

6. Historic and Cultural Resources

North Stonington, incorporated in 1807, is a rural town whose character is most vividly seen in its active and historic farms; miles of stonewalls; buildings of architectural and historical distinction; scenic views and large tracts of forest. As early farmers began to harness the power of the Shunock River, the town became a prosperous mill town. This not only enhanced the town's strong agricultural heritage, but contributed to its many successful cottage industries and thriving mercantile center in the 19th Century.

It is the lasting presence of historic structures, roads and bridges intermingled with more modern elements that give North Stonington a sense of authenticity and place. Even though North Stonington undeniably complements the greater New England area it occupies, it has held fast to its own traditions and resisted often strong development pressure over the years. The former success of the historic mills and cottage industries despite the presence of nearby modern facilities, demonstrates the almost willful self-reliance of the residents - a trait that is still quite evident today.

Until the 17th Century, Native Americans were the only human residents. The white settlers who ultimately inhabited this region kept a number of the native names for the town's prominent geologic features including the Shunock Brook, Assekonk Swamp, Wintechog and Cossaduck Hills. Eventually, two reservations were allotted to the Pequots, one of which is located along Long Pond near Lantern Hill.

The first colonial settlers of what was then the larger town of Stonington were Ezekiel Main and Jeremiah Burch. Other prominent families included the Miners, Wheelers, Browns, Palmers, Hewitts, and Averys. In the early 19th Century, residents in the northern portion of the town of Stonington began to regard themselves as possessing a character separate from their southern counterparts (now Mystic, Pawcatuck, and Stonington) to which they were attached and so they officially separated to form their own town (North Stonington). North Stonington has roots in small-town entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and volunteerism which enabled it to thrive in the 19th Century and ultimately survive to the present with its character intact. Many of the industries were self-sustaining and the products were



(Above) Saw Mill Complex, Lower Dam on Shunock River, ca 1900 (connecticuthistory.org); (Below) North Stonington Village, ca 1907.



primarily for local consumption. Connectivity was also emphasized as evidenced by strong road networks and the old trolley line.

North Stonington has always had a substantial farm population with industrious core values. In 1808, 53% of the town's area was dedicated to farming. The town's agricultural wealth and successful mills contributed to its commercial success and growth. After the Civil War, the population began to decline as people began to migrate to cities and to the West. In the early 20th century the construction of the trolley line, and ultimately paved highways through town, led to rapid growth. North Stonington became a bedroom community for the postwar defense industry and military community of southeastern Connecticut. The town added 600 residents during the 1950's with the construction of Cedar Ridge, and another 1,800 with the construction of the Kingswood-Meadow Wood housing development in the 1960's.

6.1 Historic Resources

The residents of North Stonington cherish the town for its beauty, historic value, agricultural heritage and rural character. In 1983, the Village was added to the **National Register of Historic Places**. The Luther Palmer and John Randall homes are also on the list, though not located within the Village. There are many other historic structures, farms and areas located throughout town as depicted on the Character Resources Map on page 29.

North Stonington has approximately 123 **cemeteries**, scattered throughout the town, many of which are ancient. The town's Cemetery Committee uses an 'adopt a cemetery' program to outsource upkeep. The Old Plains Cemetery contains 307 graves and many rare examples of early stonecutter's art, which require special preservation efforts. The cemetery contains some of the earliest marked stones in town.

The **Historical Society's Steven Main Homestead** holds historic and genealogical records, a collection of art and artifacts, and is open to members for meetings and weekly luncheons. It is presided over by Anna Coit, a 105



Old Plains Cemetery



Steven Main Homestead



The Dye House



year old fountain of historic information and humorous anecdotes. Her writings for the monthly historical society newspaper are a much awaited part of many North Stonington residents' mail. The Historical Society has recently opened a **Dye House** with a respectable collection of items and information about North Stonington's early mill history. Their Dye House Day celebrates this part of the town's history and has become a well-attended annual event.

