

BETHEL TOWN PLAN

TOWN OF BETHEL PLANNING COMMISSION

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Woodstock, Vermont 05091

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I INTRODUCTION

A. SHAPING BETHEL'S FUTURE

Bethel has undergone major economic and social changes over the past 40 years. It, like other communities in the White River Valley, is moving away from the traditional base of agriculture and forestry to one of service industries and light manufacturing. These changes are fueled, to a large extent, by population increases in the Region and increased access to the area due primarily to the completion of Interstate 89. The result has been more homes, the location of new or expansion of businesses, and a changing economy. More workers now residing in Bethel work outside of town than those who have jobs in town. During the forty-year period from 1960 - 2000, Bethel's population increased by 45%, from 1,356 to 1,962.

Change stimulates the need for the community to examine its current conditions and to evaluate its prospects for the future. Change can be beneficial or it can be detrimental to the long-term welfare of the community. In order to understand the implications of change, the community must understand the problems and opportunities facing it, and identify goals for the future. Towns with little or no planning are likely to experience problems associated with development, high property taxes, and increased demand for town or school services. Bethel has made a deliberate choice to establish a municipal planning program, to provide for orderly development, to balance its natural and built environments, and to retain its rural landscape.

A well-grounded Town Plan is the foundation for ensuring appropriate development and conservation of the community's resources. Effective town planning will reduce conflicts arising from change.

B. GENERAL PURPOSE AND INTENT OF THE PLAN

The Bethel Town Plan is an official statement on the growth and development of the Town. The Plan serves as an expression of values and a vision for growth and management for the next five years. It is not intended to be a static or inflexible document. The Planning Commission will periodically review and update this Plan to reflect new conditions and needs. Under the provisions of the Vermont Planning and Development (24 V.S.A. Chapter 117), this Plan is effective for a period of five years from date of adoption or amendment, unless readopted.

The general purpose and intent of this Plan are:

1. To establish land use goals that provide adequate space for needed types of land use, both public and private, in locations that minimize the adverse impact of one land use on another;
2. To undertake a process that allows for the protection and judicious use of the Town's soils, minerals and stone, forests, agricultural lands, waters, and other natural resources;

3. To provide for a healthful distribution of population and structures in the Town taking into consideration traffic congestion; fire, flooding, and other dangers; reduction of noise, air and water pollution; and protection of access to light and air;
4. To facilitate the adequate and economical provision of transportation, water, sewage disposal, schools, parks, and other public requirements in relation to growth and to encourage the appropriate and efficient expenditure of public funds and economy in the process of development;
5. To provide an energy plan for Bethel which will analyze the Town's energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems, and which will encourage energy conservation; and
6. To conserve the Town's historic sites and districts, which are significant contributors to the Town's essential character, and also to identify a process for the future preservation of sites and structures that might deserve local, state, or federal designation.

The specific objectives of this Plan are:

1. To protect the rural character of the Town;
2. To continue Bethel village as a town center;
3. To protect existing and future historical resources;
4. To provide safe and healthful housing for all segments of the population;
5. To prevent the creation of traffic hazards and congestion and aesthetically unpleasing development on Routes 107 and 12 in the Town; and
6. To promote the environmentally sound development practices.

C. HISTORY OF TOWN PLANNING IN BETHEL

Bethel's planning history dates back to 1948. At that time, a Planning Committee was formed and it produced "A Twenty Year Plan for Bethel". This Plan provided a review of the community's needs and plans for the future, including community services, taxes, education, and economic development. This Plan addressed many of the same issues that Bethel continues to face today.

Bethel established a formal planning program in the early 1970's. At that time, the Selectboard appointed a Planning Commission. One of first tasks of the Commission was to develop a Town Plan. Bethel has maintained a local Plan since this time. Following completion of the Plan in 1975, the Planning Commission drafted the first comprehensive zoning regulation that was adopted later that year. This regulation required local approval of land and building development prior to commencing a project. This regulation or amendments to it have been in place since that time. In the late 1980's, the Town adopted subdivision regulations. These regulations require that the Planning Commission approve all land subdivisions prior to division or sale.

