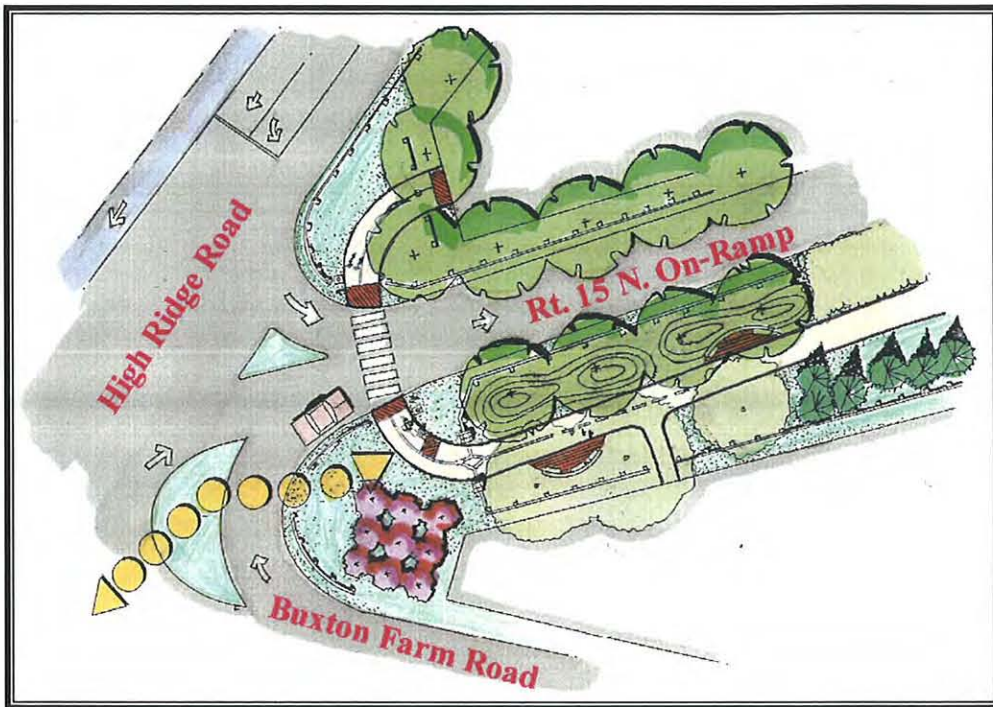


**MERRITT PARKWAY TRAIL
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**
(Landscape Study for a Proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian Path)
STAMFORD, CT



Prepared for:
**Regional Plan Association
Connecticut Office**

Prepared by:
**Milone & MacBroom, Inc.
Cheshire, Connecticut**

March, 2001

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DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**
(Landscape Study for a Proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian Path)
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**REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION
CONNECTICUT OFFICE**

MARCH 2001

PROJECT MANAGERS

**LINDA HOZA
HELEN SPECK**

MISSION STATEMENT

RPA works to make the entire Tri-State Metropolitan Region more competitive, fair, and sustainable. From its independent regional perspective, RPA generates long-range, comprehensive plans and promotes the goals of its plans by:

- Researching and developing new economic, environmental, transportation, design, and human resource initiatives;
- Demonstrating the feasibility of these initiatives in communities across the region;
- Advancing proposals for new approaches to governance that facilitate achieving its objectives;
- Stimulating informed public debate and building coalitions around practical solutions;
- Advocating public and private actions and investments to build a better region; and
- Responding to public issues as they arise with balance positions which further the best, long-term interests of the entire region.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Purpose of the Study	
1.2	Methodology	
2.0	INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS	4
2.1	General Description	
2.2	Methodology	
2.3	Summary of Findings	
2.3.1	Routing Observations	
3.0	PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS	8
3.1	General Description	
3.2	Parking	
3.3	Traffic	
3.4	Gateway Treatments	
3.5	Future Links	
4.0	DESIGN DETAILS/ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS	13
4.1	General Description	
5.0	IMPLEMENTATION	14
5.1	Permits and Approvals	
5.1.1	Local Permits	
5.1.2	Non-Local Permits	

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

When the Merritt Parkway was constructed by the Connecticut Highway Department (now the Connecticut Department of Transportation), a swath of land approximately 300 feet wide was purchased. For the most part, the Merritt Parkway was constructed in the northern one-third or one-half of the right-of-way, leaving the southern part free of development.

Regional Plan Association, (RPA), in an ongoing effort to protect and link regional open spaces through the creation of a network of greenways, has identified this undeveloped right-of way as a particularly significant resource worthy of further study. A trail along the Merritt Parkway would encourage bicycling and walking (alternative forms of transportation) between residential, commercial and recreational areas; employment centers; shopping; and schools. It would also provide an east-west link between several proposed trails including the Housatonic River Greenway, the Route 7 Linear Park, and the Norwalk River Trail. Furthermore, it is viewed as a potential link in the East Coast Greenway, a planned bicycle and pedestrian path eventually connecting all of the eastern states from Maine to Florida.

In 1994, RPA published the Merritt Parkway Trail Study to determine the feasibility of constructing a multi-user trail along the entire length of the Merritt Parkway right-of-way. The preliminary site investigations found that despite the numerous rock outcrops one observes while driving along the Merritt Parkway, much of the undeveloped, southerly right-of-way is level to gently sloping, making it suitable for a pedestrian and/or bicycle trail. Since the existing Parkway uses only a portion of the 300' right-of-way, a trail would be surrounded by a wide buffer, allowing continued privacy for neighborhood residents. The

flexibility permitted in the actual routing of the trail could be done so as to present minimal conflicts with possible future improvements to the Parkway.

One of the conclusions reached by this study was that the creation of a continuous trail along the 37.5-mile stretch of the Parkway would take time and the concerted effort of dedicated people to build consensus and acquire the necessary funds. Therefore, a long-term approach consisting of the construction of a series of 'demonstration' trails is a realistic plan. Such "stand-alone" projects could be constructed with relative ease, provide the potential to link origin and destination points, traverse an area of interesting landscape characteristics and provide opportunities for multiple uses. The construction of segments would illustrate the benefits of the multi-use trail concept and help build support for additional trails. Over time, as support increases, connecting trails can be constructed until a continuous trail is achieved. Routing the trail along parallel, local roads could connect gaps in the trail due to physical impediments or continued local resistance.

1.2 Methodology

Milone & MacBroom, Inc. has been retained as landscape architects and engineers by RPA to provide planning and design services for a conceptual plan and report for the construction of a multi-user trail within the undeveloped right-of-way of the Merritt Parkway. This demonstration project will represent the first of such demonstration projects described above, and will be located in Stamford, Connecticut. The project area extends from the vicinity of High Ridge Road (Exit 35) to Newfield Avenue on the southerly side of the Parkway, a distance of approximately 3,500 feet. Under the guidance of RPA, Milone & MacBroom, Inc. was tasked to evaluate the project area to identify the opportunities, amenities, constrictions and limitations for the construction of the trail; prepare concept studies showing the route of the trail; and to prepare a report

summarizing the findings of the study. Additionally, the report was to include a listing of permits that may be required.

2.0 INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

2.1 General Description

For the purposes of this study, Milone & MacBroom, Inc. acquired base topographic mapping at a scale of 1"=100' from the Connecticut Department of Transportation. Graphic right-of-way mapping was also provided by the Department and then superimposed over the base mapping. Conducting an accurate inventory and analysis of existing conditions is imperative to accurately identify the constraints as well as the opportunities associated with trail design and construction.

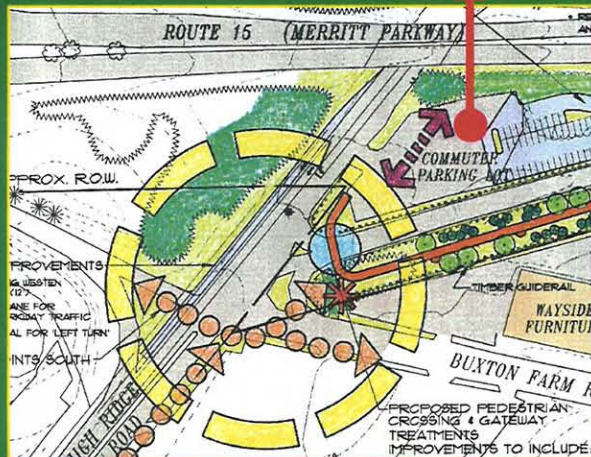
2.2 Methodology

Many elements were studied to fully understand the opportunities and constraints of the proposed bikeway. Milone & MacBroom, Inc. conducted several site visits to document the spatial and visual sequence one would experience while walking or biking along the trail.

This visual analysis was recorded through the use of photography and further documented using written notes and sketches.

The ultimate routing of the trail is the result of imagining a continuous 'ribbon' moving across and with the landform, reacting to both natural and man-made features. The series of photographs and figures that follow are an attempt to interpret just what those features are and the extent to which the 'ribbon' or trail must react in order to integrate itself into its setting. Ultimately, the design must reflect a sensitivity to many related issues, not the least of which include routing, parking, topography, wetlands and watercourses, off-site links and influences, privacy issues, traffic concerns, and pedestrian safety. The spatial sequence reflects movement from the southern terminus at High Ridge Road (Exit 35) to the northern terminus at Newfield Avenue (see Figures 1-23). The photographs

Existing Commuter Parking Lot



- Lot is Open and Visually Distracting
- Landscaping Opportunities to Screen and Break up Views
- Existing Lot Accommodates ± 45 Cars
- Investigate Expansion Opportunities

Figure 1

North End of Commuter Lot

- Potential to Expand Parking (± 40 Spaces)

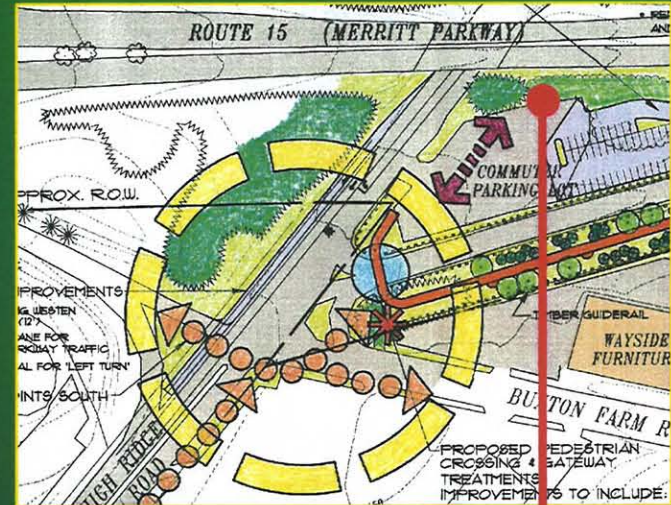
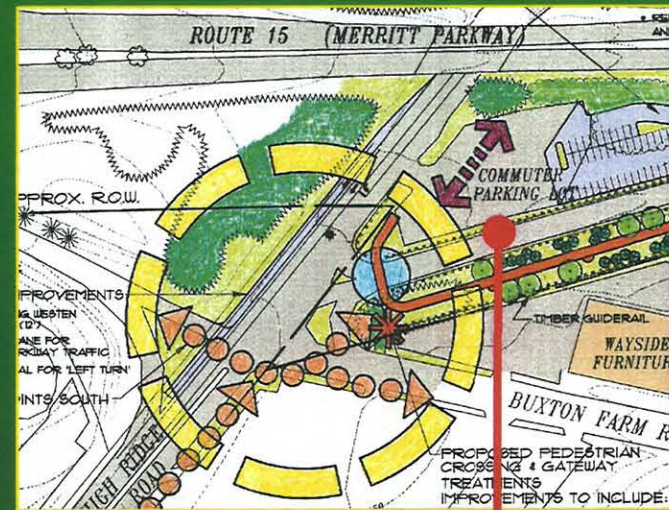


