

AL'S TRAIL CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN



FEBRUARY 2023

THANK YOU & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Al's Trail Corridor Action Plan is a result of over three years of listening to community, carefully assessing trail conditions, mapping, photographing, and re-imagining Al's Trail for the future. This would not have been possible without the input and consideration of the following individuals and organizations. We thank you for your valuable time, ideas, feedback, and imagination.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the late 1990's Al Goodrich and Mary Mitchell along with Gary Fetzer started developing the plans for a **10.7-mile linear foot trail across Newtown, CT** that connected numerous open spaces owned by various landowners with the goal of creating an opportunity for people to experience the "dense woodlands with their ponds, rocky outcroppings, and extraordinary" natural places of Newtown. The results of this effort eventually became known as Al's Trail.

In the 25 years since its inception, the trail has been maintained by the Town of Newtown and volunteers. **Despite the on-going maintenance, parts of the trail have become overgrown, trail markers have faded, and sections have eroded or fallen into disrepair.** A macroburst in the spring of 2018 devastated forest in the northern section of the trail, leaving large sections obstructed. To this day, the trail is still not completely passable from end to end.

In the fall of 2019, the Newtown Bike and Trail Committee applied for and was awarded a **grant of technical assistance from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA)** to help assess the current state of the trail and to develop an action plan to restore the trail and bring it to its full potential as an outdoor recreational asset for the community.

Since Al's Trail was first built, Newtown has changed significantly. Landowners along the trail have changed, Fairfield Hills has developed into a recreation center, and downtown Sandy Hook has experienced a renaissance of retail and dining establishments.

To understand the current state of the trail and how it interfaces with current day Newtown, the National Park Service staff worked with the Bike and Trail committee to **engage the local community.** This process included meeting with landowners and stakeholders through workshops, conducting surveys, participating in presentations, and spending time together on trail audits.

Together we worked to gather ideas from community members, understand concerns, and brainstorm how to revive Al's Trail and turn it into a community asset.

We believe that Al's trail can **connect priority town destinations, provide public recreation access to all users, boost the local economy, improve public health, decrease carbon emissions, and connect to other regional trail networks.**

We believe that enhancing Al's Trail with a **multi-use greenway** will create even more benefits for Newtown's residents and visitors, while improving wildlife habitat and water quality.

This action plan represents the information that we learned throughout our community engagement process and our vision for the future.

Based on community feedback, this action plan makes the following recommendations:

Restore the existing Al's Trail to remove hazards and update trail routes so they are more sustainable and less prone to erosion

Promote **Al's Trail as the "spine" of a town-wide trail and sidewalk network** for walking and biking to destinations

Mitigate impacts of climate change by creating **more habitat and encouraging active transportation**

Develop **clear and consistent trail marking standards and produce easily-accessible maps** with information and descriptions of the trail, parking, and various uses and amenities along the trail

Expand the current **educational and interpretive information** along the trail to include a wider array of current and past environmental and cultural information

Develop a connection from Fairfield Hills to Sandy Hook: Apply for a grant for a feasibility study to extend the multi-use Fairfield Hills Loop Trail into a **multi-use greenway** that connects to downtown Sandy Hook

Develop regional connections: Investigate the feasibility of using the Housatonic Railroad corridor to create trail connections linking Newtown with nearby communities

Develop a **volunteer-led organization** to steward Al's Trail

Review the environmental impact of trails and **adopt high-quality trail standards** that enhance and mitigate damage to water quality, ecosystems, and cultural heritage



**PROJECT
CONTEXT**

NEWTOWN HISTORY

First Peoples of Quanneapague

The town of Newtown exists on the ancestral homelands of the Pohtatuck Indians, a branch of the Paugussett Native American Tribe. It was originally known as Quanneapague.



Above: A map of Tribes in Southern New England, with modern-day Newtown indicated. To see the original map and learn more, visit: <https://www.nipmucnation.org/history>

We recognize and respect the Indigenous Peoples who have been living and working on this land since time immemorial, including their modern-day descendants in the **Schaghticoke Tribe** and others who are still here today. It is because of their ongoing stewardship that we are able to enjoy AI's Trail and the many natural assets in Newtown today.

During the community engagement process, the working group visited **The Institute for American Indian Studies (IAIS) in Washington, CT**. IAIS preserves and educates through discovery and creativity the diverse traditions, vitality and knowledge of Native American cultures. Through our visit and conversations that followed, the working group was able to learn about the history and culture of local Tribes in the region. We acknowledge that there is a lot more education and healing that needs to be done. We strongly suggest continuing this education and outreach with local Tribes to learn more and to meaningfully connect visitors of AI's Trail with the region's earliest history and culture.

To learn more about IAIS, visit: <https://www.iaismuseum.org/>

Today, Newtown is a town in Fairfield County, CT. It is part of the Greater Danbury metropolitan area as well as the New York City metropolitan area.

Newtown is characterized by rural charm and colonial character. It has several distinct villages and historic features which make it a unique destination for visitors and a welcoming place to call home. Newtown also has many natural features that bring an abundance of value to the community.

Colonial History (Industry), and Today's Villages

In 1705, English colonists purchased the townsite from the Pohtatuck Indians, a branch of the Paugussett. It was originally known as Quanneapague. Settled by migrants from Stratford and incorporated in 1711, Newtown residents had many business and trading ties with the English. It was a stronghold of Tory sentiment during the early Revolutionary War. Late in the war, French General Rochambeau and his troops encamped there in 1781 during their celebrated march to the siege of Yorktown, Virginia, which ended the Revolution.

An important crossroads throughout its early history, the village of Hawleyville briefly emerged as a railroad center. The town's population grew to over 4,000 c. 1881. In the following decades, the population dwindled to a low of 2,635 in 1930 before growing again.

Local industry has included the manufacture of furniture, tea bags, combs, fire hoses, folding boxes, buttons, and hats, as well as farming, and mica and feldspar mining. The game of "Scrabble" was developed here by James Brunot.

From the period of highway development and suburbanization following World War II, the town has developed as a suburb of Danbury, with many people also commuting to Norwalk, Stamford, and Bridgeport.



Top: Colonial downtown Newtown. Center: The historic Newtown flag pole. Bottom: "One of the best views in Town," overlooking Nettleton Preserve.

Sandy Hook

Sandy Hook center is a revitalized post-industrial New England village on the banks of the Pootatuck River. Former factories have been refurbished and converted into restaurants, shops, and offices. The recent addition of street scaping and nearby apartment communities have turned Sandy Hook into a pedestrian-friendly community. The Pootatuck River boast some of the best native trout habitat in the state and Rocky Glen State Park is a block from the center of town, providing access to open space and passive recreation.

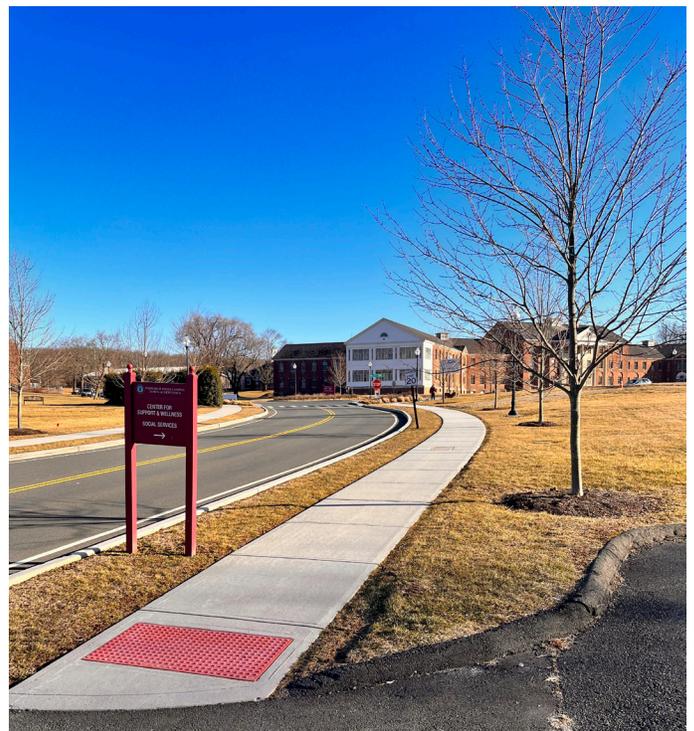


Tragedy and Community Resilience

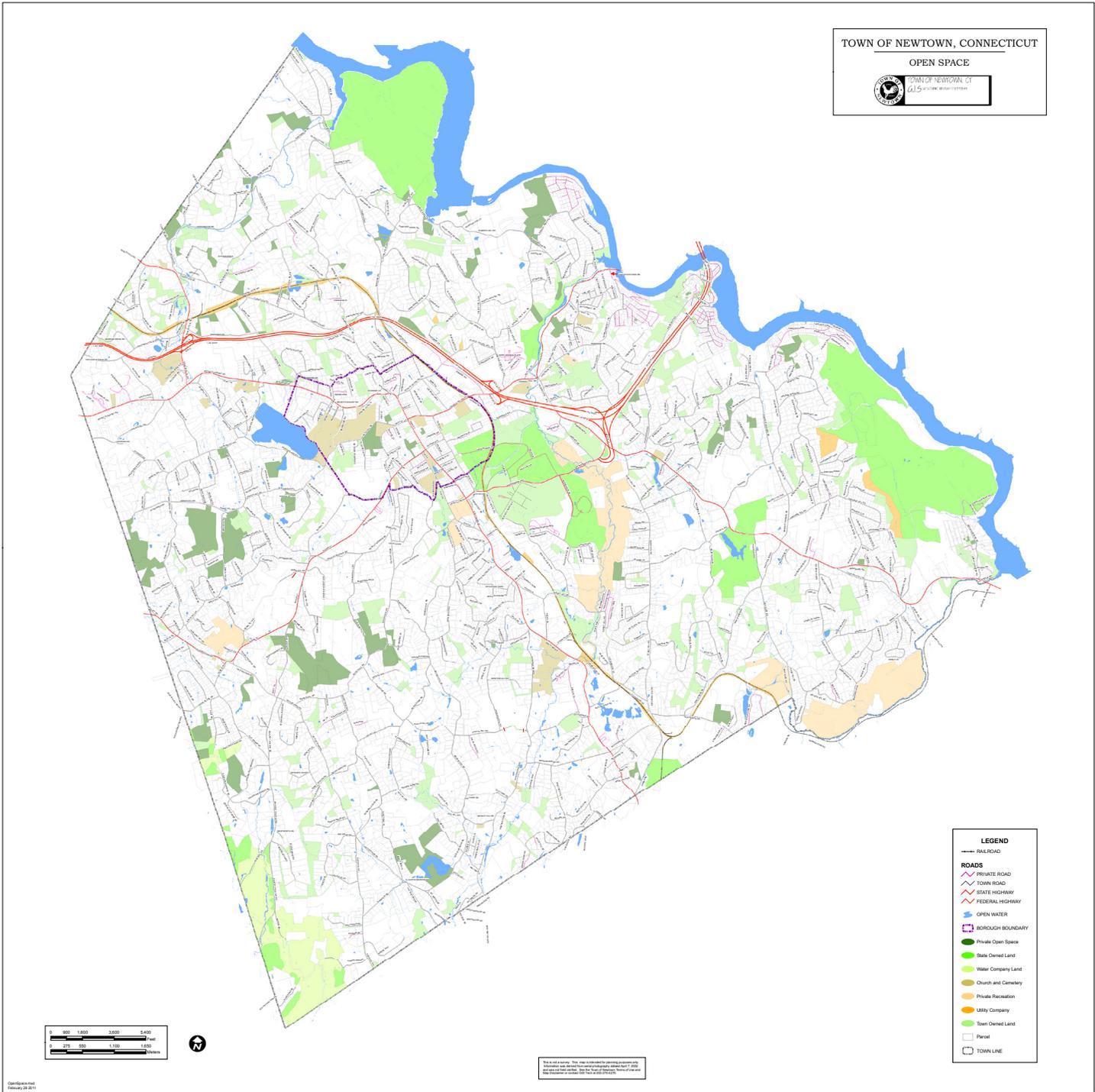
Newtown and especially Sandy Hook village are well-known because of the devastating school shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. Twenty-six lives were taken that day. While the town has experienced tremendous loss and media scrutiny because of this incident, it is also an incredible example of community resilience. Various community groups and foundations were formed to bring hope and healing, and to help rebuild a sense of community.

Fairfield Hills

Located in the geographical center of Newtown, the Fairfield Hills Campus is the site of a former psychiatric hospital that stopped operating in 1995. In 2001, the Town of Newtown purchased 185 acres of land along with dozens of former dormitory and hospital buildings from the State of Connecticut. Since then, the town has been redeveloping the property, removing dilapidated buildings, and developing it into a recreational hub for the community. The campus contains ball fields, one of the state most-used walking trails, a community center with a pool, and the Newtown Youth Academy indoor sports and fitness facility. Town offices utilize some of the renovated buildings and a master plan has been developed that aims to further develop the site into a mixed use resource for the town.



Top: New pedestrian infrastructure in Sandy Hook village. Bottom: New sidewalks and walking paths at the Fairfield Hills campus.



