

Summary and Recommendations

SUMMARY

In 2018 the Town of Yarmouth requested assistance from the Cape Cod Commission, through the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program, to identify and analyze options for connecting the former “drive-In” parcel south of Route 28 adjacent to the Parkers River with the Cape Cod Rail Trail (CCRT) using the existing bicycle and facility network and/or creation of new facilities. The origins of the bike-path extension concept came from a recommendation in a 2017 Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel (ULI-TAP) for enhancing economic activity along Route 28. The TAP report suggested that a bike path through Town-owned land could provide a new attraction for visitors and draw people to local businesses and the former drive-in site for which are currently underway to create a Riverwalk Park, boardwalk, and event space.

Commission staff conducted an initial study of potential route options and presented them in the *Alternatives Development Report* in January 2019. The report identified route alternatives, potential impacts, and costs, and represented an initial step in understanding the feasibility of the project. The next step for the Town was to solicit public feedback on the project and gauge the level of community support or opposition for the concepts. Community input is vital for understanding the feasibility of any large-scale public project.

The Town requested additional DLTA funding in 2019 for the Commission to refine the route alternatives, gather public input through public meetings and a community survey, and present the results and recommendations in a “feasibility” study. The purpose of this study has been to inform town officials and residents about route alternatives, challenges and opportunities, and present the community’s response to the idea of a bike path extension between the CCRT and the drive-in site. The information should be useful to the town when considering whether to proceed further with alternatives selection and route development or whether Town resources should be directed elsewhere.

ALTERNATIVES

The emphasis of this study has been to evaluate, route alternatives that travel through Town-owned land between the CCRT and the former drive-in site at 669 Route 28. Using Town-owned land for this bike path connection provides an opportunity to create a scenic bikeway away from traffic, but it would also alter the undeveloped nature of the existing unpaved bog service roads and woodland trails. Potential use conflicts – with hunting areas, town land management operations, water and wastewater facilities, cranberry bog operations, and conservation areas – pose significant routing challenges. Routing through or near the wetland areas and cranberry bogs between Buck Island Road and Route 28 would create resource

impacts which would require Conservation Commission review and permitting. In addition, much of the Town-owned land was purchased for wellhead protection and conservation purposes which may pose restrictions and Article 97 implications for creation of a formal bike path. The Bog Road area adjacent to Route 28 and that parcels across from the former drive-in site are private property, and the town would need to purchase an easement for public access. Without public access through this area, alternative routing to Route 28 would be needed.

PUBLIC INPUT

Town and Commission staff sought public input on the bike path connection through two public workshops, a public survey, a website, and with opportunities to comment through email and by phone. Workshop attendees generally expressed interest and support for the bike path idea but with concern about road crossings (especially Route 28) and cost. Survey responses were less supportive. While the number of responses in support was roughly equal to the number in opposition, a significant number of respondents said they have concerns about a bike path impacting wetlands, bogs, open space, existing trails, and wildlife, along with concerns about road crossings, safety, and high project costs. Survey respondents identified other areas in town where they would like to see bike accommodations. The email and phone input was overwhelmingly opposed to the bike path extension idea. Many commenters indicated that they appreciate the existing trail system the way it is and enjoy its tranquility and natural state, especially as so much of the Town is developed. Several comments expressed support for providing bicycle accommodations along existing roadways rather than making new paths in undeveloped areas. Concern about cost was also a frequent comment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the routing challenges associated with providing a bike path through the Town-owned land between the CCRT and the former drive-in parcel, as well as public opposition and concerns, Commission staff recommends that the Town consider other options to advance similar objectives, including economic development enhancement and improved bicycling accommodations and connectivity. These include the following:

- *Evaluate participation in the Complete Streets program* – The MassDOT Complete Streets program provides opportunities for towns to obtain funding for bicycle/pedestrian improvements following adoption of a complete streets policy and prioritization plan. This funding could be used to make bicycle and pedestrian improvements along existing roads to build out the network of connections. Commission staff has worked with other communities on prioritization plans and could assist Yarmouth as well.

