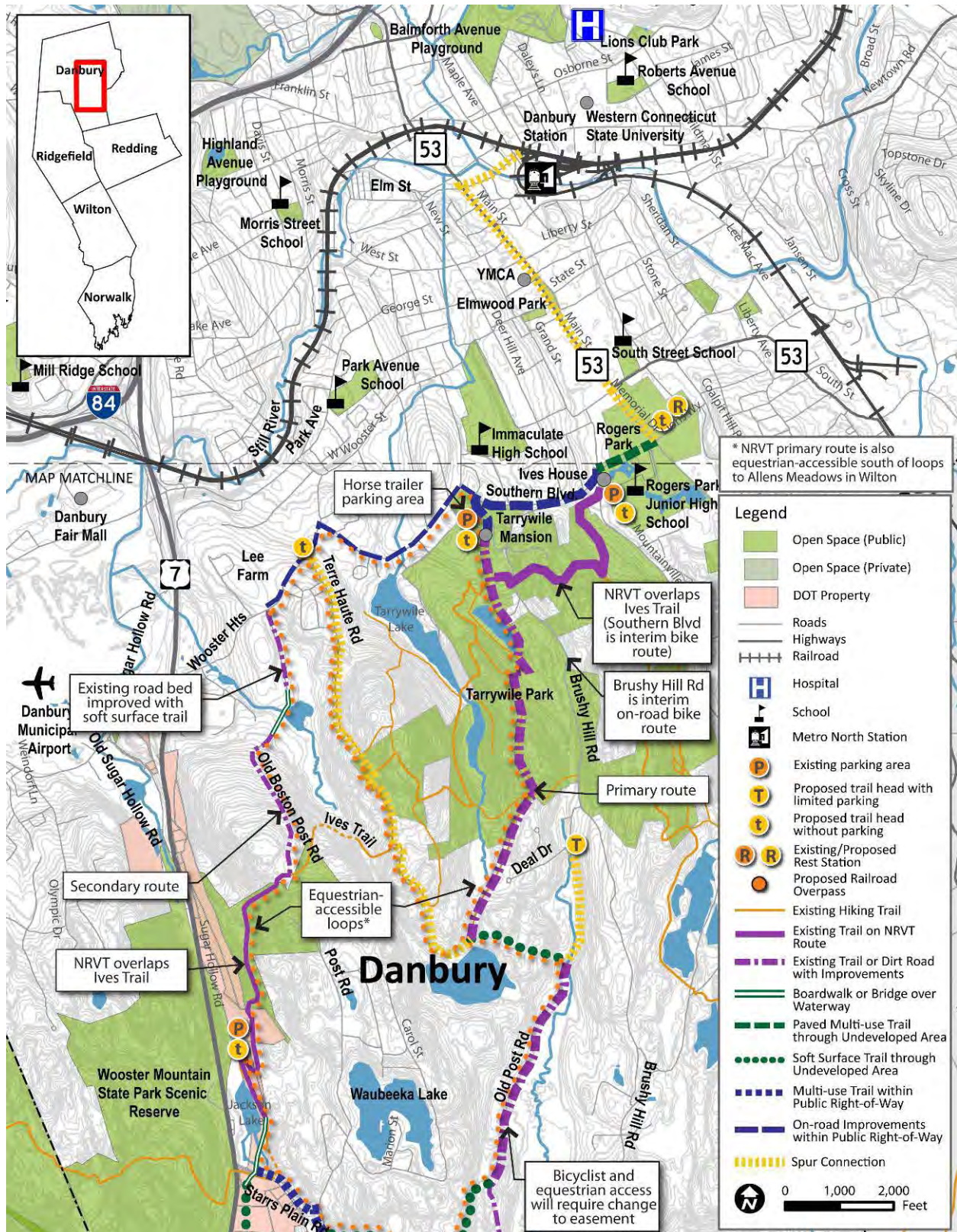


Figure 8: Recommended Route in Danbury (North)