Above: Open Space in Newtown. Source: TOWN OF NEWTOWN CONNECTICUT Geographic & Property Information Network.

NEWTOWN TODAY

DEMOGRAPHICS:

- As of 2020, the **population of Newtown was 27,173**, including 5,878 children and 21,295 adults.
- **Sixteen percent of Newtown's residents are people of color**, compared to 37 percent of the residents statewide.
- The town's **population has decreased by 1.4 percent since 2010**. The number of white residents in Newtown shrank by 8.7 percent, while the non-white population grew by 74 percent.

HOUSING:

- Of the town's 9,885 households, **88 percent are homeowner households**.
- **Twenty-seven percent of Newtown's households are cost-burdened**, meaning they spend at least 30 percent of their total income on housing costs.

EDUCATION:

- **Ninety-seven percent of public high school seniors in the Newtown School District graduated** within four years in 2019.
- Among the town's adults ages 25 and up, **54 percent have earned a bachelor's degree or higher**.

ECONOMY:

- Newtown is **home to 8,461 jobs**, with the largest share in the **Health Care and Social Assistance** sector.

HEALTH:

- Newtown's **average life expectancy is 82.8 years**.
- **Seventy-two percent of adults** in Newtown say they are in **excellent or very good health**.

CIVIC LIFE AND COMMUNITY COHESION:

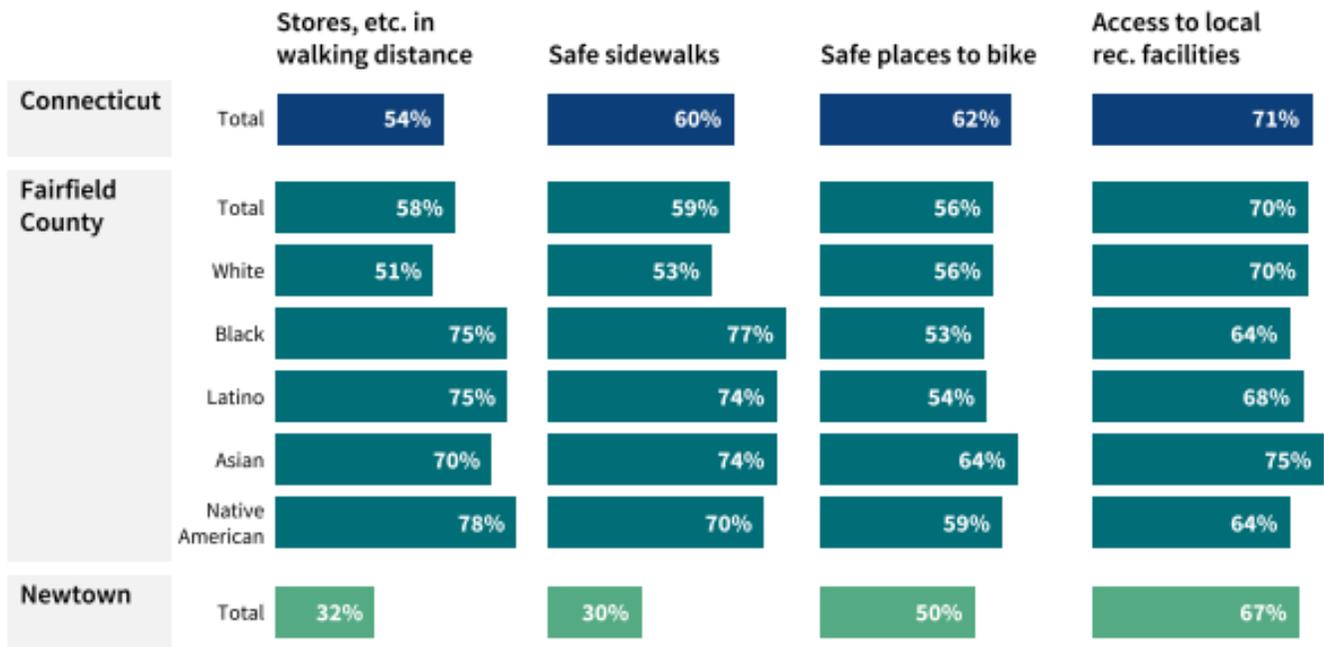
- **Ninety-one percent of adults in Newtown are satisfied with their area**, and 64 percent say their local government is responsive to residents' needs.
- In the 2020 presidential election, **90 percent of registered voters in Newtown voted**.

WALKING AND BIKING IN NEWTOWN:

- In Connecticut, over half (54%) of residents report having stores within walking distance of their residence compared to only **32% in Newtown**.
- The percent of Newtown residents that report having **safe sidewalks is 30%, which is half of the statewide percentage (60%)**.
- Newtown also rates lower than the state average for safe places to bike and access to local recreation facilities.

Source: https://ctdatahaven.org/sites/ctdatahaven/files/newtown_profile_v1.pdf

FIGURE 29: RESIDENTS' RATINGS OF LOCAL WALKABILITY MEASURES BY RACE/ETHNICITY, SHARE OF ADULTS, 2015-2018



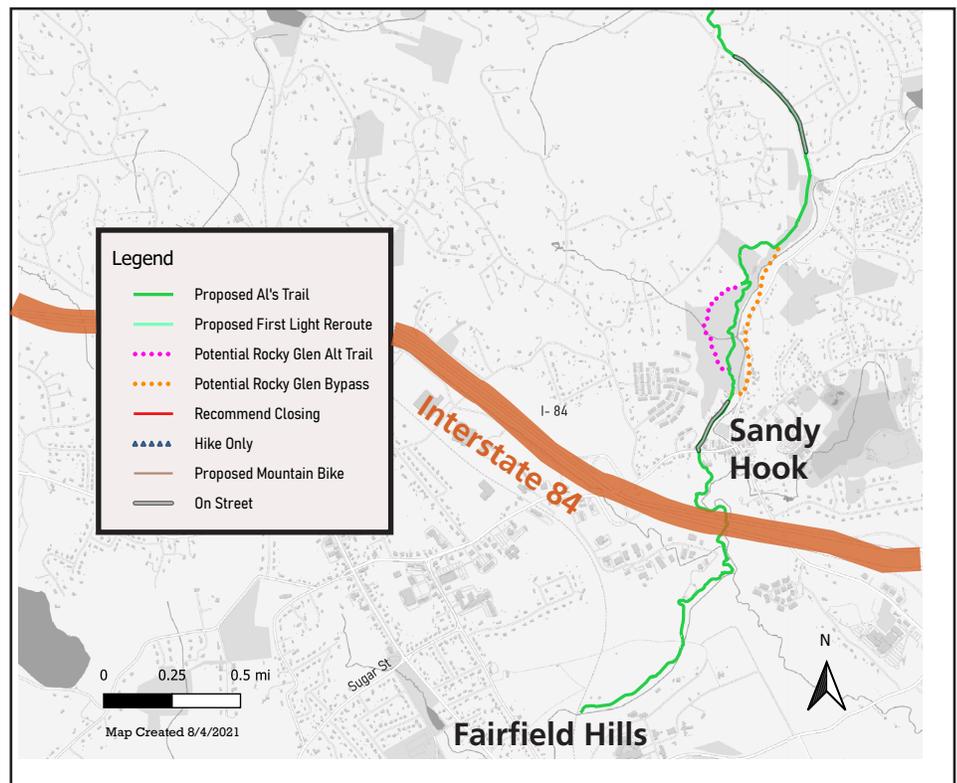
Source: https://ctdatahaven.org/sites/ctdatahaven/files/newtown_profile_v1.pdf

IMPACTS OF TRANSPORTATION

The largest barrier that divides Newtown and isolates Sandy Hook center is **Interstate 84**. This heavily-used highway connects Connecticut to both New York and Boston, and due to heavy traffic flows of vehicles entering and exiting the highway, creates a dangerous and unpleasant environment for pedestrians, even with sidewalks.

Currently, Al's trail goes under I-84, through steep and eroding terrain.

A multi-use greenway could provide an alternative means of connecting Fairfield Hills to Sandy Hook, inviting pedestrians to travel safely without further contributing to heavy vehicle traffic in this area.



NEWTOWN & CLIMATE CHANGE

Newtown is well-poised to create a system of trails that can address the impacts of climate change. It is already apparent across the globe that climate change will bring many public health and safety threats to our communities. **Trails can help mitigate climate change and serve as habitat for plants and wildlife, and can help decrease our carbon footprint.**

With AI's Trail as the spine of a greater trail network, Newtown can be a model community for the state of Connecticut and beyond of how to transform existing infrastructure to become more biking and walking friendly. Currently, two community hubs, the Fairfield Hills Campus and Sandy Hook Center, are cut off from each other by Interstate 84. Walking and biking between these two important community focal points is difficult which forces residents to commute between the two by car even though they are within walking distance of each other. A safe, direct walking route can reduce car trips and the associated climate impact of automobiles.

In order for trails to have an impact on mitigating climate change, they must:

- **Feel safe and protected.**
- **Replace what would be a short vehicle trip**, since over half of all trips taken are within three miles or less, and over a quarter of all trips taken are within a mile or less. Three miles is equivalent to a 20-minute bike ride for an average adult, and one mile is equivalent to a 20-minute walk for an average adult.
- **Connect to transportation networks:** important considerations must be made regarding land use, such as: identifying key destinations and the distance that people are traveling to activities; the safety, accessibility, and quality of roads and paths; and the affordability and integration of other transportation options (such as walking, cycling, public transit, taxi, delivery services, electronic communication, etc.)

Source: https://ctrailcensus.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2046/2020/08/Trail-Impact-Series_Resiliency.pdf



Connecting to nearby destinations, such as schools and senior living centers, and providing active transportation options provides opportunities for people of all ages to access healthy outdoor recreation in their community.



**PROJECT
BACKGROUND**

NEWTOWN BIKE AND TRAIL COMMITTEE

The **Newtown Bike and Trail Committee was formed in late 2018** through a joint effort of the First Selectman's Office and the Park and Recreation Department to help the town achieve its Healthy Community Initiative by supporting the development, maintenance, and promotion of a town-wide network of trails, sidewalks, and roadways that encourage non-motorized, recreational transportation.

The seven-member committee meets on the third Wednesday of each month and focuses on enhancing and developing a network of multi-use trails that connect across the town and ensures access to all.

The Committee has hosted various events and workdays to engage the community in outdoor recreational activities and to solicit feedback from the residents about their priorities for trails and outdoor recreation.

In the spring of 2019, **the committee surveyed residents about interest in trails** with the goal of finding what types of projects would garner community support. **Revitalizing Al's Trail was identified as a priority.**

Following that, the committee launched a **public relations campaign** that included social media posts, announcements in the local paper, and printing business cards, fliers, and a banner. The effort has increased awareness and support of Al's Trail.

In April 2019 committee members attended a town-wide Earth Day event and a separate volunteer fair to publicize the trail and recruit volunteers. In May the committee worked with partners from the **New England Mountain Biking Association (NEMBA)** to hold a **two-hour trail school** to train volunteers in trail building and maintenance that was attended by 11 people. In June the committee sponsored a **workday with 35 volunteers**, including the First Selectman, that restored 0.6 miles of trail.



The first Al's Trail Maintenance event hosted by the Bike and Trail Committee, 2019.

AL'S TRAIL AND A GREENWAY SYSTEM

Newtown, Connecticut has a rich history of trails and open space. In the 1980s and 1990s, **Al Goodrich, a former director of the Newtown Forest Association and trail advocate**, with his protege, Mary Mitchell, realized that although Newtown contained plenty of open space, few residents were aware of its existence and even fewer knew how to access it. These two took it upon themselves to map the properties, blaze trails, and publish **The Newtown Trails Book**, giving people the information needed to discover the “dense woodlands with their ponds, rocky outcroppings, and extraordinary” natural places that had captivated Al and Mary.

By the late 90's Al and Mary along with Gary Fetzer started developing the plans for a **10.7-mile linear foot trail across town that connected numerous open spaces** owned by various landowners. The Newtown Open Space Task force took up the cause and individuals including Judy Holmes, Pat Barkman, and scores of volunteers took to marking the path and building the trails. Landowners including the Town of Newtown, State of Connecticut, Newtown Forest Association, The Nature Conservancy, Northeast Generation Services (now FirstLight Power), United Methodist Church, and the McLaughlin family granted permission for the trail to cross their property. Numerous community groups including Eagle Scouts, Trout Unlimited, Lions Club, Iroquois Pipeline, and the Newtown Tree Project contributed funding and/or labor that were instrumental in completing the trail.

While Al did not live to see the completion of the trail, his vision was carried on until it was finally completed by the end of 2004. Since then, The Conservation Commission's funding and countless volunteers kept his vision going.

