

CONSERVATION THEMES



Overview of Conservation Themes

Bethel's character is largely the result of its unique combination of land and water, as well as historic and scenic resources. As these resources are mutually dependent upon one another, negative impacts to one can negatively impact others. Properly protected, these important resources will continue to have positive impacts upon the Town's quality of life, for generations to come.

These issues are addressed early in the planning process since it is necessary to identify those resources that the community wishes to preserve and protect before making decisions about where to locate development and what types of development to encourage.

Although Open Space preservation was identified as the most important issue in community workshops, this section leads with a discussion of natural resources, which are also a very important consideration and can have a tremendous impact on the qualities of individual pieces of open space.

Protecting important resources is a critical element in maintaining community character and ensures quality of life for current and future generations.



Open Space



Land Resources



Historic Resources



Water Resources



NATURAL RESOURCES

Overview

“The nation behaves well if it treats natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value.”
Theodore Roosevelt

Preserving and conserving natural resources protects environmental functions, maintains biodiversity, and prevents environmental damage.



Tree Canopy



Water Resource

Protect Land Based Natural Resources

Bethel is fortunate to have so many acres of forest land, meadowlands, and other undeveloped natural lands. While some of these areas are protected, many acres with valuable natural resources are vulnerable. There are a number of strategies that both our Commission and other Town entities can pursue to protect these resources for future generations.

The Town's land use regulations include provisions which address soil and erosion standards, road standards prohibiting grades in excess of 12 percent; and requirements to consider preservation of natural features. There are additional tools that can be used to provide protection for natural resources. Some of these issues are addressed below; others are discussed in greater detail in the development section of this Plan.

Address Steep Slope Development

One of the most fundamental issues to consider for new development is the ground upon which the proposed development will be built. Unfortunately, no soil category in this area of Connecticut is entirely problem free. For example, excessively drained soil may seem to solve hydraulic problems, but these soils are particularly subject to groundwater contamination. And once the percentage of slope starts to rise, especially above 15 percent slope, there is an increase in the potential for slope instability, erosion, and various structural concerns.

The Town's Zoning Regulations currently consider "steep slopes" to only apply to slopes greater than 25 percent (25 feet of rise for 100 feet of horizontal distance), as measured in ten-foot contours and consisting of contiguous areas totaling 3,000 square feet of area or more. As the Zoning Regulations are amended the Commission should ensure that slopes be considered steep if they are in excess of 25 percent slope, no matter how small the area of land affected.

A major concern is the practice of blasting hillsides and steep slopes in order to accommodate development in inappropriate locations. In addition, the Commission has concerns about drainage, erosion, and sedimentation issues. Commercial development is already subject to regulations that address these issues, but under the existing Zoning Regulations, residential development is exempt from requirements to address these consequences of development on hillsides and steep slopes. The Commission will consider requiring a Special Permit for residential development on steep slopes to ensure that there is adequate review of the inherent engineering challenges of hillside development.

Since the majority of future development is likely to be proposed on lands with environmental constraints, including steep slopes, the Commission believes it is critical to obtain accurate topographic data for the entire Town. The Commission requests that the Board of Selectmen authorize topographic mapping at two-foot contours for all lands within Bethel. Until that mapping has been obtained, the Commission should adopt a practice of requiring two-foot contours for any development proposed on slopes in excess of 25 percent.

The HVCEO Regional Plan provides definitions for minimal, moderate, severe or prohibitive soil and slope conditions and provides a Development Opportunity Map prepared by the federal Soil Conservation Service. The Commission should consider using the definitions provided by HVCEO and the soil survey maps of the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture as a standard in determining land use regulations, an action which is authorized by Connecticut General Statutes, Chapter 124, Section 8-2b.

Adopt Buildable Land Provisions

Buildable land regulations, typically applicable only to residential development, relate the number of housing units on a property to the natural carrying capacity and the character of the land. This is accomplished by excluding certain areas that are essentially unbuildable when considering the amount of “buildable” land on a piece of property. Unbuildable land refers to lands within the road right-of-way, wetland, steep land, or lands with other constraints.

As the Commission revises the Zoning Regulations, it should adopt a buildable land regulation to ensure that each building parcel has sufficient buildable land. This will include provisions that exclude slopes steeper than 25 percent from counting towards the minimum amount of buildable land on a parcel. Floodplains and floodways, streams, wetlands, and rights-of-way will similarly be excluded from consideration of the buildable land area of any parcel. Additional discussion of this topic is in the development section of this Plan.

Actions for Preserving Land Based Resources

1. Revise the definition of steep slope in the Zoning Regulations.
2. Consider requiring a special permit for residential development on steep slopes; but do not allow the outright removal of steep slopes or hillsides.
3. Encourage the Board of Selectmen to authorize topographic mapping at two-foot contours for the entire Town.
4. Require topographic mapping at two-foot contours for all development activities.
5. Add a definition in the Zoning Regulations for buildable land. Exclude steep slopes, floodplains, floodways, and wetlands from buildable land areas.



Erosion and sedimentation



Hilltop clearing

Protect Important Habitat Resources

There are several areas in Bethel which contain important habitat resources for rare, endangered, and threatened species. These areas include forested areas, abandoned fields, intact wetland ecosystems, and migratory corridors. In Bethel, the State DEP has identified several areas within the Town containing lands with these qualities which have been identified in the State's Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDDB).

As part of the land use application process, applicants should be required to identify NDDDB sites on their applications and to consult with DEP if proposing development on lands identified as an area of concern in the NDDDB. The Inland Wetlands Commission requires this procedure if any part of a proposed development is within or adjacent to a wetland or waterway. Our Commission should also require the DEP to review and comment if any part of a development project lies within an area identified in the NDDDB. The Commission should then adopt a practice of considering the DEP's comments when reviewing applications on lands in the NDDDB and include the comments as conditional requirements of approval, to the maximum amount practicable.

Use Native Species in Landscaping

A simple measure for protecting native species habitat, used in several Towns in Connecticut, is a requirement to only allow the introduction of plant species listed on the Connecticut Native Tree and Shrub List. This list provides not only a complete list of those plants which are native and compatible with our region, but also provides information on the availability and location of suppliers of these plants. A copy of this list can be found in the Land Use office and a link is maintained on the Town's web site. The Commission will require that applicants only make use of the species identified on the Connecticut Native Tree and Shrub list.

Prohibit the Introduction of Invasive Species

Another simple measure for preserving the natural ecosystem is to prohibit the deliberate introduction of non-native or invasive species during the site development or subdivision process. Invasive plant and animal species with no predators can aggressively multiply, replacing or depleting native wildlife food sources, leading to erosion, costly property damage and even threatening human health and safety when species are toxic, such as the giant hogweed recently found in Bethel.

Actions for Protecting Habitat Resources

1. Require all applications within the NDDP to be reviewed by DEP.
2. Consider DEP's comments during application review.
3. Require the use of native species in landscaping plans.
4. Prohibit the introduction of invasive species.

Protect Bethel's Trees

Bethel's character is shaped in large part by the many trees found throughout Town, particularly the old and notable trees. According to the Connecticut Botanical Society, which tracks large, notable, and champion trees in Connecticut, there are two officially recognized notable trees in Bethel. The two trees, both *Platanus Occidentalis*, commonly known as Sycamores, measure 256" and 228" in circumference respectively. One is the well-known tree at the intersection of Route 302 and Route 53.

Bethel has a tree ordinance that addresses some activities related to street trees and public trees. It does not address the preservation of notable trees, or prevent the practice of clear-cutting large amounts of land.

The Commission recommends that the Board of Selectmen revise the tree ordinance to provide protection for notable trees and to discourage clearcutting, to the degree possible within the constraints of State Statutes. Definitions for tree harvesting, clearcutting, land disturbance, and caliper should be included in the revised ordinance.

Currently there is a 500-cubic yard threshold that triggers a Special Permit for extraction and grading activities. As the Commission revises the Zoning Regulations, it should also consider requiring a special permit whenever land disturbance activities in excess of 5,000 square feet (or more than 1/10 of an acre), are proposed, with exceptions for foundations and septic systems. Integrating these requirements into the erosion, sedimentation, and grading regulations will provide a framework and rationale for these requirements.



Sycamore Tree

The Subdivision Regulations require that trees over 18" in diameter be considered during development activities. The Commission should pursue efforts that will preserve mature trees to the maximum amount practicable. Where it is not possible to preserve trees, the Commission should pursue regulatory efforts to replace trees during the development process. Elm and Chestnut trees are two tree species that were commonly found throughout our region. Both species were subject to diseases that killed many trees over the last decade. Recently a disease resistant Elm tree has become available and a disease resistant Chestnut will be available in the next couple of years. The Commission will recommend that applicants make use of these species in their landscaping plans.

Actions for Protecting Trees

1. Encourage the Board of Selectmen to revise the tree ordinance to discourage clearcutting and to include definitions for tree harvesting, clearcutting, land disturbance and caliper.
2. Integrate tree protection measures into the soil erosion and sedimentation regulations.
3. Revise the subdivision and Zoning Regulations to require replacement of mature trees lost during the development process, as practicable.
4. Encourage the use of disease resistant Elm and Chestnut trees.

