

Here is the Planning Commission's **PROPOSED DRAFT REVISION** of the '**Historic & Scenic Resources**' 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.

## **XII. Historic and Scenic Resources**

The purpose of this section is to identify the importance of Bethel's special amenities, being its historic, cultural, and archeological resources and to establish goals and objectives and recommend actions to conserve these unique resources.

Change is the fundamental element of time and history. After a long period of relative stability, the Upper Valley, including Bethel, has commenced to grow both in scale and the pace of development. The effects of this growth have been a gradual, yet noticeable, reshaping of the natural and manmade landscape of the Town and surrounding communities. Most development resulting from the change has adapted well to our historical and cultural landscapes, our lifestyles, and community values. Generally, the old and the new have been complementary.

In spite of the successes of the past, change has great potential to degrade and destroy our heritage unless cherished landscape patterns and community values are given proper consideration. Many of these losses are preventable or can be mitigated. The Planning Commission acknowledges the strong desire of Bethel's citizens to conserve their landscape.

One of our most important resources and assets is our Town Hall. This attractive 1892 brick building is the visual focal point of the historic downtown. It is the icon of the Town of Bethel, appearing on official town stationary and chosen by outsiders when they characterize Bethel. Preserving and re-using it will stimulate economic vitality, strengthen our Village Center Designation and improve the fabric of community life.

In 2005, it was decided that the Town Hall would not be retrofitted for Town Offices, but rather serve its historical function as a gathering place and community center. The Select Board made this decision after a public presentation by architecture students from Vermont Technical College and much citizen input. An engineer and a fundraiser have been engaged by the Town and approximately \$50,000 is currently in the Town Hall Restoration Fund to advance this important historical, cultural and economic restoration project and Town priority.

The landscape of the Town is an economic asset. Tourists come to the White River Valley and spend money here because they are attracted to its scenery and the values and qualities of rural life. These economic benefits can be preserved by establishing design guidelines to insure that new development will complement our historic, scenic, and cultural resources.

Bethel is rich in historic character as evidenced by the many structures built in the early days and later into the 1800's that remain intact. In recognition of this architectural history, a National Historic Register District was created in the 1970's.

The Bethel Village Historic District covers the business center of Bethel Village on Main Street together with adjacent residential areas extending along South Main, North Main, and Church Streets. The major part of the historic district is aligned on a single north-south axis, Main Street, which curves along the easterly side of the Third Branch of the White River.

**[See Appendices A, B & C for ‘Goals,’ ‘Planning Principles,’ and ‘Recommendations for Action,’ respectively, specific for Historic & Scenic Resources and other sections of this Town Plan.]**