Figure 2

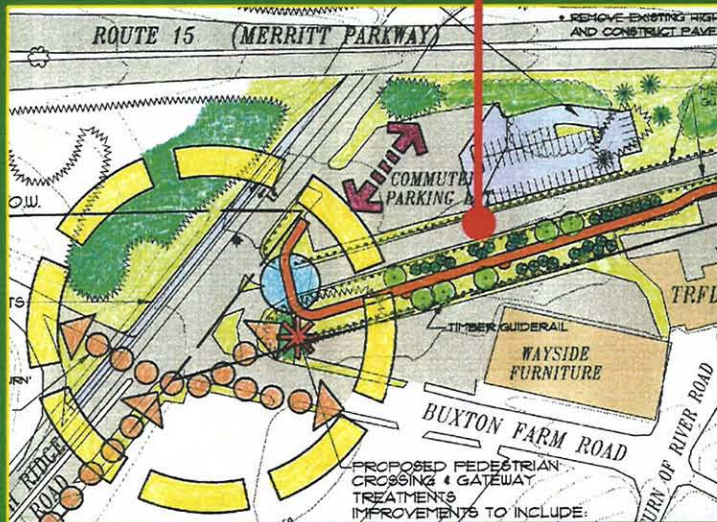
View Across On-Ramp Toward Commercial District



- Note "Turn of River" Housing Complex in Background – Investigate Opportunities to Provide Trail Linkage
- Mature Shade Trees Help to Break-up Undesirable Views

Figure 3

View Toward Intersection from Route 15 North On-Ramp



- View Toward Possible Pedestrian Crossing
- Multiple Turning Movements Create Confusion
- Opportunity to Introduce Merritt Parkway Guiderail System

Figure 4

Route 15 Northbound On-Ramp, Southern Terminus of Greenway



- Possible Pedestrian Crossing
- Deconfliction of Circulation Patterns Needed
- Opportunity to Establish Design Standards

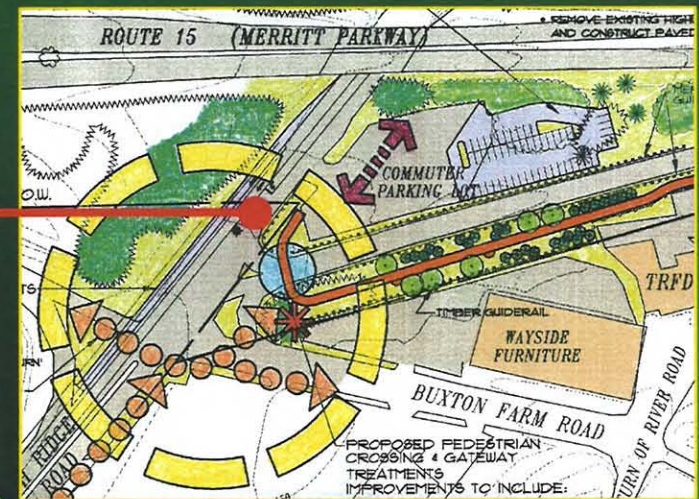


Figure 5

High Ridge Road – View West

- Trail Crossing at Existing Intersection May Require a Dedicated Left Turn Lane for Route 15 Northbound Traffic
- Potential Need to Add a Third Lane for Thru-Traffic
- Left Turn Lane would be Controlled by Pedestrian Signal

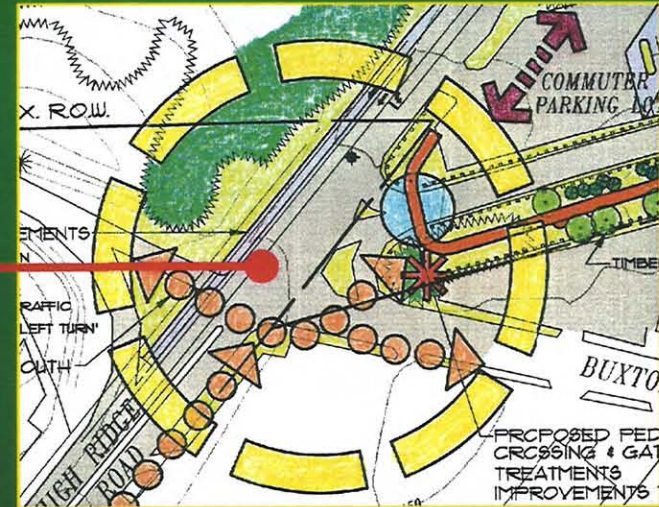


Figure 6

View North Along Buxton Farm Road

- Major Generator of Northbound Parkway Traffic (from Office Park)
- Poorly Defined Right Turn Lane
- Right Turn Movement is Unrestricted

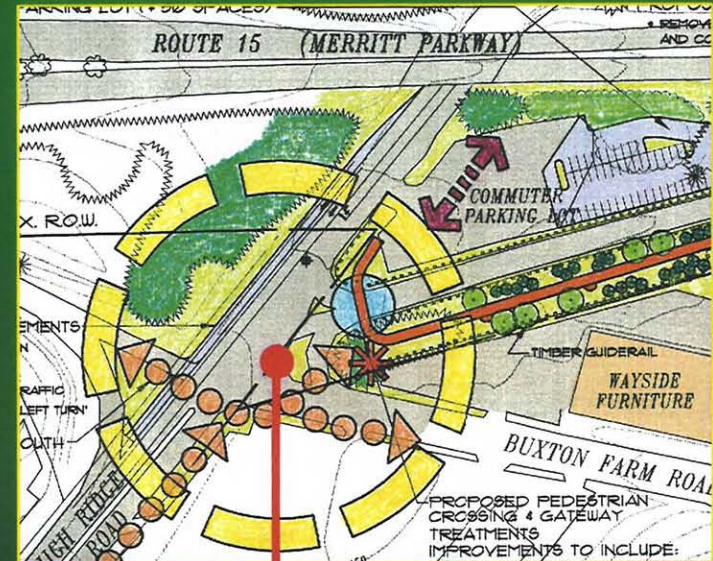


Figure 7

Southern Terminus of Greenway



- Gateway Opportunities
- Significant Trees Provide Strong Visual Backdrop for Park-like Setting
- Note the Furniture Store and Parking to the Right of Photo

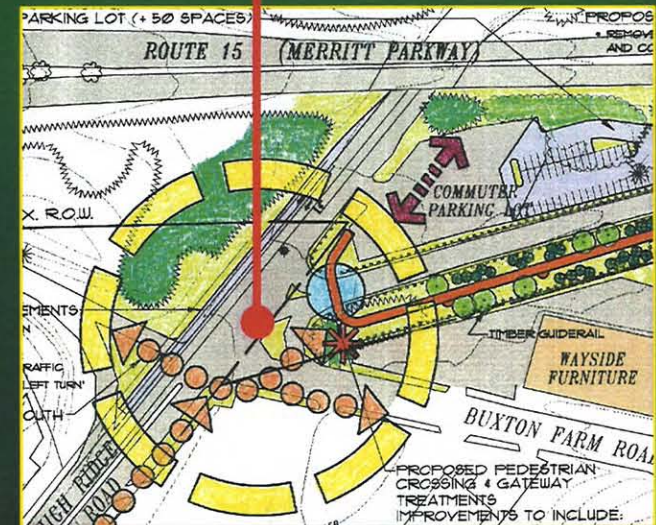
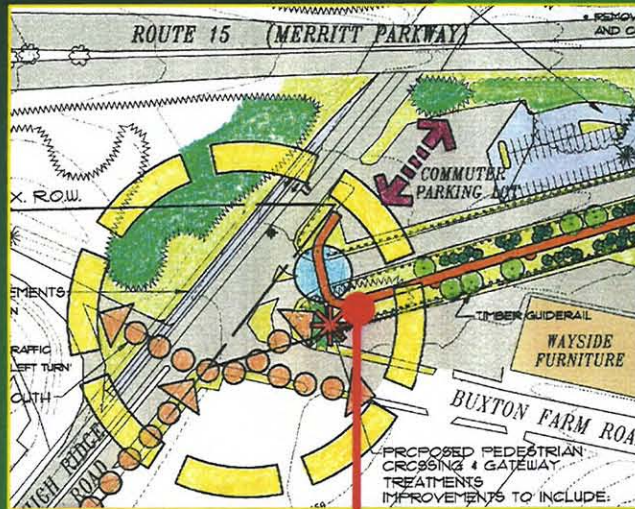


Figure 8

R.O.W. Adjacent to “Wayside Furniture”



- Note the Park-like Setting
- Earthen Berms and New Landscaping Would Begin to Screen Views to the On-Ramp and Commuter Lot Beyond



Figure 9

Rear Service / Utility Area



- Available Green Space is Limited
- Need for Screening
- Investigate Relocation of Dumpster
- Note: Route 15 On-Ramp is on the Other Side of Vegetation

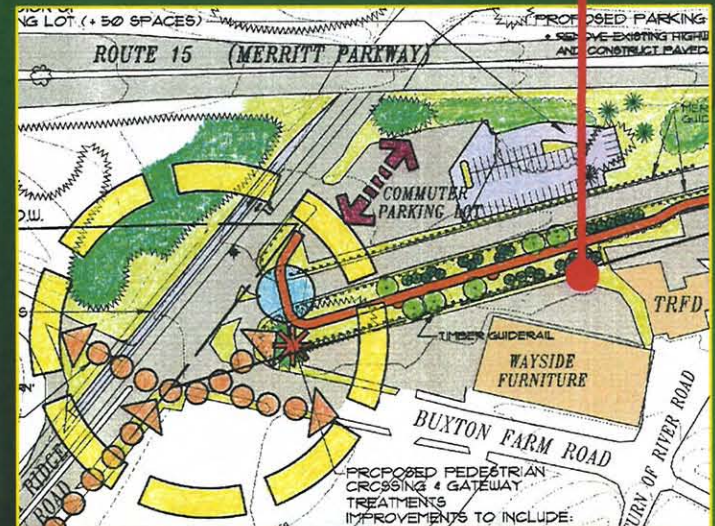


Figure 10

Turn-of-River Road

- Heavily Traveled Road that Links the Office Park to High Ridge Road
- Investigate Possibilities for Future Sidewalk to Link the Trail to Sunrise Assisted Living, Turn-of-River Apartments and High Ridge Road

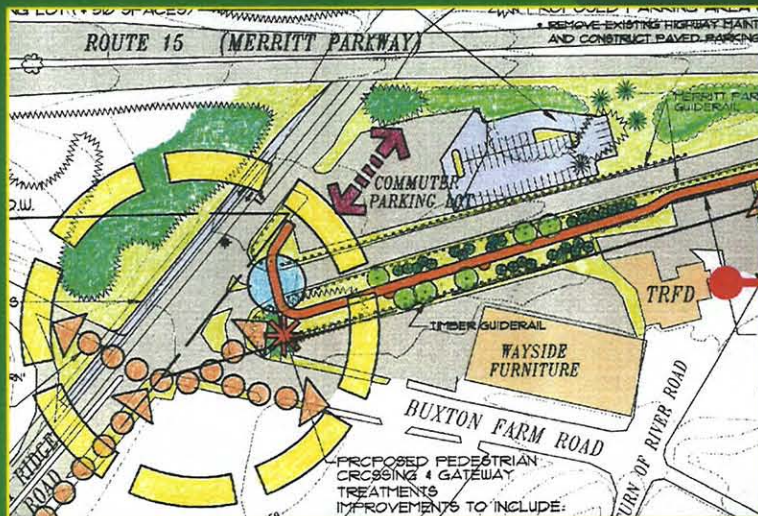


Figure 11

Office Park Entrance



- Trail will Provide Excellent Recreational Opportunities for Employees
- Facility may offer Some Overflow Parking Relief – Coordination would be Required

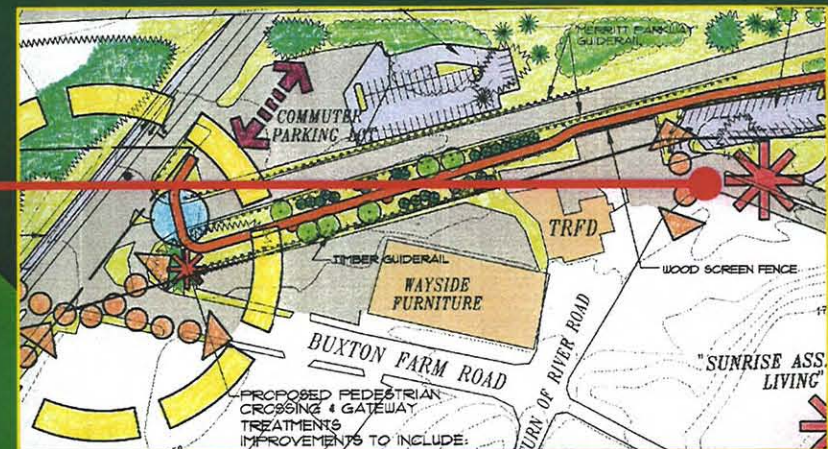


Figure 12

View North Toward Existing Paved Lot

- Excessive Pavement Width
- Gated Entrance to Road Maintenance Stockpile Area
- Area lies within the R.O.W.