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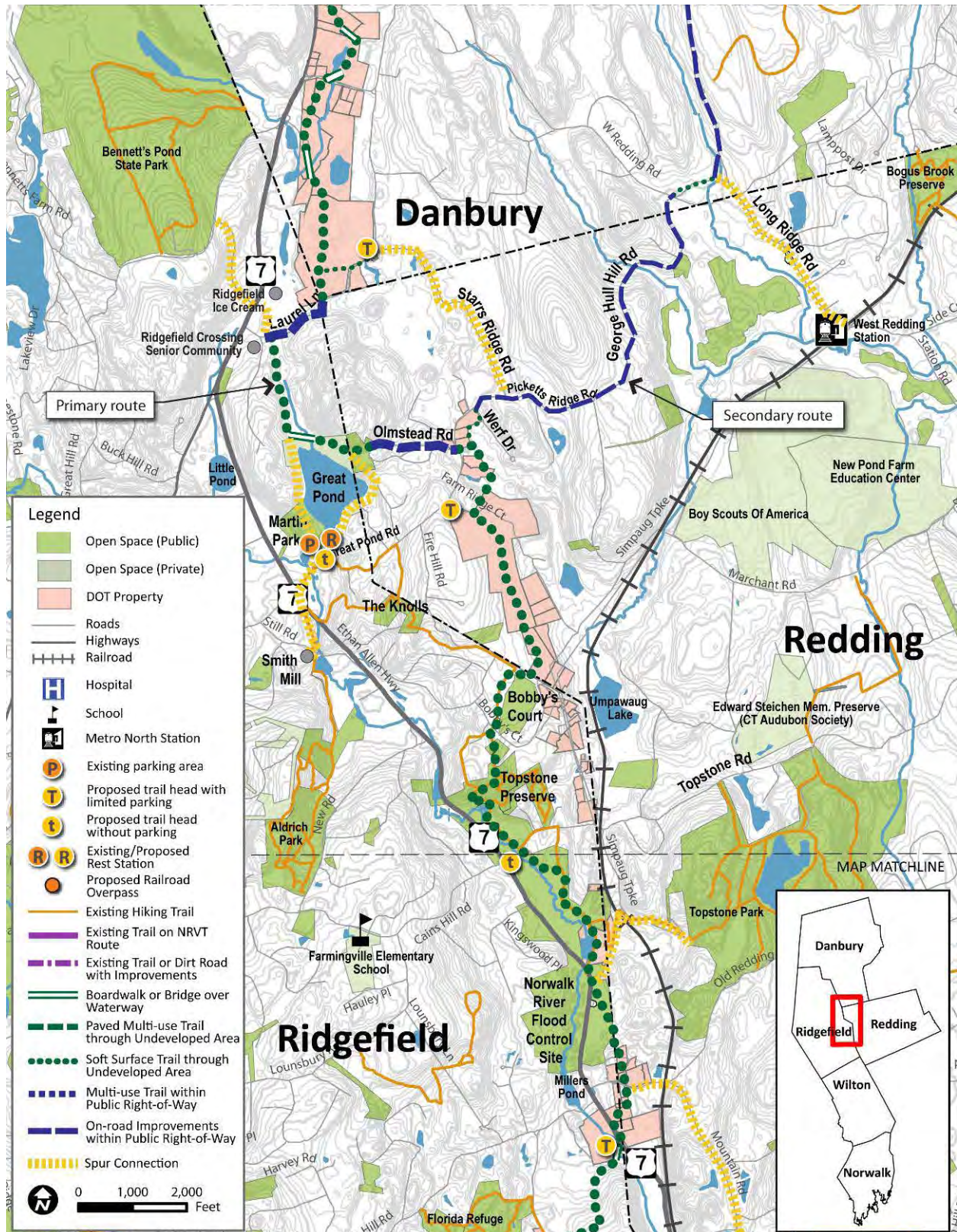


Figure 10: Recommended Route in Ridgefield/Redding (North)