The historic **Green Gables Cottage** is located on the Hewitt Farm and was owned by North Stonington's artist and photographer, Fred Steward Greene. Greene used the cottage as an art school/studio and much of his art work is currently owned by the Historical Society. The cottage was also the site of the Little Red House Nursery School run by Ruth Penfield for 40 years, and was the first Montessori School in Southeastern Connecticut. Green Gables Cottage is owned by the town and may qualify for Historic Preservation Grants to stabilize, preserve and restore this historic and culturally significant building.

6.2 Cultural Resources



The Grange



Hardware Store & Former Watermark Cafe - Village

repeatedly lamented the loss of this cultural resource and expressed keen interest in supporting a similar business in the abutting properties.

Since the flood, **Wheeler Library** has tried to fill the need for a community hub, and has presented a variety of programs for all ages. Built in 1900, it contains a period hall comprising the entire second floor, which functions both as the main floor of the collection, and an inviting location to hold events. Although the library is a private trust, its fund drives are always well supported by

The Grange was founded in the late 19th century to help farms that had been devastated by the Civil War. In the 20th century, the North Stonington Grange was the cultural center of town. Many residents still remember going to square dances there every weekend. The Grange's civic interests have broadened over the years, but it still hosts two of the largest cultural events in town: the Agricultural Fair and the Halloween Party/Cup Social. These and its bi-monthly meetings provide a much needed chance to rub elbows with fellow townspeople. In fact, every Grange meeting ends with a social hour around a bountiful refreshment table.

From Brown and Stone's General Store to the Watermark Cafe, **2 Wyassup Road** was always the gathering spot in town, where residents could hang out and catch up with their neighbors. It's destruction in the flood of 2010 was a cultural blow to the town and the village and it is sorely missed. During the visioning process residents



Wheeler Library

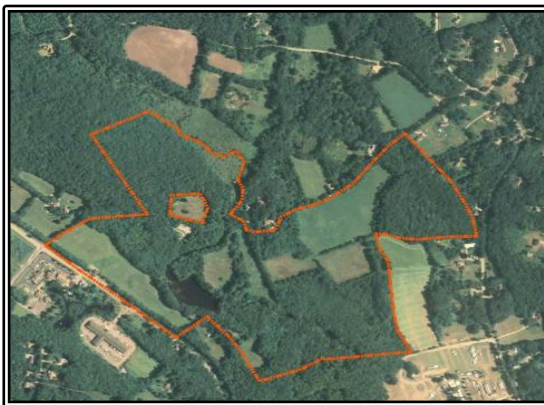
townspeople. Wheeler Library is located near the schools, encouraging use by students. Since 1990, the library has undergone renovations, which include the installation of an elevator, a meeting room, and new computer terminals. The Library is actively supported by a volunteer group: *Friends of the Wheeler Library* and receives donations from the town as well.

New to town is **The Wired Bean**, a coffee shop in Holly Green with Wi-Fi. Its owners, local residents, and other owners of businesses in Holly Green, are hopeful it will fill a much needed roll as a place for students to gather after school.



Holly Green Plaza

Hewitt Farm is 104 acres of forest, farm, and historic buildings purchased by the town. It contains walking, cross-country skiing, and canoe trails and a community garden, and provides a location for events that celebrate the rural environment, such as picnics and night sky watching. Interest has been shown in opening a farmers market, and working with the school to teach agriculture and science to students.



Aerial View of Hewitt Farm

The town has many **public trails and pathways** that were created throughout its milling, woodland harvesting, and farming history. The North Stonington Citizens Land Alliance and the Avalonia Land Conservancy also provide an abundance of recreational and open space. These connective and access features can provide future generations with many recreational opportunities to enjoy the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the town.

6.3 Summary

Continued efforts must be made to identify and protect pre-contact and historic structures, buildings and resources as well as archeological sites prior to site development. This may be accomplished proactively by updating and expanding the existing survey of historic and cultural sites, and creating a more detailed map that land use boards and commissions can consult prior to making decisions. These surveys should be updated periodically as significant resources are identified. Early detection of cultural and/or historic resources during a project's design phase would allow developers to incorporate the resource into the site design in a manner that preserves or protects its value. In cooperation with the Historical Society, the town must actively promote preservation through education, appropriate land use regulations, and listing significant homes and buildings on the National Register of Historic Places.