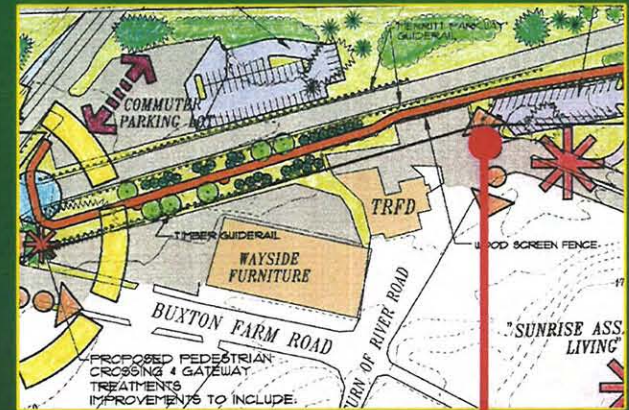
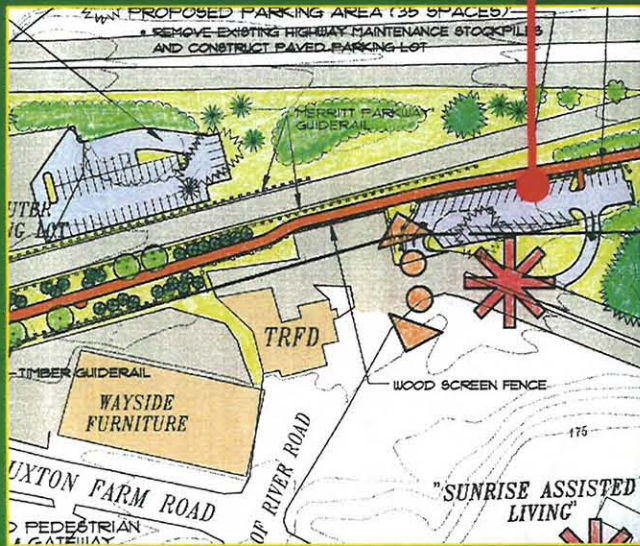


Figure 13

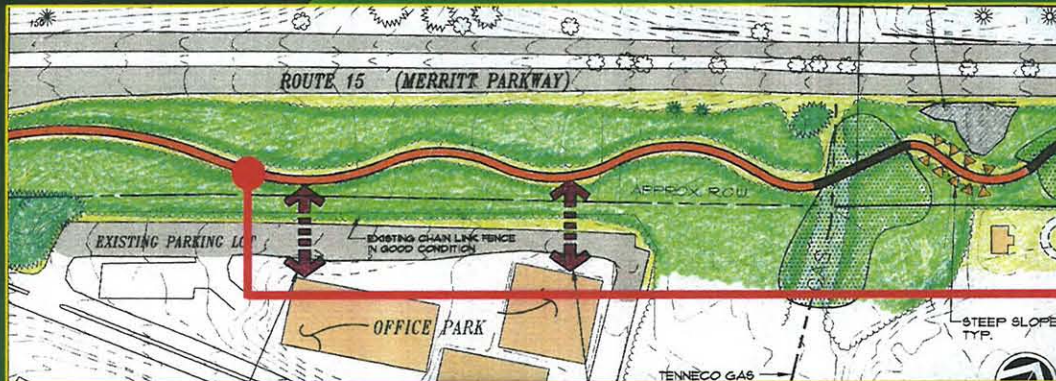
Existing Paved Maintenance Area



- Note: Stockpiled Material
- Possible Previous Site of Hazmat Remediation
- Compatibility Issues
- Potential Parking Resource (+/- 35 Spaces)
- Steep Terrain to the Right

Figure 14

View into Office Complex Parking Lot



- On-Grade Access Opportunities to the Bikeway at Several Locations
- Existing 6' High Vinyl Coated Chain Link Fence in Good Condition
- Existing Parking Lot could Function as "Overflow" or "Weekend Only" Parking for Trail



Figure 15

Significant R.O.W. Vegetation

- Trail Must be Modified as Necessary to Avoid Significant Trees

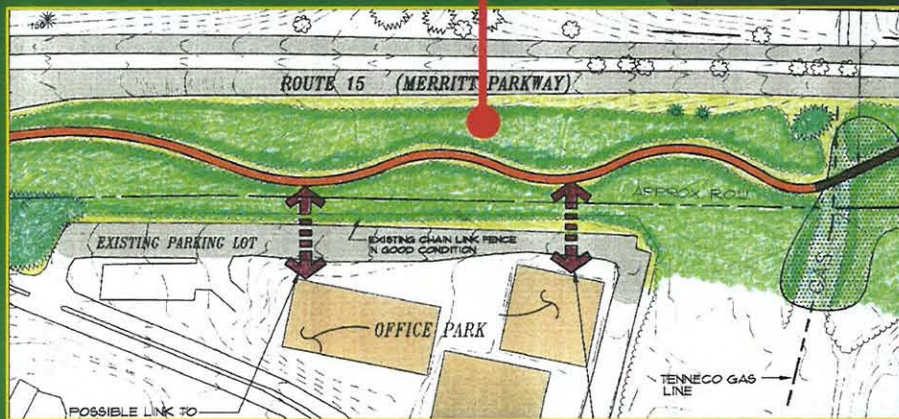


Figure 16

Wetland Crossing

- Tenneco Gas Pipe Issues
- Investigate Potential for Environmentally Sensitive Crossings
- Consider Wetland Enhancement Measures such as New Herbaceous Plantings

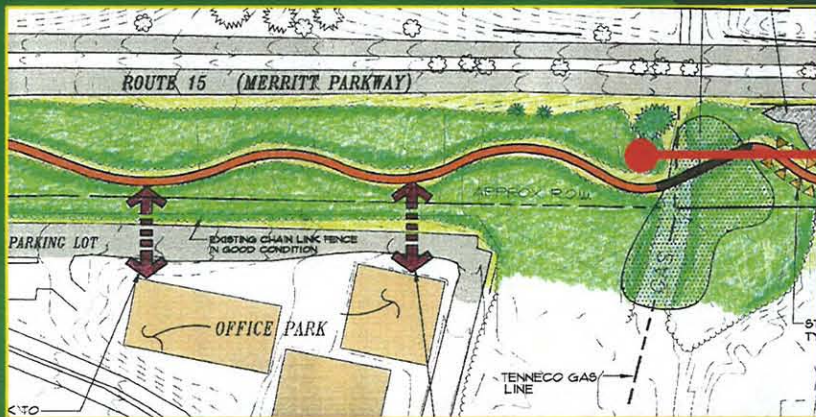


Figure 17

Natural Rock Formations



- Significant Resource to be Preserved
- Exposed Ledge Usually Signify Excessive Grades and Potential Accessibility and Construction Issues

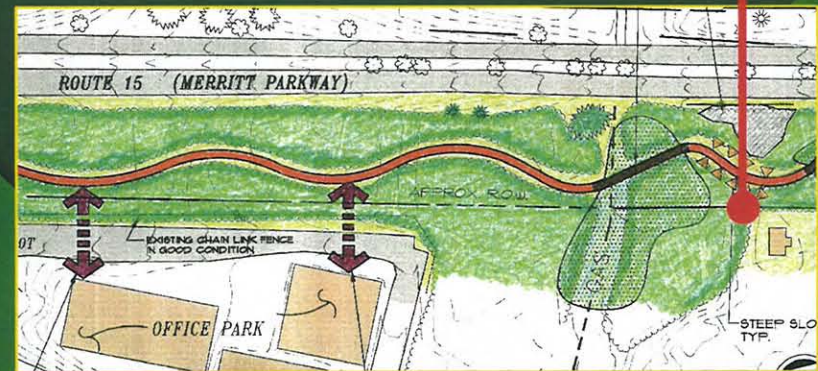
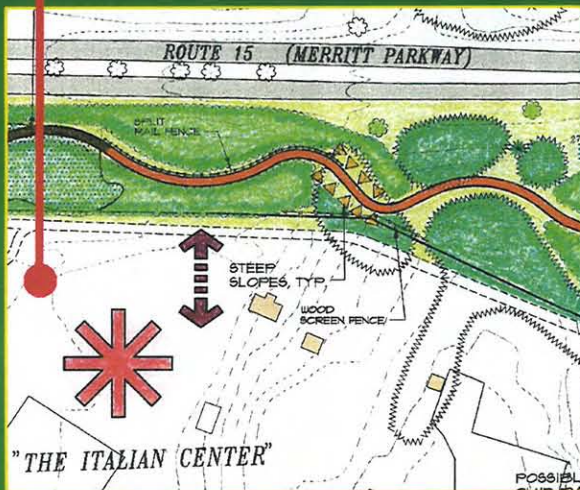


Figure 18

“The Italian Center”



- Trail Offers Expanded Recreational Opportunities for Members
- Investigate Screening and Access / Privacy Issues

Figure 19

Open View to Parkway

- Safety Consideration for Trail Users
- Investigate Screening or Fencing Options Where Necessary

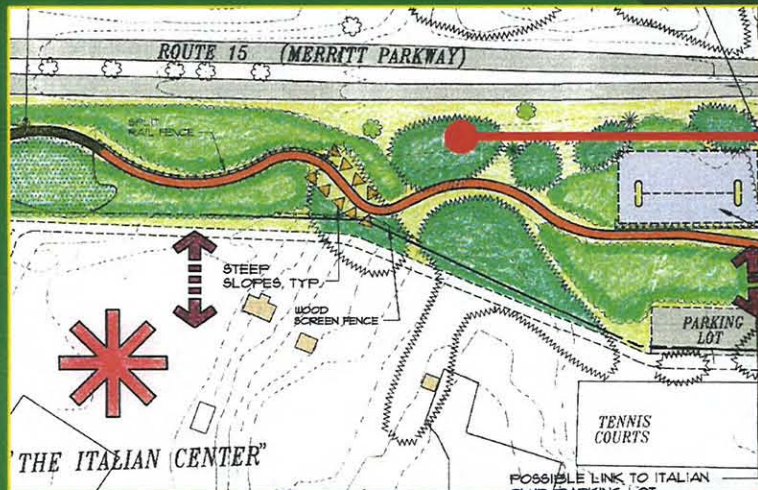


Figure 20

Existing Parking Lot at Northwest Entrance to the “Italian Center”