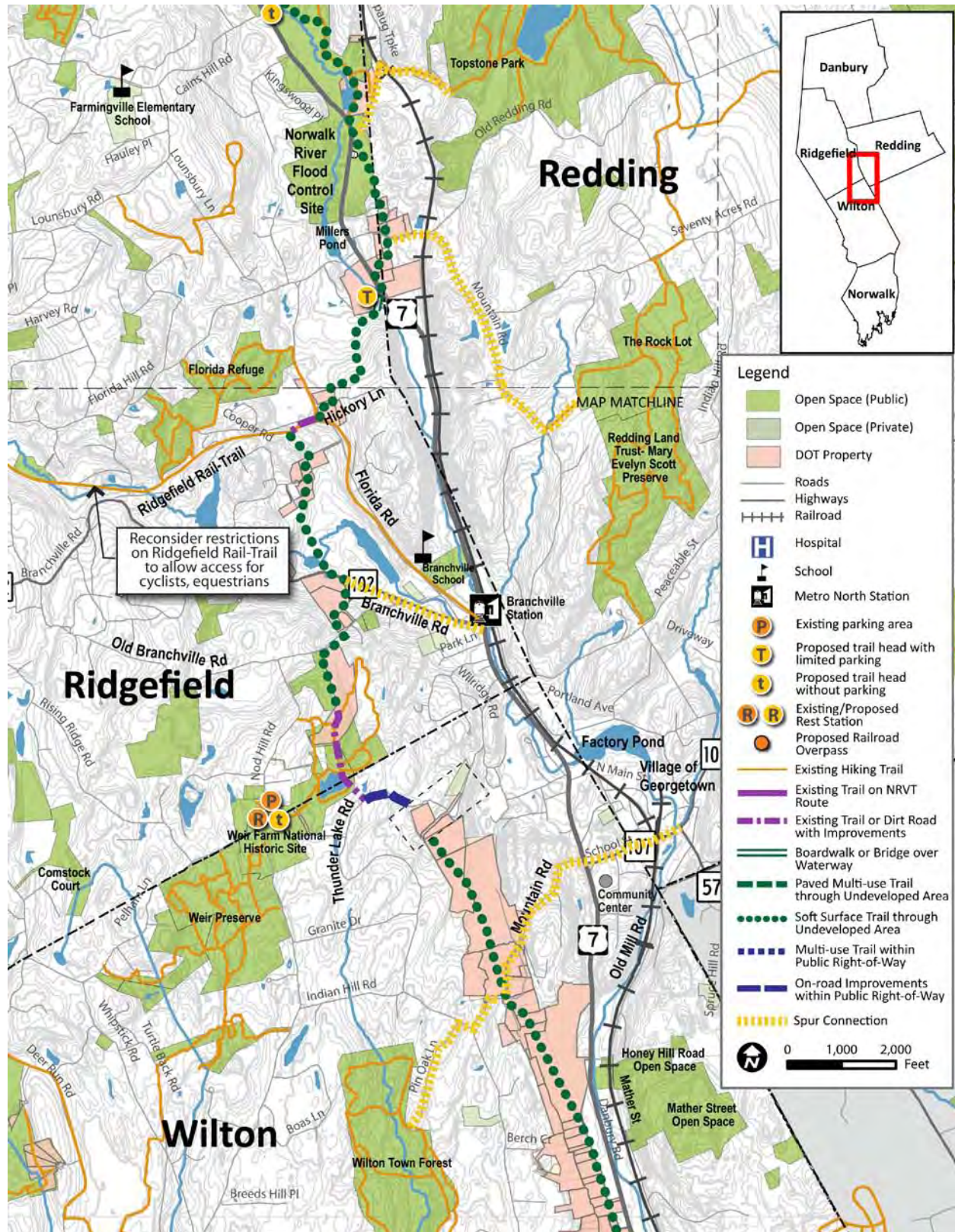


Figure 11: Recommended Route in Ridgefield/Redding (South)

