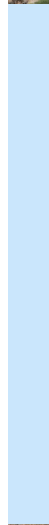
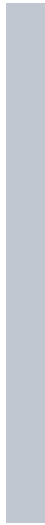


# Greater Wilton Center Area Master Plan











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**10/17/2023**







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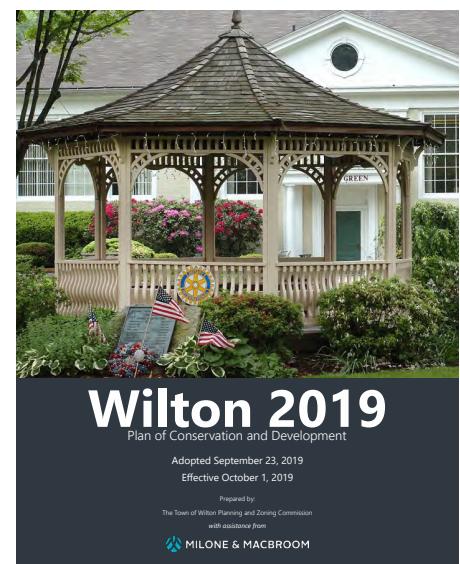
# 1

# Introduction

## Overview

This Greater Wilton Center Area Master Plan follows the recommendation from the Town of Wilton 2019 Plan of Conservation and Development (2019 POCD) for a more detailed study of the Greater Wilton Center area. As seen in **Figure 1** on pg. 3, the Greater Wilton Center area is located in the Town of Wilton, Fairfield County, Connecticut off the north-south corridor of Danbury Road (Route 7). The Town neighbors Ridgefield on the north, Redding and Weston on the east, Norwalk and Westport on the south, and New Cannan, CT and Lewisboro, NY on the west. The Greater Wilton Center area encompasses the Town's downtown center, referred to as Wilton Center proper in this report, and the adjacent area to the east up to Danbury Road. The Town of Wilton is connected to nearby Connecticut and New York municipalities through regional highway networks and the Metro-North Railroad's New Haven Line (Danbury Branch). The train station is located in the Greater Wilton Center.

The Town of Wilton issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) on April 15, 2021 seeking a professional planning consultant firm to assist the Town's Planning and Zoning Commission in developing a master plan study for the Greater Wilton Center area. BFJ Planning, in association with Urbanomics and RGR Landscape, was chosen to assist the Planning and Zoning Subcommittee with the development of the plan. As reflected in the 2019 POCD, the Wilton community highlighted the importance of "improved vibrancy, architectural quality, and expansion of Wilton Center to support new and existing businesses by planning for residential, commercial, and mixed-use development" (Town of Wilton, RFP Number 2021-05 Land Use Planning Consultant, pg. 5). This key objective and strategies outlined in the 2019 POCD as well as the public outreach feedback from this Greater Wilton Center Master Plan effort has guided the plan's development. Once adopted, the Master Plan will serve as a roadmap to guide future planning while considering current issues, changes, and trends that the community is undergoing. The plan will provide elected officials and decision-makers with a reference guide when making decisions related to land use, zoning, and capital investment in this area.



Source: Town of Wilton, 2019.



# Planning Process

Starting in December 2021, the Town of Wilton embarked on the development of the Greater Wilton Center Master Plan with the BFJ Planning team. The Town of Wilton formed the Planning and Zoning Subcommittee to oversee the development of the plan and provide valuable feedback throughout the entire planning process. The BFJ Planning team met regularly with the Planning and Zoning Subcommittee to ensure the plan reflects the priorities and desires of the Wilton community. These meetings were held online via Zoom allowing the Wilton community the opportunity to listen to the meeting live or see the recording available on the Town's website. The planning process took place in several phases, including an evaluation of previous documentation and plans, analysis and fieldwork of the study area, public engagement opportunities, preliminary and refined concepts as well as recommendations, and the draft and final Master Plan report.

In developing the plan itself, the Planning and Zoning Subcommittee and the BFJ Planning team heavily built upon the public's recommendations in the 2019 POCD as it related to the Greater Wilton Center area. In addition to the 2019 POCD, there were a series of public outreach opportunities conducted for the Greater Wilton Center Master Plan process. The plan's public outreach opportunities consisted of the following:

- **Staff and Stakeholder Meetings** – December 2021 - March 2022
- **Public Workshop** – March 31, 2022
- **Wilton High School Student Meeting** – March 22, 2022
- **Resident Feedback Via Email** – Throughout the planning process
- **Website** – Throughout the planning process

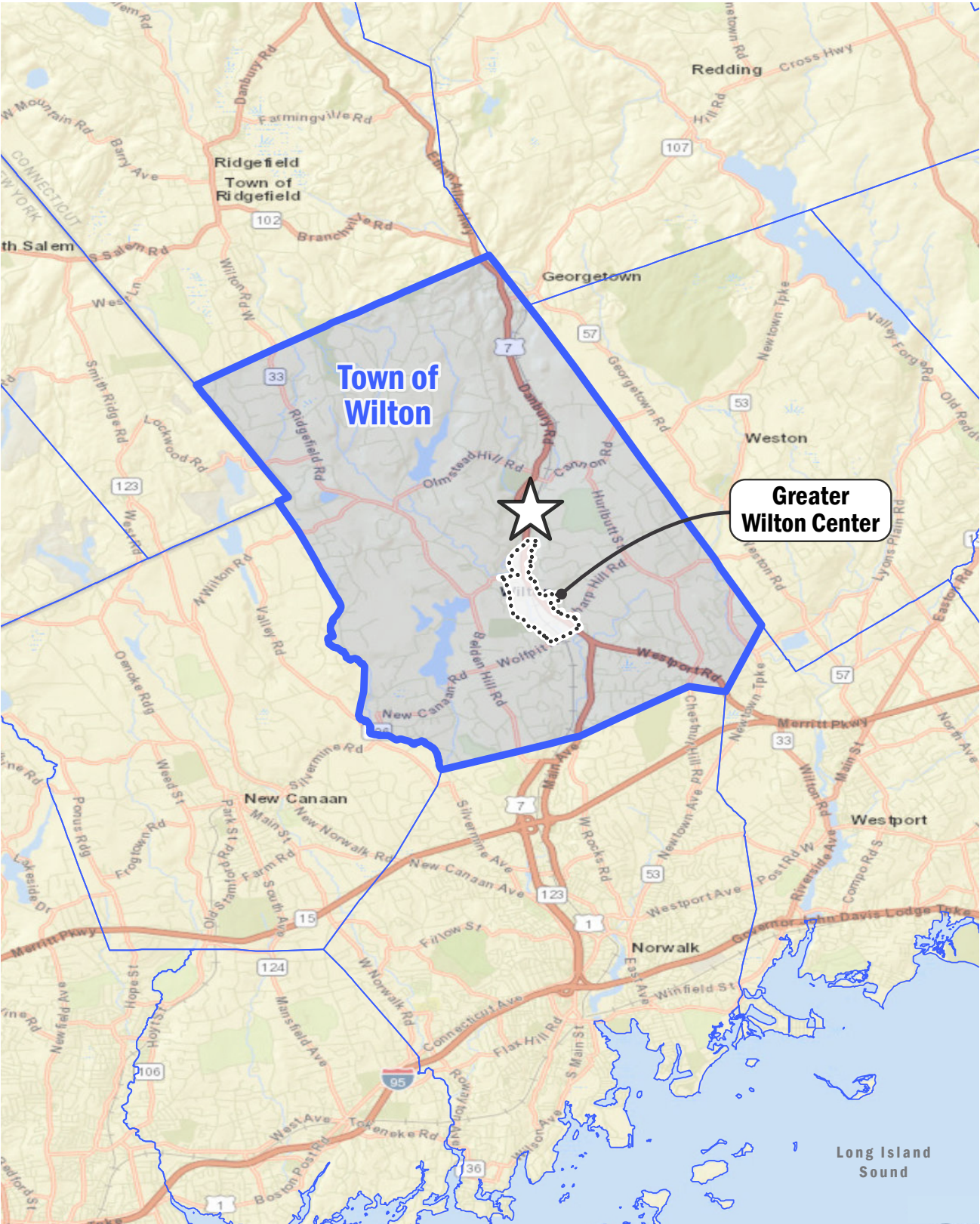
Additional information about public outreach can be found in **Chapter 2**. Collectively, the Wilton community's feedback from these efforts was used to inform the key priorities, concerns, and opportunities that this Master Plan addresses.

## Organization of the Master Plan

The plan is organized in the following chapters.

- **Chapter 2 – Study Area and Previous Plans**
- **Chapter 3 – Existing Conditions**
- **Chapter 4 – Market Overview**
- **Chapter 5 – Transportation and Parking**
- **Chapter 6 – Plan and Public Realm Concepts**
- **Chapter 7 – Implementation**

The plan concludes with proposals for revised zoning regulations in the Greater Wilton Center area. In Wilton Center proper, the plan suggests a Form-Based Code. Along Danbury Road, the plan suggests an overlay zone approach. The actual draft text for both proposals will be developed after the Planning and Zoning Subcommittee reviews the plan's zoning recommendations in **Chapter 7**.



**Figure 1** Regional Context

Source: CT DEEP, ESRI, BfJ Planning, 2022.





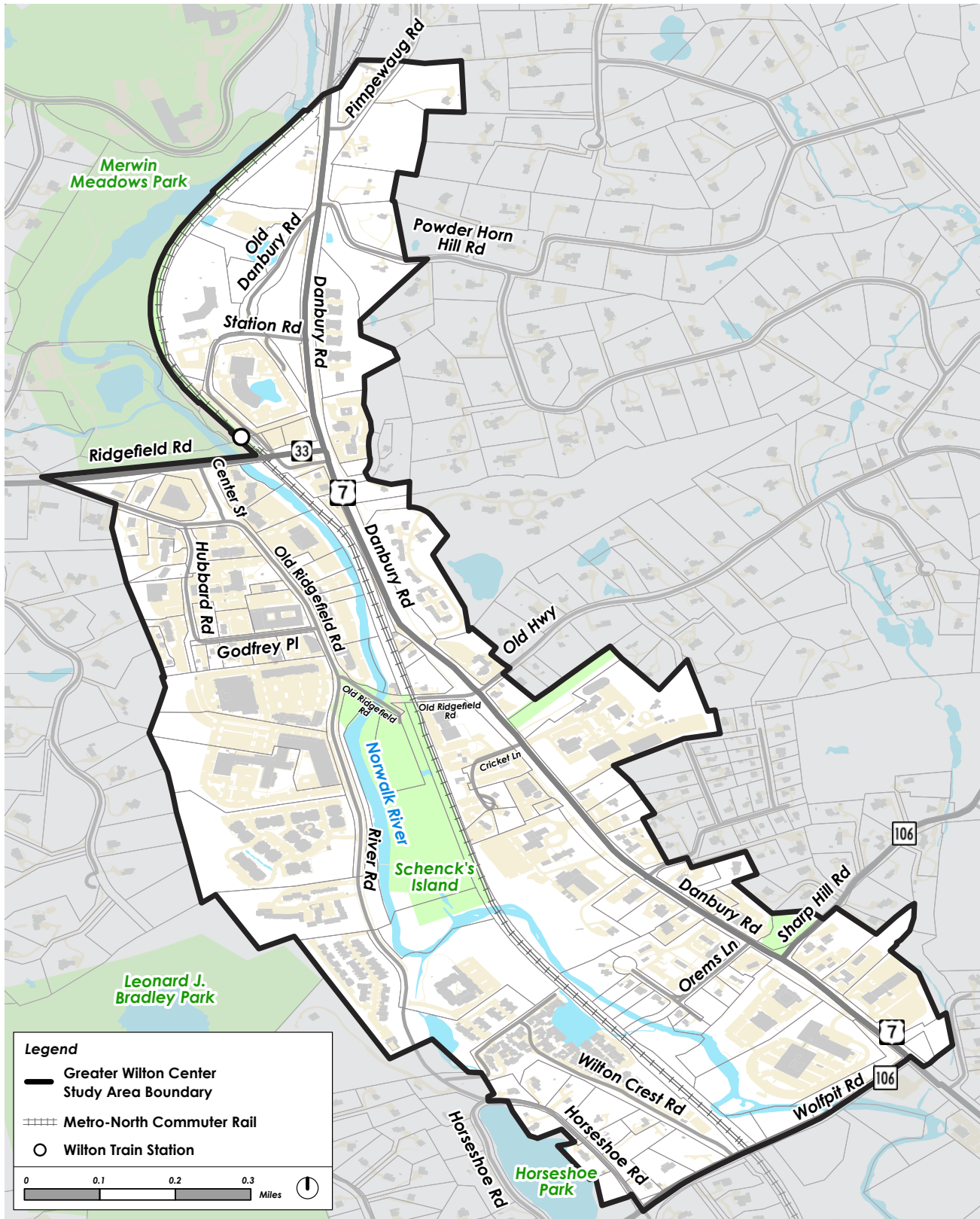
# 2

## Study Area and Previous Plans

### Study Area Boundary

The Study Area for the Greater Wilton Center Area, shown in **Figure 2** on the following page, covers approximately 434 acres located in the center of the Town of Wilton, Connecticut. The Greater Wilton Center Study Area is comprised of the Town's central downtown core, Wilton Center, starting at the intersection of Ridgefield Road (Route 33) and Center Street/Old Ridgefield Road stretching south to Wolfpit Road. In addition, the Study Area continues east to encompass the properties fronting along Danbury Road (Route 7) from Pimpewaug Road in the north to Wolfpit Road in the south.





**Figure 2** Greater Wilton Center Study Area Boundary

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFJ Planning, 2022.



# Previous Plans

This section provides a summary of recent planning efforts, studies and documents that relate to the Greater Wilton Center Area. These previous planning efforts serve as one of the many foundations that the Master Plan has built upon to fulfill the community's vision for the Greater Wilton Center Area.

## Wilton Center Master Plan 2001

In 2001, the Town of Wilton retained BFJ Planning to assist with developing a master plan for Wilton Center. The plan was developed with guidance and feedback from the Wilton Center Committee and the Wilton community. Below are the goals and objectives of the plan are listed:

### 1) Improve Traffic Circulation

- Redesign the intersection of Ridgefield Road (Route 33) and Center Street
- Extend Hubbard Road from Godfrey Place to the access road at the rear of Stop & Shop
- Widen Godfrey Place
- Relocate drive-thru facilities

### 2) Increase Pedestrian Connectivity

- Enhance pedestrian safety along Godfrey Place, Old Ridgefield Road, and parking lots
- Improve pedestrian safety in Wilton Center such as along Godfrey Place, River Road, Old Ridgefield Road
- Create a formal riverwalk from Schenck's Island to the train station area

### 3) Reduce Traffic Speeds Along Main Roads

- Add a speed hump on River Road
- Develop a raised intersection of Old Ridgefield Road and the entrance of Schenck's Island
- Create a modern roundabout at Center Street and Old Ridgefield Road

### 4) Allow for Shared Parking

- Opportunity for shared parking

### 5) Plan for Future Building Expansion

- Expand the existing library by 10,000 square feet
- Potential for a few buildings along the east side of Old Ridgefield Road to expand and remain within the current regulations

### 6) Strengthen Street Edges

- Recommend that new developments should be located along street edges
- Create a provision of both front and rear entrances
- Work on implementing shared parking whenever possible

### 7) Update Land Use Regulations (Zoning and Parking)

- Change the maximum FAR from 0.75 to 0.40
- Provide FAR bonuses of 0.10 if a riverfront property provides an easement or any property institutes a Park-and-Walk system on a private parcel
- Revise parking to either the municipalization of parking fields or the interconnection/decentralization of parking



In 2019, the Town in partnership with Milone & MacBroom, Inc. embarked on a two-year planning process to update Wilton's 2009 POCD. The planning process included extensive community engagement opportunities that provided the community with various ways to provide feedback through public workshops, POCD website, POCD email, online community survey, and community-wide telephone survey. The plan's vision-oriented goals, issues, trends, strategies, and objectives are organized into three chapters that include (1) Natural and Historical Environment, (2) Human and Economic Environment, and (3) Built Environment. From the POCD, below are key objectives and strategies that relate to the Greater Wilton Center Study Area:

### Goal 1: Strengthen Wilton Center as a vibrant economic, residential, recreational and cultural hub for the community and region

Within Chapter 6 of the 2019 POCD, **Goal 1's Objective 1.1** calls for the need to "improve the vibrancy, visual quality, and cohesion of Wilton Center while supporting new and existing businesses by planning for residential, commercial, and mixed-use development" (p. 65). To address this objective, the plan recommends that the Town conduct a master plan process to identify an overall vision for Wilton Center and immediate surrounding areas, including the train station area and a portion of Danbury Road. The plan should include potential funding opportunities, options for implementing the master plan, recommended regulatory changes and incentives, and infrastructure improvements. The following strategies should be included as a part of the master plan effort:

- 1) Boundary** – Define the boundary of Wilton Center to include the formal Wilton Center zoning district boundaries, the train station area, and the proposed mixed-use development at 300 Danbury Road
- 2) Market Opportunities** – Explore market opportunities for residential and commercial development and/or redevelopment with potential for mixed-use, multi-modal, and transit-oriented development with a range of uses and designs (i.e., required ground floor retail space)
- 3) Desired Form and Streetscape** – Use case studies and possible form-based zoning approaches to assess property owners' and the community's desired design, form, and intensity for future development and/or redevelopment including gateway and streetscape design, building architecture, height, bulk, setbacks, parking at street/below-street-level, municipal garages, river access, civic/green space, historic preservation, and natural resources, protection
- 4) Water Resources** – Evaluate water quality, wetland, riverbank flood zone, and floodway impacts by higher development and/or redevelopment at the riverfront as well as provide strategies and regulations to address the impacts
- 5) Community's Future Vision** – Reflect market realities, proactive approach for development and/or redevelopment incorporating the community's vision, and incorporate recent ongoing initiatives such as the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT), planned enhancements to the Town Green, Schenck's Island/Merwin Meadows improvements, Chess Park, River Walk, and Wilton Center pedestrian bridge connecting Wilton Center to the train station
- 6) Infrastructure** – Plan for infrastructure capacity to accommodate new development and/or redevelopment (capacity in roadway, rail, pedestrian, water, sewer, natural gas, and telecommunications)

**Objective 1.2**, also found in Chapter 6 of the 2019 POCD, indicates the need to “better connect Wilton Center to Danbury Road, the Train Station, and the Norwalk River” (p.66). There is an opportunity to improve the streetscape design and development pattern in portions of Danbury Road to be similar to Wilton Center. These changes would help to improve the connections between these two areas and make the formal Wilton Center more visible to residents and visitors.

**1) Connect Wilton Center to the Train Station Area** – Enhance the pedestrian connection from Wilton Center to the train station area through pedestrian improvements to Ridgefield Road, the realization of the planned pedestrian bridge, and other similar projects

**2) NRV/ Riverwalk** – Create a formal riverwalk through Wilton Center along the Norwalk River

**3) Pedestrian Walking Environment** – Improve the pedestrian environment, such as sidewalks and streetscape, along Danbury Road to create a sense of place that portrays the “town center” character, which serves as a visual eye-catching marker that one has arrived to Wilton Center with further clues drawing residents and visitors into the formal Wilton Center

**4) Streetscape Improvements** – Improve gateway signage, lighting, and traffic calming on Danbury Road, especially at the main Town Center gateway found at Danbury Road and Ridgefield Road

## Goal 2: Pursue context-sensitive economic development on Danbury Road

Within Chapter 6 of the 2019 POCD, **Goal 2's Objective 2.1** calls for the need to “plan and regulate for transition in development patterns along Danbury Road from more intense uses in the southern corridor to more rural patterns in the northern corridor” (p.69). Below are the zoning recommendations for the portion of Danbury Road between Cannon Road and Wolfpit Road (also known as Central Wilton).

- Allow commercial, residential, and mixed-use development that emphasizes transit-oriented development, community, and village design character and connections to Wilton Center. Evaluate form-based zoning approaches.
- Establish landscaping, signage, and site design standards that help to define this section of Danbury Road as a part of, or a gateway to, Wilton Center.
- Promote better parking utilization, access management, and curb cut consolidation by reviewing parking requirements, requiring easements over neighboring properties for access and egress and facilitating and incentivizing integrated site planning between multiple property owners.
- Consider zoning incentives for historic structure preservation (see Natural and Historical Environment Goal 4).

## **POCD Public Outreach Feedback**

Below are key highlights from the 2019 POCD public outreach feedback organized by various topic areas that arose related to the Greater Wilton Center Study Area.

### **Land Use and Zoning**

- Develop a land use policy that enhances and supports both Wilton Center and adjacent Danbury Road area
  - a. Support for sustainable higher density housing that complements the New England architectural character for younger residents, “empty nesters”, and “age-in-place” residents
- Wilton Center – Top 4 Improvements
  - a. New businesses (new businesses such as shared office space, makerspace, and diverse restaurants/bars);
  - b. Revitalized to match New England feel;
  - c. (3) Pedestrian friendly walking environment; and
  - d. New housing
- Danbury Road – Top 4 Improvements
  - a. More economic development to fill in vacancies with existing and new local small businesses;
  - b. Improve traffic flow;
  - c. Beautification efforts; and
  - d. New housing

### **Public Realm and Open Space**

- Improve street life at night
- Enhance the walking environment (i.e., sidewalks, plantings, etc.)
- Create new parks and open spaces (i.e., dog park)
- Support for Schenck’s Island improvements
- Leverage the area surrounding the Town Green

### **Transportation and Pedestrian Mobility**

- Design streets that prioritize pedestrians and bicycles
- Danbury Road should be the primary north-south vehicular road
- Top 3 Improvements – (1) Pedestrian connections, (2) Traffic and safety on Danbury Road, and (3) Bicycle connections

### **Economy**

- Draw residents and visitors into Town with more businesses such as clothing stores, shoe stores, and local restaurants (incl. few chain restaurants such as First Watch)
- Majority of telephone survey participants support additional business development in Town. Top 5 priorities include (1) Review and revise land use regulations to encourage appropriate development, (2) Improve telecom and wireless/cell infrastructure and services, (3) Extend water, gas, and sewer service in appropriate areas, (4) Hire experts to help plan development in key areas, and (5) Implement Town-wide marketing, branding, and/ lifestyle programs.

## Greater Wilton Center Master Plan Public Outreach Feedback

An essential part of the Greater Wilton Center Master Plan process involved meeting with members of the community to learn about the area through their unique perspectives as longtime and new residents, business owners, property owners, and students. Throughout the planning process, the community's feedback highlighted several themes that include areas of improvement and opportunities for the Greater Wilton Center. The master plan will be shaped by the community input gathered for this planning process and the feedback received through the extensive public outreach for the 2019 POCD process.

In summary, the input received from the outreach process supports the POCD recommendations, namely:

- A desire for Wilton Center to be more active, walkable and interesting.
- Support for mixed-use development, including residential in Wilton Center.
- Calls for amenities, including a wider range of uses, open spaces and improved walkability.

Below is a summary of the key topic areas covered at the various community engagement opportunities.

### Stakeholder Meetings – March 2022



BFJ met with business owners, developers, property owners, Town Commissions, and Town Department staff to gain a better understanding of the current conditions in Wilton through their professional lenses. Across the board, the meeting participants felt that some changes have to be made to allow property owners to really engage the market in a more productive manner. Major takeaways are listed below:

- Key issues with owning a business are high rents, high taxes, and challenging zoning regulations.
- There is an opportunity to streamline the approvals process to make it easier to build.
- “What are you coming into Wilton Center for?” The Town could use daytime and evening destinations.
- Wilton Center needs more density to make retail and restaurants successful. Presently, there is a lot of retail turnover due to lack of foot traffic.
- Residential uses in Wilton Center would help create a population to activate the area and support existing businesses.



### Public Workshop – March 31, 2022

The workshop for the Greater Wilton Center Master Plan was held online via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting began with a brief presentation by BFJ Planning, who provided an overview on the Master Plan Study Area, timeline, work completed, and next steps. For the next portion of the presentation, BFJ shared the goals and objectives for the Greater Wilton Center as discussed in the Town's 2019 POCD. Meeting participants had the opportunity to answer live polls asking their preferences on questions related to Wilton Center and Danbury Road. Following the presentation, the last portion of the meeting was an open Town Hall where participants could ask questions and provide feedback. Comments revolved around the following topics:

- Bike Accessibility – Improve bike accessibility between Wilton Center and the NRV
- Danbury Road – Fill in commercial vacancies and improve appearance
- Events – Increase the variety of events in Wilton Center
- Gateway Signage – Attract residents and visitors into Wilton Center through clear welcoming signage and a bulletin board where events are posted
- Schenck's Island – Opportunity to enhance the park's programming and associated events
- Sidewalks – Improve pedestrian access into Wilton Center, including along Danbury Road and Ridgefield Road
- Wilton Center – Desire to see more businesses and improve walking environment



## High School Students Meeting – March 22, 2022



On March 22, 2022, BFJ virtually met with Wilton High School's Executive Board and Student Senate at their weekly morning meeting to discuss their ideas for the Greater Wilton Center. Principal Dr. Robert O'Donnell joined the student group meeting. Each of the students shared their wishes on how the area could be improved for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. The students would like to see Wilton Center become a more concentrated downtown that is aesthetically pleasing with beautiful and exciting features making it more attractive and visible from Danbury Road. Three key topics constantly arose in the conversation, (1) Things to do/Business Retention, (2) Streetscape Improvements, and (3) Open Spaces and Programming. An overview of the topics covered are found below.

- Beautification – Decorated benches, flowers, fountain/sculpture, lighting, sidewalks
- Better Utilization of Open Spaces – Activate and improve the Gazebo Area and Schenck's Island
- Businesses – Need more stores and things to do that attract all demographics such as (1) Activity Options – Bowling alley, escape room, or laser tag venue, (2) Retail – Affordable food options, book stores, and clothing stores, and (3) Unique Shops – Small shops unique to Wilton
- Open Spaces – Need for pretty areas with greenery to sit/do homework/have events
- Pedestrian Areas – Create plazas near coffee shops similar to the plaza in front of Marly's
- Programming – Bring additional events such as concerts, fairs (i.e. craft, jewelry, and maker), flea market, food trucks, outdoor art exhibition, and themed festivals
- Trail – Create a natural riverwalk along the Norwalk River in Wilton Center

## Resident Feedback Via Email



As part of the planning process, the Wilton community had the opportunity to provide feedback to guide the plan by emailing Michael Wrinn, Town Planner, at [michael.wrinn@wiltonct.org](mailto:michael.wrinn@wiltonct.org). Resident feedback was communicated to the BFJ Planning team. Overall, those who submitted feedback indicated the desire to preserve historic architectural structures and landscapes while welcoming new developments that match and/or respect the existing historic fabric. Opportunities to improve the Greater Wilton Center include (1) Branding and Signage, (2) "Main Street feel", (3) Streetscapes, (4) Historic Preservation, (5) Parks and Open Spaces, (6) Activities and Programming, and (7) Norwalk River.

## Schenck's Island Master Plan 2021

The Schenck's Island/Merwin Meadows (SIMM) Committee in partnership with Milone & MacBroom, Inc. to develop a master plan for the future of Schenck's Island. The three-year planning process included opportunities for the community to provide their input. As seen on the right, the conceptual rendering illustrates the proposed active and passive programmed areas for the park. The areas include a great lawn, acoustic amphitheater, improved parking lot and park entry, nature themed free-play area, meadow observation tower, River Road gateway, managed meadow area and trails, river restoration plantings, and river access.



### SCHENCK'S ISLAND PRESERVE MASTERPLAN WILTON CONNECTICUT MILONE & MACBROOM

Source: Milone & MacBroom, Inc., 2021.



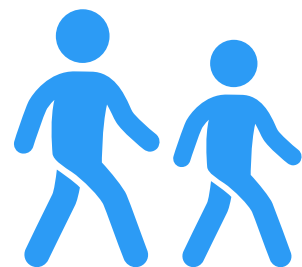
# 3

## Existing Conditions

### Overview

Building upon the previous planning documents, the next section provides an overview of the current existing conditions of the Greater Wilton Center. Data was collected through a series of field studies, publicly accessible databases, and walking/driving tours. A key objective of this section is to catalog salient features of the Greater Wilton Center, including:

- Land Use
- Zoning
- Historic Resources
- Pedestrian Connectivity
- Easements
- Environmental Constraints
- Emergency Services
- Infrastructure





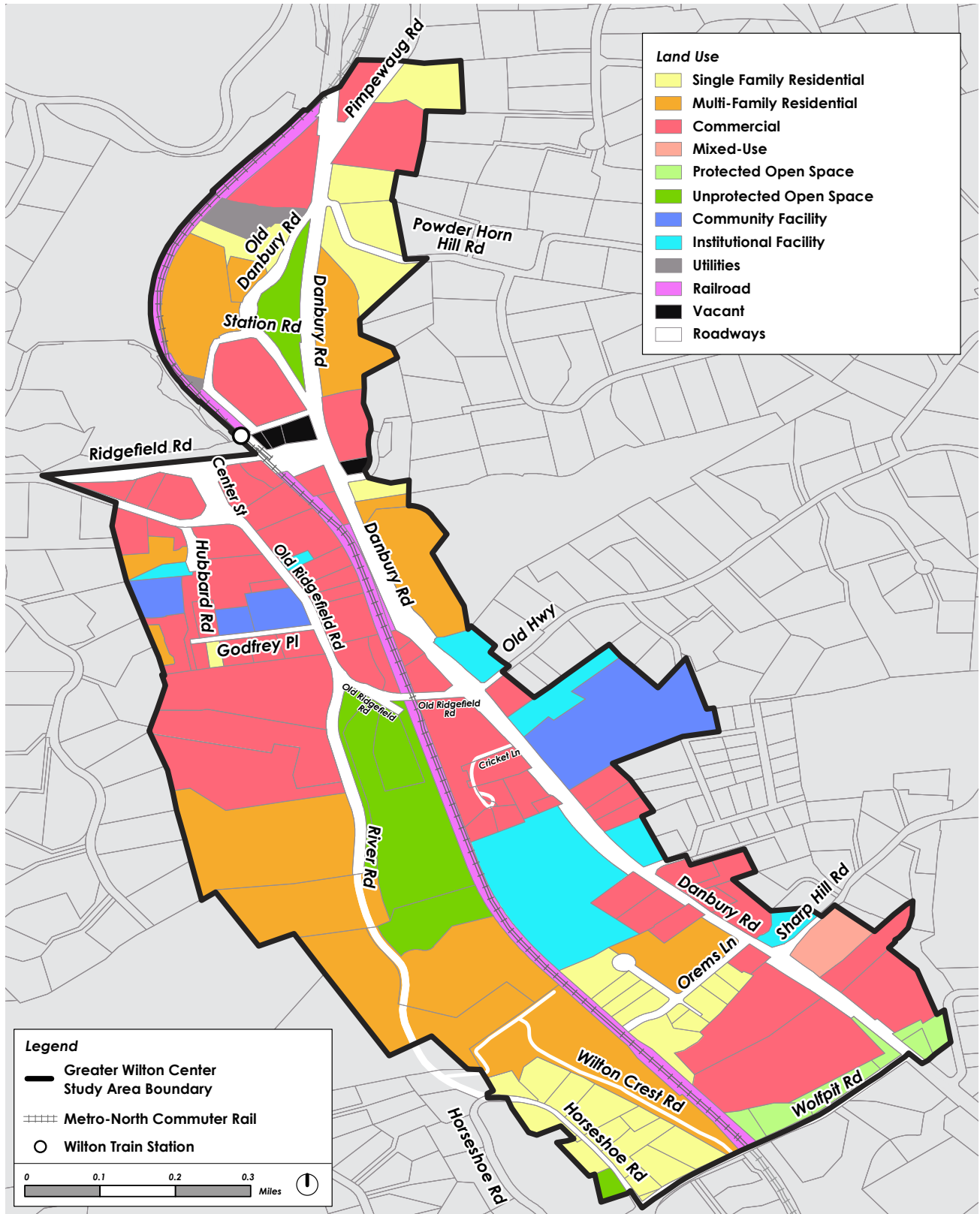
## Land Use

Located in Central Wilton, the Greater Wilton Center Area makes up the heart of Wilton’s commercial center. Within the Study Area, commercial use makes up the largest percentage of the total land area at approximately 33 percent. There are two distinct commercial areas, Wilton Center and Danbury Road. Wilton Center serves as the community’s downtown area with activity-based businesses, grocery stores, offices, recreational opportunities, restaurants, shops, Schenck’s Island, the Town Green, and Wilton Library. While Danbury Road has a mix of small to larger structures ranging in uses from car dealerships, institutional uses such as the Town Hall complex, mixed-use development, office park campuses, religious institutions such as Our Lady of Fatima Roman Catholic Church, small businesses, single-family homes, and multi-family residential developments. Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School, located adjacent to the church at 229 Danbury Road, closed after the 2021-2022 school year. The train station area is currently underutilized and has the opportunity to accommodate some transit-oriented development (although train service is quite limited). At the north and south portions of the Study Area, there are single and multi-family housing developments within walking distance of Wilton Center. Below, **Table 1** and **Figure 3** provide a summary of the Study Area land uses. **Figure 4** summarizes existing development applications in the pipeline and sites with additional development potential in the Greater Wilton Center Study Area.

Land Use	Total Area in Acres	Total Area in Percentage
Commercial	143	32.9%
Mult-Family Residential	96	22.2%
Roadways	53	12.1%
Single Family Residential	40	9.1%
Unprotected Open Space	28	6.6%
Institutional Facility	23	5.2%
Community Facility	20	4.7%
Railroad	17	4.0%
Protected Open Space	6	1.4%
Utilities	3	0.7%
Vacant	2	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

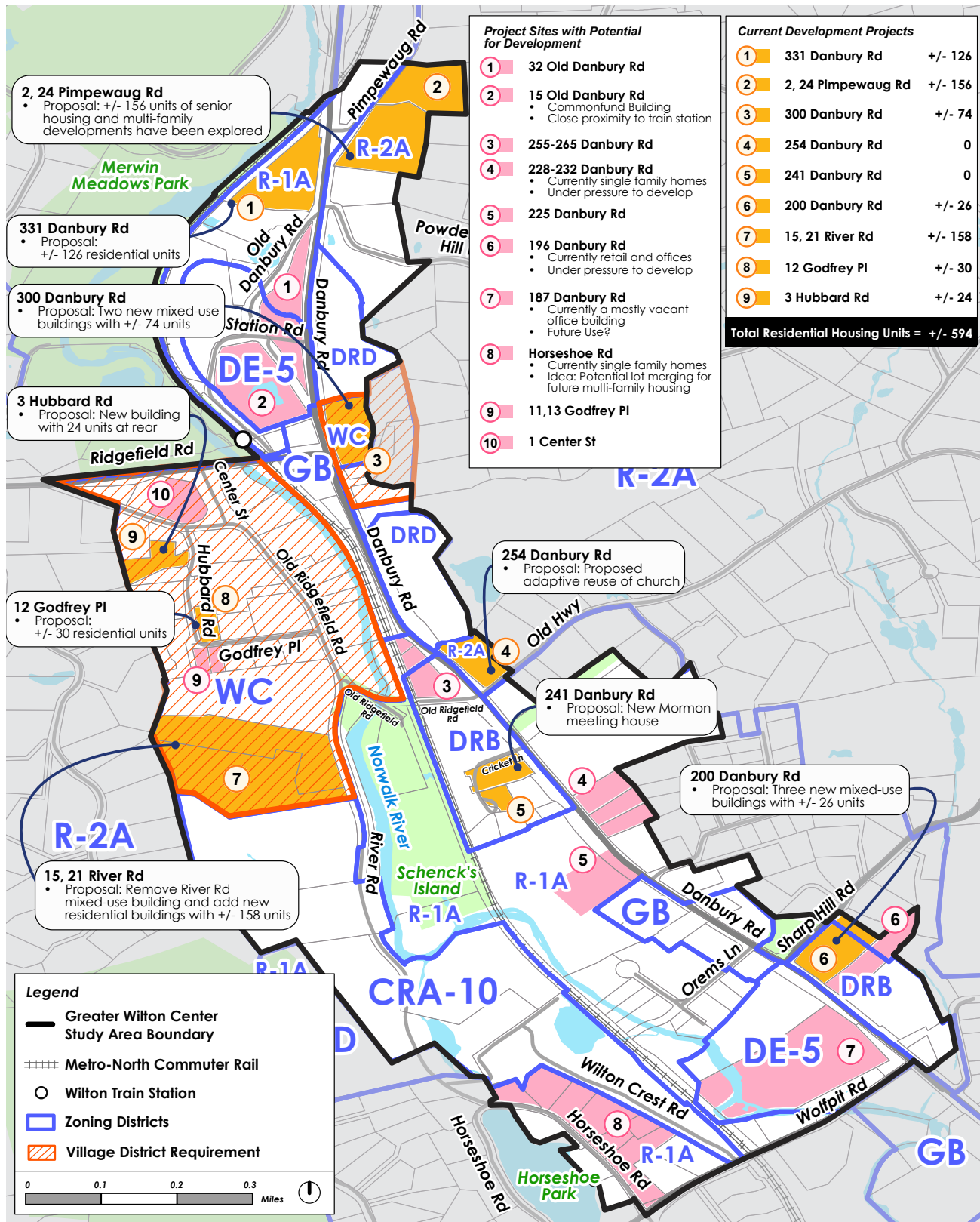
**Table 1** Summary of Land Uses for the Greater Wilton Center Study Area

Source: Town of Wilton, BFJ Planning, 2022.



**Figure 3** Land Use

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFJ Planning, 2022.



**Figure 4** Existing Development Applications and Project Sites with Potential for Development

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFI Planning, 2022.

# Zoning

This section discusses the existing zoning in the Study Area, and closes with some observations related to goals outlined in the POCD and heard throughout the outreach process for the Wilton Center Area Master Plan.

The Wilton Center Area Master Plan Study Area is covered by seven (7) zoning districts (see **Figure 5** on pg. 22). These include the following districts (see also **Table 2** on pg. 24 and **Table 3** on p. 26-27):

**DRB – Design Retail Business District** is a commercial district intended to accommodate retail stores and service establishments primarily serving the regular needs of Town residents. As shown in **Table 3** and in accordance with its stated purpose, the DRB District allows for a range of smaller retail, restaurant and commercial uses, including general offices, retail shops, medical offices and the like provided they are <20,000 gross square feet (gsf). All larger uses as well as those that have the potential to generate significant vehicle trips (e.g., movie theaters, uses with drive-thru windows, etc.) are permitted by special permit. Approximately half of all permitted uses in this district require a special permit application. Residential is not permitted in the DRB District except over non-residential uses on the ground floor and as assisted living facilities, and is authorized through a special permit (see **Table 3**). All uses require site plan review. The minimum lot size in the DRB District is 1.0 acre with a maximum FAR of 0.25. Maximum allowable building height is 2-stories / 35 feet (see **Table 2**).

**GB – General Business District** is a commercial district intended to accommodate larger retail and service establishments primarily serving the needs of the entire Town and neighboring communities. The GB District allows a similar range of uses as the DRB District, including commercial, retail and office uses, but the GB expands the range by allowing more intensive uses such as garden centers, homebuilding supply stores, equipment rental and wholesale/storage facilities, and the like. Many require special permit, but business size is still for the most part capped at 20,000 gsf, except retail home building services, which may be up to 30,000 gsf. Residential is not permitted in the DRB District except over non-residential uses on the ground floor and as assisted living facilities, and is authorized through a special permit (see **Table 3**). All uses require site plan review. The minimum lot size in the GB District is 1.0 acre with a maximum FAR of 0.35. Maximum allowable building height is 2-stories / 35 feet (see **Table 2**).

**R1-A – Single-Family Residential District** is intended to provide suitable areas for residential development appropriate to the environmental characteristics of the land and the character of the neighborhood. The districts are also intended to accommodate certain nonresidential uses, which are compatible with residential uses while preserving neighborhood character and property values. As residential district, the R1-A District allows for single-family residences only and does not permit any other form of residential development, including attached dwellings, affordable housing, multi-family or senior citizen housing. However, a range of other uses are permitted, including professional offices, nursing and group homes, child/adult day care centers, and bed and breakfast establishments. All uses permitted in the R1-A District are principal permitted uses (i.e., they are allowed by right) (see **Table 3**). All uses require site plan review. The minimum lot size in the R1-A District is 1.0 acre with a maximum density of one dwelling unit per lot. Maximum allowable building height is 2-stories / 35 feet (see **Table 2**).



**CRA-10 – Center Residence Apartment District** is a MF-Residential district intended to provide appropriate locations for a range of densities, and increase the availability of affordable housing in Wilton, where adequate facilities and services are present. The CRA-10 District is a residential district that accommodates the full-range of permitted residential uses, including single-family, attached dwellings, affordable housing, multi-family or senior citizen housing. The CRA-10 District is the only district in the Study Area that permits multi-family and senior citizen housing. The affordable housing requirement is 20 percent, and multi-family residence projects cannot have greater than 50 percent of their units as 2-bedroom units. The CRA-10 also permits nursing and group homes, child/adult day care centers, and bed and breakfast establishments, and the like (see **Table 3**). All uses in the CRA-10 District require a special permit application. The CRA-10 District allows for up to 10 du/acre on lots of at least 5-acres in area (minimum lot size). The CRA-10 District allows for residential densities of up to 10 du/acre with a minimum lot area of 5-acres, and allows for up to 20 percent building coverage and 60 percent site coverage. Maximum building height is 2.5-stories or 35 feet (see **Table 2**).

**DRD – Design Residence District** is a MF-Residential district intended to provide appropriate locations for a range of densities, and increase the availability of affordable housing in Wilton, where adequate facilities and services are present. The DRD District allows a tailored range of residential uses as compared to the CRA-10 District in that it accommodates single-family, attached dwellings and affordable housing, but multi-family and senior citizen housing are not permitted. Affordable housing requirement is 20 percent, and all permitted uses require a special permit application. The DRD district also permits nursing and group homes, child/adult day care centers, and bed and breakfast establishments, and the like (see **Table 3**). It requires a minimum lot size of 3-acres and a maximum lot size of 10-acres, and allows for residential densities of up to 3 du/acre with 20 percent building coverage and 20 percent site coverage. Maximum building height is 2.5-stories or 35 feet (see **Table 2**).

**DE-5 – Design Enterprise District** is an industrial district intended to provide a favorable and stable environment for the growth of industry to strengthen Wilton’s economic base. The controls in the districts are intended to foster coherent development of modern industrial facilities at contemporary site development standards, while minimizing disturbance to residential areas. The DE-5 District permits a range of economic uses, including offices (general and medical), health and fitness clubs, hotels, nursing homes, retail homebuilding supplies, warehouses and storage facilities, manufacturing, printing and research/development laboratories. Residential uses are not permitted in the DE-5, except accessory dwelling units to existing single-family residential. About half of all uses require a special permit. All permitted uses require site plan review (see **Table 3**). The DE-5 District has no stated density requirement in the Town Code, but requires a minimum 5-acre lot size and permits a maximum building coverage of 25 percent and a maximum site coverage of 50 percent. Maximum building height is 3-stories / 39 feet but this can be increased to 4-stories / 55 feet if the project is in compliance with the minimum area requirements stated in the code (see **Table 2**).

**WC – Wilton Center District** is a commercial district. It is also a Village District authorized under Connecticut state law with the purpose of maintaining and enhancing distinctive character, landscape and historic structures of Wilton Center, to encourage the conversion, conservation and preservation of existing buildings and sites, and to encourage the orderly development of a shopping area for the Town, which provides the opportunity for creative and flexible architectural design, the sound interrelationship of buildings to open spaces, pedestrian and vehicular circulation, landscaping, parking areas and business uses and to carry out the recommendations and proposals for circulation and use contained in the duly adopted plans and policies of the Commission.

The WC District allows for a range of commercial, retail and restaurant uses, if less than 20,000 gsf. Grocery stores greater than 20,000 gsf are permitted by special permit, as are fast-food restaurants, childcare facilities, adult care facilities, banks with drive thru windows, etc.

Residential is not permitted in the WC District except over non-residential uses on the ground floor and as assisted living facilities, and is authorized through a special permit. Maximum permitted residential densities are 5 du/acre in most of the district, or 10 du/acre if within 1,000 feet of the train station, up to a maximum of 0.5 FAR. Residential is only allowed over street-level non-residential uses (e.g., retail/offices/commercial uses (but offices are generally not permitted on the ground floor, street level in the WC District as noted elsewhere in the code). All uses must go through site plan approval.

Maximum building height through most of the WC District is 3-stories/42 feet, but this increases to 4-stories / 54 feet on Route 7/Danbury Road for the portion that is in the WC District.