Natural Resources Plan

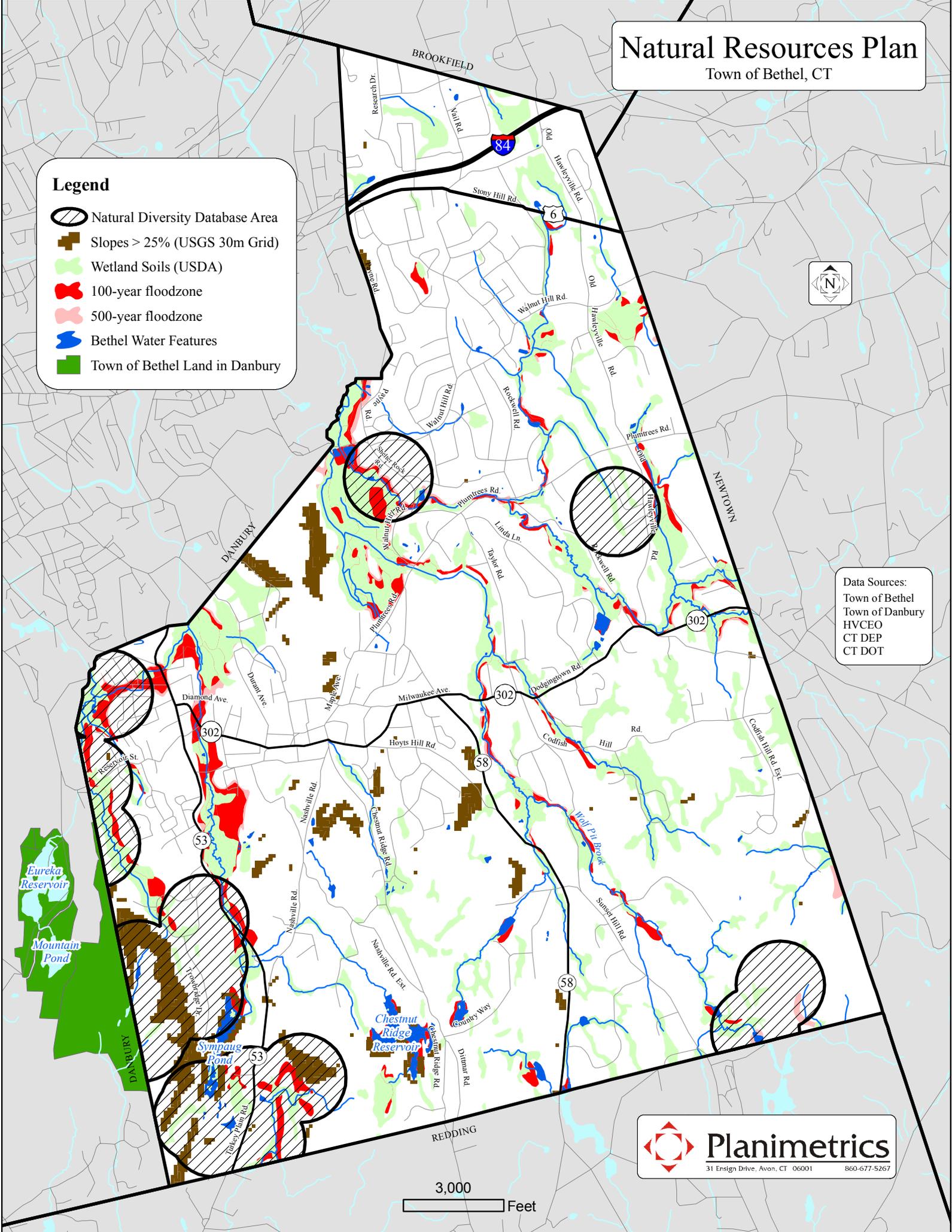
Town of Bethel, CT

Legend

-  Natural Diversity Database Area
-  Slopes > 25% (USGS 30m Grid)
-  Wetland Soils (USDA)
-  100-year floodzone
-  500-year floodzone
-  Bethel Water Features
-  Town of Bethel Land in Danbury



Data Sources:
 Town of Bethel
 Town of Danbury
 HVCEO
 CT DEP
 CT DOT



3,000 Feet



Planimetrics
 31 Ensign Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5267

Point vs Non-Point

Since the adoption of the Clean Water Act in 1972, the focus of water quality protection had been to regulate direct discharges of pollution, such as industrial discharges of contaminants, into waterways. This was referred to as pollution points.

In recent years, the focus has been on less direct sources of pollution, referred to as non-point sources, which includes polluted stormwater and agricultural run-off.

Protect Water Resources and Water Quality

Water, a basic building block of life, provides drinkable water, contributes to biological diversity, and adds to the overall quality of life. Both surface and groundwater are fragile resources, which once contaminated can be lost forever as a source of potable water. Therefore, the best strategy is to protect all water resources from contamination to the maximum amount practical.

Since 1990, water quality has been regulated, in part through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program. Phase I of the NPDES involved permits issued by the CT DEP to large municipal stormwater systems and for construction activities equal to or in excess of five acres of land.

Since 2003 Phase II of the NPDES has required regulation of even small discharges from municipal storm water systems and permits for construction activities that disturb as little as one acre of land.

There are six program elements of the NPDES Phase II program. The Commission along with the IWC, the Health Department, and the Board of Selectmen, should continue participation in all of these program elements. The following table identifies the various program elements and provides examples of Best Management Practices that should be encouraged and promoted through all available avenues and through a coordinated effort of all appropriate Town agencies.

Program Element	Description	Examples of Best Management Practices
Public Information and Outreach	Programs to help make the public aware and concerned about the impact of their behavior on pollution and water quality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an outreach program • Prepare information materials • Implement the outreach program
Public Participation and Involvement	Joining forces with other groups to work toward the same goal with complementary programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community meetings • Clean-up days • School programs and field trips
Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination	Preparing pro-active and reactive approaches to finding and eliminating untreated discharges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop detection program • Develop avoidance program • Develop response plan • Implement programs
Construction Run-off Controls	Programs to control erosion and sedimentation (E&S) for sites disturbing one or more acres.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update erosion and sedimentation regulations • Review all development plans • Require use of prevention / management techniques • Regularly inspect construction sites
Post-construction Run-off Controls	Reducing the amount of run-off occurring as a result of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require infiltration • Minimize impervious surfaces • Buffer sensitive resources
Pollution Prevention	Preventing pollution by municipal organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize street sanding • Clean up street sweepings • Contain possible pollution sources

Water Supply Resources Plan

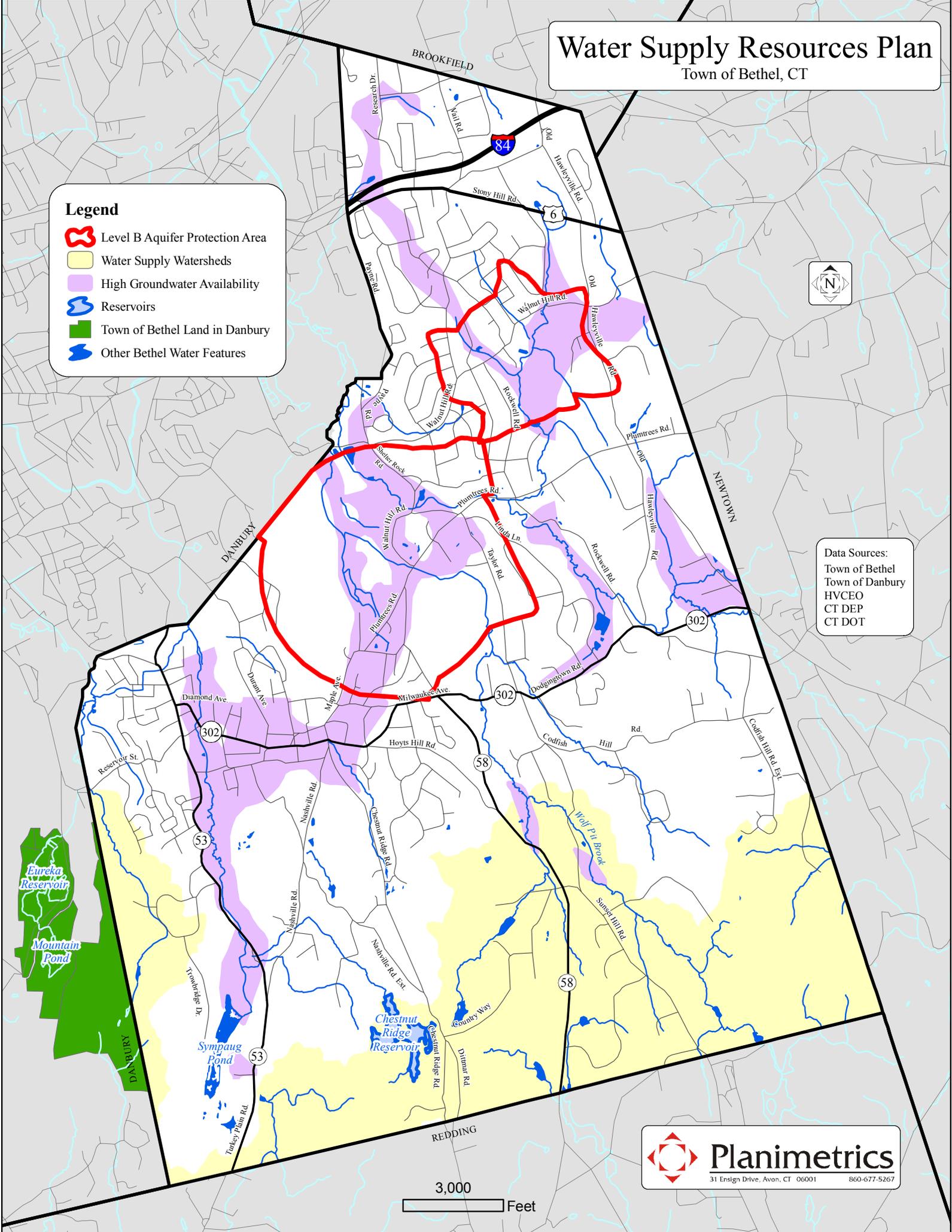
Town of Bethel, CT

Legend

-  Level B Aquifer Protection Area
-  Water Supply Watersheds
-  High Groundwater Availability
-  Reservoirs
-  Town of Bethel Land in Danbury
-  Other Bethel Water Features



Data Sources:
Town of Bethel
Town of Danbury
HVCEO
CT DEP
CT DOT



3,000 Feet

Protect Aquifers and Groundwater

Wellhead areas are well sites that produce a source of public water. These are the areas that the CT DEP refers to as aquifers. Areas of high groundwater availability are areas where geologic conditions may be appropriate for the development of future public water supplies. In Bethel, the Inland Wetlands and Waterways Commission (IWC) has the responsibility for protecting aquifers and groundwater.