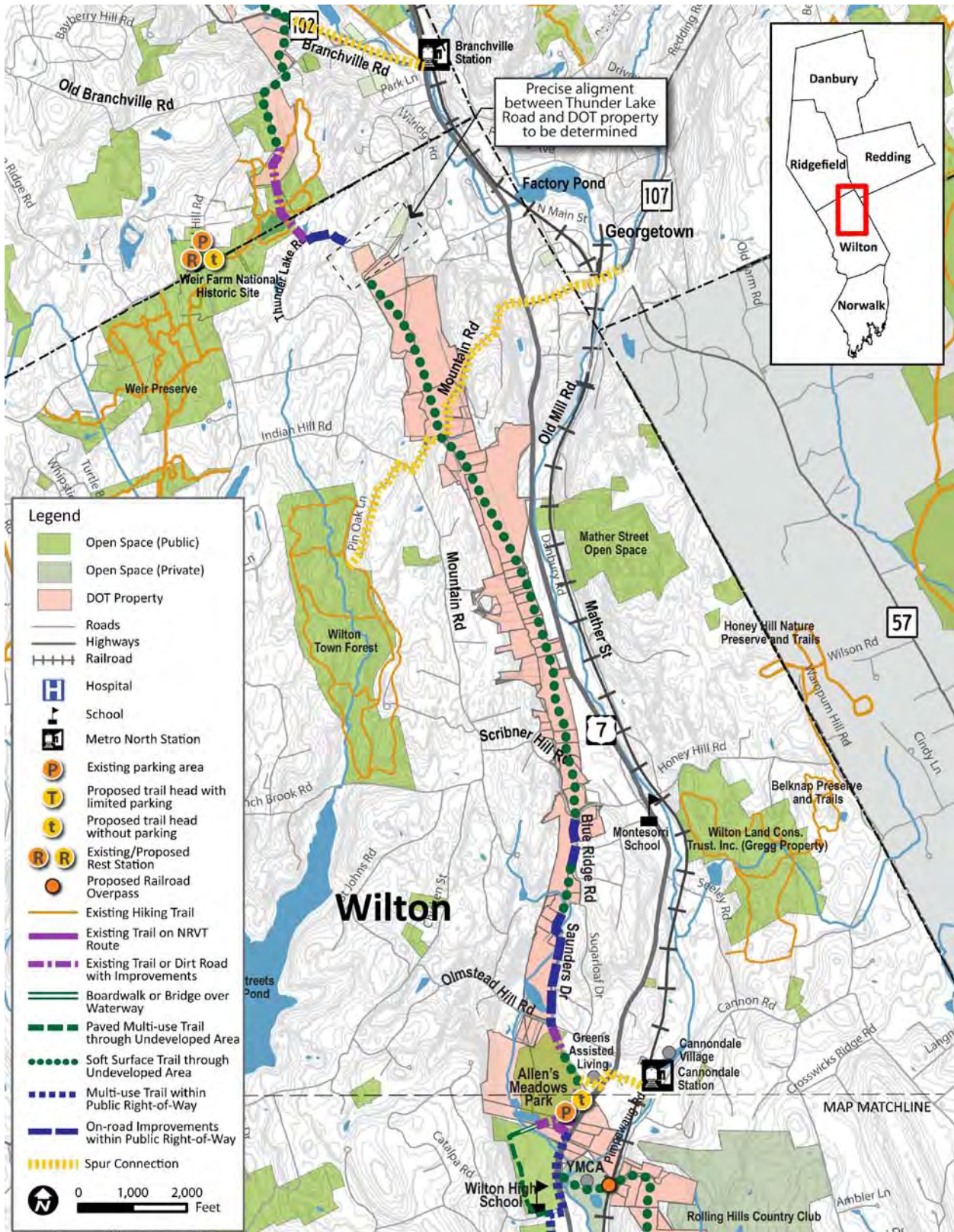


Figure 12: Recommended Route in Wilton (North)

