

DEVELOPMENT THEMES



Overview of Development Themes

The next several chapters address development policies and patterns affecting the Town of Bethel as the Plan of Conservation and Development was being prepared.

Unless additional development in Bethel is guided appropriately, areas of forest, meadow, and wildlife habitat could disappear, and historic resources could be damaged or destroyed, altering the character of the Town. The strategies in this section are guided by the vision that Bethel has appropriate development providing a range of goods, services, and employment opportunities, that areas with existing infrastructure are the densest parts of Town

"Growth is inevitable and desirable, but destruction of community character is not. The question is not whether your part of the world is going to change. The question is how."

Edward T. McMahon, The Conservation Fund



Residential Development



Commercial Development



Village Development



Moderate Density Housing



COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

Overview

Community structure refers to the physical organization of the developed areas of a Town and provides a guide for future land use policies and regulations.

In studies of community structure and character, people feel most comfortable and identify most strongly with specific focal points in a community. These focal points provide the community with its unique “sense of place.” If one examines Bethel’s structure from an aerial perspective, the following elements, which can be traced back to Bethel’s historical development, become apparent:

- strong mixed-use Village Center;
- secondary commercial districts along Route 6 and Grassy Plain;
- densely developed residential areas adjacent to the commercial districts; and
- decreasing residential densities in other outlying areas.



Village Center



Route 6



Downtown Mixed-Use



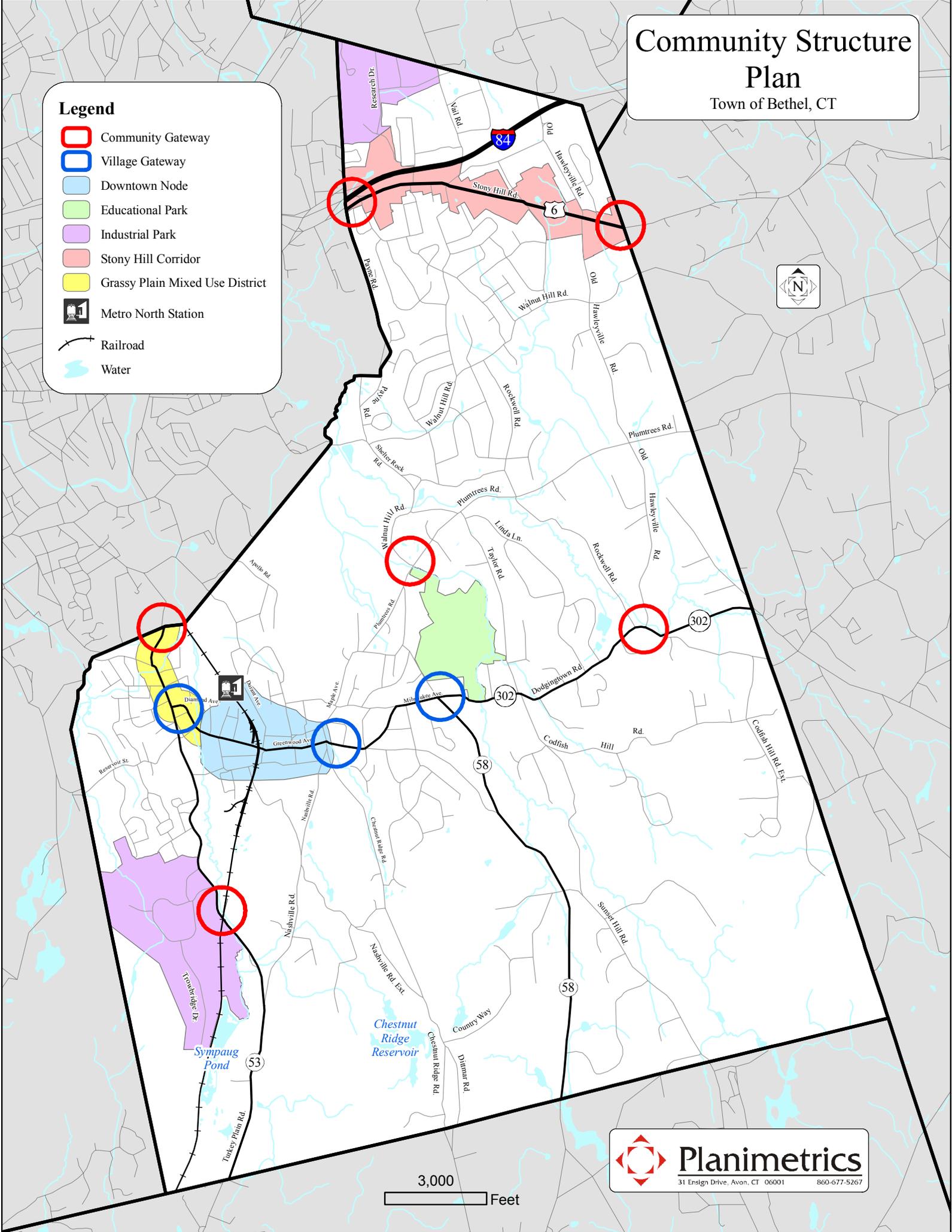
Stony Hill

Community Structure Plan

Town of Bethel, CT

Legend

-  Community Gateway
-  Village Gateway
-  Downtown Node
-  Educational Park
-  Industrial Park
-  Stony Hill Corridor
-  Grassy Plain Mixed Use District
-  Metro North Station
-  Railroad
-  Water



3,000 Feet



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

What are Nodes?

Nodes are areas of more intense activity that serve as a focal point for the surrounding areas. Nodes can be defined as including office, retail, residential, recreational, and institutional uses at a scale appropriate for the location.

What is Mixed-use Development?

Mixed-use development refers to development of a single parcel that includes a mix of uses such as residential and retail, or retail and office uses.

Support Enhancing Elements

The Town’s land use policies and regulations should guide future development so that it is compatible with Bethel’s unique character and structure. Elements that enhance community structure should be encouraged and elements that detract community structure should be discouraged and/or avoided. The following table identifies those elements that can enhance a community’s character and which should be supported. Also identified are those elements that detract from the desired character and which should be minimized.

Element	Description
Enhancing Community Elements	
Nodes	Identifiable focal points or places with distinctive characteristics and more intense development, such as the Village Center.
Cluster / Campus	Neighborhoods, educational or business development identifiable by use, location, character, or style, such as the Educational Park.
Greenbelts	Greenways, trails, stream belts, and other contextual linear elements such as the Ives Trail.
Gateways	Places providing a clear sense of entry or arrival with landscaping or signage, such as the Sycamore Tree at the intersection of Routes 53 and 302.
Detracting Community Elements	
Strip Development	Linear areas, usually commercial, with automobile-orientation.
Sprawl	Large areas with little variation in style or character.
Either Enhancing or Detracting	
Roads/Railways	Roads and railways can be positive or negative elements.

Actions for Enhancing Community Structure

1. Maintain and enhance the strong, mixed-use node in the Village Center.
2. Support cluster and campus development that includes design considerations.
3. Promote greenways, blueways, and other linear elements.
4. Create design plans for gateways.
5. Maintain the gateways.
6. Avoid sprawling development patterns in areas without public infrastructure.
7. Manage conflicts between roads, railways, and adjacent land uses.

Enhance the Village Center

The Town's historic Village Center is a vibrant node that contributes positively to the community's character. Preserving and enhancing the character and structure of the downtown is an important recommendation of this Plan. A vibrant Village Center may also be an important economic development tool and additional strategies to encourage increased economic vitality in the Village Center, are discussed in the discussion about encouraging quality design.

Continue Streetscape Improvements

In order to support the pedestrian friendly environment that exists in the Village Center today, Zoning Regulations, grants for streetscape improvements, and other tools that promote an active streetscape should continue to be utilized. The streetscape improvements that were added to parts of Greenwood Avenue a few years ago should be extended throughout the Village Center. Maintaining an attractive and safe environment for pedestrians will encourage shoppers to window shop which can lead to visits and purchases at additional stores, contributing to a vibrant Village Center that supports the local retailers. The EDC should consider working with local banks to identify low-interest loans, which could be used in conjunction with grants, for façade improvements and extension of the streetscape improvements.