The Commission recommends that the IWC adopt Aquifer Protection Overlay Zones for the Aquifer Protection Areas (APA), once the Aquifer Protection mapping has been completed. Aquifer Protection zones should prescribe uses according to the potential risk each use poses. As the Commission revises its Zoning Regulations, it should ensure that our regulations addressing sedimentation and erosion control are consistent with the practices recommended and required by the 2002 Connecticut Guidelines for Erosion and Sedimentation Control.

Pollution of groundwater from incompatible land uses, accidents, or the introduction of common groundwater contaminants another concern of the Commission. The Commission recommends that the IWC consider adopting regulations to protect areas identified as high groundwater areas.

Develop a Septic Management Program

Septic systems pose a threat to ground and surface water resources. Septic system failure can lead to contamination of stormwater runoff, which can contaminate drinking water supplies. Steps that Bethel can take to prevent water contamination problems include Septic Management Programs that encourage or require residents to monitor and regularly maintain septic systems.

The Commission, in cooperation with the Health Department, should evaluate the threat of septic systems on drinking water resources, and if warranted, request that the Board of Selectmen adopt and fund a Septic Management Program which would require the periodic inspection and maintenance (pumping) of septic systems.

Manage Underground Storage Tanks

Underground storage tanks (UST) for residential fuel oils are another significant threat to groundwater resources. The CT DEP estimates that one in every five residential USTs in Connecticut have leaked at some point in the past. For many residents, a UST out of sight is out of mind and no thought is given to them until something goes wrong. To address this potential problem, some communities have adopted UST ordinances which may require any combination of registration, monitoring, and removal.

The Commission recommends that the IWC evaluate the threat of USTs to groundwater and ultimately all public water supply resources. If warranted by the results of the UST evaluation, the Commission requests that the Board of Selectmen adopt an ordinance that prohibits the installation of new underground oil tanks and requires the removal of existing underground residential fuel tanks to avoid pollution of water resources from tank leakage.

Manage Impervious Coverage

Impervious coverage refers to areas of land which are paved or developed and which do not allow water to percolate through the soils and into ground water resources. Except for the recently enacted Designed Conservation District, there are no restrictions on impervious coverage in Bethel. The Town's Zoning Regulations address lot coverage, but this only applies to roofed buildings, and does not include driveways, patios, pools and other types of land development that prevent infiltration or increase stormwater runoff.

As the Commission revises the Zoning Regulations, it should encourage site designs that minimize impervious surfaces, promote infiltration and reduce runoff. The Zoning Regulations should also include impervious coverage performance objectives including the use of roof leaders, rain gardens, a minimum amount of landscaped and/or natural areas, and the use of porous paving materials to allow clean water from building roofs to infiltrate the ground. The coverage requirements should include stronger standards in environmentally sensitive areas (aquifer protection zones) and more relaxed standards in historically dense developed areas (Downtown Village area and along Route 6). Site designs that minimize impervious surfaces, promote infiltration, and reduce runoff should be encouraged.

Protect Public Water Watersheds and Reservoirs

Public water supply watersheds are areas that drain into drinking water supply reservoirs. Pollution, which comes primarily from development activity, is the primary concern. Approximately 26 percent of Bethel's total land area is designated by the DEP as "existing or potential water supply watershed" (see the Water Supply Resources Plan).

Two of Bethel's reservoirs are located in Danbury, (the Mountain Pond and Eureka Lake Reservoirs) and are protected from land use activities that could potentially contaminate them. However, the Chestnut Ridge Reservoir in southern Bethel, and other DEP designated surface water supply tributary areas throughout Town, are not currently protected. Even though the Chestnut Ridge Reservoir may be put on reserve status as a future water supply, given Bethel's very limited reserve supply resource it is possible that the Chestnut Ridge Reservoir may need to be reactivated in the future. The Commission recommends that the Board of Selectmen consider acquiring the lands around the Chestnut Ridge Reservoir whenever those properties become available for sale.

The Board of Selectmen and the Commission are currently working with HVCEO to quantify future potential water resources. The results of these assessments should be used to modify and shape future land use policies and regulations, including the development of an overlay zone for all watersheds. Additional recommendations are contained in an HVCEO report entitled "Adopting a Water Supply Watershed Protection District Overlay Zone for Bethel, CT" dated October 2006. These recommendations should be implemented when the Commission revises the land use regulations.



Protect Wetlands and Watercourses

Wetlands, which in Connecticut are defined as poorly drained areas or areas containing floodplain soils types, are the links between water and land. Wetlands are essential to the adequate supply and quality of surface and underground water; to the stability and control of flooding and erosion; to the recharging and purification of groundwater; and are vital for the existence of many forms of life.

Bethel has an Inland Wetlands Commission (IWC) which regulates specific and defined “core activities” within wetlands, and adjacent uplands within 100 feet of wetlands. The existing wetland regulations define “core activities” as activities involving the deposition or removal of 100 cubic yards or more of materials. Activities involving less than 100 cubic yards can also have significant impacts. The existing 100-cubic yard threshold is therefore allowing activities with significant impacts to both wetlands and adjacent upland areas to occur without any review or regulatory guidance.

The Commission recommends that the IWC establish a policy of no net loss of wetlands and adopt regulations that will allow for the evaluation of direct impacts to wetlands that occur outside riparian review areas. The Commission will work with the Inland Wetlands Commission to identify a lower threshold for consideration of core activities, in order to ensure that all wetlands and the adjacent upland areas are protected from development impacts to the maximum amount practicable.



Protect Vernal Pools

Vernal pools are seasonal pools of water, found in depressions in the soil with no above ground outlet. Many species of salamanders, frogs, and insects require vernal pools for breeding and reproduction. Vernal pools support fauna specifically adapted to breed in the seasonal and cyclical nature of these unique water resources. While it is likely that there are vernal pools in Bethel, there is limited data on locations.

Vernal pools are not protected under any State or Federal program, although some species, such as the state-listed Jefferson salamander, which is a species of special concern, is dependent upon vernal pools for habitat conditions. As discussed in the section on rare and endangered species, asking applicants to confer with the DEP prior to submission of an application to the Commission can provide some protection for these valuable natural resources.

The Commission should endorse a policy of no net loss of vernal pools and should pursue a contract with a certified wetlands scientist or herpetologist to prepare a town-wide vernal pool study, identifying the probable location of existing vernal pools. As the Zoning Regulations are revised, the Commission should adopt regulations to protect vernal pools such as requiring that any development within a 750-foot radius of any identified vernal pool meet specific performance standards such as cape cod curbing.

Three Views of the Same Vernal Pool During Fall/Winter/Spring

Manage Floodplains and Floodways

Floodplains and floodways are typically low-lying lands adjacent to rivers subject to periodic flooding. These areas should be managed to prevent water from entering the roadways from adjacent streams and brooks.

The Town's Zoning Regulations do not currently prohibit development in the floodway or the floodplains, which can impact the Town's ability to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). When the Commission revises the Zoning Regulations, it should carefully consider how best to manage development in these flood-prone areas. Areas within the floodplain should be excluded from the buildable land area and the Flood Plain Regulations amended to limit additional development in areas subject to flooding.

Protect Streams

Just as a roadway network is the skeletal support for most land uses, the stream system is the backbone of the water resources. The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection stream classification system could be considered the spine of the Town's water resource policy.

The CT DEP has developed water quality standards in conjunction with the principles of the federal Clean Water Act, as follows:

Class AA

Designated uses are existing or proposed drinking water supply, fish and wildlife habitat, some recreational use, agricultural and industrial supply. Discharges are severely restricted.

Class A

Designated uses are potential drinking water supply; fish and wildlife habitat; recreational use; agricultural and industrial supply; and other legitimate uses including navigation. Discharges are severely restricted. No reclassification of A or AA allowed down to B.

Class B

Designated uses are varied and include discharges from industrial and municipal wastewater treatment facilities providing Best Available Treatment and Best Management Practices are applied. All water bodies must eventually reach the minimum standards of the B classification.

Classes C & D

Indicates unacceptable quality. DEP will issue orders requiring improvement to Class B or Class A.

Each stream or water body in Bethel has two classifications; one for existing use and one for ultimate future use. These two classifications are written in an existing/future format such as "B/A" or "A/AA". The highest standards refer to water supply areas which provide drinkable water, or "AA" classified streams.



Flooded Street



Sympaug Brook

Streams in Bethel have been classified by CT DEP as identified in the following table, Stream Classifications in Bethel.

DEP Stream Classifications in Bethel, CT

Name and Description of Stream	Classifications Existing/Future
Aspetuck Reservoir tributaries reaching north into Bethel from Redding and Newtown	AA/AA
Bethel Reservoir Brook from west of Hudson Street north to the Danbury City Line	B/A
Chestnut Ridge Reservoir and its tributaries	AA/AA
Murphy Brook (aka Braunies Brook) from source in Danbury to pump station at Reservoir Street	AA/AA
Saugatuck Reservoir tributaries reaching north into Bethel from Danbury and Redding	AA/AA
Sympaug Brook from Sympaug Pond and the old Bethel Landfill flowing north to just north of railroad bridge	B/A
Sympaug Brook from just north of railroad bridge to Danbury City Line	B/B
Wolf Pit Brook and tributaries that are upstream of a point just north of the intersection of Route 58 with Hoyts Hill Road	A/AA
All other streams in Bethel including but not limited to: Chestnut Brook, Dibble's Brook, East Swamp Brook, Limekiln Brook	A/A

The Commission recommends that a Town Conservation Commission, which is discussed in greater detail in the section addressing Open Space, be charged with the task of working cooperatively with the State DEP and HVCEO to establish buffers along all streams. These stream buffers can and should become part of the Town's trail system (also discussed in the Open Space chapter). In addition, the Commission, as it revises the Zoning Regulations, will include limitations on development along all streams, particularly those classified B or better, to the maximum amount practicable.