Today, **Al's trail is the heart of a system of designated greenways by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), linking the Massachusetts border through western Connecticut to the Long Island Sound.**



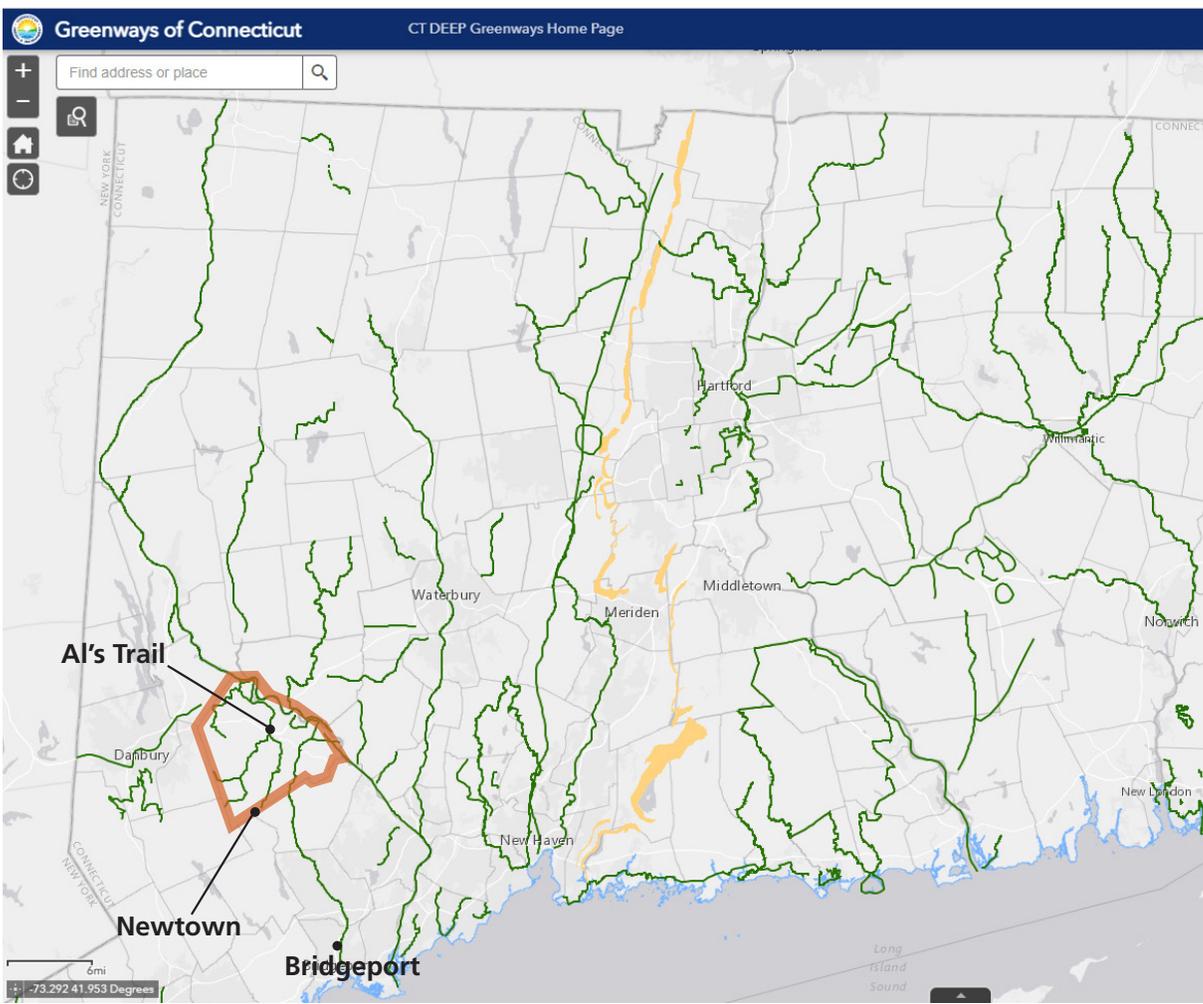
Above: the late Al Goodrich

GREENWAY DESIGNATIONS

The development of Al's Trail was a contributing element to the town receiving an officially recognized greenway.

In 2003, the Al's Trail corridor along the Pootatuck River became part of a larger Newtown Greenway System -The four primary corridors being designated include the **Pootatuck River Greenway, the Lake Zoar Greenway, the Lower Paugussett State Forest Greenway, and the Huntington State Park Greenway.** These corridors form an interconnected system of multi use trails radiating out from the center of town, linking many recreation opportunities.

The Greenway system in Newtown connects north to the Massachusetts border via the **Housatonic Riverbelt Greenway** and south to Bridgeport and the Long Island Sound via **the Pequonnock/Housatonic Railbed Greenway**, both designated in 2001. Just a few miles over the town border, the 2002-designated Still River Greenway in Brookfield **connects to Danbury and robust trail systems in New York State.** To date, these greenway systems are conceptual in nature, and **require further development** to connect critical gaps.

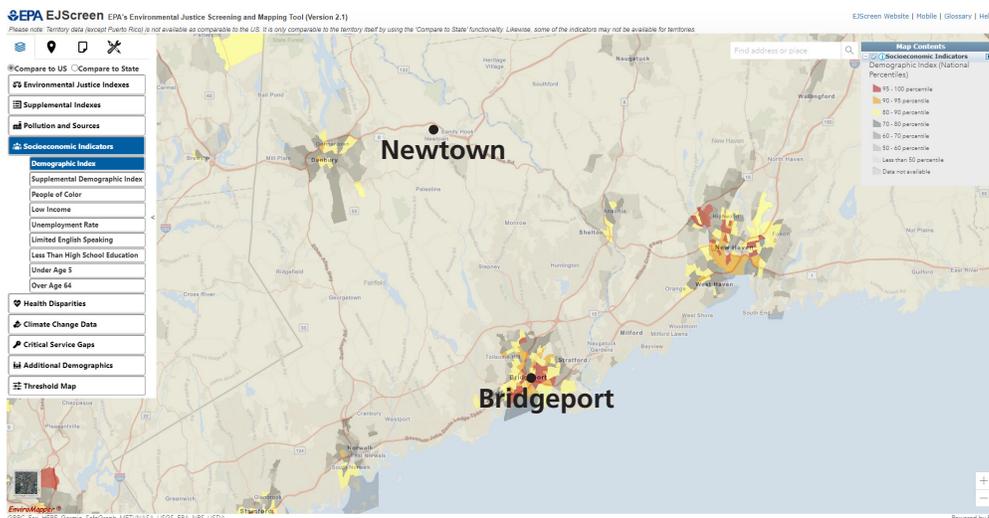


Left: a map of the Greenways of Connecticut on the CT DEEP website. Designated Greenways are in green.

For more information, visit:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Outdoor-Recreation/Greenways/Official-Connecticut-Greenways>

CONNECTIVITY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



Newtown is centrally located on the greenway systems connecting the Massachusetts border and the Long Island Sound. Through this greenway system, **Newtown connects to the City of Bridgeport**, (see Greenways of Connecticut map, above) **potentially being able to serve the city which is one of the most diverse cities in Connecticut and an environmental justice community.**

Above: Socioeconomic indicators of Environmental Justice in the State of Connecticut show Bridgeport as being in the 95-100 percentile. Source: the EPA's Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool: <https://ejscreen.epa.gov/mapper/>

NEED FOR REVITALIZATION

The Bike and Trail Committee wished to create **better connections to the schools, residential developments, parks, open spaces, community center, and village center along the trail, giving residents of all ages better access to open spaces and recreational activities that Al's Trail provides.** Currently, Al's Trail affords walking access to the newly built community center, farmers market, and recreational athletic facilities at Fairfield Hills, as well as the shopping and restaurant district in Sandy Hook Village.

Over time, despite regular maintenance from the Town and volunteers, parts of Al's trail have become overgrown, trail markers have faded, and sections have eroded or fallen into disrepair. What really had an impact was **a macroburst in the spring of 2018**, which devastated forest in the northern section of the trail, leaving large sections impassable. To this day, **the trail is still not completely passable from end to end.** This is what sparked a need for revitalization.

In its current dilapidated state, sections of Al's trail are only used only by the most determined hikers with outdoor navigation skills. Reestablishing and blazing the trail will open it's full length to more casual hikers, walkers, trail runners, and snowshoers, giving them the opportunity to experience the **pollinator meadows, pristine trout streams, bald eagle habitat, hemlock groves, and crags with magnificent views of Newtown.**

Making connections to schools and developments will increase awareness, access, and use of the trail, opening it to a new audience of users. **Building a multi-use recreational greenway would become the recreational hub of town by increasing the accessibility of the trail to young children, the elderly, and the disabled who may not be able to traverse a footpath.**



Above: Photo of an example of the damage from the 2018 macroburst along Al's Trail.



Above: Photo of interesting debris along Al's Trail.

Once Al's Trail becomes an established trail used by many different users, it could have even larger impacts such as:

- **reducing the impacts of climate change** by providing alternative and active transportation options
- **creating access to the outdoors for many** who may not have access otherwise
- providing an **economic driver** for Newtown and Sandy Hook village
- providing **health benefits** to both Newtown residents and visitors the area
- creating a sense of place with opportunities for sharing the **rich history and character** of the region

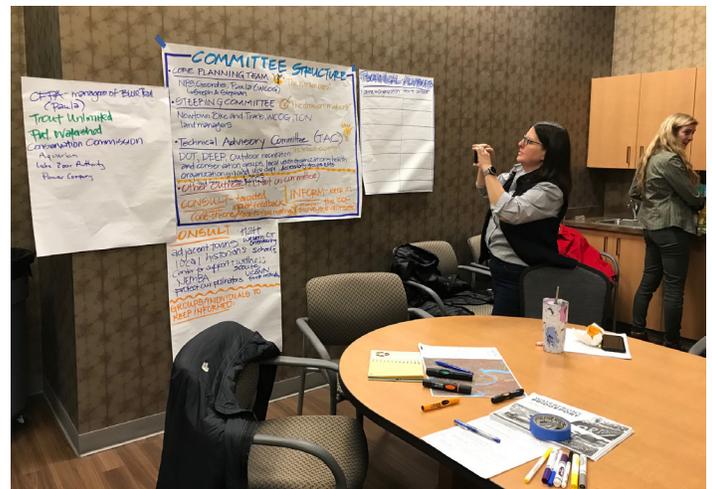
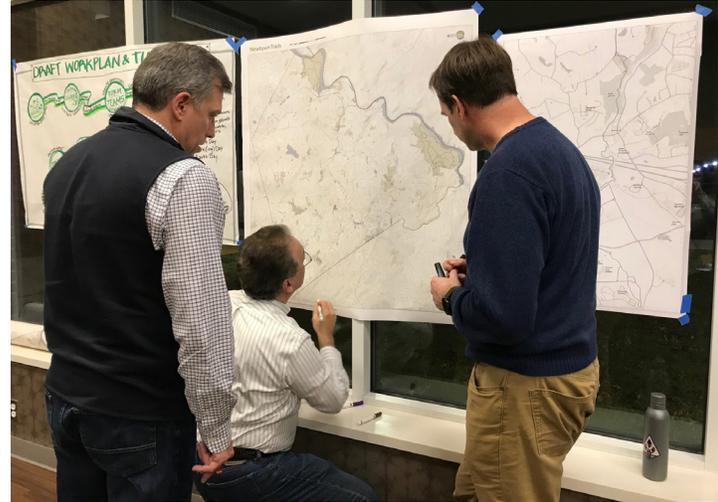
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ASSISTANCE

In the fall of 2019, the Newtown Bike and Trail Committee applied for and was awarded a grant of technical assistance from the **National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA)** to help assess the current state of the trail and to develop an action plan (this document!) to restore the trail and bring it to its full potential as an outdoor recreational asset for the community.

In January of 2020, the Newtown Trails Connectivity Working Group (aka, “the working group”) held a **kick-off workshop** with project stakeholders to gather feedback and ideas for a shared vision to restore Al’s Trail and explore other opportunities around trail connectivity in Newtown.

In this workshop, we heard from the community a desire for **transforming Newtown into a destination for outdoor recreation**. We also heard about the possibilities of creating a unique sense of place in town, and for telling stories.

As a result of the kick-off workshop, the working group assembled a Vision, Mission and Goals for an effort to both restore Al’s Trail and transform Newtown into an outdoor recreation destination.



Above: photos from the community kick-off workshop in January 2020.



Left: NPS staff on the first initial visit to Al’s Trail, January 2020.

VISION, MISSION AND GOALS

VISION:

A Newtown that is a **renowned “outdoor town,”** with thriving businesses and passionate ambassadors supporting a network of **safe, connected trails and scenic open space.** It is a **hub for recreation activities** of many different kinds, and connects residents and visitors alike with the natural beauty of Fairfield County, and beyond.

MISSION:

The Newtown Connectivity Action Plan Working Group will.....

