

Small Libraries Create Smart Spaces

TRANSFORMATION STORIES

Wilton Public & Gregg Free Library

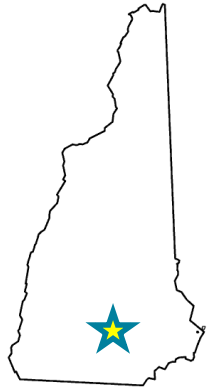
Wilton, New Hampshire

The Community

Every community is unique

Wilton, New Hampshire

- **Service population:** 3,700
- **Location:** on the Souhegan River
- **Library website:** wiltonlibrarynh.org/
- 108-year old building on the National Registry of Historical Places



Old mill on the Souhegan River by B. Gutsche, with permission

No wonder it's on the National Historic Registry



Tiffany glass in the domed cupola of the entryway



Hand-painted Grueby tiles on the wood-framed fireplace



Exquisite detailing on the coved ceilings, crown molding, and painted wall panels

“Wilton has a town culture that is looking for ways to improve the town, making it family-friendly, walkable, and connected and attractive to new business.”

Pat Fickett, Library Director

Before the Changes

Small libraries can create Smart Spaces

“I've been thinking a lot not only about getting people into the library, but on getting the library out to the people, and engaging them in a different manner.”

Stephanie Loiselle, former Children's Librarian

Thinking Outside the Library

The Wilton Library is the only Smart Spaces project participant to focus on their outdoor physical space for active learning and community engagement. They already had a lot of success with STEM/STEAM programming inside the library.

The town of Wilton was planning to create a new Riverwalk Park across the street from the library as part of a wider effort to make the community more livable and convivial. A library outdoor space could be a continuation of that.

“If we are visible outside of these walls and people are having positive interactions, it is more likely that they will make it a point to come to visit the [inside] space as well.”

Stephanie Loiselle



Placemaking on the Library Grounds

The grounds to the south of the library were torn up in 2015 for major drainage and sewer work on the 108-year-old building. Once the turf was restored, it presented a blank canvas waiting for something to happen.



The Vision

Townspeople will gather at the space and participate in creative use of installations, making music and art, and reading to each other. Parents will use free WI-FI while children engage in creative activities.

Engage & Explore

Engaging community members in visioning and planning

**“We really got into the community
engagement part.”**

Pat Fickett, Library Director

The Community Discovery Toolbox

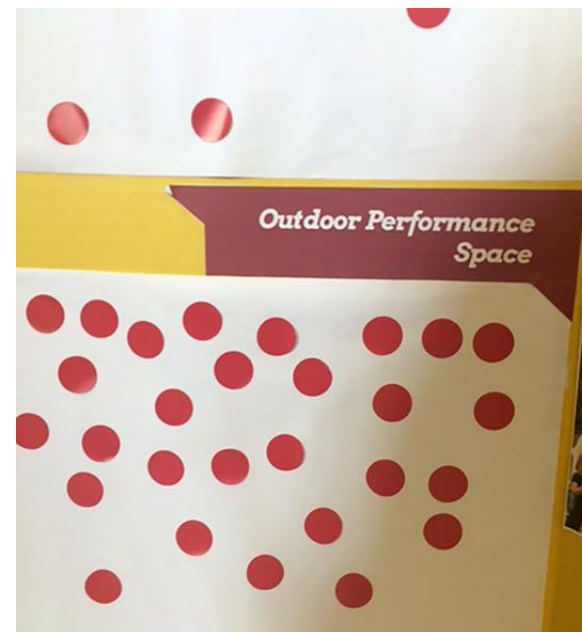
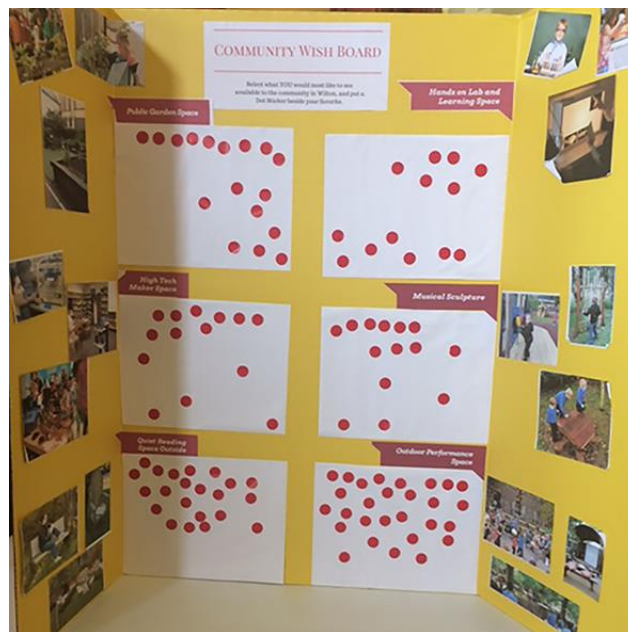
- *Town-wide charette*: In the previous year, the whole town had started conversations about increasing livability in Wilton, looking at housing, work, and leisure. Fickett engaged with many community members by attending those Main Street meetings.
- *Community focus groups*: Fickett conducted conversations with many town stakeholders over two months, harvesting information for the Smart Spaces project.
- *Survey*: Library staff distributed a five-question survey to participants at high-attendance library events.
- *Dot Boards*: Six activity choices were synthesized from community input and put up for dot board voting at local fairs and other Wilton locations.