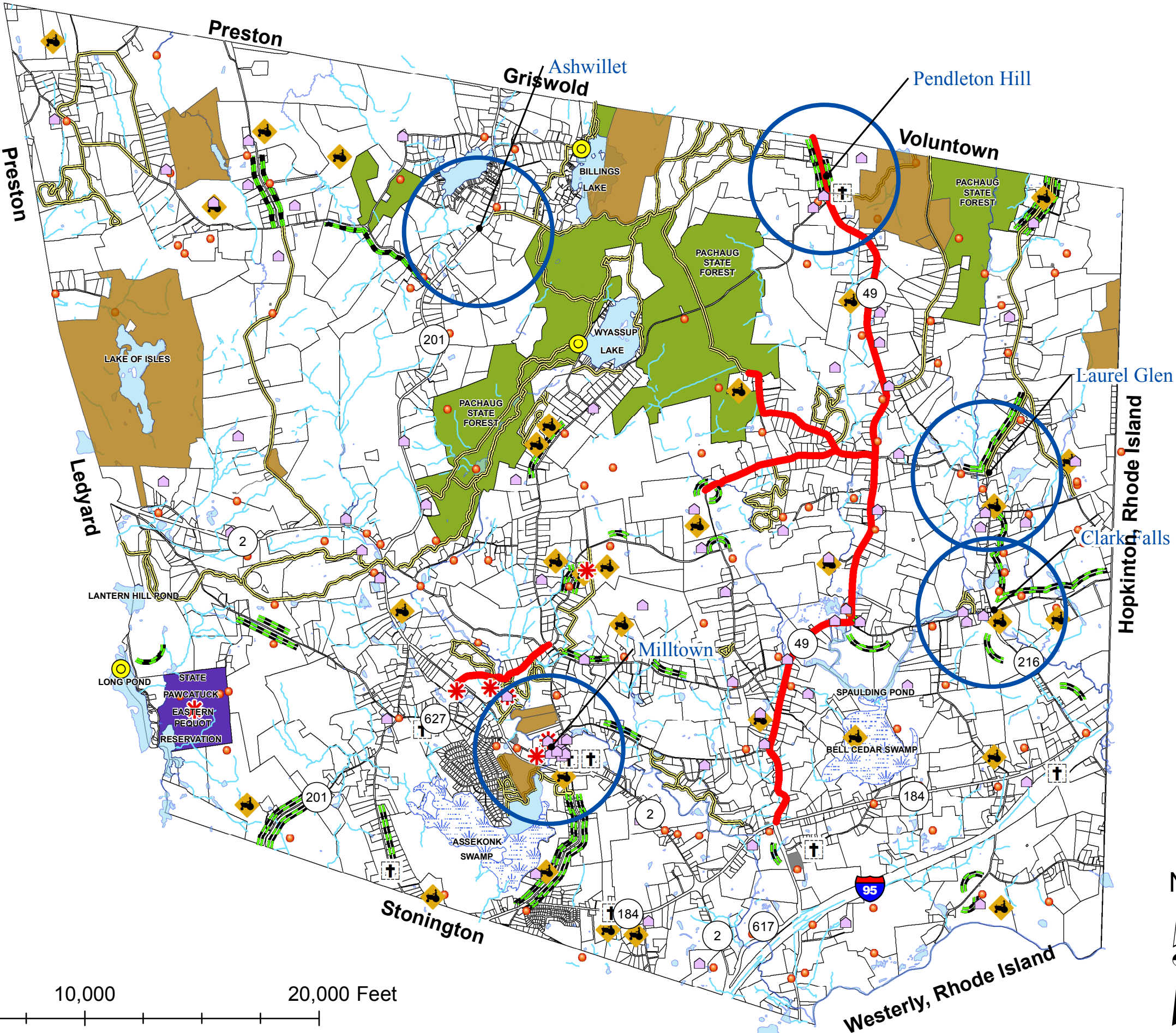


Character Resource Map

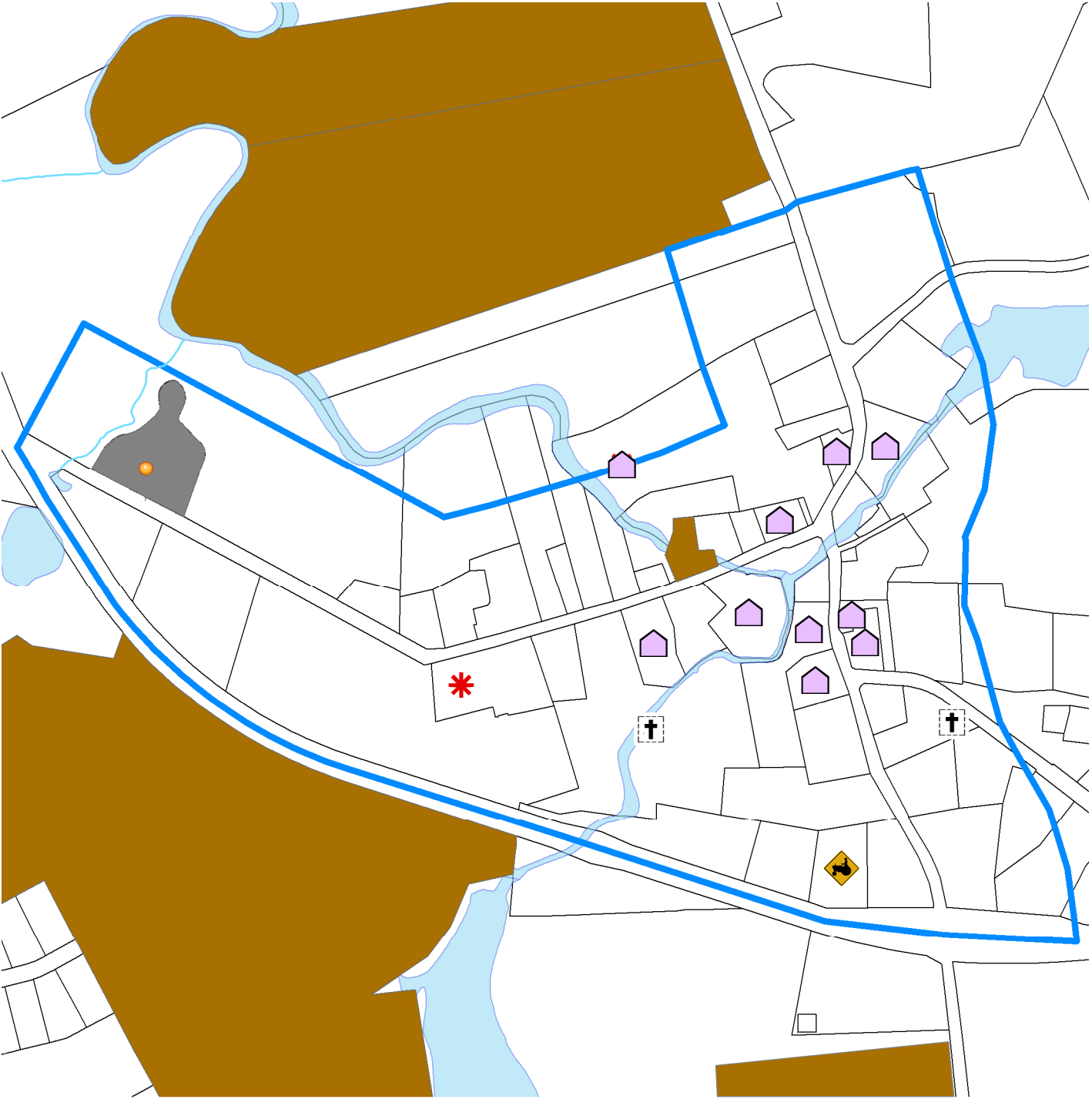
Parcel Lines To
10/1/2012

Character Resources

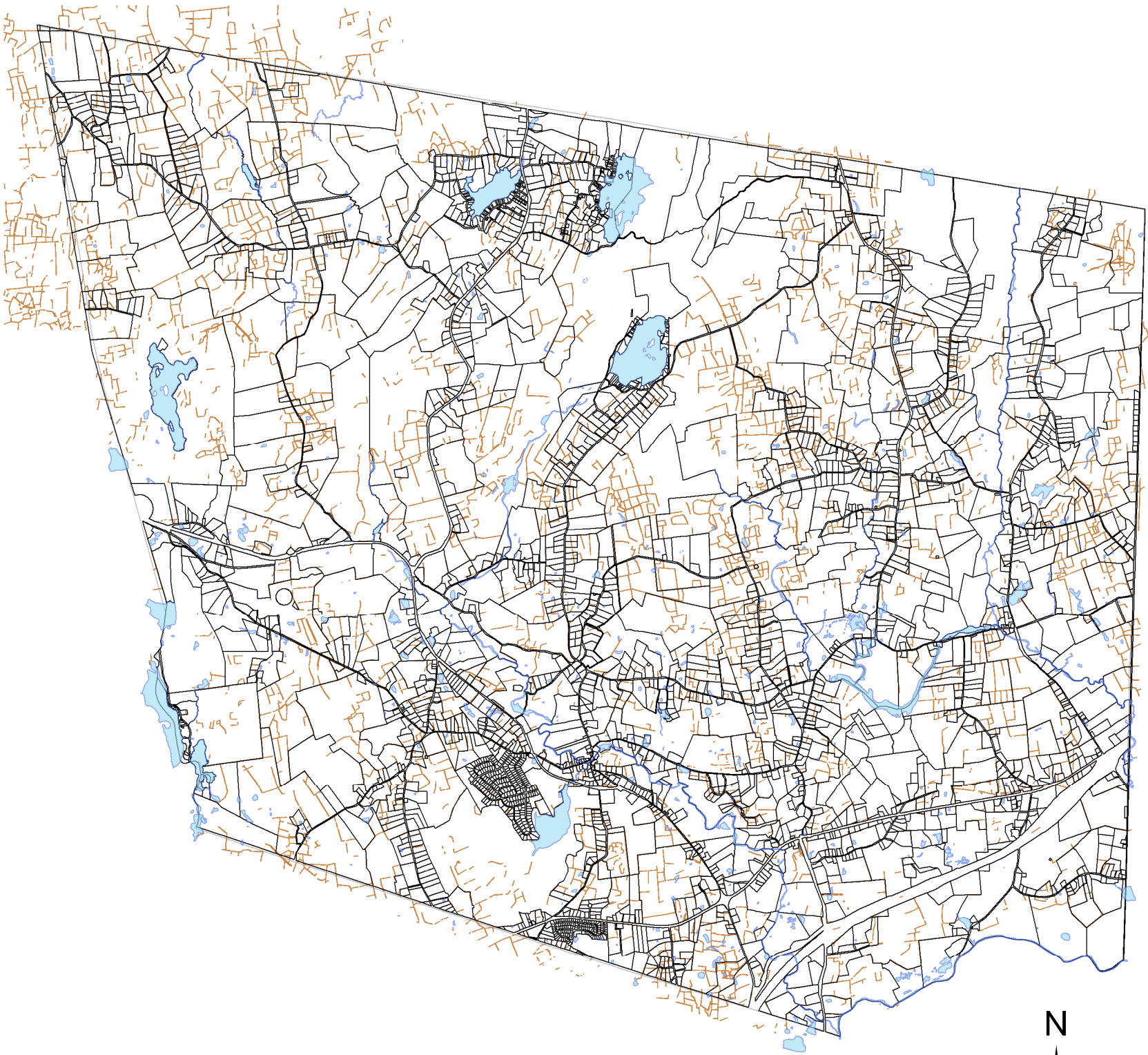
- Church
- Cultural Resources
- Historic Homes/Resources
- Cemetery
- Historic Villages
- Boat Launches
- Farm Locations
- Scenic Roads
- Scenic Views
- Town Identified Trails
- Hewitt Farm
- Reservation
- State Forest
- Parks and Recreation









North Stonington Village



Stonewalls



Character Resources

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Parks and Recreation |  Cultural Resources |
|  Historic Homes/Resources |  Cemetery |
|  Village Protection Overlay Area |  Church |