Educate the Public

Since human activities pose the greatest threat to water resources, the public needs to be educated about the activities that can have an impact on these vital resources. Educational strategies should be developed and a number of avenues for distributing the information should be utilized. Display tables in the library, inserts in municipal mailings, and partnerships with utilities can assist in educating the public about the importance of protecting water resources.

The Commission recommends that the Board of Selectmen distribute a flyer or mailing insert summarizing the recommendations of this Plan and provide a copy of the information to every household in Town.

Actions for Protecting Water Resources

1. Continue to implement the NPDES program components.
2. Adopt aquifer protection regulations.
3. Revise the Zoning Regulations for consistency with the 2002 CT Guidelines for Erosion and Sedimentation Control.
4. Protect areas identified as high groundwater through the IWC regulations.
5. Assess the need for a septic management program and if warranted, develop and fund the program.
6. Evaluate the threats to groundwater from underground storage tanks (UST) and if warranted, adopt an ordinance prohibiting the installation of new USTs and requiring the removal of existing USTs.
7. Adopt provisions in the Zoning Regulations to limit the amount of pervious surfaces, including performance standards encouraging the use of roof leaders, rain gardens and other measures that limit run-off and promote infiltration.
8. Consider acquiring lands around the Chestnut Ridge Reservoir.
9. Implement the recommendations of the October 2006 HVCEO watershed protection report, including adopting a water supply overlay zone.
10. Use ongoing water resource assessments to guide revisions to land use regulations.
11. Adopt a no-net-loss of wetlands policy.
12. Lower the threshold of disturbance, for consideration of core activities in wetlands, watercourses, and upland review areas.
13. Identify significant wetlands, and all wetlands in undeveloped areas within recharge areas.
14. Establish a no-net-loss of vernal pool policy.
15. Contract a vernal pool specialist to inventory vernal pools.
16. Adopt regulations to protect vernal pools such as requiring that any development within a 750-foot radius of any identified vernal pool meet specific performance standards such as cape cod curbing.
17. Consider prohibiting additional development within floodplains and floodways.
18. Establish buffers along streams and limit development within the buffer particularly along streams classified as B or better.
19. Educate the public about the threats to and strategies available to protect water resources through mailings, flyers, and distribution of the water resource recommendations of this Plan.



OPEN SPACE

Overview

Preserving open space can conserve important natural resources, protect wildlife habitat, create more environmentally sensitive development patterns, provide fiscal benefits, protect community character and enhance the quality of life for the residents of Bethel. In addition the future residents of Bethel will need open space and this Plan is committed to providing future residents with the resources they will need.

Open Space Definitions

This plan refers to actual and perceived open space and defines these terms as follows:

- Permanently protected open space is referred to in this Plan as dedicated open space. It includes State-owned lands such as Huntington State Park, lands owned by local land trusts, and lands owned by private home owner associations. It should include Town-owned parks, however, as none of the Town's parks have a formal conservation easement, none can be considered permanently protected at this time.
- Managed open space refers to lands that may be used for passive and/or active recreational activities, including the Town's parks. It also refers to lands surrounding reservoirs which are managed for water quality issues. Other land use types include DOT owned right-of-way lands and cemeteries. Many of the managed open space lands in Bethel are without any formal mechanism preventing development.
- Perceived open space refers to lands that are not developed. In Bethel, the perception may be that more than 40 percent of land is "open space," because the land is uncommitted, undeveloped and appears in a natural state providing many of the benefits of open space. The majority of lands categorized as "perceived open space" are privately owned and zoned for residential uses, with approximately 20 percent owned by the Town.

Open Space Vision

The Commission envisions that within the next ten years, there will be significant parcels of open space in all parts of Town connected by trails, streams, and sidewalks. These open space parcels will provide both active and passive recreational opportunities. In some instances these areas will be inaccessible to humans in order to protect important resources such as water supply resources. In order to achieve this vision of a network of open space parcels connected by trails and other accessways, additional open space must be acquired. The Commission has identified those areas of Town where acquisition of additional open space is a priority, which includes:

- southwest corner of Town, including Terre Haute, Bald Rock, and Chestnut Ridge Reservoir;
- southeast corner of Town including lands adjacent to the Huntington State Park as far northwest as the intersection of Route 302 and 58;
- the area around East Swamp as far southwest as the intersection of Route 302 and 53 and as far southeast as the intersection of Route 32 and 58; and
- the northeast section of Town bounded by Route 6, Plumtrees, Rockwell, and the Town border with Newtown.

In addition, the Commission has identified approximate locations for open space connections along streams, trails, or easements, or through acquisition of additional open space parcels. These areas, identified on the Open Space Plan as Conceptual Open Space Connections, are not site specific, but do provide guidance when reviewing potential open space acquisitions. The Commission will monitor acquisitions and refine these goals as necessary. A priority will be to complete the Ives Trail connections.

Create Connections

The physical act of connecting open space is usually accomplished with greenways (typically trails and wildlife corridors) and blueways (trails along stream belts) as well as sidewalks, and conservation easements. Interconnecting open spaces is one of the most effective ways of maximizing the benefits of open space.

Greenways and blueways can provide educational and passive recreational opportunities, benefit wildlife, and support water quality programs. A system of greenways and blueways allows wildlife to migrate between larger open space habitats. The Open Space Plan identifies existing and desirable open space parcels as well as existing and proposed greenways and blueways.

Making trail connections to the parks, the Village Center, the Educational Park, and the Ives Trail can increase passive recreational opportunities and increase the value of each piece of the open space network. The Town, ideally through the Conservation Commission, the Board of Selectmen, and our Commission, should continue to work with appropriate partners such as the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO), the Bethel Land Trust (BLT) and PATH (Preservation Advocates for Terre Haute) to complete existing trails, like the Ives Trail. The Town and its partners should construct and maintain additional trails, including those proposed by the Town's Parks and Recreation Department and obtain conservation easements along the greenways, blueways, cemeteries, and parks. The Commission should also consider pursuing easements for trails or greenways across or at the edge of cemeteries and vacant lands to help link the existing open space network together.

Ives Trail

The Ives Trail is a 15-mile hiking path, which connects Terre Haute in Bethel to parks and natural areas in Ridgefield and Danbury.

HVCEO Proposed Trails

HVCEO has identified a number of proposed trails, greenways, and blueways, which if developed would go a long way towards connecting many of the existing open spaces in Bethel.

Terre Haute Findings

- Development potential and access is limited by shallow depth to bedrock, steep slopes, and the presence of wetlands.
- Terre Haute has the potential to provide more economic opportunities through open space and recreational land uses than through housing or additional industrial development.
- Terre Haute and the reservoir lands are an enormous amenity for the Town with the potential for becoming a major "Gateway to Recreation."

Protect Significant Portions of the Terre Haute Lands

In 1980, the Town of Bethel purchased a parcel known as Terre Haute which currently consists of approximately 255 acres located in the southwestern part of the Town and approximately 208 acres located in adjacent Danbury. The original intention was to develop some of the land for industry and economic development, preserve open space, and provide recreational opportunities for the citizens of Bethel. While the Town has developed a segment of the land as the Francis J. Clarke Industrial Park, there has been no formal action taken to preserve the open space or develop recreational opportunities.

Terre Haute is a unique natural resource in southwestern Connecticut with heavily forested land, steep slopes, vernal pools, wetlands, meadows, and significant habitat for many wildlife species, some of which are listed in the State's NDDDB. In 2003, the Board of Selectmen contracted a design team from the Conway School of Landscape Design to prepare a land-use feasibility study of the Terre Haute property and adjacent reservoir land. (Findings from that report are identified in the sidebar.). With respect to the approximately 208 acres located within the city of Danbury, the Commission recommends that, in accordance with the town charter, a legal instrument, such as a conservation easement, be applied, preserving this valuable resource for passive recreation in perpetuity.

The future of Terre Haute is an important consideration for the Commission, and generates passionate discussion in Town meetings. The Commission recommends that significant portions of the Terre Haute property be permanently protected. While some development may be appropriate on a portion of the property immediately adjacent to the Francis J. Clarke Park, the Commission recommends that any development proposal also address the Industrial Park's inefficiencies related to parking, loading and infrastructure. In addition, the Commission should adopt regulations and design standards to promote and protect the environmental resources associated with these lands. The Conway report proposed design criteria for development and the Commission recommends that the criteria in the Conway report be applied to any development on the Terre Haute lands.

