

Here is the Planning Commission's **PROPOSED DRAFT REVISION** of the 'Land Use' section of the **Bethel Town Plan**. By State Statute, the Town Plan is revised every five years. The Planning Commission will hold a duly warned public hearing in mid-June on this and, depending on comments received then, will transmit it to the Select Board, which will hold a hearing at the end of July. Public comments are appreciated. Formal adoption by the Select Board is anticipated by August 13, 2006.

IX. LAND USE

A. INTRODUCTION

Bethel's rural character is strongly influenced by its pattern of land development, building design, its relationship to the landscape, and the sense of community that comes from people living and working here.

This section of the Plan describes Bethel's current land use and sets a framework on how land should be utilized in the future. The White River Valley is experiencing growth. This has resulted in new and expanded job opportunities, more income, and increased social and cultural diversity. Overall, the results have been positive and have benefited the Town. In spite of this, these changes and others underscore the need to identify and to develop effective growth and land use principles that will serve the long-term future interests of the community.

B. OVERALL LAND USE GOALS

In formulating a future land use pattern, consideration needs to be given to the existing settlement pattern, maintenance of the Village Center, the surrounding low density rural and agricultural areas, and its large open spaces and forests.

Accordingly, the following are recognized as key factors for determining future land use:

- land topography, soils, water, and other natural resources characteristics;
- relative ease of access to roads and other transportation facilities;
- availability to public services, including water and sewer facilities;
- desirability of avoiding land use conflicts; and
- the needs of the citizens of Bethel.

The overall land use goals for Bethel are listed below:

1. Encourage the full use of existing or designated growth centers or areas;
2. Promote the economic viability and revitalization of the village center;
3. Conserve the natural environment by judicious use of natural resources;
4. Protect the character of rural areas and their natural resources by avoiding scattered development and incompatible land uses;
5. Channel public investments into existing or planned settlement areas to avoid
6. Protect wetlands and aquifers from incompatible development.

C. PROPOSED LAND USE SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

For the purposes of this Plan, seven “areas” are identified. These areas have certain characteristics that identify them within the Town. These areas are:

1. Bethel Village District
 - Village Residential Area
 - Village Business Area
 - Village Commercial Area
 - Village Industrial Area;
2. East Bethel Rural Village District;
3. Highway District;
4. Medium Residential District;
5. Rural Residential District
6. Resource Conservation District and
7. Flood Hazard District.

1. Bethel Village District : Bethel Village historically has been considered to be that area of Bethel serviced by town water or sewer, or both. This area is recognized as the focal point of the community, and as the place for civic, economic, and social interaction. It is a relatively densely settled area with numerous historic buildings, including churches, schools, a library, and residences. Four sub-areas are identified within the Village Area. These are Village Residential, Business, Commercial, and Industrial.

Given that there are geographical limitations to the Village District and that historically these limitations have been an impediment to any major physical changes in the character of the Village, the focus of the Town Plan should be geared to maintaining what currently exists and enhancing the same.

2. East Bethel Rural Village District: This District is more densely settled and consists of a small concentration of mixed uses along Route 14. The Rural Village District is not served by municipal water or sewer, thus smaller lot sizes must be carefully planned. Historic properties and buildings are located in the District.

3. Highway District: This area lies adjacent to the Village District and along primary roads, including portions of Route 107 and Route 12 south and north of Bethel Village. The Highway District lacks town water and sewer services.

4. Medium Residential and Rural Residential Districts: Land outside of the Bethel Village District, East Bethel Rural Village District, and Highway District is predominantly rural. Historically, much of this outlying area was associated with agricultural and forestry uses. With the decline of the number of farms, many of the fields and pastures have reverted back to woodland or been developed for residential use, primarily single family homes on moderate to large lots.

Favorable conditions for the construction of buildings and wastewater disposal facilities should not be the sole determinant for development in the Medium Residential and Rural Residential Districts. Impacts on forestry and agricultural resources, critical wildlife habitats, historic sites, scenic resources and other features need to be evaluated and planned for when developing projects in these districts.

5. Resource Conservation District: This District consists of special areas in need of special protection due to their fragile nature, irreplaceable value, unique and important ecological functions. The Resource Conservation areas are predominantly forested, and lack direct access to year-round public roads and basic public utilities (electricity and telephone). The Resource Conservation areas represent one or more of the following characteristics:

- steep slopes in excess of 25% grade;
- soils which are predominantly wet or shallow;
- wetlands;
- water recharge areas to primary or public water supplies;
- critical wildlife habitats or endangered species;
- irreplaceable or locally recognized recreational or scenic amenities; or
- large tracts of land with relatively high potential for commercial forestry.

6. Flood Hazard District

The Flood Hazard District consists of a relatively narrow strip of land bordering the banks of the White River, the First Branch, and their associated tributaries. These areas are low-lying areas that flood during times of high water. They are important for retaining water that might cause damage or destruction elsewhere. Flood Hazard Districts often contain the best agricultural lands because of thick glacial deposits, minimum slope, and proximity to surface water. Floodways represent those areas immediately adjacent to the stream channel and carry the bulk of the water during a flood. These areas during a flood present the greatest risk to property and life during periods of high water.

[See Appendices A, B & C for ‘Goals,’ ‘Planning Principles,’ and ‘Recommendations for Action,’ respectively, specific to Land Use and other sections of this Town Plan.]