Develop Integrated Parking Strategies

Residents expressed concern about parking availability in the Village Center and believe that additional parking is necessary in order for the area to be financially successful. The Commission should undertake a parking study for the Downtown that explores the following elements:

- occupancy rates for existing parking spaces in order to determine the nature and extent of any potential parking shortage;
- identification of shared parking strategies that allow for lower parking ratios when serving residential, retail, and office uses;
- signage directing traffic to available parking;
- municipal agreements with downtown property owners to make use of available parking spaces located on private property;
- integrating innovative stormwater management techniques including roof top gardens;
- potential development of municipal parking facilities including garages;
- consideration of the former train station as a parking facility if such a program includes preservation of the historic train station; and
- potential public/private redevelopment of the School Street properties incorporating parking, retail, and open space.

Downtown Green Spaces

As discussed in Chapter 4, Bethel does not have an abundance of protected green or open spaces. This is particularly apparent in the Village Center. Efforts to acquire properties should involve the Chamber of Commerce, a possible Conservation Commission, and a potential Economic Development coordinator.



PT Barnum Square



Green Open Space at the Municipal Center



Historic Train Station

Identify More Green and Public Spaces in the Village Center

The Village Center does not have any significant public spaces, particularly green and open spaces, except for the lands associated with the Municipal Center and the small triangle of land known as P.T. Barnum Square. Green and open public spaces are necessary for public gathering and community events and allow for passive recreational opportunities. Additional green and open spaces should be acquired and preserved as public spaces.

The Commission recommends that any additional development or redevelopment in the Downtown consider provisions for additional green and open spaces particularly those suitable for public gatherings and passive reflection. The Board of Selectmen and/or the Conservation Commission should make the acquisition of additional open and green space in the Village Center a priority.

Preserve the Historic Train Station

The Town's historic train station, located within the Village Center, provides retail space, currently for a local non-profit organization. The surrounding land provides parking for Main Street businesses and the Library.

The Commission recommends that the site be more thoroughly studied to determine if there are any redevelopment possibilities on the site. Any plan to redevelop the site needs to consider the following:

- preservation of the historic train station building;
- ability to co-locate any public green and /or open spaces;
- the nature and amount of parking on the site;
- access and circulation opportunities and constraints, particularly in relation to Greenwood Avenue and Depot Avenue; and
- public private partnership.

Actions for Enhancing the Village Center

1. Continue streetscape improvements throughout the Village Center.
2. Maintain sidewalks and street furniture.
3. Develop integrated parking strategies for the Village Center.
4. Identify more open and green spaces for the Village Center.
5. Consider structured parking with open spaces, gardens, and innovative stormwater management techniques at the former train station.
6. Preserve the historic train station.
7. Support public-private partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Commission.

Encourage Quality Design

The development and management of land can affect the quality of our lives. In addition to dimensional standards and type of use, there are also aesthetic aspects of development that can play a role in the character of a community.

Establish Design Districts and a Design Review Process

The Commission is considering establishing design districts in several parts of Town, including:

- the Village Center; (discussed in the next section)
- gateway areas (identified in the sidebar);
- transit-oriented districts; (discussed in the next chapter).

Bethel can make use of a process to have all applications in design designated districts reviewed by a design professional as allowed under CGS 8-1c. The design review process is usually an iterative process and works best if applications are reviewed early in the design stages. Some communities use an informal pre-submission conference, but other communities feel that the entire process is best addressed in regular Commission meetings. As the Commission revises its land use regulations, it will explore the various options to determine which will be the best approach for Bethel.

Create Design Criteria

For the Village Center, the State's Village District enabling legislation CGS 8-2j provides specific criteria against which all development must be reviewed. The following section provides a more detailed discussion of the process and objectives of Village District regulations. For all other design designated districts, specific design criteria providing quantitative and qualitative design guidelines and regulations will need to be developed in conformance with CGS 8-2m. The primary considerations in drafting design guidelines are to ensure that they are consistent with due process and sufficiently clear that a person of ordinary intelligence can understand what they mean.

In order to implement a design review process, the Commission will need to establish either specific design districts or overlay districts. The Commission should establish a Village District for the Village Center, the boundaries of which are identified on the Village District Plan map. Other areas of town, including the Route 6 Corridor and a newly created transit-oriented development, will need clear boundaries for the design district, or have a design overlay for all non-residential development, and design criteria against which proposals can be measured for compliance.

In some communities where design is an important consideration, form-based or performance-based codes are adopted. Form-based codes contain traditional zoning elements such as minimum and maximum heights, with increased flexibility for a property owner to meet changing real estate markets by having the ability to build apartments, offices, or retail based on market demand, as long as the appearance of the development conforms to the community's vision. Wilton uses an ad-hoc board to review design considerations in design districts. Another possibility, used in Simsbury, is to consider a Design Review Board which has the ability to review all non-residential development in any district. The Commission will explore the various options and determine the best approach for Bethel as it revises its Zoning Regulations.

Potential Gateway Locations

- Grassy Plain Street and Greenwood Ave.
- Greenwood Ave. and Chestnut
- South Street and Route 53
- Old Hawleyville Road and Route 6
- Payne Road and Route 6

Village District Regulations Criteria

- Proposed buildings and modifications to existing buildings be harmonious with their surroundings and their terrain, and to the use, scale, and architecture of nearby buildings to which they are functionally or visually related.
- Spaces and structures visible from the road be designed to enhance the visual amenities in the area around the proposed building or modification.
- The characteristics of residential or commercial properties, such as color and materials, be evaluated for their compatibility with the local architectural motif, and the maintenance of views; historic buildings, monuments, and landscaping.
- Removal of or disruption to historic, traditional, or significant structures or architectural elements shall be minimized.
- An architect or architectural firm, contracted by the Commission and designated as its consultant for the application, must conduct reviews and submit recommendations to the Commission within 35 days of receipt and the Commission must consider it in decision-making.

Adopt Village District Regulations

Bethel's historic downtown Village Center is a mixed-use New England Village with shops, restaurants, residences, and municipal services. The architecture is typical of an early American New England village, with peaked roofs reminiscent of the village churches that were the Town's first buildings, and narrow streets with tightly developed lots. As mentioned earlier, there is good sidewalk infrastructure throughout the Village Center.

The design qualities of the Village Center are important components of the Town's character, with distinct sub-areas including:

- the Downtown Core, a vibrant commercial district with a mix of uses including retail, restaurants, residential, and municipal uses, with a 19th century New England architectural character, and a pedestrian oriented streetscape;
- the surrounding historic residential areas which includes: the Greenwood Avenue residential area along both sides of Greenwood Avenue east from the Downtown Core, with moderately dense single-family residential homes in a mix of 18th through 20th century styles; South Street, Blackman Avenue, High Street, Farnam Hill, and Grand Street, with many 18th and 19th century homes providing additional residential options for multi-family living with a historically authentic character; and an area north of the downtown core with a mix of single family and multi-family homes, converted from single-family residences, many of which are architecturally and historically significant from the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Commission has discussed the possibility of including additional areas, including properties along Grassy Plain Avenue, many of which are historic and contribute to the Town's attractive character. At this time, the conceptual map for the Village District does not include those properties, but in the future, the Commission may expand the boundaries to include additional properties.