Open Space Plan

Town of Bethel, CT

Legend

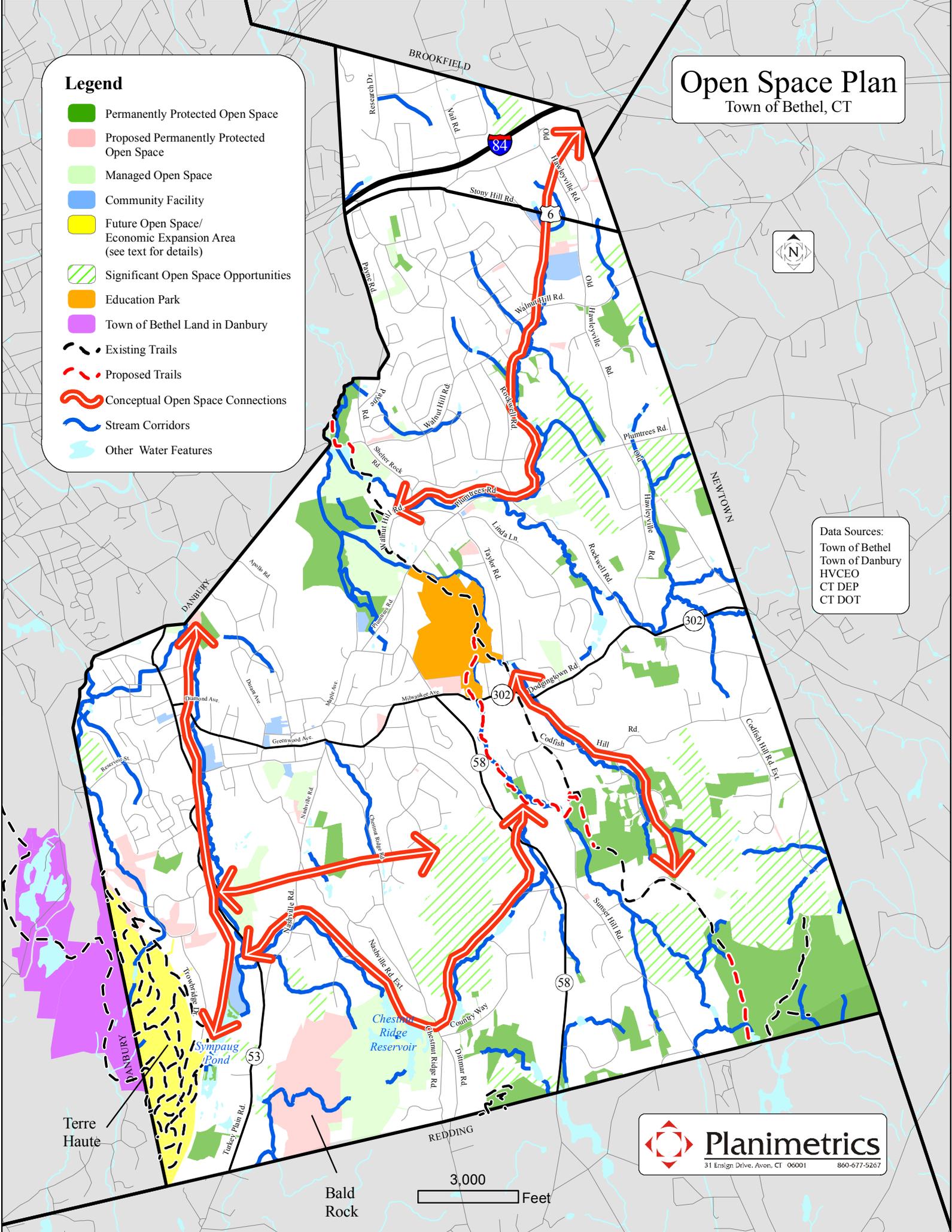
- Permanently Protected Open Space
- Proposed Permanently Protected Open Space
- Managed Open Space
- Community Facility
- Future Open Space/
Economic Expansion Area
(see text for details)
- Significant Open Space Opportunities
- Education Park
- Town of Bethel Land in Danbury
- Existing Trails
- Proposed Trails
- Conceptual Open Space Connections
- Stream Corridors
- Other Water Features



Data Sources:
 Town of Bethel
 Town of Danbury
 HVCEO
 CT DEP
 CT DOT



3,000 Feet



Terre Haute

Bald Rock

REDDING

NEWTON

BROOKFIELD

DANBURY

DANBURY

DANBURY

Preserve Portions of Bald Rock for Passive Recreation

In 1984, the Board of Selectmen requested an analysis of the Bald Rock parcel to assist the Town in the development of a management plan for this 158-acre Town-owned land. A report was produced by the King's Mark Environmental Review Team (ERT). That report found that due to topographic and geologic constraints, the land would be best suited for passive recreational uses and concluded that "the Bald Rock tract has excellent potential for passive recreational use."

With judicious trail development, the site can provide an attractive area for hiking, nature study, and backpack camping. Opportunities also exist for forest management and wildlife habitat improvement.

There is no direct access to Bald Rock. The Commission recommends that, working in collaboration with the Board of Selectmen and willing land owners, lands adjacent to the Bald Rock tract be acquired to provide access for cars and hikers.

The Board of Selectmen should authorize the preparation of a management plan for this Town-owned property that takes advantage of the unique topographic and geologic resources and contributes to open space connections and resources.

Actions to Realize the Open Space Vision

1. Monitor open space acquisitions focusing acquisition strategies in areas identified on the Open Space Plan as highest priority.
2. Connect open spaces along trails and stream corridors with acquisitions and easements.
3. Collaborate with adjacent towns and interested non-profit organizations to complete the Ives Trail.
4. Connect Bethel trails to the Ives Trails.
5. Permanently protect significant portions of Terre Haute, particularly on the western portions.
6. Create development guidelines for undeveloped lands in the Francis J. Clarke Industrial Park.
7. Prepare a management plan for Bald Rock that includes recreational opportunities.
8. Acquire adjacent lands to provide and improve access to Bald Rock.

Establish a Conservation Commission

While the Commission is overseeing the implementation of the Open Space vision, in the future it would be better to have a Conservation Commission charged with these tasks. The Commission recommends that the Board of Selectmen amend the Town Charter to allow for the creation of a Conservation Commission, in conformance with Section 7-131a of the CGS. Members should have expertise in land management and the ability to work cooperatively with the Commission. It will also be important to provide the Conservation Commission with appropriate authority, staff, and other resources.

One of the first tasks of the Conservation Commission should be to propose a mechanism, such as conservation easements, for Town-owned lands used as parks, to provide assurance that these facilities will be preserved for future generations for both passive and active recreational opportunities. The appropriate conservation easement should allow for some limited construction of buildings that support active and passive recreation, appropriate lighting that does not trespass off the site, and adequate parking. However, any significant development should be prohibited and the conservation easement should define the parameters of any potential development. The Commission should consider creating a Park Zoning District, as is used in communities such as Stamford, limiting development in the Park Districts.

The Conservation Commission should pursue conservation easements that help connect existing open space parcels. The Conservation Commission should also consider obtaining easements through cemeteries, particularly when the cemetery helps to facilitate open space parcels.

The Commission recommends that another goal of the Conservation Commission should be to pursue a right-of-first-refusal on significant parcels of privately owned lands that are offered for sale. Significant parcels would be those that complete connections between existing open space parcels or that provide open space in those parts of Town identified as priority areas for acquisition, as identified on the Open Space Plan.

Another task that should be addressed by the Conservation Commission should be identification of appropriate stream buffers. Stream buffers physically protect and separate a stream from disturbance or encroachment and act as a water right-of-way during floods. The streamside buffer is typically comprised of three zones: a streamside zone; a middle zone; and an outer zone. The three-zone buffer is variable in width, typically ranging between 75 and 300 feet. Variation is required to allow for protection of special areas such as wetlands and floodplain areas.

Actions for a Conservation Commission

1. Establish a Conservation Commission.
2. Create conservation easements for Town-owned parks.
3. Consider a Park Zoning District.
4. Consider easements across or at the edge of cemeteries as part of the Town's trail system.
5. Pursue right-of-first-refusal for significant parcels of privately owned land.
6. Identify and define the parameters of stream buffers.

Raising Open Space Acquisition Funds through the Mill Rate

Average Tax Assessment	\$205K
Mill Rate (FY/2006 per \$1,000 of valuation)	\$28
Average Tax Bill per household	\$5,740
Average Increase per tax bill at ¼ of 1% of the mill rate	\$51
Approximate Amount of money that would be raised for open space acquisition annually	\$351K

Acquire Open Space

In order to implement the Open Space Plan, it will be necessary to acquire additional lands for both passive and active recreational opportunities. Bethel needs to develop a proactive land acquisition strategy because if the Town waits until a property is proposed for development, the community may miss the best open space parcels or pay excessively for them. A prudent overall land acquisition strategy can help avoid this situation. The following strategies, which should be developed and implemented through the Board of Selectmen and the Conservation Commission, with assistance from our Commission, can be used separately or in combination, to acquire additional open space.

Apply for State Aid

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection recommends that by the year 2023, approximately 21 percent of the State be preserved as protected open space, with the State acquiring 10 percent and municipalities acquiring the rest. In order to assist local municipalities acquire the local share, the State has financial assistance programs for land acquisition. A requirement of the State's open space acquisition programs is that the land be identified in the Town's Open Space Plan and/or Plan of Conservation and Development. There is, typically, a requirement that the municipality contribute a portion of the funds.

The State programs promote the purchase of agricultural lands, the addition to and/or creation of contiguous open space, open space adjacent to urban areas, and compliance with local and regional conservation and development plans. The State's financial assistance programs allow communities to purchase properties that previously seemed beyond the reach of the local entity.

Create a Land Acquisition Fund

The Board of Selectmen should establish a fund for open space acquisitions, in conformance with CGS 7-131r. These funds can be used to leverage open space grants, as required by many funding organizations. Money in a land acquisition fund can also be used to purchase open space when appropriate open space land become available.

One method is to establish an annual line item in the budget supported by ¼ of one percent of the mill rate. If this provision had been applied to the 2006 tax bill, the Town would have raised approximately \$350,000 for open space acquisition in one year (see sidebar).

Another funding tool is an open space bond, where funds can be immediately obtained and paid back over time to allow for the purchase of open space whenever it becomes available.