A community gathering in the stately, historic main hall of the Wilton Public and Gregg Free Library

Dot Board Choices

- Public garden space
- Hands-on lab and learning space
- High tech makerspace
- Musical sculpture
- Outdoor performance space
- Quiet outdoor reading space



The community was asked to rate their interest in a range of active learning options through dot board voting.

And the winner is ...Outdoor Performance Space!

Purpose statement

Develop an outdoor Creative Space as a community gathering space for both formal and informal learning and recreation, which will add to the appeal of Wilton's village as a friendly place for businesses and families.

Prepare for Change

Making way for transformation

Sketch and Test

An architect, who is a member of the board, drew a scaled drawing of the plans for the outdoor space, showing the arrangement and flow around the building.

The library began hosting events in the planned (but still empty) space to gauge community response. One particularly successful event was an impromptu town potluck to celebrate the end of summer reading. People who don't usually come to the library showed up and everyone brought homemade food. "People in Wilton really know how to cook," said Chance Joyner, Youth Services Librarian.



Architect's drawing

The Garden Experiment

Another early foray into outdoor active learning occurred when the local Eagle Scouts built a raised garden bed and the storytime children planted it in early summer.

The garden project was a success and will be part of the grander plan for the outdoor library.



Winter's Coming

Just as plans and funding were falling into place for the new space, the encroaching winter was about to put a halt to construction and implementation. Fickett wanted to see some visible progress before the long wait for the spring thaw.

Fortunately, a bit of good fall weather allowed for the completion of the stunning granite steps and walkway that lead from the parking lot to the future Smart Park.



Transform

Make it happen!

Hibernating and Planning

While the outdoor space at Wilton Public and Gregg Free Library was snow and ice-covered, library staff were busy working on programming for the future space. The winter cold did not inhibit their creative ideas.

Music Programs

- Concerts with local musicians
- Open mic nights
- Ukulele lessons
- Instrument making
- Community sing-alongs

Making and Creating

- Build It days for trebuchet, paper airplanes, model rockets, and more
- Mandala-making from nature
- Lawn games and family game days

The raised bed will let folks plan and plant a garden. Related programming could include making herbal concoctions or recipe exchanges. The library will connect with local farms and community gardens for Share your Surplus days.

Construction Resumes in Spring



Hopes for an early spring were dashed when winter lingered on through April, dumping snow on the Northeast four times during the month. Finally the ground thawed, new lighting was installed, and the backhoe arrived to level the area and set the large granite slabs in place that will be the foundation for the interactive musical instruments.

The Smart Park Takes Shape



The sun kept shining and sod was laid over the bare dirt.



Beautiful and classic lighting was installed.



Safety concerns were addressed with motion-sensor lights and cameras.