In May 1999, the Planning Commission sent a Community Survey to all taxpayers in the Town. The intent of the survey was to assist the Planning Commission in determining Bethel's current attitudes and needs and how public desires could best reflected in this revised Town Plan.

Approximately 800 surveys were sent out. About 180 surveys were returned to the Planning Commission, a response rate of 23%, a typical rate of return. A full copy of the survey and the total tabulated responses are available from the Planning Commission. From the survey results, several conclusions were made.

1. Bethel citizens are interested in the future of their community and they want to be informed about their town and planning.
2. Residents strongly desire the elements of small town rural life and a sense of community that small town living provides.
3. Conservation of natural resources is important to the quality of life in Bethel. Planning policies and programs should seek to maintain these resources.
4. Quality town and school government is important to the citizens of the community and overall they feel that local services are good.
5. Bethel should continue to direct new growth into selected areas where the environmental and economic impacts are minimal.

Bethel's Plan expired in November 1999. This Plan replaces that earlier version. It contains all the elements required of a Plan per State law. This includes sections pertaining to land use, transportation, natural resources, utilities and facilities, historic and cultural resources, energy, and implementation of the Plan.

Major changes, highlights, or similarities between the expired Plan (1999) and this Plan are:

1. Updated and expanded databases and analyses on population and economy (Chapters III and IV).
2. Reaffirmed overall land use goals, retained land use settlement patterns identified in the expired Plan and the current Zoning Regulations.
3. Expanded discussion on planning principles for each of the land use areas. This was done partially in response to recent Vermont Supreme Court and Environmental Board cases, and current planning practices which directs that town plans be specific, not general or ambiguous.
4. Updated sections pertaining to transportation. Added sections regarding rail facilities, pedestrian/bicycle facilities, public transportation, Route 100 and 107, and access management. Included specific goals and planning principles regarding transportation facilities planning (See Chapter IV).
5. Revised sections pertaining to utilities and facilities, including schools. Added specific goals, planning principles, and recommendations for each (See Chapter X).
6. Created a separate chapter regarding historic and scenic resources; added discrete goals and planning principles.
7. Created a new chapter for agriculture and forestry.
8. Updated housing inventory, including information regarding type, ownership, valuation, and market characteristics. Evaluated housing needs, affordability, and availability in Bethel. Added goals, planning principles and recommendations.
9. Conducted a community values survey for all taxpayers in May 1999.
10. Updated maps consistent with GIS standards.

II TOWN HISTORY

The Town of Bethel, consisting of approximately 24,960 acres, is situated on the eastern slopes of the Green Mountains. The Town was first settled in the early 1780's by pioneer farmers who established numerous small, self-sustaining communities on the banks of the Town's principal streams. Farming was the primary means of support for most of these early settlers. Some, however, built small sawmills, gristmills, tanneries and shoe shops, all powered by the streams' waters, to supply needed materials to the farmers. Most of the Town's present day communities had their origin in these early farming settlements. Since the mill built at the junction of the White River and its Third Branch enjoyed a superior water supply, it became the leading mill in the area. This perhaps contributed largely to the development of what is the present day Bethel Village at that site.

The Town grew rapidly into the 1800's reaching a population of 1,886 people by the year 1840. After 1840, the opening of the West and the transfer of sheep raising to that area, along with economic growth in other parts of the country, slowly undermined the subsistence farming practiced in New England. As farmers and others in Vermont were attracted by greater opportunities in the West and many soldiers did not return after the Civil War, abandoned farms appeared throughout the Town. By 1890, Bethel's population had dipped to 1,440 people.

As the importance of farming declined, the Town began to exploit its potential for industrial growth. It was aided significantly by the construction of the Vermont Central Railroad line through Bethel in 1848. Large tanneries developed in Bethel Village and Lilliesville. Granite quarrying also helped town expansion and from the low population of 1,890, the Town grew to 1,953 in 1910. The increasing importance of Bethel Village as the town center was reflected in the growth of the Village population from 608 in 1892 to 948 in 1910 and to 1,328 in 1913.