- Private Parking for \pm 30 Cars
- Portion of Existing Lot May Lie within the Parkway R.O.W.
- Investigate Opportunities of Expansion and Shared Use for Bikeway Users
- Investigate Potential for New Lot (\pm 50 Spaces)

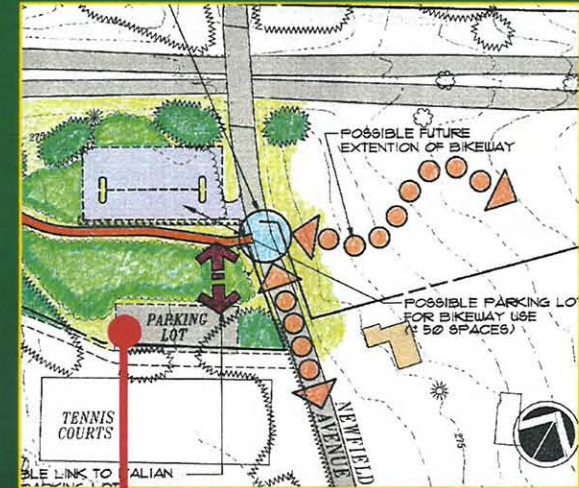


Figure 21

View West Along Newfield Avenue



- Road is Narrow
- Traffic Moves Quickly
- Sight Distance to Bridge is Fair

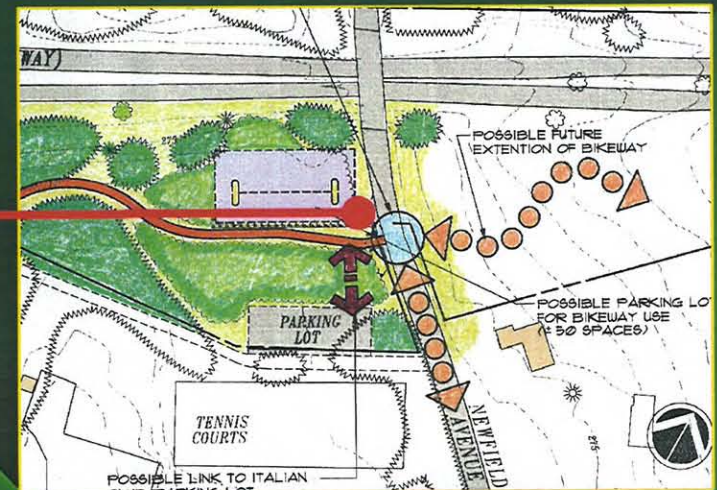


Figure 22

View East Along Newfield Avenue

- On-Grade Crossing
- Gravel Shoulder to the Right Offers Best Opportunity for Safe Pedestrian Crossing
- Sight Distance is Fair

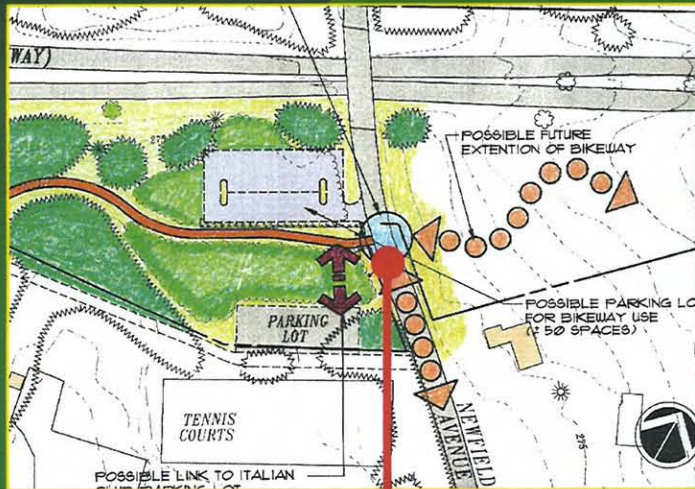


Figure 23

are keyed into a reduction of the base map to more accurately understand where the particular condition(s) exist.

2.3 Summary of Findings

2.3.1 *Routing Observations*

The trail will have its beginning in an urban setting, and will be forced to respond to the built environment along the heavily traveled High Ridge Road and Route 15 northbound on-ramp. Primary issues here include the need for adequate parking, traffic concerns, pedestrian safety, distracting off-site views, and the influences from the adjacent commercial district. Opportunities for developing signature gateway treatments exist in the triangular green space of the right-of-way, bordered by the Wayside Furniture parking lot and Route 15 on-ramp.

The available green space behind the Turn of River Fire Department (TRFD) is somewhat limited, as the fire department's parking lot lies partially within the Parkway right-of-way. Just beyond this point, the trail will have to negotiate a paved highway maintenance depot. There is a gated access to this lot off Turn of River Road near the entrance to the office park. This lot may be in the location of a previous hazardous material site, which has been remediated. Further investigation will be required to verify the history of the subsurface conditions here.

Continuing north, the right-of-way is entirely wooded. With the exception of some steep slopes, the routing is somewhat flexible. Some significant mature trees highlight this area and provide an adequate screen to the adjacent parking lot for the office park. The office park lies immediately beyond the eastern edge of the right-of-way. An existing vinyl coated chain link fence that appears to be in very good condition has been erected

along the right-of-way along the entire length of the parking lot. The trail would provide an outstanding recreational resource for the employees of the office park, and the opportunity for creating such links should be explored.

Further north, the Tenneco gas pipe crosses the right-of-way in a perpendicular fashion. The pipe crossing lies within a fairly large area of wetlands, and it appears that there are no possible routing options that would avoid a wetland crossing here.

The terrain rises steeply beyond the wetlands, and several areas of exposed rock formations create visual interest. The topography then levels off and transitions to another sizable wetland area opposite the Italian Center, a private club that features a large main building and multiple recreational facilities, including swimming, tennis and baseball. The Italian Center borders the right-of-way for a distance of approximately 1,200 feet, to Newfield Avenue. Beyond the wetlands, the forested cover is fairly thin resulting in open views toward the Parkway. The topography then rises sharply, leveling off in a stand of pines. At the approach to Newfield Avenue, there is a paved parking lot adjacent to the tennis courts at the Italian Center.

The northern terminus of the demonstration project is the intersection with Newfield Avenue. The terrain on both sides of the road is level. Newfield Avenue can be quite busy at certain times of the day, but perhaps more significant than traffic volume is the nature of the road itself. The road is narrow and winding, and sight lines are only fair in both directions. The posted speed is unknown, however, observed speeds were in the range of 35-45 mph.

3.0 PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

3.1 General Description

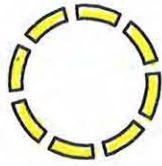
The conceptual master plan is a graphic depiction of the proposed routing; taking into account the dynamic contextual forces that will act upon it. It includes proposed program elements that will be necessary to ensure the trail meets minimum accepted standards. The standards used are those contained in the AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, 1991. The trail as designed will be 12' wide and paved with a two course bituminous concrete over compacted gravel base. The opportunity exists to modify the texture and color of this pavement if desirable, by rolling a selected aggregate stone into the top course of bitumen.

The master plan also reacts the need for convenient parking, possible links to nearby housing, and future pedestrian links to the City of Stamford, as well as possible extension of the trail to the north and south. Specific design elements such as the paved trail, guiderail, fencing, landscaping, boardwalks, etc., are shown on the plan and are also identified in the graphic legend (see Schematic Master Plan, Sheets 1-3).

3.2 Parking

The existing commuter parking lot near Exit 35 currently accommodates approximately 35-40 parking spaces and is heavily used throughout the day. The adjacent Wayside Furniture parking area is relatively small and should not be expected to handle parking for the trail. Likewise, the A&P parking lot is heavily used and would present the problem of pedestrian safety. Lacking any other resource, it is assumed that trail users will attempt to park in the commuter lot. Preliminary site investigations would indicate that this parking lot could be expanded to accommodate perhaps another 40± spaces.

GRAPHIC LEGEND



INTERSECTION



POINT OF INTEREST



PROPOSED
PAVED TRAIL



OPTIONAL ROUTE



BOARDWALK



EXIST. CONIFEROUS
TREE MASS



PEDESTRIAN
CROSSING



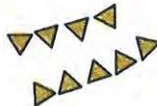
WETLAND



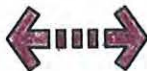
ROCK OUTCROP



FUTURE PEDESTRIAN LINK



STEEP SLOPE



PEDESTRIAN
MOVEMENT



R.O.W.