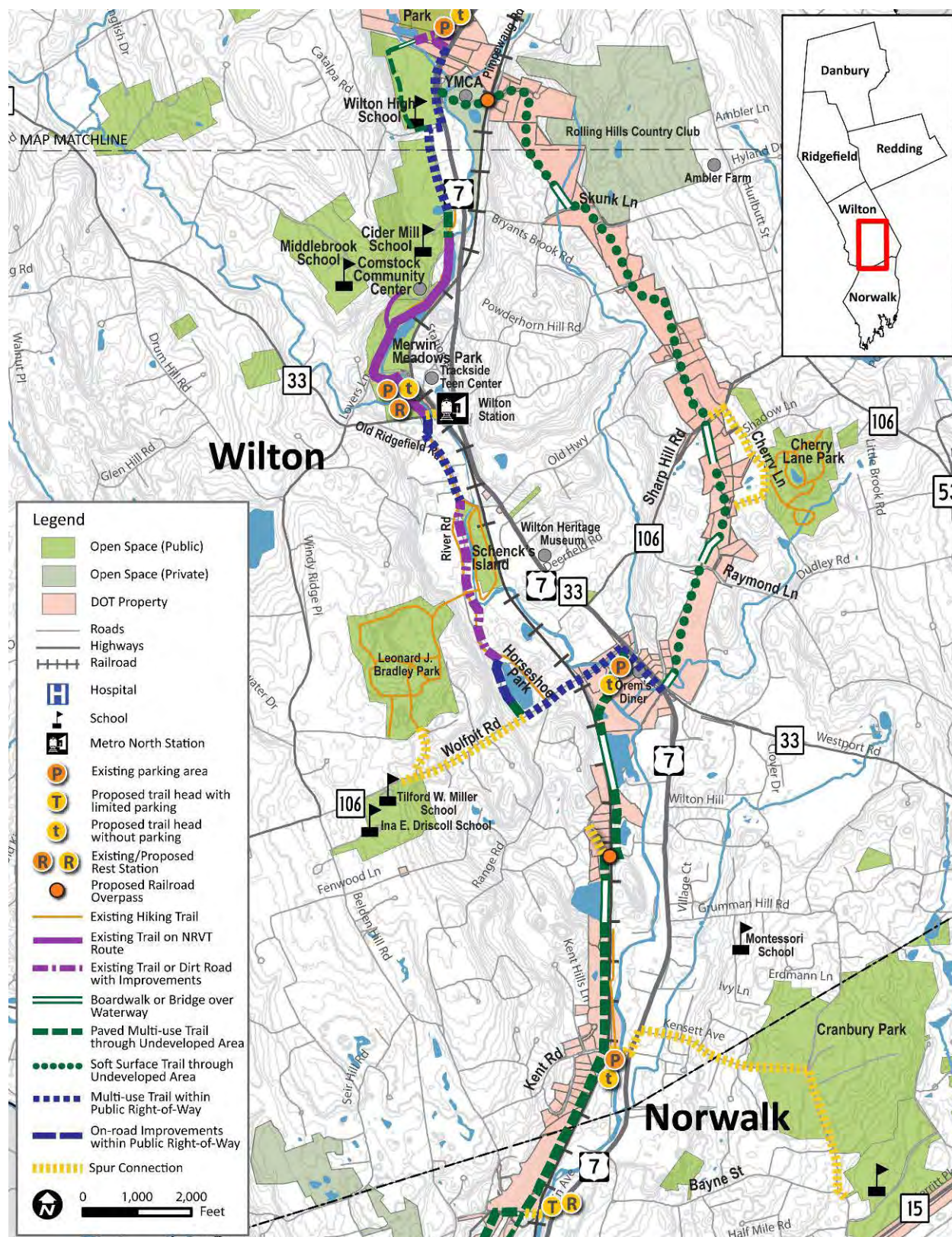


Figure 13: Recommended Route in Wilton (South)