- Create a **“Newtown Connectivity Action Plan”** to guide strategic efforts for trail planning in Newtown
- Create **partnerships and build relationships** to foster a community around trails and open space in Newtown
- **Gather inventory about Newtown Trails,** especially Al’s Trail, which has been identified by the community as a high priority
- Engage stakeholders through **communications and outreach**
- **Make recommendations to formal committees** (such Conservation Committee and Bike and Trails Committee)

GOALS:

- Create a **safe and connected network of multi-use trails**
- Create **connections to destinations** such as schools, neighborhoods, shopping/business districts, community centers, village centers, and recreation opportunities
- Create **opportunities and connections for historically underrepresented parts of the community**
- Create **access for all users,** especially youth, the elderly, and disabled
- Create a **regional attraction, promote tourism and boost the local economy**
- Create **informative maps and information** widely available for the general public
- Link to **long-distance regional trails and open spaces**
- Create opportunities for **year-round recreation**
- **Create an organization/coalition** to promote stewardship and sustainable maintenance
- Promote opportunities for **health and well-being**
- Create opportunities for **community resiliency and alternative transportation**
- Create opportunities to **interpret local history and stories**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



COMMUNITY SURVEY

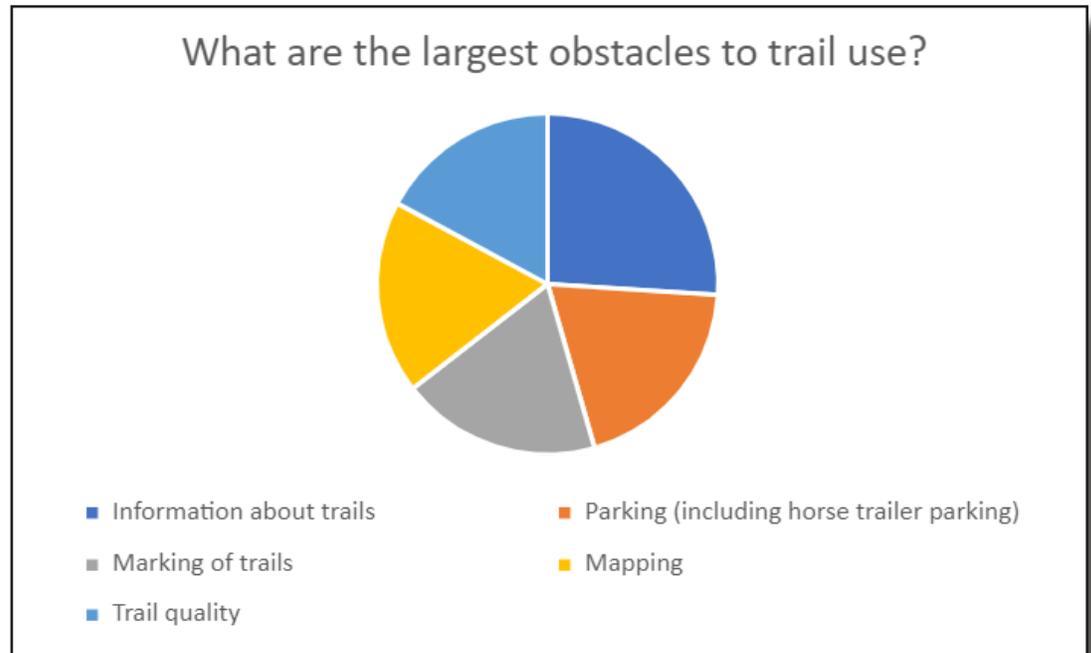
Just prior to the COVID lock down in March of 2020, the Committee hosted a community engagement event at the Newtown Community Center that included an informal survey to learn about community attitudes about trails. One hundred and ninety six respondents took the survey. Information gathered helped guide design decisions throughout the planning process.



Of the respondents, 36% used trails 2-6 times per week; 26% were once a week users; 23% used trail monthly; 8% used trails a few times per year and 5% used trails every day.

A vast majority (89%) answered that they would use trails MORE OFTEN if there were better options.

When asked the **largest obstacles to trail use**, the most answers were **information about trails (44%) and parking (including horse trailer parking) (33%)**, followed closely by **marking of trails (32%)**, then **mapping (31%) and trail quality (29%)**.



When asked which trails they used, the top responses were Fairfield Hills (47%) and Al's Trail (28%). A quarter of respondents answered the State Forest (Upper/Lower Paugussett, Rocky Glen) which are both located along Al's Trail.

Based on the survey results, the working group could infer that **offering better information about the trails and improving access and quality may increase trail use.** Additionally, the team used the survey results as a guide to focus their efforts on **connecting the most-used trails, Fairfield Hills and**

TRAIL AUDITS

Over the following year and several months, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the working group met regularly outside with community members to capture **existing conditions of trails in Newtown, and explore opportunities for improved sustainability and access**. The working group also explored opportunities to **connect existing trails to destinations such as Fairfield Hills and Sandy Hook; and points of interest such as historic features, places to shop and eat, schools and residential areas, parks, and more**.

During the audit process, the working group made note of areas that had **downed trees or steep slopes, crossed private lands, flooded, or had other concerns**. This included documenting areas that were **damaged by the 2018 macroburst**.

We **met with land managers and partners** such as FirstLight, CT Department of Transportation, Trout Unlimited and Connecticut Forest & Parks Association, to help build a relationship and to share information about AI's Trail.

A typical audit process included meeting with project stakeholders, identifying trail hazards and existing conditions, GIS-mapping the current trail, and discussing possibilities for an improved, more accessible and sustainable trail route.

One important aspect of the audit process was working with land managers and land owners to discuss **trail access in perpetuity**, since many sites along the trail had changed landowners or in some cases, had not discussed access to the trail since the 1980's or 90's.



Images from the trail audits: meeting with partners from FirstLight (top), CT DOT (middle) and Catherine Violet Hubbard Wildlife Sanctuary (bottom).

SEEKING GUIDANCE

Also throughout the community engagement process, the working group met with several other stakeholders and organizations to ask for guidance and advice. This included a presentation from Dennis DiPinto with the **Still River Greenway, in Brookfield, CT**, and a presentation from Joe Hovious with **Trout Unlimited**.

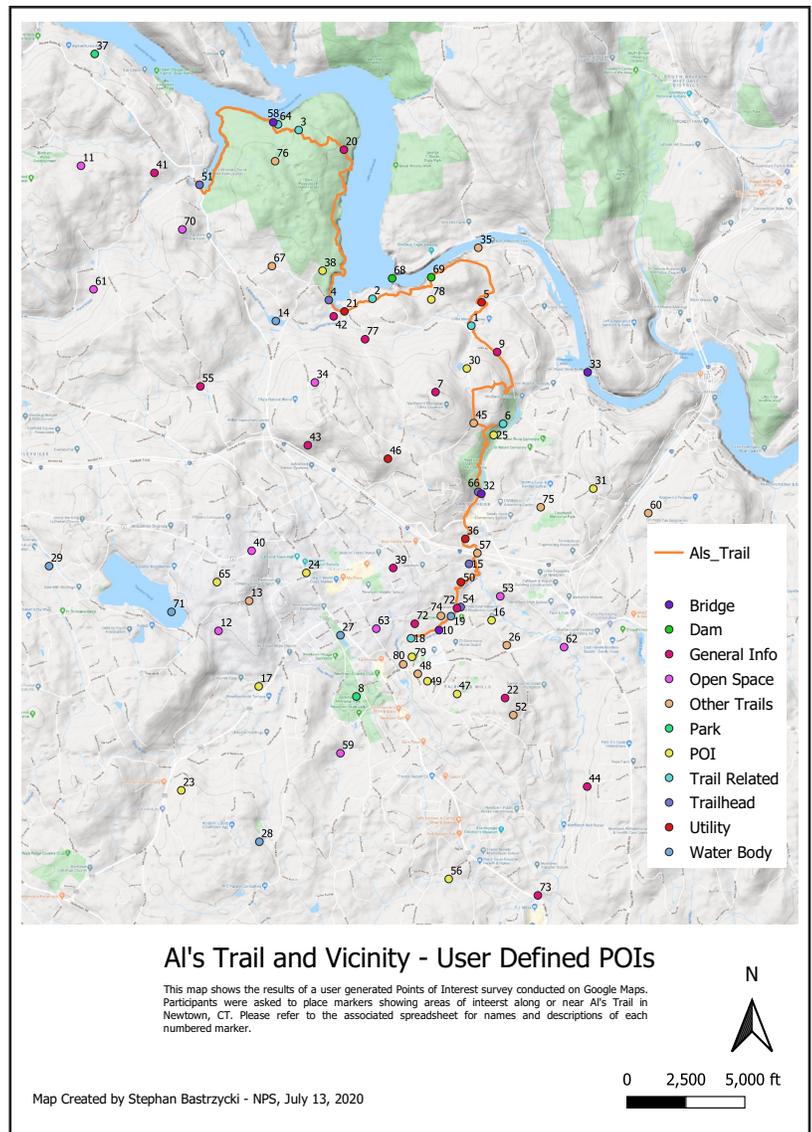
Some key takeaways from these presentations were about the **importance of patience, creating a coalition of dedicated advocates, and focusing on protecting habitat and water quality.**

The working group also took a field trip to the **Institute for American Indian Studies, in Washington, CT**, where we participated in a presentation about Indigenous history of the land, and learned from Dr. Lucianne Lavin about how to **identify and recognize Native American archaeological features**, such as stone walls that are shaped like a snake to correspond to celestial beings.

The working group also consulted with Technical Advisors, and held two **Technical Advisor Committee** meetings throughout the process to gather advice. The group also hosted a mapping workshop to collect **Points of Interest along AI's Trail**, to understand what destinations should be considered in the planning process.



Watching a virtual presentation from the Still River Greenway.

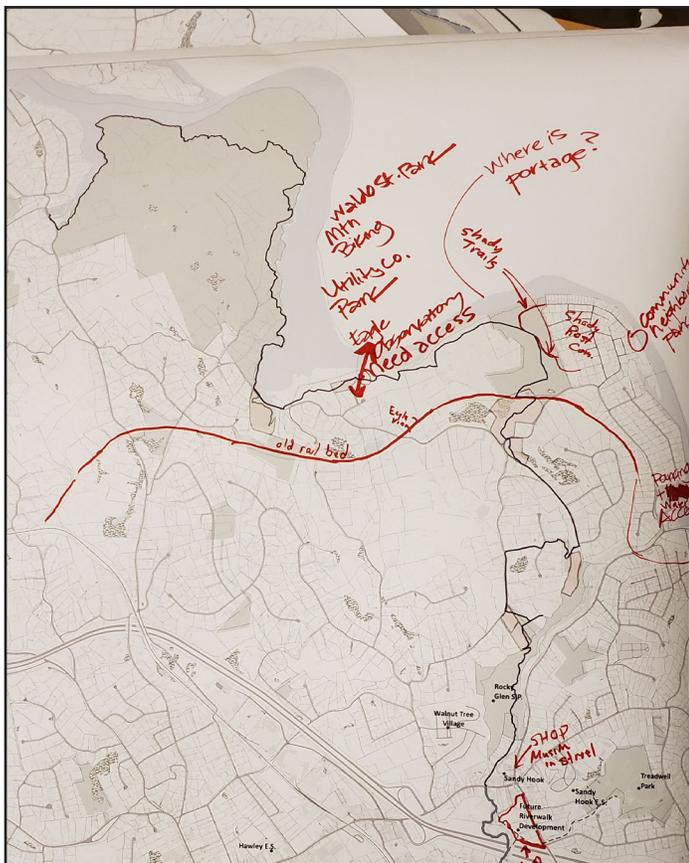
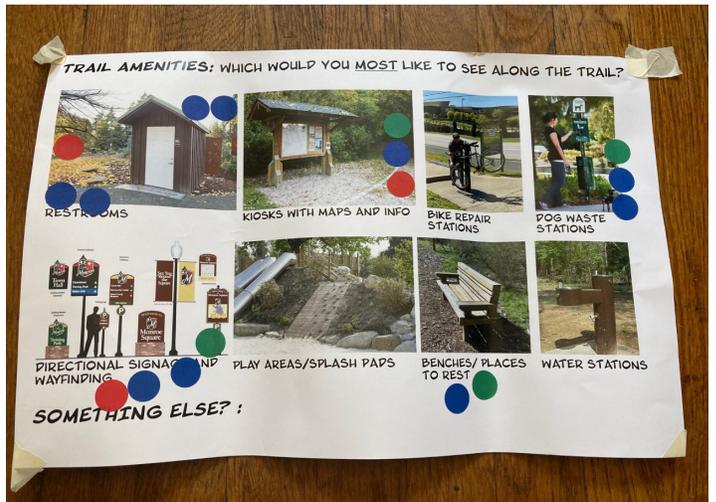


The final map with Points of Interest, which helped the working group make decision for the planning process.

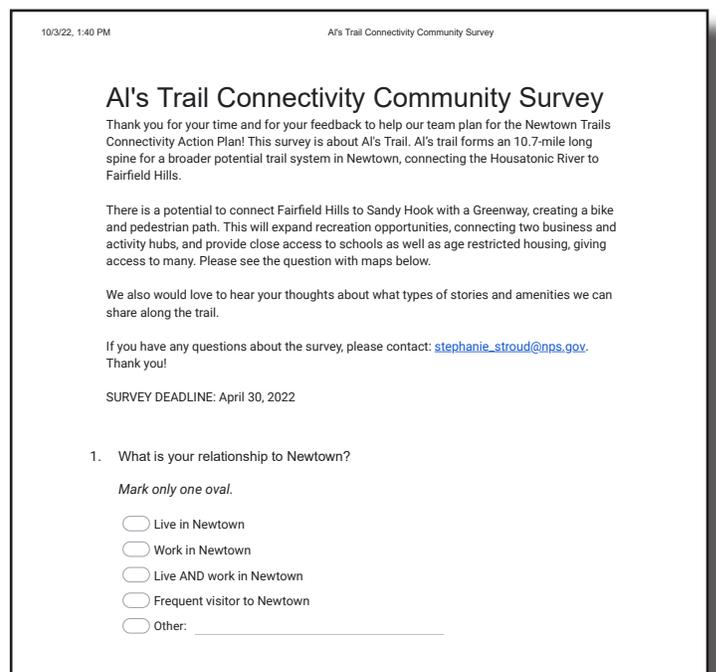
COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

In March of 2022, the working group hosted a community meeting at the Newtown Community Center to share the outcomes of the audit and engagement process. Attendees were able to share feedback and vote on their favorite interpretation ideas and greenway option. An online survey was also shared to gather information from individuals who wanted to share more feedback and/or were not able to attend in person.