Collaborate with Appropriate Partners

The Town, either through the Conservation Commission, or through our Commission, should develop collaborative relationships with willing landowners, non-profit organizations, and governmental agencies to acquire meaningful and protected open space. Organizations such as the Nature Conservancy, the DEP, the Trust for Public Land, local land trusts, and other organizations committed to land preservation are already working with us to protect specific properties. Working in partnership, and working proactively to implement the Town's long range Open Space Plan, will increase opportunities for adding desirable properties to the list of protected open spaces.

Encourage Philanthropy

Many property owners have a spiritual attachment to their land and given a choice would prefer to see their property preserved in a way that enhances the community, if they can do so in a financially responsible manner. The active solicitation of land donations is an increasingly popular and successful open space implementation device and efforts in this direction should be promoted in Bethel. The Town, through the Conservation Commission once that has been created, and with the Board of Selectmen and our Commission, should work with landowners, land trusts, and conservation organizations to encourage the use of philanthropic donations and convert perceived open space to dedicated open space.

Update Regulations

The Town's subdivision regulations require ten percent (10%) of lands subject to subdivision be reserved for parks or open space; or provide lands elsewhere in Town, equal in value. Open space acquired through the subdivision process must be usable for passive recreation and not be solely unfit for construction. Additionally, such open space must be deeded to an entity acceptable to the Commission. The Town has had a philosophical approach to ownership of open space that places the Town at the bottom of the hierarchy (see sidebar). The Commission recommends that this hierarchy be reviewed and possibly revised, placing the Town at the top of the hierarchy.

Some communities require as much as 20 percent of subdivided lands be dedicated as open space. Bethel should consider revising the subdivision regulations to require that at least 15 percent of any subdivided parcel be dedicated as open space during the subdivision process, or an equivalent fee-in-lieu be provided.

Encourage Conservation Residential Developments

In addition to conventional and mandatory open space set-asides, there is another "no-cost" option for preserving more open space during the development process. Conservation Residential Developments (CRD) allow reduced frontages and lot sizes in return for preserving more open space. By permitting development flexibility in return for preserving more open space, developers unencumbered by conventional zoning requirements are able to set aside additional and often more significant open space.

To encourage the use of CRDs, the Commission should consider CRDs as-of-right and require a Special Permit for conventional subdivisions in the R-40 and R-80 Zoning Districts. By adopting density standards for CRD and applying them to the buildable land within a CRD, a development yield approximating a conventional subdivision can be easily determined without the added expense of additional soil testing and preliminary subdivision designs. The increased development flexibility, reduced infrastructure costs, and streamlined approval process would make CRDs the preferred development option. More detailed information on these regulatory approaches is discussed in the Residential Development chapter.

Hierarchy of Preferred Open Space Ownership

The following is a summary of the Town's Subdivision Regulations (§95.10.A) relative to preferred ownership and management of Open Space Lands:

- Bethel Land Trust
- Home Owners Associations with conservation easements
- Other Land Trusts
- Town of Bethel

Fee-In-Lieu

A fee-in-lieu is an acceptable approach, particularly if the lands in question do not contribute in a meaningful way to the Town's existing open space network, as determined by the Commission. This approach will become even more meaningful with an adopted Open Space Plan that clearly identifies criteria for desirable lands.

Promote the Benefits of PA 490

Public Act 490 (PA 490) is a State authorized, locally managed assessment program that can be effective in reducing the cost of owning large tracts of land used for forest, farm land, or open space preservation. This program allows for reduction of property taxes on applicable properties. The Board of Selectmen and the Assessor's Office should promote this program particularly with owners of large tracts of undeveloped lands. Although it does not provide for permanent protection, it does allow owners of large properties to hold onto properties that add to the perception of open space.

Actions for Acquiring Open Space

1. Develop funding strategies for open space land acquisition.
2. Apply for state aid, using this Plan as a tool.
3. Create a land acquisition fund with small percentage of the mill rate (1/4 of one percent) and through bonding.
4. Collaborate with appropriate partners.
5. Encourage philanthropy of Bethel residents and property owners to increase land donations to the open space plan.
6. Increase the open space requirement of subdivided lands.
7. Encourage conservation residential development.
8. Promote the benefits of PA 490.



Terre Haute Hillside



Terre Haute Path

HISTORIC RESOURCES



Overview

Bethel's historic resources are a significant component of the Town's character. Successfully protecting these resources will contribute to Bethel's unique sense of place for years to come.

Identifying Historic Resources

Various dictionaries define "historic" as anything having importance in or influence on history. The National Trust for Historic Preservation takes a broader approach asking not whether a building is historic but whether it is worth saving because of its architectural character. Many buildings in Bethel fit this broader definition because their destruction and/or replacement with contemporary structures would ultimately alter the character of the Town.

In Bethel, there are several recognized historic resources, identified in the sidebar and the Historic Resources Plan, which include the Library, the Ely House and the Greenwood Historic District all listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). There are two additional structures listed on the State Register of Historic Places.

Other historic resources, with no official historic status, include Victorian homes along Grand Street and many historic homes throughout the Town. While some of Bethel's historic resources are officially recognized, there is currently no mechanism in place that ensures that the many historic resources in Bethel will be preserved. If not adequately protected, these resources could be lost forever. This chapter suggests a number of strategies to provide protection for Bethel's many historic resources.

Complete a Historic Resources Inventory

A comprehensive town-wide inventory was begun several years ago and should be completed to identify all architecturally and historically significant structures. The State provides financial assistance for the preparation of a historic resource inventory. The Board of Selectmen should apply for State assistance to complete the inventory.

Actions to Identify Historic Resources

1. Complete and maintain the historic resources inventory.
2. Apply for State assistance to complete the inventory.
3. Consider creating a local registry of historic places.
4. Publicize events and programs for historic preservation in collaboration with the Bethel Library, the Historical Society, and the Board of Selectmen.

Bethel's Recognized Historic Resources

- Seth Seelye House aka Bethel Library
- Rev. John Ely House on Milwaukee Avenue
- 1st Congregational Church at 46 Main Street
- 1842 2nd Meeting House at 40 Main Street
- Greenwood Avenue Historic District running along Greenwood Avenue and South Street from Nashville Road and the P.T. Barnum Square on the east to the railroad tracks on the East.



Old Opera House

Certified Local Government Status

Once the Town creates a local Historic District it will become eligible for certification as a Certified Local Government, and is able to establish a Historic District Commission, which is able to apply for grants for educational and rehabilitation purposes.

Provide Financial Incentives

The Board of Selectmen can provide economic incentives such as tax abatements for the restoration or improvement of historic resources, provided such improvements do not compromise the architectural or historic integrity of the property.



Historic Victorian

Support Local Historic Preservation Efforts

Bethel has a local Historical Society which provides information and education, but has no authority and limited access to financial resources. The Commission recommends that the Historical Society consider developing a local Registry of Historic Places, which is a voluntary program that involves the placement of a small placard on historic structures or locations to indicate the original owner and date of activity. While adding no legal protection for a property, this program provides visibility for historic resources and can instill pride in ownership and encourage additional preservation efforts.

The Commission also recommends that the Historical Society continue to provide educational programs, technical assistance, and information about the types of financial assistance available to historic property owners. The Historical Society, in collaboration with the Board of Selectmen and the Library, should publicize events and programs so that a wider audience is exposed to the efforts of this local, volunteer-run organization.

Establish Local Historic Districts

Local Historic Districts (LHD) should not be confused with National Register Districts (NRD). Although both are listed on the State Register of Historic Places, they are structured very differently. A LHD is established and administered by a local Historic District Commission to protect the distinctive and significant characteristics of a listed area. New development and renovations to existing structures need to be compatible with the area's historic distinctiveness.

Establishing a local historic district requires adoption of a local ordinance (approved by the local legislative body) and approval by two-thirds of the properties to be included in the district. A local historic district, under the auspices of a local Historic District Commission, provides the highest level of regulatory protection for historic resources. Generally, any activity that affects the exterior of a property must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the local Historic District Commission.

This approach has been successfully adopted in neighboring communities such as Brookfield, New Fairfield, New Milford, and Southbury. While the scope of historic district regulations varies from district to district, the intent is typically to ensure that repairs and improvements do not harm the architectural character of properties or the district. Preservation-minded property owners within local historic districts often appreciate the assurance that their investment in maintaining and rehabilitating their property is protected by the continued historic and architectural integrity of neighboring properties. The Commission recommends that efforts by the local Historical Society to establish a LHD be supported by the Board of Selectmen.