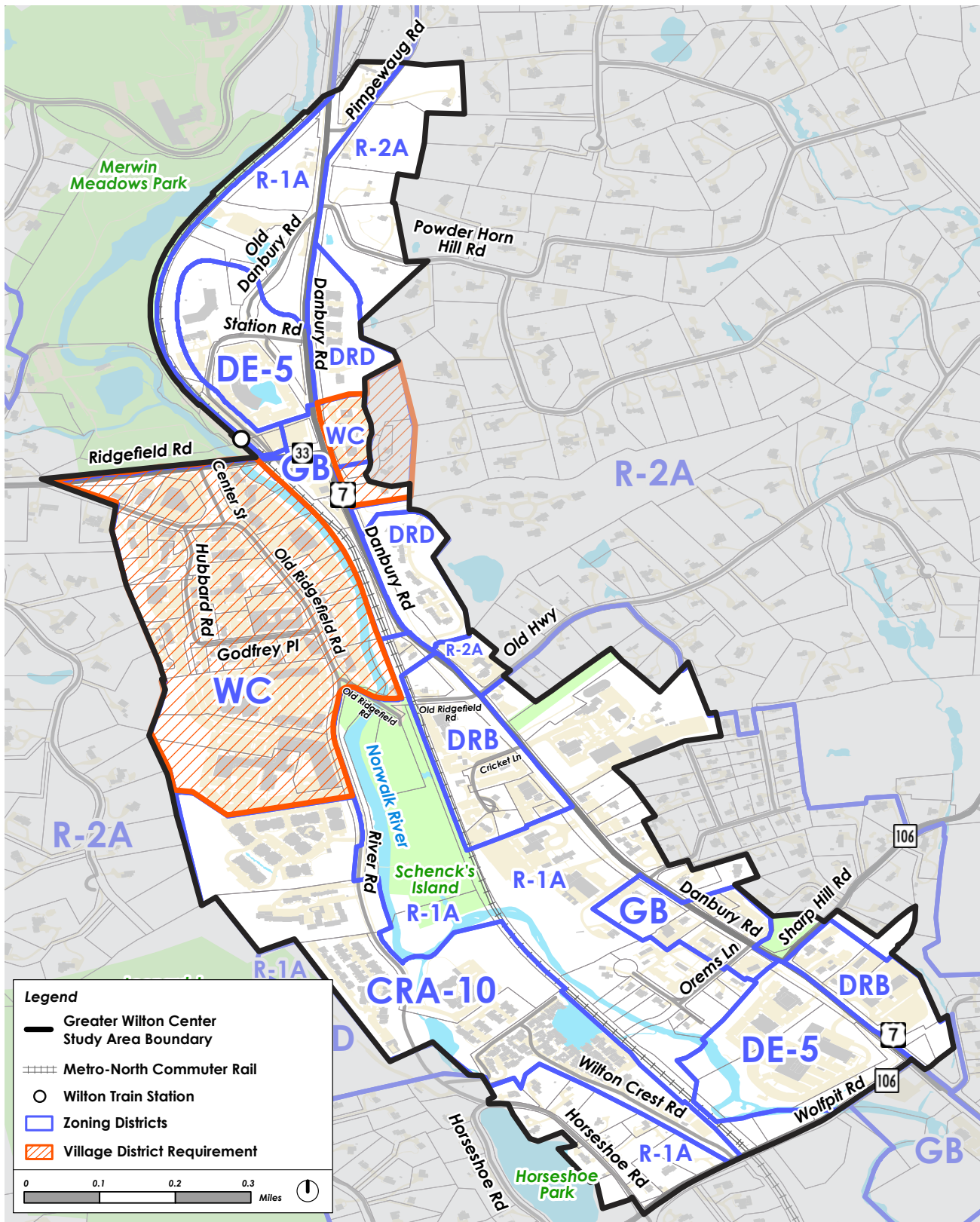
Maximum building coverage is 30 percent and maximum site coverage is 80 percent.

All development is required to make improvements to the built environment/public realm, including designating a principal entrance to a public right-of-way and the provision of sidewalks. The maximum building coverage at 30 percent, which seems low compared to other walkable downtowns.

The WC District provides FAR density bonuses under two (2) programs that allow up to 10 percent increase in FAR (at the discretion of the P&Z Commission).

- (1) “Park & Walk” to promote efficient parking if an applicant voluntarily agrees to allow use of parking spaces in excess of those required in the zoning as public parking; and
- (2) Norwalk River Greenway Trail Program, to provide access to the west bank of the Norwalk River if the property owner agrees to provide and maintain a 15 feet wide easement with a trail to the river.

Field observations suggest that neither of these programs have been favored by property owners to any significant degree.



**Figure 5** Zoning Districts

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFJ Planning, 2022.

WILTON CENTER MASTER PLAN   APPLICABLE ZONING DISTRICTS (AREA & BULK PARAMETERS)							
Zone	DRB	GB	WC	R1-A	CRA-10	DRD	DE-5
Type	Commercial	Commercial	Commercial	SF-Residential	MF-Residential	MF-Residential	Industrial
Name	Design Retail Business District	General Business District	Wilton Center District (Village District)	Single-Family Residential District	Center Residence Apartment District	Design Residence District	Design Enterprise District
Purpose	The DRB Design Retail Business District is intended to accommodate retail stores and service establishments primarily serving the regular needs of Town residents.	The GB-General Business District is intended to accommodate larger retail and service establishments primarily serving the needs of the entire Town and neighboring communities.	To maintain and enhance the distinctive character, landscape and historic structures of Wilton Center, to encourage the conversion, conservation and preservation of existing buildings and sites, and to encourage the orderly development of a shopping area for the Town which provides the opportunity for creative and flexible architectural design, the sound interrelationship of buildings to open spaces, pedestrian and vehicular circulation, landscaping, parking areas and business uses and to carry out the recommendations and proposals for circulation and use contained in the duly adopted plans and policies of the Commission. *	The single-family residential districts are intended to provide suitable areas for residential development appropriate to the environmental characteristics of the land and the character of the neighborhood. The districts are also intended to accommodate certain nonresidential uses which are compatible with residential uses while preserving neighborhood character and property values.	The multi-family residential districts are intended to provide appropriate locations for a range of densities, and increase the availability of affordable housing in Wilton, where adequate facilities and services are present.	The multi-family residential districts are intended to provide appropriate locations for a range of densities, and increase the availability of affordable housing in Wilton, where adequate facilities and services are present.	To provide a favorable and stable environment for the growth of industry to strengthen Wilton's economic base. The controls in the districts are intended to foster coherent development of modern industrial facilities at contemporary site development standards, while minimizing disturbance to residential areas.
Page in Zoning	p. 109	p. 113	p. 118	p. 67	p. 75 (and p. 80)	p. 75 (and p. 79)	P. 132
Front Yard (min.) (ft.)	50	50	10	40	50	50	50 (100 along Rte. 7)
Front Yard (max.) (ft.)	75	75	20	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Side Yard (min.) (ft.)	25	25	0	30	50	50	50
(if abutting a residential district) (ft.)	85	85	75	N/A	75	75	100
Side Yard (max.) (ft.)	50	50	N/A	N/A	50	50	N/A
(if abutting a residential district) (ft.)	85	85	N/A	N/A	75	75	N/A
Rear Yard (min.) (ft.)	25	25	20	40	50	50	50
(if abutting a residential district) (ft.)	85	85	75	N/A	75	75	100
Min. Parking/Load Setback (ft.)	10	10	0	N/A	15	15	25
(if abutting a residential district) (ft.)	60	60	60	N/A	50	75	75
Max. Buildng Height (Stories/Feet)	2/35'	3/35'	3/42'	2.5/35'	2.5/35'	2.5/35'	3/39' (4/55' if in compliance with min. area requirements)
Max. Building Coverage (%)	20	25	30	10	20	20	25
Max. Site Coverage (%)	80	80	80	15	65	20	50
Min. Lot Size (acres)	1	1	None	1	5	3	5
Max. Lot Size (acres)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10	N/A
Min. Lot Frontage (ft.)	100	50	None	25	50	50	100
Min. Lot Width (ft.)	100	50	None	150	200	200	N/A
Max. FAR	0.25	0.35	0.50	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Max. Density (du/ac)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10	3	N/A

Table 2    Summary of Zoning Districts for the Greater Wilton Center Study Area

Source: Town of Wilton, BFJ Planning, 2022.



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Principal Permitted Use		NOTE: All permitted uses require Site Plan Approval
Special Permit Use	SP	
Not Permitted	X	

USE	DRB	GB	WC	R-1A	CRA-10	DRD	DE-5
	Design Retail Business District	General Business District	Wilton Center District (Village District)	Single- Family Residential District	Center Residence Apartment District	Design Residence District	Design Enterprise District
Single-family Detached Dwellings	X	X	X		SP	SP	X
Farms	X	X	X		X	X	X
Open Space (public and private)	X	X	X		SP	SP	X
Attached Dwellings	X	X	X	X	SP	SP	X
Affordable Housing Units	X	X	X	X	SP	SP	X
Affordable Housing Requirement	X	X	X	X	20%	20%	X
Multi-Family Dwellings (no more than 50% at 2-bdrm. max.)	X	X	X	X	SP	X	X
Senior Citizen Housing	X	X	X	X	SP	X	X
Public and semi-public uses					SP	SP	SP
Private membership clubs	SP	X	Not Permitted at Street Level		SP	SP	SP
Public utility buildings	SP	SP	X		SP	SP	SP
Radio or television transmission facilities	SP	SP	Not Permitted at Street Level		SP	SP	SP
Cemeteries	X	X	X		SP	SP	X
Planned Residential Developments	X	X	X		X	X	X
Nursing Homes	SP	SP	X		SP	SP	SP
Group Homes	X	X	X		SP	SP	X
Riding Stables	X	X	X		X	X	X
Congregate housing	SP	SP	X		SP	SP	SP
Schools (public and private)	SP	SP	X		SP	SP	X
Adaptive Use Historical Structures	X	X	X		X	X	X
Professional Offices	X	X	X		X	X	X
Bed and Breakfast Accommodations	SP	X			X	X	X
Charitable Organizations	SP	SP	Not Permitted at Street Level		X	X	X
Health/Fitness Club (<20,000 sf)	SP			X	X	X	SP
Stores/Shops for Retail (<20,000 sf)				X	X	X	X
Stores/Shops for Personal Services (<20,000 sf)				X	X	X	X
Banks/Financial w/o drive-thrus (<20,000 sf)				X	X	X	X
General Offices (<20,000 sf)			Not Permitted at Street Level	X	X	X	
Medical Offices (<20,000 sf)				X	X	X	
Medical Offices (>20,000 sf)	X	X	SP	X	X	X	X
Retail Dry Cleaning/Laundry (<20,000 sf)				X	X	X	X
Libraries/Museums/Art Galleries (<20,000 sf)			X	X	X	X	X
Printing/Lithography Etc. (<20,000 sf)				X	X	X	
Dance/Art Studios (<20,000 sf)			Not Permitted at Street Level	X	X	X	X
Caterers (<20,000 sf)			X	X	X	X	X
All Permitted Uses >20,000 sf (with 30,000 sf max. allowable)	SP	SP	X	X	X	X	SP

**Table 3** Summary of Uses by Zoning District for the Greater Wilton Center Study Area

Source: Zoning Regulations of the Town of Wilton, Connecticut (Effective March 15, 1994 - rev. June 25, 2019)

	Principal Permitted Use		NOTE: All permitted uses require Site Plan Approval				
	Special Permit Use	SP					
	Not Permitted	X					
USE	DRB	GB	WC	R1-A	CRA-10	DRD	DE-5
	Design Retail Business District	General Business District	Wilton Center District (Village District)	Single- Family Residential District	Center Residence Apartment District	Design Residence District	Design Enterprise District
Banks/Financial w/ drive-thrus	SP	SP	SP	X	X	X	X
Dwelling Units over retail	SP	SP	SP	X	X	X	X
Movie Theaters	SP	SP	SP	X	X	X	X
Assisted Living Facilities	SP	SP	X	X	X	X	X
Existing Automotive sales/service	SP	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sexually Oriented Businesses	SP	X	X	X	X	X	X
Package Stores	SP	SP	SP	X	X	X	X
Pharmacy (1-drive-thru allowable)	SP	SP	SP	X	X	X	X
Retail Home Building Supplies (<20,000 sf)	X		X	X	X	X	
Retail Home Building Supplies (<30,000 sf)	X		X	X	X	X	SP
Nurseries/Garden Supply (<20,000 sf)	X		X	X	X	X	X
Funeral Homes (<20,000 sf)	X		X	X	X	X	X
Equipment Rental/Leasing Services (<20,000 sf)	X		X	X	X	X	X
Commercial Recreation Facilities	X	SP	X	X	X	X	X
Wholesale/Storage Facilities	X	SP	X	X	X	X	
Contracting Business	X	SP	X	X	X	X	X
Automotive Repair/Service	X	SP	X	X	X	X	X
Commercial Kennels/Vet. Hospitals	X	SP	X	X	X	X	X
Automotive Sales/Service	X	SP	X	X	X	X	X
Gas Stations	X	SP	X	X	X	X	X
Manufacturing	X	SP	X	X	X	X	
Licensed Dispensary Facility	X	SP	X	X	X	X	X
Real Estate Offices	X	X		X	X	X	X
Civic Organizations	X	X	Not Permitted at Street Level	X	X	X	X
Social Service Agencies	X	X	Not Permitted at Street Level	X	X	X	X
Grocery Stores (20,000 sf min. - 60,000 sf max.)	X	X	SP	X	X	X	X
Accessory Dwelling Units (in SF residences)	X	X	SP	X	X	X	SP
Educational Residential Facilities	X	X	SP	X	X	X	X
Library (20,000 sf min. - 60,000 sf max.)	X	X	SP	X	X	X	X
Research/Development Laboratories	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Hotels	X	X	X	X	X	X	SP

**Table 3 cont.** Summary of Uses by Zoning District for the Greater Wilton Center Study Area

Source: Zoning Regulations of the Town of Wilton, Connecticut (Effective March 15, 1994 - rev. June 25, 2019)

While seven zoning districts cover the Study Area, residential is a principal permitted use in the R-1A District, which allows single-family residential as-of-right. Residential is allowed by special permit in five other districts, which are designated as commercial or multi-family districts. Moreover, in the DRB, GB and importantly the WC District, residential is allowed by special permit only, but only if it is provided over non-residential uses that occupy the ground floor.

How the zoning presently regulates residential uses in Wilton Center raises several potential impediments related to goals outlined in the 2019 POCD and future revitalization of the Wilton Center proper.

- The special permit provision for all residential uses requires all applications to proceed through what can potentially be a lengthy and unpredictable special permit approval process. Certainly, this allows the Town to exercise greater care through its review process, but from a developer's perspective it also slows down and adds uncertainty to the approval process, and ultimately to the development process. Making residential use a principal permitted use in some districts, including and most importantly the WC District, would help streamline the development process and meet market demand (see Market Overview Report). All projects would still be subject to site plan review, providing the Town sufficient opportunity to steward projects carefully through the approvals process.
- While requiring active uses along the street seems appropriate for many downtown settings, Wilton Center does not conform the traditional "Main Street" typology. Presently, the Center's physical framework is that of a series of fairly large suburban-like commercial development pads. Improving pedestrian circulation in and among these properties will improve connectivity, but it seems unrealistic to expect that all streets will transform to create traditional shopping streets. But, the existing zoning offers this as its only frontage type for the whole WC District.

A more flexible approach could be taken by making other frontage types available to development in Wilton Center. Strictly ground floor retail/restaurant is a limitation, and represents a "one-size-fits-all" thinking that may be somewhat outdated given the changing retail landscape and the sizeable geography of the WC District. Current pipeline applications to the Planning and Zoning Commissions suggest that developers, understanding the challenges of the present retail market and the reality of low foot traffic in Wilton Center, especially away from River Road, meet this requirement by providing building amenity uses such as fitness rooms and the like along the street level. These uses arguably add no more activity along the street, nor do they make the street any more walkable, than would a well-appointed town-like residential frontage, such as a stoop or porch frontage along the street, if it were permitted.

- Finally, for Wilton Center proper, the current zoning offers insufficient building capacity to attract the active uses desired as expressed throughout the outreach process and outlined in the POCD. While the current WC District allows stores/shops for retail and services, and offices as principal permitted uses (residential is not permitted except as described above), maximum building height is capped at 3-stories / 42 feet across the majority of the WC District. This, paired with a fairly low building coverage of 30-percent, offers substantial financial challenges to developers, especially if the desire of the Town is to see arrival of destination uses like regional purveyors or a theater that can be riskier (as compared to residential) from a proforma / financial analysis perspective.



As a point of reference to the discussion above, BFJ reviewed the zoning adopted for Corbin Corners in Darien, Connecticut. The zoning governing that mixed-use area is designated as Central Business District - Corbin Subarea (CBD-CS), and exists almost as a special district tailored especially for the Corbin Corners area. The CBD-CS zoning allows for a wide range of commercial sales and services, business and professional offices, public and semi-public uses, retail, medical/dental offices, structure parking, and most are allowed as principal permitted uses (i.e., they do not require a special permit). Residential is allowed as-of-right as a principal permitted use, and is designated to upper floors only (like in the WC District zoning) (see **Table 3**). But unlike Wilton Center, relegating residential to upper floors makes sense in Corbin Corners given its comparatively smaller, more concentrated geography than Wilton Center, one that lends itself more easily to the creation of a walkable and more synergetic pedestrian environment.

In terms of bulk parameters, Corbin Corners' CDB-CS zoning allows for greater building height and significantly greater building coverage than the WC District. For example, building heights in Corbin Corners Darien are defined by subarea and range from 3-stories / 50 feet, 4-stories / 55 feet, and 5-stories / 70 feet. The CBD-CS District specifies no maximum building or site coverages, no minimum lot width, and no maximum FAR or density (du/acre). While these zoning parameters would likely be too aggressive for Wilton Center, they illustrate a more market-friendly and flexible approach to land use regulation that could inform rethinking the Wilton Center zoning.

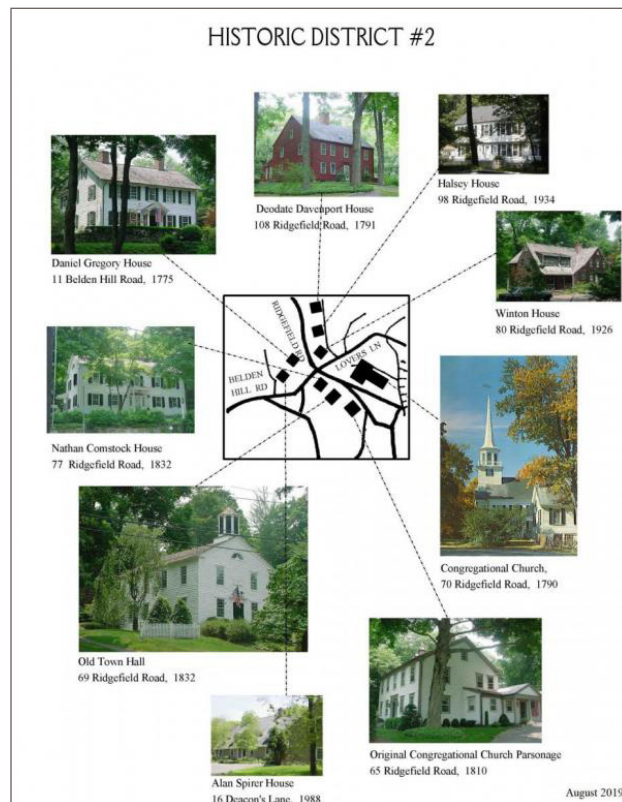
- First, the CBD-CS zoning is written specifically for the conditions of the area (e.g., adjusting regulations where appropriate rather than providing one standard across the whole district). This tailored approach could be applied to Wilton Center to create a range of street frontage types that appropriately fit the area's unique conditions and context.
- Second, the building heights, coverages and flexibility built into the allowable density create market conditions necessary to spur interest and action on the part of the development community.
- Third, many of the desirable uses are principal permitted, and thus do not require a special permit application. All development in Corbin Corners Darien, however, require site plan approval.
- Finally, Corbin Corners CBD-CS zoning has built-in incentives for parking, landscaping and public space.

Together, these create a far more modern and attractive regulatory environment for Corbin Corners than is observed in the WC District in the Town of Wilton. In addition, incentives could be built into new zoning for Wilton Center that encourage developers to meet higher design standards and/or include community serving uses (e.g., a theater, more civic space, etc.).

There are also several zoning takeaways for the portion of the Study Area outside of the WC District, i.e., "between the lights" along Danbury Road / Route 7. First, allowable commercial and residential densities seem fairly low with FARs of 0.25 and 0.35 in the DRB and GB commercial districts respectively. Similarly, for the CRA-10 and DRD, the coverages are 10 du/ac. and 3 du/ac., with fairly large required lot sizes. Across all zoning districts outside of the WC District, building heights are maintained at 35 feet (except in the DE-5). It may be possible to create an incentive program (via an overlay district) to allow additional for a broader range of residential in some districts (e.g., townhouses), slightly increased building height and/or density, etc. provided developers meet higher design standards or contribute to improving connectivity and visual appearance along the corridor. These were mentioned as two primary objectives for this area. Finally, given current market conditions and the relative size of the Study Area, it may be worth considering a limited expansion to residential in certain districts. For example, with the office market struggling, allowing residential (by special permit) in the DE-5 district could be considered. Similarly, the portion of R1-A within the study area could allow on a very limited basis some residential other than single-family given its proximity to Wilton Center proper, the train station, and its frontage along Danbury Road.

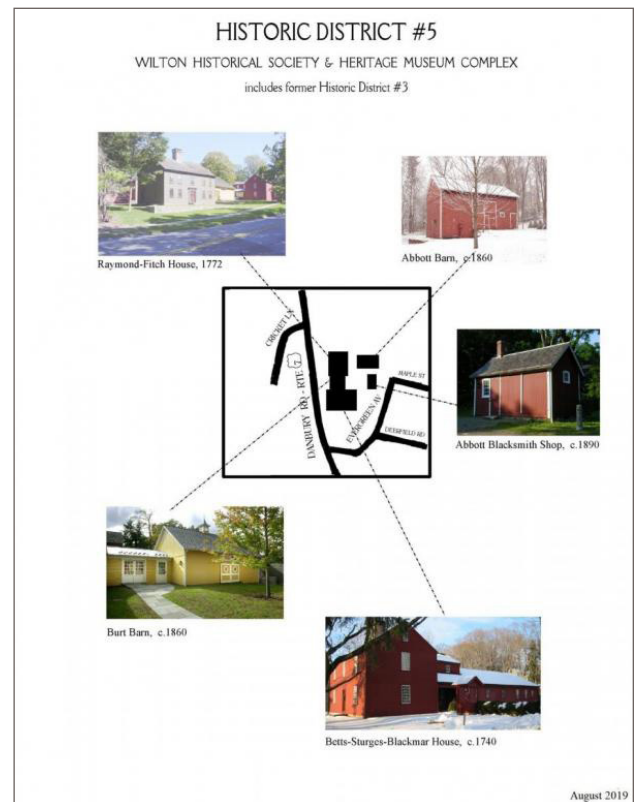
Two historic districts are either located in or in close proximity to the Study Area. Historic District 2 is centered around the intersection of Belden Hill Road, Ridgefield Road and Lovers Lane to the north-west of Wilton Center (see **Figure 6**). This district includes eight properties, but none fall within the Study Area. Two impressive buildings are located in close proximity to the west of the Study Area, including the Original Congregational Church Parsonage (1810) at 65 Ridgefield Road and Old Town Hall (1832) at 69 Ridgefield Road. Historic District 5 (see **Figure 7**) is located along the east side of Danbury Road approximately between Evergreen Avenue to the south and Cricket Lane to the north. This district centers around the Wilton Historical Society and Heritage Museum Complex and includes five structures: (1) the Raymond-Fitch House (1772), (2) the Abbot Barn (c.1860), (3) the Abbott Blacksmith Shop (c.1890), (4) the Burt Barn (c.1860), and (5) the Betts-Sturges-Blackmar House (c.1740).

These historic districts and their attendant properties celebrate, preserve and protect the distinct character and landscape of the Town. As such, the Wilton Center Master Plan should respect the close proximity of those structures in Historic District 2 and seek to further protect those structures that compose Historic District 5 that sits fully within the Greater Wilton Center Study Area. This is especially important as potentially new zoning and development opportunity is considered in the future plan. It will be important to improve coordination and communication between the Planning & Zoning Commission and Historic District and Historic Properties Commission as the plan is developed.



**Figure 6** Historic District #2

Source: The Wilton Historic Districts and Historic Properties Commission, 2007.



**Figure 7** Historic District #5

Source: The Wilton Historic Districts and Historic Properties Commission, 2007.

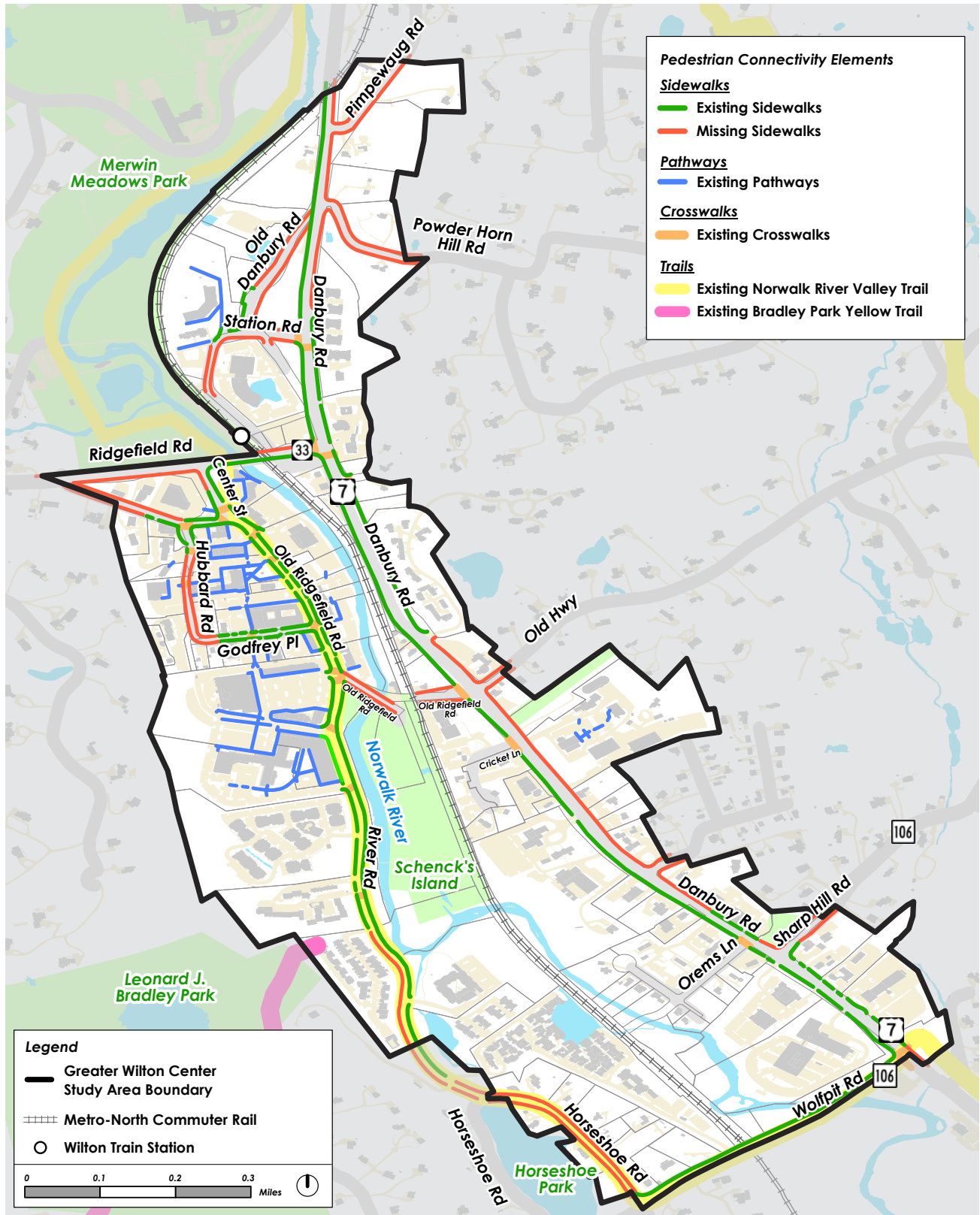
# Pedestrian Connectivity

**Figure 8**, on the following page, illustrates the existing pedestrian connectivity elements, such as sidewalks, pathways, crosswalks, and trails, that are present or missing in the Study Area. Generally, Wilton Center has continuous north-south sidewalks starting at the intersection of Ridgefield Road and Center Street then moving south along Old Ridgefield Road and River Road. Sidewalks are needed to further connect River Road to Horseshoe Road and Wolfpit Road. As well, the intersection at Center Street and Old Ridgefield Road was noted as an area that could use further study to improve the pedestrian crossings. The intersection at Horseshoe Road and River Road could also be improved with the addition of crosswalks. Additional sidewalks are needed near the intersection of Ridgefield Road and Old Ridgefield Road to create an improved pedestrian environment entering Wilton Center's main gateway, including Old Ridgefield Road between Ridgefield Road and Hubbard Road. In addition, Hubbard Road would also benefit from the addition of sidewalks. Existing pathways in Wilton Center are located in the various parking lots on the west side of Old Ridgefield Road. There is an opportunity to enhance the pathways if the Town considers working with property owners to develop a sharing parking system.

Currently, the segment of Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT) near Wilton Center passes through scenic trails along Merwin Meadows Park into Wilton Center running along roadways and reconnects with scenic trails at the intersection of Danbury Road and Wolfpit Road. Previous planning efforts, including the 2001 Wilton Center Master Plan and 2019 POCD, and recent public outreach feedback for the current Wilton Center Area Master Plan indicates the desire to see a riverwalk run along the Norwalk River. Along the Danbury Road, the corridor has continuous sidewalks running along the west side but the east side has gaps in the sidewalk that should be filled. The Department of Public Works suggested that traffic calming within Wilton Center should be considered by the Town to encourage vehicles to slow down and thereby create an improved pedestrian friendly environment. Future roadway improvements should consider emergency vehicle access and circulation. They also suggested encouraging the State to consider traffic calming on Danbury Road.

## Easements

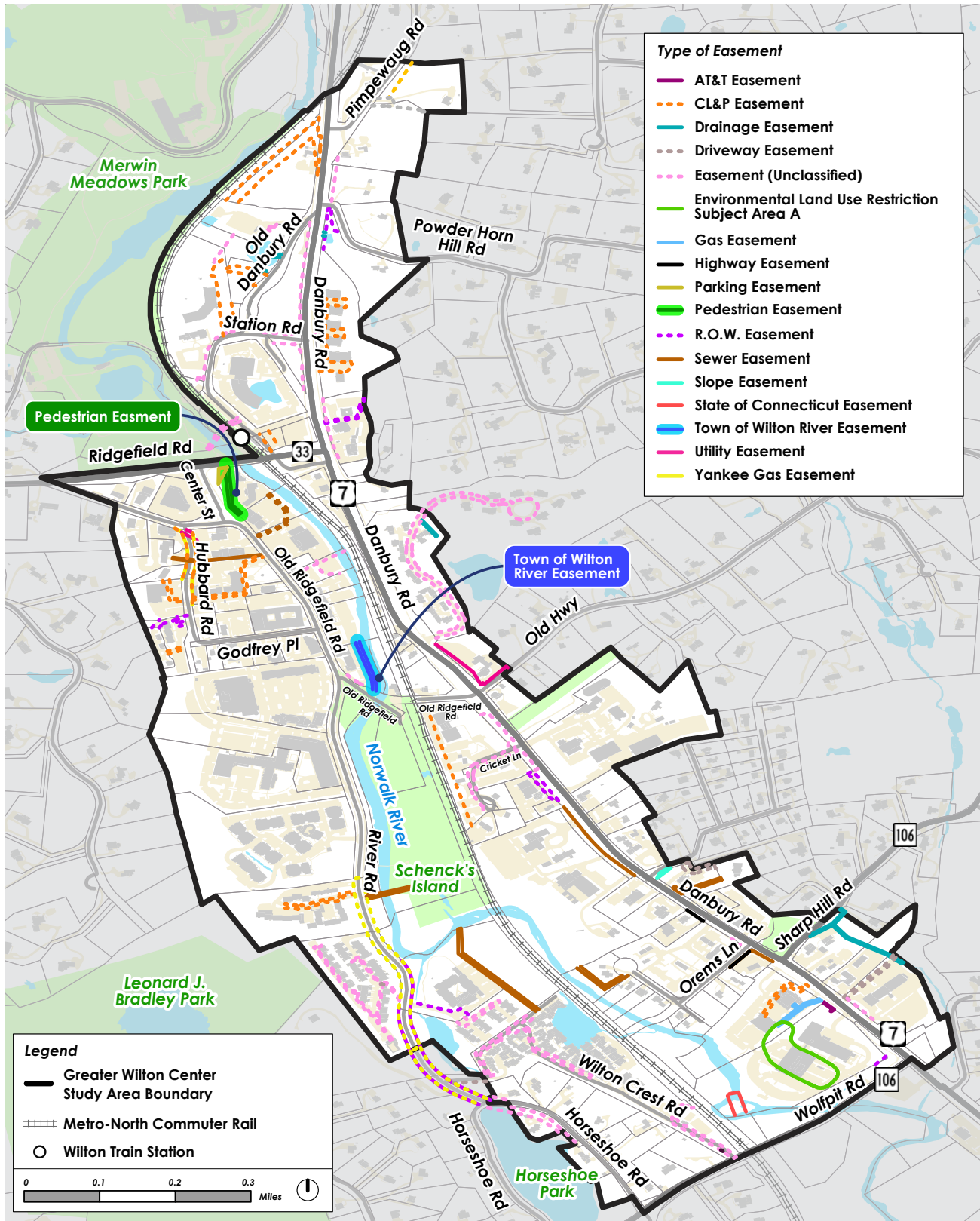
The Study Area has a total of 17 types of easements illustrated in **Figure 9**, on pg. 33. Easements range from driveway, environmental, infrastructure-related (i.e. drainage, electric, gas, sewer, and utility), parking, and right-of-way. There are two easements that could assist with creating better pedestrian connections: (1) Pedestrian Easement (shown in solid green) and (2) the Town of Wilton River Easement (shown in solid dark blue). The Pedestrian Easement could assist with improving the connection from the train station area to Wilton Center proper. The Town of Wilton River Easement could assist with realizing the desired riverwalk along the Norwalk River.



**Figure 8** Pedestrian Connectivity

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, NRV, Google, Town of Wilton, BFI Planning, 2022.





**Figure 9** Easements

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFI Planning, 2022.

# Environmental Constraints

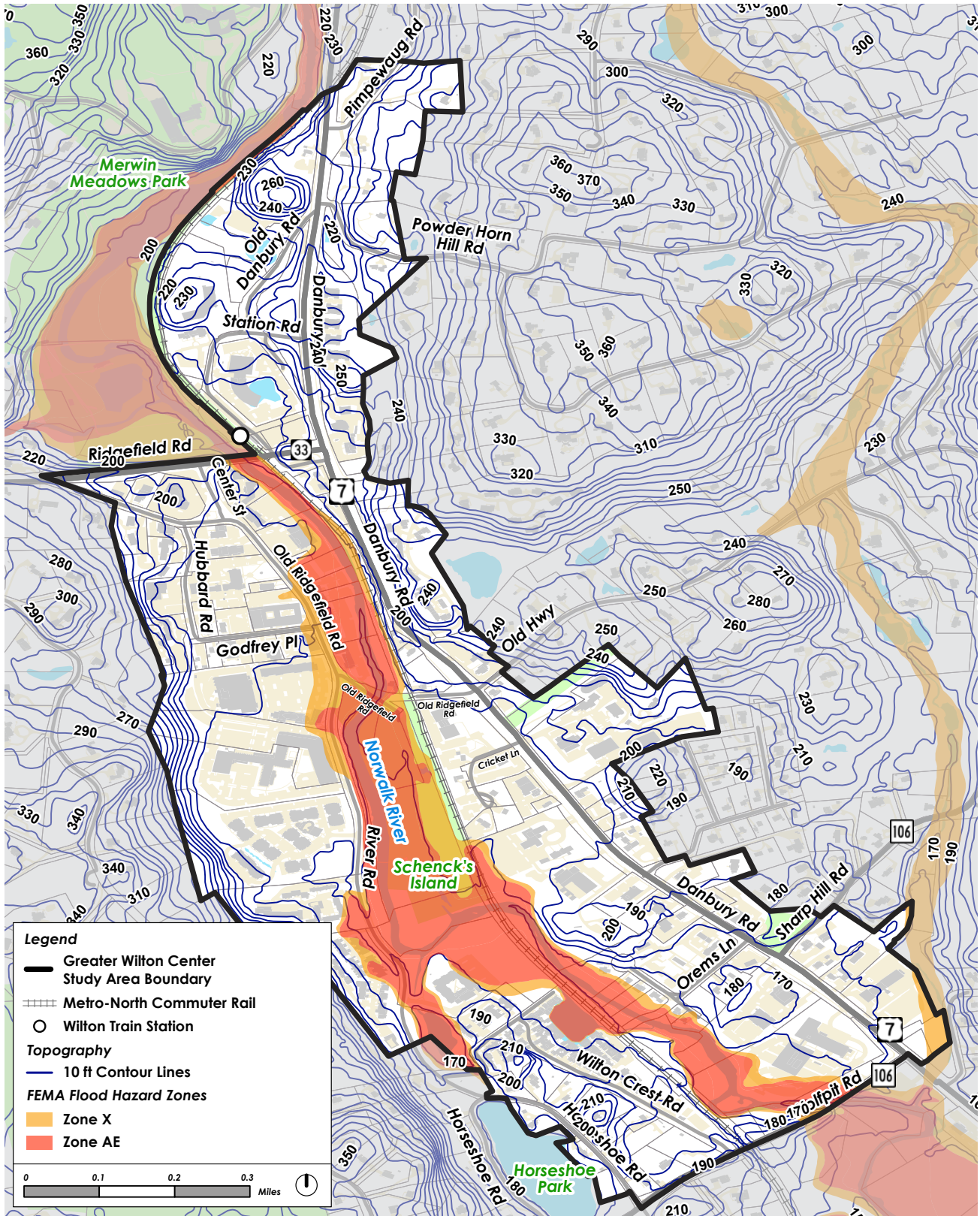
**Figure 10** depicts the environmental constraints located within the Study Area, which include changes in topography and flood zones. As illustrated in the map, the topography lines shown in dark blue illustrate changes in the ground elevation by increments of 10 feet. The highest elevation in the Study Area is approximately 260 feet, which is found at the western portion at the rear of the properties fronting Hubbard Road and River Road. The properties fronting along the east side of Danbury Road also have high elevations. Shifting away from either the west and east sides of the Study Area, the topography slopes downward to approximately 170 to 190 feet in elevation. It will be important for potential future developments on sites with great changes in elevation to effectively plan for stormwater run-off management.

Properties along and adjacent to the Norwalk River are located within Zone X and AE of the FEMA Special Flood Hazard Areas making up approximately 19 percent of the Study Area (84 acres out of the total 434 acres).

- Zone X (shaded) (shown in orange in **Figure 9**) are areas with moderate flood hazard, usually the area between the limits of the 100-year and 500-year floodplains, and can easily accommodate development. Technically, FEMA defines Zone X as “other flood areas” with either a 0.2 percent (500-year) chance of flooding or a 1 percent annual chance of flood with depths of less than 1 foot.
- Zone AE (shown in red in **Figure 10**) are areas defined by FEMA as a “special flood hazard areas” subject to inundation by the 1-percent-annual-chance flood, including areas with the 2-percent wave runoff, elevation less than 3.0 feet above the ground, and areas with wave heights less than 3.0 feet. These areas are subdivided into elevation zones with Base Flood Elevations (BFEs) assigned.
- Shown in **Figure 11** and **Figure 12**, present along the Norwalk River as it runs through Wilton Center, is a Zone AE Floodway Area along the Norwalk River to the rear of existing buildings on the west side of Old Danbury Road / River Road. FEMA defines a floodway as the channel of a stream or river plus any adjacent floodplain areas that must be kept free of encroachment so that the 1 percent annual chance of flood can be carried without substantial increase in flood heights.

It should be noted, however, that **Figures 10 – 12** and the descriptions above do not suggest that Wilton Center has a flooding issue. While some flooding has occurred along the river in the past, there is nothing that would prohibit development along the riverfront provided sensible and required precautions are taken. For example, there are no specific flood-related building requirements in an X Zone, and flood insurance is generally not required. Development can proceed in an AE Zone provided it conforms to the following measures. FEMA and National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) elevation standards for AE Zones require the lowest floor of new and substantially improved residential structures must be elevated to or above the BFE. The lowest floors of non-residential structures in AE Zones are also required to be elevated to or above the BFE, or alternatively flood proofed to or above the BFE. The Connecticut State Building Code has similar requirement for new and substantially improved residential structures in AE Zones, which must be elevated to or above the Design Flood Elevation or to or above the BFE plus one foot, whichever is higher. Requirements are far more stringent for development within a Zone AE Floodway Area: a developer to first prove that the development will not increase flood elevations at any location during the 100-year flood. This will be a difficult and complicated analysis and there is the possibility that development situated too close to the river’s edge might have possible undesirable negative impacts.

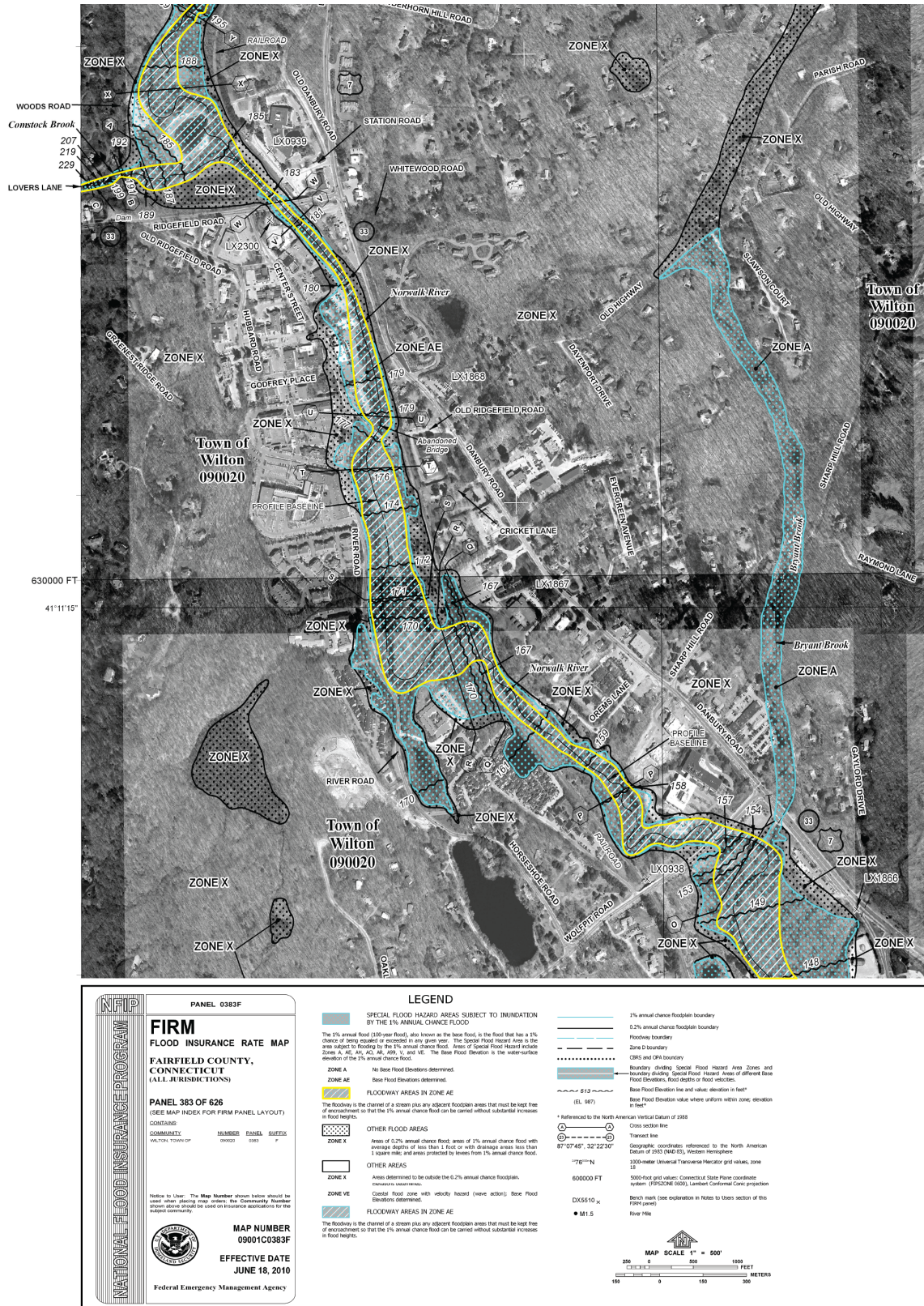




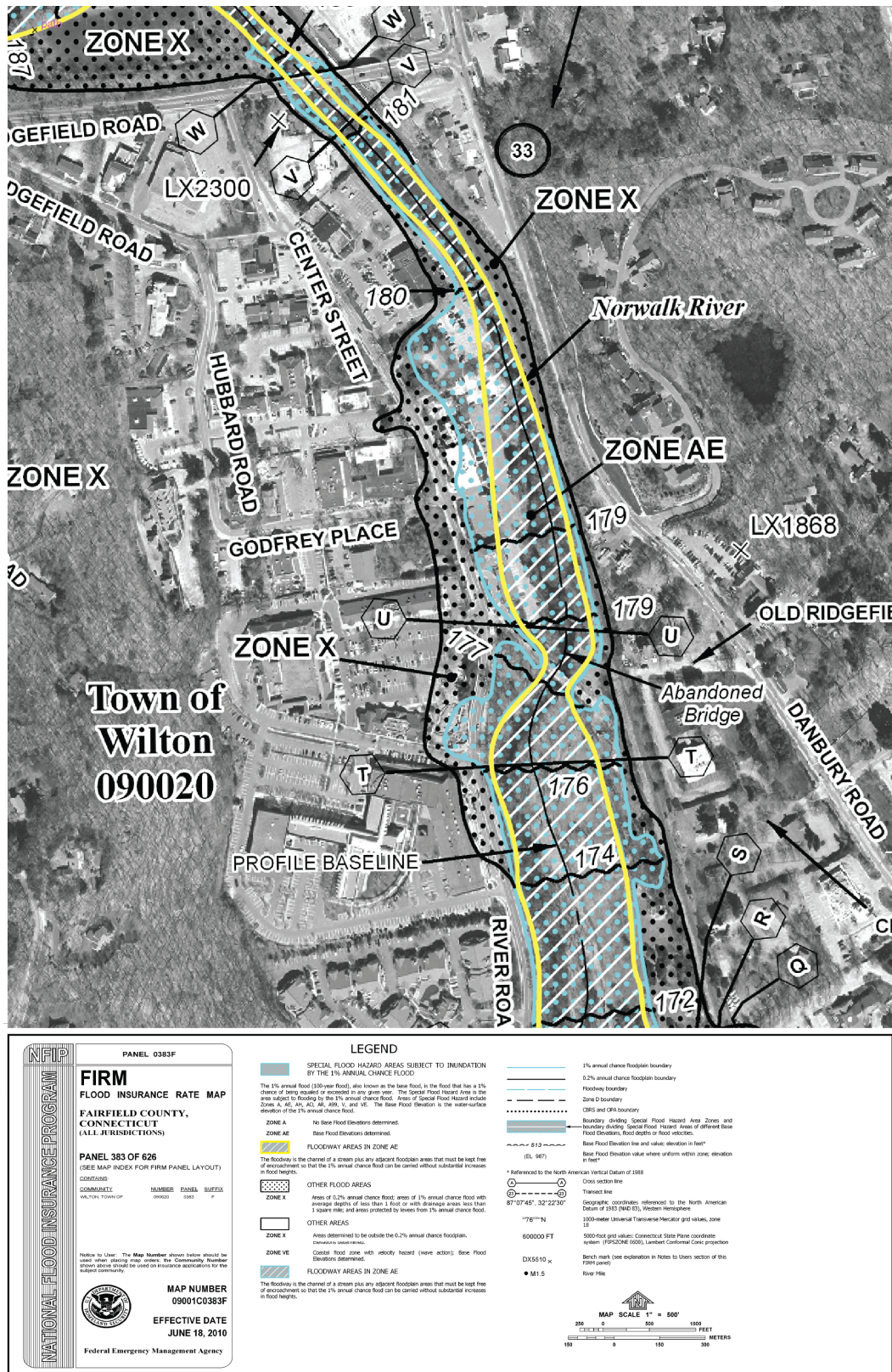
**Figure 10** Environmental Constraints

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, FEMA, USGS, Town of Wilton, BFJ Planning, 2022.