The following sections of this Action Plan are the final results of our community engagement process, and encompass our findings after over two years of meeting with stakeholders, holding workshops, and learning from our community survey.



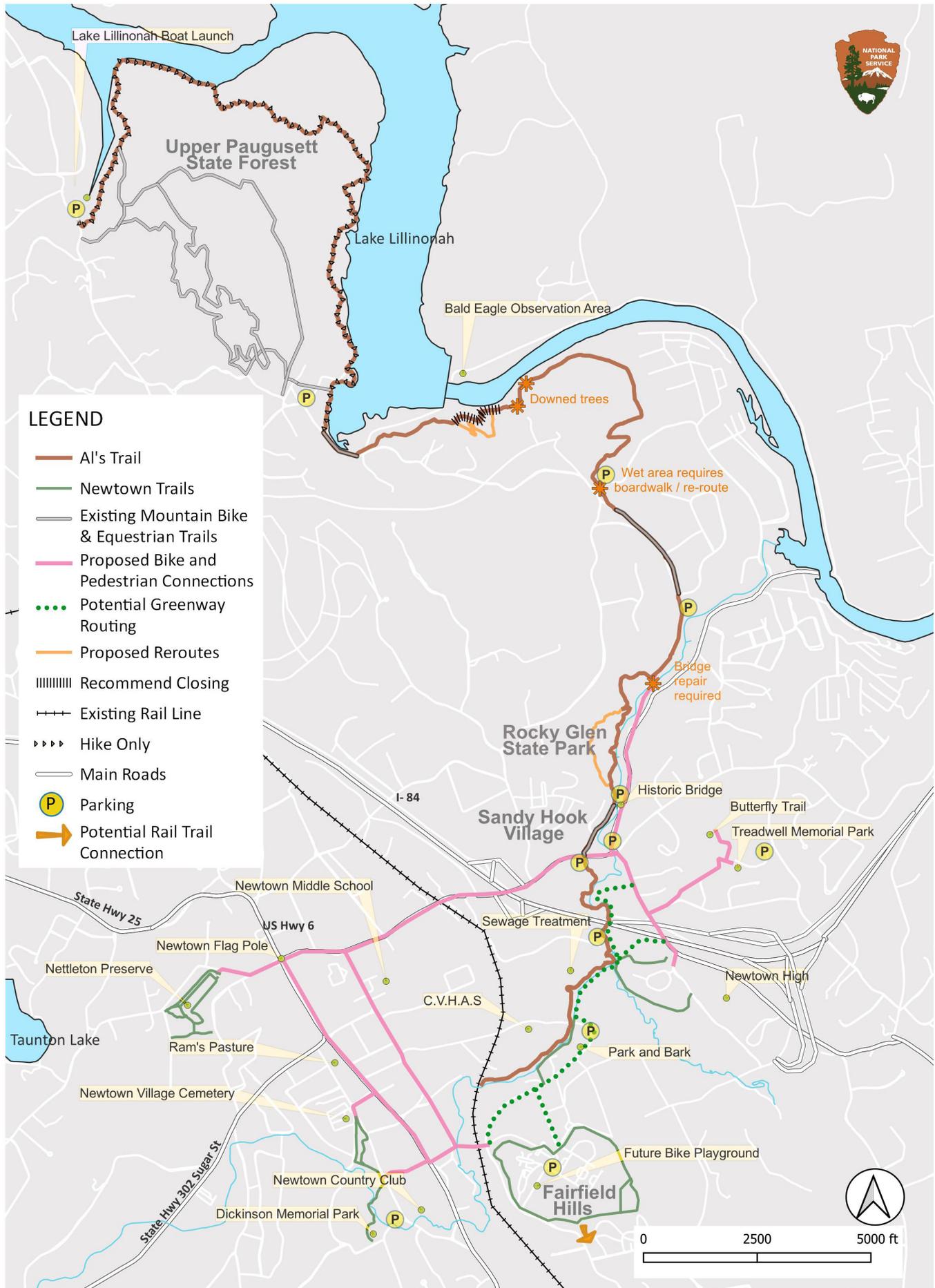
Above: Mapping activity from the community workshop. Right, top: Final presentation at the community workshop; center: voting on favorite trail amenities; bottom: the online community survey.





**RESTORING AL'S
TRAIL
&
CREATING
A GREENWAY**

AL'S TRAIL: OVERVIEW MAP



AL'S TRAIL: OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Add signage** to areas to help separate bikes in hiking only sections (Upper Paugussett State Forest)
- **Re-route and improve steep areas** that are prone to erosion to create a more sustainable trail
- **Remove downed trees and improve damaged sections of trail**
- **Address wet areas of the trail** by providing a re-route or a boardwalk
- **Repair historic bridges and other infrastructure** along the trail
- **Create an accessible and low-impact greenway to link Fairfield Hills to Sandy Hook**
- **Provide and promote safe walking connections** from Al's Trail to downtown Newtown and other recreation areas, creating a network of walkable streets and trails

Overall Proposed Trail Length: Original 10.7 miles + improved connections to Fairfield Hills and to street network

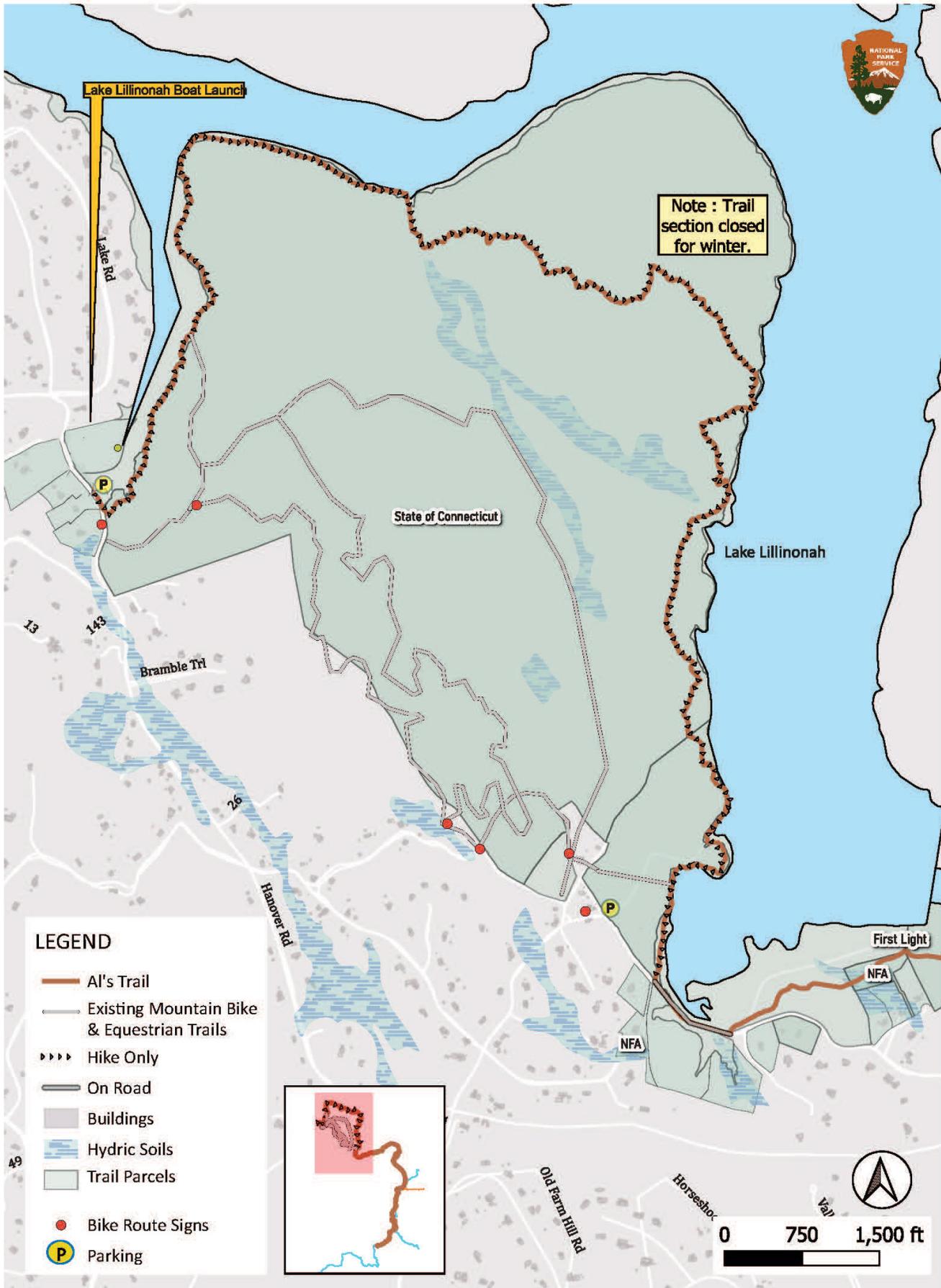


Adding and maintaining clear directional signage will greatly help first-time (and experienced) trail users.



Rerouting trail areas that are steep and eroding to flatter areas will help with maintenance long term.

AL'S TRAIL: UPPER PAUGUSSETT STATE FOREST



PROPOSALS: UPPER PAUGUSSETT STATE FOREST

Trail Section Description: This section of trail follows the **blue-blazed trail through Upper Paugussett State Forest**. It features the Lake Lillnonah Boat Launch at the parking area on Hanover Road.

Trail Length: 4.0 miles through Upper Paugussett State Forest;
0.18 miles on Alberts Hill Rd to First Light Property Line.

Proposed Uses: Hiking only on blue-blazed trail; biking, equestrian and water access.

Existing Features: Scenic water views of the Housatonic, interesting rock outcroppings, variety of forest types.

Management and Ownership

Information: This section is primarily owned by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) and managed by Connecticut Forest and Parks Association (CFPA).

More information:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/stateparks/maps/Paugussettpdf.pdf>

Recommended Action Steps:

- **Add signage** to areas (indicated on map) to direct bikers and hikers to appropriate trails.

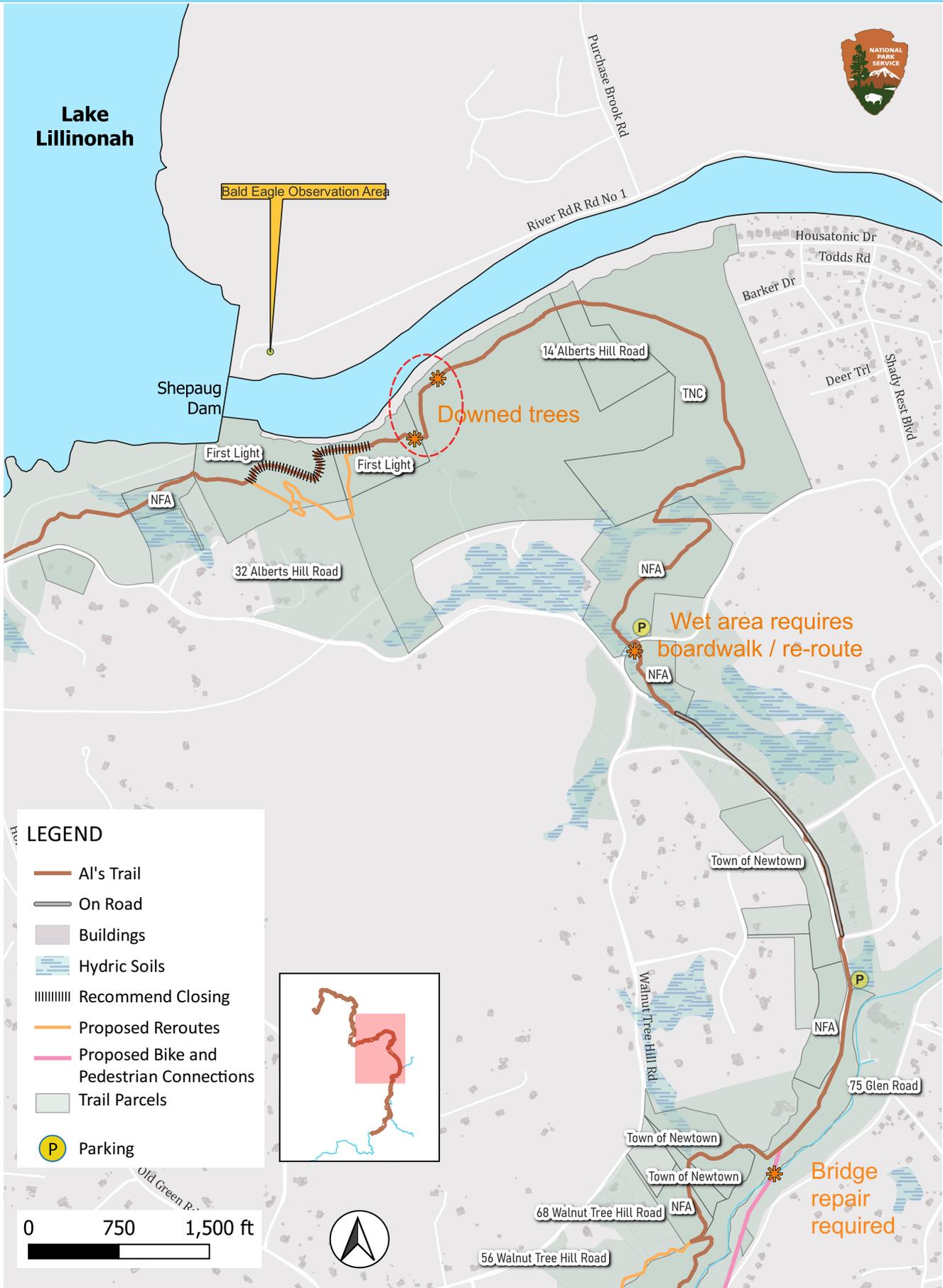


The blue-blazed trail in Upper Paugussett State Forest is for hiking only. Signage could direct bikers and other users to appropriate trails.