Encourage Stewardship of Private Structures

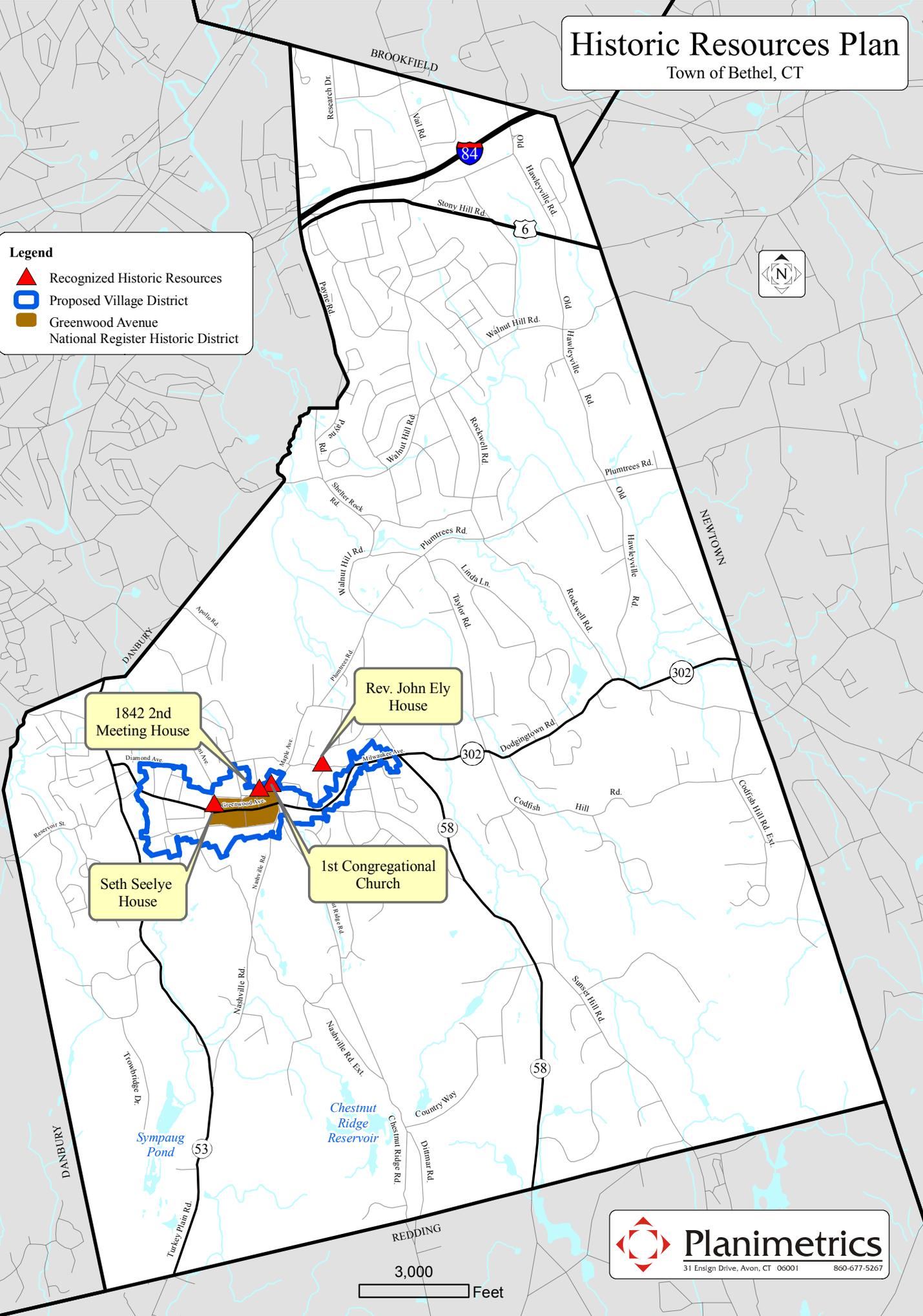
Property owners who are emotionally and financially committed to maintaining a historic resource are the most effective source for protecting and preserving historic properties. Sensitive stewardship programs should be encouraged since without the willing participation of the property owner, no regulatory or incentive program can prevent the loss of these resources from demolition or neglect. The Historical Society, with support from the Board of Selectmen, can spearhead these efforts. Annual awards for most improved property can help stimulate rehabilitation efforts.

Historic Resources Plan

Town of Bethel, CT

Legend

-  Recognized Historic Resources
-  Proposed Village District
-  Greenwood Avenue National Register Historic District



1842 2nd Meeting House

Rev. John Ely House

Seth Seelye House

1st Congregational Church



Historic House



Renovated Historic Home



Historic School

Consider Regulatory Approaches

To encourage historic preservation, regulatory incentives can be adopted by our Commission to give owners of significant historic properties flexibility in re-tenanting their properties in return for making repairs that ensure the continued architectural and historic integrity of the property.

One regulatory tool that Bethel currently makes use of is the demolition delay ordinance. This ordinance requires as much as a 90-day waiting period before historic buildings can be demolished. While not preventing demolition, the waiting period allows the opportunity to seek alternatives such as purchasing the property, relocating the structure(s), or at a minimum, salvaging architectural components. This tool has been successful in protecting some historic resources and the Commission recommends that we continue to make use of this ordinance. Working collaboratively with other governmental and non-profit organizations to publicize each Demolition Delay Permit may allow for additional assistance in the preservation of threatened historic properties.

The Commission should consider another regulatory tool that can be included in the Zoning Regulations, which is an adaptive re-use provision that provides for redevelopment of historic properties, such as mills, or barns, in ways that allow for modern land uses in historic structures.

The Commission is also considering establishing a Village District which can provide protection for historic resources through regulatory criteria allowed under CGS 82-j. A more detailed consideration of the approach is discussed in the Development section of this Plan.

Actions to Protect Historic Resources

1. Consider establishing Local Historic Districts.
2. Encourage sensitive stewardship programs and reward outstanding efforts.
3. Continue to use the Demolition Delay provisions with increased public notice.
4. Revise the Zoning Regulations to include adaptive reuse strategies.
5. Consider Village District regulations for historic protection.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER



Overview

Community character is typically a reflection of the physical resources and appearances of a community. Preserving and enhancing community character was identified by Bethel residents as an important issue to address during the planning process. While there is no accepted definition of what constitutes community character in Bethel, it is believed to include the following physical characteristics.

Category	Resource	Description
Enhancing	Natural / Scenic Resources	Forests, hillsides, wetland areas, meadows, ridgelines and scenic features (vistas, stone walls, barns, fences)
	Open Space	Dedicated, protected, and managed open spaces and undeveloped land
	Historic Resources	Historic resources that contribute to a sense of history
	Community Structure	Village Center, Stony Hill Corridor, densely developed areas adjacent to commercial centers and forests and meadows in the outlying parts of Town.

Enhancing or Detracting Depending on a Number of Factors

Residential Development	Older homes and neighborhoods establish character, new developments can detract
Business Development	Walkable village area enhances character, “strip development” can be seen as detracting
Community Facilities	Community facilities / services can enhance or detract from community character
Transportation	Streets, sidewalks, and other transportation facilities can affect community character
Community Design	Architectural styles can complement Bethel’s identity as an historic New England town

Strategies throughout this Plan have been made with consideration of how they may affect community character and enhance the overall quality-of-life in Bethel.

Encourage Community Spirit

Community spirit is directly related to how people feel about their community and how it presents itself to the outside world. Community spirit tends to be a reflection of the emotional or social connections that people feel about their community. When nurtured, this spirit permeates the community and creates a culture of positive results.

Bethel should focus on enhancing community-wide quality of life by encouraging values that support the preservation and enhancement of community character, and which strike a balance between competing values, such as lower taxes and better town services. Over the years, the tireless devotion of residents have preserved community character, built community spirit, and allowed the Town of Bethel to do more with less financial resources. The following table identifies some of the resources that contribute to community spirit in Bethel.

Enhancing

Unique Events	Events such as the St. Mary's Carnival and the Downtown Spring Festival where residents join in a common activity
Volunteerism	Volunteers on boards and commissions and volunteer organizations help Bethel do more for its residents, making it a special place
Philanthropy	Voluntary donations of time and money help make Bethel a special place
Shared Visions / Goals	Establishing and attaining shared visions and goals
Open Communication	Discussion of community issues and priorities is an important part of community spirit
Positive Recognition	Positive recognition of local activities and events helps build community spirit and pride

Detracting

Negative Communication	A lack of communication or negative communication can undermine community spirit
Negative Recognition	Negative recognition of a community can undermine community spirit and pride

Activities that contribute to community spirit should be encouraged since these activities will contribute to the overall quality of life in Bethel. Volunteer efforts are enhanced by positive publicity and recognition by elected and appointed officials. Recognizing and celebrating the efforts of volunteer contributions through events such as an annual picnic, a "hometown hero's plaque," and /or a "volunteer of the year" goes a long way towards encouraging additional efforts.

Actions to Encourage Community Spirit

1. Promote unique Bethel events.
2. Regularly recognize volunteer efforts.

Protect Scenic Resources

Bethel's numerous scenic qualities are important elements of the community's character. Fields, stone walls, and pastoral views, remnants of the Town's agricultural heritage, contribute to quality of life and rate high among resources valued by Bethel residents. Like the Town's other important resources, if not adequately protected, they could disappear forever.

Preserve Scenic Vistas

Preservation of the Town's many scenic vistas is an important recommendation of this Plan. Vistas should be considered in development decisions as they provide visual relief. The existing land use regulations provide for some consideration of scenic features, but many of the Town's scenic features have not been formally identified, making it difficult to incorporate scenic vistas into the design phase and as a result, they were often overlooked.

The Character Resources Plan element of this Plan identifies a number of important scenic vistas. Property owners and developers should be encouraged to preserve these vistas. When they have knowledge about the location of vistas important to the community, applicants will often willingly include them in the design phase, since they can contribute positively to the design of the project. When development threatens an identified scenic vista, the Commission and the applicant should work together to develop appropriate mitigation measures. The Commission, perhaps with the assistance of the Conservation Commission, should update the scenic resources component of the Character Resources Plan accordingly.

Adopt a Scenic Roads Ordinance

Bethel has scenic roads throughout the Town, many lined with stone walls, some shaded by majestic trees others offering stunning vistas or along pastoral meadows and fields. The scenic qualities of these roads should be protected to the maximum amount practicable. Preservation of scenic roads can be supported by Connecticut State Statutes (CGS 7-149a), which allows for some scenic roads meeting specific criteria (see sidebar) to be identified as official Scenic Roads. The adoption of scenic road ordinances have been popular in the area, with Danbury, Brookfield, Newton, and Redding having scenic road ordinances in place.

By adopting a scenic road ordinance and designating a certain road as a scenic road, a municipality may regulate improvements or changes to the roadway, which would otherwise alter its character. Widening, paving, straightening, changes in grade, and removal of mature trees or stone walls, whether by the municipality or a property owner, can all affect the character of a road. A scenic road ordinance does not interfere with normal maintenance activities, nor prevent essential safety improvements or the construction of new roads or private driveways that intersect with the designated scenic roads. The Commission recommends that the Board of Selectmen adopt a scenic road ordinance.