**Figure 12** Flood Insurance Rate Map of Wilton Center Proper

Source: US Department of Homeland Security, FEMA.

## Emergency Services

Located within the Study Area is the Wilton Town Hall Complex where the Town Hall, Police Department, Fire Department, Department of Public Works, Planning & Zoning, Environmental Affairs, Building Department, Health Department, and Animal Control are all situated. Discussions with the Police Department, Fire Department, and Department of Public Works highlighted that any future development and infrastructure related improvements in the Study Area should consider emergency services and any impacts to these services. For example, the radio communications for the Town's emergency services should not be affected by new development. In addition, the Town could evaluate the current staffing in the emergency services to better understand staffing needs to respond and serve current and future Wilton residents.

## Infrastructure

Based on discussions with the Town's Departments of Public Works, Fire, and Police, below is a brief overview of the existing infrastructure conditions and recommended future improvements, where noted.

- **Cell Phone Service** – Within the Study Area and other parts of the Town, cell phone service does not have a strong signal. Currently, there is an active proposal being reviewed to install a cell tower near the Middlebrook School. If approved, the cell tower could be constructed some time in 2024. This proposed cell tower would help address the cell phone service in the Study Area, which would allow residents and visitors to reach all emergency services.
- **Roadway System** – Currently, the road widths in Wilton Center are quite narrow. If development were to occur in Wilton Center in the future, some existing roads may need to be widened and carefully designed to allow for emergency vehicle access.
- **Stormwater System** – For future alterations and new developments, the development should meet the stormwater management requirements. In addition, the amount of stormwater runoff should not exceed the existing baseline conditions.
- **Sanitary Sewer System** – The Wastewater Pollution Control Facility, located in Norwalk, CT, treats the wastewater for the City of Norwalk and the Town of Wilton. Currently, the Town working with a consultant team to study the inflow and outflow of the Town's sanitary sewer system. Any future alternations or new developments should coordinate with the Town's Department of Public Works, Town's Water Pollution Control Authority, and the previously mentioned sanitary sewer study to understand the development's impacts on the system. The Wastewater Pollution Control Facility itself has sufficient capacity for current and near-term future development.



# 4

# Market Overview

## Executive Summary

To inform the recommendations for Wilton Center, Urbanomics performed a market overview and evaluation identifying socioeconomic characteristics that influence market demand, real estate conditions, and retail and housing gaps. Socioeconomic conditions are largely based on the most recently available, pre-pandemic data. Where appropriate, Urbanomics has included qualitative information and assumptions based on more current conditions.

Our key findings and recommendations are summarized below and are followed by the full, in-depth analysis on the following pages.

### Key Findings

#### **Socioeconomics**

- Wilton's population has diversified in the last decades largely due to new foreign-born residents.
- Housing development has slowed and population growth along with it.
- While the town is quite affluent, there are household types (renters, singles, and seniors) that have median household incomes far below the overall median of \$204,000. Housing affordability is an issue for renters and owners.
- Almost one-third of residents are under the age of 18, yet there are few activities or stores in Wilton Center than cater to children, youth, or families.
- Only 8% of the working population is in the early working years (18-35). One contributing factor may be the cost of housing.
- Many of Wilton's residents are paying more than is considered affordable for housing including almost half of renters, one-third of mortgage holders, and two in five owners without a mortgage.
- If Wilton's population continues to increase at the same rate it has over the past 30 years (0.49%), the Town's population will increase to almost 20,000 by 2035 and 21,000 by 2050.

## **Retail**

- Wilton stores serve Wilton residents with the exception of the sporting goods store on Route 7, which is a regional draw.
- There is significant buying power in Wilton despite its small size, but Wilton residents are primarily spending their money outside of the town.
- Commercial competition from regional shopping malls and neighboring downtowns with greater density and more “experiential” establishments.
- Some residents and business owners have concerns about Wilton Center:
  - o Lack of visibility
  - o Limited walkability
  - o Limited places or activities for young people

## **Real Estate**

- There is no demand for new office space.
- Retail space has low vacancies and subsequent high rents.
- There is significant demand for housing of all types.
  - o Condos for empty-nesters
  - o Rental units for young adults who do not want to leave Wilton.

## **Recommendations**

- Create additional local demand by allowing multifamily residential in Wilton Center.
- Seek out unique attractions for limited available space.
  - o Cultural/entertainment/arts
    - ☐ Permanent
    - ☐ Festival
  - o Activity-based for all ages
- Create flexibility in zoning to meet new trends.
- Follow through on placemaking and landscaping improvements to improve walkability.



# Regional & Local Socioeconomic Conditions

The market analysis is informed by the latest data available from the Census Bureau.<sup>1</sup>

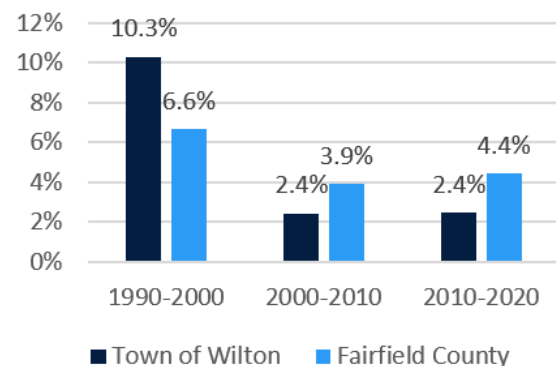
## Population Overview

Wilton's population has increased by 2,500 people, or 15.7 percent since 1990 to reach 18,503 in 2020. Fairfield County has grown by the same overall rate in the past 30 years, but Wilton's growth occurred primarily between 1990 and 2000, with relatively little growth since 2000—with the population increasing by just under 500 persons per decade.

	Town of Wilton	Fairfield County
1990	15,989	827,645
2000	17,633	882,567
2010	18,062	916,829
2020	18,503	957,419
<b>1990-2020</b>		
Numeric Change	2,514	129,774
Percent Change	+15.7%	+15.7%

**Table 4** Total Population 1990-2020

**Chart 1** Total Population, Percentage Gain



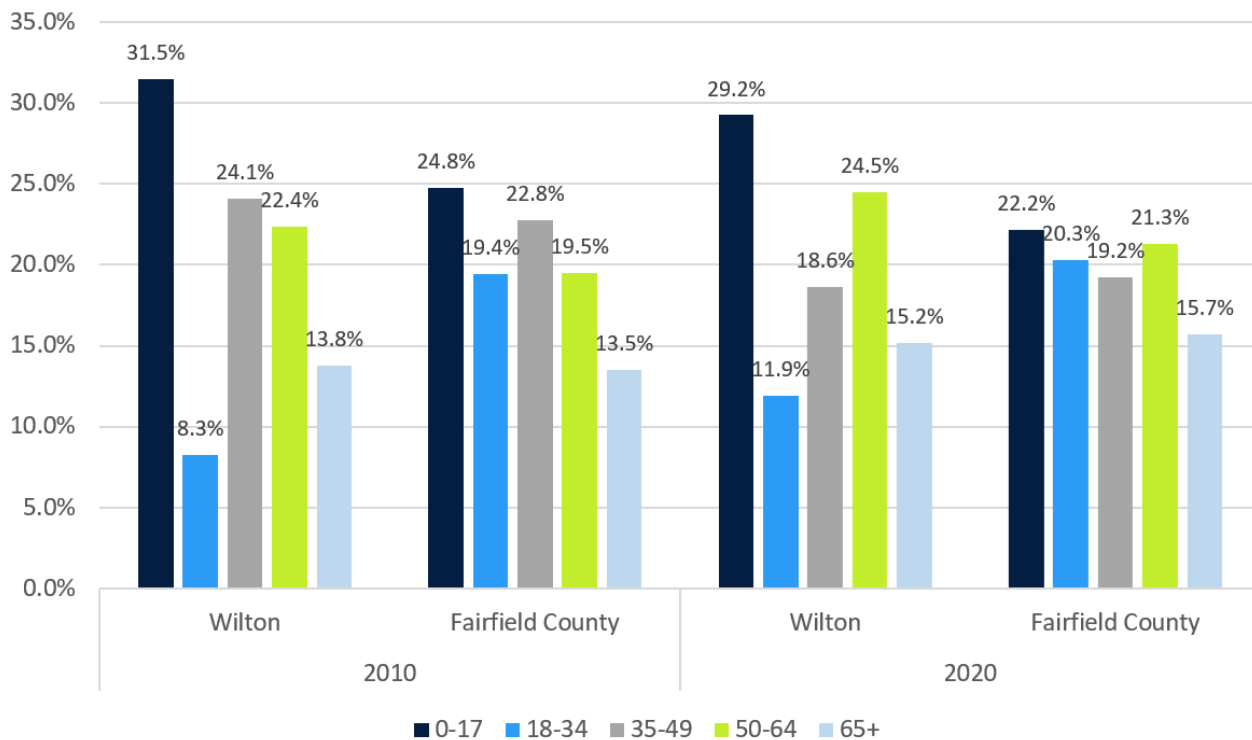
**Chart 1** Total Population 1990-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, 1990-2010, 2020 Decennial Census Redistricting File.

## Age

The age distribution of Wilton's residents indicates that the town is primarily made up of established families. The greatest share, roughly 30 percent, of residents are children under the age of 18—approximately seven percentage points more than Fairfield County as a whole. The parents of Wilton's children appear to be aging in place, with the 50-64 and 65+ age cohorts increasing from a combined 36.2 percent in 2010 to 39.7 percent in 2020. While the share of residents between the ages of 18 and 34 has increased from 8.3 percent in 2010 to 11.9 percent in 2020, they remain by far the minority age group.

<sup>1</sup> The 2020 Decennial Census data will not be released until May 2023 at the earliest. The 2020 Decennial Census Redistricting File known as Census 2020 PL-94 redistricting file is available, but this file contains only non-revised information for total population, total housing units, and population by race. Additionally, the 2020 Decennial Census does not cover a wide range of topics studied in the market analysis. Due to the lack of available data, the latest available 2016-2020 American Community Survey, a product of the US Census Bureau was utilized. This is the most up-to-date source of information from the US Census Bureau for all topics that do not rely on the Census 2020 PL-94 redistricting file as a source. The 2010 Decennial Census is included in the analysis to compare current conditions with the recent past.



**Chart 2** Population by Age Distribution, 2010-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census and 2016-2020 5-Year Estimate.

## Race-Ethnicity

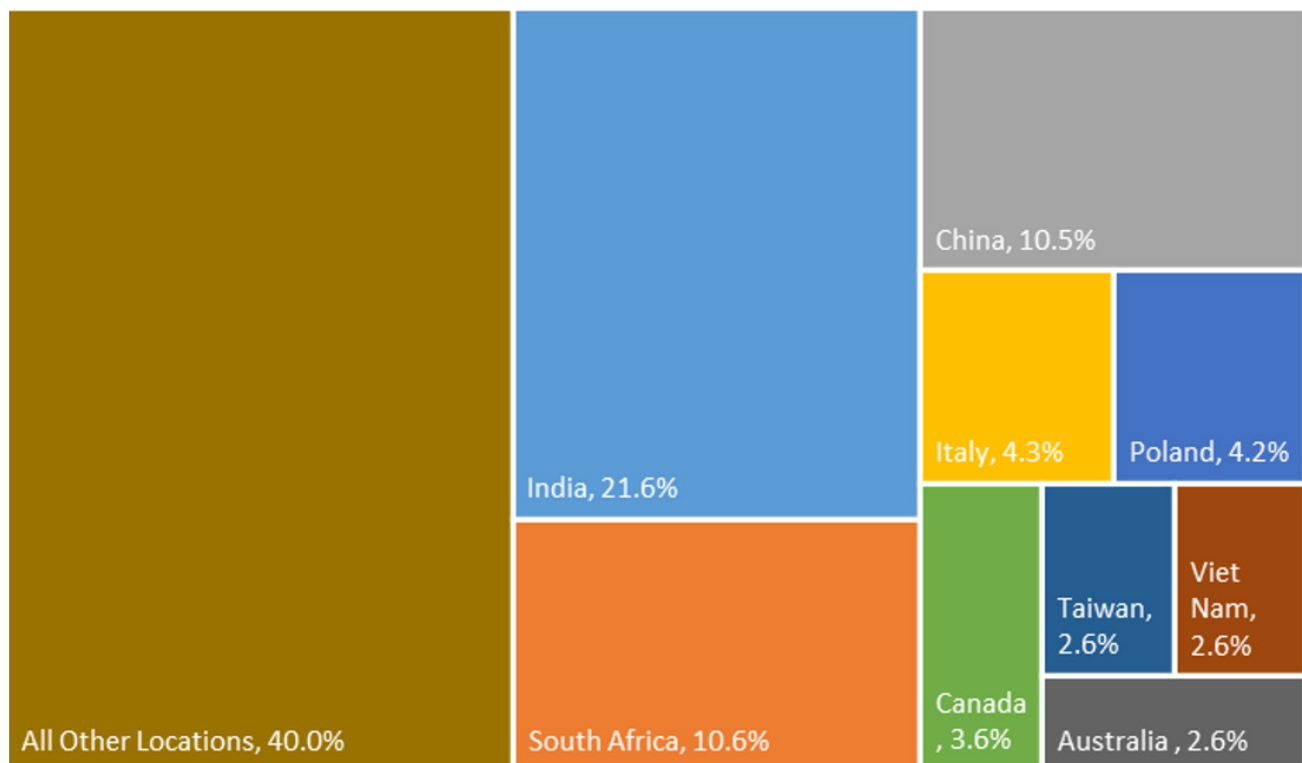
While lacking the diversity of Fairfield County, Wilton has become more mixed in terms of race-ethnicity in the past decade with the white alone population decreasing in share from 90 percent to 80.8 percent. The African-American population has held steady at just under one percent in share of total, while the Asian/Other, Two or More Races categories have increased by 3.8 and 4.1 percentage points, respectively. The Hispanic or Latino population grew from 3.0 percent to 3.6 percent of the local population in the past decade.

	Town of Wilton		Fairfield County	
	2010	2020	2010	2020
<b>Total</b>	18,062	18,503	916,829	944,306
<b>White Alone</b>	90.0%	80.8%	66.2%	61.0%
<b>Black Or African American Alone</b>	0.9%	0.9%	10.1%	10.6%
<b>Asian/Other</b>	4.8%	8.6%	5.3%	6.0%
<b>Two Or More Races</b>	1.4%	5.5%	1.5%	2.4%
<b>Hispanic Or Latino</b>	3.0%	3.6%	16.9%	20.0%

**Table 5** Population Distribution by Mutually Exclusive Race-Ethnicity, 2010-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census and 2016-2020 5-Year Estimate.

The growing diversity in Wilton is largely explained by increasing shares of foreign-born population. As of the 2016-2020 five-year period, 2,727 Wilton residents were foreign-born. The largest share (21.6%) comes from India, followed by South Africa (10.6%) and China (10.5%). Italy, Poland, and Canada follow at 4.3%, 4.2%, and 3.6%, respectively, while 2.6% each of Wilton's immigrant population come from Taiwan, Viet Nam, and Australia. The remaining 40 percent of foreign-born residents come from a diverse range of countries throughout the world, with very few hailing from Latin America.



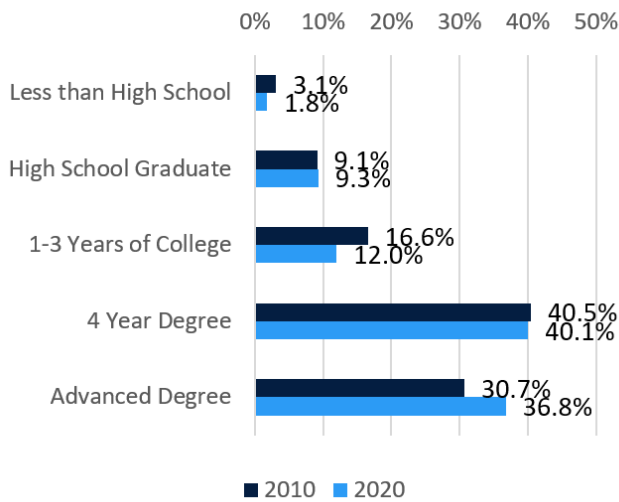
**Chart 3** Place of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population, 2020

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates.

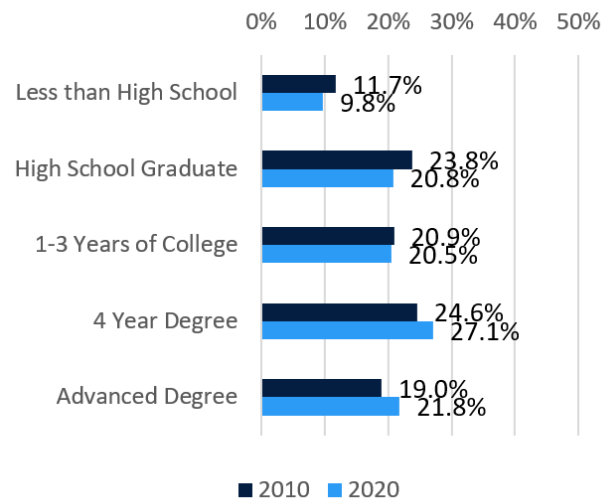
## Educational Attainment

Wilton's residents aged 25 and older are highly educated with 76.9 percent having a 4-year degree or more in 2020. Only 11.1 percent of the population over the age of 25 do not have at least one year of college education. (See **Charts 4 and 5**.) In comparison, only 48.9 percent of Fairfield County's population has college degrees and almost ten percent have not completed high school.

## Town of Wilton



## Fairfield County



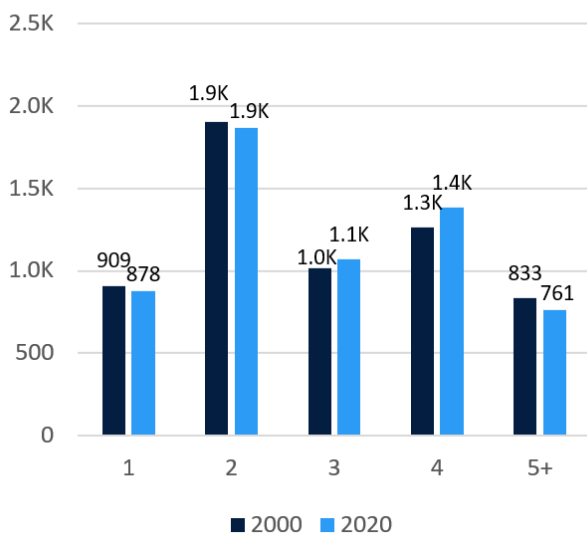
### Charts 4 and 5 Distribution of Population Aged 25+ by Educational Attainment, 2010-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2010 and 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates.

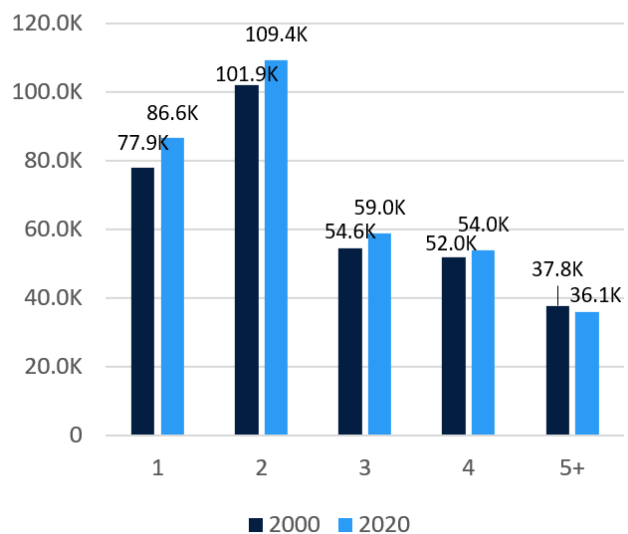
## Household Profile

There are some 5,955 households in Wilton with an average household size of 3.1. As shown in **Charts 6 and 7**, counter to the prevailing trend, the number of one- and two-person households has decreased in Wilton in the past two decades while the number of three- and four-person households has increased.

## Town of Wilton



## Fairfield County



### Charts 6 and 7 Households by Number of Persons, 2010-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Estimate.

As shown in **Table 6**, the majority of Wilton households, regardless of age of head, are married-couple family households (64.1%). The next most-common household type is single-person households at 14.7 percent of all households. These are most common among the oldest and youngest householder age cohorts, consisting of 31.0 percent of all households with heads 65 or older and 16.5 percent of those with heads under the age of 35. Just under 10 percent of households in both the 15-34 and 35-64 age categories and 6.1 percent of the 65+ age category are single-parent family households. The single-person and single-parent family households (a combined 23.4% of total) are the most likely to have difficulties affording housing in Wilton.

Households by Type		Town of Wilton			Fairfield County		
		Count	% Share of Total	% Share of Subtotal	Count	% Share of Total	% Share of Subtotal
Total Households		5,955	100.0%		345,070	100.0%	
15 - 34	Subtotal	284	4.8%	100.0%	45,224	13.1%	100.0%
	Married-Couple family	203	3.4%	71.5%	16,497	4.8%	36.5%
	Single-Parent Family	26	0.4%	9.2%	9,933	2.9%	22.0%
	Single Person Living Alone	47	0.8%	16.5%	10,055	2.9%	22.2%
	Non-Family w/ 2+ Persons	8	0.1%	2.8%	8,739	2.5%	19.3%
35 - 64	Subtotal	4,067	68.3%	100.0%	208,988	60.6%	100.0%
	Married-Couple family	3,285	55.2%	80.8%	126,295	36.6%	60.4%
	Single-Parent Family	389	6.5%	9.6%	36,931	10.7%	17.7%
	Single Person Living Alone	333	5.6%	8.2%	38,217	11.1%	18.3%
	Non-Family w/ 2+ Persons	60	1.0%	1.5%	7,545	2.2%	3.6%
65+	Subtotal	1,604	26.9%	100.0%	90,858	26.3%	100.0%
	Married-Couple family	923	15.5%	57.5%	40,561	11.8%	44.6%
	Single-Parent Family	98	1.6%	6.1%	9,286	2.7%	10.2%
	Single Person Living Alone	498	8.4%	31.0%	38,307	11.1%	42.2%
	Non-Family w/ 2+ Persons	85	1.4%	5.3%	2,704	0.8%	3.0%

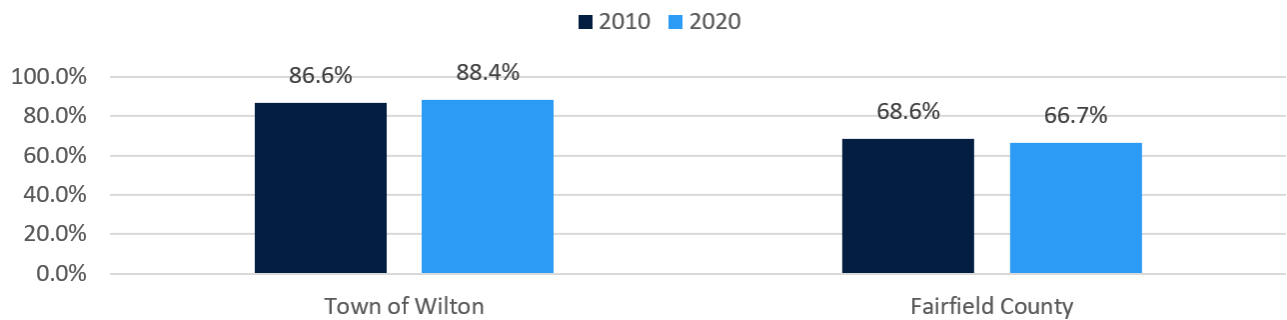
**Table 6** Distribution of Households by Age of Householder & Household Type, 2020

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates.

## Housing Tenure

The majority of households in Wilton are owner-occupied, the share of which increased from 86.6 percent in 2010 to 88.4 percent in 2020 in a trend countervailing that of Fairfield County and the region as a whole that have seen the majority of new housing in rental units.





**Chart 8** Share of Homeowner Households, 2010-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010 and 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates.

## Household Income

Wilton is a very affluent town with a median income of \$204,473 in 2020, surpassed only by Darien (\$243,750), Westport (\$222,375), and Weston (\$207,863) among cities and towns in Connecticut. Not only is Wilton's median more than double that of Fairfield County, but the median income increased by 33 percent between 2010 and 2020, compared to the 20 percent increase in the county as a whole.

Households by Type	Town of Wilton			Fairfield County		
	2010	2020	Change	2010	2020	Change
Total Households	\$153,770	\$204,473	+33.0%	\$81,268	\$97,539	+20.0%
1-person households	\$52,891	\$59,643	+12.8%	\$37,417	\$45,548	+21.7%
2-person households	\$134,167	\$162,788	+21.3%	\$87,725	\$106,918	+21.9%
3-person households	\$181,118	\$240,509	+32.8%	\$99,020	\$119,438	+20.6%
4-person households	\$214,125	\$250,001	+16.8%	\$116,216	\$150,941	+29.9%
5-person households	\$250,001	\$250,001	+0.0%	\$121,015	\$127,036	+5.0%
Householder under 25 years	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$35,596	\$47,046	+32.2%
Householder 25 to 44 years	\$207,000	\$250,001	+20.8%	\$86,684	\$100,353	+15.8%
Householder 45 to 64 years	\$164,522	\$227,250	+38.1%	\$100,810	\$121,643	+20.7%
Householder 65 years and over	\$70,190	\$122,000	+73.8%	\$47,359	\$67,566	+42.7%
Owner occupied (dollars)	\$163,722	\$217,050	+32.6%	\$102,707	\$126,851	+23.5%
Units with a mortgage	\$171,042	\$233,283	+36.4%	\$115,206	\$142,728	+23.9%
Units without a mortgage	\$133,819	\$160,202	+19.7%	\$65,626	\$90,609	+38.1%
Renter occupied (dollars)	\$64,688	\$94,688	+46.4%	\$41,117	\$52,371	+27.4%

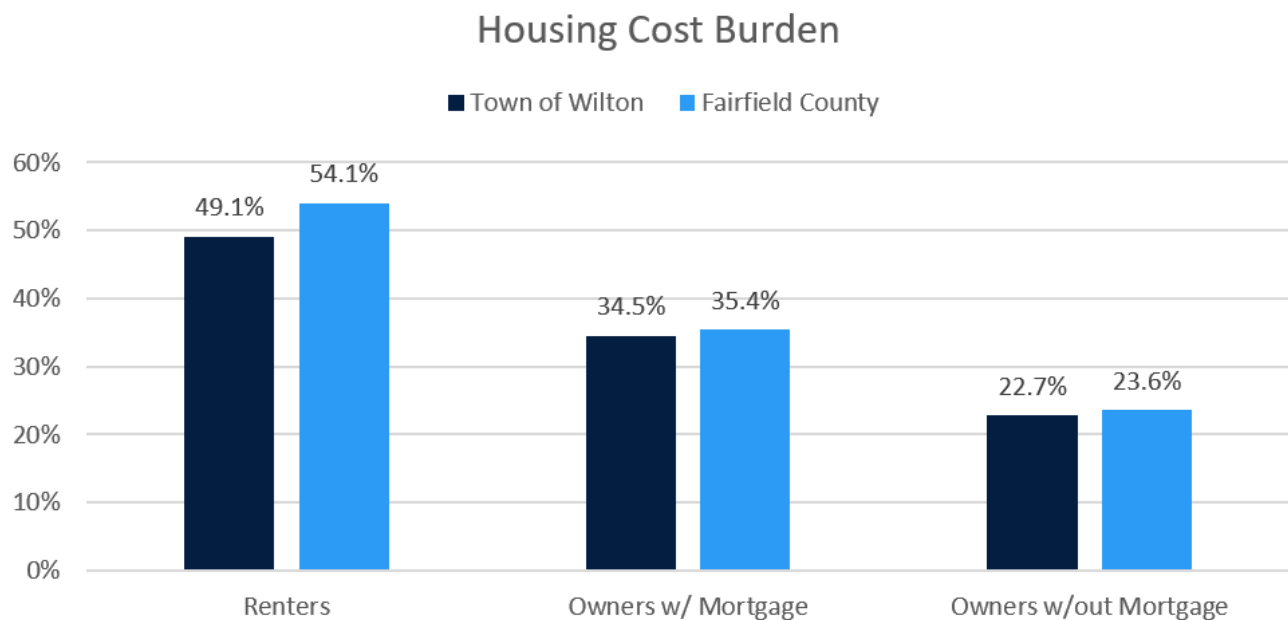
**Table 7** Characteristics of Median Household Income, 2010-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010 and 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates. Note: Not adjusted for inflation.

However, that level of affluence is not shared by all resident households. The median income of the 878 single-person households is just under \$60,000 or roughly 29 percent of the overall median. Renter-occupied households in Wilton have a median income of only \$94,688, much more in keeping with the County at large. Households with heads 65 and older as well as households without a mortgage (which also are largely households with heads 65+ who have paid off their mortgages) have median incomes of \$122,000 and 160,000, respectively. For these types of households, the ability to move or even to afford the housing they already have may be questionable.

## Affordability

Wilton exceeds Fairfield County in terms of household income; but as seen in **Chart 9**, it almost perfectly aligns when looking at the share of cost-burdened households. A household is considered cost-burdened if 30 percent or more of income is spent on housing costs be they rent, mortgage, and/or maintenance and fees. Roughly half (49.1%) of Wilton renters are paying more than considered affordable for housing along with 34.5 percent of mortgage holders and 22.7 percent of owners without a mortgage. In short, the disparity between income growth and housing costs is just as severe in Wilton as in the whole of the county.



**Chart 9** Share of Households by Tenure Spending More than 30% of Income on Housing Costs, 2020

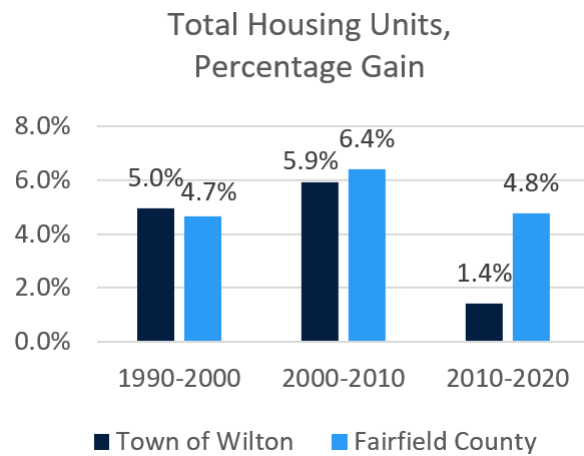
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates.

# Housing Conditions

## Housing Units

The number of housing units (occupied, vacant for sale or lease, or vacant for occasional use) in Wilton increased by 743 between 1990 and 2020 when the total was 6,567 units. The greatest period of growth in housing construction was between 2000 and 2010, the decade after Wilton's greatest population increase.

	Town of Wilton	Fairfield County
1990	5,824	324,355
2000	6,113	339,466
2010	6,475	361,221
2020	6,567	378,479
<b>1990-2020</b>		
Numeric Change	+743	+54,124
Percent Change	+12.8%	+16.7%
Annual Average Change	+0.43%	+0.55%

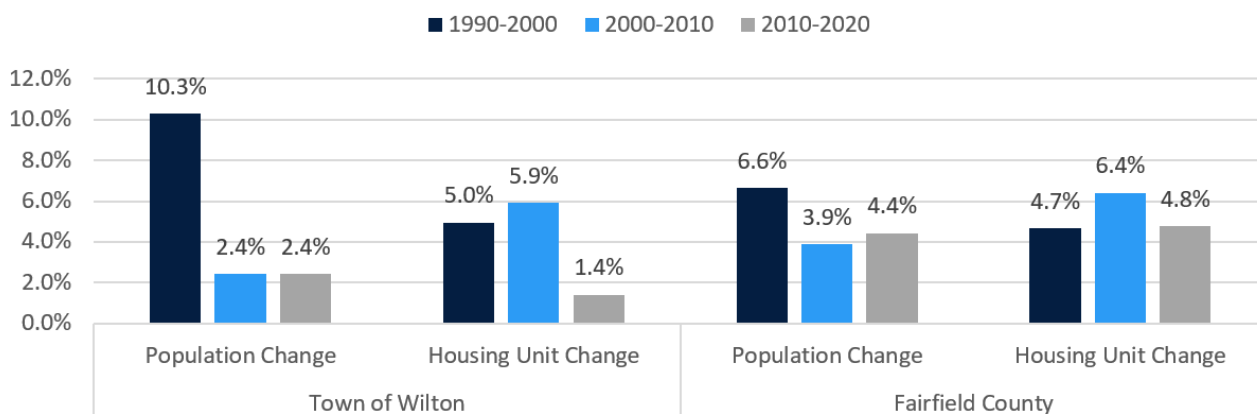


**Table 8** Total Housing Units, 1990-2020

**Chart 10** Total Housing Units, 1990-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, 1990-2010, 2020 Decennial Census Redistricting File.

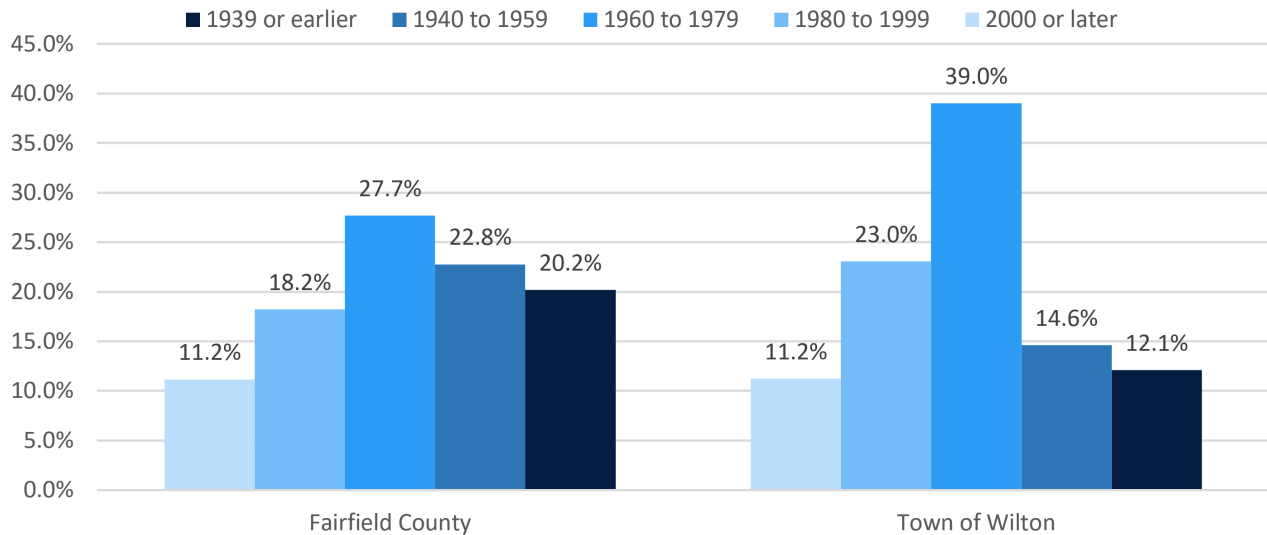
The annual average change in housing was 0.43 percent per year over the three-decade period, while the population grew at a rate of 0.49 percent per year, yielding an increasingly tight housing market.



**Chart 11** Population and Housing Unit Growth, 1990-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, 1990-2010, 2020 Decennial Census Redistricting File.

Wilton is a rural community, and as such saw the majority of its housing constructed since 1960 as shown in **Chart 12**. Only 26.7 percent of Wilton housing was building before 1960, compared to 43 percent of all housing in Fairfield County. Just under 40 percent of Wilton's housing was constructed between 1960 and 1974, 23 percent between 1980 and 1999, while only 11.2 percent was constructed since 2000—less than half than in the previous 20-year period.

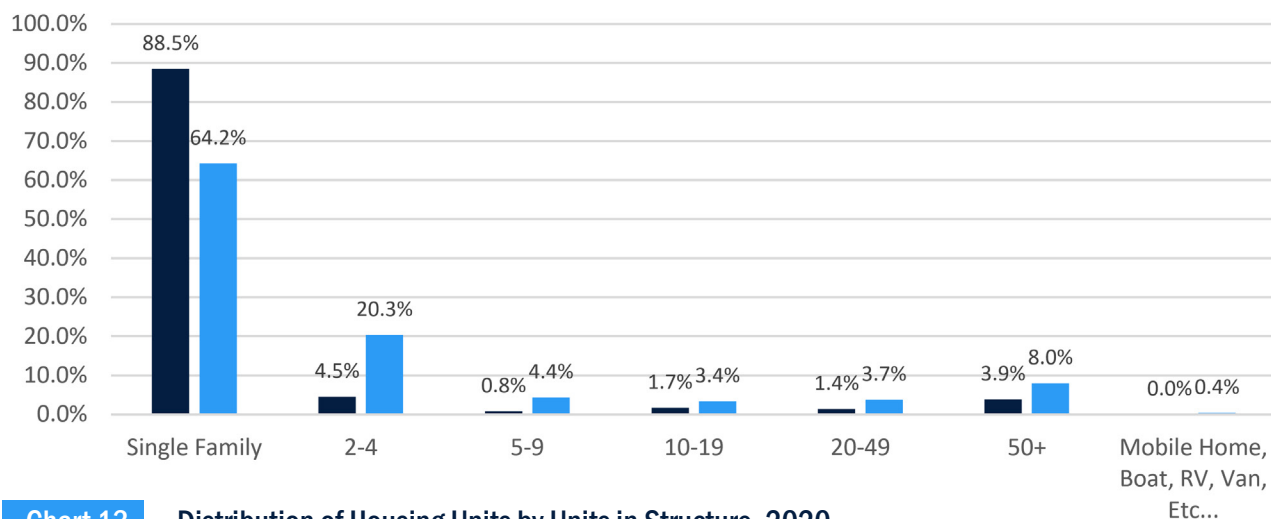


**Chart 12** Year Structure Built, 2020

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Estimate.

The vast majority of Wilton housing units are single-family homes (88.5%). There are a small share of units (4.5%) in 2-4 unit structures and an additional 3.9 percent of units in 50+ unit buildings. 5-9 unit, 10-19 unit, and 20-49 unit buildings provide less than 2 percent each of the Town's residential stock.

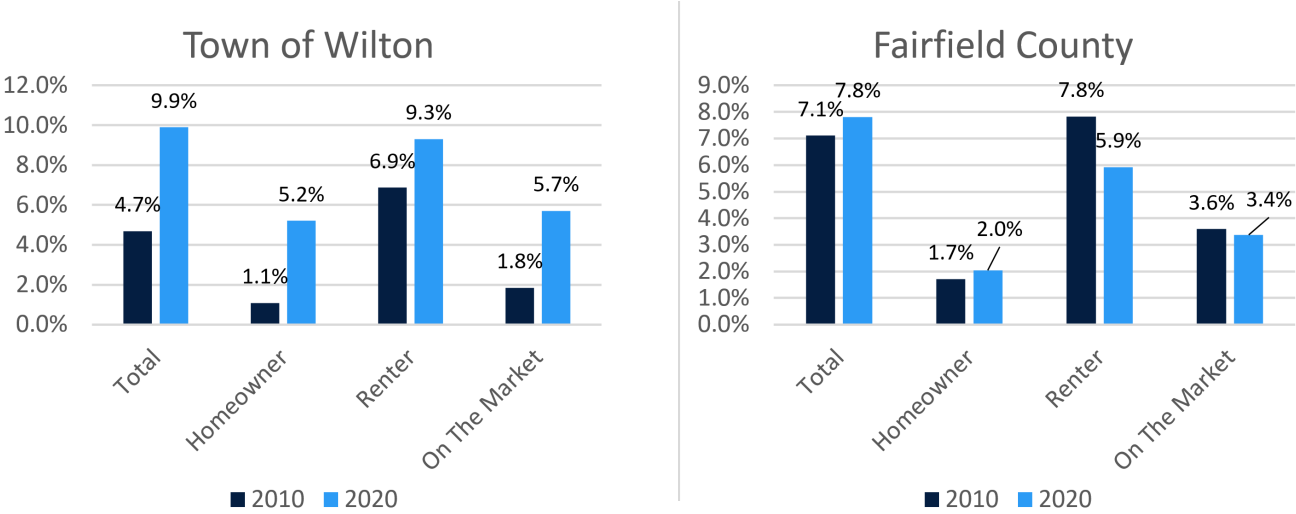
## Units in Structure



**Chart 13** Distribution of Housing Units by Units in Structure, 2020

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Estimate.

In 2020, the US Census Bureau estimated homeowner vacancy rates at 5.2 percent and rental vacancy rates at 9.3 percent—higher than what is considered healthy market vacancies of 1.3 to 2.0 percent and 6.0 to 8.0 percent, respectively. However, this may reflect newly completed housing that had just become available at the end of the sample period. COVID pandemic conditions have altered this situation greatly reducing availabilities as will be discussed in more detail in the residential real estate section found on page 64.



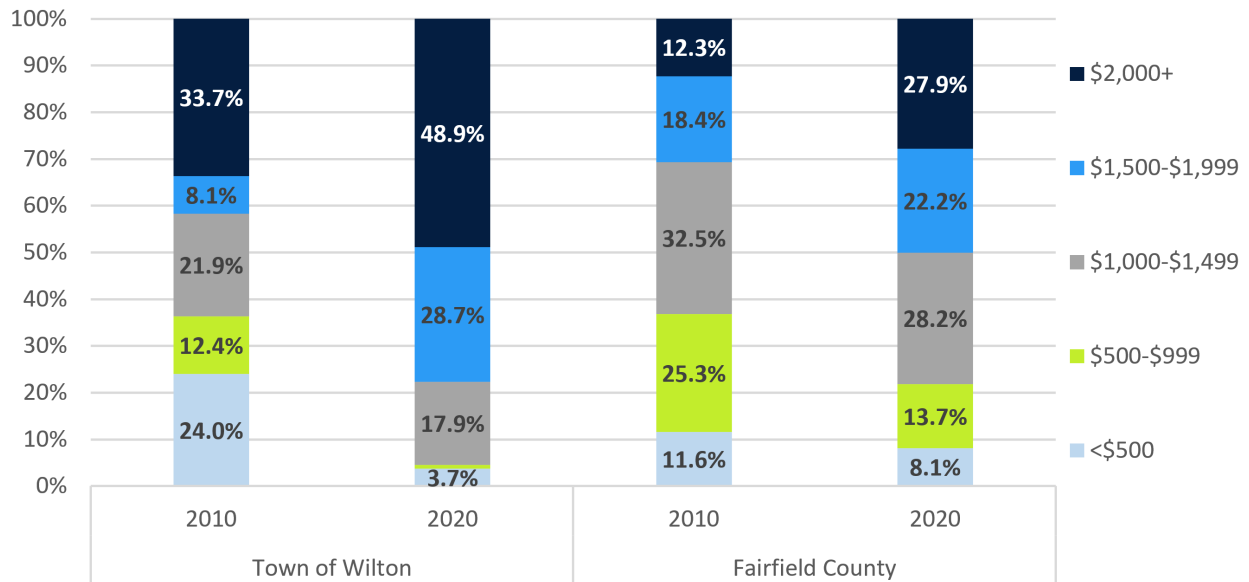
**Charts 14 and 15** Housing Vacancy Rates by Type, 2010-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010 and 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates.

## Costs

Median gross rent in Wilton was \$1,981 in 2020, an increase of 46.2 percent over the 2010 median. Fairfield County’s overall median gross rent in 2020 was \$1,511, an increase of only 25.3 percent over the previous decade. As shown in the payment distribution figure that follows, 48.9 percent of Wilton renters paid \$2,000 or more in 2020 compared to only 27.9 percent of Fairfield County renters. A disproportionately high percentage (28.7%) of Wilton renters are in the second-highest category (\$1,500-\$1,999) as well. However, the greatest changes in rental cohorts is the loss of below-market rate units renting for less than \$500 and between \$500-\$999, which went from 24.0 percent and 12.4 percent, respectively, in 2010 to 3.7 percent and 0.8 percent, respectively, in 2020.



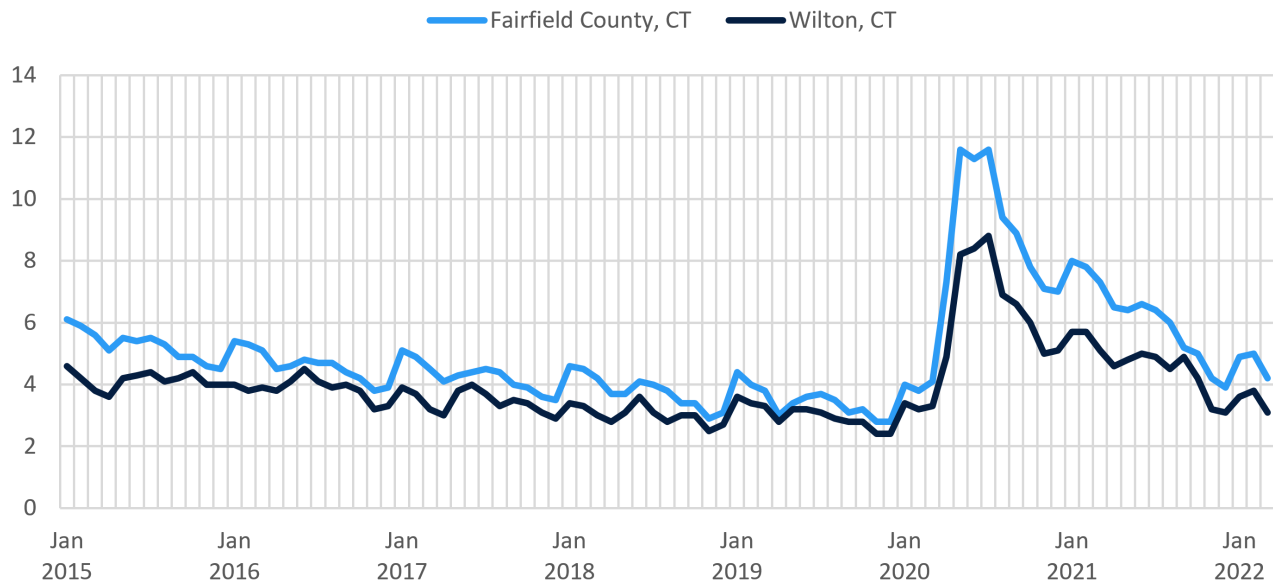


**Chart 16** Distribution of Rent-Paying Households by Gross Rent, 2010-2020

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010 and 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates.