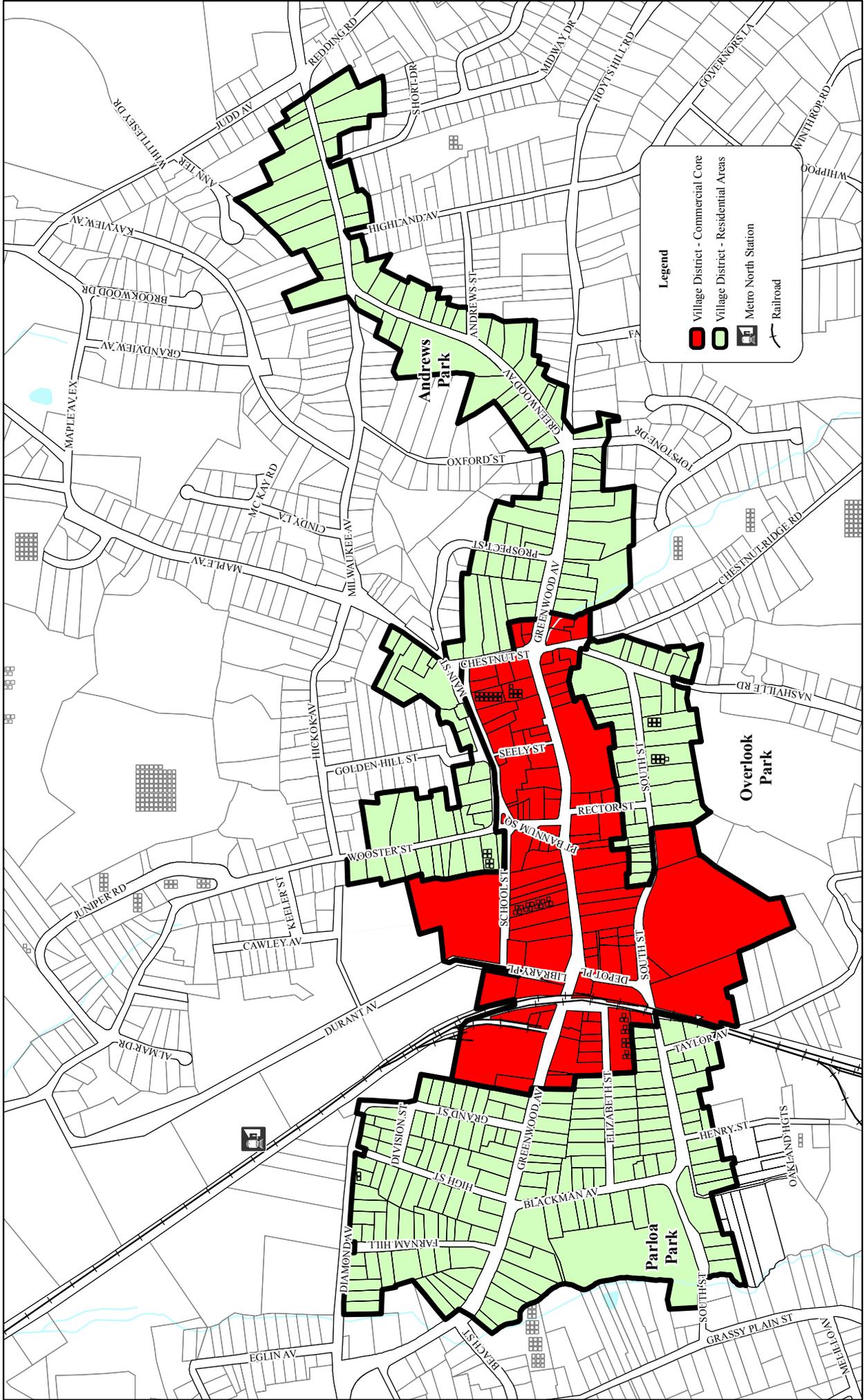
Connecticut General Statute's 8-2j allows for the establishment of village districts through an amendment to the Zoning Regulations that includes architectural and site design components to ensure that new development reflects the most desirable attributes of the village. Village District regulations must include specific criteria, identified in the sidebar.

Within the Village Center, under Village District regulations, the law requires that applications for all new construction and substantial reconstruction that are visible from the road must undergo architectural review. All development in the district must be designed to meet various compatibility objectives including arrangement and orientation of proposed building; and all accessory structures must support a uniform architectural theme and present a harmonious relationship to the neighborhood.

As the Commission revises the Zoning Regulations, it should develop Village District regulations in conformance with CGS 8-2j. The conceptual boundaries for the Village District are identified on the adjacent page, on the Village District Plan. The Commission will determine the exact boundaries which may include areas as far west as Grassy Plain. The Commission may decide to adopt regulations applicable to the Village Core at its earliest possible convenience and to later include those areas of the Village District which are more residential in character.

Village District Plan

Town of Bethel, CT



Encourage the Use of Sustainable Design Principles

With growing concerns about climate change and on-going improvements in building practices allowing sustainable development to be competitive with approaches that involved negative consequences for communities and their natural environments, designers and developers are adopting sustainable design principles. Some of Bethel's neighbors, including Redding and Brookfield, are already exploring ways to revise their land use regulations to encourage the use of green and sustainable technologies.

Examples of this development practice are found in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System, known as the LEED standards. These standards include a set of nationally accepted design, construction, and maintenance principles for high performance green buildings. Key elements are sustainability, optimizing energy performance, and environmental awareness. Sustainable building practices also encourage collaboration between builders, businesses, and residences to encourage all new development and redevelopment to incorporate these sustainable practices.

Land use policies that support sustainable design principles take advantage of the relationship of the building to the sun; integrate energy efficient and water efficient technologies; use specific materials that meet sustainability criteria and address indoor environmental quality.

Simple actions, like requiring that all windows can be opened, and allowing for differing setbacks on north-facing as opposed to south-facing streets to take advantage of the heating and lighting benefits of the sun; and allowing for permeable parking areas designed to freeze and thaw as a unit, are examples of sustainable design practices.

Today, in order to be competitive when securing governmental funding, developers are encouraged, sometimes even required, to comply with basic sustainable building practices. In Redding, a recent LEED certified project to redevelop a former wire mill brownfield site, known as the Georgetown Village and/or the Gilbert and Bennet mill site, resulted in \$72.5 million in tax exempt bonds. In a number of municipalities and states, such as New York City, Oregon, and California, in order to obtain permits for a development project that includes a public building or involves public funds, the use of sustainable design practices is required.

It is anticipated that over the next ten years, this trend will continue. Therefore, as the Commission revises its land use regulations it will consider and include sustainable design and building practices to the maximum amount practicable.

Develop a Unified Sign Design Plan

In order to help create a positive image for the Town, a unified sign design plan should be developed that would be applicable to all Town-owned and/or managed signs. The sign design theme should be used on all signs that identify Town-owned facilities and properties. Currently most publicly owned facilities have some signage, such as the creative sign identifying the location of the Public Works Department. The unique and distinctive signage apparent at some locations should continue to be displayed but augmented by a consistent design approach to improve the Town's overall image and to facilitate finding and identifying municipal facilities.

The Commission recommends that the Board of Selectmen and / or EDC develop a unified sign design theme that can also be used for signs identifying parking areas in the downtown, directing travelers to and from the Train Station and along Town roads directing visitors and residents to places of interest.

Develop “Wayfinding” Signs and Maps

One way to preserve and reinforce Bethel's community structure would be to develop a system of “wayfinding” signs and maps to direct residents and visitors to key areas of town. The maps could highlight business centers and commercial activities as well as public buildings and facilities. Wayfinding signs and maps, using the Town's adopted unified design motifs, can be used to direct motorists and pedestrians. Some of the locations that should be identified on the wayfinding maps and signs are identified in the sidebar. The Commission encourages the Board of Selectmen and/or EDC to develop wayfinding signs and maps.

Actions for Design Consideration

1. Establish a design review process.
2. Create appropriate design guidelines and/or criteria for design designated districts.
3. Consider form-based codes in design designated districts.
4. Adopt Village District Regulations.
5. Institutionalize architectural review for the Village District.
6. Encourage the use of sustainable building practices such as siting development appropriately in relation to natural light.
7. Develop a unified sign design for all Town-owned and managed properties.
8. Develop “wayfinding” signs and maps.

“Wayfinding” Locations

- Between the Village Center and the Route 6 Corridor;
- Municipal Center, identifying it as the location of Town Hall and the Senior Center;
- Library;
- Teen Center;
- Railroad Station;
- Educational Park;
- Clusters of business activities such as shopping or dining areas;
- Tourist attractions such as Blue Jay Orchards or Huntington State Park
- Historic Districts, Structures and Places



Public Works Entrance



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Overview

Attracting and retaining appropriate businesses are important for a variety of reasons, which includes providing goods and services to residents, maintaining jobs, enhancing community character and vibrancy in the community, and providing tax benefits. Bethel has a number of business districts for both commercial and industrial businesses. These business districts include a diversity of businesses which contributes approximately 25 percent of the Town's Grand List. Commercial businesses are located primarily in the Downtown Village Center and along Route 6. Industrial businesses are located within the Town's two industrial parks, and within the historic industrial zone adjacent to the Village Center.