- *Consider establishing a bicycle and pedestrian committee.* Bicycle committees can be a tremendous asset in helping communities identify needs, goals, and priorities for improving pedestrian/bicyclist travel and safety, as well as identifying challenges, funding opportunities, and implementation strategies. Almost all Cape Cod towns have bicycle committees composed of knowledgeable and committed volunteers and town staff members (typically, DPW, Planning, or public safety) who work together to improve bicycle and pedestrian accommodations in their community. In Yarmouth, staff workloads and prioritization of other ongoing Town initiatives may impact the viability of establishing another committee at this time.
- *Evaluate expanding bicycling accommodations along existing roadways.* Several roads in the project area could provide bicycle connections between the CCRT and Route 28, including Forest Road, Higgins Crowell Road, and West Yarmouth Road. Forest Road has a bike path that could be extended to connect to Route 28 and the CCRT. Design is currently underway for a 10-foot wide shared use path along the east side of Higgins Crowell Road from Buck Island Road to the roundabout. This pathway will provide critical connections between the CCRT, Sandy Pond Recreational Area, woodland trails, schools, and residential neighborhoods. The Town should continue with design, permitting, and identifying funding for the project, including grant opportunities.
- *Advocate for MassDOT to provide improved bicyclist accommodations on Route 28.* Route 28 lacks bicycle accommodations and is a key transportation corridor through Yarmouth's economic activity area. It may be possible to widen the existing sidewalk to create a bike path or install a bike lane in some areas. A recent MassDOT Road Safety Audit along Route 28 from Iyannough Road to the Parkers River Bridge suggested evaluating the feasibility of constructing a shared use path along the south side of Route 28. MassDOT should consider improving bicycle/pedestrian accommodations as part of any planned work, including repaving, of Route 28.



Figure 4 -Revised Route Options North - Cape Cod Rail Trail to Buck Island Road.