## Labor Force & Employment Conditions

Unemployment in the Town of Wilton is very low, trending at least half a percentage point below that of Fairfield County in good economic conditions. During the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic shut down, unemployment in Wilton reached a high of 8.8 percent in July 2020, at which time it was almost 4 percentage points less than that of Fairfield County.



**Chart 17** Monthly Resident Unemployment Rate, January 2015 to March 2022

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program, 2022.

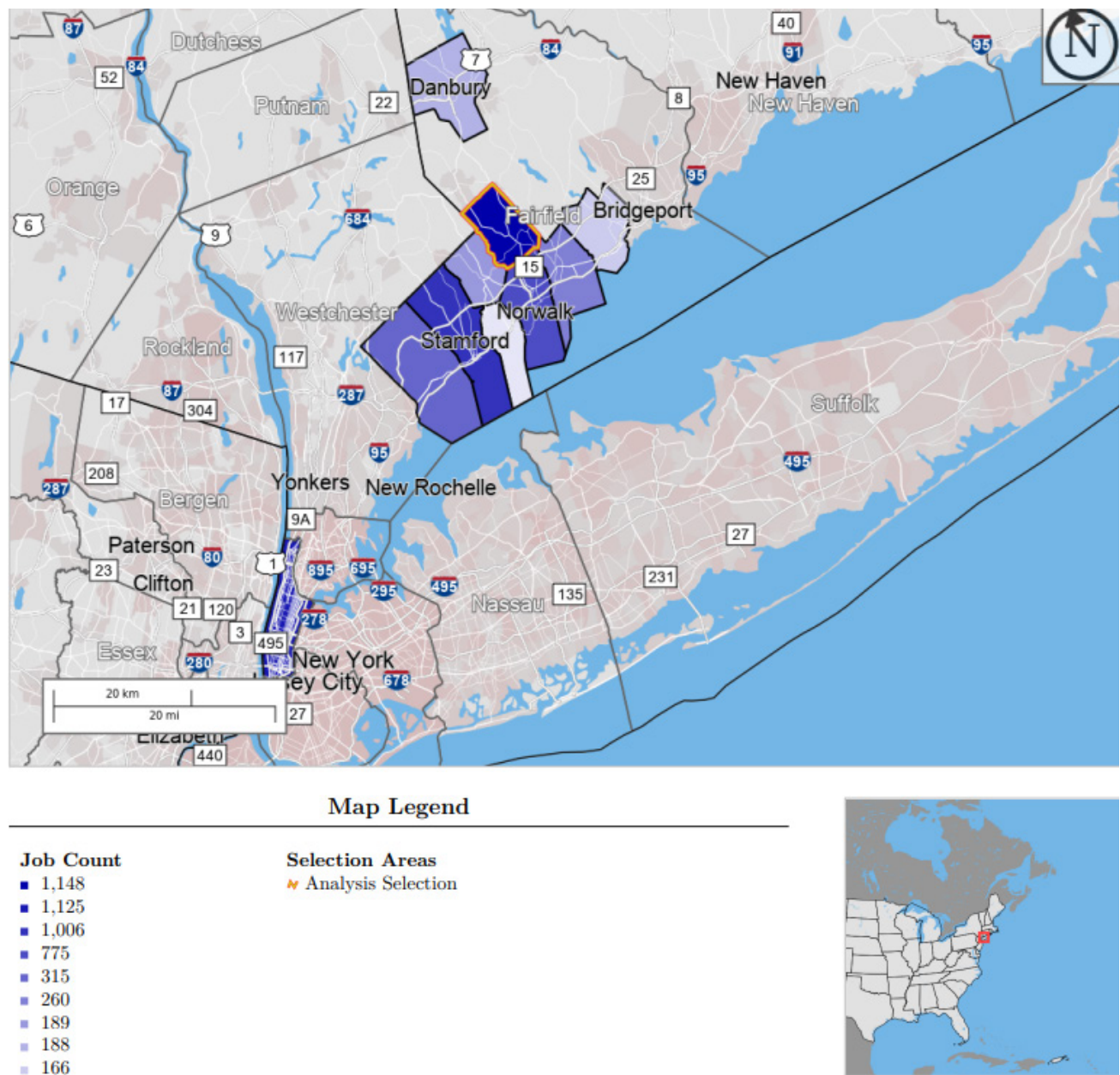
**Table 9** shows the employment by industry for Wilton's employed labor force in 2010 and 2019. As shown, Wilton residents tend to work in professional service professions led by Finance & Insurance; Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services; Health Care & Social Assistance; and Educational Services, many of which have relatively high salaries. Less than 20 percent of residents worked in the lower-wage sectors hardest hit by pandemic shutdowns: Retail, Accommodation & Food Services, and Arts, Entertainment & Recreation.

	2010	2019	Numeric Change
Total All Jobs	6,870	7,800	+930
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	8	4	-4
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil & Gas Extraction	1	3	+2
Utilities	20	16	-4
Construction	192	222	+30
Manufacturing	330	255	-75
Wholesale Trade	336	308	-28
Retail Trade	669	719	+ 50
Transportation & Warehousing	96	124	+ 28
Information	304	455	+51
Finance & Insurance	1,070	1,038	-32
Real Estate and Rental & Leasing	123	167	+44
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	818	980	+162
Management of Companies & Enterprises	295	302	+7
Administration & Support, Waste Mgmt, & Remediation	326	429	+103
Educational Services	759	801	+42
Health Care & Social Assistance	686	833	+147
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	156	213	+57
Accommodation & Food Services	311	471	+160
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	248	339	+91
Public Administration	122	121	-1

**Table 9** Distribution of Local Employed Labor Force by Industry Sector, 2010 & 2019

Source: US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program, 2019.

**Figure 13** illustrates the place of work for Wilton residents. Wilton is the place of work for 14.7 percent of residents, followed by Manhattan (14.4%), Stamford (12.9%), and Norwalk (9.9%). Greenwich, Westport, New Canaan, Danbury, Fairfield, and Darien round out the top 10 work destinations.



**Figure 13**    Where Wilton Residents Work by Town (Top 10 Work Destinations), 2019

Source: US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program, 2019.

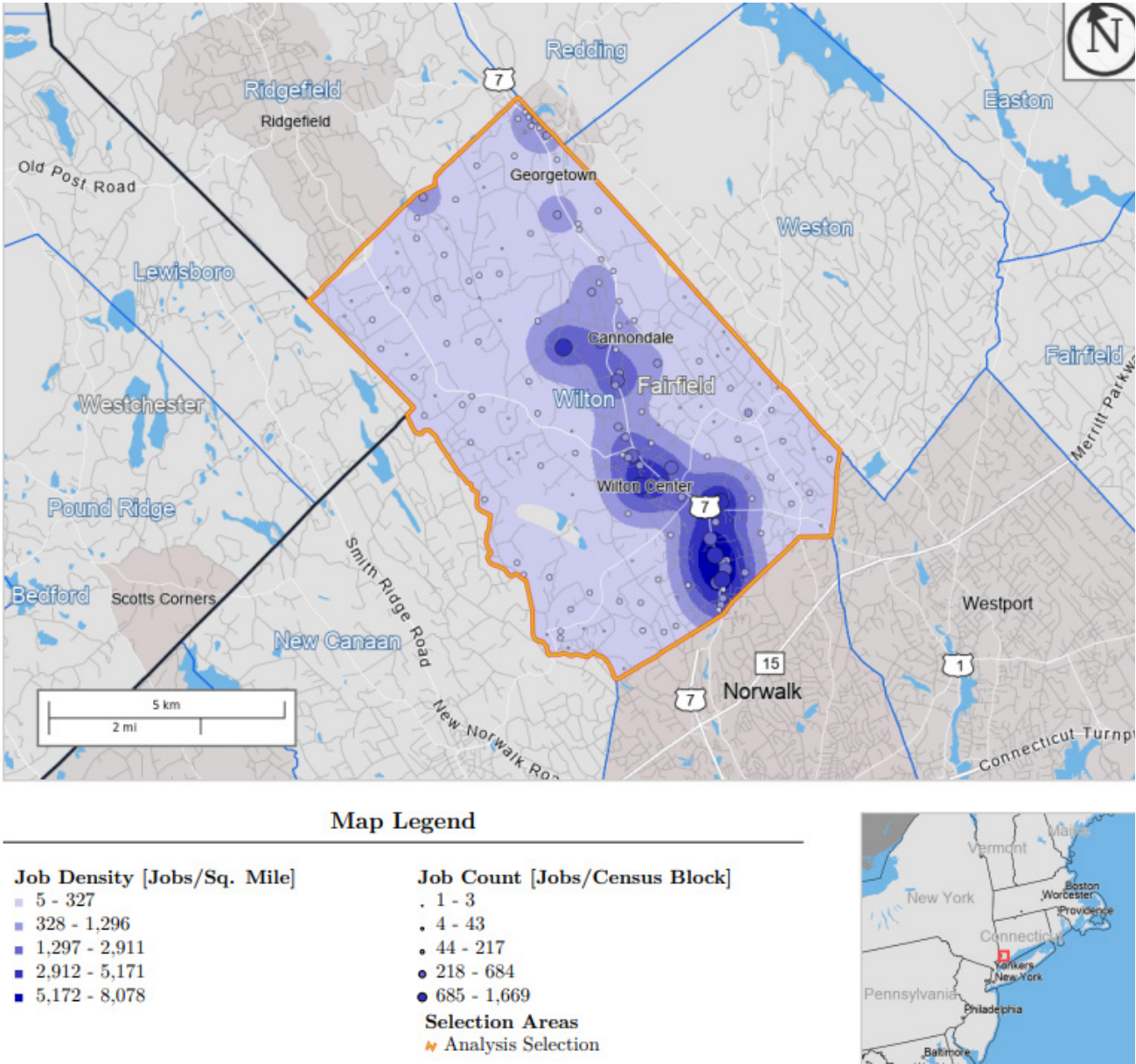
As shown in **Chart 18**, only 1,148 people both live and work in Wilton. The other 6,652 employed Wilton residents work outside the Town. An additional 11,869 people work in the Town of Wilton, but commute in from other places.



**Chart 18** Inflow & Outflow Commutation Trends within the Town of Wilton, 2019

Source: US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program, 2019.

Figure 14 presents a heat map of job clusters in the Town of Wilton. As shown, the majority of jobs are clustered along the Route 7 Corridor, in areas around South Wilton, Wilton Center, and Cannondale.

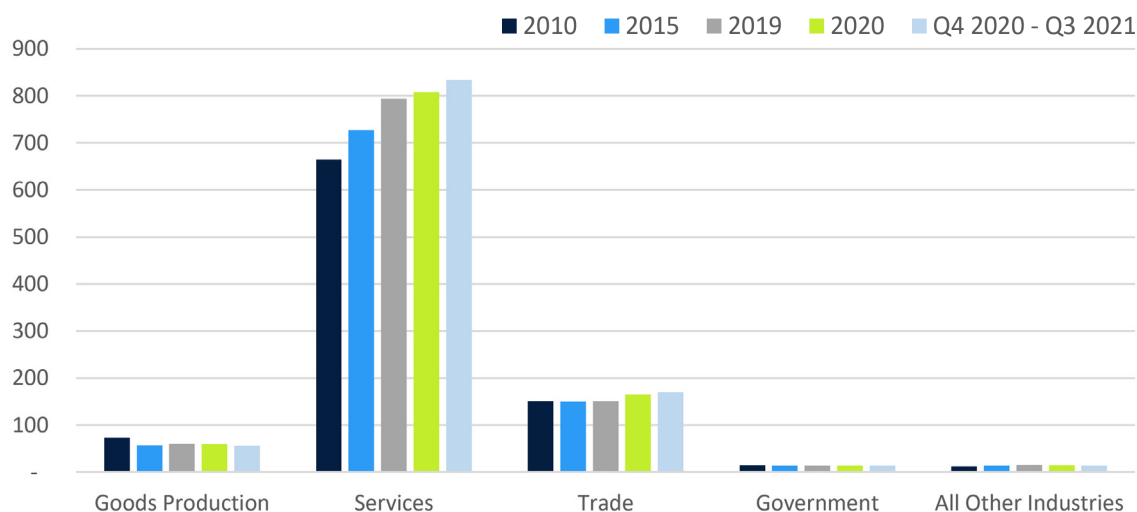


**Figure 14** Job Clusters in the Town of Wilton, 2019

Source: US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program, 2019.

Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2010 to 2021 illustrated in **Chart 19**, show that the dominant share of Wilton’s employers are in the broad and steadily-growing services category followed by wholesale and retail trade as well as goods production.





**Chart 19** Employers by Major Industry Category, 2010 to 2021

Source: USBLS, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), 2022.

More specifically, as shown in **Table 10**, the greatest number of Wilton jobs are in Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services (2,554); followed by Finance & Insurance (1,431); Retail Trade (1,242); and Health Care & Social Assistance (1,220). Unlike many other areas in the region, the majority of industries in Wilton grew between 2010 and 2019, with the exceptions being Educational Services (-160 jobs); Public Administration (-28 jobs); Construction (-22 jobs); and Information; Utilities; and Mining, which lost less than 10 jobs each.

	2010	2019	Numeric Change
Total All Jobs	10,456	13,017	+2,561
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	0	9	+9
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil & Gas Extraction	2	0	-2
Utilities	8	5	-3
Construction	286	264	-22
Manufacturing	783	900	+117
Wholesale Trade	507	817	+310
Retail Trade	1,135	1,242	+107
Transportation & Warehousing	78	328	+250
Information	180	172	-8
Finance & Insurance	1312	1,431	+119
Real Estate and Rental & Leasing	110	151	+41
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	1,894	2,554	+660
Management of Companies & Enterprises	435	746	+311
Administration & Support, Waste Mgmt, & Remediation	498	877	+379
Educational Services	971	811	-160
Health Care & Social Assistance	1029	1,220	+191
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	153	225	+72
Accommodation & Food Services	435	569	+134
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	504	588	+84
Public Administration	136	108	-28

**Table 10** Distribution of Local Jobs by Industry Sector, 2010 & 2019

Source: US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program, 2019.

According to the Town of Wilton Community Development Department Telephone Survey referenced in the Town of Wilton Bond Statement<sup>2</sup>, the largest employer in Wilton is ASML Lithography with 1,821 employees. The Wilton Public School District and Bridgewater Associates Investments follow with 610 and 315 employees, respectively. The diverse list of employers also includes a wholesaler, two nursing homes, the Town itself, and other professional services.

Name	Business	Workers
ASML Lithography Systems	Printing Machinery & Equipment	1,821
Wilton Public Schools	Education	610
Bridgewater Associates Investments	Investment Advisors	315
Melissa & Doug LLC	Toy and Puzzle Wholesaler	260
Wilton Meadows	Nursing Home	191
Belersdorf Inc.	Pharmaceutical Preparations	170
Town of Wilton	General Government	149
Louis Dreyfus	Commodities, Brokerage property mgmt.	148
Tauck, Inc.	Tour Operator	144
Wilton Retirement Housing	Nursing Home	132
Tracy Locke Partnership	Business Advertising Services	115
Cotiviti	Recovery Auditing	78

**Table 11** Major Employers as of February 2021

Source: Town of Wilton - Community Development Department and Telephone Survey.

Overall, local employment runs across a diversity of sectors with varying rates of pay. However, only those jobs at the highest wage levels in professional services produce salaries sufficient to live in Wilton.

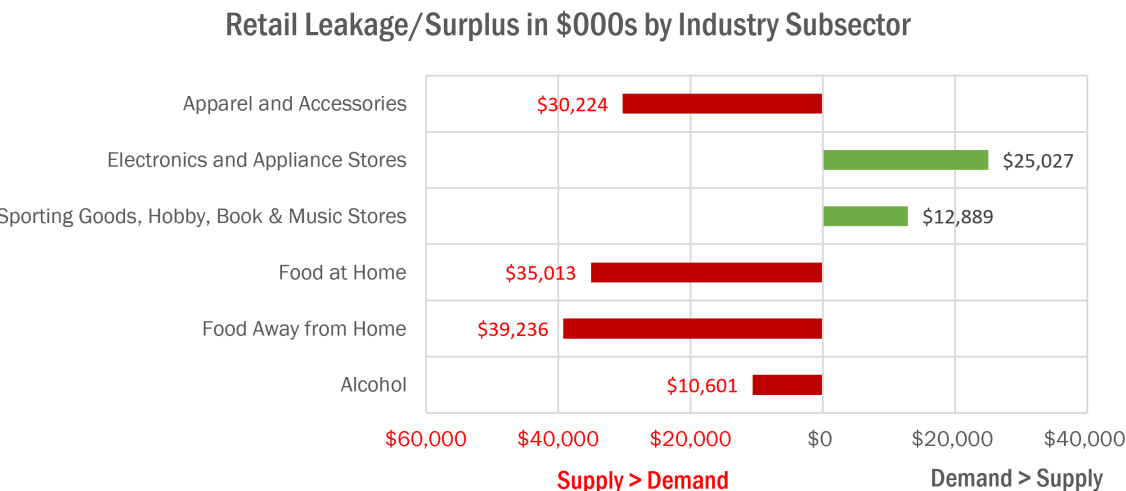
<sup>2</sup> Town of Wilton Final Official [Bond] Statement. February 18, 2021. Pg. 21. [https://www.wiltonct.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif4046/f/uploads/2021\\_wilton\\_ct\\_-\\_bonds\\_-\\_final\\_official\\_statement\\_-\\_mq.pdf](https://www.wiltonct.org/sites/g/files/vyhlif4046/f/uploads/2021_wilton_ct_-_bonds_-_final_official_statement_-_mq.pdf)

# Retail Market Conditions

## Market Area

One of the primary purposes of this assessment is to determine the retail market area for Wilton and Wilton Center. The first step in this determination is to determine if local residents are shopping at local retailers or spending their disposable income elsewhere. ESRI data on expected consumer expenditures by household was matched against DataAxle business revenue and retail sales for retail and restaurants in Wilton.

**Chart 20** illustrates the differential between the potential consumer expenditures of Wilton residents and actual local retail sales. Electronics and sporting goods, as shown in the bars to the right of the central axis sold goods and services beyond what would be expected to be purchased by Wilton residents. Electronics and computer stores brought in \$25.0 million in sales from outside of Wilton in 2022, while sporting goods sales exceeded expected local expenditures by just under \$13 million. In each of the other categories, Wilton residents are shopping outside of Wilton or online, as shown by the bars to the left of the central axis. The total value of the leakage is \$77 million in these six categories alone, an amount that supports roughly 231 thousand square feet of retail space elsewhere.



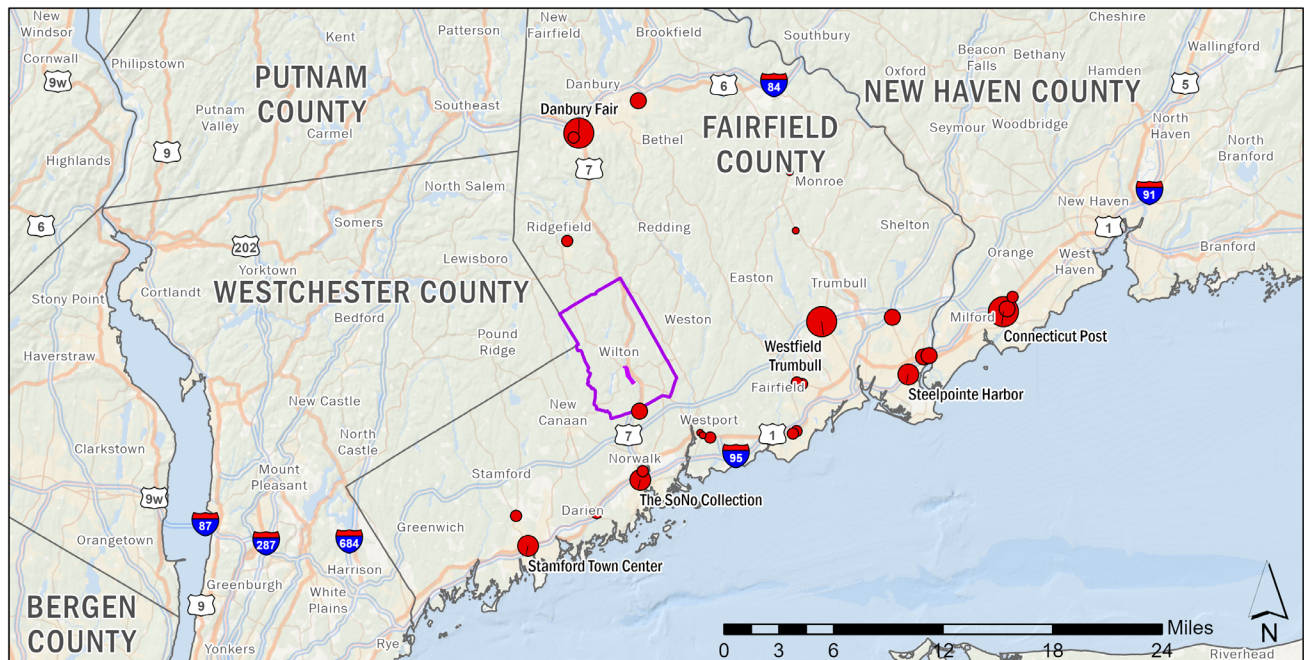
**Chart 20**      **Retail Leakage/Surplus in \$000s by Industry Subsector 2021**

Source: ESRI/DataAxle, 2022.

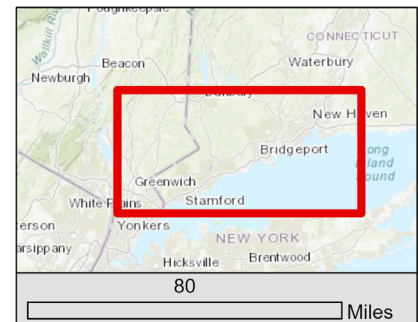
In short, the market area for Wilton Center's retailers is generally Wilton, while the market area for Wilton residents is regional.

## Retail Competition

One of the reasons for the outflow of consumer expenditures is competition from surrounding shopping malls and downtowns as mapped in **Figure 15**. When limited to regional centers, there is a total of more than 7.6 million square feet of shopping in these alone as listed in **Table 12**.



## Major CT Shopping Centers by SF in Relation to Wilton Center



**Figure 15** Major CT Shopping Centers Within a 30 Minute Driving Distance to Wilton Center

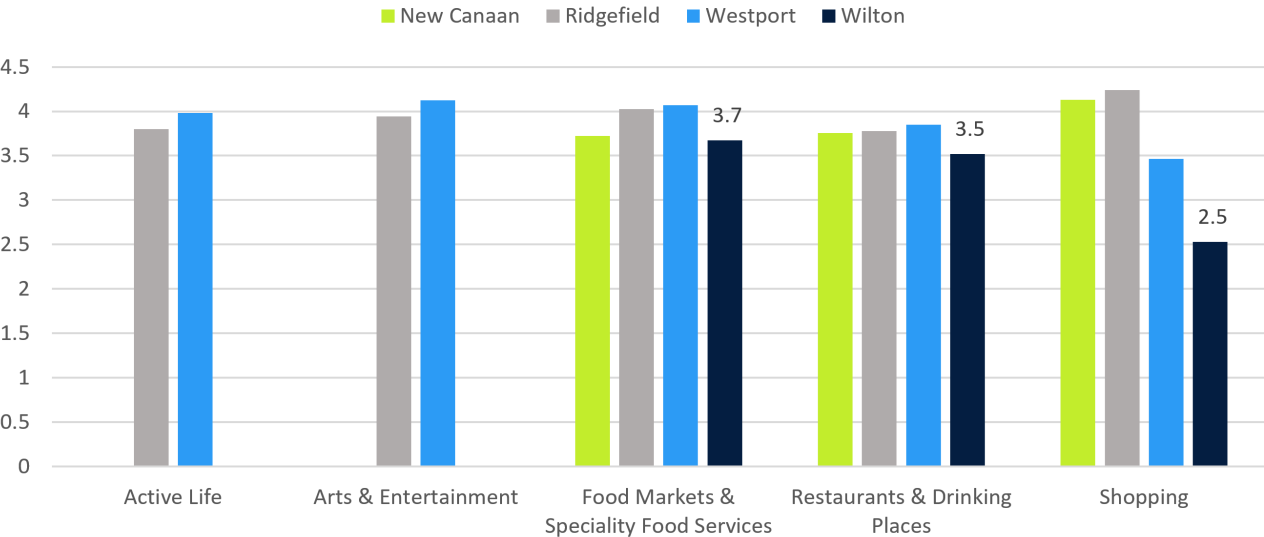
Source: Directory of Major Malls, Urbanomics, 2022.

Name	City	Type	Area (SF)
The SoNo Collection	Norwalk	Regional Center	700,000
Danbury Fair	Danbury	Super-Regional Center	1,292,176
Westfield Trumbull	Trumbull	Super-Regional Center	1,130,696
Steelpointe Harbor	Bridgeport	Regional Center	800,000
Stamford Town Center	Stamford	Regional Center	762,000
Connecticut Post	Milford	Super-Regional Center	1,332,489
Westfield Trumbull	Trumbull	Super-Regional Center	1,130,690

**Table 12** Major Shopping Centers Within a 30-Minute Driving Distance to Wilton Center

Source: Directory of Major Malls, Yelp, Urbanomics, 2022.

Along with shopping malls, Wilton Center is also competing with downtowns in neighboring communities. The four comparable communities to Wilton are Darien, New Canaan, Ridgefield, and Westport. Absent significant market research that was beyond the scope of this project, relative opinions of stores in Wilton and competing downtowns were drawn from weighted average Yelp<sup>3</sup>, ratings as shown in **Chart 21**. These “voice of the consumer” ratings are not scientific and may be skewed by response rates; however, they are also a market driver as some consumers check these ratings before deciding where to shop or eat. Categories that did not have a large enough sample of stores were excluded.



**Chart 21**      **Weighted Average Yelp Ratings by Type and Municipality, 2022**

Note: Categories with less than ten reviews per municipality were omitted. Source: Yelp, 2022.

Wilton commercial type ratings are compared to the same categories in New Canaan, Ridgefield, and Westport. Wilton has comparatively lower average ratings in the Food Markets & Specialty Food Services, Restaurants & Drinking Places, and Shopping categories. There were no ratings for Wilton in the Active Life and Arts & Entertainment categories that draw shoppers looking for a more “experiential” shopping experience. The absence of a sufficient sample to include in these categories is more significant to the market analysis than the ratings themselves. Comments from several residents specified a lack of activities or stores for children and youth in Wilton Center.

## Density

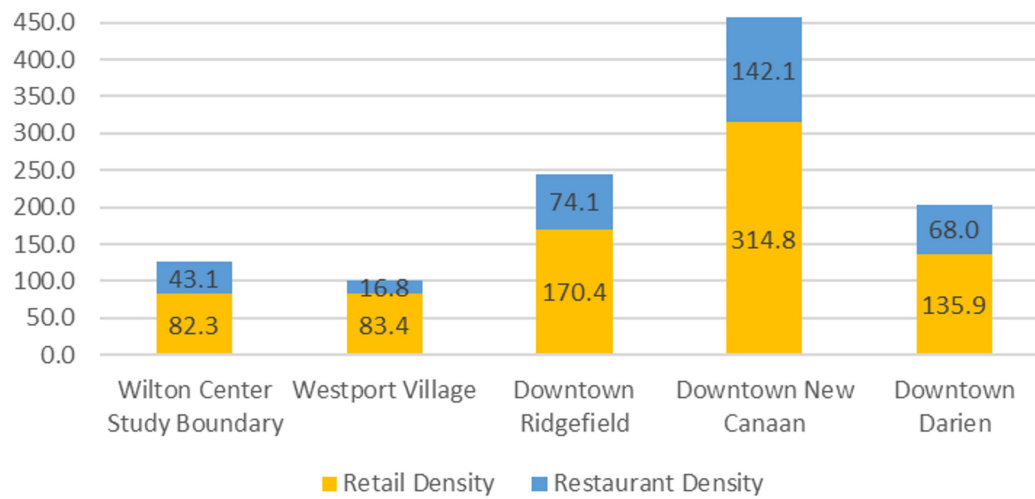
The same as with shopping malls, retail density draws shoppers to downtowns as well. In successful commercial areas, there is a nexus between residential and commercial density for many retail business categories.

**Chart 22** compares the relative retail and restaurant density in terms of the number of establishments per square mile. As seen, Wilton Center has less commercial density than any of the neighboring downtowns other than Westport Village.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Along with Yelp, we investigated data from other sources including Meta/FB and Google Analytics. Meta/FB does not track consumer sentiment, only website clicks. Google Analytics “voice of the consumer” data are not available to researchers without a license. Foot traffic data from Google Analytics is only available in more urban areas.

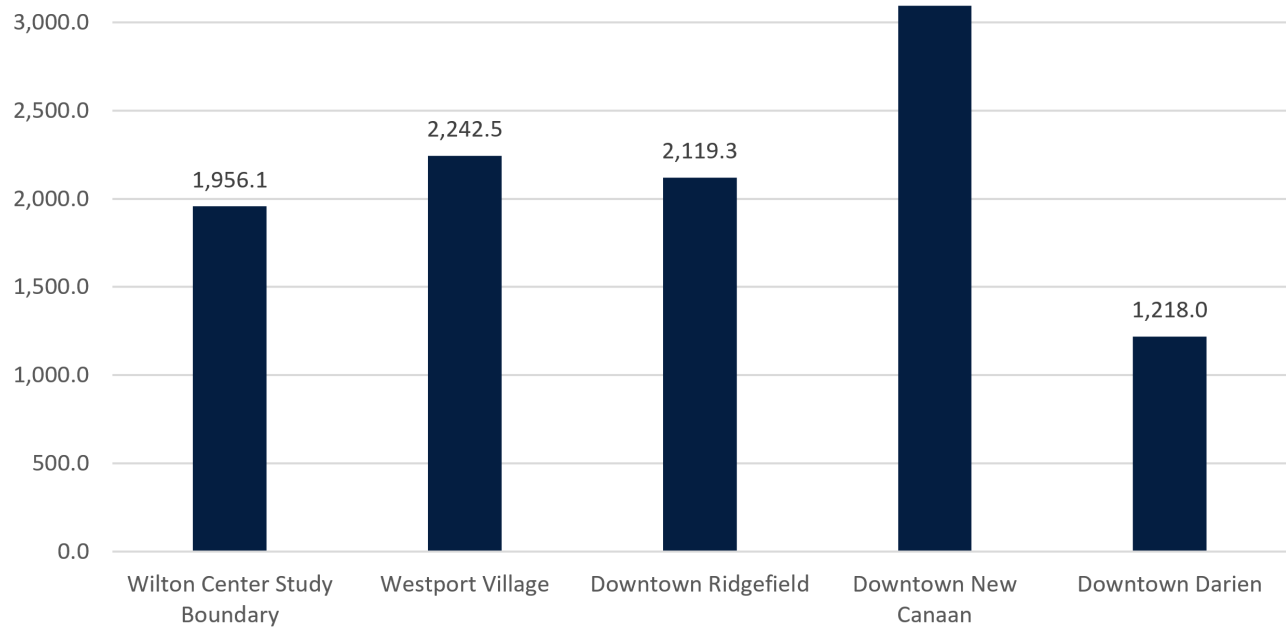
<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the very small area of Wilton Center makes it appear to have more stores than a larger area such as Westport Village.





**Chart 22** Retail and Restaurant Density (establishments per square mile)

Sources: US Bureau of the Census, ESRI/DataAxle, 2022, Urbanomics.



**Chart 23** Population Density

Sources: US Bureau of the Census, Urbanomics.

These data confirm the opinion shared by one business owner in the public workshop on March 31, 2022, that the rent-to-return ratio is high, and that businesses would choose to locate in other communities where the rents are lower and there would be more shoppers.

# Real Estate Conditions

## Office

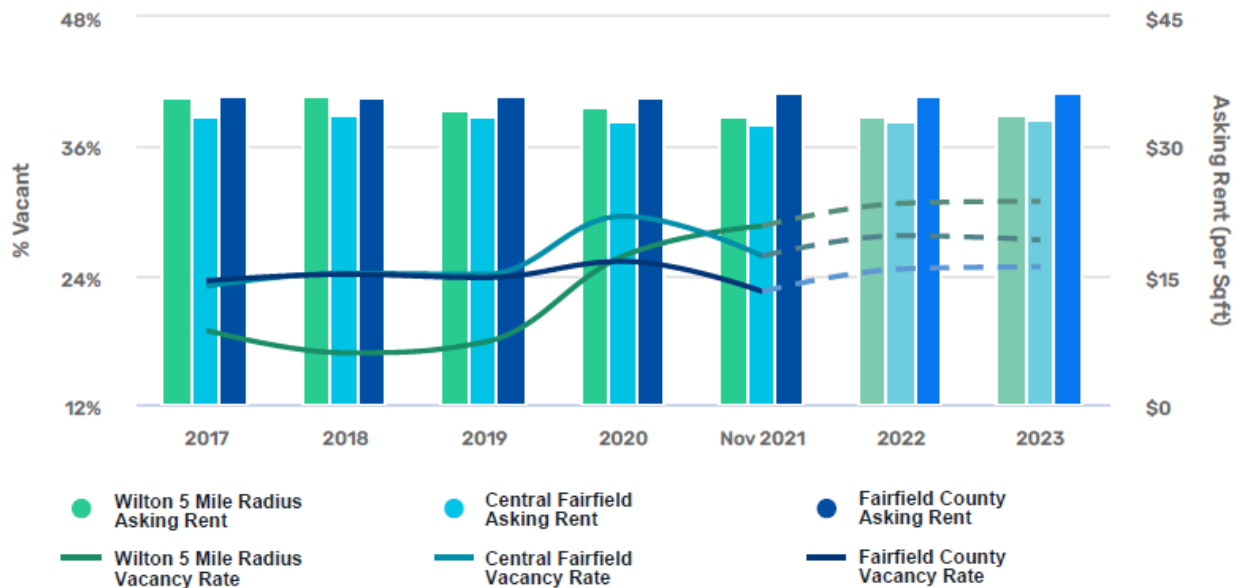
As of summer 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a disruptor of office use. Work-from-home emergency mandates established that many jobs may be performed remotely, reducing the amount of time business owners can require workers to be in corporate office spaces. Even partial remote work has decreased demand for office space in many industries and is manifested in high vacancy rates as shown in **Table 13**. It is notable that the 5-mile radius from Wilton Center has the highest office vacancy rate in Fairfield County at 28.6 percent, more than 6 percentage points higher than the county average.

	REIS Rank*	Asking Rent PSF	Effective Rent PSF	Vacancy	Inventory
5 Mile Radius from Wilton Center	-	\$33.56	\$27.24	28.6%	4,823,575
Fairfield County	17	\$36.15	\$30.08	22.5%	41,282,000
Stamford CBD	168	\$46.71	\$38.07	23.9%	7,155,000
Stamford	259	\$34.56	\$28.26	26.2%	10,278,000
North Fairfield	7	\$22.50	\$18.99	16.4%	3,911,000
East Fairfield	202	\$24.03	\$20.47	18.5%	6,733,000
Central Fairfield	543	\$32.76	\$26.72	25.8%	8,993,000
Greenwich	50	\$61.34	\$53.77	16.5%	4,212,000

**Table 13** Office Real Estate Market Fundamentals: Asking Rent, Vacancy Rate & Inventory

Source: Moody's Analytics REIS, 1/26/2022.

As shown in **Chart 24**, according to Moody's Analytics, office vacancies are forecasted to continue to increase within a 5-mile radius of Wilton while asking rents decrease. There will be no demand for additional office space in the foreseeable future.



**Chart 24** Office Asking Rent & Vacancy Rate Trends

Sources: Moody's Analytics REIS, 1/26/2022.

	Wilton 5 Mile Radius		Central Fairfield *		Fairfield County *	
Year	Asking Rent per Sqft	Vacant %	Asking Rent per Sqft	Vacant %	Asking Rent per Sqft	Vacant %
2017	\$35.61	18.9%	\$33.54	23.0%	\$35.94	23.5%
2018	\$36.03	16.8%	\$33.74	24.2%	\$35.81	24.1%
2019	\$34.41	17.8%	\$33.34	24.1%	\$35.92	23.8%
2020	\$34.73	25.8%	\$33.02	29.5%	\$35.69	25.3%
Nov 2021	\$33.56	28.6%	\$32.76	25.8%	\$36.15	22.5%
2022	\$33.58	30.7%	\$32.85	27.7%	\$35.96	24.6%
2023	\$33.81	30.9%	\$33.09	27.3%	\$36.29	24.8%

**Chart 24 (Continued) Office Asking Rent & Vacancy Rate Trends**

Sources: Moody's Analytics REIS, 1/26/2022

## Retail

### Retail Supply

As noted above, there is relatively little commercial density in Wilton Center. The lack of commercial density is not a matter of vacancy so much as a matter of supply. **Table 14** shows that there is only 782,000 square feet of retail space within a 5-mile radius of Wilton Center or just under nine percent of the county's total<sup>5</sup>. The vacancy rate is among the lowest in the County at 5.7 percent and the asking rents per square foot are relatively high at \$32.09 per square foot, while at the same time there are relatively few sales.

	Asking Rent PSF	Effective Rent PSF	Vacancy	Inventory
				SF
<b>5 Mile Radius from Wilton Center</b>	\$32.09	\$28.95	5.70%	781,932
<b>Fairfield County</b>	\$29.51	\$26.73	6.50%	8,956,000
<b>Upper Fairfield County</b>	\$23.99	\$21.79	8.60%	2,402,000
<b>Lower Fairfield County</b>	\$37.56	\$33.89	6.90%	3,249,000
<b>East Fairfield County</b>	\$25.60	\$23.29	4.60%	3,305,000

**Table 14 Comparative Retail Real Estate Metrics**

Sources: Moody's Analytics REIS, 1/26/2022.

<sup>5</sup> REIS data were pulled for the 5-mile radius of Wilton Center due to data concerns with the town-specific databases.

As noted in **Table 14**, there is a 5.7% retail vacancy rate within a 5-Mile radius of Wilton Center. To augment this data, multiple listing services were accessed to identify available retail units for sale and for rent.

Only 4 retail properties were listed for sale or lease:

- 221 Danbury Rd is for sale, but 100% leased
- 11-15 River Rd has 28,757 SF available for Lease including 23,229 SF available in 30 days and 5,528 SF available now
- 101 Old Ridgefield Rd (Town Green at Wilton Center) has 2,115 SF available for lease (most suitable for small café, fast-casual restaurant, boutique, or medical service provider)<sup>6</sup>
- 200 Danbury Rd, 6,197 SF for lease, 3 units at 2035, 2763 and 1399 SF<sup>7</sup>

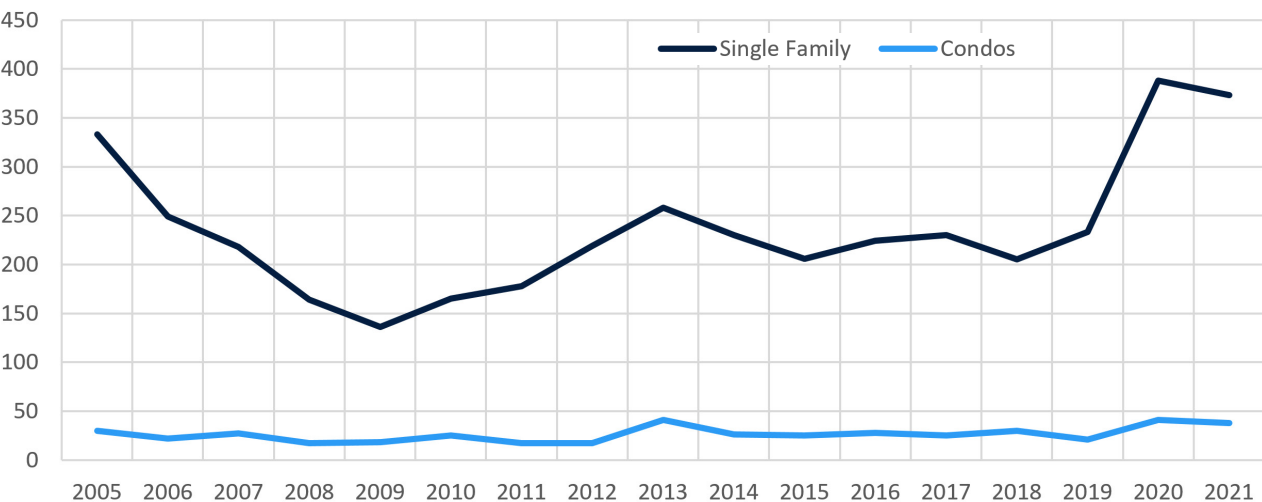
## Retail Demand

As noted above, expenditures of Wilton’s residents could support 231,000 sf of additional retail. However, given the high rents caused by low vacancy rates, it is challenging to attract new retailers to Wilton Center in existing buildings when the population density—one of the key metrics used in site selection as per the adage “retail follows roofs”—is relatively low. As shown in **Chart 23**, Wilton’s population density is less than 2,000 persons per square mile, less than any competing area other than Downtown Darien.

# Residential

## Residential Supply

The residential market has been incredibly active in the past two years as the COVID-19 pandemic spurred relocations from urban centers to communities with larger housing units and more open spaces. As shown in **Chart 25**, the number of closings on single-family homes reached 17-year highs in 2020 and 2021 when home sales numbered 388 and 373, respectively. Condominium sales stayed steady, but likely due more to lack of stock than to weak demand.



**Chart 25** Annual Residential Housing Unit Closings in the Town of Wilton, 2005-2021

Sources: Berkshire Hathaway Home Services, 2022.

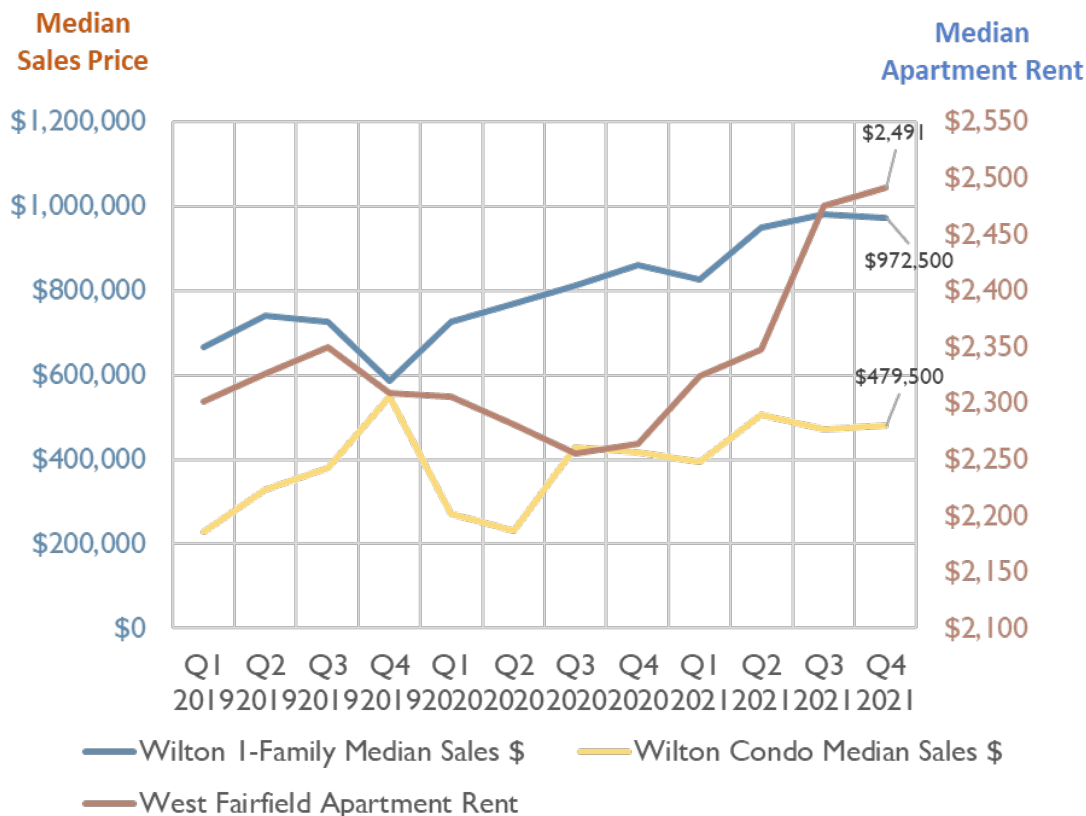
<sup>6</sup> <https://images1.loopnet.com/d2/W9YNPS7XNkjsBY9pFaeAqHAtAXjRZT6aQ-csEYg1ZgU/Marketing%20Brochure.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cityfeet.com/cont/listing/200-danbury-rd-wilton-ct-06897/cs25979988?sk=1f2597ba3e664befb783fc9e2124cfba>

A search of Zillow, a national multiple listing service showed 45 homes for sale in Wilton as of July 1, 2022: 44 single-family homes and one (1) condominium. On that same date, there were only seven (7) rental listings: 2 apartments and 5 houses. This is an effective 0 percent vacancy rate across all housing types.

## Residential Sales and Rents

As shown in **Chart 26**, housing costs have continued to climb over the past two years as well. With single-family and condo sales reaching medians of \$972,500 and \$479,500, respectively. Rent data are not tracked for Wilton individually, instead it is grouped in the West Fairfield [County] submarket. The West Fairfield submar-



**Chart 26** Quarterly Residential Sales and Rents in the Town of Wilton, 2019-2021

Sources: Berkshire Hathaway Home Services & Moody's Analytics REIS, 2022.