Reorganize the EDC

Bethel would benefit from a coordinated and supported Economic Development Commission (EDC) with comprehensive economic development responsibilities for the entire Town. Currently the EDC has a limited mission to oversee the orderly development of the Francis J. Clarke Industrial Park. There are other parts of Town, such as the Village Center, that would benefit from the oversight of an EDC. The Board of Selectmen should expand the scope of the EDC to oversee economic development activities throughout Bethel.

The newly reorganized commission will need financial support. The EDC might also benefit from staff assistance, including the services of a full-time Economic Development Director to provide expertise relative to the complex issues related to economic development activities in Bethel. The Board of Selectmen should consider hiring a full-time experienced person to support the EDC.

Actions for Reorganizing the EDC

1. Expand the mission of the EDC to provide Town-wide economic development oversight.
2. Provide staffing support to the EDC.
3. Consider hiring a full-time Economic Development Director.

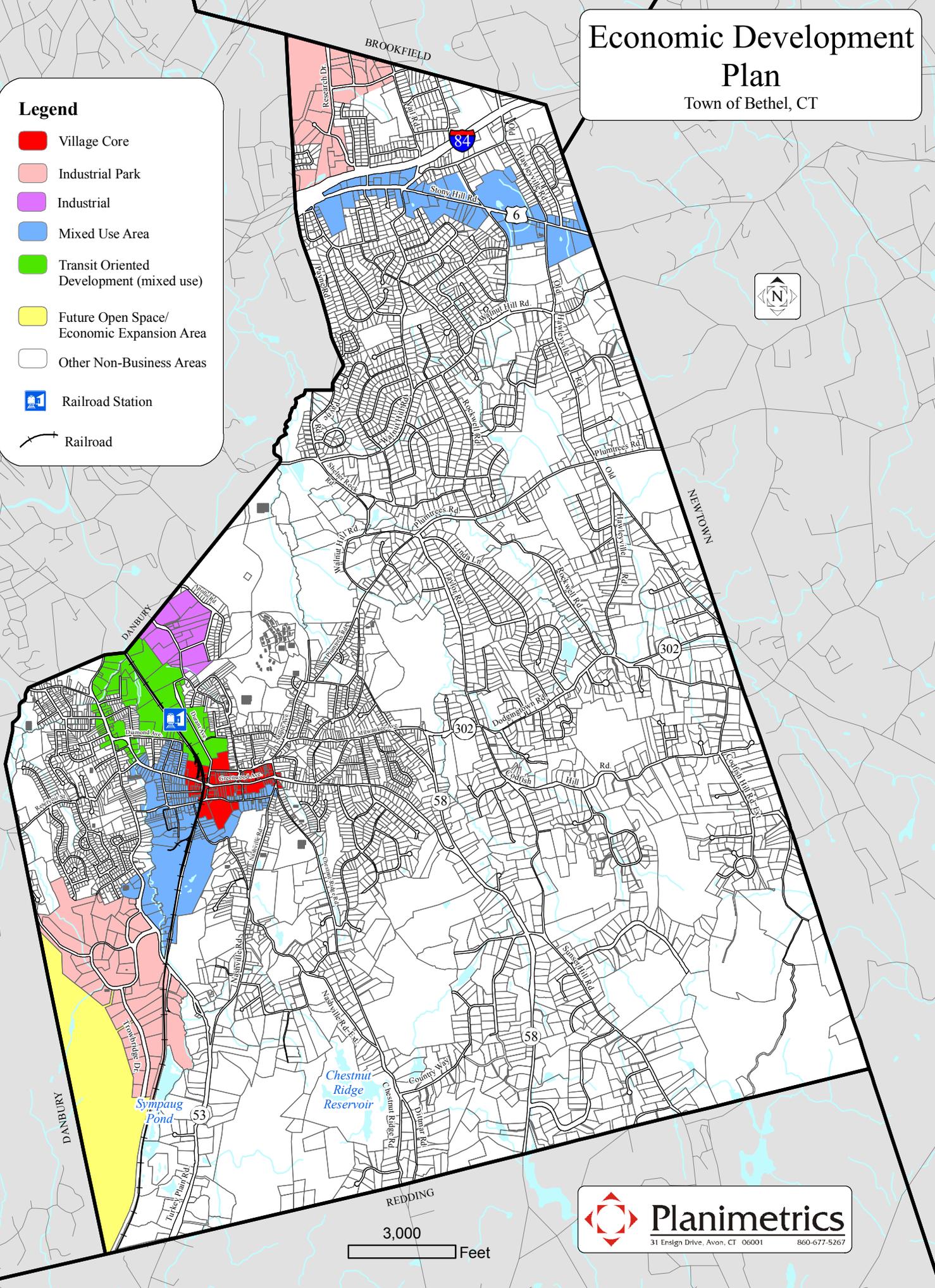
Economic Development Plan

Town of Bethel, CT



Legend

- Village Core
- Industrial Park
- Industrial
- Mixed Use Area
- Transit Oriented Development (mixed use)
- Future Open Space/Economic Expansion Area
- Other Non-Business Areas
- Railroad Station
- Railroad



3,000 Feet

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



Bethel Cinema



Northern Access into Berkshire Industrial Park



Francis J. Clarke Industrial Park

Attract and Retain Appropriate Business

During the scoping sessions for the Plan, residents identified a desire to attract consumer oriented retail, restaurants; medical businesses; and research and development firms. The EDC and/or the Town’s economic development staff should work collaboratively with existing business and property owners, Town Staff, the Commission, and elected officials to identify potential businesses, manage recruitment activities, and provide assistance in identifying appropriate locations for new business development.

One location in Town zoned for industrial and commercial uses is the Berkshire Industrial Park, a privately developed and maintained industrial park. This sixty-four acre parcel is not proximate to any water supply resources and the Park’s owners provide water, sewer, electrical, and fiber optic connections, and security with good access to Routes 7 and 84. The owners of the Berkshire Industrial Park have been working with the Board of Selectmen and the Land Use Office to attract light industrial and commercial office operations appropriate for Bethel. The Board of Selectmen, the Land Use Office, and our Commission should continue to work with the owners of the Berkshire Industrial Park to identify additional tenants. The EDC should also be involved in assisting in this effort.

The other industrial park, the Francis J. Clarke Industrial Park, is a publicly managed industrial park located within the Terre Haute lands. The Commission will consider design considerations and other development regulations and criteria for these lands as it revises the Zoning Regulations. The EDC and the Commission should collaborate to identify and attract the most desirable tenants for these sites, once development guidelines for the undeveloped areas have been established. Consideration should be given to making more efficient use of this existing industrial park, including the use of regulatory strategies.

Site Businesses Appropriately

Finding the right location for the right business is an important goal and one that needs the attention and direction of the Economic Development Commission. Some businesses have little impact on their surroundings, while others can become a source of irritation, particularly if they are improperly sited.

Bethel is fortunate in having a number of successful businesses and several well-developed business areas. However, as the Town’s recent water supply study indicates, some of the Town’s historic industrial areas are located on top of critical water supply resources. The Commission and the Board of Selectmen may wish to provide incentives for business and property owners in the older industrial areas to relocate to more appropriate locations, in order to avoid conflicts with these resources. The Commission should consider rezoning some of the industrial zoned lands north of and on Taylor Avenue for inclusion in the Village District.

Actions for Attracting and Retaining Business

1. Identify appropriate businesses types for Bethel.
2. Identify appropriate locations for appropriate businesses.
3. Consider identifying incentives for industrial businesses located over public water supply resources to relocate.
4. Identify support services for new businesses.
5. Recruit appropriate businesses.