Actions for Protecting Scenic Resources

1. Adopt and maintain the scenic resources component of the Community Character Plan.
2. Work with applicants to protect scenic resources.
3. Consider adopting a Scenic Road ordinance.

Possible Scenic Roads

- Codfish Hill Road
- Chestnut Ridge Road
- Plumtrees Road
- State Road 58
- State Road 53
- Sunset Hill Road

Scenic Road Criteria

Designation as a scenic road includes a requirement that at least 50 percent of the landowners with road frontage support the Scenic Road designation. In addition, the road must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Unpaved
- Bordered by nature
- Traveled portion no more than 20 feet wide
- Offers scenic views
- Blends naturally into the terrain
- Parallels or crosses brooks, streams, lakes, or ponds

Benefits of the State Farmland Preservation Program

- Allows farms to remain in private ownership and to be farmed in perpetuity.
- Prevents farmland from ever being developed.
- Provides farmers with an influx of cash, eliminating the need to sell all or part of a farm for development.
- Reduces the taxable values of the land, making farming more viable.



Blue Jay Orchards

PA 490

PA 490 allows local tax assessors to assess lands that are in agricultural production, forested, or other locally determined undeveloped states, at a lower rate than developed land. This provides private landowners with incentives to keep land undeveloped.

Preserve Bethel's Agricultural Character

Farming operations played a major role in Bethel's history, with most land outside of the Village Center in self-sufficient farms until the 20th century. Today, only a handful of working farms remain in Bethel, mostly dependent on tourist and retail supported operations. However, the agricultural character of the Town is still evident and steps should be taken to preserve this piece of Bethel's past, which contributes positively to Bethel's community character. There are several programs available for farmland preservation, and the Commission encourages farmers and landowners to make use of these programs whenever and wherever possible.

Provide Flexibility for Farmers

To remain viable, some farmers have diversified their farms to include educational and recreational components including corn mazes, hayrides, and maple sugaring operations, as well as retail components such as farm stands, dairy stores, nurseries, bakeries, wineries, and restaurants showcasing farm products. When the Commission revises the Zoning Regulations, it should provide additional flexibility for agricultural uses by permitting many more farm related activities as by-right accessory uses including craft products and farm products from other farms, and only use the Special Permit process when absolutely necessary.

Promote the Benefits of Public Act PA-490

Public Act 490 (PA 490), discussed in the Open Space section, is a State authorized, locally managed assessment program that can be effective in reducing the cost of owning farmland, by allowing the Town Assessor to reduce property taxes on land used for farming. Many owners of large properties make use of this tool. The Commission encourages the Board of Selectmen and the Assessor's office to work together to ensure that property owners with properties that conform to the locally developed PA 490 criteria are aware of the benefits of this program.

Promote the Farmland Preservation Program

The State Farmland Preservation Program is a voluntary program wherein the State Department of Agriculture purchases the development rights to the land and the land is kept in agricultural use. One of Bethel's largest farming operations, the Blue Jay Orchards, is in this program.

Collaborate with Agricultural Trusts

Agricultural land trusts are dedicated to holding and leasing farmlands, and offer another alternative to preserving agricultural lands. The American Farmland Trust operates nationwide to preserve farms and address farmland issues while the Working Land Alliance has recently established the Connecticut Farmland Trust for the donation of agricultural land and preservation funds. Such organizations make ideal stewards to own and maintain the productive use of preserved farmland.

Support the Local Farmer's Market

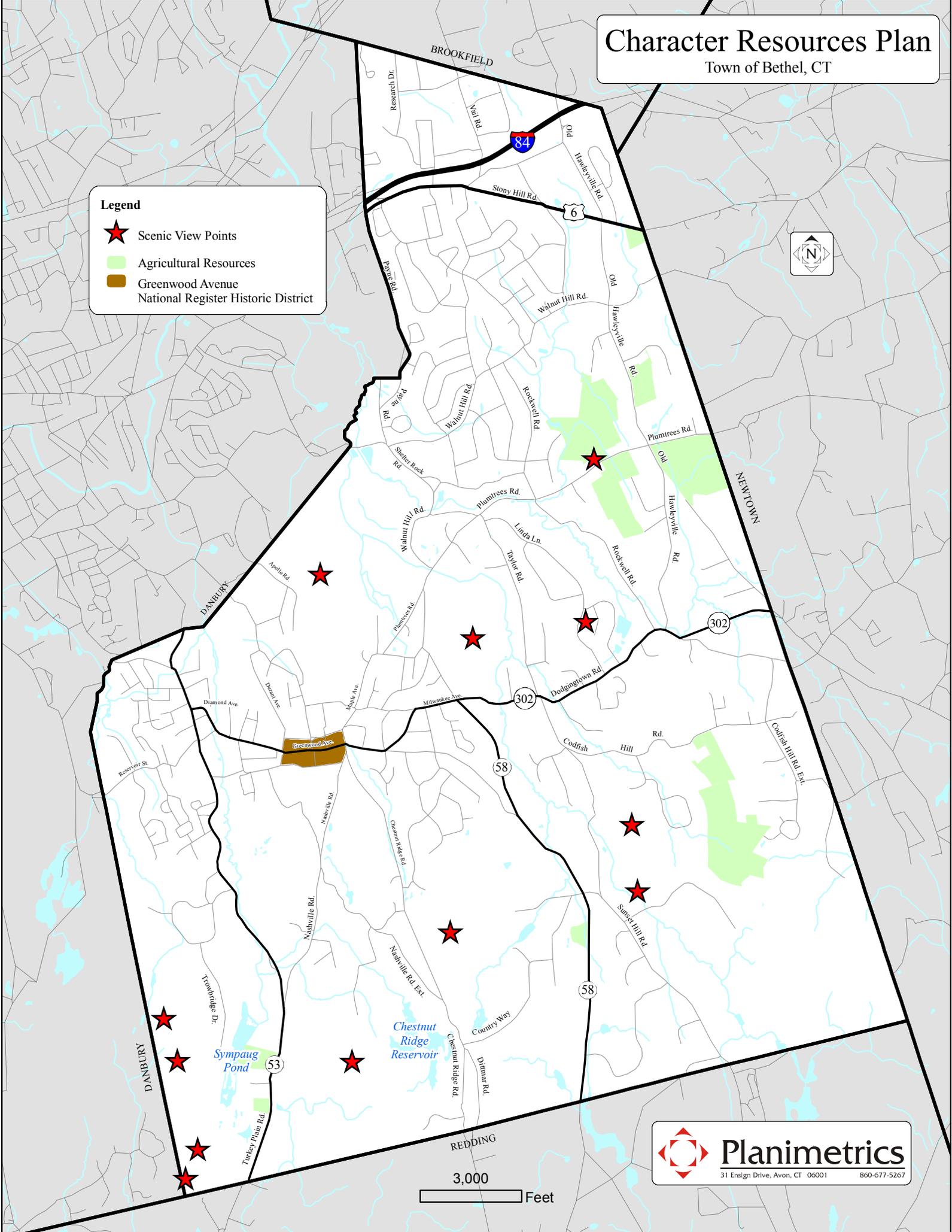
Farmer's markets support farms and preserve agricultural heritage. A farmer's market can be found, seasonally, at the State Agricultural Extension Service property on Route 6. The Board of Selectmen and the EDC should promote this local venue.

Character Resources Plan

Town of Bethel, CT

Legend

- ★ Scenic View Points
- Agricultural Resources
- Greenwood Avenue National Register Historic District



Actions to Support Bethel's Agricultural Character

1. Provide flexibility in the Zoning Regulations for agricultural uses including crafts, products from other farms and more as-right accessory uses.
2. Promote the benefits of PA 490.
3. Encourage use of the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program.
4. Collaborate with appropriate partners to protect farmland.
5. Support the local farmer's market.



Blue Jay Orchard Windmill



Blue Jay Orchard Barn



Nursery



Farmer's market

Protect Stone Walls, Foundations, and Bridges

Scattered throughout Bethel are foundations of structures long since vanished. At first glance, many of these old stone walls and foundations look like nothing more than a pile of stones. However the location, dimensions, structure, and material of these foundations are an archeological key to Bethel's past.

Some communities have enacted ordinances to protect stone walls from unnecessary demolition. Without depriving citizens' use of their property, or detracting from the property's value, these ordinances provide a process to identify, protect, and preserve stone walls of historic, aesthetic and/or cultural merit. The purpose of a stone wall ordinance should be to preserve highway boundary stone walls; prevent the scavenging and destruction of historic stone walls during subdivision of agrarian land; preserve the scenic qualities of roads lined by stone walls; and regulate excavations adjacent to stone walls. Bethel should adopt a stone wall preservation ordinance that addresses these purposes.

Complete Bridge Improvements

Within Town-owned rights-of-way are several stone bridges in need of repair, some of them well over 100 years old. These old stone bridges are an important element of the Town's character and should be preserved for future generations. The Town Engineer's office maintains a database of the bridges with information on capacity, structural deficiencies and needed improvements.

State and Federal funds are sometimes available for bridge repair and replacement. The Town, through the Town Engineer's office, should continue to work with its partners at the Regional, State and Federal levels to access transportation enhancement funds and historic preservation grants that can be used for bridge enhancements. As matching funds are typically required for these particular grants, the Board of Selectmen should consider identifying a yearly line item for bridge maintenance of approximately \$50,000. Bridge maintenance should be more highly prioritized in order to preserve these unique bridges and reduce the possibility of replacement with modern structures.

Actions for Protecting Stone Walls, Foundations and Bridges

1. Consider a historic stone walls and foundations ordinance.
2. Maintain the historic stone bridges.
3. Create a line item for maintenance of historic bridges.



Historic Stone Bridge

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