## Nexus of Density

The preceding segments show that Wilton Center’s commercial and residential densities are overall lower than the densities of comparable downtowns and that there is demand primarily for residential development. The question is: What level of development would be required in Wilton Center to ensure it is more competitive in the regional market landscape and more supportive of existing businesses? Year 2021 daytime population density—the number per square mile of residents and workers typically located within a given area—is the best reflection of this. The required daytime population density threshold varies by specific retail type; however, it is a safe assumption that bringing Wilton Center’s daytime population density up to a level that is similar to those of comparable downtowns will enhance the study area’s competitive market positioning.

The table that follows shows a comparison of Wilton Center’s daytime population density to those of the downtowns of New Canaan, Westport, Ridgefield, and Darien. In all cases but Darien, the daytime population density of the comparable downtowns far exceed Wilton Center.

	Downtowns				
	Wilton Center Study Area	Downtown New Canaan	Downtown Westport	Downtown Ridgefield	Downtown Darien
Daytime Population Density (DPD)	4,095	8,390	12,434	5,969	4,071
Daytime Pop to meet DPD		2,186	4,261	961	(14)
Pop Alone to meet DPD (55%)		3,975	7,747	1,747	(25)
Hslds to meet Pop Alone DPD (Wilton Av Hsld Size 2.99)	Average: 1,200	1,329	2,591	584	(9)
Jobs to Meet Emp Alone DPD		2,186	4,261	961	(14)
Floorspace to Meet Emp Alone DPD	Average: 750,000	874,400	1,704,400	384,400	(5,600)

**Table 15** Quarterly Residential Sales and Rents in the Town of Wilton, 2019-2021

Source: ESRI Data, 2022. Note: Not all formulas are shown in the table.

Density could be gained in two ways: by increasing employment and/or the residential population. If employment alone is used to increase the daytime population, it would require the addition of some 1,850 jobs to reach the average level of competitive density. At 400 sf per worker, this would require some additional 750,000 square feet of commercial space—nearly doubling Wilton Center’s current commercial stock. If the daytime population were increased through the addition of residential units, roughly 1,200 new units would be required to meet the average daytime population density of the four comparable downtowns.

# Development Potential

As shown in the previous section, the only category showing significant demand is the residential sector.

## Costs

Construction costs in the Northeast United States are higher than the national standard by a factor of 1.5<sup>8</sup>. However, the Town of Wilton also has higher than average land values in proportion to development costs (generally less than 30% as a rule of thumb). A scan of property assessments show land value as a share of total property value is relatively high in Wilton, ranging from 30 to 55 percent in our review of a sample of properties throughout the study area.

To determine the unit return desired in relation to land value, we checked the current land value appraisal against the number of units for selected existing, proposed, and approved sites as shown in the table below.

	Address	Current Value Land Appraisal	Units	Ratio Land Value to Units
Existing Sites	25 River Road	\$ 15,300,000	100	\$ 153,000
	116 Danbury Road	\$ 10,000,000	100	\$ 100,000
Proposed MF Sites	331 Danbury	\$ 571,700	126	\$ 4,537
	2, 24 Pimpewaug	\$ 1,467,700	156	\$ 9,408
	12 Godfrey	\$ -	30	\$ -
Approved	141 Danbury	\$ 3,410,600	173	\$ 19,714
	3 Hubbard	\$ 1,750,000	49	\$ 35,714
	300 Danbury	\$ 3,512,900	74	\$ 47,472

**Table 16** 2022 Assessed Land Value to Units for Existing, Proposed, and Approved Multi-Family Development Sites

Source: Town of Wilton.

The average land values per unit are as follows:

- \$126,000 for the existing multi-family sites;
- \$6,973 per unit for the proposed; and,
- \$34,300 for the approved sites.

The property value per unit for approved sites is the strongest basis for future estimations of likely return requirements as it represents the values of very recent viable developments. The \$30,000 to \$40,000 cost of land per unit is a reasonable test of likely viability for future developments.

<sup>8</sup> The construction cost multiplier is derived for Connecticut from the ENR Cost indices by city. The average costs for NYC and Boston were divided by the 20 City Index. [CONSTRUCTION ECONOMICS ENR : January 4/11, 2021 \(bnpmmedia.com\)](https://www.enr.com/construction/economics/enr-january-4-11-2021)

## Residential

If Wilton's population continues to increase at the same rate it has over the past 30 years (0.49%), the Town's population will increase to almost 20,000 by 2035 and 21,000 by 2050. Given that roughly 740 units are already before the Town for approval, this seems to be a reasonable reflection of the market.

## Retail

As demonstrated in the retail gaps analysis, Wilton has the consumer base to support an additional 231,000 sf of retail, but what it lacks is the foot traffic. Increasing the daytime population through increased residential density is a first step in sustaining existing businesses and attracting new ones. The location of any new retail should generally focus on project sites with potential for development identified earlier in this report in Figure 4 on pg. 18.

### ***Danbury Rd vs Downtown Wilton Center***

Broadly, any approved development that creates additional foot traffic is good for Wilton's overall commercial environment. That being said, different types of retail are more appropriate for Danbury Road (larger scale, car-based stores). Commercial uses in the village should focus on establishments that stimulates or strengthens placemaking efforts.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Conclusions

Wilton is an affluent rural town with enough disposable income to support several million square feet of retail space. However, residents are doing most of their shopping online, in large area shopping centers, and/or neighboring downtowns with greater retail density and/or more activities.

Wilton Center primarily provides goods and services to Wilton residents and workers. Vacancy is low and rents are high relative to other towns in the area, yet population density is not sufficient to create favorable rent-to-return ratios for businesses. Nor is there any regional draw or anchor tenant in the downtown that would attract additional shoppers.

In terms of real estate, the only significant demand is for residential uses. Creation of additional rental and condominium units would provide a diversity of housing choice for downsizing empty-nesters and young professionals who cannot yet afford single-family home prices. Allowing the development of these units in Wilton Center would also provide more shoppers for local retailers.

## Recommendations

**Increase daytime population density/local consumer demand by developing additional multifamily residential units in the Greater Wilton Center Study Area. Any additional retail development would follow as the market demands.**

**Seek out unique attractions for limited available space in Wilton Center.**

- ☐ Cultural/entertainment/arts
  - o Permanent
  - o Festival/Seasonal Programming
- ☐ Activity-based for all ages

**Create flexibility in zoning to meet new trends.**

**Follow through on placemaking and landscaping improvements to improve walkability.**

**Direct highway-based uses to the Danbury Road corridor.**





# 5

## Transportation and Parking

### Wilton Center Traffic Circulation

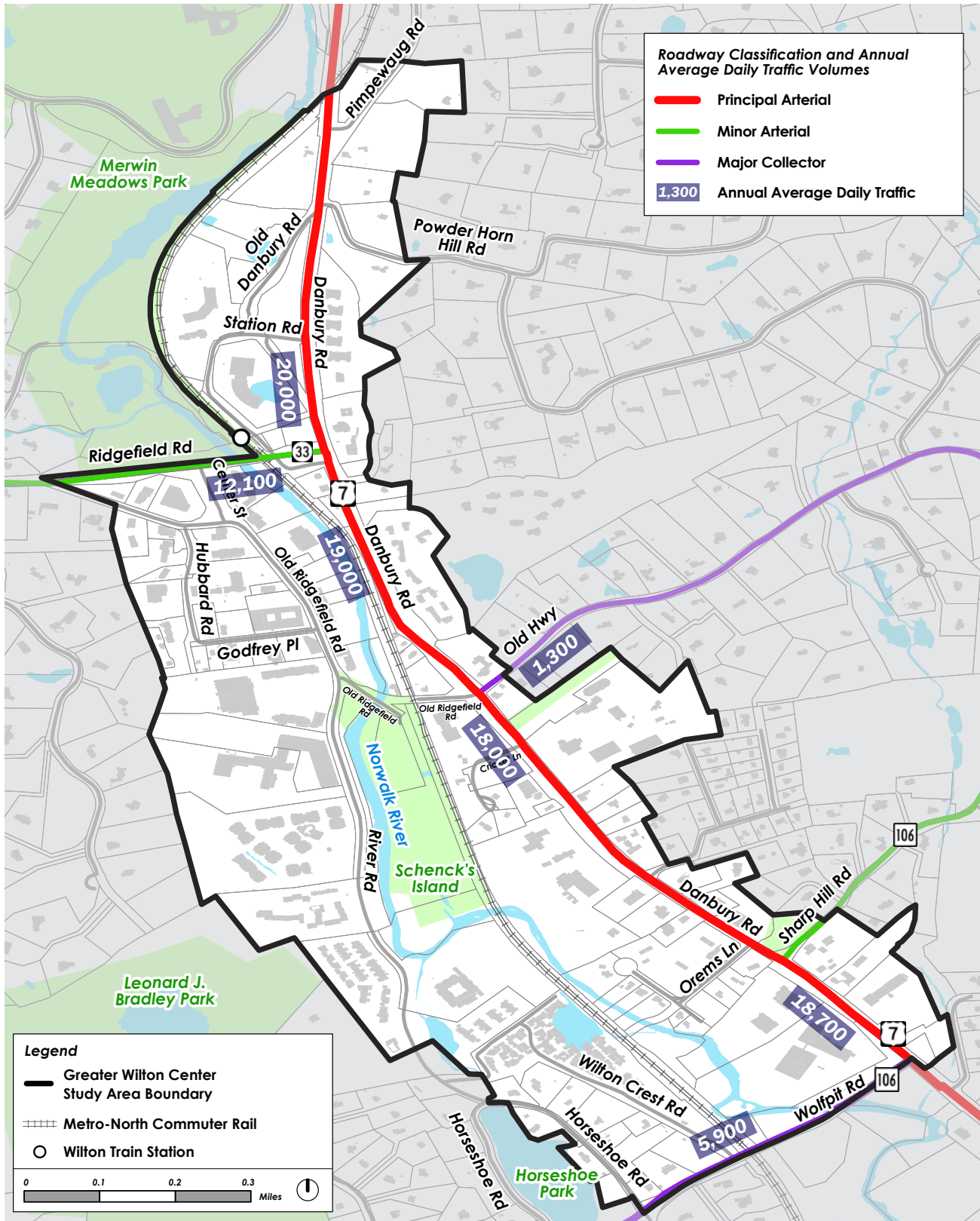
Route 7 / Danbury Road provides Wilton Center with convenient regional access to the north (connection to I-84) and to the south (connection to the Merritt Parkway and I-95). The core Wilton Center study area is bound by Ridgefield Road to the north and Wolfpit Road to the south, both serving as critical access roads that connect Wilton Center to residential areas of the community.

Traffic circulation in Wilton Center is predominantly oriented north-south via Old Ridgefield Road / River Road. Hubbard Road provides a lesser degree of north-south connectivity within the northerly portion of Wilton Center. East-west connectivity in Wilton Center is limited to Godfrey Place as well as several driveways through parking lots. Such limited options for north-south traffic circulation across Wilton Center, paired with the prevalence of east-west parking lot driveways has resulted in circulation challenges that are exacerbated due to the prevalence of driving versus walking. **Figure 16** provides information on Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) volumes surrounding Wilton Center as well as Roadway Classification.

#### Vehicular Crashes

CTDOT State Crash data were reviewed from the last three years (2019-2022). The interior portion of Wilton Center had approximately 20 crashes that were distributed between parking lots and roadways spanning between Ridgefield Road and the Avalon development to the south. Of these documented crashes over the last three years, there is no hotspot area of clustered incidents. The Center Street-Ridgefield Road intersection area had six crashes whereas the Horseshoe Road-Wolfpit Road intersection area had 14 crashes. In the last three years there was one incident that involved a pedestrian and one incident that involved a bicyclist, both of which occurred along Old Ridgefield Road.

Higher crash rates are documented along Route 7 at or in proximity to the following intersections: Ridgefield Road (~48 crashes); Sharp Hill Road (~46 crashes); Wolfpit Rd (~32 crashes); Old Highway (~19 crashes).



**Figure 16** Roadway Classification and Annual Average Daily Traffic Volumes

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, CTDOT, Town of Wilton, BFI Planning, 2022.

# Wilton Center Parking

Parking occupancy and turnover fieldwork was conducted on a Friday (11am-3pm) and a Saturday (11am-7pm) in May 2022. There are 1,622 spaces in the “Core Parking Area” outlined in **Table 17** below. There are an additional 472 spaces at the southerly Kimco building and 217 spaces at the Metro-North station.

## Parking Occupancy

Parking occupancy counts were organized by zone as shown in **Figure 17** (Zones A-H). **Table 17** summarizes the peak-hour occupancy of each parking zone when parking utilization was the highest. The peak parking occupancy of the Wilton Center Core parking area was 44% on Friday (about 900 vacancies) and 36% on Saturday (nearly 1,050 vacancies). Note that these area-wide peak numbers are conservative as they represent the summation of the individual peak-hour counts for each parking zone. In conclusion, over half (over 800 spaces) of the parking spaces in the Wilton Center Core remain vacant even during peak periods.

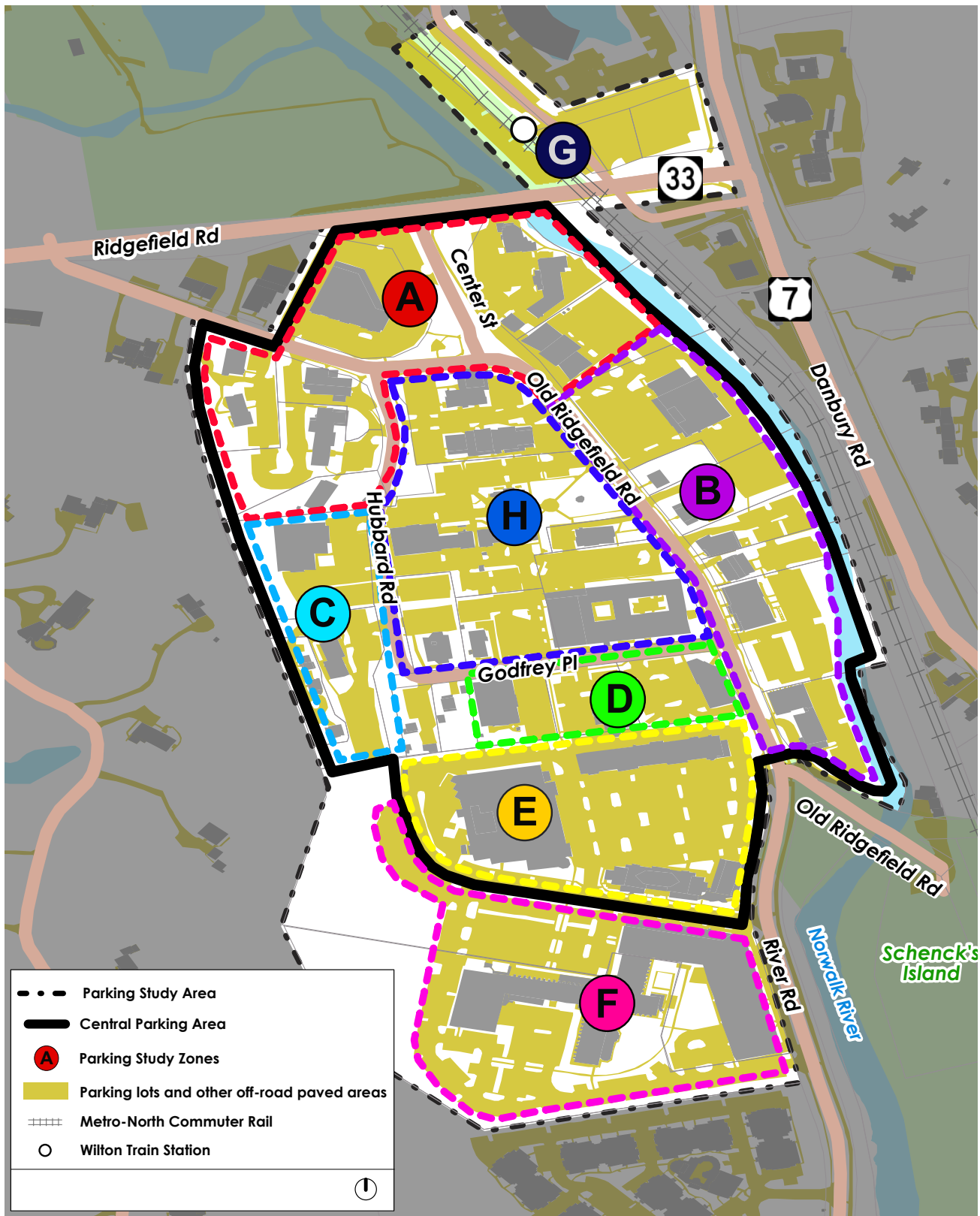
Within the Wilton Center Core area, the highest parking occupancies were observed at the Old Post Office Square, the Village Market, the Wilson Building (Tusk and Cup) around the Barringer Building. While all other areas of Wilton Center show a significant surplus of parking during peak periods, central locations with higher than average vacancies include:

- o Rear parking behind both Stop and Shop and the adjacent plaza
- o Professional offices, including: 180-190 Old Ridgefield Road, 23 Hubbard Road Professional Offices, and 12 Godfrey Place Professional Offices
- o Retail/service uses along Godfrey Place (7 Godfrey Place and 3 Godfrey Place)

Zone	Spaces	Friday		Saturday	
		Peak Occup.	% Peak Occup.	Peak Occup.	% Peak Occup.
<b>A</b>	367	158 (11am)	43%	158 (11am)	43%
<b>B</b>	330	159 (12pm)	48%	136 (11am)	41%
<b>C</b>	115	43 (12pm)	37%	33 (11am)	29%
<b>D</b>	122	43 (1pm)	35%	24 (3pm)	20%
<b>E</b>	333	170 (5pm)	51%	136 (3pm)	41%
<b>H</b>	355	139 (3pm)	39%	92 (1pm)	26%
<b>Wilton Center Core Subtotal</b>	<b>1,622</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>F</b>	472	95 (11am)	20%	40 (12pm)	8%
<b>G</b>	217	32 (1pm)	15%	8 (12pm)	4%
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,311</b>	<b>839</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>27%</b>

**Table 17** Peak Parking Occupancy by Zone

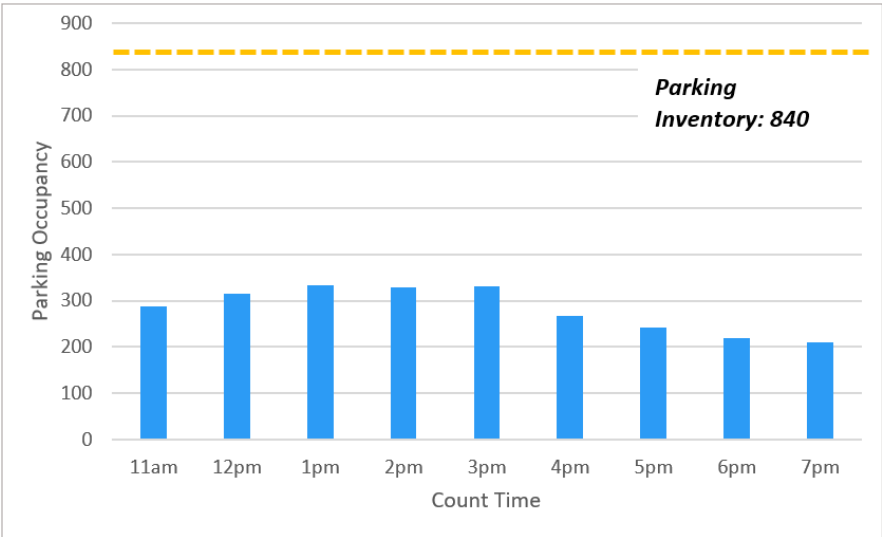
Source: BfJ Planning, 2022.



**Figure 17** Wilton Center Parking Study Area

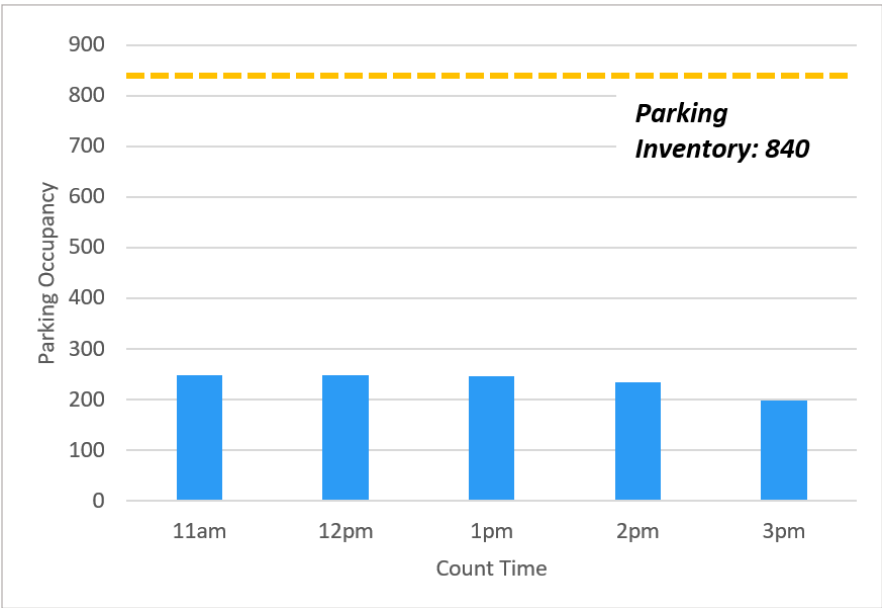
Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFI Planning, 2022.

A smaller study area with 840 parking spaces, the “Central Parking Area” (Zones A, H, D), was analyzed on an hourly basis. The Friday and Saturday charts below show that parking demand remains relatively stable during the day in the sense that there are no major spikes or sharp declines from hour to hour. Consistent with overall Wilton Center parking occupancy trends, the highest peak demand period in this area remains below 50% utilization with at least 400 vacant spaces.



**Chart 27** Central Parking Area - Hourly Parking Occupancy (Friday)

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.



**Chart 28** Central Parking Area - Hourly Parking Occupancy (Saturday)

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.



## Parking Turnover

Parking turnover counts were conducted for a total of 355 spaces in Zone H in order to assess how long individuals park in the area. The following summarizes the parking durations:

Parking Duration	Friday	Saturday
Parking less than 2 hours	64%	69%
Parking 2 to 3 hours	19%	22%
Parking more than 4 hours	18%	10%

**Table 18** Zone H Parking Duration Summary

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.

It is interesting to note that large proportions of parkers in Wilton Center park for periods less than two hours. Less than 20% of vehicles were parked for more than four hours on Friday and only 10% were parked for more than four hours on Saturday.

## Parking Strategies

The fact that parking in Wilton Center today is so underutilized calls for strategies that will eventually allow for a more efficient land use pattern, basically a greater ratio of built floor areas in relation to the surfaces devoted to parking. Two basic actions can be taken:

### 1. Right Sizing Parking Ratios

The table below shows the parking ratios that currently apply to developments in Wilton Center together with alternate ratios that are recommended by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE). These ratios are still considered suburban ratios whereby each site in Wilton Center has to satisfy its own parking demand independently of when the peak demand occurs. Revised parking ratios in the Wilton Center Zoning District would apply to new uses as well as existing uses in the instance that a property owner seeks to expand floor area. Although Wilton Center has its own unique qualities and characteristics, BFJ believes that ITE parking ratios are appropriate for a built environment like Wilton Center.

	Existing Min. # of Spaces Required:	Recommended Alternate Ratios
Libraries, museums, art galleries or similar uses	1 per 400 sq. ft. of GFA	1 per 450 sq. ft. of GFA
Day care centers	1 per employee, plus 1 per 10 enrollees	1.22 spaces per employee
General, business or professional offices, non-medical	1 per 300 sq. ft. of GFA	1 per 350 sq. ft. of GFA
Wilton Center Business Uses (General Commercial)	1 per 250 sq. ft. of GFA	1 per 300 sq. ft. of GFA

**Table 19** Wilton Center Zoning District: Existing Non-Residential Parking Requirements and Recommended Alternate Ratios

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.

## 2. Converting Wilton Center Parking to Shared or Municipal Parking

The real gain in parking efficiency could be reached through a shared parking or municipal parking system whereby all parking resources in Wilton Center would be shared among all uses and where the only regulations would control the duration of parking (short-term parking versus long-term parking). If a municipal or quasi-municipal system could be implemented, the parking ratios could be reduced further to a level that corresponds to the actual demands observed during the peak period. In this case the occupancy surveys showed parking in Wilton Center peaks during the midday/lunchtime hours. During this peak period the restaurant parking demand is high, but not as high as it is during evening hours. In addition, some of the lunchtime restaurant patrons are people that work in Wilton Center and are already parked as part of their primary trip purpose. The parking demand generated by office spaces is also below its peak demand as some of the office employees leave for lunch outside of Wilton Center.

A number of years ago the Borough of Princeton undertook a parking demand analysis for their small downtown that included detailed counts of all cars parked downtown plus surveys of the drivers to determine the main purpose of their trip downtown, how long they stayed and how many and what other uses they frequented. As all parking in downtown Princeton was either publicly or privately shared the Borough was able to adopt “municipal” parking ratios as follows:

At least one parking space for each:	
Places of Worship, libraries	6 seats or students
Eating or drinking places	400 square feet of floor area
Theaters or assembly halls	5 seats
Service business uses not listed above	For ground floor: 300 square feet of floor area; For other floors: 450 square feet of floor area
Office	370 square feet of floor area
Retail	475 square feet of floor area
Institutional	360 square feet of floor area
Hotel	580 square feet of floor area

**Table 20** Princeton, NJ Central Parking District: Non-Residential Parking Requirements

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.

Note that the above parking ratios do not necessarily represent the peak parking demand for each use, but the demand for each use during the overall peak period for downtown, i.e. lunchtime.

The challenge in Wilton Center will be to achieve such a shared or municipal parking system as all parking spaces in the center belong to individual private owners and it would be difficult to entice all owners to transition to a comprehensive shared parking system.

Wilton zoning currently allows for a shared parking provision in two instances:

- Parking for two or more different uses on the same lot: The total combined parking capacity for such establishments in Wilton Center cannot exceed a 30 percent reduction and the Commission must conclude that the proposed supply will meet parking needs.
- Parking for interconnected/adjacent sites may also be reduced by the Commission by a maximum of 30 percent of the total number of spaces required.

Wilton zoning also includes a Park and Walk Program. A FAR density bonus up to 10 percent (at the discretion of the PAZ Commission) is provided if an applicant voluntarily agrees to allow the use of parking spaces in excess of those required by the zoning regulations for public parking. The Town may consider increasing this FAR bonus to 20% in order to encourage participation in the program. The combination of this increased bonus with the reduced parking ratios may make this program more successful.

A key condition for an efficient shared parking system is that no spaces can be assigned or reserved for a particular user. Although there can be shared parking arrangements where a particular space is reserved for user A from 8 am to 6 pm and user B for the balance of the time, that is not an efficient system and is difficult to manage and enforce. The more efficient and successful shared-parking system is one where the sharing occurs organically, and generally in a larger parking facility, where we can statistically predict the percentage of users that leave their spaces at 7 am, 8 am, 9 am, etc. and also when they return home. The parking industry has extensive parking occupancy data for numerous uses that allow us to analyze sharing opportunities with some precision. Non-assigned parking spaces also have the advantage that the parking supply in a multi-family building that is needed for the peak demand between midnight and 5 am (when all residents are home) will also accommodate visitor parking as there are plenty of vacant spaces during the day when household employees or contractors may need to park and during the evening hours when generally there are more residents out of the building than there would be visitors in the building.

It is therefore recommended that the Town eliminates the requirement for visitor parking in a multi-family residential building where parking spaces are not assigned both in Wilton Center and town-wide. The non-assignment of parking spaces will then automatically facilitate the sharing of the spaces during the non-peak period for the residential parkers with other users.

Shared parking can also be allowed for sites that are not adjacent to each other but are within a reasonable walking distance from each other.

A more transformational option would be for the Town to lease certain parking areas from the owner and manage those areas as a municipal lot. The Town could then redesign certain areas to make parking more efficient and sustainable, create public gathering areas and enhance the overall landscape of Wilton Center. The property owners that lease the parking areas to the Town would still get the zoning recognition of the leased parking spaces. This strategy would mean that the Town would take a more active role in managing and enforcing parking in Wilton Center and in the overall design of Wilton Center.

### **3. Parking and Traffic Considerations for Sites along Route 7**

Increasing development activity along Route 7 provides an opportunity to right-size the parking supply for greater efficiency. The majority of the Route 7 corridor within the study area is zoned as General Business. BFJ reviewed parking requirements of the general business district and recommends the following adjustments based on ITE data:

- Non-Medical Offices (general, business or professional offices): Similar to the Wilton Center Zoning District, an alternative parking requirement of 1 parking space per 350 sq. ft. of GFA is recommended instead of the current requirement that is based on 300 sq. ft. of GFA.
- Mid-Rise Residential: The current zoning requirement for multi-family residential buildings is 1.5 parking spaces per unit. Per ITE recommendations, any mid-rise residential development along Route 7 (approved by special permit) that has at least three stories and at least four units could instead require rental units to provide 1.35 parking space per unit.
- Retail or Personal Service: Wilton Zoning currently requires 1 parking space per 200 sq. ft. of GFA. An adjusted requirement of 1 space per 250 sq. ft. of GFA is recommended.

Shared parking should be encouraged at properties along Route 7, in the same manner as for Wilton Center. The credit from shared parking cannot exceed a 30 percent reduction and the Commission must conclude that the proposed supply will meet parking needs.

In order to encourage safe and efficient traffic circulation, all site applications should be reviewed with Access Management principles in mind, including:

- Driveway sharing: Fewer driveways spaced further apart will increase traffic safety and fluidity.
- Try to shift access to development sites to side streets if possible.

## Summary of Recommendations

### 1. Right Size Parking Ratios in the Wilton Center

Existing parking ratios should be adjusted as a strategy to right-size future parking supplies in Wilton Center

- It is recommended that parking ratios be reduced for retail (Wilton Center General Commercial), non-medical offices, daycare centers, and libraries/museums/art galleries. (Refer to **Table 19**)
- For multifamily buildings, Wilton currently requires 1 visitor space per 2 dwelling units. It is recommended that if a building has assigned parking, there should be 1 visitor space per 5 units. If parking is unassigned, there is no need to have visitor parking.

It is also recommended that general commercial and non-medical office ratios be reduced outside of the Wilton Center Zoning District in order to right-size uses along Route 7.

### 2. Pursue the allocation of a municipal parking supply in Wilton Center

The Town should explore opportunities to municipally-manage parking supplies in Wilton Center. Ideally, this would occur on Town-owned land but opportunities to lease lot areas from property owners should be explored. Given that the Town owns the buildings and lot area to the west of Town Green, these lots should be given priority consideration.

### 3. Encourage and Incentivize shared parking in Wilton Center

In addition to clear parking management communications that explain opportunities/strategies to organize shared parking, Wilton should offer an incentive to developers to create a shared parking plan. For example, a fifth story height bonus could be permitted if a plan for shared parking is submitted by the developer.





# 6

# Plan and Public Realm Concepts

## Introduction

Based on the analyses and information presented in the previous chapters, as well as input gathered through the planning process, this chapter presents a series of planning concepts and options to improve the public realm in Wilton Center. The public realm includes all publicly accessible spaces such as community facilities, parks and open spaces, roadways, sidewalks, trails, etc. Collectively, along with proposed implementation strategies, including zoning and land use regulations proposed in **Chapter 7**, these ideas and options constitute the Master Plan for Wilton Center. As such, this plan sets a framework that is flexible and responsive to potential opportunities rather than presenting a static image of what Wilton Center and the Danbury Road corridor should look like in the future. The plan sets forth a series of ideas and recommendations covering a wide range of improvements, both physical and regulatory. All are aimed at improving upon what already exists and leveraging new opportunities to improve Wilton Center in the future. Collectively, these ideas and recommendations seek to produce a built environment that will meet the needs of the community and attract visitors and desirable private investment, including commercial and residential development. This chapter initiates this effort with recommendations for building a stronger public realm through pedestrian circulation improvements, creating opportunities for new public spaces (and improving those that already exist), and later in **Chapter 7** setting forth regulations to ensure these outcomes are met.

# Pedestrian Circulation Overview, Analysis and Proposed Wilton Center Circulation Plan

This section discusses issues related to pedestrian circulation and connectivity and introduces a proposed Pedestrian Circulation Plan for Wilton Center. Analysis of existing conditions indicates the following observations:

- Wilton Center lacks a central focus point. An obvious opportunity for this would be the intersection of Center Street and Old Ridgefield Road. Presently there is an attractive memorial park on the northwest corner at this location, but it is flanked by the parking that surrounds the Persall Building. Pedestrian crosswalks are provided on only two of the three road crossings, and an excessive proportion of the right-of-way is dedicated vehicular traffic.
- Existing pedestrian circulation throughout the Study Area is fragmented. Danbury Road is an exceptionally busy corridor, and while sidewalks exist, walking can be uncomfortable and crossing Route 7 can be difficult. In Wilton Center Proper, where improvements have been made, sidewalks tend to be quite narrow (most are about four feet wide), enhanced with a narrow brick border between the pedestrian and vehicular rights of way. Internal (private) pedestrian pathways provide alternate routes, but these seem to appear and then seemingly fade away, leaving the pedestrian to traverse a parking lot in search of the next connection. More broadly, pedestrian pathways in Wilton Center lack a consistent design or material vocabulary.
- Limited wayfinding, orientation and connectedness can be observed throughout the Study Area. A common refrain heard throughout the planning process was how people had lived nearby Wilton Center for quite some time but never knew it was there. Internally, the few signs that exist to direct the pedestrian and/or call attention to features and places operate as independent events, uncoordinated in both design and their service to an overall wayfinding strategy.
- Wilton Center lacks a significant public gathering, event space. Ordinarily, this would be served by a central open space such as the Town Green. While efforts have been made to further utilize the Town Green, including (positively) moving the Farmer's Market to this location, the Green is presently under performing as a public space in Wilton Center.

The lack of publicly-owned land and roadways in Wilton Center suggests that any plan will have to rely on more than streets alone, which traditionally serve as the structure on which to build a strong pedestrian environment. As such, this Master Plan envisions the circulation plan as a framework around which future development can be supported and organized. The existing street network, including Center Street, Hubbard Road, Old Ridgefield Road / River Road play an important role, but given the extant conditions observed in Wilton Center, we begin with a proposed Pedestrian Circulation Plan for Wilton Center that also considers new connections and improvements to existing pathways, many of which occur on private property.

Two important goals of this master planning effort are (1) sustainability and (2) pedestrian friendliness. In particular, the POCD (2019) includes recommendations and design guidelines to encourage sustainability through Low Impact Development (LID) as well as infrastructure improvements that will protect and preserve the Town's important natural resources, especially the prominent wetland environment and essential ground water resources of the Norwalk River and Scheck's Island Preserve.

**Key objectives of Low Impact Development include:**

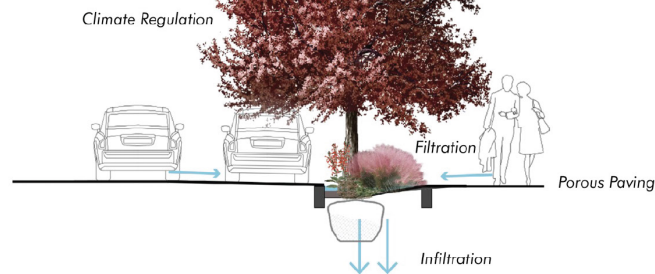
- 1) Preserve existing vegetation;
- 2) Control storm water at its source;
- 3) Create multi-functional landscapes;
- 4) Reduce impervious surfaces' and
- 5) Modify drainage paths to minimize the flow of runoff to storm drainage systems and large detention areas.

These principles can be applied to streetscapes and parking areas alike, as shown in **Figure 18**.

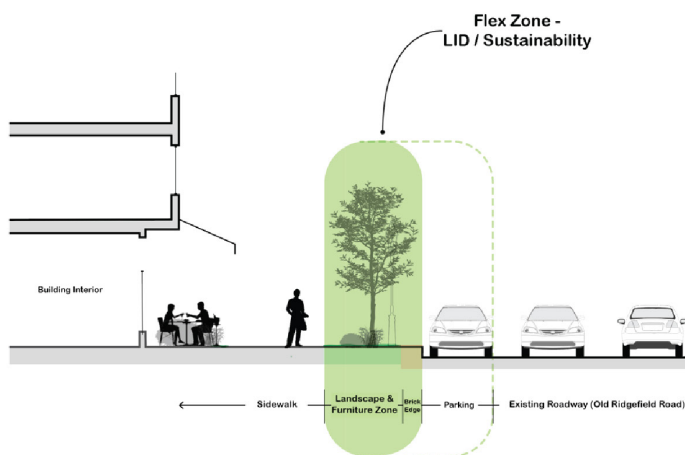
A streetscape environment that includes storm water control and disbursement devices, such as bioswales, rain gardens, and tree pits for storm water management, will not only help to minimize storm runoff impacts such as flooding and pollution, but will also create a more comfortable and attractive pedestrian environment. Improvements, such as reduced travel lane widths, can provide safer crossings for pedestrians, but will also reduce the total amount of impervious surface and, thereby, the amount of storm water runoff flowing to the Town's water bodies. In turn, areas that are reclaimed by reducing the street pavement can be made green and used for storm water management as rain gardens and bioswales. These principles can and should be also applied to parking areas. Given the sizable area of surface parking in Wilton Center, existing parking lots could be "greened" with the application of planting areas and landscaping that operate as water control and disbursement devices. Future parking areas (or renovations to those that already exist) could incorporate permeable surfaces for parking stalls, while travel aisles could be sloped to direct runoff to the permeable surfaces and onward to water collection devices areas.

# **FLEX-ZONE (LID - SUSTAINABILITY)**

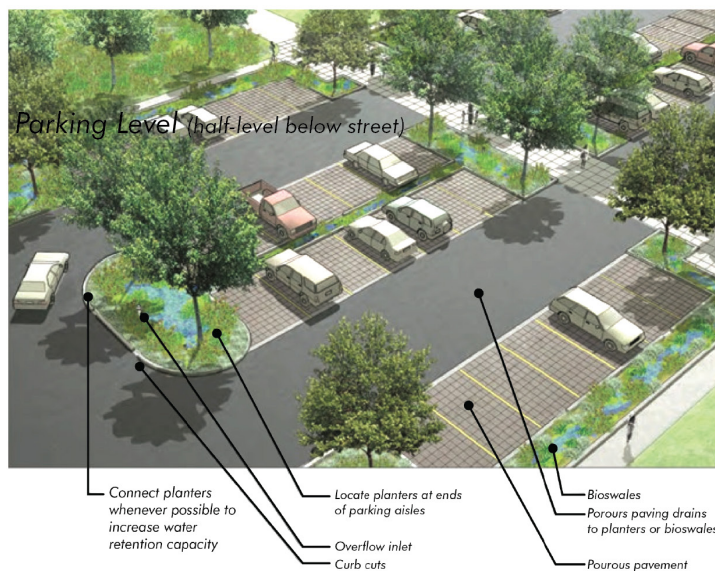
- Rain Garden
- Pervious Paving
- Bioswale



(A) Streetscape Application



(B) Parking Lot Application



**Figure 18** Illustrative LID Strategies

Source: City of Boston Complete Streets Guidelines (2013), US Environmental Protection Agency.

The POCD also includes recommendations to enhance mobility throughout Wilton Center by creating a safe, attractive, and comfortable environment for pedestrians that facilitates walkability and connectivity. In a traditional downtown setting, pedestrian circulation is primarily supported by the presence of a street grid, on-street parking, and a fine-grained pattern of blocks, lots, and buildings that naturally support walking and shopping. The existing pattern of development in Wilton Center is suburban, characterized by large lots and street facing or internal parking lots, and therefore property owners have overtime created a system of internal walkways and connections that can be built upon. In addition, the existing street network could be better leveraged to encourage and make walking more enjoyable. Building upon these ideas, the Proposed Circulation Plan seeks to improve existing circulation routes that traverse the large retail pads in Wilton Center, add new features such as proposed pedestrian routes to connect the train station and future River Walk to the town center, provide a stronger sense of arrival at key entry points, and identify important nodes for wayfinding and signage opportunities. A key element of the circulation plan is re-envisioning the existing town green as a Town Green Square to serve as a focal point, meeting place, and event space for Wilton Center.

As shown in **Figure 19**, the proposed Wilton Center circulation plan has the following overall objectives:

- 1. Sense of place:** Creating a central focal point, providing a coherent pedestrian network, and developing a consistent streetscape vocabulary of materials and furnishings;
- 2. Pedestrian friendliness and safety:** Lowering traffic speeds, implementing high visibility crosswalks, and utilizing accessible paving throughout the pedestrian network;
- 3. Comfort:** Providing shade and seating opportunities, making key connections to complete the pedestrian network, and facilitating navigation by establishing orientation points with wayfinding signage;
- 4. Vibrancy:** Encouraging diverse uses and activities by developing varied spatial experiences and opportunities for social gathering and events; and
- 5. Aesthetic Appeal:** Harmonious materials and furnishings that are well- maintained;





**Figure 19** Proposed Pedestrian Circulation Plan for Wilton Center

Source: Google Earth, RGR Landscape, BFJ Planning, 2022.



## Recommendations

Specifically, the circulation plan includes the following key initiatives and recommendations (numbered elements below as referenced in **Figure 19**):

1. New pedestrian entry point at Ridgefield Road to serve as a connection to the existing Norwalk River Valley Trail as well as the future pedestrian bridge connection to the Wilton train station. This will link to the Wilton Center pedestrian circulation network as well as a future riverfront walkway extending southward along the Norwalk River, and will include pedestrian scale lighting, seating, orientation and wayfinding signage, shade trees, and ornamental plantings. The underside of the Rte. 33 bridge could also be improved with lighting and finishes to create a more attractive environment;
2. New accessible walkway from the new entry point near leading to the Center Street/Old Ridgefield Road intersection as well as the future riverfront walkway extending southward along the Norwalk River to Schenck's Island. Town has an existing pedestrian easement across the parking lot in this location;
3. Reconfigured Center Street/Old Ridgefield Road intersection to minimize travel lane widths and reduce turning radii thereby reducing crossing distances and providing places of refuge for pedestrians. This can be accomplished with either a small roundabout with a vertical monument/element or with an expanded and enhanced central median. The intersection could be improved with new shade trees, lighting, signage, and ornamental plantings as well as high-visibility crosswalks across all roadways. A raised intersection could be considered to create a safer pedestrian environment at this location. This entails raising the roadway three to six inches above street level or to the same elevation as the sidewalk, effectively extending and affirming the pedestrian domain, while purposefully calming traffic. Raised intersections are effective in reducing speeds and conflicts between drivers and pedestrians. Generally, the raised "table" is paved with attractive materials, differentiating it from the vehicular roadway (see **Figure 20**).



**Figure 20**

Illustrative images showing raised intersections. Of note in the lefthand image is the narrowing of the vehicular travel lane widths, reducing pedestrian crossing distances. Raised intersections are typically raised three to six inches above street level or to the same elevation as the sidewalk.

Source: NATCO.org

4. New Town Center Square to provide a safe and comfortable pedestrian destination that is centrally located and can be a focal point, meeting place, and event space for Wilton Center and that is designed to prioritize pedestrian activity over vehicular use, offering shade, seating, lighting and other amenities to attract pedestrian activity;
5. Reconfigured Town Green to be a more attractive and useful public park space for Wilton Center and to act as a pedestrian hub to facilitate wayfinding and circulation in all directions through the heart of Wilton Center with refurbished and relocated gazebo as a signature feature;
6. More efficient parking area on the north side of the library (between the bank and the library), replacing the diagonal parking with perpendicular parking that will reduce the amount of vehicular paving and, therefore, the amount of impervious surface as well as providing space for a new pedestrian walkway to connect the Town Center to the river;
7. Prominent central walkway, with permeable paving and rain gardens, that will link the new Town Center public spaces with a viewing space at the river and a new riverfront walkway extending southward to Schenck's Island and the Norwalk River Valley Trail;
8. Redesign and consolidation of existing fragmented parking areas to enhance parking efficiency, reduce the area of impervious surface, provide more opportunities for decorative plantings and shade trees, incorporate storm water retention devices such as bioswales and rain gardens, and employ the use of permeable paving as much as possible to reduce runoff and enhance infiltration of storm water;
9. Preservation of Schenck's Island as a nature preserve and enhancement of its potential to be a rare and significant resource for the residents and visitors of Wilton Center to engage with nature and an opportunity for the study of natural systems and habitats – native plants, stream ecology, fresh water wetlands, woodlands, and meadows;
10. Orientation points located at key intersections throughout the pedestrian circulation network with information about activities and destinations as well as wayfinding signage to facilitate navigation through Wilton Center;
11. Consistent and compatible vocabulary of streetscape materials and furnishings that will be recognizable and that will assist in wayfinding and navigation as well as being an attractive enhancement of the pedestrian experience. Presently, the sidewalks, pathways, lighting and street furniture in Wilton Center vary widely in their material and design (see **Figure 21**);
12. Pedestrian lighting that is energy efficient and compliant with 'Dark Sky' standards in terms of providing light only where needed, being no brighter than necessary, being on only when needed, minimizing blue light transmissions, and preventing upward-directed light;
13. High-visibility crosswalks, including raised crosswalks wherever possible, to give pedestrians greater prominence at crossing points, improve visibility for both drivers and pedestrians, and encourage lower vehicular speeds through Wilton Center;
14. Addition of new shade trees wherever possible to enhance the pedestrian environment by providing shade and shelter as well as creating a sense of place throughout Wilton Center;
15. Permeable paving for new walkways, plazas, and sitting areas to minimize storm water runoff; and
16. High albedo, reflective materials to reduce the urban heat island effect.





Godfrey Place - view west, south side of street



Godfrey Place - view west, north side of street



Central Walkway - view south



Central Walkway (at Town Green) - view north

**Figure 21**

These images show variation in design vocabulary of streetscape materials. The top images show inconsistency in how sidewalks cross large curb cuts in the pedestrian environment. The bottom images show two very different designs for the prominent north-south central walkway in Wilton Center. The proposed Pedestrian Circulation Framework recommends this walkway to be redesigned using a consistent design incorporating sustainable LID strategies, including permeable paving and rain gardens.