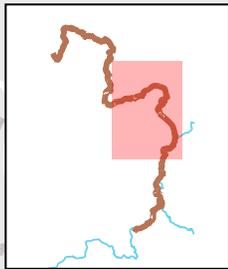
Al's Trail terminates in the quiet and rugged Upper Paugussett State Forest.

AL'S TRAIL: ALONG THE HOUSATONIC



LEGEND

- Al's Trail
- On Road
- Buildings
- Hydric Soils
- Recommend Closing
- Proposed Reroutes
- Proposed Bike and Pedestrian Connections
- Trail Parcels
- Parking



PROPOSALS: ALONG THE HOUSATONIC

Trail Section Description: This section of trail follows the Housatonic River, through some steep areas. Portions of trail have extensive tree damage and require maintenance. Portions of trail are too steep and at risk of eroding. Storm and beaver damage on Knott's property.

Trail Length: Approx 3.1 miles (from Upper Paugussett to Black Bridge) .

Proposed Uses: Hiking and biking.

Existing Features: Scenic water views of the Housatonic, interesting rock outcroppings, variety of forest types.

Ownership Information: FirstLight, private property, The Nature Conservancy (soon to be Newtown Forest).

Recommended Action Steps:

- **Re-route trail to a flatter grade.** See recommended route on the map.
- **Remove downed trees and other hazards** from the trail.
- Find an **alternative route or create a boardwalk** on Knott's property.
- Finalize **use agreement with FirstLight and reach out to other private landowners.**
- Encourage trail users to **view bald eagles in designated areas** to maintain safety to eagles.

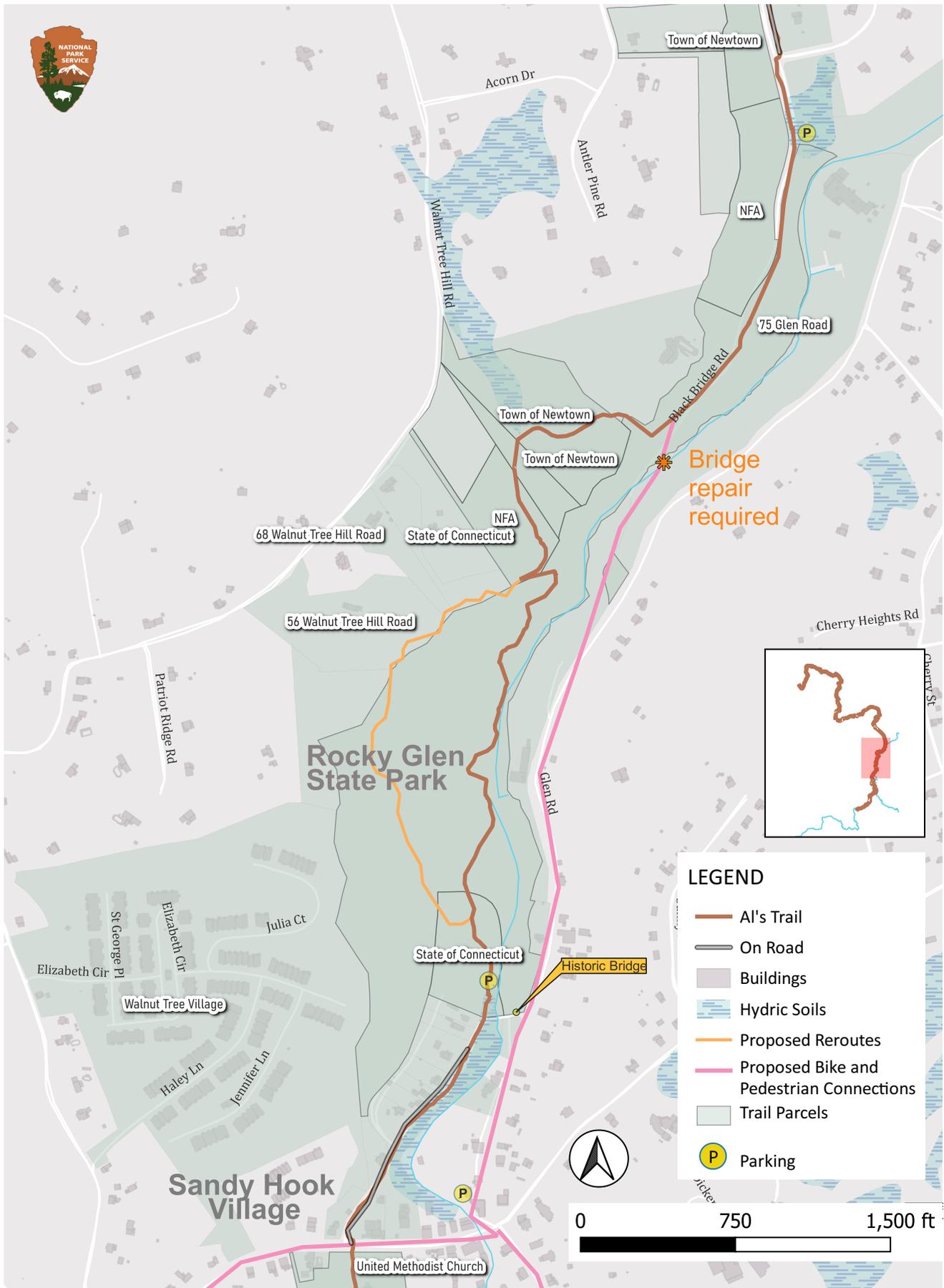


Views to the Shepaug Dam along Al's Trail on land that is owned by FirstLight.



Bald eagle viewing is a popular activity, but can be threatening to the eagles. Encourage visitors to see the eagles across the river at Eagle View Park in Southbury.

AL'S TRAIL: ROCKY GLEN STATE PARK



LEGEND

- Al's Trail
- On Road
- Buildings
- Hydric Soils
- Proposed Reroutes
- Proposed Bike and Pedestrian Connections
- Trail Parcels
- P Parking



PROPOSALS: ROCKY GLEN STATE PARK

Trail Section Description: This section of trail follows Black Bridge Road and travels through Rocky Glen State Park and Sandy Hook.

Trail Length: Approx. 1.5 Miles

Proposed Uses: Hiking, biking

Features: The highest point of Al's Trail, featuring scenic views of the Housatonic and valley below. Many historic features and the Connecticut Garnet Trail. Connection to Sandy Hook village.

Proposals: Additional historic interpretation, trail re-route(s).

Management and Ownership Information:

This section is primarily owned by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP). There are several areas where social trails have been created that are on private property.

More information:

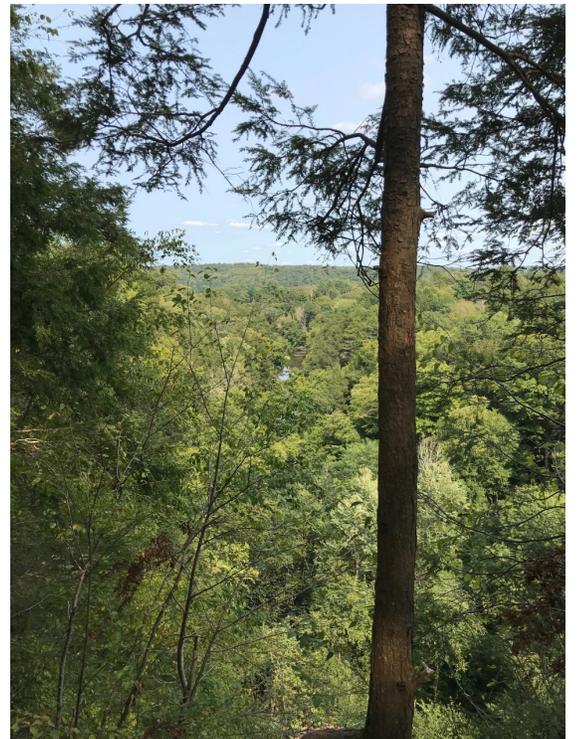
<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/stateparks/maps/Pagussettpdf.pdf>

Recommended Action Steps:

- **Repair and maintain existing historic features.**
- Coordinate with SHOP to **promote historic interpretation along the trail.**
- Research possibilities of creating a trail **re-route on flatter grade in steep and eroding sections, possibly using existing social trail** (shown on map as a proposed reroute).
- Continue to coordinate with **private property owners along the trail route.**

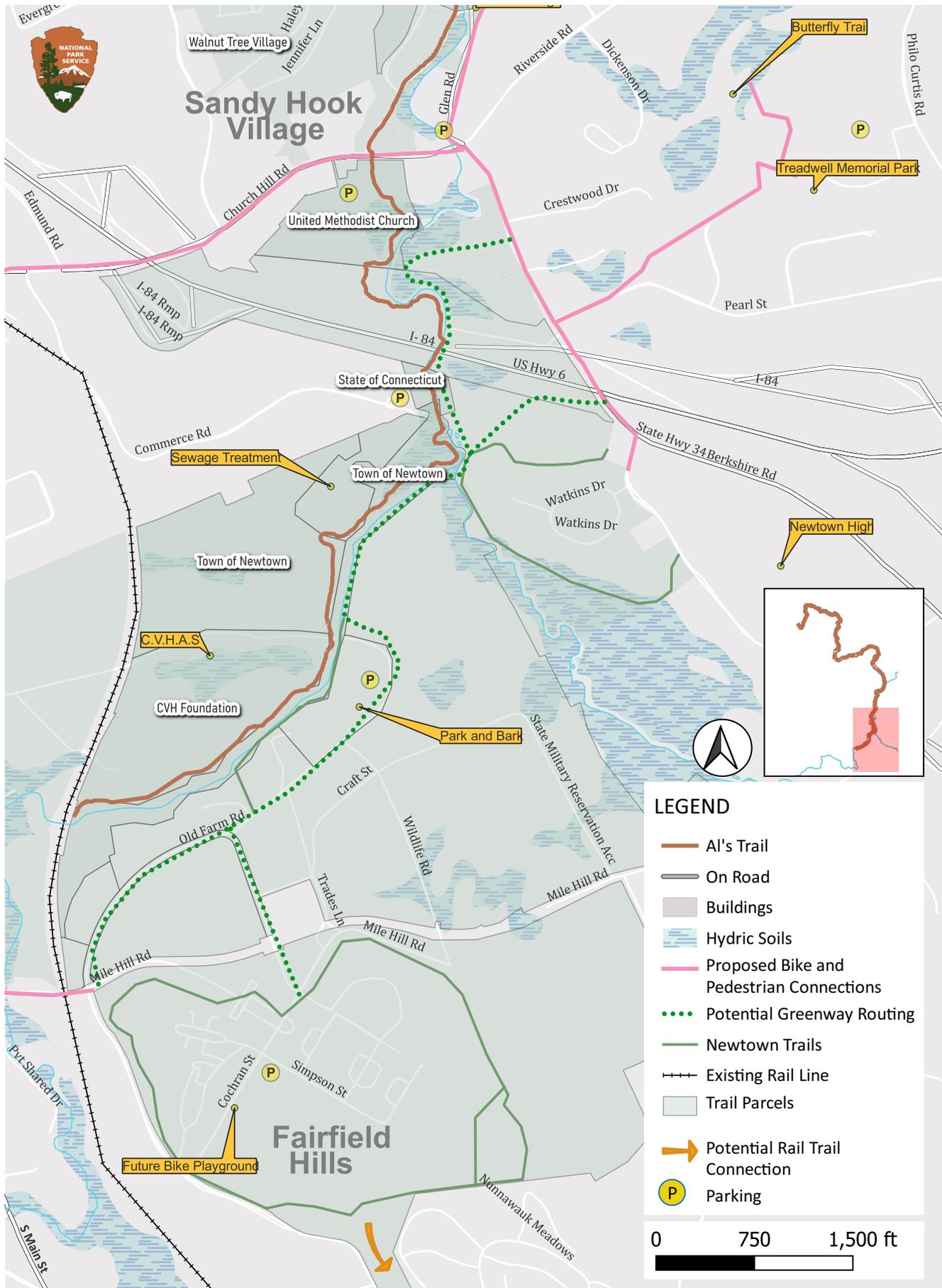


Hand railings recently installed along this steep section of trail in Rocky Glen.