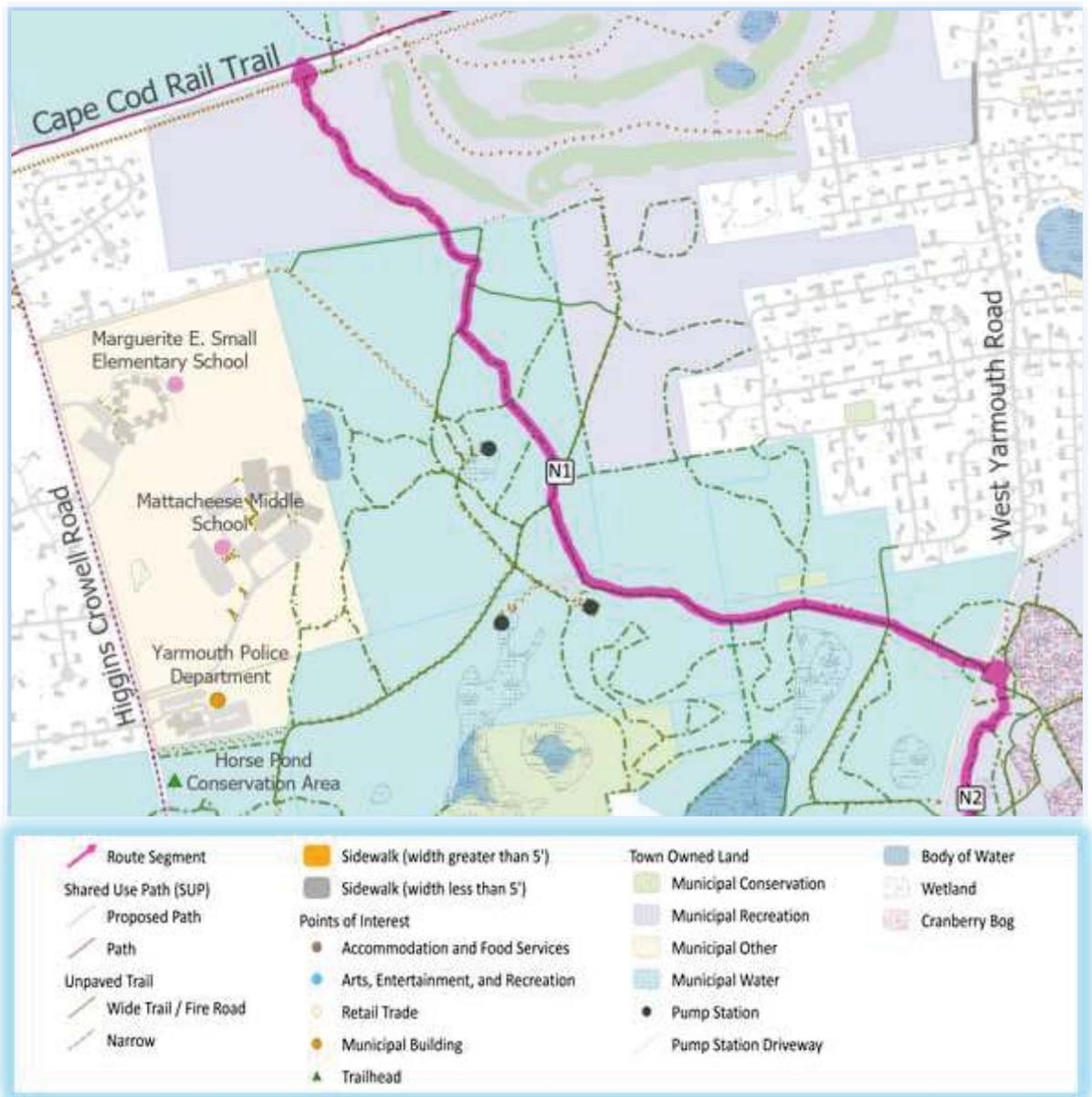
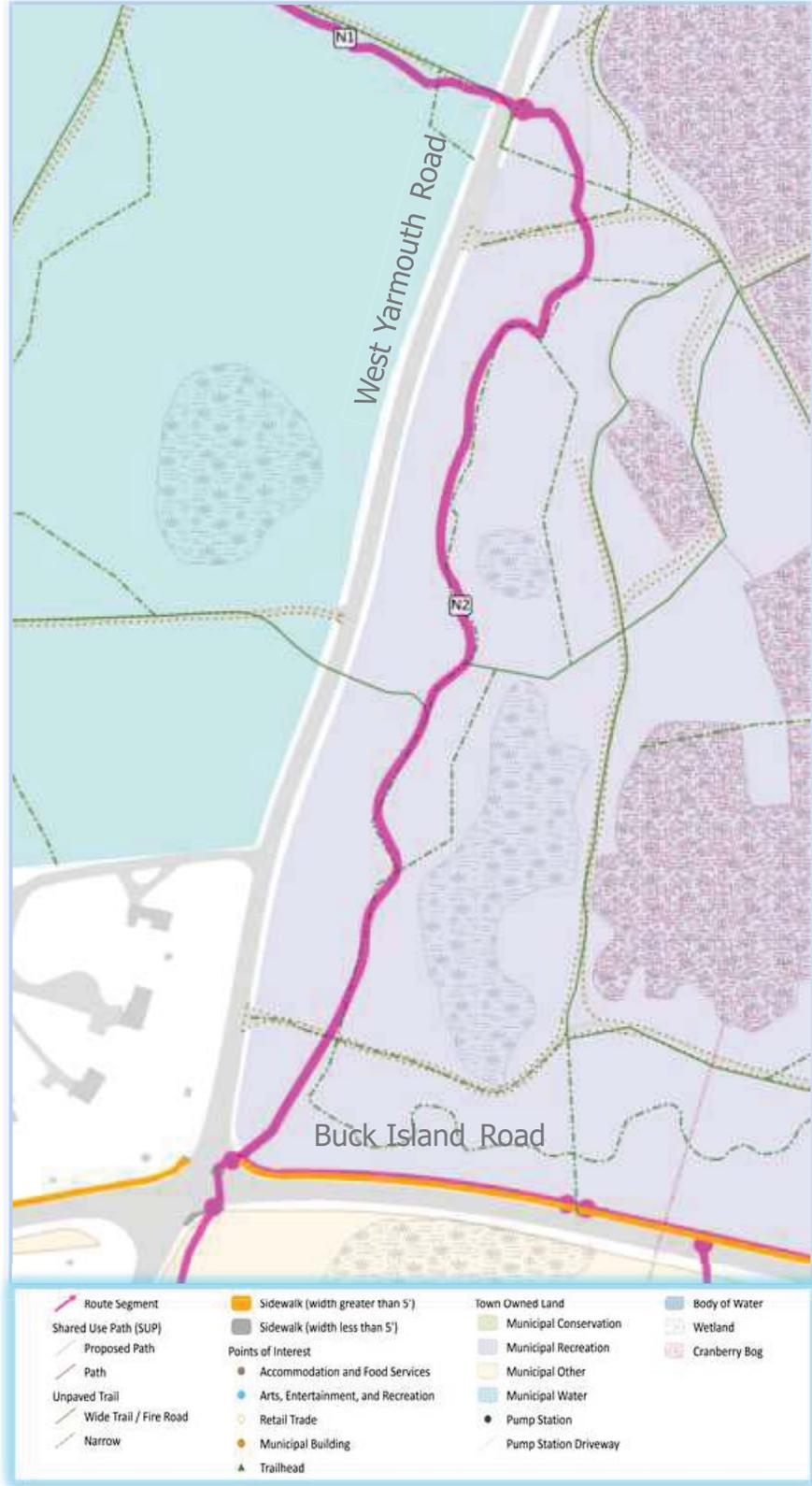