PROPOSED PARKING LOT



GUIDERAIL



WOOD SCREEN FENCE



SPLIT RAIL FENCE



EXISTING CHAIN LINK FENCE



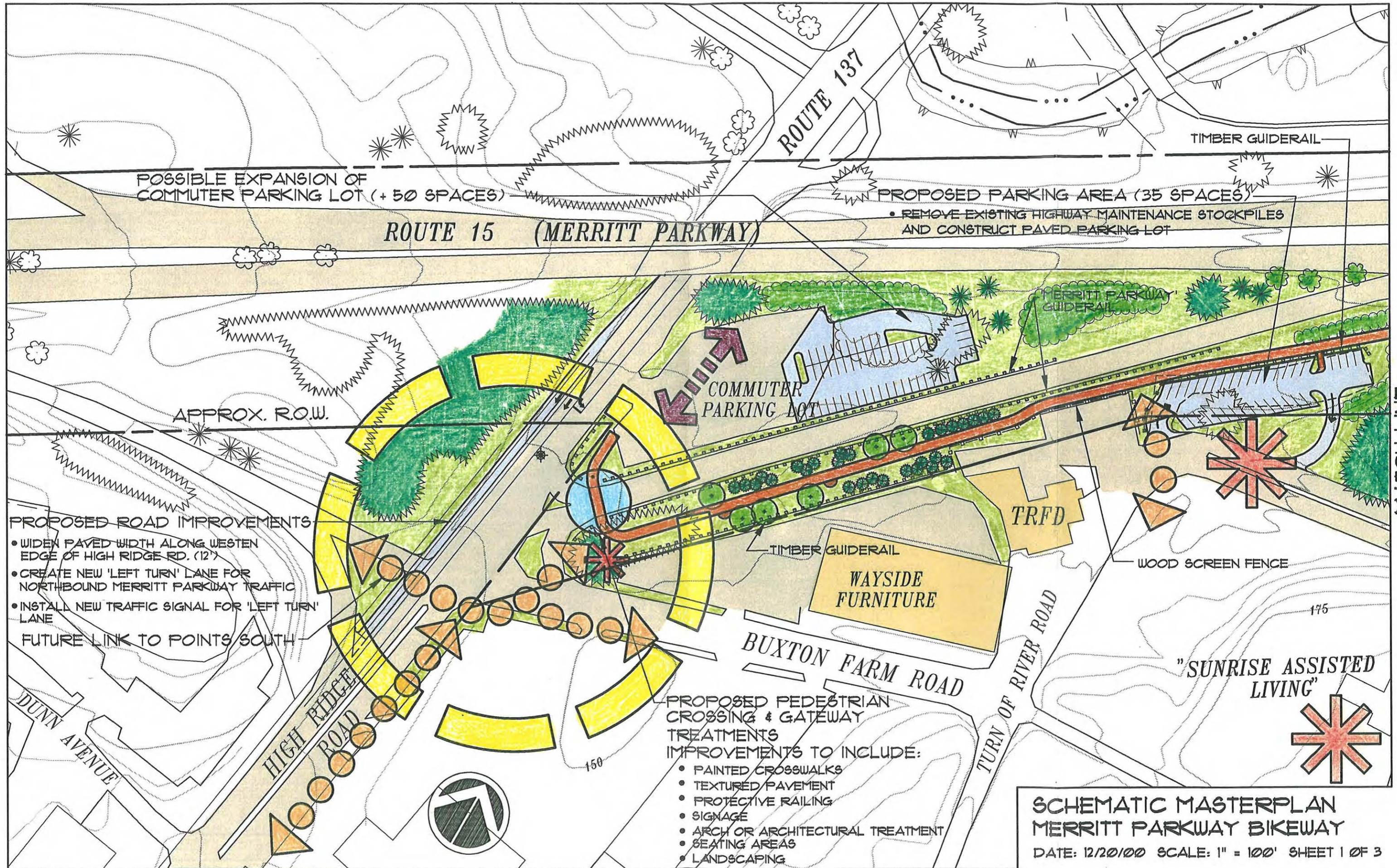
PROPOSED TREES



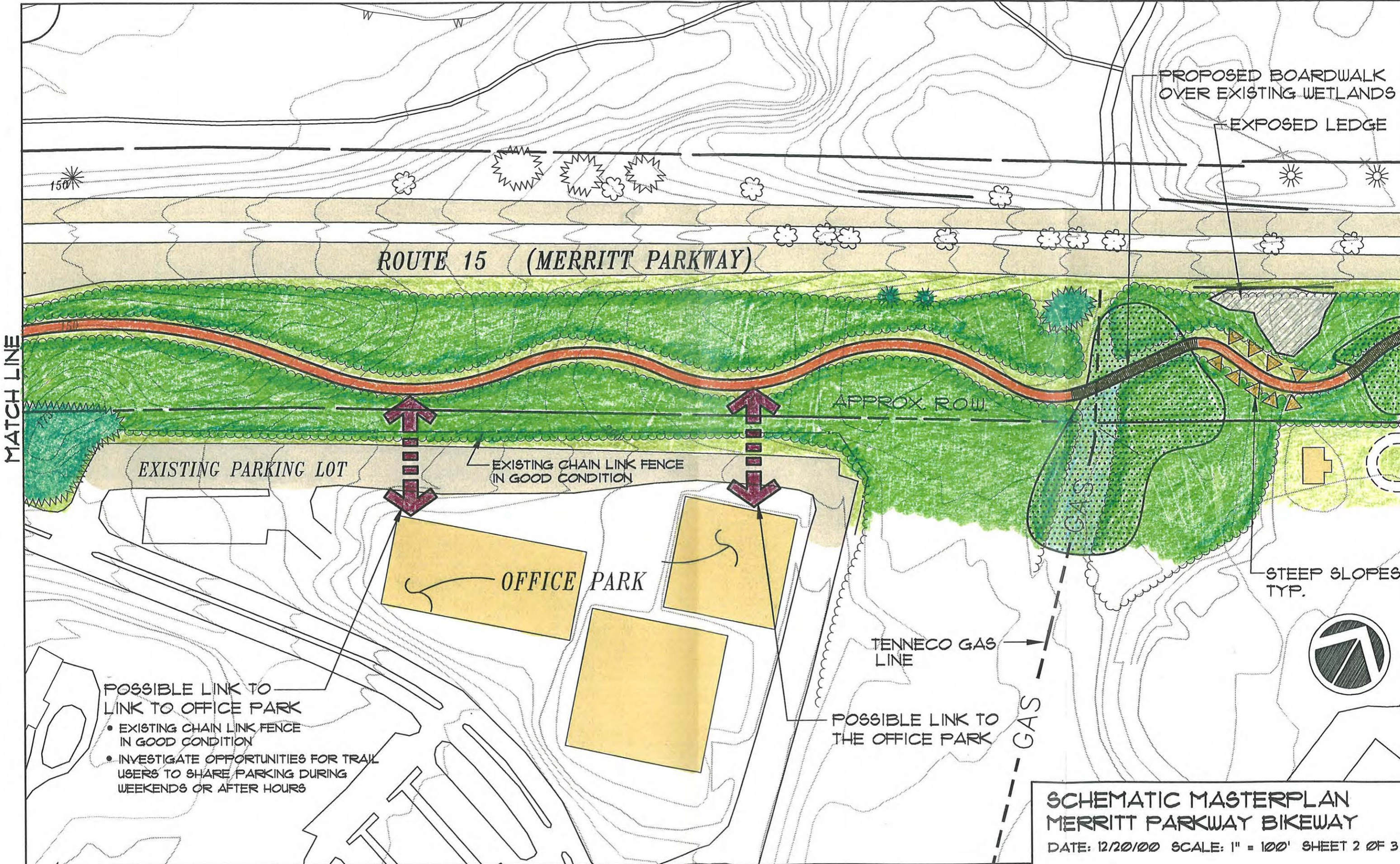
FORMAL SEATING AREA



TREELINE



MATCHLINE





SCHEMATIC MASTERPLAN
MERRITT PARKWAY BIKEWAY
 DATE: 12/20/00 SCALE: 1" = 100' SHEET 3 OF 3

The existing paved lot near the entrance to the office park, which is currently used to stockpile road maintenance materials, could also be converted to a parking lot. This lot could be dedicated exclusively to trail users. Development of this area as a parking lot would require some additional clearing and earthwork. In order to reduce the paved width of the lot, a one-way vehicular flow is proposed at the location of the current entrance. An exit lane that ties into the office park exit drive is also proposed. Additional improvements would entail the introduction of timber guiderail and signage. Prior to commencement of detailed design drawings, further investigation regarding the potential, current, or previous presence of hazardous materials should be performed.

The proximity of the office park to the proposed routing of the trail presents a wonderful recreational opportunity for the employees. While it is recommended that the creation of direct links to the trail be investigated, the issue of privacy also becomes a potential concern. The parking lot for the office park complex is expansive but is heavily used. Additionally, the most convenient spaces (adjacent to the trail) may very well be reserved for employee use only. It should be assumed that this lot would not be available for trail users. However, the possibility of shared use of this lot during the weekend or after business hours is possible and should be further investigated.

Just as the need for parking at the southern terminus is a concern, trail users accessing the trail from the north (Newfield Avenue) should have nearby parking. The existing paved parking lot adjacent to the tennis courts at the Italian Center may provide an opportunity for shared parking. Access to this lot however, is through the gated entrance to the facility itself, presenting a potential privacy concern. Should the prospect of shared parking not be possible, the master plan shows an area of new parking for ±50 spaces that could be constructed within the right-of-way.

3.3 Traffic

In the design of recreational trails, the interaction between pedestrians and vehicular traffic must not be overlooked. The design of an effective pedestrian crosswalk is important to the safety of both the pedestrian and the motorist. To enhance a pedestrian crossing, the installation of attractive guiderail, fencing, signage, and in some cases signalization may be necessary. The volume of traffic using the intersection of High Ridge Road at Buxton Farm Road/Merritt Parkway Ramps and the existing intersection geometry complicates the interaction of the pedestrians and vehicular traffic at this location.

Access to the Merritt Parkway northbound on ramp from eastbound High Ridge Road (left turns) and from southbound Buxton Farm Road (right turns) is unrestricted. To provide a safe pedestrian crossing from the commuter parking lot located adjacent to the Merritt Parkway, as shown on the master plan, a number of road improvements are recommended. First, a dedicated left turn lane on High Ridge Road, controlled by a traffic signal, for northbound Merritt Parkway traffic should be added to eastbound High Ridge Road. Second, to maintain the flow of through traffic on eastbound High Ridge Road, the road should be widened from the Route 15 overpass to just east of the Route 15 southbound exit ramp. This widening should be approximately 12'. Third, the phasing of the existing signal should be modified to control the right turn from southbound Buxton Farm Road onto the Route 15 northbound ramp. Fourth, the phasing for the westbound High Ridge Road traffic at the Buxton Farm Road leg of the intersection should be modified. Lastly, investigations with ConnDOT's Office of Traffic Engineering should be made to advance the installation of a pedestrian actuated traffic signal on the Merritt Parkway northbound entrance ramp at the commuter lot crossing.

3.4 Gateway Treatments

The triangular shaped green at the southern terminus provides a wonderful opportunity to establish a signature gateway to the trail (see Figure 24). The existing field of lawn under the existing canopy of shade trees provides a park-like setting that is not unlike the intent of the original roadside design for the Merritt Parkway. Architectural treatment(s) such as an arch, along with plantings of flowering trees, perennial/annual flower beds, and select shrubs will announce to the passerby that this is the portal to the Merritt Parkway Bikeway. Additional treatments might include the use of special paved surfaces, replacement of existing guiderail with the Merritt Parkway Guiderail, seating areas, landscaped earth berms (to screen undesirable off-site views), and ornamental lamp posts and/or bollards.

3.5 Future Links

While extension of the trail within the Right-of-Way is the ultimate vision of RPA, the implementation of this demonstration project will provide a prototype for surrounding towns to follow. Plans are currently being discussed to construct a system of bicycle/pedestrian paths along Newfield Avenue, with links to the King & Low-Heywood Thomas School and the surrounding neighborhood. This system of walks could be readily linked into the demonstration project.

Additionally, the City of Stamford has recently undertaken the design of a multi-use trail along the Mill River Corridor. The new paved trail is expected to extend to Scalzi Park. In concept, this trail could be extended along Long Ridge Road to the Merritt Parkway. Should the demonstration project be extended southerly within the Parkway R.O.W. to Long Ridge Road in the future, the City of Stamford would benefit from a significant, 'continuous' trail system.