Support Transit-Oriented Development

The Commission recommends identifying locations for compact, transit accessible, pedestrian-oriented, mixed use development, sometimes referred to as transit-oriented development (TOD). TOD, as defined by the American Public Transportation Association, is compact, mixed-use development near new or existing public transportation infrastructure that serves housing, transportation, and neighborhood goals.

According to the Census and studies by the Housatonic Area Regional Transit (HART), transit travel to New York City from Fairfield County, as well as increased employment opportunities in Fairfield County commercial centers, has been increasing, making Bethel a desirable location for those working to the south and living in northern Fairfield County.

Components of compact, transit accessible, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development patterns are:

- transit station as the prominent feature;
- walkable design with pedestrian as the highest priority, designed to include the easy use of bicycles and scooters, and supported by transit that includes streetcars, trolleys, buses, etc;
- high density, (approximately 15 to 20 units to an acre) high-quality development within a 1/2 mile (approximately a ten to fifteen minute walk) radius surrounding the transit station,
- a mix of uses in close proximity to each other, including office, residential, retail, and civic uses; and
- reduced parking ratios; and
- a transportation management plan.

One area that is appropriate for TOD is the area adjacent to the Metro North Railroad Station on Durant Avenue. The Board of Selectmen, the Commission, and the EDC should work together to begin the process of identifying and / or helping property owners to assemble appropriate parcels in the area for TOD development. A map describing the proposed boundaries of the district is found following the discussion on transit-oriented development.

As the Commission revises the Zoning Regulations it will develop transit-oriented development regulations for areas deemed appropriate for TOD to encourage multi-story buildings set close to the street, with some on-street parking and bus kiosks. Other considerations include ground floor retail and restaurants with upper story residential. Parking should be structured, either in stand-alone or mixed use buildings. Landscaped sidewalks connecting the mixed use development with the train station and downtown should include benches, water fountains, and other pedestrian amenities.



Transit Hub Adjacent to Mixed-use Development

Currently, access to the train is only from the east side of the tracks. The Commission recommends that there be consideration of a west side platform for commuters living on the west side of the tracks. Since there is only one rail line, trains stopping at Bethel could open doors on both sides of the track to let passengers enter and exit from the most convenient side. If it is possible to build a west side platform, additional parking on the west side should be constructed, as well as bicycle facilities and additional sidewalks to improve access to and use of the train. The Commission would like to communicate this request directly to CONN DOT and encourages the Board of Selectmen to endorse the concept through a Resolution.

In addition to transit-oriented developments, there may also be locations appropriate for moderately dense residential development (approximately 10 to 15 units per acre) that integrates transit options by providing access to the train station by shuttle van, bus, bike, pedestrian paths, and other non-auto dependent transportation modes. The transit-supportive development locations should be identified and zoned appropriately, allowing for denser development with low parking ratios than used in more suburban districts which are strictly dependent upon automobiles for transportation.

In addition to good transit options, these transit-supported locations will also need access to retail, restaurants, and recreational opportunities. In particular, the area along Grassy Plain north of Greenwood Avenue should be examined as a potential location for transit-supported development. This area already has a mix of uses and is served by public water and sewer. In addition to considering revisions to the Zoning Regulations to allow for denser development, strategies to increase transit services should be explored. This could include a requirement that any new development provide a transportation management plan that provides shuttle service to the train station during peak commute hours.

As the Commission revises the regulations to allow for transit-oriented development, staff should be directed to communicate and collaborate with Metro-North Railroad to ensure compliance with the railroads efforts to develop TODs. The Commission and staff should also coordinate with HVCEO.

Actions for Transit-Oriented Development

1. Identify appropriate locations for Transit-oriented development (TOD) and consider assembling parcels.
2. Work with property owners to educate them about the benefits of TOD.
3. Rezone the areas around the Metro North Rail Station to support TOD.
4. Encourage Metro North to build a west side platform at the train station.
5. Consider similar regulations for transit-supportive development with lower densities than allowed in a TOD.
6. Coordinate and collaborate with MNR and HVCEO.



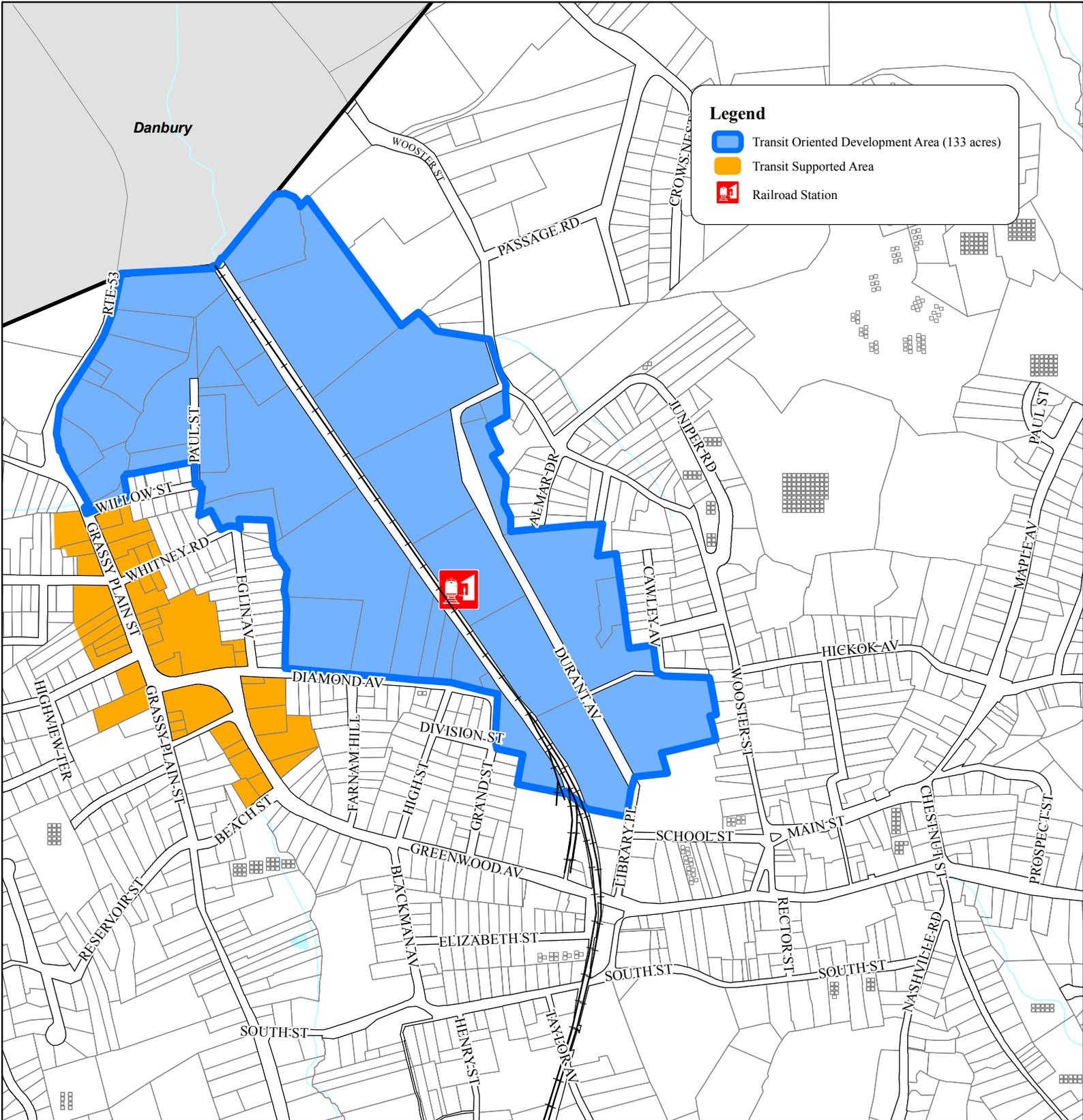
Proposed Transit Oriented Development

Town of Bethel, CT

Danbury

Legend

- Transit Oriented Development Area (133 acres)
- Transit Supported Area
- Railroad Station



490 Feet



**Sycamore Drive-in
Restaurant**

Support Local Businesses

The Bethel Cinema has become a destination location for the region. Encouraging compatible and synchronistic businesses, such as restaurants adjacent to the theatre, might be successful if sufficient parking can be identified. When the Bethel Cinema is involved in statewide film programs the Board of Selectmen and the EDC should consider organizing one day street fairs piggybacking on the festival. The Commission will work with the owners of the Bethel Cinema and adjacent properties to identify shared parking options.