The lean years following World War I carried the Town into its second decline. By 1923, both the tannery and granite industries in the Town had ceased their operations. Many laborers left the area in search of work elsewhere and the population started a steady drop to a low in 1940 of 1,477 persons.

In the years following 1940, Bethel suffered further population declines, largely the result of a lack of jobs. The tannery and quarry industries were replaced by new capital-intensive factory operations, smaller in scope and less in need of workers than their earlier counterparts. Agriculture too had become mechanized. Unprofitable farms slowly gave way to large, modern dairy farms. At the same time, the number of agricultural operations continued to decline from over 100 in 1923 to 51 in 1968, 12 in 1978 and finally down to just four operating dairy farms in 1992. The result was a gradual emigration that left Bethel with a population of 1,347 people in 1970. The Town grew in the 1970s and 80s and the 1990 census shows a population of 1,866, almost back to the population level of 1840.

During the same period, the Town began to feel the impact of the post-war transportation boom. Economical personal transportation, aided by efficient federal and state highways, afforded

travelers from all over New England and the Northeast easy access to Vermont. Development of the second-home industry soon followed with persons from out-of-state purchasing as vacation or retirement homes the vacant residences of former Bethel residents. Those in Bethel, in turn, found it convenient to use the new highway system to commute to jobs and shopping districts in other areas.

This revolution in transportation has transformed Bethel into a truly regional town; it draws the workers for its two major factories, the reemerging granite quarry, a major regional building supply distributor, and other local businesses from the neighboring towns. It sends its own residents to jobs and stores throughout the neighboring area. It seems likely that Bethel's future development will be tied closely to that of the region.

Because of the steep topography common throughout the Town, Bethel is not as suited for major industrial or commercial expansion as other towns in the area. Bethel can, however, accommodate several small industries and essential neighborhood shopping facilities while providing adequate housing for those who work in Bethel and for a reasonable number of those who do not. It is probable that increased industrial and commercial growth in neighboring towns and the Lebanon/White River Junction area will create pressures for expanded housing in Bethel. The second home industry can also be expected to continue to add to such pressures. Since the accommodation of any type of development can place heavy burdens on local government and significantly alter the quality of life in the area, it is important that such growth be balanced and properly timed.

It is with these thoughts in mind that the Planning Commission has recommended this Town Plan.

III POPULATION

A. POPULATION PATTERNS

Population growth is an important element in the overall development of Bethel. Increases or decreases in population relate directly to community needs and demands, and the capacity of Bethel to provide efficient and equitable services. The density and overall distribution pattern of Bethel's resident and non-resident population can affect the type of public services and facilities that are necessary. Large public investments such as schools can be more effectively planned and built with knowledge of the population characteristics or changes within Bethel and within communities affecting the Town.

Outlined below are population statistics for Bethel compiled by the U.S. Census. Bethel's population in 2000 was 1,968 compared to 1,866 in 1990, a growth rate of 5.4%. Compared to other towns in the Greater Upper Valley, Bethel experienced a relatively slow growth rate, slightly less than the statewide average. The primary factor influencing population was due to families moving into Bethel rather than unusual birth or death rates.

TABLE 1: Bethel Population, 1950 – 2000 (U.S. Census)

1950	1,534
1960	1,356
1970	1,347
1980	1,715
1990	1,866
2000	1,968

B. AGE OF POPULATION

Between 1980 and 1990, most of the increase in Bethel's population was over 18 years of age. Compared to Vermont, percentage changes in the over 18 age group was slightly higher (+17.9%) than the State (+12.2%). Nationally, for the past three decades, older persons have continued to represent an increasing percentage of all age groups. People are living longer, families are smaller, and couples are deferring raising families to a point later in life. Unfortunately, as of the date of this Plan, the final 2000 population statistics for Bethel are not available from the U.S. Census Bureau.