Southern Gateway & Pedestrian Crossing

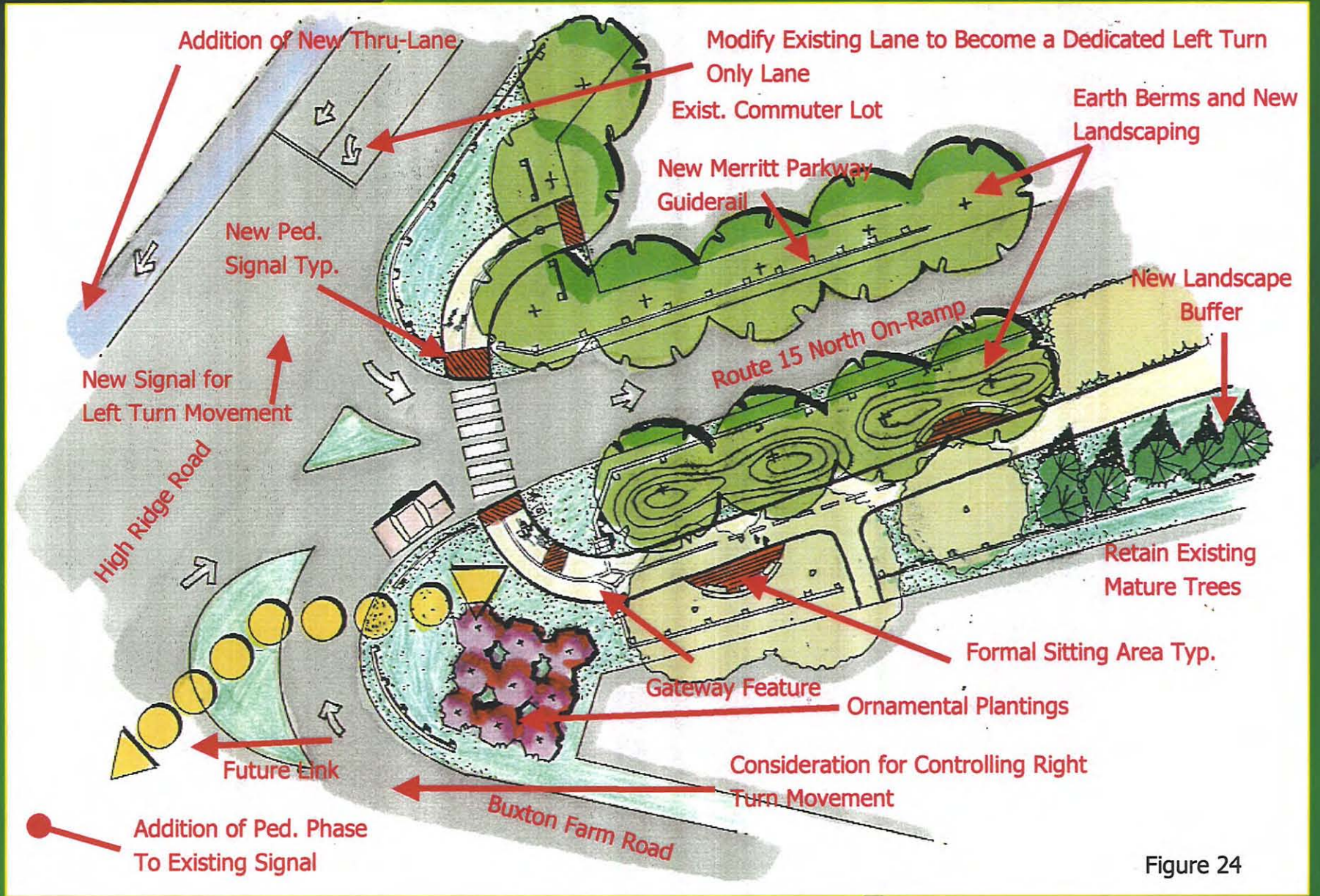


Figure 24

4.0 DESIGN DETAILS/ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

4.1 General Description

Perhaps the least considered, but most important features of a successful trail design is the selection of construction details. The palette of design details must be complementary to one another, visually pleasing to the eye, sensitive to the needs of the particular application, and cost effective. The images that follow (Figures 25-35) identify examples of some standard trail details. Additionally, graphic representations are included that begin to identify specific trail routing options (for example, where the trail must be routed close to private property) and how the treatment of specific conditions can be handled.

Typical Trail Clearing Detail (not to scale)

- The Recommended Clear Zone for Bikeways and Trails are Set Forth in the Current AASHTO Guidelines
- Careful Routing and Requiring the Stakeout of the Trail Prior to Clearing Operations will Help Avoid Removal of Significant Vegetation on other Natural Features

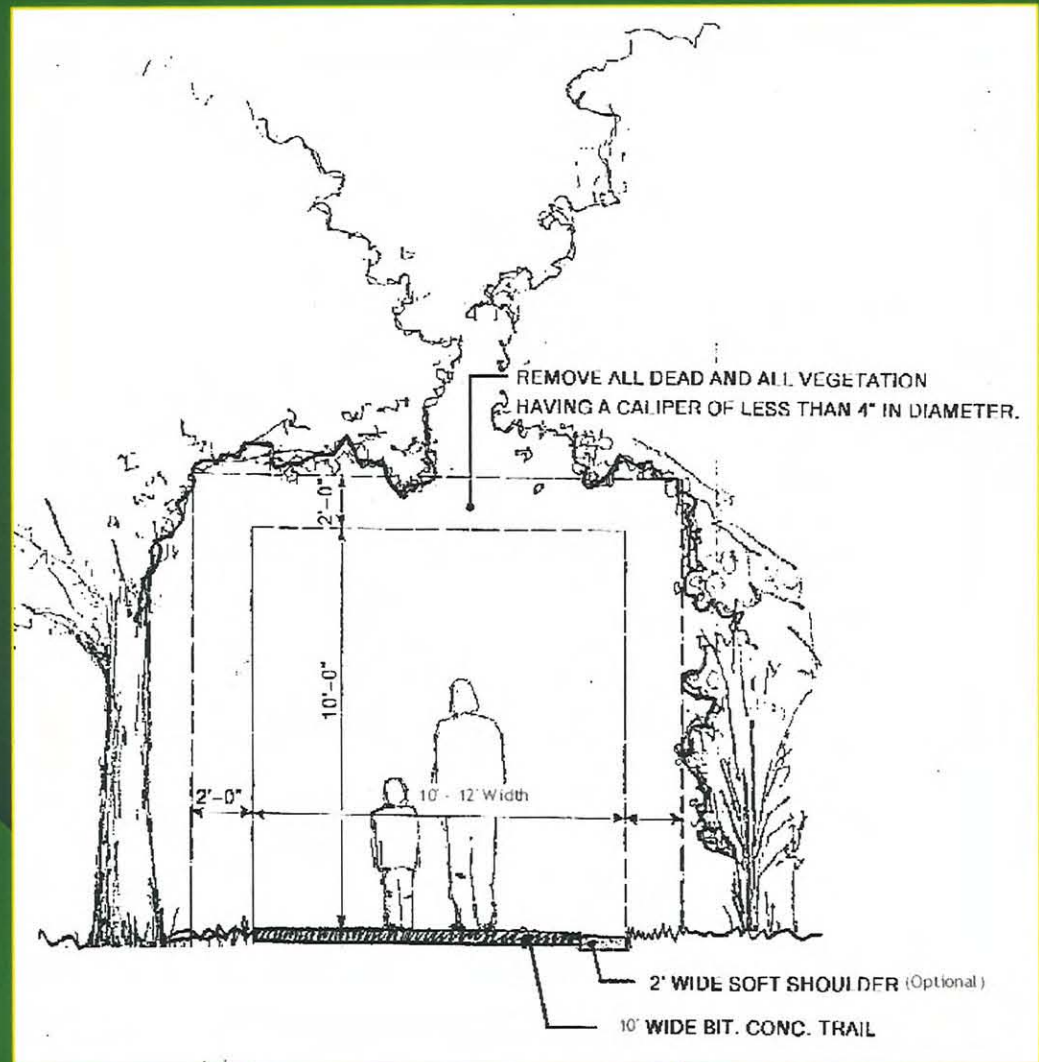
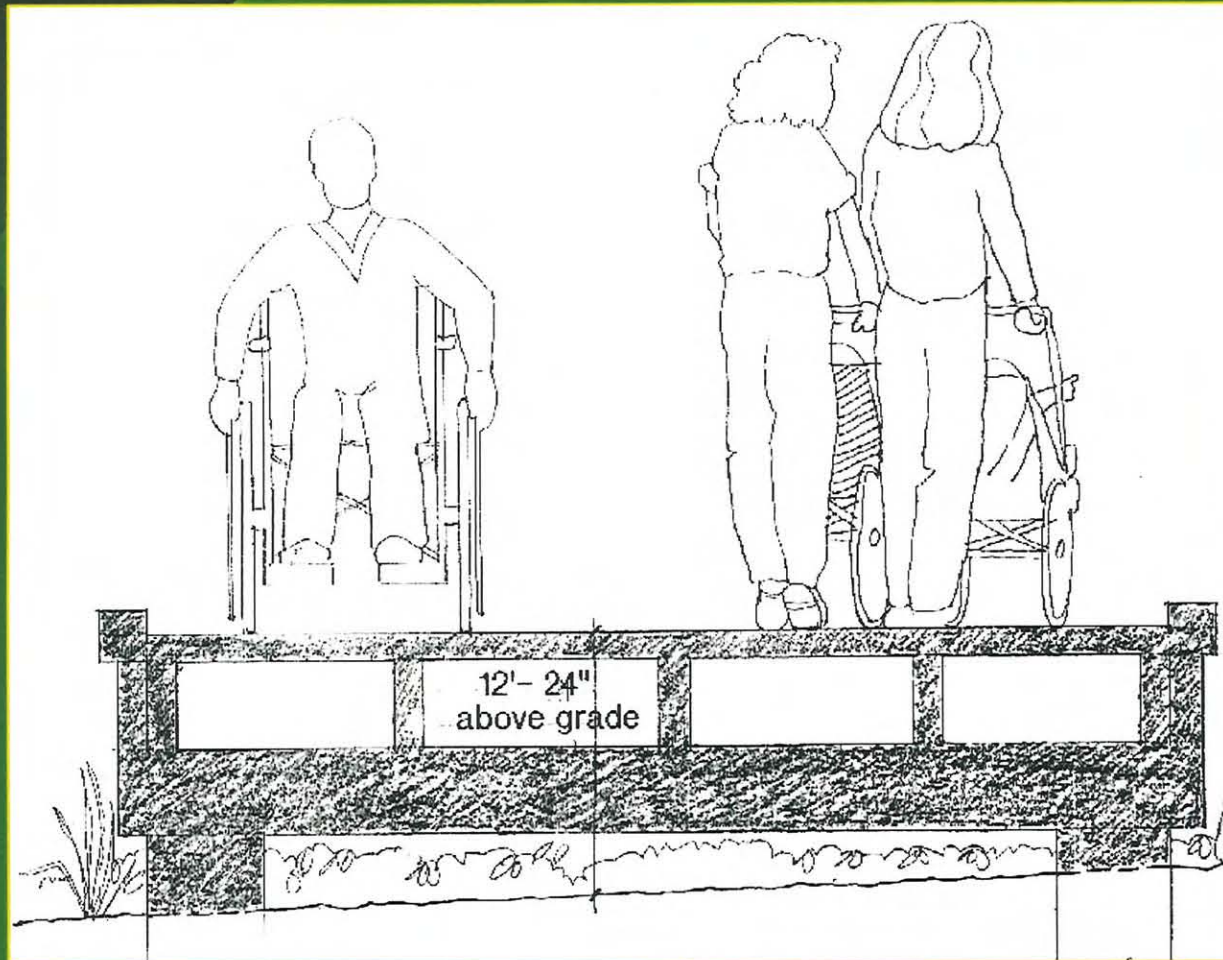