The highest viewpoint along Al's Trail in Rocky Glen. Viewers can see the river below.

AL'S TRAIL: FAIRFIELD HILLS TO SANDY HOOK



PROPOSALS: FAIRFIELD HILLS TO SANDY HOOK

Trail Section Description:

This section of trail follows Deep Brook from Sandy Hook village, underneath Interstate 84 along steep slopes, passing by the sewage treatment plant, terminating along the border of the Catherine Violet Hubbard Animal Sanctuary at the active railroad.

Trail Length: Approx. 1.6 miles.

Proposed Uses: Hiking, biking, equestrian.

Existing Features: Connection to Sandy Hook village. Scenic woodland hike along Deep Brook. Class II trout habitat.

Proposals: Connect existing Al's Trail and possible re-route to Fairfield Hills by a **multi-use greenway**. Restore Deep Brook to promote **pristine water quality**. Connect to nearby existing **State-designated greenways and nearby destinations and points of interest**. Repair and maintain **existing historic features**, and coordinate with SHOP to promote historic interpretation along the trail.

Ownership Information:

Methodist Church; CT Department of Transportation; Town of Newtown.



Though it is passable, going under Interstate 84 on Al's Trail is very steep and difficult to maintain.



A multi-use greenway could provide a safe way to cross under Interstate 84 along Al's Trail. A feasibility study will be needed.

CREATING A GREENWAY

NEXT STEPS FOR CREATING THE GREENWAY:

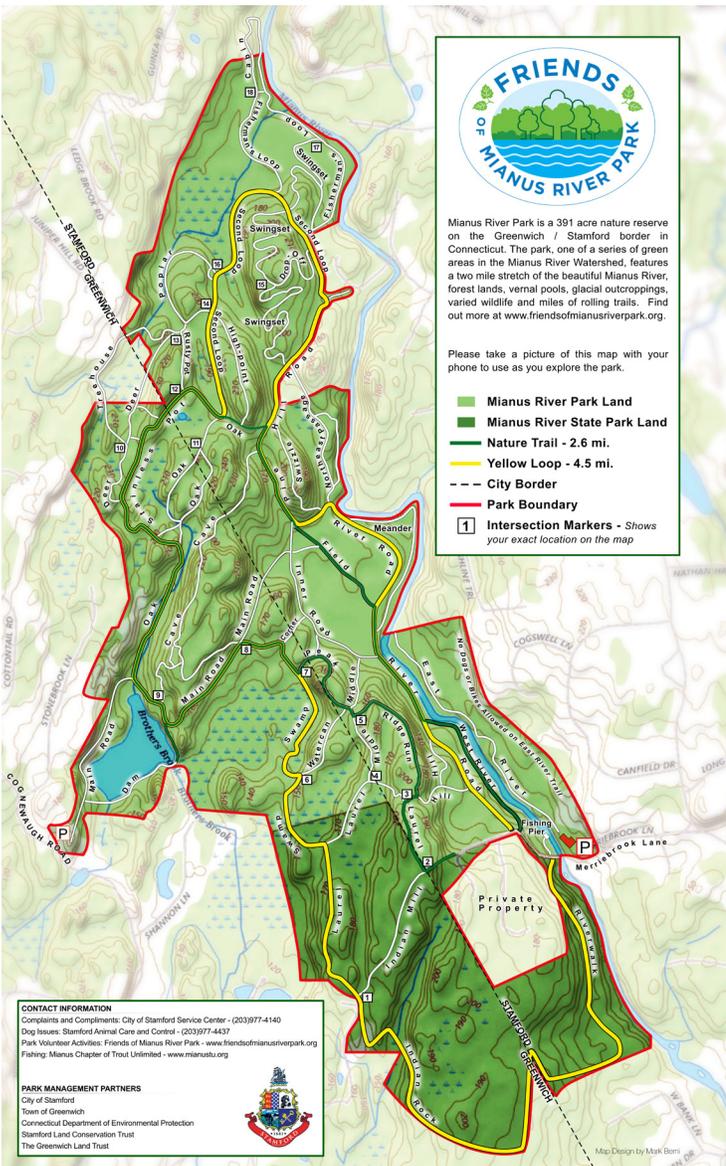
- Begin to convene partners for the **creation of a 501 c-3 or “Friends of” group with fiscal agent** for promoting and stewarding AI’s Trail.
- Consider installing **high-quality educational information** about protecting habitat, so visitors can be informed about how to recreate along the greenway.
- Obtain a **feasibility study** for the most sustainable and enjoyable trail route that also protects water quality.
- Continue to partner with **the Town of Newtown** and other key stakeholders for creating **restored and protected stream banks** for best water quality.
- Complete an **environmental analysis** to determine solutions for protecting critical habitat with the proposed greenway.
- **Hire a landscape architect to create a series of design drawings** that represent the proposed greenway. Design proposals should: highlight **green infrastructure** to protect and enhance existing habitat and water quality and enhance **accessibility and interpretation** features.
- All design proposals should undergo a **community engagement process** and community feedback should be reflected and incorporated into the process. This could be done through a survey and community workshop.
- **Secure ownership and/or use of land** for the proposed greenway corridor (this could include land donations, easements, purchasing land, MOUs, etc.)
- **Designate special areas for “high impact activities” and “conservation zones.”** Consider having separated areas for high impact activities and other areas that are highly protected for wildlife habitat and restoration to help eliminate potential conflict.
- Sometimes the goal of creating a greenway will feel very tedious and challenging. **Celebrate success along the way! Trust the process, and don’t forget to enjoy the trail, spend time outside and have fun!**

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS: WATER PROTECTION



For more information, visit: <https://www.portland.gov/bes/protecting-rivers-streams/watersheds/johnson-creek>

Johnson Creek Watershed:
The Johnson Creek watershed is the largest drainage basin in **Portland, OR**, and is important habitat for salmon, steelhead, and trout including several threatened and endangered species. Their past and current project focus on: Restoring floodplain and stream banks; lowering stream temperatures; increasing riparian canopy (planting trees along stream banks); and adding large wood to streams.



Mianus River Park: Mianus River Park is a 391 acre nature reserve on the **Greenwich / Stamford border in Connecticut**. The park, one of a series of green areas in the Mianus River Watershed, features a two mile stretch of the beautiful Mianus River, forest lands, vernal pools, glacial outcroppings, varied wildlife and miles of rolling trails.

The Friends of Mianus River Park (Friends) is an all volunteer group. We are a non profit corporation and a registered 501c3 allowing donors to make tax deductible contributions. While the group formed in 2008, our origins date back to 2004 when the City of Stamford and the National Park Service held a series of meetings with the Public to address the park's deterioration.

To learn more about the Mianus River Park, and the Friends, visit: <https://www.friendsofmianusriverpark.org>

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS: MUTLI-USE GREENWAY



Still River Greenway



Still River Greenway (left) is a multi-use trail and greenway along the Still River in **Brookfield, CT**. The trail runs from the Brookfield Municipal Center to the Brookfield Town Center (also known as the “Four Corners” district) and is completely paved. The other section of the trail runs from the Municipal Center, and loops around in the woods.

Greenway Rules

Greenway Hours: Sunrise to Sunset

Allowable Greenway uses: Walking, jogging, bicycling, rollerblading, skateboarding, bird watching, dog walking (on a leash & please clean up after your pet), cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, mountain bikers (on handicap access only).

Disallowable Greenway uses: Horses, motorcycles, ATVs, snowmobiles, swimming, hunting and trapping, camping, building of fires, consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Courtesy: Bike riders, please control your speed, ride on the right, and pass on the left. Please give warning of your approach with a friendly greeting or use a bell. Cyclists should yield the right of way to pedestrians. Everyone should yield to wheelchairs at all times. Leave no tracks, do not litter or disturb wildlife. Wildlife's trees, shrubs, and animal habitat can only flourish if left alone.

To report non-emergencies contact the Police at 203-775-2575. To report emergencies, dial 911.

Please do:

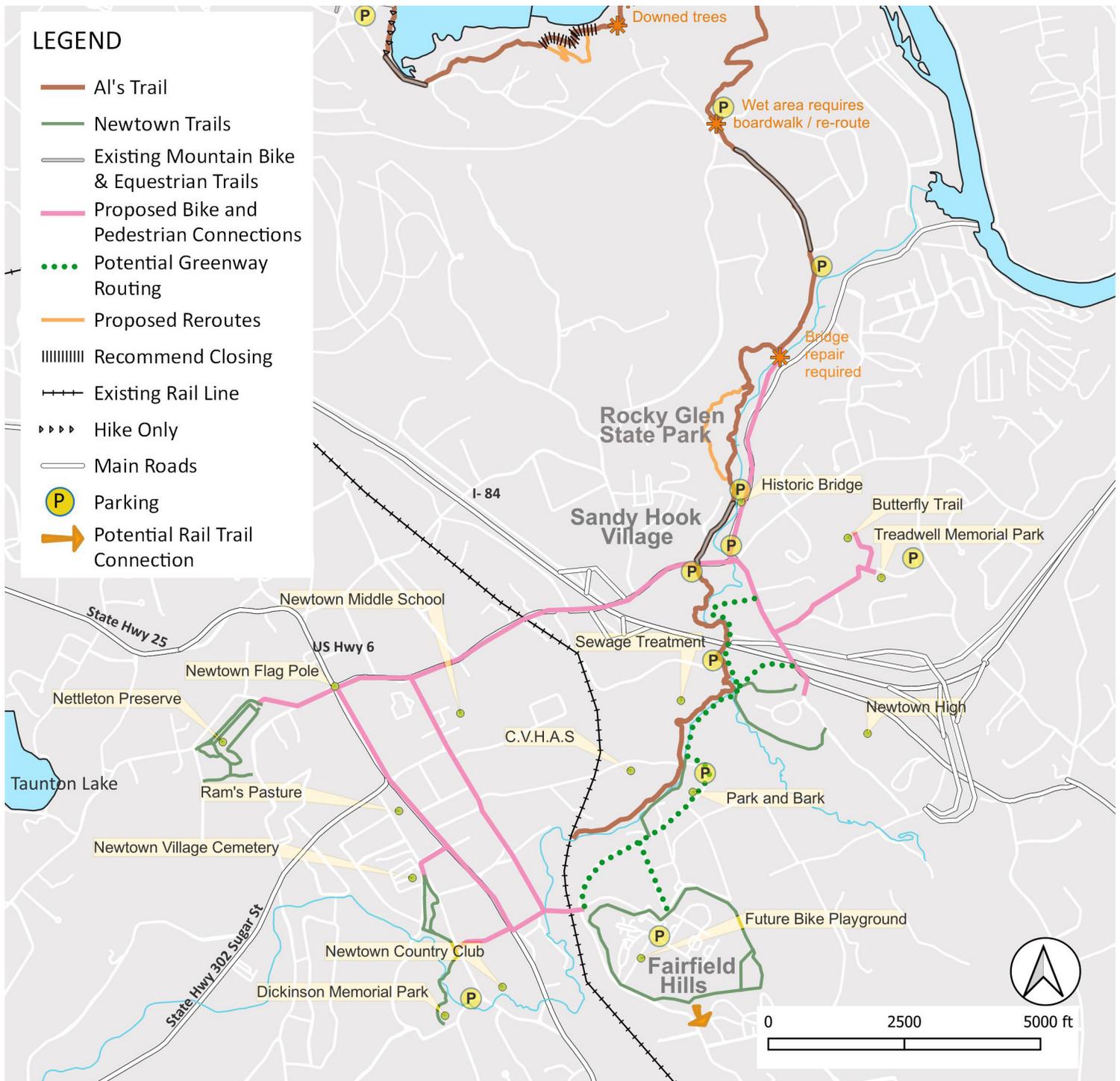
Please don't:



The Woonasquatucket River Greenway (above) is a catalyst for renewal along the Woonasquatucket River in **Providence, Johnston and North Smithfield, Rhode Island** – three of the six municipalities touched by the Woonasquatucket River Watershed. The Woonasquatucket River Greenway is Rhode Island’s only funky, urban bike path, linking parks and green spaces for the enjoyment of neighborhood residents and people from across the watershed towns. It’s one big, green linear park that includes: Seven miles of urban bike path; connection from Waterplace Park, Providence to Lyman Ave., Johnston; three municipalities linked (to date!): Providence, Johnston and North Smithfield; over seven parks & gateways; and 52 acres of restored land. The greenway contributes to the vitality of the neighborhoods through environmental, recreational and youth job training programs. The Woonasquatucket River Greenway promoted the restoration of abandoned industrial sites, the reuse of historic mill buildings, and residential stabilization, with over \$300 million in new commercial, residential and mixed-use projects that are in various stages of development. Improvements to the ecosystem include remediation of Brownfields, restoration of riparian buffers and wetlands, and restoration of fish passages in the lower Woonasquatucket River.