While outdated, the 1990 population distribution for Bethel shows that 31% of its residents were in child bearing years (20-39), slightly lower than the average compared to the rest of Vermont (33%) and far greater than the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Region (13%).

C. INCOME OF POPULATION

The Vermont Department of Taxes annually publishes *Vermont Tax Statistics* that include a summary of income tax returns filed with the State. In 1996, 946 tax returns were filed from residents in Bethel with aggregate income reported for all Bethel residents of \$28.4 million. Bethel has a fairly representative profile for income distribution. Distribution by income class for 1996 is outlined below.

TABLE 2: Bethel Distribution By Income Class, 1996 (VET 1996)

0 - 10K	202	21.4%
10K - 19.9K	216	22.8%
20K - 29.9K	169	17.9%
30K - 49.9K	208	22.0%
50K- or more	151	16.0%
TOTAL	946	100%

D. PLACE OF BIRTH

Of Bethel's 1,866 residents in 1990, 1,101 or 59% were born in Vermont, 29% in the Northeast, and the balance elsewhere in the U.S. or foreign born. In 1980, 63% or 1,081 of the Town's resident were natives. This trend of fewer natives is typical of the rest of Vermont as native Vermonters continue to represent a declining proportion of the total population of the State.

E. FUTURE POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Existing population projections are becoming outdated, however, one trend bears consistent throughout the State - migration into Vermont has increased significantly over the past decade and birth rates and family size have generally declined.

In a report titled, *Vermont Population Projections - 1990-2005* (1989), projections for the White River Valley communities in the Two Rivers Region were made. This forecast model did not have the benefit of the 1990 Census Report. Comparison between baseline assumptions for 1990 population estimates and the 1990 Census Report figures reveals that the forecasts for 1990 were overstated. Thus, actual counts were less than the estimates. Overall, the Vermont Department of Health projects that growth in population for the White River Valley will not be dramatic for the period 1995-2005. Growth is expected to be a slow to moderate 5.8% increase over the ten-year period. This trend of slow growth is characteristic of Vermont overall. Most demographic studies reveal that the high rates of growth during the 1980's are not likely to be reported during the 1990's.

F PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

The extent and type of population change in Bethel will be primarily influenced by economic and social conditions throughout the Northeast. Assuming no net migration of persons into Bethel over the next decade or two, natural changes in population will have little or no effect on population. In-migration to Vermont will continue to occur if the economy holds strong. Bethel, like the rest of Vermont, is largely rural. There is a certain mystique about the people and the land that attracts people to the area. The existence of a quality economic and cultural core in the area, coupled with a superior environment, will continue to be a haven for individuals and families seeking this lifestyle.

IV ECONOMY

A. LOCATIONS OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Bethel serves as a regional economic hub for communities in the Upper White River including, Royalton, Stockbridge, Barnard, and Rochester. Basic retail services are available in Bethel as well as a building materials supplier, banking services, automobile sales and service, and restaurants.

I-89 and Route 107 serves as the primary transportation link to Bethel. Land adjacent to Route 107 and Route 12 serves as the location of several services and retail businesses. The village area, however, continues to serve as the primary concentration point for these activities. Major employers in Bethel are Vermont Castings – a multi-line stove/fireplace manufacturer, GW Plastics – an injection molding manufacturer, Valley Motors – an automobile dealer, the Whitcomb School, Bethel Mills, a building materials supplier, Ultramotive - a container dispensing business, and Silvatech - a manufacturer of specialized sawmill processing equipment. The New England Central Railroad provides rail service to area businesses, but to a lesser extent than in previous years. Most freight is now moved by trucks.

Economic activity in Bethel has seen moderate growth since the early 1990's. As noted above, its economy is largely manufacturing and service oriented and represents a shift from farming and lumbering. For major retail, trade, and health care, Bethel residents gravitate to the Tri-Town Area (White River Junction, Hanover, and Lebanon), to Rutland, or the Barre-Montpelier Area and to a limited extent to Randolph. Additionally, many of Bethel's residents are employed in these communities.

B. EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

The private employment sector is the largest employment sector for persons residing in Bethel. Sixty-nine percent (69%) are employed by private business. Another 6% work for non-profit organizations, 15% for government, and 10% were self-employed (Source U.S. Census – 1990). In 1997, average annual employment was 933, a moderate but steady increase from previous years. Table 4 depicts the occupational fields reported as part of the U.S. Census:

TABLE 4: Occupational Types (1990 U.S. Census)

Managerial/Professional	216	23%
Technical, Sales, Administrative	220	23%
Service	177	19%
Farming and Forestry	25	3%
Precision Production	166	16%
Operators, Fabricators, Laborers	140	15%
TOTAL	944	100%

The overall average annual wage in 1997 for Bethel's 933 employed workers was \$25,652. Table 5 below shows average annual wages for occupational divisions reporting data to the Vermont Department of Employment and Training.

TABLE 5: Annual Average Wages By Occupation Type (VET 1997)

Construction	\$24,379
Manufacturing	\$29,351
Wholesale Trade	\$45,807
Retail	\$17,667
Finance/Insurance	\$22,060
Services	\$21,693
Public Administrator	\$33,983
Transportation/Utilities	\$29,448

As might be expected, women have assumed a greater percentage of the work force over the past three decades. In 1990, approximately 48% of Bethel's work force consisted of women. This probably comes as no surprise as the trend of two income earners in a household is typical for Vermont.

C. TRAVEL TIME TO WORK

In 1990, approximately 7% (71) of Bethel's work force worked at home, 17% (159) traveled less than 10 minutes to work, 36% (337) between 10 to 20 minutes, 12% (112) between 20 minutes to 30 minutes, and the 28% traveled over 30 minutes to work. (Source: 1990 U.S. Census.)

Tables 6 and 7 show not only where Bethel residents worked, but also where people who worked in Bethel lived.

TABLE 6: Work Places For Bethel Residents (1990 U.S. Census)

Bethel	273	32%
Randolph	220	26%
Royalton	61	7%
Woodstock	52	6%
Hartford	43	5%
Barnard	23	3%
Pittsfield	19	2%
Stockbridge	18	2%
Rochester	15	2%
Other VT Towns	78	9%
New Hampshire	55	6%
Other	7	1%
TOTAL	864	100%

TABLE 7: Place Of Residence For Bethel Workers (1990 U.S. Census)

Bethel	273	35%
Royalton	129	16%
Randolph	103	13%
Braintree	34	4%
Barnard	34	4%
Tunbridge	27	3%
Brookfield	15	2%
Sharon	15	2%
Stockbridge	15	2%
Other VT Towns	118	15%
New Hampshire	26	3%
TOTAL	789	100%

As might be expected, a large percentage of workers not working at home travel outside of town to work (68%). Most travel to nearby towns in the Greater Upper Valley Area. Thus, it is fair to note that Bethel can be classed as a “bedroom community”. Bethel businesses do attract 65% of their employees from outside of town again mainly from workers who reside in nearby towns.

D. LABOR FORCE TRENDS

The economic climate of Bethel is strong and similar to Vermont's. The economy in Vermont is experiencing restructuring – a move away from an agricultural and manufacturing economy to a service/tourist economy. Notwithstanding, Bethel enjoys a healthy manufacturing economy due largely to the successes of GW Plastics and Vermont Castings. Unemployment is at an all time low. The total estimated 1997 labor force in Bethel was 1,130 workers (reporting for part-time, full-time, and temporary workers) with an unemployment rate of 3.8%. The economic future of Bethel will be influenced by global events. The service and technology sectors will continue to grow in the Upper Valley. Businesses seeking to expand in the Bethel area will find it difficult to locate quality employees with near or full employment existing. This is an economic impediment, prompting industry to look to other areas outside of the Region where a skilled labor force may be readily available.

E. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

If population demographics hold true for the Region, the number of people entering the work force over the next five years will increase, albeit slowly. Natural work forces changes in the future can more than likely be accommodated by Bethel without undue hardship on public services, as the rate of change would be relatively slow. However, the advent of new industries or business expansion in Bethel or in towns within reasonable commuting distance from Bethel, could put growth pressures on this community.

V 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 fit well with the landscape of the Town. In spite of this, these changes and others underscore the need to identify and to develop effective growth and land use strategies 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, consisting of downtown Bethel, its hamlets, the surrounding low density rural and agricultural areas, and its large open spaces and forests. This existing settlement pattern has demonstrated itself to be beneficial to the community and is attractive, desired, and understood by the residents of Bethel, and therefore, should be protected and enhanced. This is best accomplished by the using this pattern as a guide for future development of the Town.

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. Maintain the economic viability and accessibility of Bethel village;
3. Provide for intensive development only in areas where public services are available or planned to support such development;
4. Conserve the natural environment by judicious use of natural resources;
5. Protect the character of rural areas and their natural resources by avoiding scattered development and incompatible land uses;

6. Channel public investments into existing or planned settlement areas to avoid the costly effects of sprawl; and
7. 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 Area
 - Village Residential Area
 - Village Business Area
 - Village Commercial Area
 - Village Industrial Area;
2. East Bethel Rural Village Area;
3. Highway Area;
4. Medium Residential Area;
5. Rural Residential Area;
6. Resource Conservation Area; and
7. Flood Hazard Area.

Bethel Village Area

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. The Village Area serves as the central location for commercial activities, schools, municipal services, and cultural activities for the Town and surrounding communities. It is a relatively densely settled area with numerous historic buildings, including churches, schools, a library, and residences. Generally, the Village Area has been designed and scaled to accommodate the pedestrian and includes sidewalks.

Four sub-areas are identified within the Village Area. These are Village Residential, Business, Commercial, and Industrial. Outlined below are planning principles for the Bethel Village Area and its sub-areas.

- (a) Intense mixed-use growth is supported where a reasonable complement of town services, such as water, sewer, and transportation facilities, are available. To this end, maintenance and expansion of such facilities are encouraged subject to available tax revenues and public investments.
- (b) Capital planning programs should give high priority to downtown revitalization and renovation (i.e. parking, sidewalks, and street lighting) to enable in-filling and private investment within the Village Area.
- (c) Adaptive reuse of older or vacant buildings within the Village Area is encouraged to enable full use of these properties.
- (d) New development that affects structures of historic significance should be compatible with the special character of such buildings and the immediate area.

- (e) Principal retail establishments (i.e. shops, and grocery stores) should be located in the Village Area to minimize the cost inefficiencies of scattered development or sprawl.
- (f) The Village Area should support a mixture of single family, two-family, and multiple family homes at high densities.
- (g) Postal facilities and similar governmental offices shall be located in the Village Area where other public services already exist. Governmental offices distant from the Village Area or population concentrations contribute to increased traffic congestion and drain vitality from these centers.
- (h) New development should be designed to be compatible with existing buildings, streetscapes, and respect the traditional scale, proportion, and shape of the immediate surrounding neighborhood.

East Bethel Rural Village Area

The East Bethel Rural Village Area is the area within and surrounding the hamlet of East Bethel on Route 14. This Area is densely settled and consists of a small concentration of mixed uses. It is not served by municipal water or sewer, thus smaller lots sizes must be carefully planned. Historic properties and buildings are located in the Area. Outlined below are planning principles for the East Bethel Rural Village Area.

- (a) Single and two family homes should be accommodated at high densities, subject to meeting water supply and sewage disposal constraints.
- (b) Small business enterprises that fit the context of the immediate area should be encouraged.
- (c) Planning and zoning tools should be developed to encourage cluster development to protect open spaces and farmland around this area.
- (d) Design features which contribute to the historic and aesthetic values of the area should be promoted.

Highway Area

This area lies adjacent to the Village Area and along primary roads, including portions of Route 107 and Route 12 south and north of Bethel Village. The Highway Area lacks town water and sewer services. Outlined below are planning principles for the Highway Area.