Figure 25

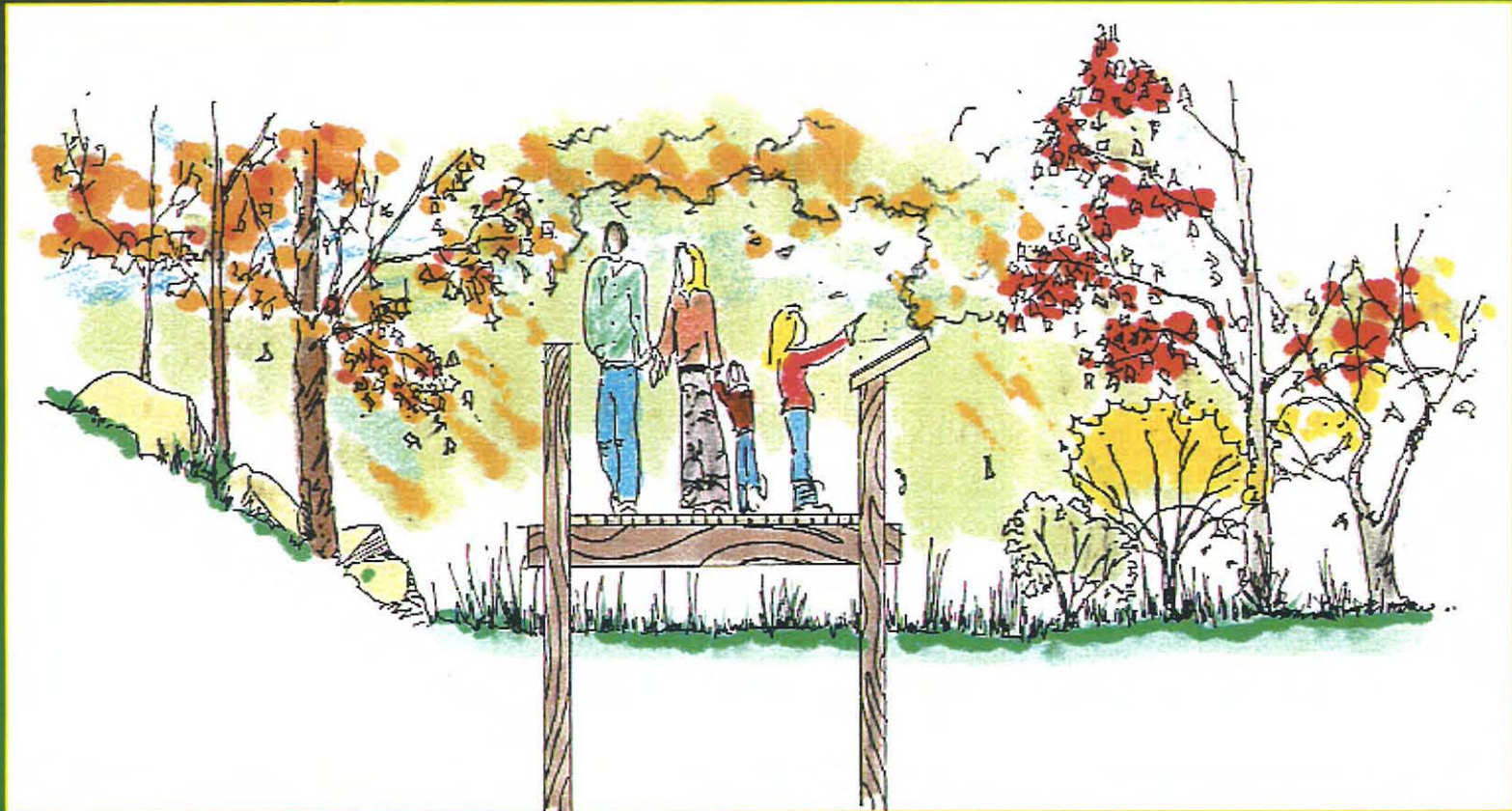
Wetland Crossing Boardwalk



- Note: Use of Timber Curb to Provide Visual Warning. Additional Width of Boardwalk can Overcome Safety Concerns.

Figure 26

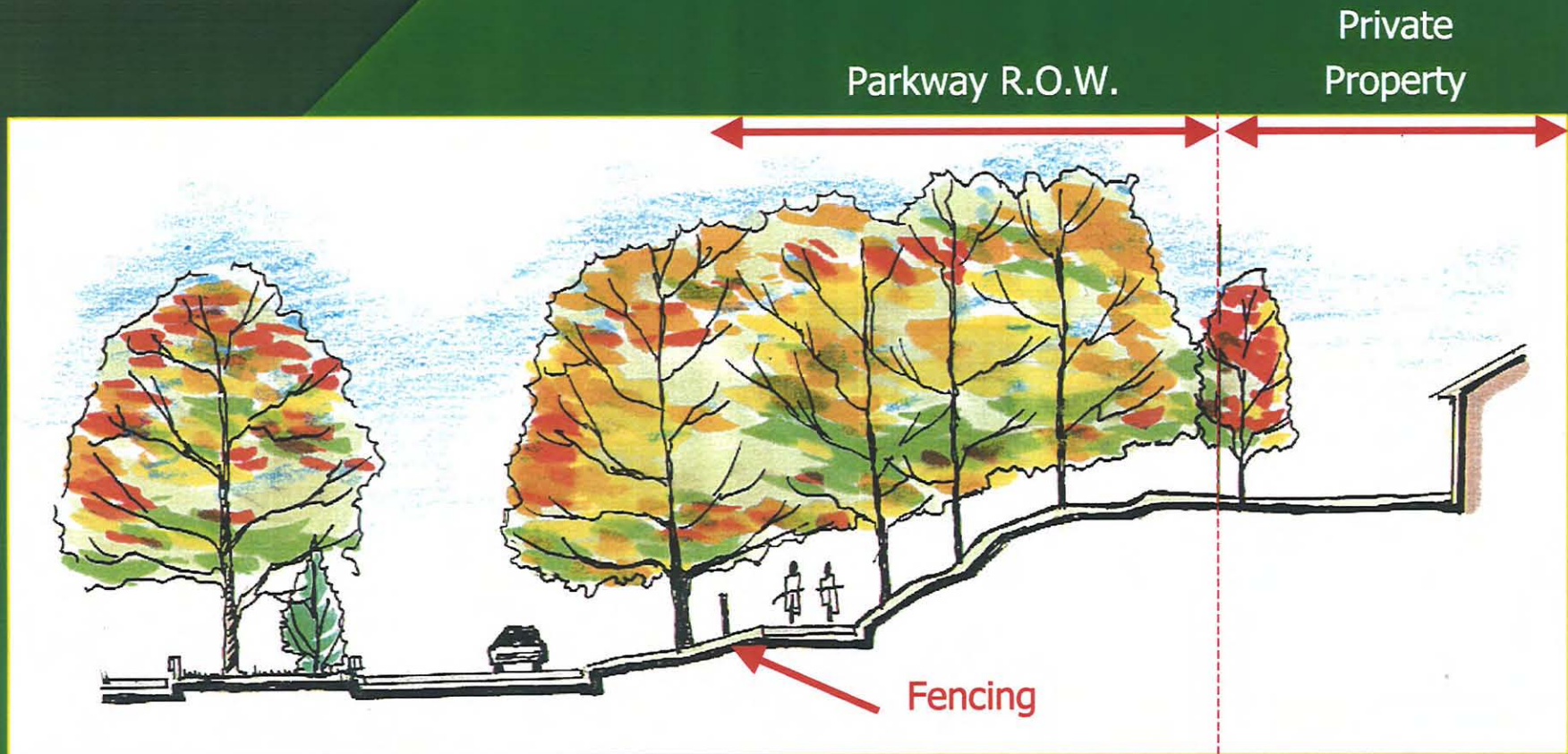
Wetland Crossing Boardwalk (Optional Railing)



- Railings Should be Considered Where Site Demands Require, i.e., Heights of 30" or Greater
- Enhance Biodiversity with Introduction of Indigenous Wetland Plantings

Figure 27

Routing Option



- When Site Considerations Force Trail Close to Travelway, Pedestrian Safety Feature(s) Should be Considered
- In No Case Should the Trail Close to Within 30' of Travelway

Figure 28

Transition Zone – Landscape Buffer



- When Trail is Routed Close to Private Property, Landscape Buffers Would Provide a Good Visual Screen

Figure 29

Transition Zone – Landscape Berm



- When Trail is Forced Tight to Private Property, Earthen Berms and Heavy Landscaping Would Provide Increased Privacy

Figure 30

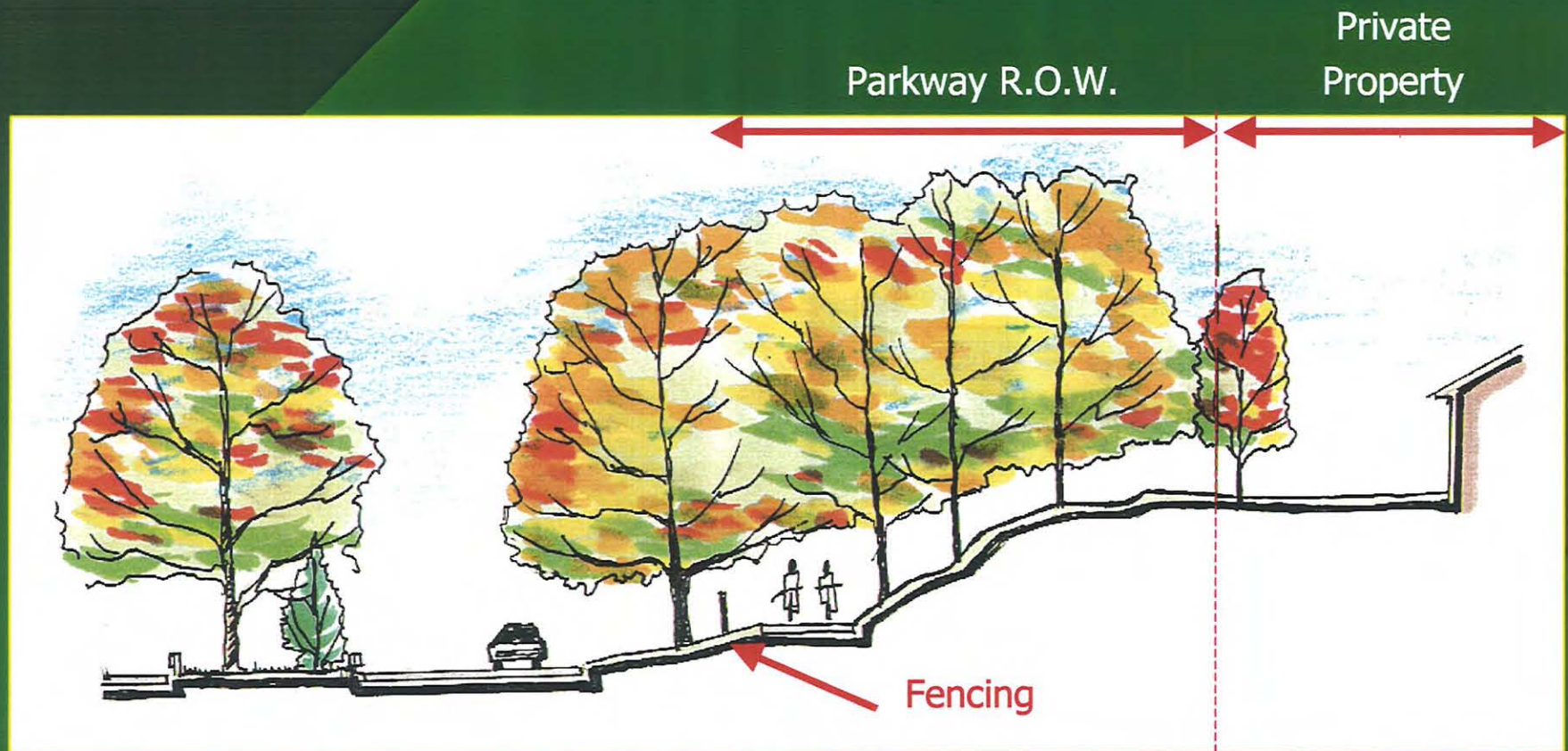
Transition Zone – Wood Screen Fence



- Where Complete Privacy is Needed, the Introduction of a 6-8' High Wood Fence and Landscaping Should be Considered