More Features are Installed



The storyboard frames were constructed by a volunteer in a local shop during the winter.



In spring, the storyboards got the final touches that will bring them to life along the story trail.



Seating arrived for outdoor crafting, picnicking, and general reading and hanging out.

Learn

Activate the space with people and programming

The Grand Opening

The opening of the library's Smart Park was scheduled to coincide with the dedication of Wilton's Riverside Park across the street. Although the New England weather did not cooperate, many people came to the opening. It was the start of a summer-long flow of informal and formal enjoyment of the outdoor space.



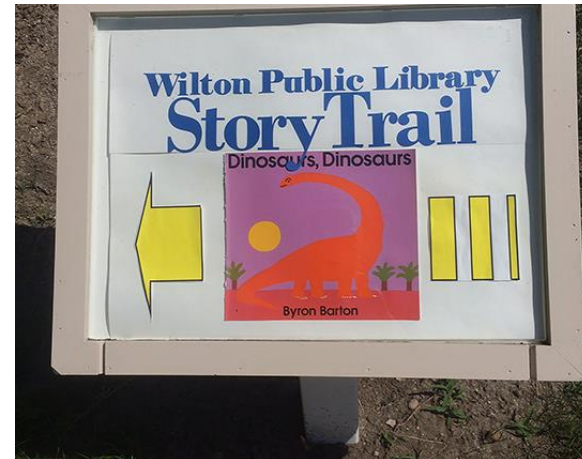
The whole community was invited for food, music, exploration, and fun!



“I can get so focused on all that I have to get done (buy stuff, wrangle contractors, make more lists), it would be easy to see checking off the list as the outcome. But what we hope to have people engaging in—the building, singing, planting—will bring the real outcome of strengthening our community.

Pat Fickett

Take a Walk Along the Story Trail



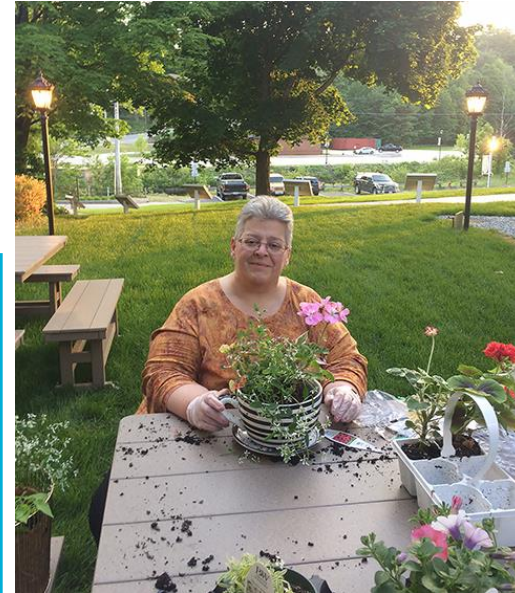
The boards of the Story Trail follow the arc of the semi-circular path that leads up to the grand front entrance of the library. According to Fickett, "The story trail was created to bring parents and caregivers onto the library grounds by creating an opportunity to read a story together as they walk up the sidewalk." The first book to be displayed is *Dinosaurs, Dinosaurs* by Byron Barton; books will be changed periodically.

Mixing Fresh Air, Learning, and Fun

People gather in the park to visit, meet friends or make new ones, play with the instruments and games, use the free Wi-Fi, or just relax and read.

The library uses the spaces for participatory events, like song circles, jam sessions, shared art experiences, crafter meet ups, and DIY projects.

The children's library uses the story trail for storytime.



Re-envisioning the Youth Space with Smart Space Principles

After going through the Small Libraries Create Smart Spaces process, the Wilton library staff decided to apply the principles to the youth area renovation that had started a year prior.

They added active learning goals:

- Get books into children's vision and hands
- Open up space for music and movement
- Dedicate space for active, creative, participatory learning





**“This project has
absolutely fulfilled
our vision ...
and we’re just
starting!”**

Pat Fickett

For more information on how Small Libraries
Create Smart Spaces and more case studies
please visit [**oclc.org/SmartSpaces**](https://oclc.org/SmartSpaces).

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