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INTRODUCTION



WELCOME



July 23, 2007

Dear Mr. Burke, Mr. Szatkowski and Mr. Wilde:

This document represents the proposed 2007 Plan of Conservation and Development for the Town. The Planning and Zoning Commission is pleased to submit this Plan to you for your consideration and comment. We have spent the past twelve months, with the assistance of our consultants, and with input from the public, and Town staff, to develop this Plan.

This Plan provides a vision for the conservation and development of Bethel, and establishes policies for the Town's land use regulations, to which the Commission will refer when amending regulations and making land use decisions. This Plan also includes recommendations applicable to other Town agencies, as well as our elected officials, which we hope will be considered when making decisions about land use and development over the next ten years.

We ask that you review and endorse this Plan. We have scheduled a public hearing on adoption of the Plan for late September, and would request your comments prior to the Public Hearing. We are also forwarding this Plan to our regional partners at the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO).

We would like to thank all of the citizens of Bethel who participated in the many public meetings and workshops, and for the many thoughtful and sometimes provocative ideas that they shared with us. We hope that many of the good ideas about ways to preserve our resources and explore innovative development proposals will continue to be discussed and when possible, implemented over the next several years and decades.

Sincerely,

Peter Olson
Chairman, Bethel Planning and Zoning Commission

INTRODUCTION



Overview

Bethel is located in northeastern Fairfield County east of Danbury, and mostly south of Route 84. An old community, even by Connecticut standards, it is a beautiful Town with a lively mixed use village center, rural and suburban areas of wooded residential and modern technical commercial parks. The town is approximately seventeen square miles. According to the U.S. Census, there were more than 18,000 people living in Bethel in 2000.

Vision

A vision statement in a Plan of Conservation and Development identifies an ideal state which the community envisions for its future. The following vision will provide guidance for the policies and strategies in this Plan.

Bethel is a lively and well-rounded community which has successfully protected its many natural and historic resources. New development is guided to those appropriate locations which have the necessary services to support existing and future generations with a pleasing and sustainable place to live, work, shop and play.

While there may be refinements to this Plan over time, it is anticipated that this overall philosophy will remain relevant during the next ten years.

About Plans of Conservation & Development

A Plan of Conservation and Development is a tool for guiding the future of a community. While this Plan is primarily a statement of recommendations addressing the conservation and development of Bethel (the physical layout), this Plan is also intended to address the social and economic development of the community.

The goals and recommendations of the Plan reflect an overall consensus of what is considered desirable for Bethel and its residents in the future.

Prior Bethel Plans

Bethel has a strong history of preparing and adopting Plans of Development. The town adopted its first Plan of Development in 1958. The Plan was updated in 1969 and again in 1984. The most recent plan was adopted in 1997 and was developed with the assistance of Buckhurst Fish & Jacquemart and the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials.

Planning Process

The process of preparing this comprehensive Plan of Conservation and Development (the Plan) for Bethel has been overseen and coordinated by the Commission with the help of planning consultants from Planimetrics. During the process of preparing this Plan, community input was gathered through several public meetings and workshops with residents, boards and commission members, and Town Staff to discuss issues that they felt were important to them and the community. The combined results indicate that open space protection; improvements to community facilities; natural resource protection; preservation of community character and historic resources; and business development are the most important issues facing Bethel.

Public Input

Public meeting participants indicated that they were proudest of Bethel's public lands and natural resources; the Town's educational facilities and library; and the Village Center's historic character.

Transportation systems, including insufficient alternatives to auto travel and heavy truck traffic through residential neighborhoods; overly dense development in some areas; and insufficient recreational facilities throughout the Town, were noted as issues that residents of Bethel were most unhappy about. Other concerns included insufficient protection for open space parcels, insufficient protection for historic resources, and inadequate protection of natural resources.

Availability of Planning Documents

All background materials used in the preparation of this Plan are stored with the Land Use Department in Town Hall. In addition, copies of this Plan and prior plans are found in both the Land Use Office and the Library.