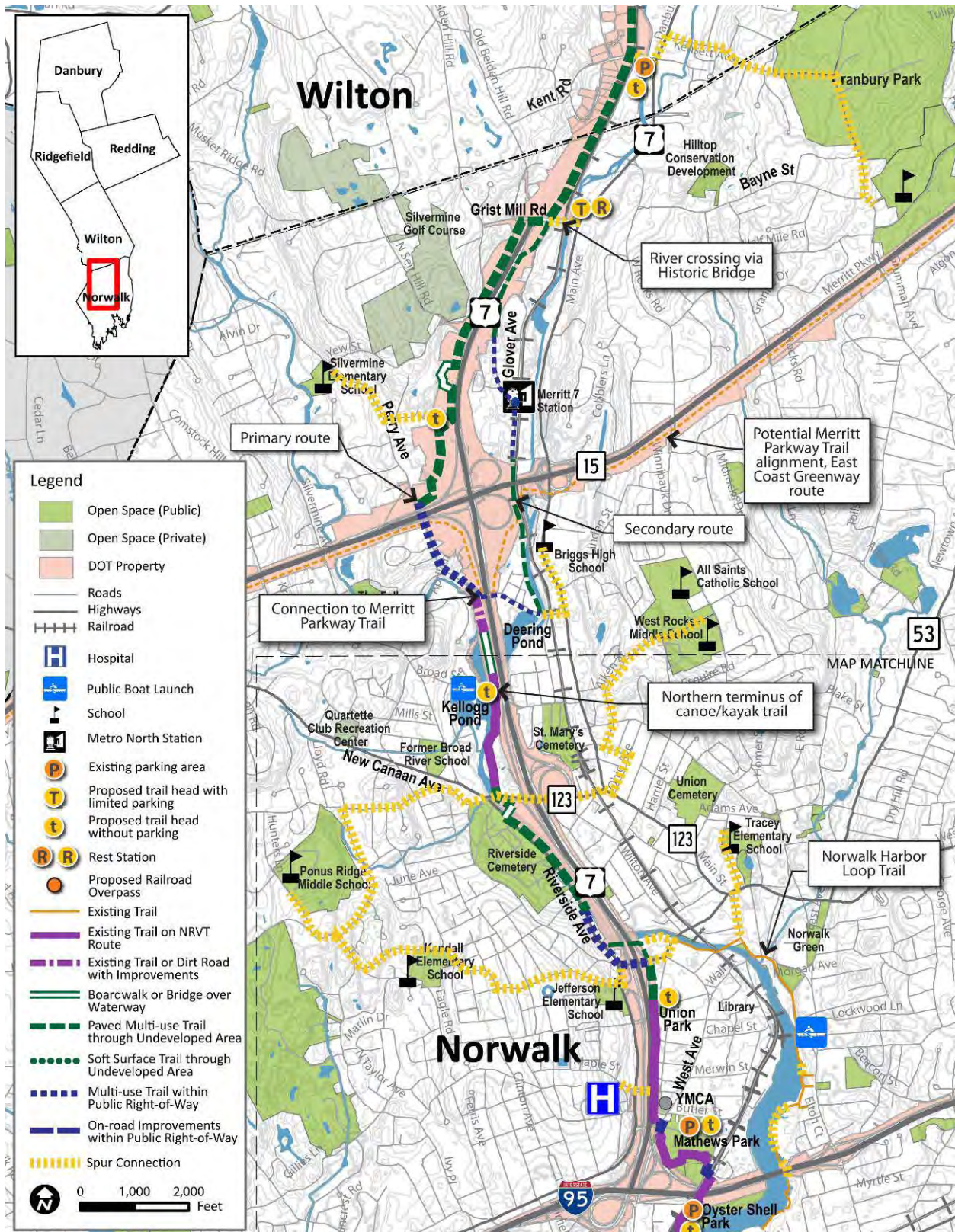


Figure 14: Recommended Route in Norwalk (North)



Figure 15: Recommended Route in Norwalk (South)

4 Cost Estimates and Phasing

4.1 Cost Estimates

As part of the NRVT Routing Study, the consultant team developed an initial cost analysis of each segment of the proposed trail. The cost estimates for each segment of the trail appear in an addendum issued separately from the analysis and routing recommendations report. The primary goal of the Cost Estimate Addendum is to enable NRVT implementation teams in each of the five communities to begin detailed discussions with town, state and federal officials as well as representatives from the utilities, local businesses and foundations. These discussions are intended to establish a set of priorities and projected cost estimates applicable to each community with the intent to leverage available state and federal grant funding wherever possible. In addition, because several major utility projects are currently underway along the proposed route, this could enable additional construction cost savings. Finally, the NRVT Committee has begun and will continue to reach out to local individuals, businesses and foundations to establish public - private partnership commitments to assist in funding the on-going implementation of the trail.

4.2 Phasing

In order to establish the phasing for the NRVT, the numerous segments identified in the study were ordered into logical and reasonable “project” areas for development. The projects were labeled according to the town in which they occur and numbered beginning north and moving south, first along the primary route and then on any secondary route. For example, D-1 is the northernmost project along the primary route in Danbury.

Table 1: Summary of Phasing (refers to Figure 16)

	Phase #	Project #	Length (mi)
Danbury			10.35
	1	D-2	1.71
	2	D-1	0.72
	3	D-3	2.33
	4	D-5	1.11
	5	D-6	1.64
	6	D-7	1.12
	7	D-4	1.72
Ridgefield/Redding			7.92
	1	R-3	2.07
	2	R-4	2.23
	3	R-2	0.93
	4	R-5	1.43
	5	R-1	1.26
Wilton			11.78
	1	W-2	1.46
	2	W-3	1.30
	3	W-1	3.85
	4	W-5	0.46
	5	W-4	1.94
	6	W-6	2.78
Norwalk			7.69
	1	N-2	1.03
	2	N-3	0.38
	3	N-1	2.31
	4	N-4	2.12
	5	N-5	1.67
	6	N-6	0.19
NRVT			37.74

Next, phase numbers were assigned to each project. Each project was individually evaluated and scored on the following ten (10) categories: Trail Connectivity, Links to Destinations, Visibility and Access, User Experience/Aesthetics, Economic Development, Property Acquisitions, Momentum, Permitting Requirements, Ease of Construction, and Estimated Order-of-Magnitude Construction Costs. Each category was weighted for importance and was given a maximum available point total. These categories were summed to determine an overall phase score, with 100 points being the maximum score. This scoring was used to help determine which phases were most vital to the development of the trail. A description of how scoring was structured for each category can be found in the phasing matrix (see Addendum).