Figure 5 - Revised Route Options North– Cape Cod Rail Trail to West Yarmouth Road.

Figure 6 - Revised Route Options North – West Yarmouth Road to Buck Island Road



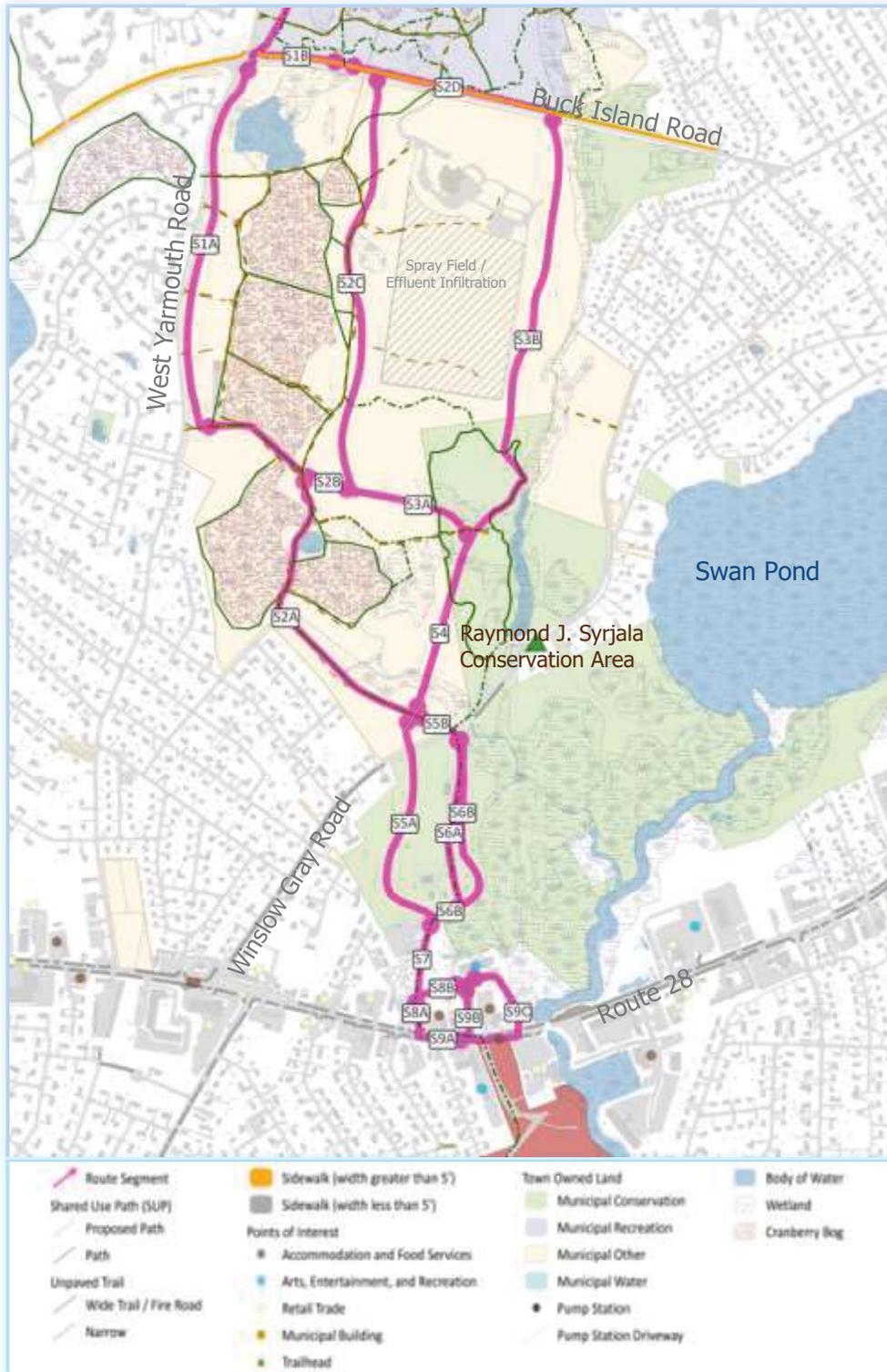


Figure 7 – Revised Route Options South – Buck Island Road to Drive-In Site

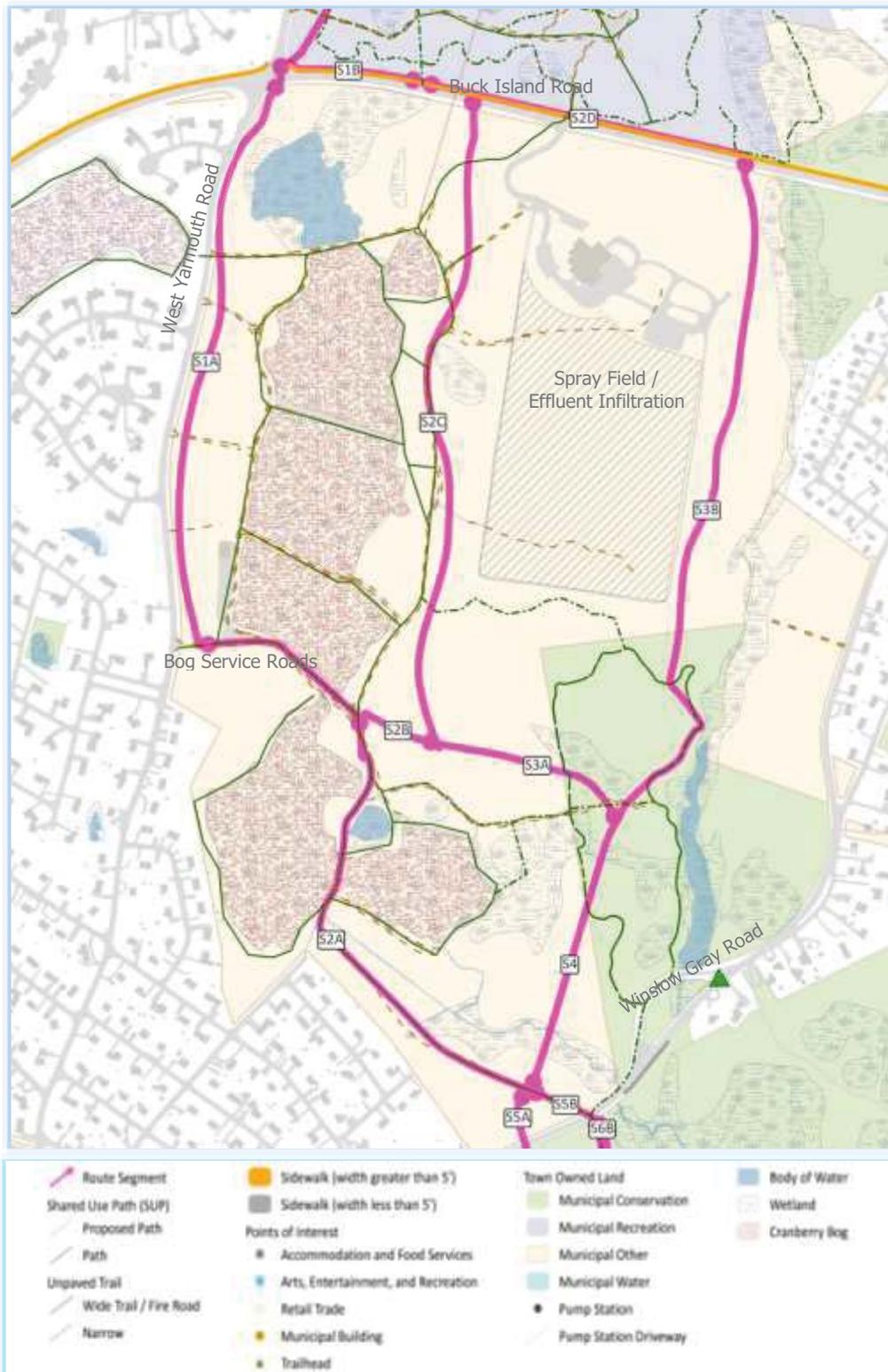