There are many historic buildings and sites that could be developed as regional attractions. With Bethel's long history and many buildings dating back to the 1700's, there are locations and stories that could provide interest.

Family oriented attractions, with activities catering to children, should be pursued. Examples include historic agricultural activities, such as maple sugar operations, which could provide a regional interest and some limited income for town-owned lands with mature maple trees.

Bethel also owns significant tracts of undeveloped lands with recreational opportunities. The EDC working with a Conservation Commission could create regional attractions with the development of hiking trails and nature preserves on lands already owned by the Town.

Support Economic Vitality in the Village Center

Residents who attended scoping meetings for the Plan identified a desire to encourage and promote consumer oriented retail and restaurants in the Village Center. One tool that may stimulate appropriate retail and service oriented businesses, which in turn will support a vital Village Center, is to allow residential development on the upper floors of a building only if the ground floor provides space for desirable retail that promotes an active streetscape.

Desirable retail in Bethel is likely to be stores that provide everyday necessities such as apparel stores, small general merchandise stores, stationary and book stores, and similar establishments. Restaurants that cater to family dining and destination restaurants that cater to special occasion meals should be encouraged where practical.

Public-private partnerships, including collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Commission, should be encouraged to create a vibrant Village Center with the full support of the business community.

Develop a Route 6 Corridor Plan

The Route 6 corridor in the Stony Hill section of Town is sometimes referred to as the "other Bethel." It is an area of Town that could allow for significant new and redevelopment opportunities. There are currently a number of vacant parcels along Route 6 and approximately 60 acres available for new development within the Berkshire Industrial Park. In addition, many of the existing commercial developments provide redevelopment opportunities.

The Route 6 corridor may be an appropriate location for mixed-use development. A concurrent planning effort to develop specific redevelopment proposals for this corridor is underway and the results of that study will be incorporated into this Plan as appropriate.

Support Home Based Businesses

According to the US Bureau of Labor, small businesses create the majority of new jobs in the US. According to the National Federation of Independent Businesses, two out of every three new businesses are started at home.

In today's wired global economy, small businesses can grow into multi-million dollar enterprises. As businesses add employees and outgrow the home environment, many business owners will look to move locally rather than uproot their own families. The EDC, with the help of an Economic Development Director, should collaborate with state agencies to make programs available to small businesses and help them remain in Bethel.

Actions for Supporting Local Businesses

1. Promote synchronistic businesses such as restaurants adjacent to the Bethel cinema.
2. Hold street fairs in conjunction with film festival events.
3. Work with the Bethel Cinema and adjacent properties to identify shared parking solutions.
4. Consider developing historic-theme activities for tourists such as maple-sugaring operations.
5. Consider developing recreational opportunities on Town-owned lands.
6. Revise the Zoning Regulations for the Village Center to encourage mixed use buildings with active ground floor uses and upper story residential.
7. Encourage public-private partnerships.
8. Develop a Route 6 Corridor Plan.
9. Ensure regulations relative to home businesses are consistent with today's global economy.
10. Assist small business owners identify and make use of state and national programs.



RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Overview

The focus of this chapter is on strategies to improve the pattern of residential growth and to ensure that Bethel has the range of housing opportunities appropriate for the diverse needs of the community.

The primary issues related to residential development identified during the planning process include:

- managing densities in areas of Town with large parcels of vacant and/or sparsely developed land and without public water or sewer services;
- conversions of single-family homes into multi-family homes;
- conversions of owner-occupied homes to renter-occupied homes;
- providing workforce housing affordable for people employed in and around Bethel; and
- future concerns relative to a phenomena seen widely in lower Fairfield County, involving the tearing down of older homes, some of which are historic, and replacing with houses that feel overly large in scale.



Low-density Residential



Multi-family Club House

Manage Residential Development

This Plan recommends that the Commission consider modifying the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations applicable to subdivisions. The conservation section of this Plan discussed some approaches that may affect development patterns, including a revision to the Zoning Regulations relative to a buildable land provision and a revision to the definition of steep slopes. Other approaches are discussed here.

The current regulations adhere to a traditional form of zoning that relies on minimum and maximum specifications. Another form of zoning, referred to as “performance based” zoning, includes a collection of flexible zoning tools that are particularly useful where there are large pieces of undeveloped land, a situation that exists in the south and eastern parts of Town.

The primary benefits of the revised conservation subdivision regulations are that they preserve the character that Bethel residents cherish, protect natural and scenic resources, relate development to the capacity of the land, and allow more flexibility for the developer. These regulations include the following elements:

- a definition of buildable land (discussed in detail in an earlier chapter);
- establishment of density standards to regulate the total number of lots on a parcel being subdivided;
- flexibility in lot sizes and setbacks;
- requirements that a specific percentage of the parcel area be preserved as open space; and
- allowance for community septic systems.

The Commission supports the concept of clustering residential development along existing road frontage and minimizing the amount of land required for each individual building lot. However, due to concerns about soil suitability for community septic or dense development dependent upon individual septic systems in close proximity to one another, the Commission wants to explore the regulatory mechanisms for conservation subdivisions before making a determination relative to any specific density on areas with challenging soils and / or steep slopes.



Example of a Conventional Subdivision Site Plan

Benefits of Density-Based Zoning

- lot sizes can be reduced without increasing the number of housing units;
- the total buildout potential of the Town can be moderated through adjustments in density;
- amount of infrastructure to be constructed and maintained can be reduced
- sensitive areas can be avoided and the impacts on larger sensitive areas such as aquifers and steep slopes can be reduced; and
- residents and wildlife are able to enjoy all the benefits of the larger open spaces surrounding the newly developed homes.

Adopt Residential Density Regulations

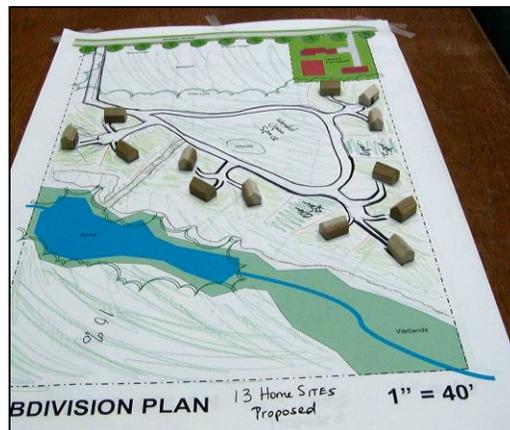
Currently, the development yield of a property is determined by an engineer or developer trying to locate as many lots on a parcel as will comply with the local health code and land use regulations. This approach can result in development patterns that are insensitive to the resources on a parcel, and do not contribute meaningful open space to the community.

The current text and calculations for conservation subdivisions are cumbersome and, as identified in the 1997 POCD, should be simplified. Rather than requiring a developer to produce a subdivision plan under existing minimum lot size requirements and then calculate the total number of lots that might be approved, the approach proposed in this Plan relies on the establishment of a density factor. A density factor identifies a number applied to the buildable acreage of a parcel which determines the total number of lots. For instance, if the density factor is determined to be 0.37 and there are ten buildable acres in a two-acre district, then the total number of buildable lots will be 4 (3.7 rounded up). The buildable acreage is different than the total acreage due to land being excluded from the calculations because road right-of-ways, wetlands and waterways, steep slopes, and other conditions are not included in the buildable land calculation.

The developer then prepares one plan for four home sites as a conservation subdivision plan. The four home sites should be clustered to the maximum amount practicable given the constraints of the land and its ability to accommodate septic sewer systems. The remaining land is shared land accessible to the residents of the subdivision and in some cases, available to the greater community.