Source: BfJ Planning.

# Create a New Sense of Place

In support of the proposed Pedestrian Circulation Plan above, this section introduces a series of ideas to strengthen the pedestrian environment in Wilton Center. These revolve around developing a stronger public realm to create a new sense of place and expanding people-oriented civic space in Wilton Center.

Too often sense of place is sought through specifying consistent architectural style, where every building conforms to a particular or a limited range of architectural detailing and building form. While this strategy can contribute to strengthening sense of place and is often vital to preserve historic districts, it can also produce built environments that appear artificially themed. Further, this approach can be difficult to implement in existing developed areas, especially those without a strong architectural foundation or historical street pattern. As has been observed by the Wilton Master Plan Subcommittee, there is no one dominant architectural style in Wilton Center, rather Wilton's architectural essence is simplicity and clarity. Therefore, a more appropriate approach for Wilton Center is to build upon and encourage those traits of simplicity and clarity, while encouraging stronger streetscapes and building-street relationships, and tailoring these to create an attractive and varied pedestrian environment. This approach can be accentuated by the use of high quality commonly found local materials and building forms, as has long been the effort of the Architectural Review Board. But, with that said, good urban design (and sense of place) often begins with and is more influenced by the way in which buildings behave in relation to the public realm they serve.

Presently, a wide range of building-street relationships (or frontages) can be observed in Wilton Center, none of which are especially successful from the pedestrian's point of view. Many typify the standard suburban strip mall or corridor frontage, models designed for the convenience of the automobile. They include buildings that are set back from the street with parking placed in front (see **Figure 23**), and buildings that, while set closer along a well-appointed sidewalk, fail to offer activity along the street (see **Figure 22**). Here, the backs of buildings are placed where the objective should be to provide activity along the street to encourage walking. In this location, however, the building's active frontages instead face parking in the interior of the lot, away from the street or public right-of-way. In this configuration, businesses and restaurants wishing to create a vibrant pedestrian environment in an effort to capture foot traffic or offer outdoor dining must do so in competition with cars. In this configuration, walking amounts to not much more than a stroll from car to shop across a parking lot. At the other end of the spectrum are buildings set too close to the public right-of-way, leaving too little room to leverage a sidewalk's capacity to attract people and encourage public street life (see **Figure 24**). In these instances, again building access often doesn't happen along the street because parking to the rear provides primary building access. A goal of this plan should be to undo the prevailing suburban pattern whenever the opportunity strikes by ensuring that buildings form appropriate relationships with their street frontages.





**Figure 22** Example of inactive rear of building addressing an otherwise well-appointed pedestrian way. The active front of this building addresses the parking lot to the interior of the site.

Source: BFJ Planning.



**Figure 23** Two examples of many suburban, auto-oriented frontages in Wilton Center with parking placed to the front of the lot along the public right-of-way. In both examples, missing sidewalks discourage walking, further sending the message that these streets are for cars not people.

Source: BFJ Planning.





**Figure 24** Examples of building frontages that leave insufficient space for street furniture or other elements that could contribute positively to the pedestrian environment. The image on the right also provides no pedestrian enclosure from the traffic along Old Ridgefield Road / River Road. The image on the left provides on-street parking, but little in the way of shade from awnings or possibly a tree canopy. Both could be improved by setting the building further back and providing more pedestrian space and amenities.

Source: BFJ Planning.

There are several successful local frontage models in Wilton Center on which to build. For example, 142 Old Ridgefield Road where the Tusk and Cup coffee shop is located has an approximate 25-foot set-back from the curb which is filled with landscaping, outdoor dining, and an interior walkway against the building to provide access to the shops and restaurants (see photo and section (A) in **Figure 25**). Here is offered a place to relax, enjoy a meal or a cup of coffee and people watch (potentially) along the street but set sufficiently back from the flow of traffic. The sidewalk here is fairly narrow and situated immediately adjacent to the roadway, which offers little protection for the pedestrian. This could be improved by a wider sidewalk and provision of on-street parallel parking, which would require the building to be set further back approximately 8 to 10 feet from the curb (see section (B) in **Figure 25**).

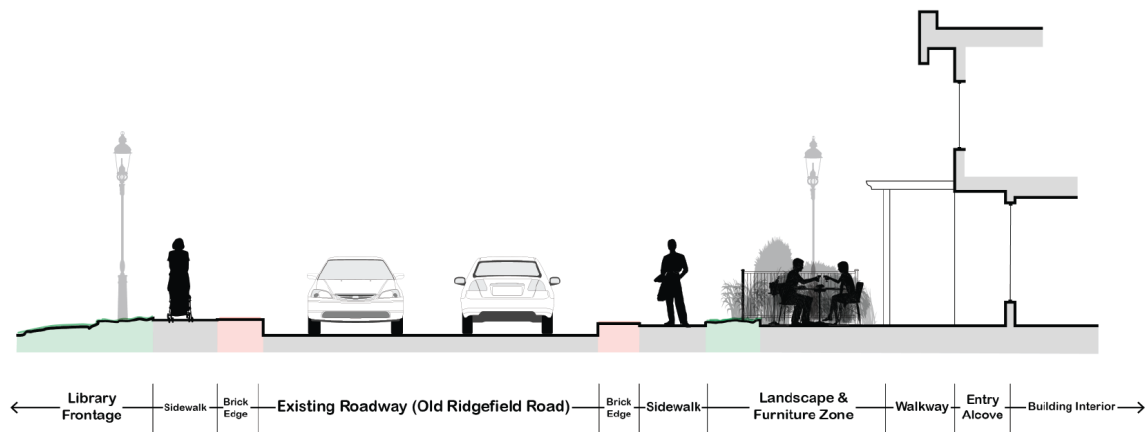
Similarly, the frontage at 15, 21 River Road shown in the lefthand photo of **Figure 24** could be improved with some slight modifications. For example, a wider sidewalk and reconfiguration of the on-street parking would create a far more successful pedestrian-oriented space. Presently, the building sits approximately 36-feet from the curb of River Road. The space between the roadway and building is occupied by a layby roadway that provides convenient on-street parking. The layby is separated from the vehicular roadway by a landscaped median (see photo and section (A) in **Figure 26**). Improving this frontage would involve setting the on-street parking on River Road in either a parallel or angled configuration, which would provide enough space along the street for a wider sidewalk and street furniture, including outdoor dining, trees and lighting (see sections (B) and (C) in **Figure 26**).



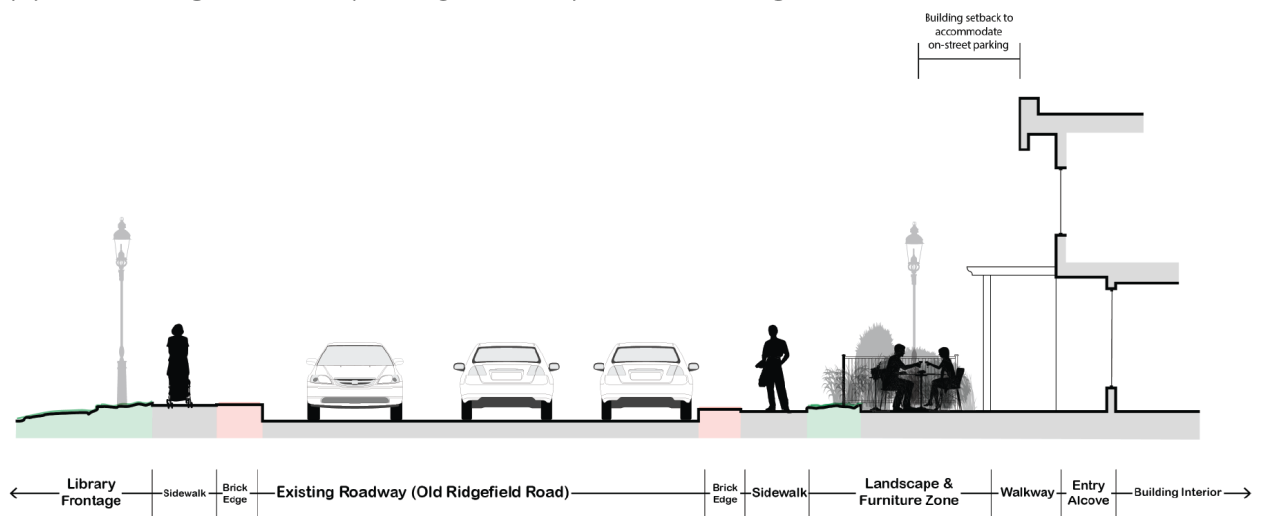
**Figure 25**

This building, while architecturally simple, actually offers a rich and interesting street frontage that contributes significantly to the pedestrian environment along Old Ridgefield Road. This is drawn to scale in the section below (A). At the bottom of the page in section (B), the frontage is examined in a slightly modified (improved) form that places on-street parallel parking on the street.

Source: BfJ Planning, 2022.



**(A) 142 Old Ridgefield Road (existing condition) - section looking north**



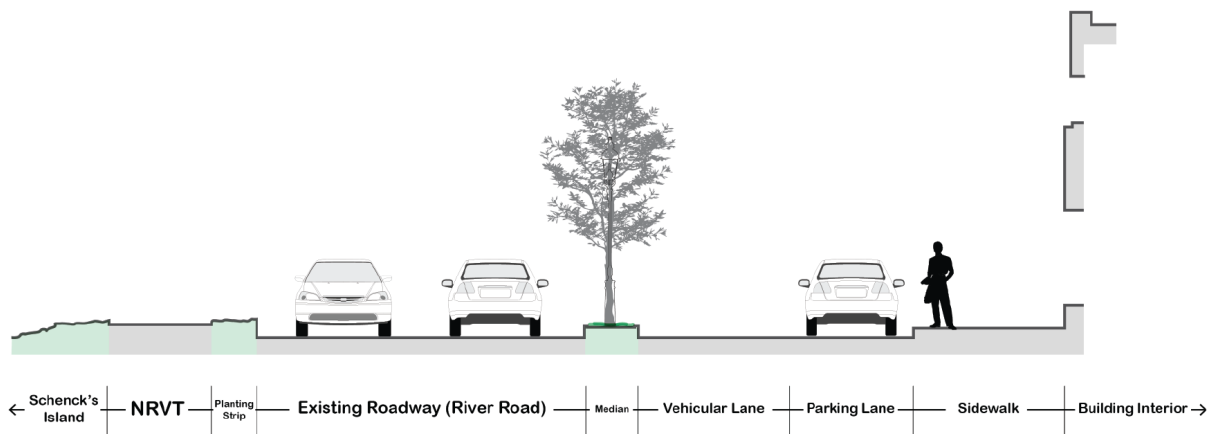
**(B) 142 Old Ridgefield Road (modified condition - parallel parking) - section looking north**



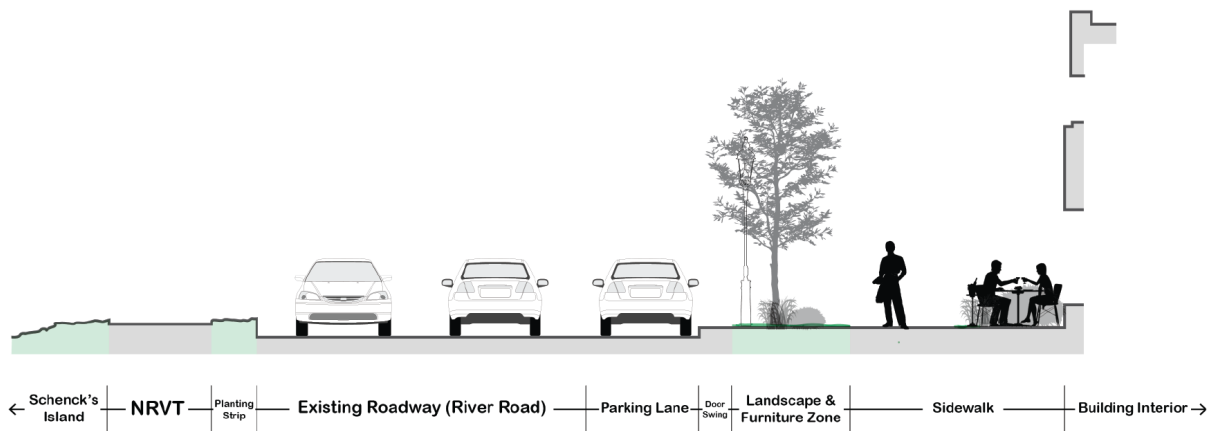


**Figure 26** This frontage provides off-street parking in a layby configuration (see Section (A) below). A more pedestrian-friendly configuration removes the separating median and places parallel parking (B) or angled parking (C) next to the roadway. These configurations would allow for a wider and more active sidewalk and create a more people-friendly environment.

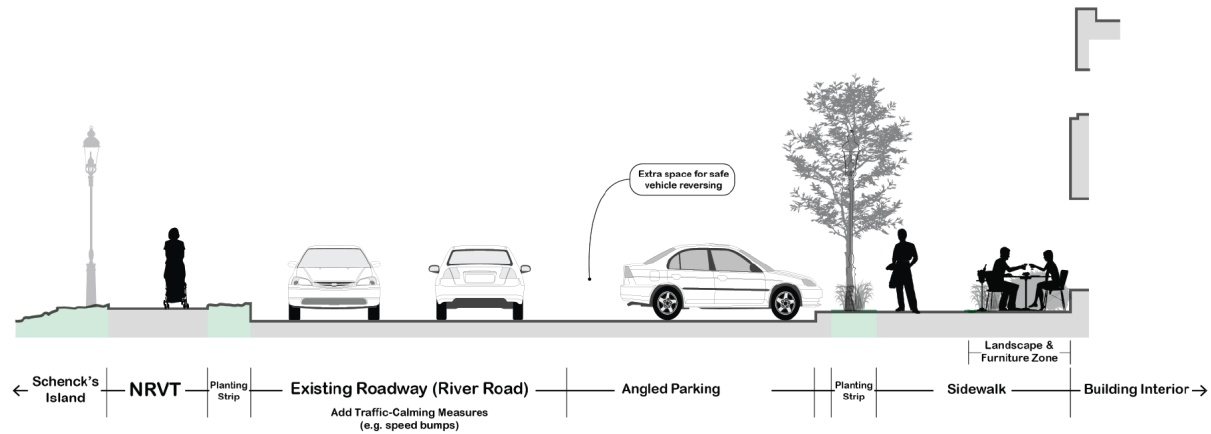
Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.



**(A) 15, 21 River Road (existing condition) - section looking south**



**(B) 15, 21 River Road (modified condition - parallel parking) - section looking south**

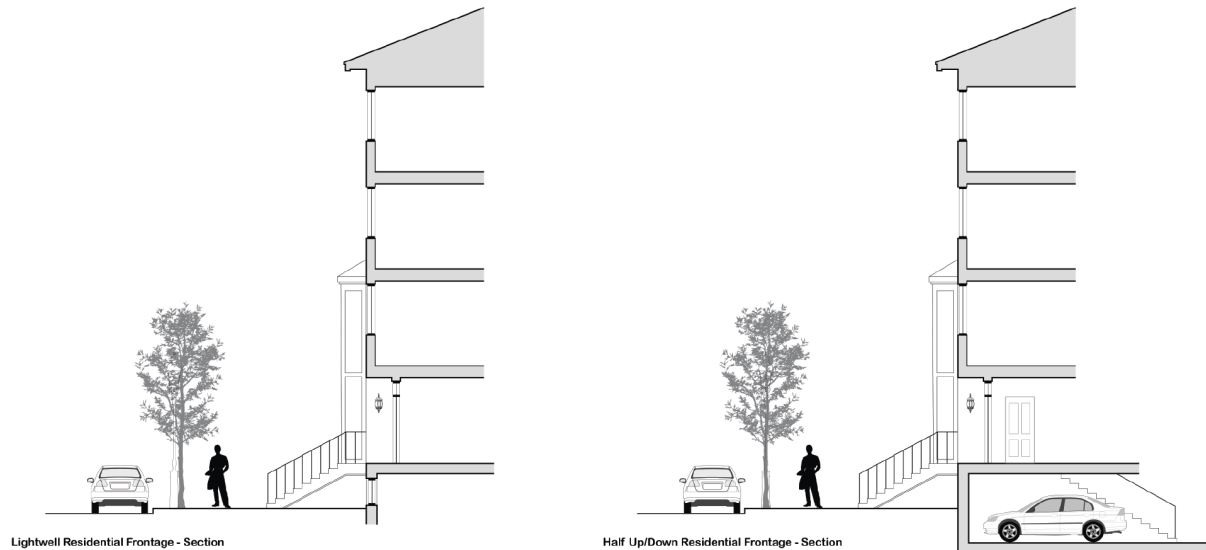


(C) 15, 21 River Road (modified condition - angled parking) - section looking south

While the discussion above examines existing frontage models and options to create a more active pedestrian environment along Old Ridgefield Road / River Road specifically, not all streets should be treated identically. As discussed in the zoning takeaways section (see [pages 28 - 29](#)), active frontages should not be required along all frontages in Wilton Center as the current zoning dictates. Rather the streets in Wilton Center could be curated to specify different types of building frontages appropriate for different areas. Diversity in street and frontage type can add a dimension of variety and interest to Wilton Center's built environment. This proposes concentrating more-active frontages (e.g., retail and restaurants) along Old Ridgefield Road / River Road and allowing less-active frontages, including residential and offices along Godfrey Place and Hubbard Road, where foot traffic (and retail viability) is likely to be diminished. In some ways, this somewhat describes current conditions – but it should be formalized in this plan.

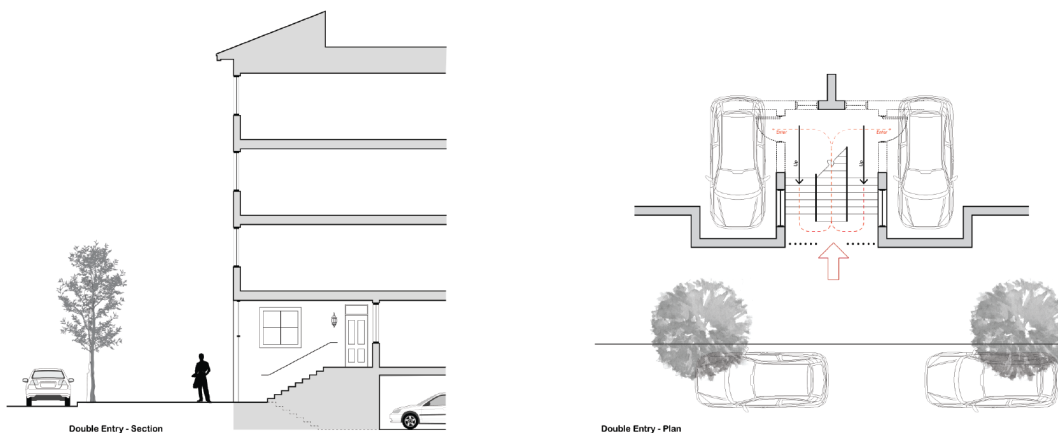
To this end, there are a range of residential frontages beyond the commonly proposed podium parking building that would be appropriate for Wilton Center, and that would contribute to creating a stronger pedestrian realm along the street. Alternative frontages such as a stoop, porch and/or a lightwell would place residential uses on or just above the street level (see [Figures 27 and 28](#)). In many cases, these can be configured to accommodate parking either underground entirely or in a half-up/half-down configuration, which places the first floor of residential slightly above street level and parking partially underground. This produces an attractive and walkable urban-like (as opposed to suburban) streetscape, while protecting first floor occupants' privacy. It also avoids excessive (and expensive) excavation necessary to accommodate a full-level of underground parking, under the building. This approach would be preferable to full podium parking seen in many of the applications to date. Built examples of alternative residential frontages are shown in [Figures 29 and 30](#). An example of a half up/down residential building design is shown in [Figure 31](#).





**Figure 27** These diagrams show alternative frontages whereby residential uses can comfortably occupy the first floor of buildings. This creates a more walkable environment than does the typical podium building, which puts residential uses on the second floor and parking on the ground floor behind a liner of utility space or landscaping to screen it from view. The above examples are two in a theme - they both place the first floor of residential four or five feet above the sidewalk, protecting the privacy of occupants. The frontage on the right tucks the parking under the building, a few feet down, which saves on excavation costs and can provide residents direct access to a townhouse from the parking.

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.



**Figure 28** The Double Entry frontage shown above places the first floor of residential four or five feet above the sidewalk, protecting the privacy of occupants, while accomodating parking tucked under the building. The stairs from the parking and the street to the apartment are within the building's envelope creating a clear sidewalk. A decorative gate separates the stairs from the public street for added security.

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.



**Figure 29**

Examples of residential frontages that contribute positively to the creation of a strong pedestrian realm. These include a porch frontage, (A & B), a lightwell frontage (C), the half up/down frontage (D & E) and the foreyard frontage (F). Some of these can be configured to accommodate parking below the first residential floor, and all provide access directly from the street.

Source: Mapio.net, FBCL, City of Toronto, BFI Planning.





*The Avalon, Bronxville NY*



*The Quarry, Tuckahoe, NY*



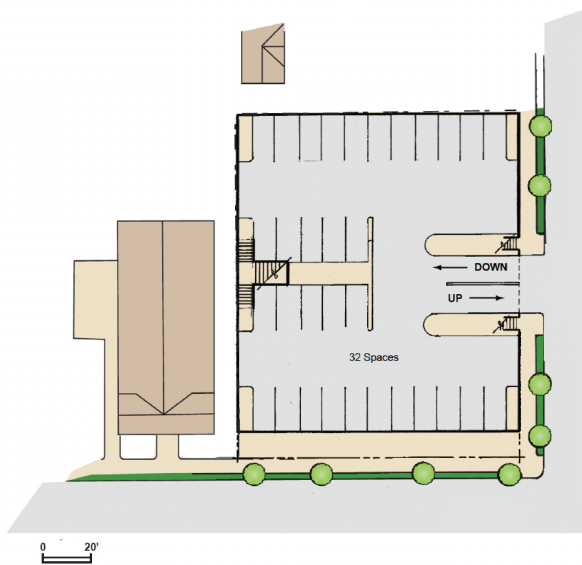
**Figure 30**

Examples of multi-family residential buildings that contribute positively to their street frontage. These could serve as models for infill development in Wilton Center.

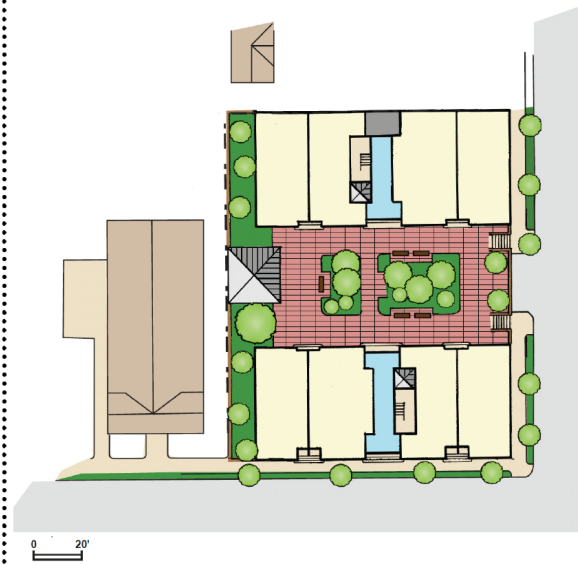
Source: BFJ Planning, Avaloncommunities.com, verisresidential.com.



Perspective



Parking Level (half-level below street)



Courtyard Level (half-level above street)

**Figure 31**

An example of a half up/down multi-family residential building. Parking is provided partially below street level and maximized across the full site. Pedestrian access is provided from both the street and from a courtyard between buildings, which is also accessible from the street and parking garage.

Source: BFJ Planning.



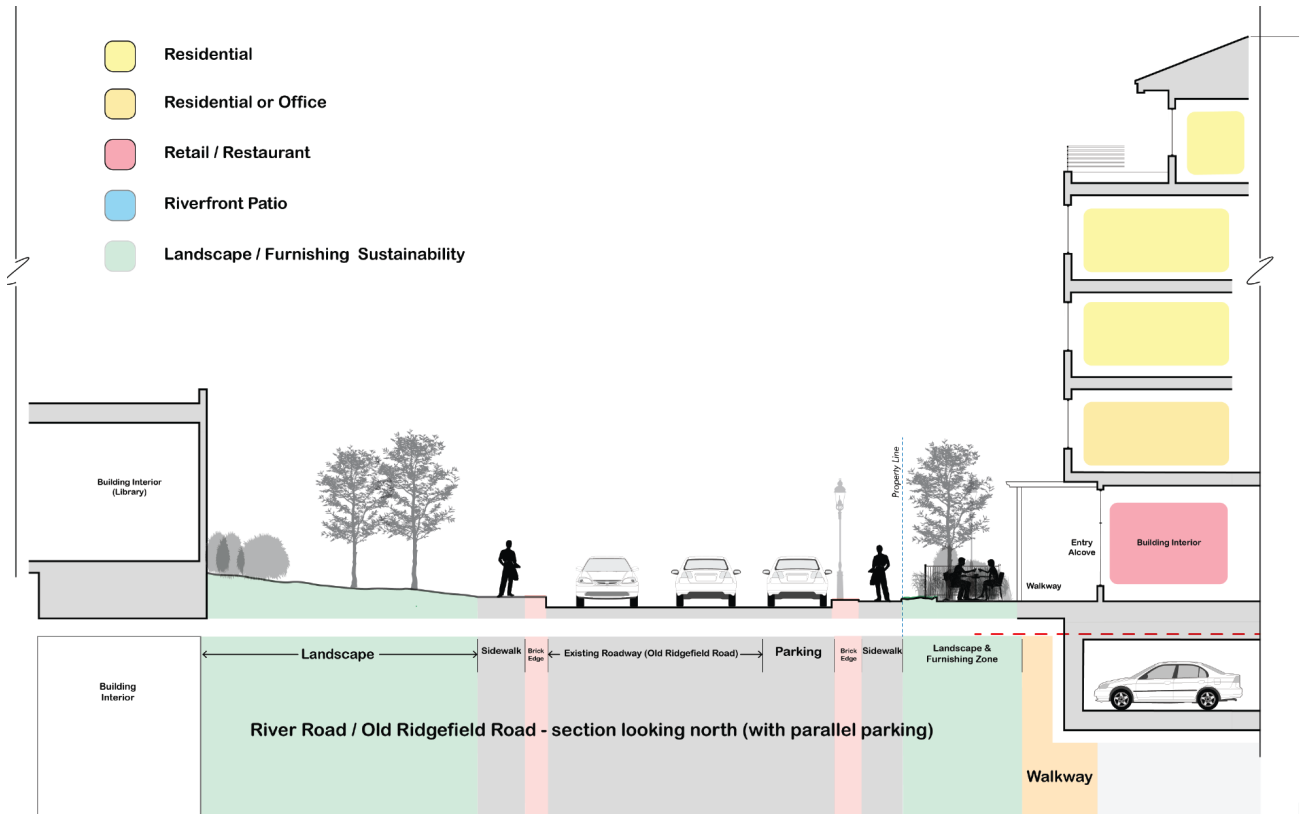
Active frontages appropriate for Old Ridgefield Road / River Road and Center Street could include a store frontage and/or arcade frontage. These can be configured in a mixed-use building with residential or office above (see **Figure 32**). These frontage types can be incorporated into four or five story buildings to activate the streetscape and expand capacity to provide infill residential uses in Wilton Center. **Figure 33** shows an illustrative example of how a street cross section in Wilton Center might look in such a circumstance. Of note here is the emphasis on creating an active retail/restaurant frontage along the street, providing ample space for the pedestrian and outdoor dining, and, in this example on street parking where possible to protect pedestrians. This would require the building to be further setback on its lot to provide room for a parking lane.



**Figure 32** Examples of active frontages appropriate for Old Ridgefield Road / River Road and Center Street, including the store frontage and/or the arcade frontage. These can be configured in a mixed-use building with retail/restaurant uses on the street level and residential or office uses above.

Source: BFJ Planning, Derck & Edson.

Several other important dimensions to encourage a successful building-street relationship should also be specified for all frontages, whether commercial or residential, including minimum glazing requirements, minimum and maximum setbacks for the building frontage with required building articulation along the facade, and placement of parking a minimum distance away from the public right-of-way to the rear, underneath or to the side of a building. The above can be accomplished through implementation of a form-based code, which could specify street types and building frontage types allowable along each street type. Details on how a form-based code could be applied to Wilton Center are discussed in **Chapter 7**.



**Figure 33** Illustrative street cross-section across Old Ridgefield Road near the Wilton Public Library. This figure provides a concept of how this streetscape could become more active with on-street parking and an active pedestrian-oriented frontage along the street level. The frontage shown above reinterprets (and modifies) an existing storefront frontage type at this location, but could equally use an arcade frontage.

Source: BfJ Planning, 2022.

## Recommendations

- Develop regulations to encourage appropriate building-street relationships in Wilton Center that specify appropriate building frontages along different streets and pedestrian routes for future infill development. This will improve the overall pedestrian environment, walkability and retail/restaurant viability.
- More specifically, concentrate active uses at street level along Old Ridgefield Road / River Road and Center Street – specifying storefront and/or arcade frontages along the street and requiring residential and office uses to be placed on second floor or above.
- Allow for greater flexibility along other less active streets and pedestrian routes, including secondary streets such as Godfrey Place and Hubbard Road, and along future interior streets on large parcels – specifying a range of appropriate residential frontages at street level. In all instances, these frontages should provide sidewalks.
- Create incentives for future infill development to encourage the creation of small civic spaces, affordability and improvements to the public realm.

# Expand the Public Realm

This section discusses opportunities and options to expand the public realm in Wilton Center through the creation of new civic space. Civic space can publicly- or privately-owned space in the built environment that is accessible (at most times) to the general public. Given the extant ownership patterns in Wilton Center, the term “public space” would, in many cases, be better termed as “publicly accessible space.” For example, ideas are discussed below to improve the Town Green, which is Town-owned but under a long-term lease to a private third party. Technically, this would be considered “publicly accessible space.” While the ideas below suggest conceptual applications for specific locations, they should also serve as examples to inform thinking for all future development in Wilton Center. Almost all buildings should seek (be required) to contribute positively to the public realm they serve. This is not only good for Wilton Center as whole (and the efforts of this plan), but also because it is good for business. As important as it is to ensure appropriate building-street relationship (as discussed in the previous section), it is equally important to consider every opportunity to provide spaces where people can gather, relax and spend time. Civic space is a hallmark of a successful downtown.

Presently, Wilton Center lacks a significant public gathering, event space. The most prominent civic space in Wilton Center is the Town Green, and while efforts have been made to improve it programmatically, including (positively) moving the Farmer’s Market to this location, the Green remains minimally appointed. More importantly, from a design perspective, the Town Green’s edges neglect an obvious opportunity to draw pedestrians or invite them to stay. The Green’s western edge is abutted by (the back side of) the former Town Hall building. As such, it offers only blank walls onto Wilton Center’s largest civic space. The southern and northern edges are equally underutilized being defined by parking lots, including a drive-thru lane and parking area for a suburban style commercial (bank) building on the south. As such, Wilton Center’s prime opportunity to create a truly active public space is missed. We recommend that the Town investigate opportunities to renegotiate the long-term lease that constrains the opportunity to improve these conditions, or encourage and support the leaseholder to improve the space accordingly. Apart from the Town Green, there exists few other people-oriented urban open spaces in Wilton Center (whether public or privately-held). We discuss below several ideas to improve the Town Green and opportunities to create additional spaces, which could serve as gathering spaces, nodes, or stopping points in an improved pedestrian environment.

## **TOWN GREEN**

There appears to be ample opportunity to re-envision the Town Green and its surrounding buildings, and seek a higher and better use to serve residents and visitors alike. For example, the former Town Hall building could be renovated to provide active, people-oriented uses like cafés and restaurants opening up on to the Green, and providing outdoor seating along the Green’s western edge. Doing so would not only help create a more desirable Town Green, but could also provide an exceptionally successful business location for such uses given its visibility from Old Ridgefield Road. Further, a pedestrian pass-through, or passageway could be created through the building to connect the Town Green (and Old Ridgefield Road) to the small plaza (where the pizza shop is located). Beyond improving the old town hall frontage along the Green, more thought and effort should be applied to think about how to better leverage this (mostly) empty building to draw people into Wilton Center. Cafes and restaurants would help, but, given that this is a fairly large building, more program could be accommodated, including potentially an arts cinema or community theater. Throughout the planning outreach process, many stakeholders, especially young adults, lamented the closing of the cinema in the Kimco development. Finding a way to bring back such a use, possibly in a new and alternate format (e.g., cinema as art) would not only extend the hours during which residents have a reason to visit Wilton Center, but also serve as an attraction to draw people from the regional area. Such an endeavor will require some creative thinking and (most



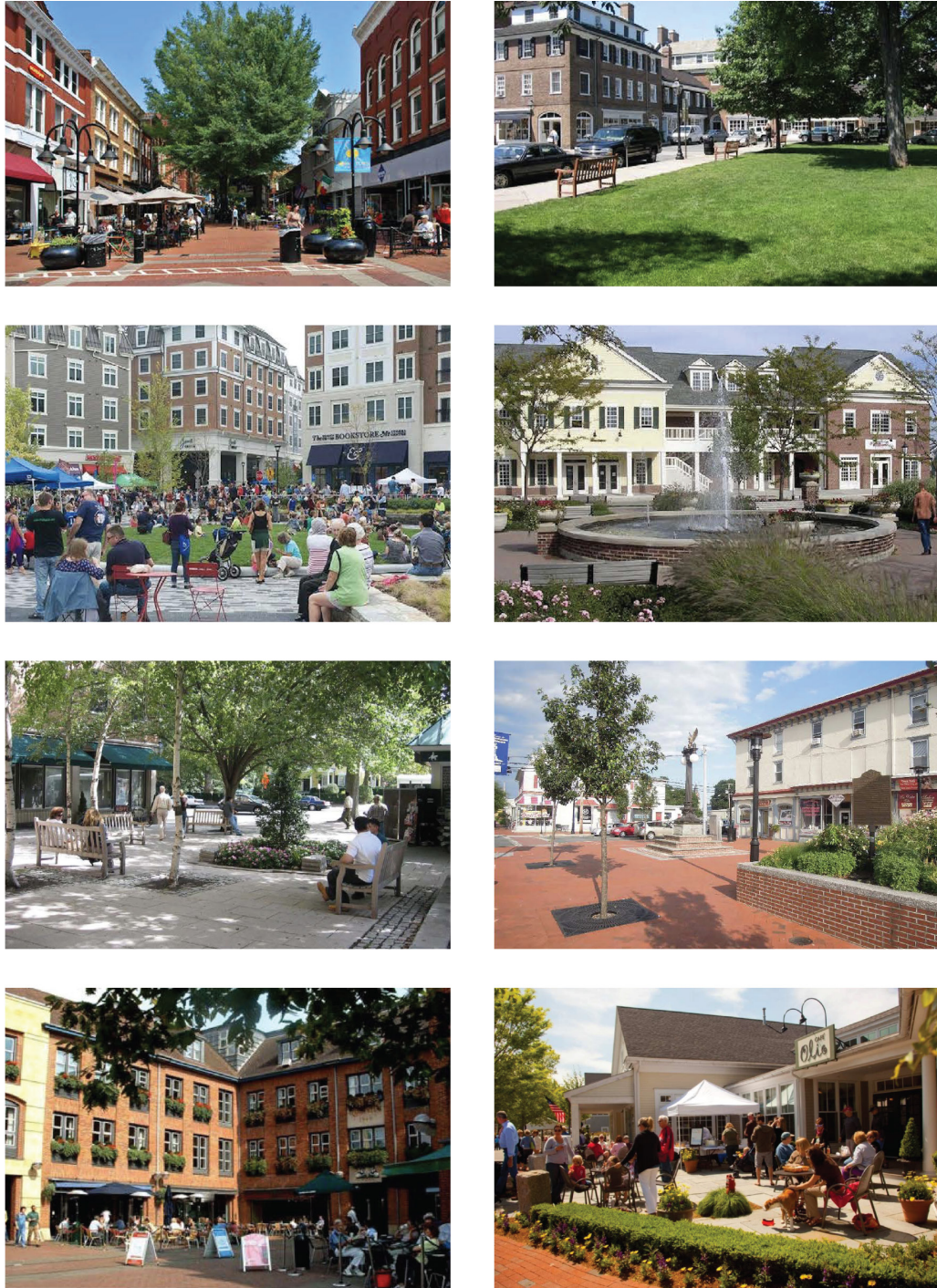


Figure 34

Examples of people-oriented active (urban) plazas and civic spaces that could inform a future re-envisioning of the existing Town Green. While these show a wide range of applications, common to all is an emphasis on people and creating a space with amenities to attract and serve people, including seating (often movable), food and shopping, shade, comfort and safety away from parking and traffic. These examples also express a high attention to detail in design through the careful use of materials, lighting, and greenery.

Source: BfJ Planning, Derck & Edson.



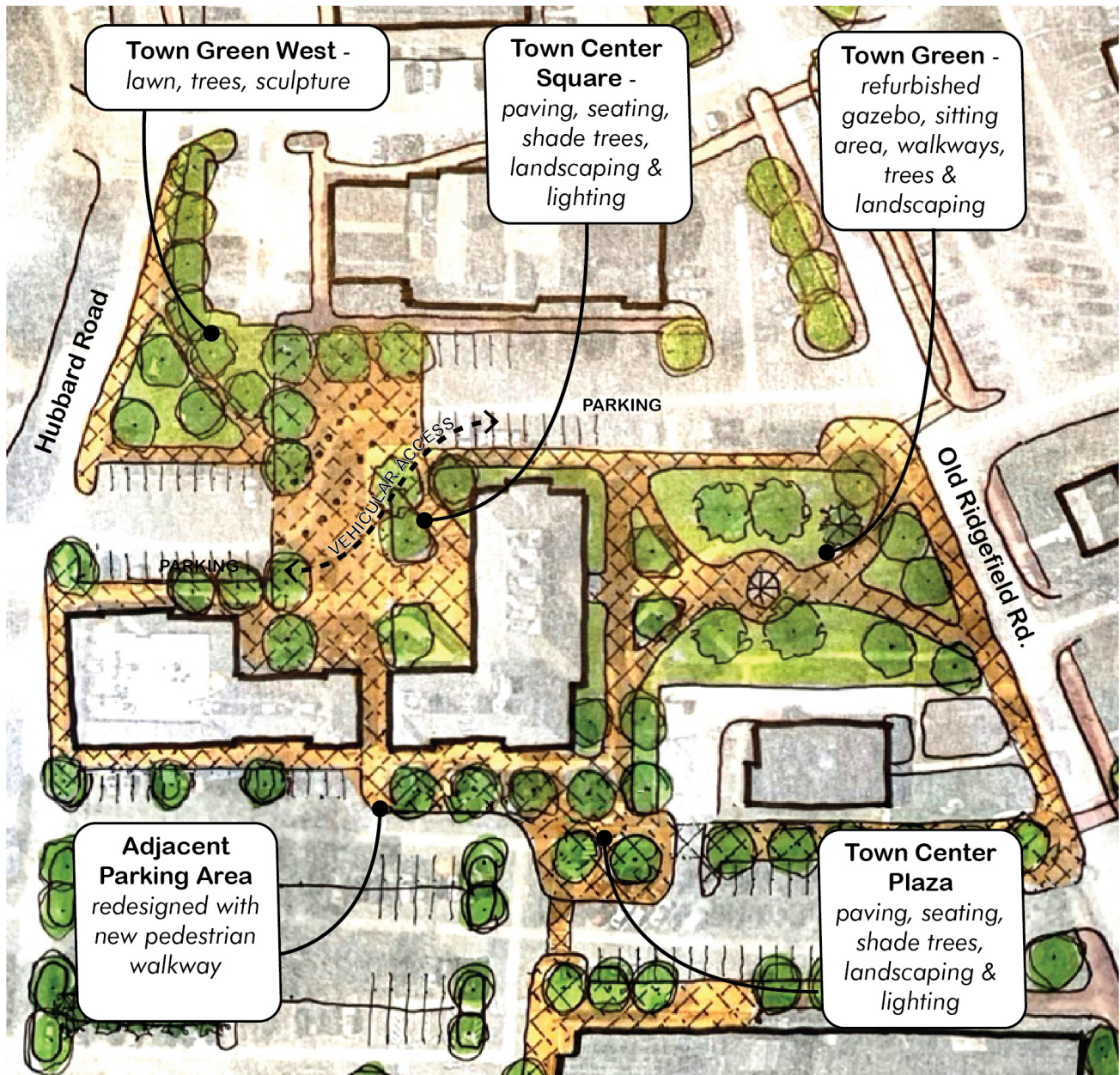
likely) public funding, at least initially. It is unlikely to expect that the private or not-for-profit sectors would go this alone; public investment at some level will be required to make this successful. There are several business models on which the Town could draw, including the Prospector Theater in Ridgefield, CT, the Madison Arts Theater in Madison, CT and the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, NY.

Longer term options for the Town Green could envision the future possible redevelopment of the bank property that abuts its southern edge. A new mixed-use building at that location should replicate the active frontages along the southern edge of the Green (and along its Old Ridgefield Road frontage), thus creating a truly active, enjoyable and centrally located gathering space in Wilton Center. **Figure 34** shows a range of examples of people-oriented active plazas and civic spaces that could inform a future re-envisioning of the Town Green. Strategically, focused attention to improve the Town Green early in the Wilton Center revitalization effort could be a catalyst for wider improvements, including redevelopment of surrounding underutilized buildings and parking lots. It could also set a new standard for design for Wilton Center, one that is decidedly people-oriented, public-facing and community-serving.

## **TOWN GREEN CENTER**

Beyond the Town Green itself, two other ideas are offered to expand the public realm in and around the Green. Both concepts work in service of re-envisioning the complex around the Town Green as a central pedestrian-oriented focus area in downtown Wilton. And both seek to expand the public realm and prioritize pedestrian activity over vehicular use, offering shade, seating, lighting and other amenities to attract pedestrian activity.

- The first concept, shown as “Town Green West” in **Figure 35**, expands the existing small plaza near the Wilton Pizza shop into the parking lots to the north, providing a safe and comfortable pedestrian destination that is centrally located and can be a focal point, meeting place, and event space for Wilton Center. The extended plaza would be physically and visually defined by the use of a common design vocabulary and materiality, including paving, lighting and furnishings. This palette of materials could be used throughout the New Town Square to set a consistent tone and help build a visual identity to the area. As shown in **Figure 35**, automobiles would be able to traverse the extended plaza so as to maintain the commonly used east-west vehicular connection between Old Ridgefield and Hubbard Road. During daily use, bollards would be used to define the path of automobile travel through the plaza, still leaving much of the plaza for pedestrian use. For festival events and the like, the bollards could be relocated to close off vehicular traffic, opening up the full plaza for pedestrian only use.
- The second concept, shown in **Figure 36**, take a different approach to the same objective by reconfiguring all the existing parking lots north of the pizza shop plaza and Town Green to create a formal east-west through street from Old Ridgefield Road to Hubbard Road. Field observations suggest that people typically use the route through the parking lots for this very reason. Formalizing this route would provide much needed on street parking, and would not remove a significant number of parking spaces. This new through street would be appointed with wider sidewalks on both sides of the street. This will better connect the pizza shop plaza and the Town Green and provide a stronger connection to an improved central pedestrian pathway that runs north-south through Wilton Center. The through street would include either parallel or angled parking (as depicted in **Figure 36**) and a bicycle lane could also be accommodated.

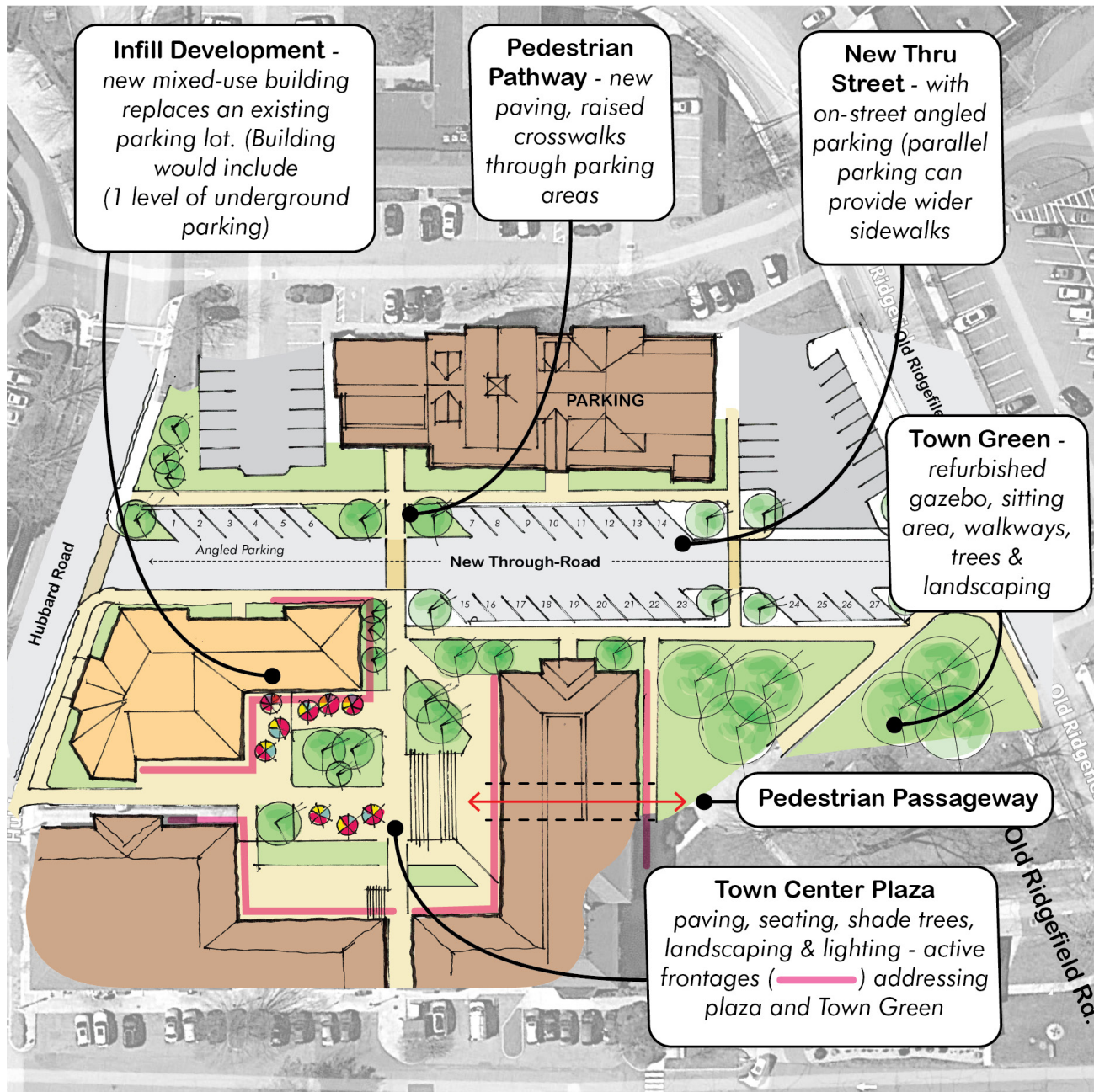


**Figure 35** New Town Center Square to provide a safe and comfortable pedestrian destination that is centrally located and can be a focal point, meeting place, and event space for Wilton Center and that is designed to prioritize pedestrian activity over vehicular use, offering shade, seating, lighting and other amenities to attract pedestrian activity.