Figure 8 – Revised Route Options South – Buck Island Road to Winslow Gray Road

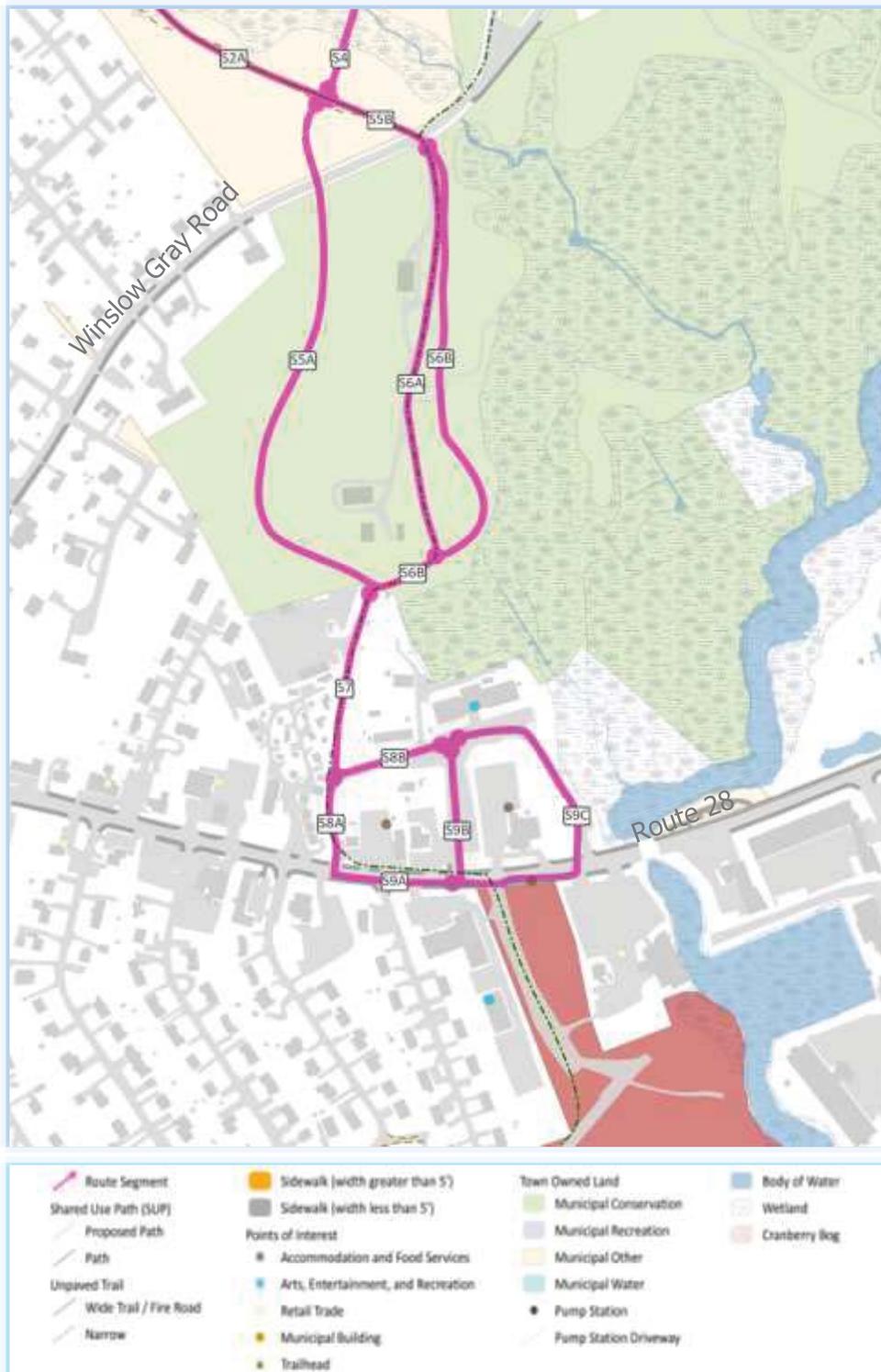


Figure 9 – Revised Route Options – Winslow Gray Road to Drive-In Site.