The Commission will incorporate the provisions discussed in this section into the land use regulations as those are revised. It is anticipated that the Commission will use density factors in the range of 0.7 lots per buildable acres in the R-40 zone and approximately 0.37 lots per buildable acres in the R-80 zone. Prior to adoption of new Zoning Regulations, the proposed density standards should be compared to actual development experience in Bethel.

When subdivision plans are approved it will be necessary to place a note on the approved plans that certain oversize lots cannot be further subdivided, once the maximum density for the parcel has been reached. It will also be important to preserve a set of assessor maps that show the configuration of property at the time the residential density regulations was adopted.



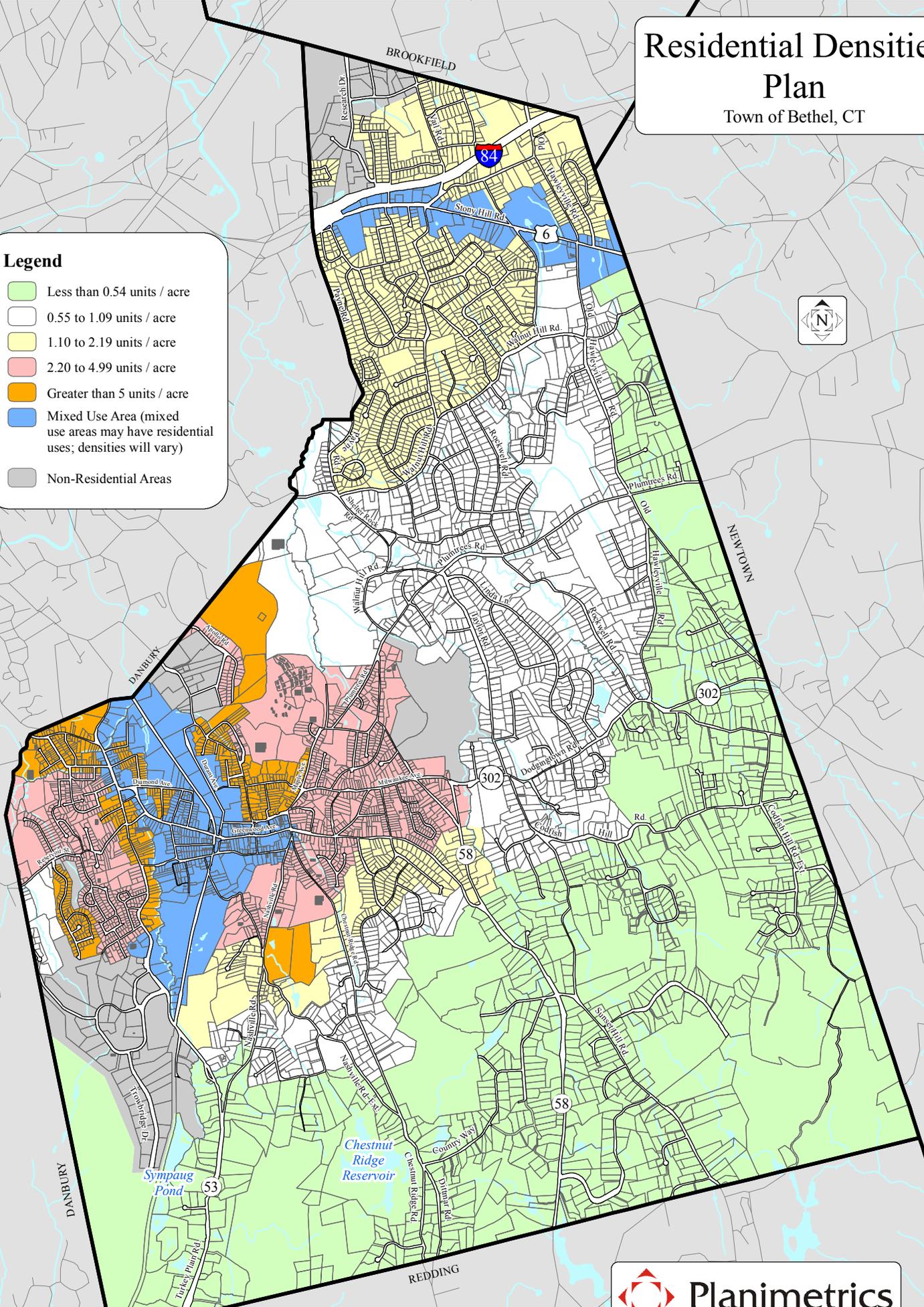
Example of a Conservation Subdivision Site Plan

Residential Densities Plan

Town of Bethel, CT

Legend

- Less than 0.54 units / acre
- 0.55 to 1.09 units / acre
- 1.10 to 2.19 units / acre
- 2.20 to 4.99 units / acre
- Greater than 5 units / acre
- Mixed Use Area (mixed use areas may have residential uses; densities will vary)
- Non-Residential Areas



3,000
Feet

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

Consider Community Septic Systems

The Commission is interested in obtaining more detailed information about the possibility of community septic systems. Based on input from the Bethel Health Department (BHD), this approach has some merits, including the ability to provide for much larger, contiguous pieces of open space, and less road construction. However systems larger than 33 bedrooms continue to pose problems and the BHD does not support the development of large community septic systems or in areas of Town identified as existing or future potential water supply areas.

Areas with soils of high sand and gravel content, such as the southern section of Route 53, where there is minimal impact of septic system discharge on public water supply watersheds, are the most appropriate. Factors that support community septic systems include well drained soils; and groundwater levels deep below existing grade.

A technical reference, "Analysis of Open Space Conservation Subdivisions by the Newtown Commission," is available from HVCEO as publication # 114 and should be considered as the Commission revises the Zoning Regulations and considers making allowance for community septic systems in conservation subdivisions.

Review Residential Dimensional Standards

The issue of tearing down homes and replacing them with much larger houses is an issue that some Connecticut communities, particularly in southern Fairfield County, have been grappling with for years. This trend results in situations where housing units that were of reasonable size relative to the size of the lot, are being replaced by housing units that are maximizing the amount of floor area, in what was originally intended to be a flexible building envelope. The desire to maximize the building size within the maximum limits of the building envelope results in a situation where existing houses are demolished ("teardowns") to make way for new construction of much larger homes ("monster homes"). While there are situations where the replacement of older homes is appropriate, the concern in Bethel is that historic homes with significant architectural and community character resources may be lost.

One approach is to identify appropriate floor area ratios (FAR) in residential zones. The floor area ratio establishes a consistent relationship between the maximum size of the house and the size of the lot. A smaller lot would result in less floor area. A larger lot could result in more floor area. The Commission wants to explore this concept in greater detail as it revises the Zoning Regulations and believes that it may be particularly applicable in the Village District. Other tools include coverage regulations, setbacks, building height, etc. all of which should be reviewed and revised as appropriate as the Zoning Regulations are updated.

Actions for Modifying Residential Development Patterns

1. Modify the land use regulations relative to conservation subdivisions.
2. Establish density standards for the R-40 and R-80 Districts.
3. Allow community septic systems in appropriate locations.
4. Consider floor area ratios and other dimensional standards.
5. Review and consider revising the coverage, bulk, and dimensional standards for all residential zoning districts.

Preserve Housing Diversity

In Bethel today, there is a diversity of housing choices with a variety of size, type, ownership versus rental options, and housing geared for specific demographic groups such as active adults. In the future, there will continue to be a need to provide housing appropriate for the diverse needs of the community in terms of age, abilities, income, as well as for people moving to northern Fairfield County.

As discussed in the Conditions and Trends chapter, the age composition of the community is changing. Whereas decades ago approximately two-thirds of the population lived in a nuclear family and wanted a single-family home with a yard, by 2020, it is anticipated that a much smaller percentage of the population will be living as a two-parent household with children. While the predominant type of housing will continue to be a single-family residential unit, a growing percentage of the population is demanding housing closer to services and without the responsibilities of house and yard maintenance, which includes a variety of multi-family housing options.