Source: RGR Landscape, 2022.

The existing plaza in front of the pizza shop would be expanded and formalized but become a true civic space, separated from parking and traffic. Presently the plaza is not well defined, and abuts surface parking on two sides. Therefore, this second concept proposes new infill mixed-use development on the parking lot that is just north and west of the pizza shop plaza. This new development would be strategically placed to create a defined pedestrian plaza that would be surrounded by active uses (restaurants, shops, cafes, etc.) on the ground level.





**Figure 36**

An alternative concept for a New Town Center Square showing how a new thru street could provide on-street parking and improve pedestrian circulation. A new infill mixed-use building replaces an existing parking lot to form a new town center plaza. Active uses such as restaurants and shops would surround the plaza at the ground level, providing outdoor dining and places to sit and stay. The square would be appointed with shade, seating, lighting and other amenities to attract pedestrian activity.

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.

## **LIBRARY READING PLAZA**

Another opportunity to expand the public realm around a New Town Center Square would be to create a small civic space or linear green space along the Wilton Public Library's southern frontage along Godfrey Place (see **Figure 37**). Presently, this frontage is occupied by a drive-thru window and driveway, and is also used as a place to keep storage bins and other service elements. Converting this area into a usable civic space would enliven the street frontage – adding activity to the pedestrian realm along what is otherwise a very automobile-oriented streetscape. This concept envisions transforming the existing frontage into a Reading Plaza and public gathering space along the street, which could serve as an extension to the library, where patrons could sit, read and converse. It could also be used as an outdoor teaching or meeting space. More importantly, it could be designed for children. Beyond potential benefits to library patrons, converting the drive-thru would add much needed public space to downtown Wilton, expanding public activity along the street, and contribute to creating a centralized area of public activity in the center of Wilton Center. This frontage occupies a significant portion of the street along Godfrey Place, and the Reading Plaza could be designed to showcase environmentally sound design principles, including low impact development strategies such as bioswales, rain gardens, and tree pits for storm water management (see **Figure 38**).







**Figure 37** Concept for a small public plaza/green space addressing Godfrey Place. This would transform the drive-thru frontage into a Reading Plaza and public space along the street that could serve as an extension to the library, where patrons and the public could sit, read and converse. This frontage occupies a significant portion of the street frontage along Godfrey Place, and the Reading Plaza could be designed to showcase environmentally sound design principles, including low impact development strategies such as bioswales, rain gardens, and tree pits for storm water management.

Source: Google Maps, BFJ Planning, 2022.





**Figure 38** Examples of design strategies for small landscaped areas that could potentially inform the design for a Reading Plaza along Godfrey Place. These range from conceptualizing the space to be quite formal to taking a more relaxed approach, as shown in the image in the lower right, where the space is designed with children in mind. The bottom left and middle images show how incorporating LID strategies can improve sustainability by avoiding traditional lawns or landscaping, while also adding comfortable greenery to outdoor spaces.

Source: BFJ Planning, Pinterest.

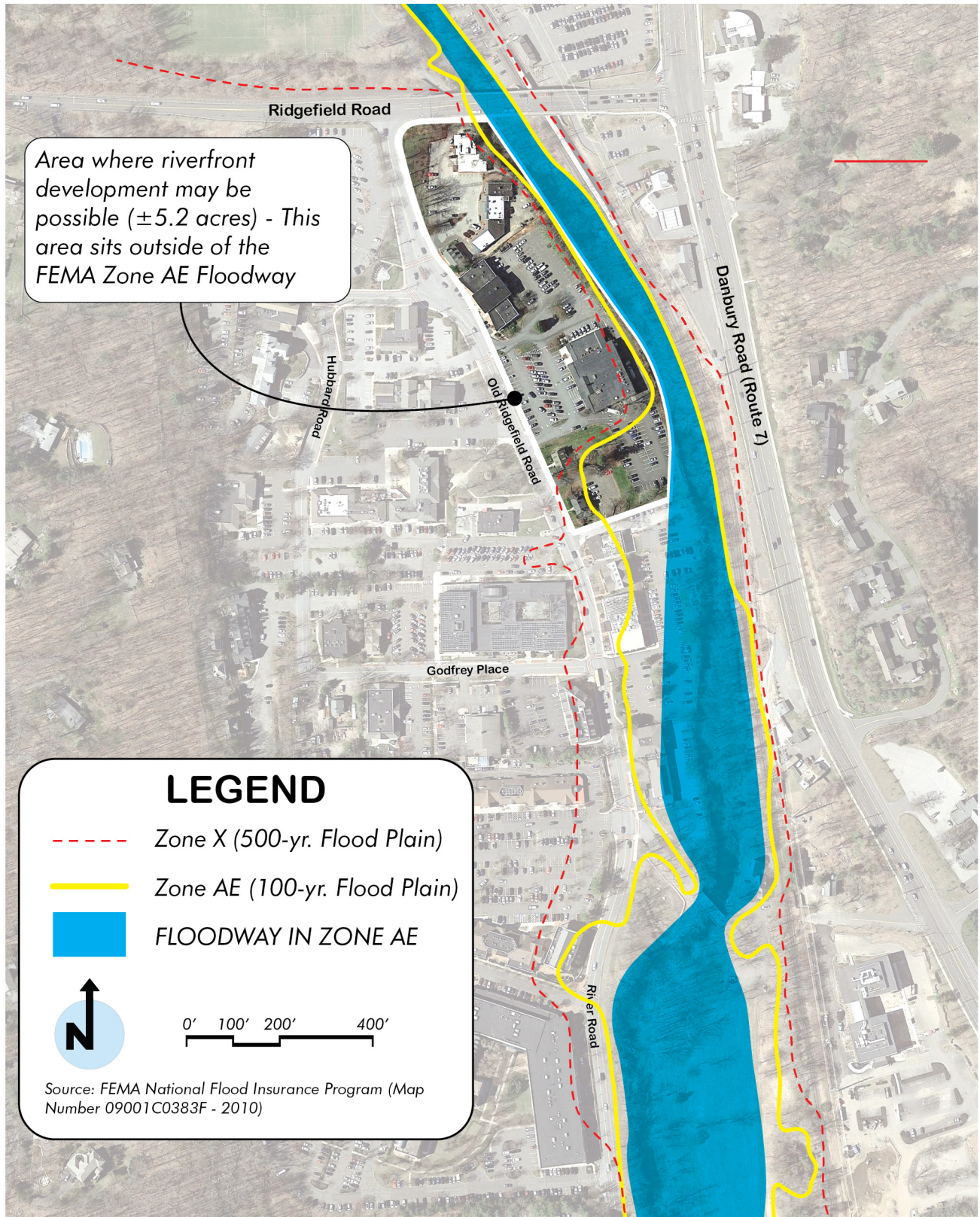
## **NORWALK RIVERFRONT**

Another opportunity to expand the public realm in Wilton Center lies along the Norwalk River. As has been mentioned throughout the planning process, this valuable scenic and natural amenity has untapped potential to attract people and provide enhancement to Wilton Center. Building on previous planning efforts, including the 2001 Wilton Center Master Plan, the 2019 POCD, and recent public outreach feedback for this current planning effort, this plan proposes creation of a riverwalk along the Norwalk River. The riverwalk would be developed as a multi-use pathway with permeable paving and stopping points with seating and lighting. As suggested in the proposed Pedestrian Circulation Plan, the path would be appointed with directional signage to connect users to points north and south and back into Wilton Center.

Opportunities to accommodate any significant amount of development along the riverfront, however, are limited due to environmental constraints, as discussed in **Chapter 3**. in support of creating an active riverwalk This would exclude all parcels south of 120 Old Ridgefield Road on the on the east side of the street. As shown in **Figure 39**, south of this point, the identified FEMA Floodway in ZONE AE encroaches far west of the river channel, and current building footprints on those properties are likely built to maximum extent possible to remain out of the floodway. With this said, there is opportunity to improve the riverside of these property. While buildings should not be placed in these locations, the current surface parking areas behind the existing buildings could be improved and redesigned to provide a narrow green apron or ribbon along the Norwalk River (and future riverwalk pathway). This green apron could be nicely landscaped and provide seating, shade, lighting and outdoor tables for patrons of restaurants along this portion of the riverfront (e.g., the taco shop and maybe more in the future if this area is improved to accommodate riverfront dining). This area is prone to flooding, and therefore creating an inviting yet flexible environment where tables and chairs can be moved to safe storage makes sense.

Limited future infill riverfront development could possibly be accommodated on parcels north of (and including) of 120 Old Ridgefield Road (see **Figure 39**). These parcels are currently occupied by a range of businesses, including the Village Market, the Barringer Building, the Red Rooster Inn and adjacent shops. The identified FEMA floodway is sufficiently narrow in this location, following the river's natural course (see also **Figures 10 - 12 in Chapter 3**). Additionally, the topography for these parcels decreases sufficiently (approximately 13 feet from Old Ridgefield Road to the river's edge) to accommodate a level of underground/podium parking. However, even in these instances, it is recommended that buildings be set back from the floodway and river's edge and be buffered by surface parking and landscaping.





**Figure 39** Area Suitable for Waterfront Development

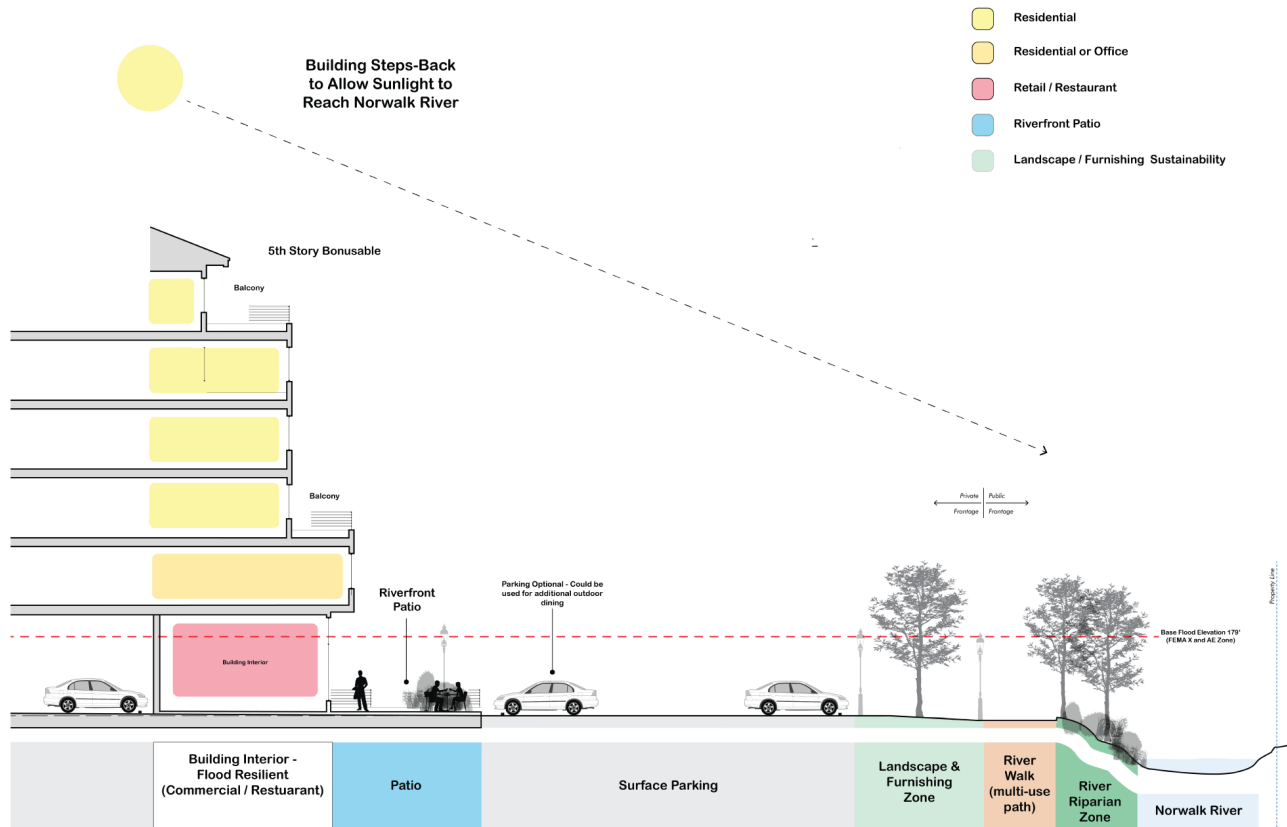
Source: FEMA National Flood Insurance Program, Google Earth, BFJ Planning, 2022.



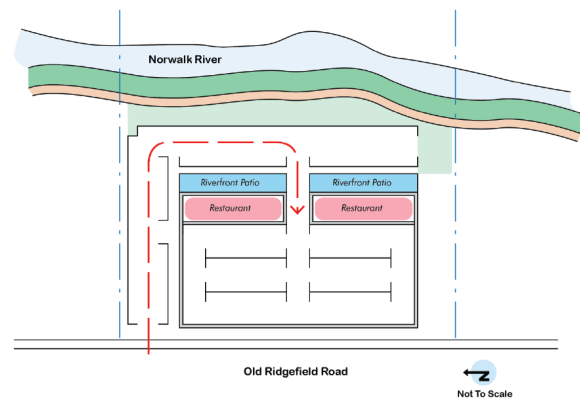
**Figure 40** provides an illustrative cross-section of how infill development could be situated in this location so as to engage the riverfront by providing outdoor dining and other amenities to create an attractive and more active frontage along the river. Key features include setting the building back from the river and well clear of the floodway, providing surface parking and landscaping as a buffer between the river and building, and taking advantage of the extant topography to accommodate structured parking below street level. This example also shows the building massing stepping back away from the river to allow sunlight to reach the riparian environment. The parking garage could be lined with commercial (i.e., restaurants, shops, etc.) along the river frontage. Parking would be accessed from the rear of the building and designed to be flood resilient and self-draining in case of a flood event. The surface parking shown would be required to support the considered residential density of four to five (bonusable) stories as illustrated in **Figure 40**.

It should be noted that the cross-section provided in **Figure 40** is conceptual. It was drawn to investigate how any building might respond to conditions specific at this location and contribute to providing an active building frontage along this portion of the riverfront. In that vein, it also seeks to balance the creation of an enjoyable people-oriented environment with issues of safety and environmental stewardship of the Norwalk River. By doing so, this approach supports a goal mentioned previously in this plan to set a flexible framework for Wilton Center's future successful revitalization, one that specifies the appropriate "rules of the game" so to speak rather than precise outcomes. That framework seeks to ensure that any future development that may occur in Wilton Center will contribute positively and productively to that aim. Many of these rules, including how buildings address the riverfront should the Town decide to allow such development, can and should be specified in the form-based code for Wilton Center as outlined in **Chapter 7**.





### Parking Access Diagram



**Figure 40**

Illustrative cross-section along the Norwalk Riverwalk. This figure shows a concept of how a riverfront residential and dining environment could be developed along a small section of the Norwalk Riverwalk (as discussed). Key features include setting the building back (and stepping back its facade away) from the river and well clear of the floodway, providing surface parking as a buffer between the river and building, and taking advantage of the extant topography to accommodate structured parking below street level. The structured parking would be accessed from the rear of the building (as shown in the Parking Access Diagram above) and designed to be flood resilient and self-draining in case of a flood event. The surface parking would be required to support considered residential density of four to five (bonusable) stories.

Source: BfJ Planning, 2022.

# Improve Signage, Wayfinding and Identity

Consistency in design vocabulary and materiality in the public realm can help strengthen sense of place and place identity. This thinking should extend to public signage and wayfinding, and the Town should consider creating a uniform signage program for all public signage, including street signs and wayfinding signage. An example of a coordinated public and informational signage program is presented in **Figure 41**. This example from Decatur, GA shows a wide range of sign types, and all may not be appropriate for Wilton Center, but this shows how a well-designed can function to not only direct people but also help communicate place identity.



**Figure 41** A coordinated public signage program can strengthen community identity and sense of place, while providing information, including wayfinding, in an efficient manner. This example shows a wide range of sign types, and all may not be appropriate for Wilton Center.

Source: City of Decatur, GA.



Consistency in design vocabulary and materiality should also extend to street furniture, including street lighting, throughout the Study Area. While some may consider this a small detail, it is an important factor for creating place identity. Presently, there is a variety of street lights placed throughout the downtown. Understandably, this likely relates to the predominance of large private development parcels, where owners have adopted different lighting styles over time. There is more consistency in the lighting place in the public right-of-way. Going forward, the Town should consider selecting one street light style specified in a consistent color and require adoption in future development applications. Replacement could occur over time in existing developments with encouragement and financial support from the Town, possibly through a publicly funded grant. Efforts to improve and benches and seating throughout the public realm in Wilton Center could be approached in a similar fashion.

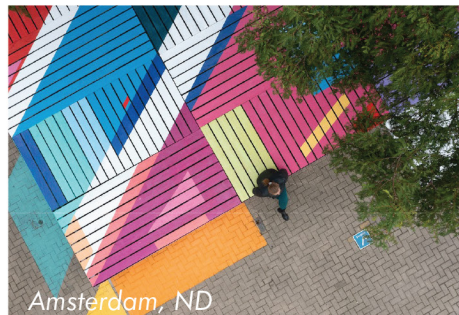
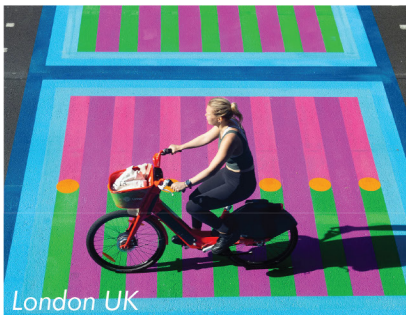
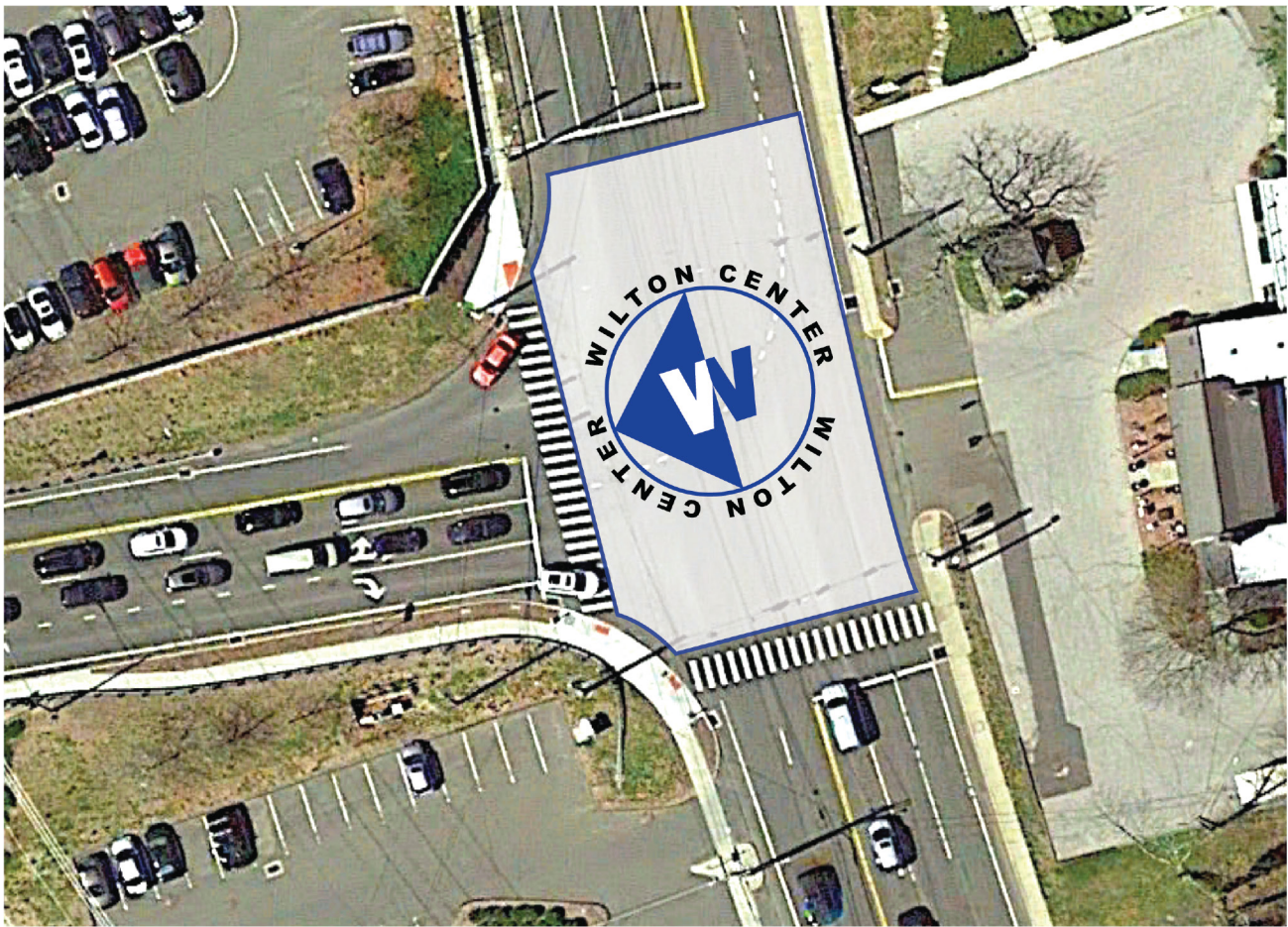
While the above will help create a more pleasant and memorable environment for the visitor, and help brand Wilton Center as an attractive place, other strategies should be employed to get the word out and market Wilton Center more broadly. A common refrain heard during the planning process was how people had lived nearby Wilton Center for quite some time but somehow never knew of its existence. This could be addressed in several ways.

### **IMPROVE SIGNAGE ALONG DANBURY ROAD**

First would be to improve signage along Danbury Road to invite those who might normally drive by that Wilton Center exists. Presently, the sign indicating Wilton Center is small and of the standard DOT-variety. As such, it blends in with the other highway signs along the corridor. A sign that is not only larger but also well-designed, coordinated with the uniform signage program discussed above would be more effective. Improved signage should also be part of the effort to create effective gateways to Wilton Center. Danbury Road is state owned, and there may be restrictions regarding the size of a sign that can be mounted on existing traffic signal posts. Therefore, a larger sign would be better placed and more effective as a standalone installation just off the road on public property. There are several Town and state-owned parcels within the corridor right-of-way that might provide a suitable location.

Another possibility is to paint the roadway surface at the intersections of Danbury Road at Wolfpit Road and Ridgefield Road. Road painting or “art in the right-of-way” has become more commonplace these days, and a well-designed road mural sign would serve not only as a directional sign to Wilton Center, but also a reference point or milepost along Route 7 that every driver would remember. **Figure 42** shows an illustrative example of this idea for the intersection of Danbury and Ridgefield Roads, and a few examples from other locations. The actual design for Wilton Center could be coordinated with a larger uniform signage effort discussed above. This would help support the branding of Wilton Center and call attention to its location in the larger region.





**Figure 42**

Illustrative idea to “paint the highway” at the intersection of Danbury Road and Ridgefield Road. This strategy could also be used to mark a gateway at the southern end of the Study Area at the intersection at Wolfpit Road. This signage approach would serve not only to direct drivers to Wilton Center, but would also become a reference point along Route 7, placing Wilton Center firmly in the mind of anyone who travels Danbury Road. The design shown here is for illustrative purposes only; the actual design could be coordinated with a larger uniform signage program for public signage and wayfinding. The images on the show more colorful examples of road painting from other locations.

Source: Google Maps, BFJ Planning, 2022.



## CREATE A VARIED SKYLINE IN WILTON CENTER

A second strategy to improve Wilton Center's visibility would be to allow for taller architectural elements to occur in few key locations in Wilton Center's built fabric. Referred to as "significant corners" in form-based zoning codes, these are defined as a special location where a distinguishing architectural element is permitted. At these locations, greater height would be permitted for the architectural element, such as a taller massing element, above what would be generally permitted in the zoning. These function visually as landmarks that can be seen from a greater distance, not unlike how church steeples function in small towns across New England. Specifying such features in a form-based code for Wilton Center could aid in creating a visual identity from Danbury Road, while also allowing for some variation where buildings meet the sky. This is a key characteristic of older, historical built environments where a certain rhythm is observable due to the variation of building heights that expose the pedestrian to varying degrees of sky.

## CREATE DISCOVERY MAP

A third idea to better market Wilton Center is to create a guide and wayfinding map calling out the special features and attractions to potential visitors. Guide maps, also called "discovery maps," can be effective marketing tools, calling out retail and restaurant offerings, where to park (and walk) and points of interest. They are often drawn in a loose and engaging style with a mild sense of fun and humor, and are supported by local advertising. Good examples include those for Cape Cod, MA, Nantucket, MA and Newport, RI. **Figure 43** shows examples from Aspen, CO and Cape May, NJ. Maps could be made available in hardcopy in Town Hall and offices, local businesses and libraries and other public places around the region, and available for download on the Town's website. A digital map is relatively easy to update as new points of interest and shops open in Wilton Center.



**Figure 43**

Guide maps, also called "discovery maps," can be effective marketing tools, calling out retail and restaurant offerings, where to park (and walk) and points of interest. A Wilton Center map could be made available in convenient locations and available for download on the Town's website. The examples above are from Aspen, CO (left) and Cape May, NJ (right).

# Summary: Issues and Opportunities

This section presents a summary the issues and opportunities discussed in above, and lists others raised during the Wilton Master Plan planning process. The 2019 POCD identified the need for Wilton Center and Danbury Road to better connect to create the Greater Wilton Center. With this in mind, **Figure 44** provides a key map of the issues and opportunities relating to the Study Area's public realm gathered as part of planning process. The public realm includes all publicly accessible spaces such as community facilities, parks and open spaces, roadways, sidewalks, trails, etc. Following **Figure 44** are zoomed in versions of the figure to highlight the north half of the Study Area in **Figure 45** and the south half of the Study Area in **Figure 46** in more detail. Below is a summary of the issues and opportunities identified in these figures.

## Improved Identity

### 1. Branding and Marketing

Wilton Center proper and Danbury Road complement each other as they provide goods and services that the other does not have. Together as the Great Wilton Center, there is an opportunity to further emphasis that these two areas are in fact one through the creation of a branding scheme. The Town of Wilton could hire a branding and marketing firm to carefully design the Greater Wilton Center branding and signage, which includes the gateway and directional signage. Some public outreach feedback mentioned that all signage for civic buildings, open spaces, public resources, and streets need to be upgraded with consistent color, typographic font, and material palettes. The Town could begin upgrading the signage starting in the Greater Wilton Center and working its way out to the rest of the Town.

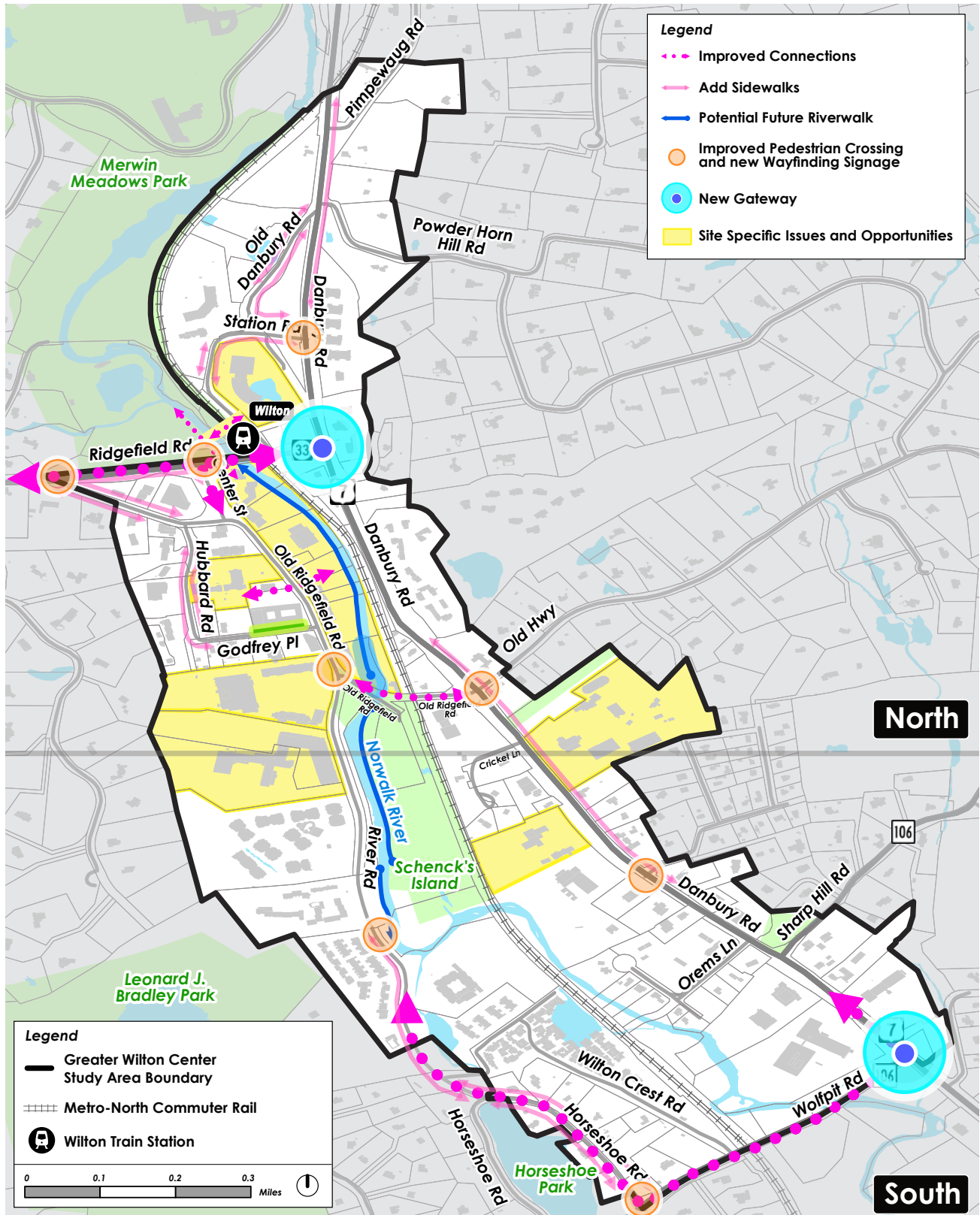
### 2. Street Names

The main street running north-south through Wilton Center proper between Ridgefield Road and Wolf-pit Road has four different names, Center Street, Old Ridgefield Road, River Road, and Horseshoe Road. This varying street name change has been noted to be confusing. The Town could consider renaming the entire street with one name.

## Improved Pedestrian Safety and Walking Environment

### 1. Streetscape

The Greater Wilton Center could use improvements to the walking environment to entice residents and visitors to visit by foot, bicycle, and other alternative modes of transportation. Additional trees, native plantings, and resting places could be incorporated along the roadways, if possible. The Town should consider creating standards for medians, planting buffers, and sidewalks in the Study Area. These elements would assist with making Wilton Center proper and Danbury Road feel as one cohesive place. Some public outreach participants indicated the desire to see a true Main Street through Wilton Center proper.

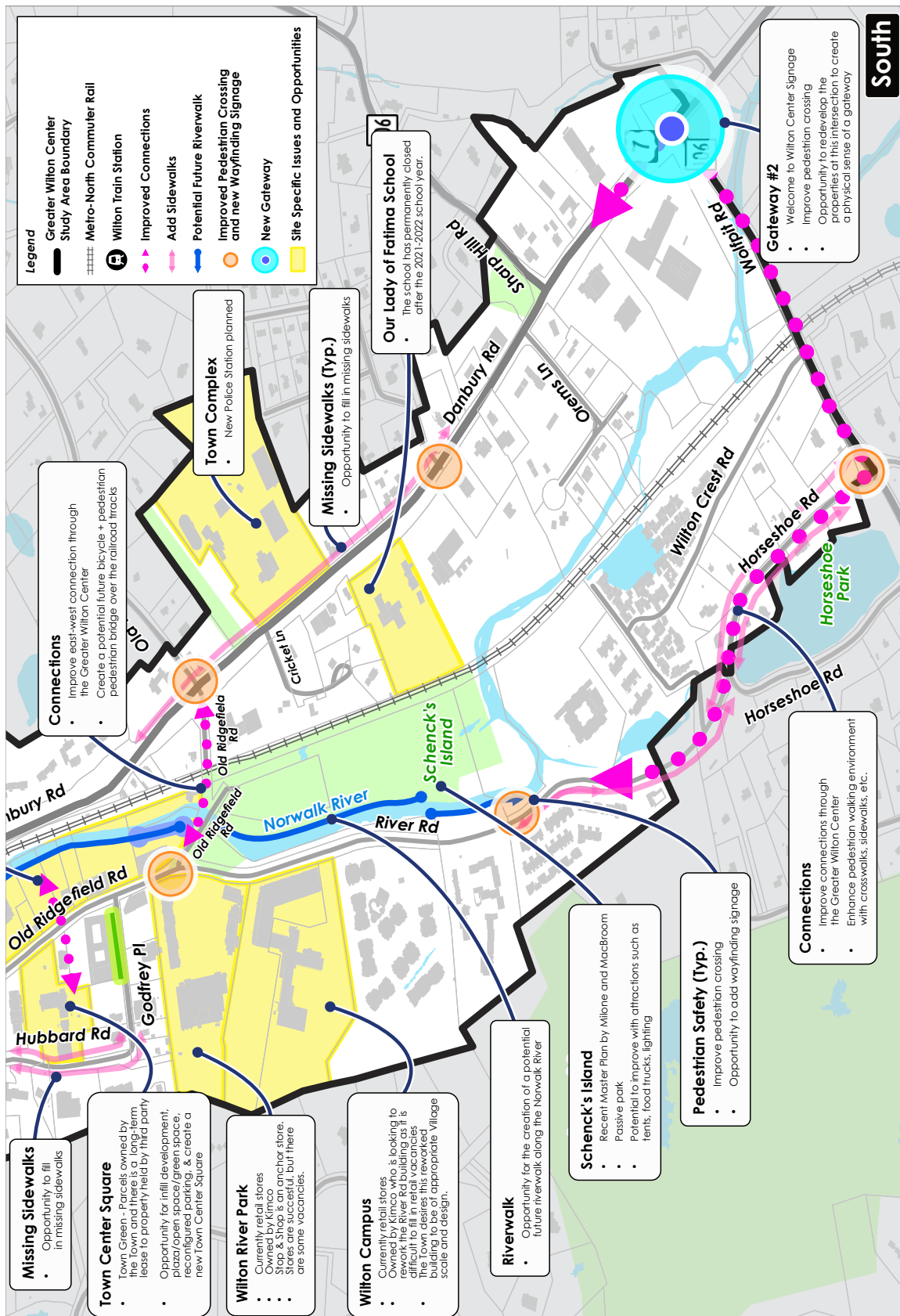


**Figure 44** Issues and Opportunities (Key Map)

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, NRV, Google, Town of Wilton, BFI Planning, 2022.







**Figure 46** Issues and Opportunities (South)

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFI Planning, 2022.

## 2. Pedestrian Crossings

One of the key priorities is to increase pedestrian safety within the Study Area. Pedestrian crossings could be improved with pedestrian signals. Missing pedestrian crossing should be installed at certain locations, including but not limited to:

- Ridgefield Road and Old Ridgefield Road
- Ridgefield Road and Center Street
- Old Ridgefield Road (east-west segment) and Old Ridgefield Road
- Glen Ridge and River Road
- Wolfpit Road and Horseshoe Road
- Wolfpit Road and Danbury Road
- Deerfield Road and Danbury Road
- Old Ridgefield Road (east-west segment) and Danbury Road
- Ridgefield Road and Danbury Road
- Station Road and Danbury Road
- River Road and Horseshoe Road (just outside of the Study Area boundary)

### Improved Riverfront Access

The Norwalk River is a special environmental feature that runs north to south through the middle of the Study Area. Currently, the Norwalk River Valley Trail (NRVT) passes through the Study Area starting at Ridgefield Road and Center Street running south along the roadway of Old Ridgefield Road/River Road/Horseshoe Road and then running east along the roadway of Wolfpit Road. The NRVT continues north of the Study Area through Merwin Meadows Park and south of the Study Area through wooded areas along scenic trails. Previous planning efforts, including the 2001 Wilton Center Master Plan, the 2019 POCD, and recent public outreach feedback for the current Greater Wilton Center Master Plan indicates the desire to see a riverwalk run along the Norwalk River.

**Figure 44** illustrates a conceptual route for a potential future riverwalk along Norwalk River within the Study Area. It is important to note that the portion of the river north of Old Ridgefield Road (east-west road) runs along the backyard of private properties. The Town of Wilton can consider having conversations with property owners about the potential of creating a future riverwalk. As mentioned earlier, the Town has an easement called the Town of Wilton River Easement, which is currently located along one property at 180-190 Old Ridgefield Road. One recommendation is that the Town could consider extending the river easement north to Ridgefield Road. The Town could also speak with the property owners about this recommendation. If the potential future riverwalk comes to fruition, the riverwalk could become an additional route as part of the larger NRVT. The related Town of Wilton Commissions, Committees, and Departments could coordinate efforts to ensure that the potential future riverwalk addresses the Norwalk River in a creative, environmentally sensitive, and sustainable way. Some public outreach participants envision retail shops and restaurants fronting the river with outdoor dining opportunities.

There is a great need to improve pedestrian connections between Wilton Center proper and Danbury Road to create one unified Greater Wilton Center. Several opportunities to improve east-west and north-south pedestrian connections include:

## 1. Gateways

The key intersections at Danbury Road/Ridgefield Road and Danbury Road/Wolfpit Road serve as two bookends framing the bounds of the Greater Wilton Center along Danbury Road. There is an opportunity to transform these two intersections into gateways that portray to residents and visitors that they have arrived to a special place, the Greater Wilton Center. Examples of potential gateways that could work include different pavement treatment at the intersection, gateway signage following a branding scheme made for Greater Wilton Center, or the redevelopment of the corner properties with new architecturally pleasing buildings that properly address the site/corner/public realm/street. Public outreach participants noted that Wilton Center proper is hidden behind Danbury Road and mentioned to need for an iconic and welcoming entry. The gateway signage at these intersections could include a simple arrow directing one to Wilton Center proper. In addition, these intersections could use improved pedestrian crossings and new crosswalks where it is missing.

## 2. Sidewalks

The Greater Wilton Center would benefit from becoming more walkable and bikeable for families and students. Most of the Study Area has sidewalks on both sides or on one side of the roadway. Locations that are missing sidewalks are depicted as light pink arrows on **Figure 44**. These missing sidewalks should be filled in to make continuous walking paths for pedestrians to clearly and safely travel around the Study Area. Extending beyond the Study Area, public outreach participants indicated the importance of improving the bicycle and pedestrian connection from the nearby areas into the Greater Wilton Center (i.e., Miller-Driscoll School to Greater Wilton Center).

Below are specific locations where sidewalks need to be improved in Wilton Center proper and Danbury Road.

### **Wilton Center Proper**

Generally, Wilton Center proper has continuous north-south sidewalks starting at the intersection of Ridgefield Road and Center Street then moving south along Old Ridgefield Road, which turns into River Road and then Horseshoe Road. Sidewalks are needed when travelling south when River Road turns into Horseshoe Road. It is important to note that Horseshoe Road is a narrow and bucolic road with private residences on both sides of the street, which limits the opportunity for a continuous sidewalk at this location. Additional sidewalks are needed along Ridgefield Road, Old Ridgefield Road between Ridgefield Road and Hubbard Road, and Center Street to create an improved pedestrian environment entering Wilton Center proper from Danbury Road. Most of Hubbard Road and its connection to Godfrey Place needs sidewalks on both sides of the street. Existing pathways in Wilton Center proper are located in the various parking lots on the west side of Old Ridgefield Road. For more specific details about pedestrian connectivity in Wilton Center proper, see the previous section called Pedestrian Circulation Overview, Analysis, and Proposed Wilton Center Proper Circulation Plan.

### **Danbury Road**

Along Danbury Road, the corridor has continuous north-south sidewalks running along the west side but the east side has gaps in the sidewalk that should be filled. Cross streets along Danbury Road lead to residential neighborhoods that do not currently have sidewalks as the streets are narrow. Sidewalks are needed along both sides of Old Danbury Road and Station Road.



### 3. Elevated Bridge Over Railroad Tracks

Between Ridgefield Road and Wolfpit Road, there is no intermediate east-west access connecting Wilton Center proper and Danbury Road. The east-west segment of Old Ridgefield Road is dissected into two segments by the railroad tracks that are at the same elevation as the street. There is an opportunity to create an elevated bicycle and pedestrian bridge over the railroad tracks to connect Wilton Center proper and Danbury Road. Other communities have also dealt with a similar connectivity challenge and have successfully addressed the challenge with the creation of a bridge over railroad tracks. The Willimantic Footbridge in Windham, Connecticut (see **Figure 47**), shows the possibility that a similar bridge could be constructed in the Town of Wilton, with modifications to the design, size, and style to properly address the site.



**Figure 47** Photographs of the Willimantic Footbridge in Windham, CT, connecting downtown Willimantic to the residential area south of the river. While built in 1906 and typifying bridge construction of its time, the scale of this bridge would be appropriate for a future connection across the railroad tracks at Old Ridgefield Road.

Source: [bridgehunter.com](http://bridgehunter.com)

### 4. Future Pedestrian Bridge at Train Station

The Town of Wilton has begun construction on the pedestrian bridge that would improve the connection from the train station area to Merwin Meadows Park and Wilton Center proper. The pedestrian easement, located to the east of Center Street, would provide an access to the pedestrian off Center Street. The future pedestrian bridge could support potential transit-oriented development (TOD) at the train station area.

### 5. Merwin Meadows Park

Just north of the Greater Wilton Center Study Area is the community park, Merwin Meadows Park. Residents can travel to and from the park to Wilton Center along the NRV that passes under Ridgefield Road/Route 33 underpass into the parking lot of the Old Post Office Square, which includes Connecticut Coffee & Grill and Red Rooster Pub to name a few. The Pedestrian Circulation Plan proposes providing a new accessible walkway across this parking lot, from the new entry point near the



new train station bridge under the Ridgefield Road leading to the Center Street/Old Ridgefield Road intersection. Public outreach participants flagged this underpass as an uninviting connection into Wilton Center. The experience of travelling through the underpass could be enhanced with improved permeable floor surface, lighting features, signage for the NRV, and signage directing to the park and Wilton Center. Examples of a range of options to improve the environment and appearance of the Ridgefield Road underpass are shown in Figure 48.



**Figure 48**

These examples from (A) Calgary, Canada, (B) Minnesota and (C) U.K. illustrate the wide range of design options to improve the environment and appearance of the Ridgefield Road underpass (shown in the lower righthand photo). The experience of travelling through the underpass could be enhanced with improved permeable floor surface, lighting features, seating, signage for the NRV, and signage directing to the park and Wilton Center.

Source: MNDOT, City of Calgary, CA, Darca Awards Competition.

## 6. Town Center Square

At the heart of Wilton Center proper, the Town Center Square is home to the Town Green where the Wilton Farmers' Market is held on Wednesdays from June to October. Just south of the Town Center Square is the Wilton Library. These key community resources, surrounding businesses, and activities/events draw residents and visitors into Wilton Center proper. If the potential future riverwalk comes to fruition, there is an opportunity to connect the Town Center Square to the riverwalk by creating an east-west walking path. As the potential walkway would need to run along a few private properties, the Town of Wilton could discuss the idea of a walkway with the property owners. In addition, should a pedestrian crossing over the railroad tracks at Old Ridgefield Road be provided, this would formally connect the Danbury Road corridor to Wilton Center.

## Improvements to Specific Areas/Sites

### 1. Train Station Area

Located within the Study Area, the Wilton train station is one of the stops along the Danbury Branch of the Metro-North Railroad. Immediately adjacent to the train station, there is potential to create transit-oriented development (TOD). It is important to note that currently the train service does not run as frequently as nearby communities, but the Town of Wilton has expressed interest in improving the train service to run more frequently so residents can better use their local station.

### 2. Town Center Square

The parcels occupying the Town Green and immediately surrounding businesses are owned by the Town of Wilton. There is a long-term lease to the property that is held by a third party. Public outreach participants stressed the importance of revitalizing this area and expanding the Town Green. To fulfill this community vision, there is potential for infill development, plaza/open space/green space, and reconfigured parking to create a new Town Center Square. Public outreach participants mentioned the opportunity to increase events and programming held in the Town Green.

### 3. Wilton Library

The Town of Wilton's library is a beloved community library situated in Wilton Center proper at the intersection of Old Ridgefield Road and Godfrey Place. Along the Godfrey Place, the library has an entrance and a drive-thru lane for patrons. A conceptual idea that could be considered is transforming this drive-thru area into a Reading Plaza, a small public plaza addressing Godfrey Place. The Reading Plaza could serve as an outdoor extension to the library where patrons could sit, read a book while drinking a cup of coffee or tea from the local coffee shops, or converse with other patrons. This plaza could also serve as a space to hold an activity, class, or event. Beyond potential benefits to library patrons, converting the drive-thru would add much needed public space to downtown Wilton. This frontage occupies a significant portion of the street frontage along Godfrey Place and the Reading Plaza could be designed to showcase environmentally sound design principles, including low impact development strategies such as bioswales, rain gardens, and tree pits for storm water management. The Town could have a conversation with the Wilton Library about the conceptual idea.