Finally, the above noted exercise and phasing development targeted as an objective perspective as possible, with the understanding that in practice, there may be other factors (e.g. adjacent/on-trail property owner support, municipal support) that will guide the eventual construction and/or identify sub phases with which to proceed.

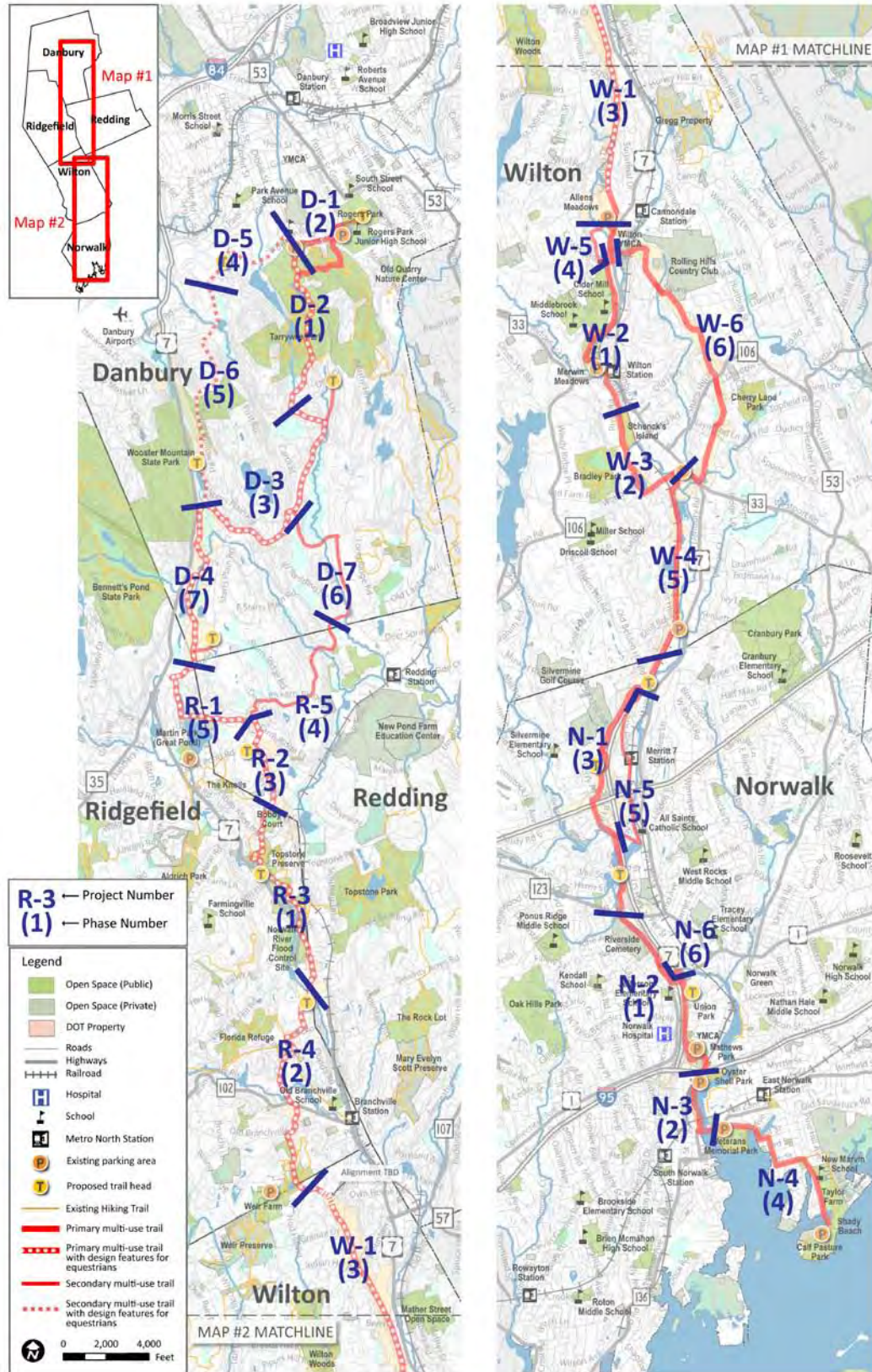


Figure 16: Regional Map showing trail broken into projects/phases

5 Next Steps

The Norwalk River Valley Trail Routing Study report is a preliminary step in the development of the NRV. The trail will be a long-term, multi-phase project led by each of the five municipalities, in cooperation with each other, and with regional, state and federal agencies. It will require the continued involvement of the NRV Committee, members of the public, community groups and elected officials at all levels of government and in order to support and guide the implementation effort. The following ‘next steps’ are recommended in order to move the effort forward in a sustained fashion:

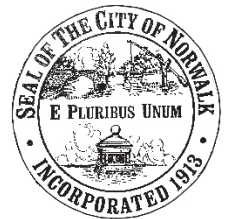
- **Adopt the Study:** Each of the five municipalities along the corridor—Danbury, Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, and Norwalk—should adopt this Study and amend their growth, conservation and development plans to incorporate the trail alignment. The municipalities should also pursue endorsement of the Study by their most relevant commissions, such as Planning and Zoning, Recreation, Economic Development and Conservation commissions.
- **Create the Trail Right-of-Way:** This will ensure that the proposed alignment for the trail is gradually assembled and made available for public access. This can be accomplished by using:
 - **Begin negotiations with Connecticut DOT** to ensure that use of their properties assembled for the Super 7 project is feasible from both a political and technical standpoint.
 - **Coordinate with the Connecticut DOT Highway Division on the use of state highway rights of way.** The NRV alignment utilizes shoulders and sidewalks along Route 7 and other signed state highways in a number of locations. This includes the use of bridges and trail alignments below bridges.
 - **Begin negotiations with other local, state and federal agencies** to ensure that all necessary approvals and permits are completed in order to use portions of public streets and sidewalks and/or to create an easement across segments of the trail that cross public lands.
 - **Work closely with private property owners** to seek easements for the trail, or consider outright purchase if/when key privately-owned parcels needed for the NRV are on the market.
 - **Develop and adopt new zoning regulations** to ensure that the NRV is accommodated into redevelopment proposals along the alignment. A “trail overlay district”, in particular, can be an effective tool for a municipality to require that trail facilities are integrated into redevelopment projects.
 - **Coordinate with DOT and the MTA on the potential use of the rail tunnel under the Merritt Parkway.** This will be necessary only if the recommended secondary route is utilized in the north end of Norwalk. In particular, coordination with DOT on the federally-mandated Positive Train Control (PTC) Plan will be necessary to ensure that the PTC Plan does not preclude the trail’s routing through the tunnel.



Figure 17: Implementing the NRV will take many years but will bring an important piece of green infrastructure that will be enjoyed by tens of thousands

- **Find Project “Champions” to Raise Awareness and Money:** Each municipality should identify an individual, commission or committee to oversee subsequent steps in the design, funding and implementation process for the NRVV. (In all likelihood, this could include former or current members of the NRVV Committee.) This will ensure continuity of effort even as elected officials, First Selectmen and Mayoral administrations change.
- **Continue to Promote the Public-Private-Non-Profit Partnership:** The establishment of the “Friends of the NRVV” non-profit organization has been a necessary first step to help supplement the public funds and grants allocated for the trail. In conjunction with the project “Champion”, the non-profit should continue to coordinate volunteers, develop an ‘adopt-a-mile’ program and raise funds through the sale of trail elements including benches, bridges, trailheads, public art, bike racks and trees.
- **Continue to Coordinate Efforts with the National Park Service:** The continuation of the relationship between the NRVV Committee and the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program will help build relationships among various communities, define goals and workable project plans, identify other potential funding sources and teach hands-on trail maintenance and other technical skills.
- **Find “Early Win” Projects:** Support for continued action at the local level will grow out of small successes that move the project or individual pieces of the project forward. Neighborhood clean-ups and ‘adoption’ of future trail sections can help build long-term support. Frequent ribbon cuttings, festivals and events create long-term visibility for the project. Development of existing and future maps and other NRVV promotional material will help to publicize the existing trail and build excitement for future phases. Celebrating every opportunity, no matter how small, can be just as important as a major ribbon cutting for the finished project.

With these actions moving forward, the Norwalk River Valley Trail will be a significant asset for Southern Connecticut’s residents, businesses and visitors. The trail will help connect the five river corridor communities and their commercial centers and train stations with the surrounding cities and towns. It will also promote active transportation (walking and bicycling), support economic development, provide a context-sensitive experience, and help a variety of users appreciate the natural environment found along the trail. In short, the NRVV will enhance the quality of life for tens of thousands of people along the 27-mile corridor.



<http://www.nrvt-trail.com/>