Continue to Allow Multiple-Family Housing

Multi-family housing is currently allowed in several areas of Town including the Village Center and areas on the Bethel/Danbury town line. Although the sewer system is near or over capacity in the Village Center, this is perhaps the most appropriate area in Town to permit multi-family housing. If additional sewage capacity can be diverted to the Village Center then additional multi-family housing units in a range of price options should be encouraged close to retail services and transit. Discussions and negotiations between the Town of Bethel and the Town of Danbury relative to the sewer system are underway to address this issue. Once those negotiations have been completed the Commission will determine if and how to allow increased residential densities in the Village Center.

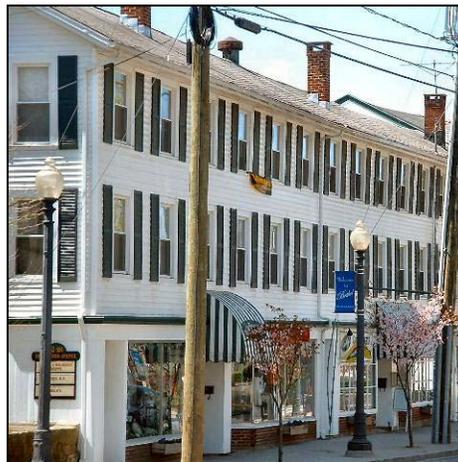
When the Town undertakes a study of the Route 6 corridor, it is possible that parts of that corridor will be identified as appropriate for multi-family housing, particularly in mixed-use buildings. If that is the case, the Commission, as it revises the land use regulations, will consider how best to allow multi-family housing as part of a mixed-use development in this corridor.

Statutory Reference

The CGS require all Plans of Conservation and Development to “make provisions for the development of housing opportunities, including opportunities for multi-family dwellings, consistent with soil types, terrain and infra-structure capacity, for all residents of the municipality and the planning region.”



Moderate Density Residential



Mixed-Use Moderate Density



Reynolds Ridge Senior Housing



Parking at Reynolds Ridge

Issues for Age Restricted Housing

- Public water
- Public or community sewer
- Buffers
- Open space set-asides
- Legal protections
- Maximum Densities

Allow Live-Work Units in Additional Districts

Bethel currently allows live-work units in the RMO zone. This housing type is particularly appropriate for certain professions including chefs, dance and art instructors, doctors and lawyers, artists, and consultants in a variety of professional arenas. The Commission is considering allowing live-work units in additional parts of Town. The Route 6 Corridor may be an appropriate location and the Commission encourages the Route 6 Study, currently underway, to examine the possibility of live-work units along the Route 6 corridor.

Manage Conversions of Single-family Homes

The area north of the municipal center is a location where many conversions from single-family to two-family and multi-family have taken place. While single-family homes with owner occupancy typically provide the greatest stability to a neighborhood, conversions can sometimes provide benefits such as affordable housing options. Converting single-family homes into two-family and multi-family housing units is also a way to adaptively reuse some of the Town’s historic housing stock. However, there are concerns about some of these conversions, which have occurred without any permits or apparent regard for fire safety issues, water and septic issues, and parking.

When the conversion can incorporate adequate parking, has access to adequate water and sewer service, provides fire safety measures for all residents, and manages garbage and other services in an efficient and aesthetically appropriate manner, some of the objections to these conversions might be eliminated. The Board of Selectmen could consider requiring a safety and occupancy certificate for all multi-family residences, which can only be issued after evidence that all safety, water, sewer, and parking issues have been satisfactorily resolved.

Provide Housing for Older Adults

As discussed in the chapter on Conditions and Trends, one of the fastest growing segments of the population is the cohort of adults aged 55 and older. This age cohort requires and desires different types of housing options than previous generations. Living longer and healthier lives, today’s older adults want more options and flexibility in their housing choices. Bethel already has provisions for active adult housing, one housing type desired by some of the 55 and older cohort. The Commission wants to ensure that the Town’s Zoning Regulations allow for and support the development of other housing options for these individuals.

Encourage the Development of Additional Senior Housing

In addition to Active Adult communities, there is also a market for traditional senior housing. Although there are a couple of housing projects specifically designed for seniors, such as the Bishop Curtis homes and the Reynolds Ridge homes, waiting lists for these housing units currently exceed the number of units many times over. The Commission and the Board of Selectmen should collaborate with the owners and managers of existing senior housing in Town, such as the Reynolds Ridge development and the Bishop Curtis homes, to develop ways to expand the number of units.

One strategy includes building on the site of the existing senior housing, providing single-level living in multi-story buildings, with elevators and parking facilities. The Board of Selectmen, the EDC, and the Town’s Commission on Aging should collaborate to pursue this recommendation and other options for providing more housing for seniors.

Provide for Affordable Housing

As mentioned earlier, Bethel's housing stock provides housing at a range of housing prices for both rental and housing ownership. In comparison with neighboring communities, Bethel has some relatively affordable housing options, with over 17% of the housing units valued below the State median house value. However, in Connecticut, any municipality that does not have at least ten percent (10%) of its housing stock affordable, in conformance with very specific State determined affordability criteria, is subject to the affordable housing appeals procedure as outlined in CGS 8-30g. As of 2006, according to records prepared by the Town and maintained by the CT Department of Economic and Community Development, 4.87% of Bethel's housing met the State's criteria for affordable housing. With approximately 6,700 housing units, 324 of them qualifying as affordable, Bethel would need to have another 350 affordable units built, plus one more for every ten units of market rate housing that is approved and built, in order to attain an exemption from the affordable housing appeals act.

In the past several years as a result of the State affordable housing appeals process, a number of affordable housing projects have been constructed in Bethel, resulting in housing that does not conform to the Town's zoning regulations and is not architecturally compatible with the character of the community. While the Commission is committed to providing for housing affordable to people who work within and adjacent to the Town, it would like to find ways to encourage housing that meets the needs of people with a range of income levels, while still conforming to the overall vision and character of Bethel.

One strategy that Bethel is using to increase the number of units that meet the State's affordability criteria is a requirement that all newly approved accessory apartments in Bethel qualify as affordable under the State criteria, discussed earlier. In order to receive approval of the accessory unit from the Commission, the property owner must guarantee that no rent will be charged for the unit for at least 40 years. The Land Use Office should continue to monitor these units to ensure that they are producing the desired type of housing.

Another strategy that Bethel can employ is a revision to the land use regulations requiring that certain housing developments include housing affordable to persons and families of low and moderate income. The provision can be met by ensuring that a percentage of the housing units are certified as affordable housing or payment of a fee-in-lieu of compliance with such a requirement. Fee-in-lieu of payments can be funneled into an affordable housing trust fund to build affordable housing. Affordable housing funds can be managed by the Town, or through partnerships with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, religious organizations or local housing trusts. Local housing trusts have shown that small-scale projects, often as small as two or three homes, can be effective. The Commission recommends studying this issue particularly as a trade-off with open space, in most residential districts, except for the R-40 and R-80 Zoning Districts.

The Commission also recommends that the Board of Selectmen, working with elected State officials, seek to amend the existing State Statutes relative to affordable housing in order to address this issue at a regional and state level and allow additional housing units, such as rental units which provide lower income housing options, to meet a community's affordable housing goals.

Actions for Encouraging Housing Diversity

1. Continue to allow multi-family in appropriate areas with sufficient infrastructure including water, sewer, and access to transit and services.
2. Consider allowing increased residential densities in the Village Center if sewer concerns are resolved.
3. Consider allowing residential as part of a mixed-use development along Route 6.
4. Consider allowing live-work spaces in additional areas of Town such as the Village Center, the TOD, along Grassy Plain, and along Route 6.
5. Consider requiring evidence of safety compliance for conversions of single-family to multi-family housing units.
6. Monitor the accessory housing units to ensure that they are producing affordable housing.
7. Collaborate with owners and managers of existing senior housing to provide additional housing units.
8. Identify appropriate areas of town for senior housing.
9. Develop an affordable housing plan that requires all residential development to include either some affordable housing or payment of a fee-in-lieu to support the development of affordable housing.
10. Consider developing an affordable housing partnership with an organization like Habitat for Humanity or a local housing trust.
11. Work with elected State officials to revise the State Statutes relative to affordable housing to include rental housing that meets the needs of low and moderate income residents.