For more information, visit: <https://wrwc.org/wp/>

AL'S TRAIL: CONNECTIONS TO TOWN



Al's Trails Connections to Town Description:

The southern section of Al's trail passes through the central part of Newtown, which includes the **Borough of Newtown, Sandy Hook Center, and the Fairfield Hills Campus**. First, this central part of town contains the town's **two parks, Dickinson and Treadwell, a loop trail in the Fairfield Hills campus that has heavy usage, and many other recreational facilities**. Second, it has a high concentration of **businesses, schools, churches, and government buildings** that generate a lot of visits. And finally, unlike most of the town, it has an **expanding network of sidewalks**. As a result, there are many opportunities for useful trail connections in this area.

The southern end of Al's Trail is adjacent to the **Fairfield Hills campus**, and with a good connection to the campus, the campus itself might ultimately be considered the starting point of the trail. Since the campus was purchased by the town about 20 years ago, it has been gradually transformed into **a destination for recreation and local government**. There are now **numerous ballfields** in the vicinity, and on a nice day, at any one time many dozens of hikers can be seen using its **paved loop trail**. A **community center** was recently added near the new town government headquarters there, and a **bicycle playground** is now being planned. Additional **short hiking trails** also exist in the area, and there are ongoing discussions about extending the Fairfield Hills trails further south, with the goal of eventually reaching the **rail trail in Monroe** that ends at Newtown border.

Just to the east of Al's Trail near its southern end there is **a new open space area, Oakview**, with an existing trail that leads from the vicinity of Al's Trail near the end of Commerce St. to the back entrance of the **High School**. Only a short section of trail, all on town and state Department of Transportation property, would need to be improved to obtain a good connection in this direction. The preferred greenway route between Fairfield Hills and Sandy Hook (see earlier) includes the northern part of this trail as its central section.

Also, to the east of Al's Trail, **the sidewalk in Sandy Hook Center connects Al's Trail to businesses in the area, and Treadwell Park** is nearby. It appears feasible to also connect the park, along with its facilities and network of trails, with a modest amount of additional infrastructure.

Right next to the Fairfield Hills campus and Al's Trail is the **Reed intermediate school**, the current location of a large book sale every summer. Sidewalks now connect the campus and school in this area to the west over to Main St., and from there into the center of the Borough. The town's other park, **Dickinson**, is just west of Main St. in this area, and it also appears feasible to eventually connect that park, and its trails, to the sidewalk network.

The center of the Borough to the west is also close to being connected to Al's trail by sidewalks along Church Hill Rd. The sidewalks in the Borough center already link **many schools and businesses** there, and the **Borough Sidewalk Committee** has discussed eventually extending sidewalks further west to the **Nettleton Preserve and the Reservoir Road Historic Place**, two additional areas with hiking trails.

It is important to note that Al's Trail already has good connections with the **Catherine Violet Hubbard Animal Sanctuary (CVHAS)** and state property just north of the Fairfield Hills campus, all of which have **additional trails**. In addition, the town owns property north of CVHAS that has trails, along with a connection to Commerce Rd. near the railroad tracks.



**ACHIEVING
THE
VISION...**

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

INTERPRETATION

Here are a few general recommendations for interpretation along Al's Trail:

The trail is an excellent place to share stories about Newtown! Consider telling stories around the following themes:

- **Indigenous Peoples** of the area (past and present)*
- Information about the **ecosystem including flora and fauna***
- **Industrial history**, including the abandoned gold and feldspar mines
- **Geological information** (including an opportunity to collaborate with the Connecticut Garnet Trail)
- **Education around water quality** and how trail users can help protect habitat

****In our community survey, 'Indigenous cultures and traditions' and 'information about the natural landscape' ranked highest in the question, "What kinds of stories would you like to learn about along Al's Trail?"***

Potential Collaboration Opportunities:

- Institute for American Indian Studies in Washington, CT for Native American stories and information
- Gather archaeological information from the Sewage Treatment Plant along Al's Trail
- Coordinate with the Sandy Hook Organization for Prosperity (SHOP) to collaborate on their on-going trail projects
- Coordinate with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection regarding Rocky Neck State Park and Upper Paugussett State Forest, as well as the Connecticut Garnet Trail
- Pootatuck Watershed Association for all matters regarding protecting habitat and water quality



Above: A post with QR code along Al's Trail, installed by Eagle Scouts.

Interpretation styles:

In our community survey, we asked "How would you MOST like to learn about the stories along the trail?" The top responses were:

- Audio and information tour through mobile app (QR codes)
- Interpretive signs
- Historic plaques
- Distinct trail markers
- Public art such as sculpture, temporary art, etc.
- Painted murals

Luckily, there is already great information available through QR codes along Al's trail! Consider making this an offering at even more sites along the trail, and promoting this as a feature and attraction.

TRAIL AMENITIES

When asked about which **trail amenities they would MOST want to see** along the trail, the community ranked the following as the highest preferences:

- **Trailhead kiosks with maps and information**
- **Restrooms**
- **Dog waste stations**
- **Directional signage and wayfinding**
- **Benches/places to rest/viewing platforms**

Additional Recommendations:

- Consider **composting restrooms** (recommended by CT DEEP), especially in places where restrooms are not accessible and human waste could become a health and environmental hazard. More information can be found at: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/composting-toilets.htm>
- Consider **wayfinding and directional signage on and off Al's trail**, including directions to and from destinations near the center of town and to other recreation facilities.
- Programs such as a **"sponsor a bench"** can help raise funding for the trail and create a sense of community ownership.



Above: A photo from the final community workshop, with sticky dots representing votes for favorite trail amenities.



Above: Composting toilets in Jasper National Park, Canada.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Some first initial steps for engaging new audiences and old friends of trails in Newtown include:

- **Create a “one-stop shop” for all trail information in Newtown.** It is recommended to have all public open space in town mapped and easily accessible on the Town’s website, with information about each park and trail. This information could include accessibility information, available amenities, distance, steepness, trail surface types and permitted uses. Trails can be highlighted if they are ADA-accessible, family-friendly, have loops for daily exercising, are dog-friendly, etc. Having this information will be a great starting point for residents and visitors to learn more about trails in the area.
- **Create a “Friends Of” Group for Al’s Trail.** This could include already engaged landowners and organizations that can help promote and steward the trail. **This group can meet yearly or more often as needed with stakeholders. This meeting can also be a celebration of working together and could include fun activities and most importantly, food!** It is recommended that this group be a **non-profit** to help support and advocate for the Newtown Bike and Trails Committee.
- **Make a special effort to engage youth and seniors.** Folks in these age groups are less likely to participate in the planning process for the trail for various reasons but are potentially big trail users! This could include efforts to engage nearby senior-living communities, walking clubs, working with schools adjacent to Al’s Trail, etc.
- **Consider having engaging events and celebrations along the trail.** Volunteer work parties are essential, and can be supplemented with history walks, food, live music, and other locally-led events!



Different types of events can create fun opportunities and provide a way for new trail users to discover the outdoors. Above: A performer singing about a historic event along the Air Line State Park Trail in Thompson, CT.

- **Create trail ambassadors!** Educate staff of nearby businesses and organizations to guide visitors to the trail. Place handy maps around Town so that people can read them and learn about the trails. Another consideration is creating a formal trail ambassador program, with roaming volunteers in orange vests on busy days to share information and advice.
- Implement a **citizen science program, that creates a yearly environmental “report card”** for Al’s Trail to engage the public monitor progress and success.

PROMOTING STEWARDSHIP

Some recommendations for creating long-term caretakers and promoting stewardship are:

- Consider **creating a youth crew.** Having an opportunity for high school or college-aged youth to care for their local landscape and learn green job skills can be critical to foster a younger generation of environmental stewards and help with trail maintenance and care. One example is the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association newly-formed youth crew. Giving youth a voice in planning and decision-making processes as part of the crew will empower them to make decisions and encourage future environmental stewardship.
- Create a robust set of **guidelines for good environmental ethics and trail etiquette**, and have it posted clearly along the trail. Events like the COVID-19 pandemic have proven that people are becoming new trail users every day, and that means there will be a learning curve about how to care for the trails. Post guidelines in an approachable, easy-to-understand format. Post signage in multiple languages as needed and use universally-understood images when possible. Post information about closest facilities, which users have right-of-way, and make it clear where not to step to damage habitat and why. Provide garbage receptacles whenever possible. Try to use a friendly and inviting tone (one example is the sticker campaign that says, "Be nice, say hi!")



Above: The Connecticut Forest and Parks Association's Connecticut Woodlands Conservation Corps performs trail maintenance, repair and construction projects on the 825-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System in Connecticut. To learn more, visit:

<https://ctwoodlands.org/connecticut-woodlands-conservation-corps/>

The National Park Service has guidelines about basic trail etiquette here:

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/hikingetiquette.htm>

FEDERAL AND STATE FUNDING & RESOURCES

FEDERAL GRANTS & RESOURCES:

- **US Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School Programs:** A compilation of resources and tools to help improve safety and physical activity for children. Visit: <https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/Safe-Routes-to-School-Programs>
- **Grants.gov:** a large database of searchable federal grants
- **National Recreation Trails (NRT):** Though not a source of funding, NRT designation from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior recognizes exemplary existing trails of local or regional significance. NRT designation provides many benefits, including access to technical assistance from NRT partners and a listing in the NRT database. In addition, some potential support sources will take NRT designation into account when making funding decisions. The NRT program is open to applications annually.
- **Historic Preservation Funding Sources:** Many trail corridors contain historic structures, which are often of regional or national significance. Administered by the National Park Service, the Historic Preservation Fund awards matching grants to state and tribal historic preservation offices for the restoration of properties that are on the National Register of Historic Places. For more information, visit: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>
- **Urban and Community Forestry (UCF):** A program of the U.S. Forest Service, Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) “provides technical, financial, research and educational services to local government, nonprofit organizations, community groups, educational institutions and tribal governments.” Trails and greenways are a key part of the program, which is administered by forestry agencies in each state. Visit: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/urban-forests/ucf>

STATE-WIDE GRANTS & RESOURCES:

- **Department of Energy and Environmental Protection:** CT Recreational Trails, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program and more. For more information, visit: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Business-and-Financial-Assistance/Grants-Financial-Assistance>
- **University of Connecticut CT Trailfinder:** Trailfinder is a free, interactive mapping site designed to help Connecticut residents and visitors find hiking, walking, snowshoeing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and paddling trails across the state. Detailed trail description pages allow users to view the trails, get essential information, submit trip comments and photos, and more. To submit a trail and learn more visit <https://www.cttrailfinder.com/>
- **CT DOT Community Connectivity Road Safety Audit Program:** Community Connectivity Program offers Connecticut’s towns and cities assistance to conduct a Road Safety Audit (RSA) at important bike and pedestrian corridors and intersections. An RSA is a process that identifies safety issues and counter-measures to help improve safety and reduce vehicle crashes. An RSA is an innovative tool that documents factors that can help or hinder safe bike/ped travel. Learn more at: https://portal.ct.gov/DOT/PP_Intermodal/CTConnectivity/CT-Connectivity-RSA

ADDITIONAL FUNDING & RESOURCES

LOCAL RESOURCES:

- **Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG):** WestCOG serves as a forum to promote cooperation among its member municipalities. WestCOG can initiate and implement services and programs as authorized by its municipalities. WestCOG also advises the region on land use, economic, emergency, and environmental planning. WestCOG supports the region's two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). MPOs are federally-designated bodies responsible for transportation planning. MPOs are responsible for adopting long range transportation plans and endorsing federally funded transportation improvement projects. Visit <https://westcog.org/>
- **Newtown Education Foundation:** The Newtown Education Foundation supports teachers and students in all Newtown Public Schools with for STEM equipment to create new learning opportunities, technology to better support teaching and student learning, and unique educational projects. Visit <http://www.newtowneducationfoundation.org/>
- **Newtown Cultural Arts Commission** offers grants and scholarships and hosts the Newtown Arts Festival. Visit <https://newtownartscommission.org/>
- **Friends of Newtown Seniors** was born out of two important ideas: First, that more could be done for, and by, the growing senior population. And Second, that the needs of seniors could best be met by working collaboratively with other organizations, and by being creative about filling the gaps. To learn more about collaboration opportunities, visit <https://friendsofnewtownseniors.org/>

OTHER RESOURCES:

- **The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy** has a plethora of resources and funding information for advocating for, developing, building, and funding trails. Visit <https://www.railstotrails.org/>
- **REI Cooperative Action Fund** is a community-supported public charity directly supporting the organizations and initiatives making change in the nation's outdoor culture. Visit <https://www.reifund.org/about>
- **The Conservation Alliance**, a group of more than 180 outdoor businesses, including Patagonia, The North Face, and Kelty, has disbursed over \$25 million worth of grants since 1989, with a focus on habitat conservation and recreation. Visit <http://www.conservationalliance.com/>

A gravel path winds through a dense forest with vibrant green foliage. The path is covered in small, dark stones and leads towards a brighter area in the distance. The trees are tall and leafy, creating a canopy overhead. The overall scene is bright and natural.

THANK YOU