### 4. Wilton River Park

Located at 5 River Road, the Wilton River Park has many retail stores, including restaurants, Stop & Shop, and offices. The businesses at this location are successful, but there are some vacancies.

### 5. Wilton Campus

Located directly south of Wilton River Park is Wilton Campus (15/21 River Road). Both properties are owned by KIMCO Realty. Wilton Campus also has many retail stores. KIMCO Realty is looking to rework the River Road building as it is difficult to fill in retail vacancies. The Town of Wilton desires this reworked building to be of appropriate Village scale and design.

### 6. Schenck's Island

As mentioned in **Chapter 2**, a master plan was recently completed for Schenck's Island to improve parking and include some more active recreation elements. The park is nestled between the Norwalk River and the railroad tracks. Along Old Ridgefield Road (east-west segment), the park access for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles needs to be improved. Public outreach participants indicated the need to improve the utilization of the open spaces, activate the park with attractions (i.e., food trucks, lighting, swing set, and lighting), and create various useable spaces such as an open lawn space.

# 7

# Implementation

## Proposed Zoning and Implementation Strategies

This section discusses a range of recommendations to implement ideas presented in the plan. Primary among these is a Conceptual Planning and Zoning Strategy. As discussed below in greater detail, this proposes a regulatory framework for implementation of the Greater Wilton Center Area Master Plan, including a hybrid form-based code for Wilton Center Proper and three overlay zoning districts for the Danbury Road corridor. The overlay zoning districts are comprised of the OL-1 Danbury Road East Overlay District (OL-1 East), OL-2 Danbury Road West Overlay District (OL-2 West), and OL-3 Danbury Road Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Overlay District (OL-3 TOD). All of the following pages on zoning assume that the affordable housing should be in compliance with the Connecticut General Statutes 8-30g regulation.

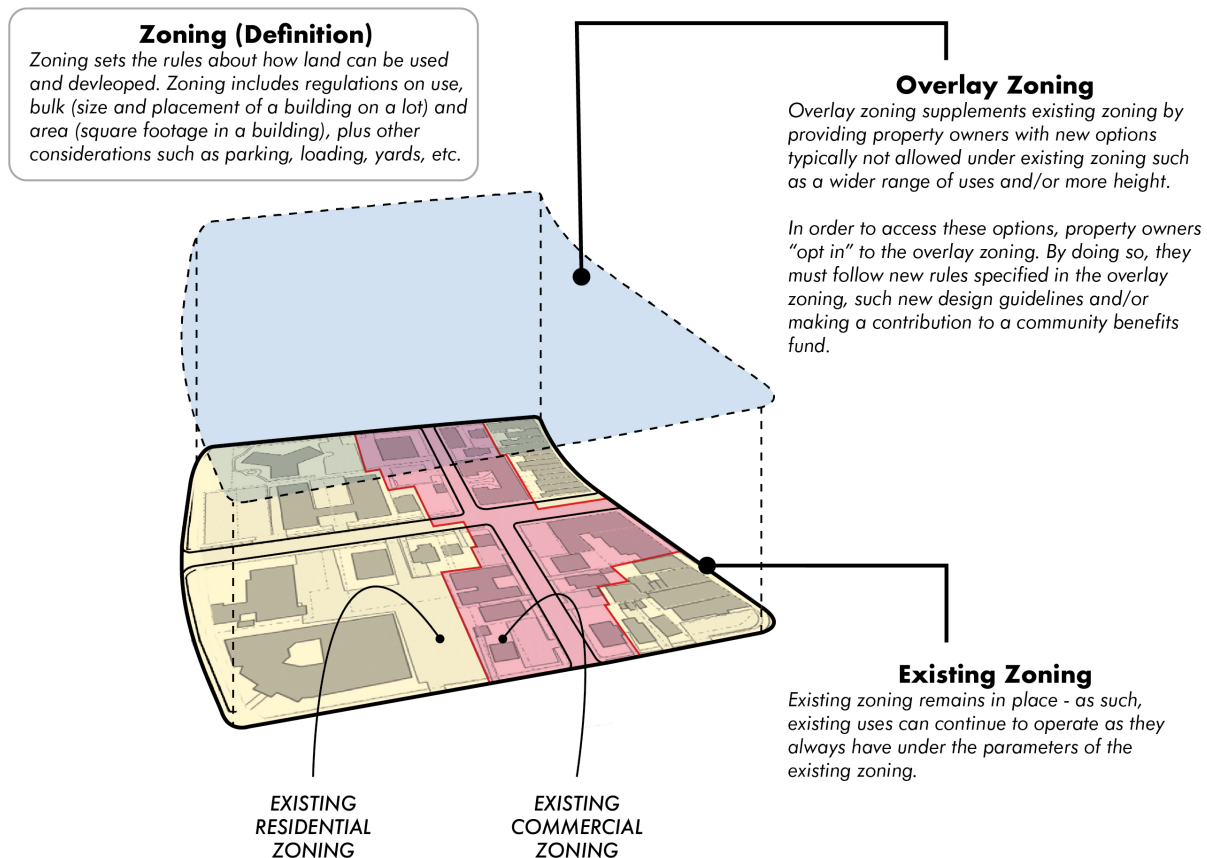


## Overlay Zoning

As a means of introductory explanation, overlay zoning supplements existing zoning by providing property owners with new options typically not allowed under existing zoning. These might include a wider range of uses and/or more height. **Figure 49** explains the basic parameters of overlay zoning. In order to access these options, property owners “opt in” to the overlay zoning. By doing so, they must follow new rules specified in the overlay zoning, such as new design guidelines and/or making a contribution to the public realm, pedestrian circulation or parking accommodations and the like. Precise parameters for what are the options and requirements are based on input from the planning process and are designed to achieve community objectives. For Wilton Center, first among these would be to ensure that future development will be contextual, and meet the guiding principles of this plan and its recommendations.

As discussed in the next section, the Conceptual Planning and Zoning Strategy recommends overlay zoning for the northern and southern portions of the Study Area along the Danbury Road corridor. Precise parameters for these two areas have not been determined and will be developed in a later stage of the work, when the zoning is formally written. The Conceptual Strategy laid out below, however, provides objectives for each area and makes recommendations to accomplish intended outcomes.

# What is Overlay Zoning?



**Figure 49** Explanation of Overlay Zoning

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.

The Conceptual Planning and Zoning Strategy recommends the use of a form-based code for Wilton Center Proper to regulate future infill development. Conventional Zoning traditionally focuses on separation of different uses and building types, and control of development through simple dimensional values (set-back, building height, lot size, and so on). Design guidelines are often used to supplement conventional zoning but are typically advisory. Form-based zoning differs from conventional zoning in that it regulates the form of buildings, especially the relationship of building to street and how a building supports the public realm. Some versions of form-based codes reach far beyond these basic design parameters as discussed below. **Figure 50** explains some of the features of a form-based code in comparison with conventional zoning.

A form-based code in its purest form focuses solely on building form and design and tends not to regulate building use. Further, pure form-based codes conform to the “Transect,” a framework developed to divide and regulate the spectrum of land, from natural and rural environs to urban centers, into zones of increasing density. Each zone is then provided with a range of detailed design rules and regulations. These can govern not only building form but very often a wide range of aspects relating building design from façade details to the spacing of pickets on a fence. This level of detail is drawn ostensibly to ensure that every building comes out “right” from design perspective. What is “right” is usually determined by mapping and replicating existing desirable buildings and patterns in the community. As such, pure form-based codes often become overly detailed, difficult to apply and onerous to manage, despite the fact that form-based codes are presented graphically. In addition, because what is “right” is codified in the code, little room remains for design innovative or architectural expression to emerge. A final concern with form-based codes is that upon adoption, any building that does not conform to the codified form in the code becomes non-conforming, which can have far-reaching implications for property owners. As such, pure form-based codes are likely more appropriate for new communities, where all aspects of development can be controlled, and in areas that have a pre-existing dominant urban pattern and preferred architectural style already in place, such as older downtowns. But, even then, not regulating land use has been found to be exceptionally problematic. Because form-based codes are especially useful in certain situations, local governments are increasingly creating hybrid codes that blend some form-based aspects along with those from conventional zoning.

For these reasons, the Conceptual Planning and Zoning Strategy below recommends a “hybrid light” form-based code as an overlay for Wilton Center. The “hybrid” terminology means that some of the useful aspects of traditional zoning would be incorporated to a form-based code developed for Wilton Center, such as use, building and site coverage, parking, etc. These along with the more useful aspects of the form-based approach, such as specifying street types, allowable frontage types, and a building’s form and disposition on a site, would constitute an effective hybrid form-based code for Wilton Center. The word “light” relates to a recommendation that the code should focus on the important parameters of building design and form, such as the relationship of building to street (e.g., frontage types), parking location, building height and setback, etc. However, precise architectural details and building design regulations should not be a part of the code. These would remain open to interpretation by land owners, developers and their design professionals, and evaluated and governed by the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Village District Design Advisory Committee during the application review process.

# What is a Form-Based Code?

**Conventional Zoning** traditionally focuses on separation of different uses and building types, and control of development through simple dimensional values (setback, building height, lot size, and so on). Design guidelines may be used to supplement conventional zoning but are typically advisory.

Simple setback minimum dimensions often create frontages with inconsistent building and parking placement over time. This results in a less pedestrian-friendly, walkable environment.

Building uses are defined districtwide, often separating uses and making it difficult to construct flexible mixed-use development.

Simple setbacks are often designed around the needs of the automobile, not the pedestrian. And parking is permitted anywhere, included along the pedestrian right-of-way.

**Form-Based Code (FBC)** is a relatively new method of managing development to achieve a specific urban form and mix of uses as preferred by a given community and decided through community outreach and input. Unlike conventional zoning, a Form-Based Code focuses not only on use but also on the physical form of development and the relationship between public and private spaces (streets, blocks, parks and buildings). Development outcomes under a form-based code is more predictable than with conventional zoning.

FBCs allow for a wider range of uses in buildings based on community needs, street type, etc.

Parking is placed to the rear or sides of buildings to maintain a stronger pedestrian environment.

Precise rules for street frontages are informed by existing positive historical patterns in a neighborhood and through community input.

FBCs use both a minimum and a maximum build-to line to ensure buildings address the street properly.

Emphasis is on the building-street relationship, including appropriate pedestrian-oriented setbacks and building form. Frontages vary by street not district, so a more finely detailed community response is possible. The goal of FBC is to ensure buildings contribute positively to the public realm?

**Figure 50** Explanation of Conventional Zoning versus Form-Based Code

Source: BFJ Planning, 2022.

Applying a hybrid form-based code for Wilton Center as an overlay accomplishes two important objectives.

- First, it would allow existing uses to remain conforming under existing zoning, holding harmless existing property owners.
- Second it would allow the Town to set a range of incentives and conditions if a property owner “opts in” to the form-based code overlay.

For example, residential uses are presently not permitted in Wilton Center, and density is fairly low. The new overlay would allow residential uses as-of-right, and permit higher density: four stories with an option for a fifth, if stepped back provided other conditions are met. These conditions should support the larger objectives of the Master Plan, and could include, for example, contributions of well-designed publicly-accessible open space, pedestrian-friendly frontages, on-street and/or shared off-street parking, affordable housing and the like. As mentioned above, precise parameters have not been determined and will be developed in the next stage of work, when the zoning is formally written.

Crafting the form-based code for Wilton Center as a “code light,” accomplishes several other important objectives.

- First, it ensures that the code focuses on the most important aspects of development, including building form, disposition on site and building-to-street relationship, and amplifies the Town’s ability to ensure that any future development proposal gets these right the first time, before a formal application is submitted for review.
- Second, a wider range of architectural expression would be accommodated because the code would be more flexible and not be overly proscriptive. By example, the code should focus on the amount of fenestration required along an active street frontage rather than the types, proportions and styling of those windows. Such details would be the purview of the Planning & Zoning Commission and the Village District Design Advisory Committee, who would evaluate design details based on the potential merits they offer.
- Finally, focusing on the broader parameters of design in a “code light” would provide significantly greater predictability for developers and streamline the approvals process. The form-based code would serve to inform developers proposing new infill development of the basic parameters that make for a good building in Wilton Center, reducing the need for multiple attempts and presentations before the Planning & Zoning Commission to develop something acceptable.

In short, big ideas, such as how a building addresses a particular street, the type of building frontage utilized along a streetscape, and where parking should be placed on any parcel would be handled by the code, getting these most important parameters right the first time, while freeing up opportunity for architectural innovation and variety (simplicity and clarity) and detailed design review to occur as part of the application process.



# Conceptual Planning & Development Strategy

The proposed conceptual planning and development strategy for the Greater Wilton Center Area divides the Study Area into five (5) distinct planning/zoning subareas, each with objectives that support goals outlined in the POCD and those developed through the Greater Wilton Center Area Master Plan process. These also conform to the prevailing land use and extant zoning (regulatory) patterns found in each subarea. The five subareas are defined below (see **Figure 51**) and described in detail in the following sections:

- 1. Wilton Center Proper Subarea** – Wilton’s traditional downtown: the area contiguous with the present WC District on the west side of the railroad tracks;
- 2. East Danbury Road Subarea** – the eastern portion of Danbury Road (Route 7) approximately between Crowne Pond Lane and Deerfield Road;
- 3. West Danbury Road Subarea** – the western portion of Danbury Road (Route 7) between Ridgefield Road and Wolfpit Road;
- 4. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Danbury Road Subarea** – the western portion of Danbury Road (Route 7) between Old Danbury Road and Ridgefield Road, which is situated adjacent to the Wilton Train Station; and
- 5. Subarea with No Proposed Zoning Changes** – the following three locations will remain unaffected and maintain the existing zoning regulations:
  - A. South River Road and Horseshoe Road, south of Schenck’s Island to Wolfpit Road,
  - B. the eastern portion of Danbury Road between Pimpewaug Road and Crowne Pond Lane as well as the western portion of Danbury Road between Pimpewaug Road and Old Danbury Road, and
  - C. the eastern portion of Danbury Road approximately between Deerfield Road and Gaylord Drive North.

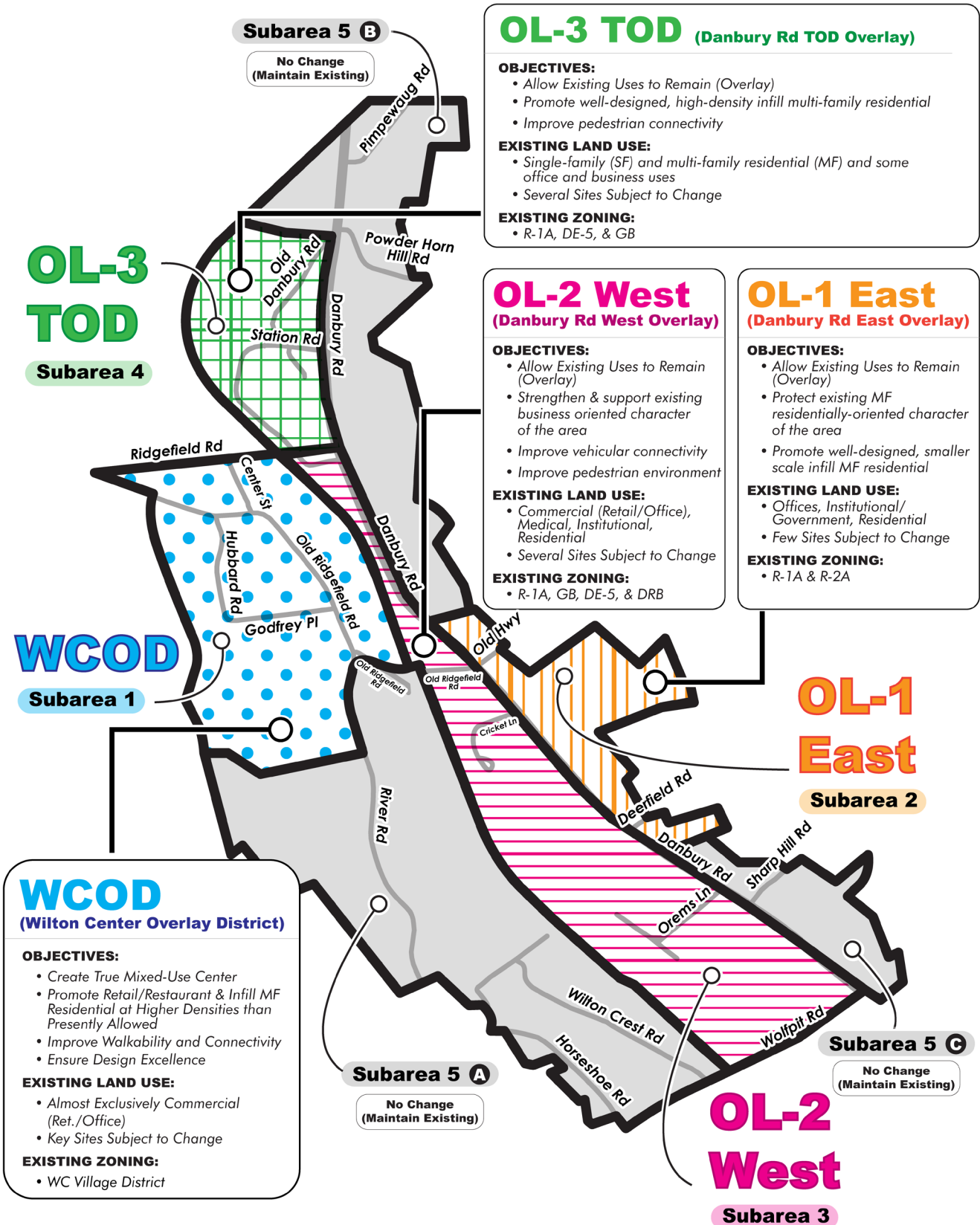
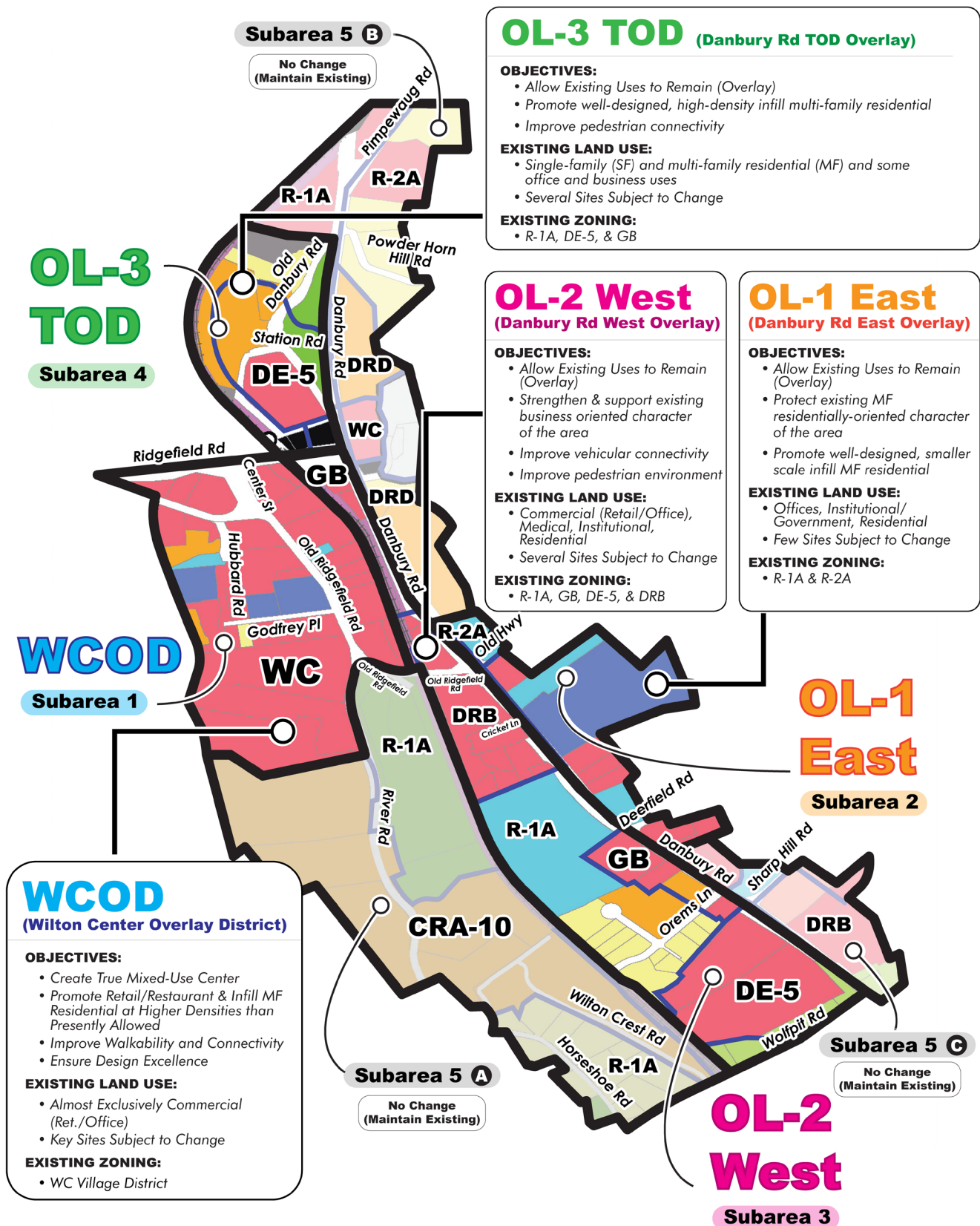


Figure 51 Proposed Planning and Development Strategy for the Greater Wilton Center Area

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFI Planning, 2023.

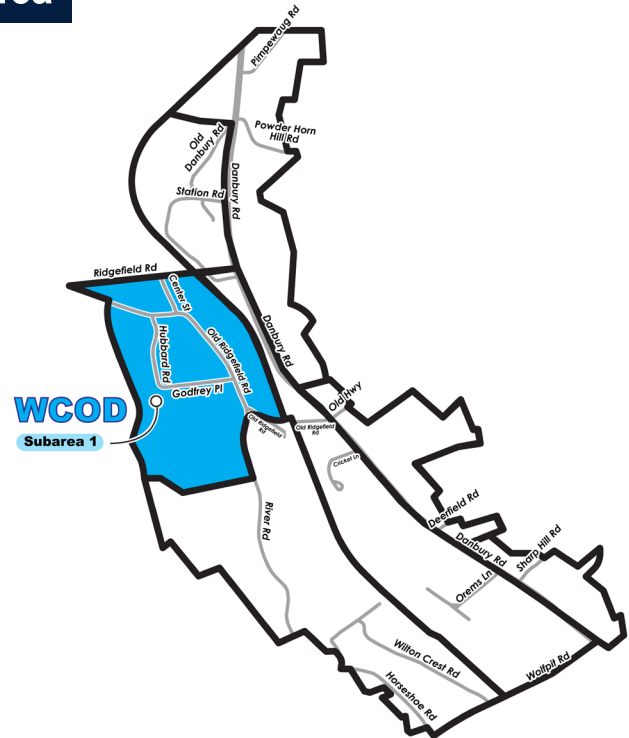


**Figure 52** Existing Land Use and Zoning Conditions Informing the Proposed Planning and Development Strategy for the Greater Wilton Center Area

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFI Planning, 2023.

## Subarea 1: Wilton Center Proper Subarea

The Wilton Center Proper Subarea includes the portion of Wilton Center south of Ridgefield Road (Rte. 33) and west of the railroad tracks that is currently regulated by the Wilton Center Village District Zoning (see **Figure 51**). The Master Plan envisions Wilton Center Proper (Subarea 1) to become a true mixed-use center with an improved pedestrian circulation framework, including a riverwalk along the Norwalk River, and new form-based zoning overlay that would allow a wider range of uses and density, including residential, and require appropriate building-street relationships to create improved pedestrian-oriented street frontages. For future planning purposes, Wilton Center would physically become a more attractive and active place, one that is conducive to living, working and visiting for shopping, eating and recreating.



### The objectives for Wilton Center Proper would be as follows:

- **Rebuild Wilton Center as a True Mixed-Use Center to Support Retail and Restaurant Uses;**
- **Promote Retail/Restaurant Uses and Infill Residential at Higher Densities than Presently Allowed;**
- **Improve Walkability and Connectivity; and**
- **Ensure Design Excellence.**

### Subarea 1 - Discussion

Future revitalization of Wilton's "downtown" has been a primary focus of this master planning process, involving many analyses, discussions, site visits, and outreach efforts and has been a focus of discussion throughout the planning process. The existing land use pattern in Wilton Center is that of an automobile-oriented commercial subdivision circa late 60s or early 70s, mostly comprised of large, privately-held, standalone parcels occupied by buildings that are adjoined by significant areas of minimally landscaped parking. The Town Green and its adjacent buildings occupy a sizable, centrally-located, town-owned parcel, which would normally serve as an obvious opportunity to create a catalyst public space for rejuvenation, but remains hamstrung under a long-term lease. As such, the Town Green complex is underutilized under its current leasehold both as a public space and active retail center. The green is minimally appointed.

Apart from the Town Green, there exists few people-oriented urban open spaces in Wilton Center (whether public or privately-held), or opportunities to create them, around which shops and restaurants could be created, or which could serve as nodes, stopping points along a formalized pedestrian-oriented network. The Town should investigate options to renegotiate the lease on the Town Green, and/or counsel or incentivize the leaseholder to improve return on investment. Schenck's Island is a beautiful and



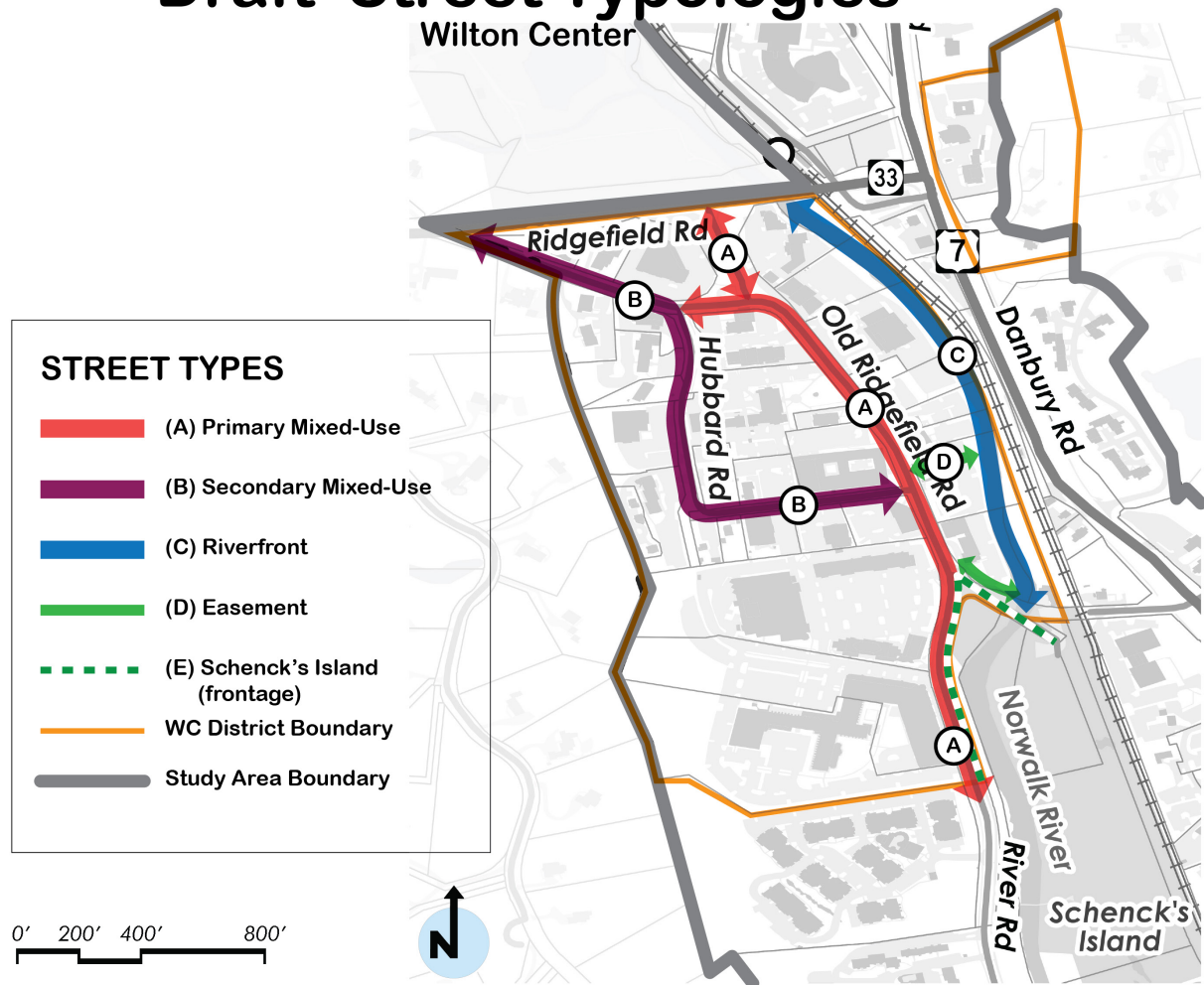
a valuable open space, but it is designed for passive recreation and should remain true to its environmental and naturalistic purposes. This and Merwin Meadows Park to the north are too separated from the Wilton Center retail environment and therefore do not significantly support shopping and economic activity.

Wilton Center has a beautiful setting along the Norwalk River, but Wilton Center's future potential is also limited by its built physicality, pattern of ownership, and zoning. Existing land uses in Wilton Center reflect zoning over the years, which promoted commercial uses, including retail, restaurant and office (see **Figure 52**). Under the current WC District zoning, residential is not permitted as a principal use, and must be approved by special permit. Further, residential must be relegated to the upper floors only. As discussed elsewhere in this report, this approach, while seemingly appropriate for a more traditional downtown setting, may not be serving Wilton Center to great effect. These conditions, along with a limited roadway network and lack of public parking and people-oriented, active open spaces, make it difficult to create a traditional walkable, small parcel downtown environment expressed by some during the planning process.

There is, however, much that can be done to improve Wilton Center over time. A first step would be to develop and support a sensible circulation plan along with strategically concentrating more active uses in a smaller geography such as that along Old Ridgefield Road, River Road, and Center Street rather than across the whole of Wilton Center (see **Figure 53**). Together these planning strategies would allow for the creation of a stronger pedestrian environment and a more synergistic retail environment. A riverwalk would serve to connect Schenck's Island and Merwin Meadows to the north, and connections to Old Ridgefield Road / River Road from the riverwalk would help bring people to the center. But, developing an active frontage along much of the Riverwalk will be hindered by FEMA flood zone designations along the banks of the Norwalk River, including a floodway.

Allowing residential infill development as-of-right would bring more people into Wilton Center, and help create a more active place for more hours throughout the day. This would help support the retail and restaurant environment. But Wilton Center must also attract outside residents and visitors, which requires Wilton Center to become a more attractive place physically, and a place where people want to go and stay. This requires regulations that ensure that all new development, whether commercial or residential, contributes positively to creating a stronger sense of place in Wilton Center. As discussed elsewhere in this report, this has less to do with architectural styling and more to do with controlling how buildings address their public frontages. Therefore, a form-based code should be developed as an overlay for Wilton Center to control street types and designate appropriate frontages along those streets. Street frontages along Old Ridgefield Road / River Road should be designated as more active, while those along secondary streets should allow for less active uses, including a range of residential frontage types, and allowing these on the ground floor. This would respond positively to market demand, and help create a more varied Wilton Center that serves its citizens and visitors alike. Other important frontages could also be managed in the form-based code, including along the river and along any easements through which future pedestrian connections might be made from the Norwalk River to downtown. **Figure 53** presents a conceptual regulating plan for designating appropriate street types in Wilton Center.

# Draft Street Typologies



**Figure 53** Conceptual Form-Based Code Regulating Plan for Wilton Center Proper (Subarea 1): This regulating plan shows five basic street types: (A) Primary Mixed-Use, (B) Secondary Mixed-Use, (C) Riverfront, (D) Easement, and (E) Schenck's Island.

Street Type A would concentrate more active street-level uses along the Center Street / Old Ridgefield Road / River Road corridor. Street Type B would allow for more residentially-oriented uses along the street level, although active uses would also be permitted. Street Type C would specify appropriate building frontage types along the Norwalk Riverfront. And Street Type D would set the rules for how building frontages would address easements or pedestrian connections.

Source: CT DEEP, US Census Bureau, WestCOG, Town of Wilton, BFJ Planning, 2022.

## Recommendations for Wilton Center Proper include:

☐ Encourage infill development, including residential uses as a principal permitted use, at four (4) stories as of right, with a possible fifth story (bonusable) and stepback from the front façade along the street. All new development would be required to provide sufficient parking as follows:

- Residential Uses without Bonusable Building Height – Multi-family residential (townhouses, flats, garden apartments, and mid-rise apartments):
  - If assigned parking: 1.35 spaces per DU plus 1 space for every 5 DUs for visitors.
  - If unassigned (i.e., shared) parking: 1.35 spaces per DU, no need for visitor spaces. Applicant is required to share parking with on-site commercial users in case of mixed-use development, Shared parking is recommended with employee parking of commercial users.
- Residential Uses with Bonusable Building Height – Multi-family residential (townhouses, flats, garden apartments, and mid-rise apartments):
  - Required unassigned (i.e., shared) parking: 1.35 spaces per DU, no need for visitor spaces. Applicant is required to share parking with on- and off-site commercial users.
  - For commercial uses, BFJ recommends slightly reduced parking ratios as part of the right-sizing strategy. This combined with the shared parking opportunities created in residential projects will open up parcel land to increase the on-site floor area and redevelopment of commercial sites in response to market.

☐ Develop regulations, including a form-based code, to encourage appropriate building-street relationships in Wilton Center, specifying a range of building frontages for future infill development along different streets and pedestrian routes. This will improve the overall pedestrian environment, walkability and retail/restaurant viability.

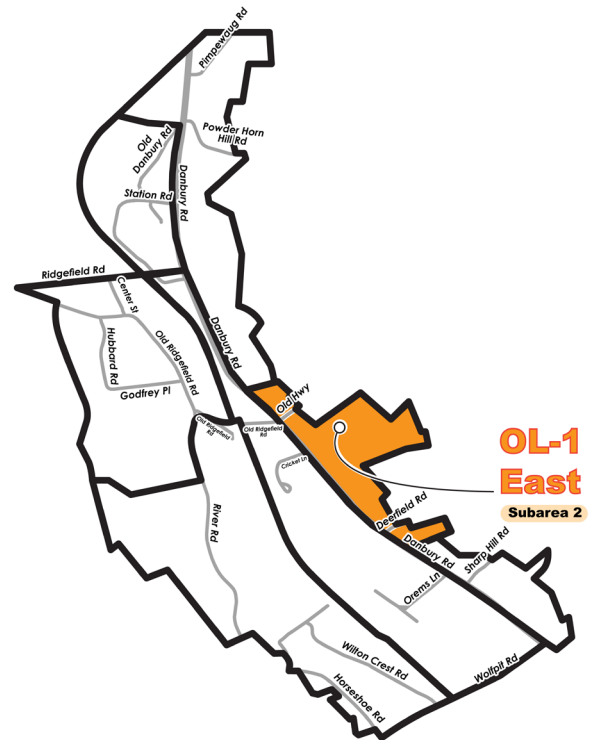
☐ More specifically, concentrate active uses at street level along Old Ridgefield Road, River Road, and Center Street – specifying storefront and/or arcade frontages along the street and requiring residential and office uses be placed on second floor or above. Future development should provide sufficient parking, including on street parking where possible, and wider sidewalks.

☐ Allow infill residential (multi-family and townhouse) development with a range of appropriate frontages at the ground level, including stoop, porch, and lightwell frontages, along less-active, secondary streets such as Godfrey Place and Hubbard Road (and possibly on future interior streets on large parcels). Infill residential development should provide sufficient parking, including on-street parking where possible, and sidewalks.

☐ Create incentives to encourage the creation of small civic spaces, affordability and improvements to the public realm as part of the development process.

## Subarea 2: East Danbury Road Subarea

The East Danbury Road Subarea includes the eastern portion of Danbury Road approximately between Crowne Pond Lane and Deerfield Road (see **Figure 51**). The Master Plan envisions this subarea to facilitate neighborhood-scaled multi-family development that is economically and environmentally sustainable. For future planning purposes, this subarea would be governed by a new overlay zone that accommodates new and existing multi-family residential uses as principal permitted uses, such as townhomes. The overlay would allow existing zoning and uses to remain and continue unhindered.



**The objectives for the East Danbury Road Subarea would be as follows:**

- Protect and strengthen the existing multi-family residentially-oriented character of the area;
- Promote well-designed, smaller-scaled infill multi-family residential development, including affordable housing;
- Encourage sustainable development; and
- Allow existing uses to remain legally per their underlying zoning.

### Subarea 2 - Discussion

This subarea along the eastern portion of Danbury Road is characterized by a wide range of uses, including offices for accounting, limousine service, real estate, and technology businesses, St. Mathews Cemetery, Wilton Town Hall Complex, Wilton Historical Society, and the future adaptive reuse of the Wilton Baptist Church into townhomes (see **Figure 52**). This subarea is presently regulated by two (2) zoning districts: R-1A and R-2A (both single-family districts).

Analysis of existing land uses and properties along this portion of Danbury Road suggests that this area operates predominantly as a business- and institutional-oriented corridor with residential uses being introduced at the northern portion. This subarea should be supported to develop more fully with residential uses.

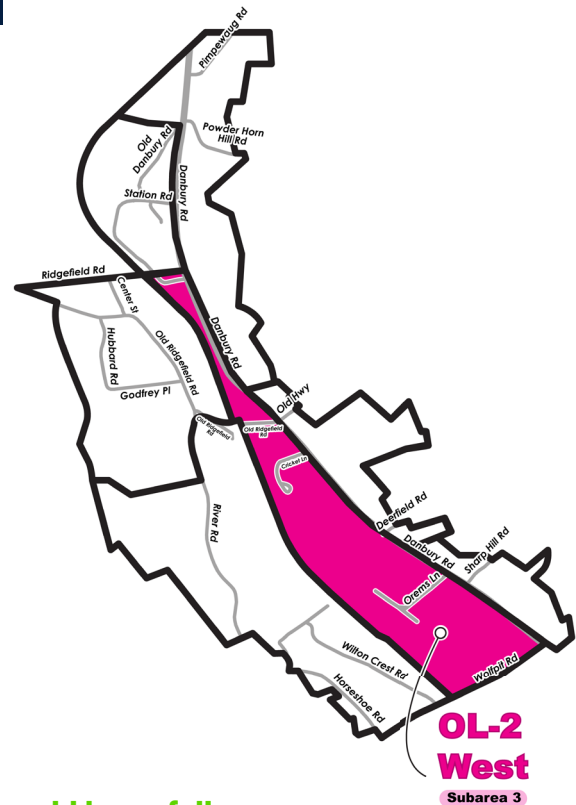


### Recommendations for the East Danbury Road Subarea include:

- ☐ Allow auto-oriented commercial development as principal permitted use at a density that is both market-viable and compatible with creation of an active auto-oriented commercial corridor;
- ☐ Allow infill multi-family residential development by special permit;
- ☐ Require improvements be made to the pedestrian environment along the corridor and vehicular connections between sites be made as part of the development process to better connect the corridor to Wilton Center Proper;
- ☐ Ensure high-quality building and site design;
- ☐ Promote the use of green building elements or green infrastructure in building and/or site design; and
- ☐ Protect and/or adaptively reuse existing historic structures.

## Subarea 3: West Danbury Road Subarea

The West Danbury Road Subarea includes the western portion of Danbury Road between Ridgefield Road and Wolfpit Road (see **Figure 51**). The Master Plan envisions this subarea to become primarily an auto-oriented business corridor, with improved pedestrian connectivity, and to encourage economically and environmentally sustainable development. For future planning purposes, this subarea would be governed by a new overlay zone that accommodates new and existing commercial uses as principal permitted uses, but also allow infill single- and multi-family development by special permit. The overlay would allow existing zoning and uses to remain and continue unhindered.



**The objectives for the West Danbury Road Subarea would be as follows:**

- Strengthen and support the existing business-oriented character of the area;
- Prioritize retail and commercial enterprise;
- Improve vehicular connectivity along the corridor by promoting vehicular connections between parcels;
- Improve the pedestrian environment along the corridor to connect to Wilton Center; and
- Allow existing uses to remain legally per their underlying zoning.

### Subarea 3 - Discussion

The subarea along the western portion of Danbury Road is characterized by a wide range of uses, including a deli, gas station, offices for commercial and medical uses, Our Lady of Fatima Church and School, a restaurant, small retail enterprises, an assisted living facility, and railroad related sites, all of which are indicative of the mosaic of zoning districts in place (see **Figure 52**). This subarea is presently regulated by four (4) zoning districts: R-1A (Single-family district), GB (General Business), DE-5 (Design Enterprise District – Industrial), and DRB (Design Business Retail – Commercial district).

Analysis of existing land uses and properties along this portion of Danbury Road suggests that this area operates predominantly as a business-oriented corridor and should be supported to develop more fully as such.

### Recommendations for the West Danbury Road Subarea include:

- ☐ Allow auto-oriented commercial development as principal permitted use at a density that is both market-viable and compatible with creation of an active auto-oriented commercial corridor;
- ☐ Allow infill single- and multi-family residential development by special permit;
- ☐ Require improvements be made to the pedestrian environment along the corridor and vehicular connections between sites be made as part of the development process to better connect the corridor to Wilton Center Proper;
- ☐ Ensure high-quality building and site design;
- ☐ Promote the use of green building elements or green infrastructure in building and/or site design; and
- ☐ Protect and/or adaptively reuse existing historic structures.

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- **Promote well-designed, high-density infill multi-family residential development, including affordable housing, at a location with sufficient infrastructure and public transit;**
- **Improve pedestrian connectivity to the Wilton Train Station and Wilton Center Proper;**
- **Encourage sustainable development; and**
- **Allow existing uses to remain legally per their underlying zoning.**

This subarea of the Study Area is presently characterized by multi-family and single-family residential uses, office and business uses, utilities, and unprotected open space (see **Figure 52**). It is regulated by three (3) zoning districts: R-1A (Single-family district), DE-5 (Design Enterprise District – Industrial), and GB (General Business). Analysis of the existing land uses and properties suggests that there is opportunity for additional infill residential development.

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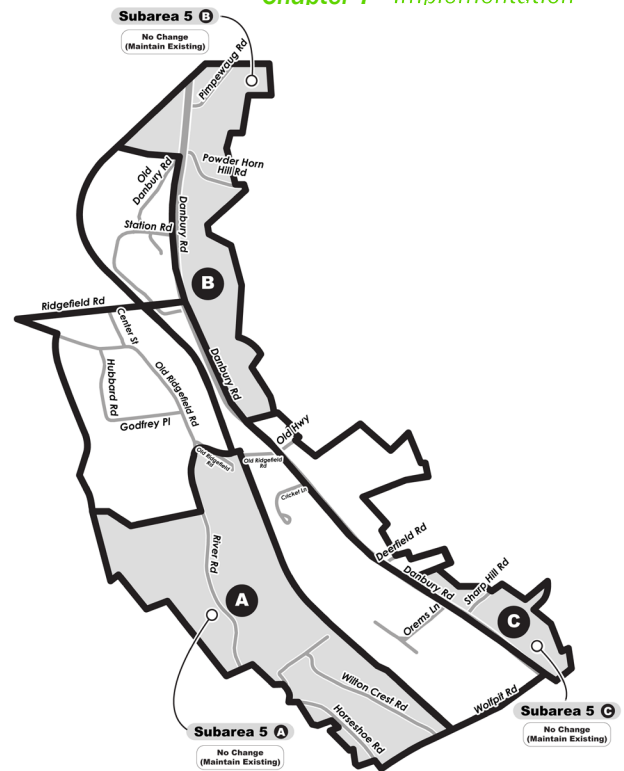
**Recommendations for the TOD Danbury Road Subarea revolve around crafting an attractive and walkable multi-family residential area and include:**

- ☐ Allow infill multi-family residential development as principal permitted use at an appropriate density that is both market-viable and compatible with creation of an attractive auto-oriented residential corridor;
- ☐ Allow commercial development by special permit only;
- ☐ Require improvement to pedestrian environment along the corridor and/or through sites be made as part of the development process to connect large parcels and improve connectivity to the train station and Wilton Center; and
- ☐ Ensure high-quality building and site design, including appropriate scale, massing, proportion, materiality, lighting; and landscaping.

## Subarea 5: Subarea with No Proposed Zoning Changes

The final subarea can be found at three locations within the Study Area (see **Figure 51**), which include:

- A. South River Road / Schenck's Island** – The first location includes Schenck's Island and the land west of the railroad tracks to Wolfpit Road, primarily along River Road in the north portion and along Horseshoe and Crest Roads in the southern portion (see **Figure 51**). This location is characterized by Schenck's Island, a series of multi-family, townhouse/condominium developments, and single-family residences. Presently, the existing single-family environment along Horseshoe Road matches closely with the surrounding development pattern and serves as an attractive lower-density residential gateway to River Road to Wilton Center along which land densities gradually increase northward.
- B. North Danbury Road** – The second location is situated along the eastern portion of Danbury Road between Pimpewaug Road and Crowne Pond Lane as well as the western portion of Danbury Road between Pimpewaug Road and Old Danbury Road (see **Figure 51**). The following uses can be found at this location: retail businesses such as a barber shop, home good store, and firewood supplier, a real estate office, condominium developments such as Perry Green and Crowne Pond, and single-family residences. The Master Plan envisions this location to remain as is with continued support for existing land uses.
- C. South Danbury Road** – Lastly, the third location is found along the eastern portion of Danbury Road roughly between Deerfield Road and Gaylord Drive North (see **Figure 51**). This portion of Danbury Road is characterized by a mixed-use development with retail on the ground floor and residential on the upper floors, offices for attorney, dentist, and real estate businesses, a car dealership, and an off-road portion of the Norwalk River Valley Trail. The Master Plan envisions this location to continue as is with continued support to strengthen mixed-used development and commercial uses.





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**WILTON**  
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