Figure 31

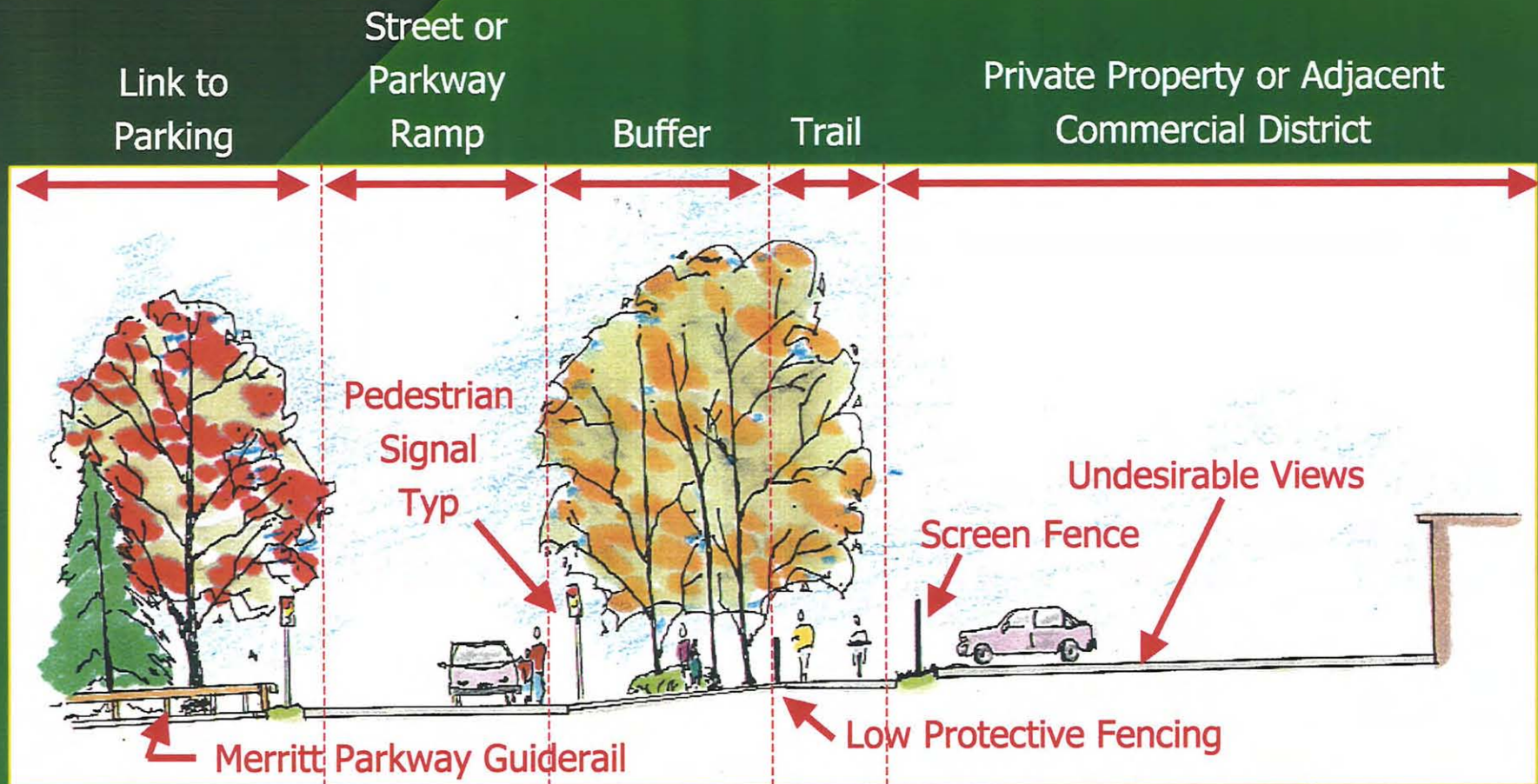
Routing Option



- When Site Considerations Force Trail Close to Travelway, Pedestrian Safety Feature(s) Should be Considered
- In No Case Should the Trail Close to Within 30' of Travelway

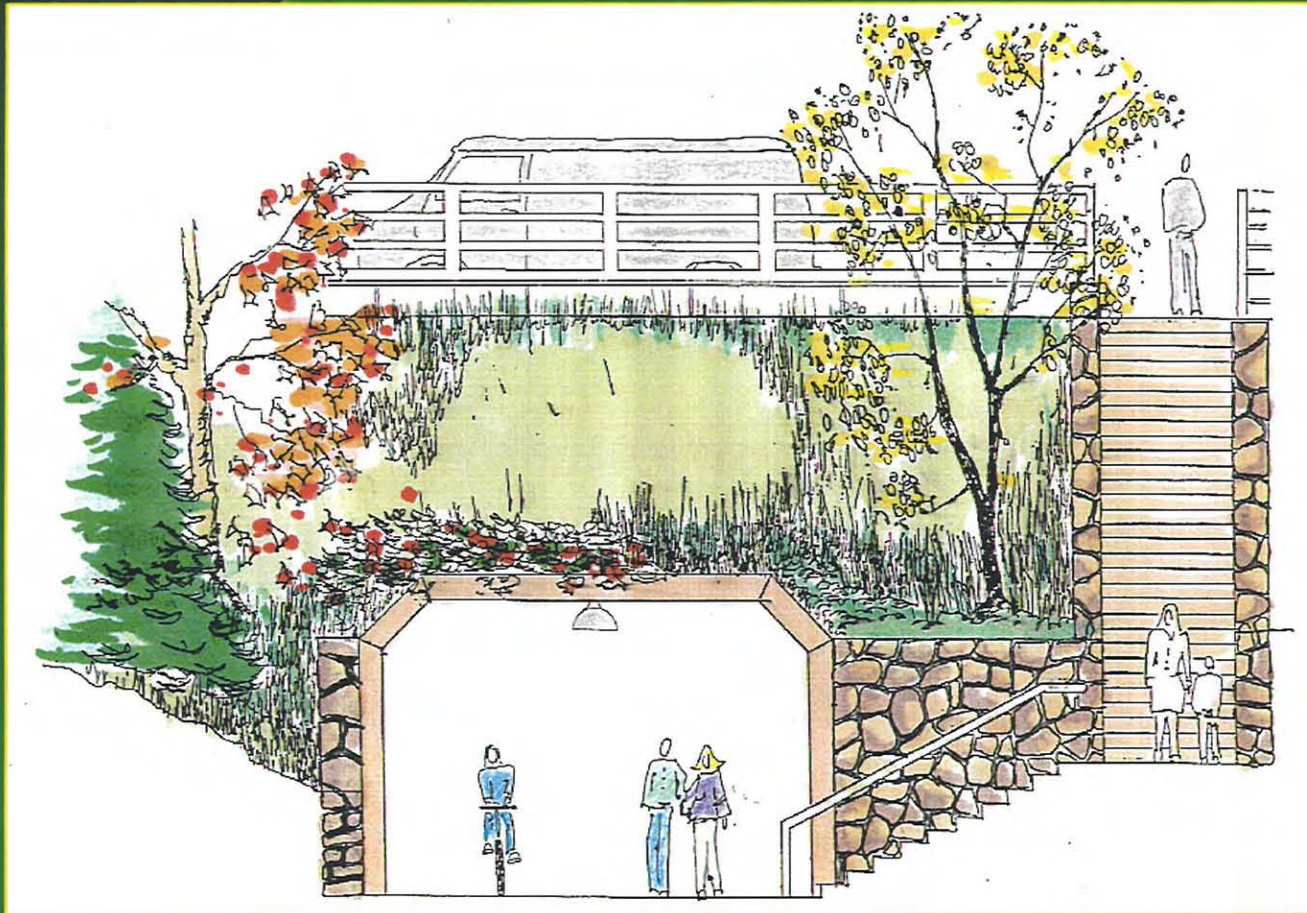
Figure 32

Urban Crossing



- This Section Graphically Depicts the Various Design Elements and Techniques that can be Employed in a More Urban Setting

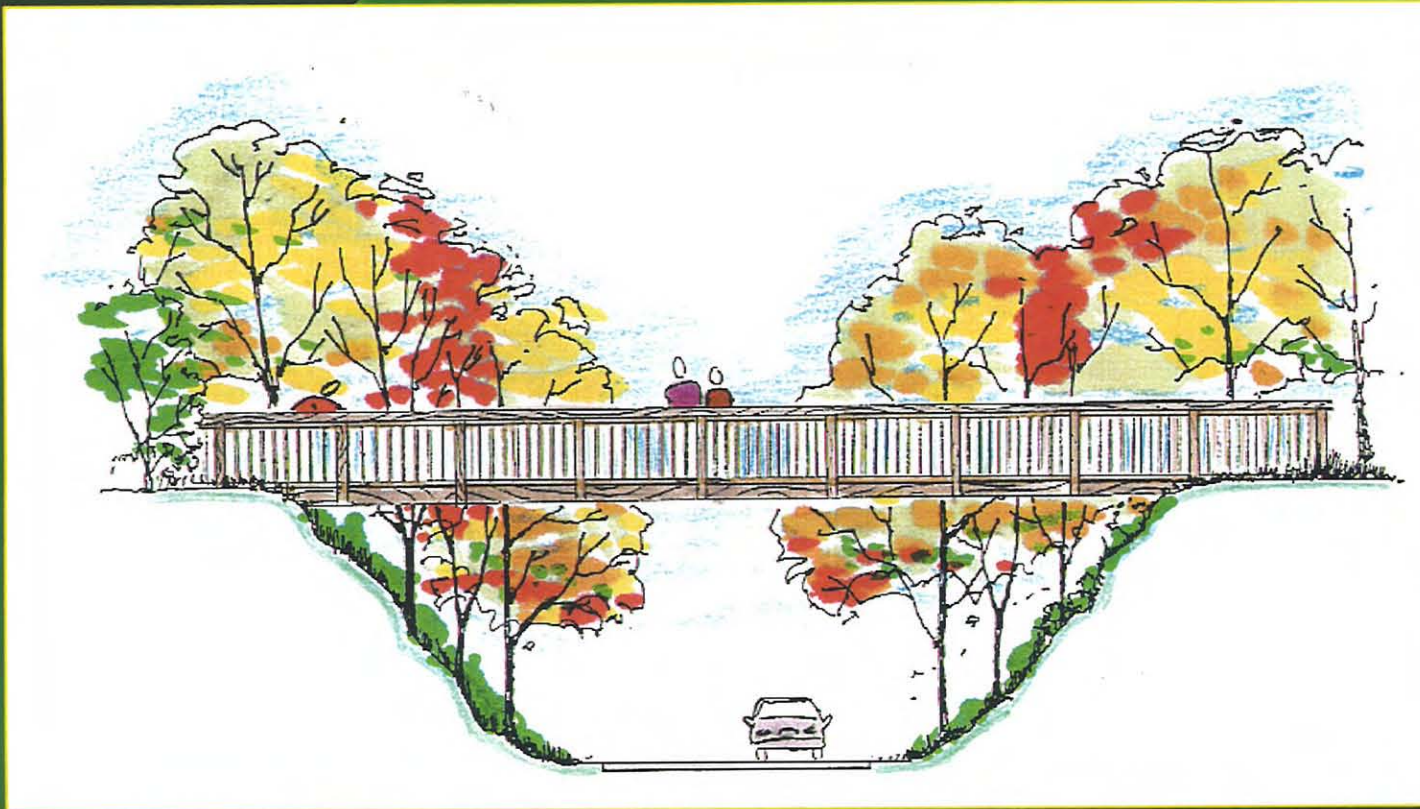
Below-Grade Pedestrian Crossing



- Where the Terrain will not Permit an Accessible or Safe At-Grade Crossing, a Below-Grade "Culvert" Type Structure Should be Considered. This condition does not exist along the demonstration project.

Figure 34

Elevated Pedestrian Crossing



- Excessively Steep Side Slopes at Local Roads may Require an Elevated Structure to Ensure Pedestrian Safety
- Shorter Bridge Spans would also be Recommended for Crossing of Watercourses
- This condition does not exist along the demonstration project.

Figure 35

5.0 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Permits and Approvals

Based on plans for the project as it is now envisioned, the permits and approvals listed below are likely to be required. This list may be expanded once the project advances to preliminary design and the impacts of the project are better defined.

5.1.1 Local Permits

- Inland Wetlands Permit for work in or adjacent to the inland wetlands.

5.1.2 Non-Local Permits

- Department of Transportation agreement for use of the Merritt Parkway right-of-way. This may take the form of a license agreement with the City of Stamford for the maintenance of the proposed facility. If the Department staff agrees with the concept for the facility, it will bring the design to the Merritt Parkway Advisory Committee for review and comment prior to the approval to proceed with construction.
- Department of Transportation encroachment permit related to the construction of the facility within the Parkway right-of-way and for work on High Ridge Road.
- State Historic Preservation Office approval for work related to a property listed on the Register of Historic Places. This action may trigger the need to prepare a Section 4(f) document evaluating the impacts to historic assets.