- (a) Both residential and non-residential uses should be planned for this area.
- (b) The ill effects of strip development should be avoided by employing the following design considerations:
 - quality landscaping and screening between the project and roadway;
 - proper size and scale of structures to fit the context of the area;
 - sensitive location and size of parking areas;
 - a compact and densely developed project which utilizes land efficiently;
 - access management techniques to minimize curb cuts, including vehicular and pedestrian links between projects; and

- plans for outdoor lighting and signage that are not excessive or out of character with the area.
- (c) Those uses that benefit the socio-economic vitality of Bethel's village areas and are feasible to locate there should be discouraged from locating within this Area.

Medium Residential and Rural Residential Areas

Land outside of the Bethel Village Area, East Bethel Rural Village Area, and Highway Area 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.

Over the past thirty years, nearly all new year-round and seasonal housing has occurred outside of the villages and in the rural areas, particularly where ease of access to good roads was afforded. This trend of new homes being built throughout Bethel's countryside is likely to continue. The level of future development will be heavily influenced by economic prosperity in the Region and the availability of land to support on-site wastewater disposal systems and private water supply systems. Areas relatively free from site limitations for development, with convenient access to roads and electric power, will experience the most change while the more remote areas distant from the Town's primary services and main roads, will develop more slowly due to the higher costs of development.

However, 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 Area. 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 areas. Outlined below are the planning policies for the Medium Residential and Rural Residential Areas.

- (a) Residential, agricultural, and forestry uses should be the primary and dominant land uses. Densely settled large-scale residential, commercial, and industrial projects are inappropriate to the Medium Residential and Rural Residential Areas.
- (b) Priority for development should be given to areas where the potential for agriculture and forestry are relatively low. Planning should avoid placing structures on open farmland that effectively diminishes its ability to continue as productive farmland. If possible, structures, driveways, and roads should be located along the edges of open fields or in the least productive areas.
- (c) Rural land next to village areas and on primary roads should be considered as locations for higher density development. Accordingly, areas away from these existing settlements should accommodate uses at lower densities.
- (d) In order to retain the rural character of these areas the following should be considered:
 - site new construction in areas where they can be visually absorbed or screened by natural landscape features;

- site buildings or structures, where feasible, in a way as to minimize blocking views of highly scenic vistas as viewed from a public road; and
- plan roads, curb cuts, power lines, or other land improvements on parcels so as to minimize conflicts on agricultural and forestry operations.

Resource Conservation Area

This area consists of locations in need of special protection due to their fragile nature, irreplaceable value, unique and important ecological functions. The Resource Conservation Area is predominantly forested, and lacks direct access to year-round public roads and basic public utilities (electricity and telephone). The Resource Conservation Area has 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.

Where land is excessively steep and soil depth to bedrock is shallow, recovery rates to damaged vegetation are low and susceptibility to erosion is high. Maintenance of diverse wildlife species is a goal of for this area. Improperly or densely planned development in this Area will counter this goal. Fragmentation of the Resource Conservation Area into small discontinuous areas would contribute to wildlife population decline and a loss of habitats. The manner in which these lands are managed also has a direct bearing on the quality and quantity of these water resources. Developments adjacent to wetlands need to be carefully planned to minimize direct disturbance to these areas and changes in water flow. Extension of roads, power lines, and related facilities into this Area to accommodate relatively large residential development projects will contribute to a reduction of the natural resources values noted above. Outlined below are planning policies for the Resource Conservation Area.

- (a) Outdoor recreation and forestry uses should be the predominant use, provided that these uses do not unduly harm significant natural resources on the site.
- (b) Large-scale developments or subdivisions at relatively high densities are discouraged particularly in areas where steep slopes, wet, or shallow soils are predominant.
- (c) Land development or subdivisions should be planned to minimize reduction of the resource value of areas for forestry by use of cluster development and new community planning concepts designed to economize on the costs of roads, utilities, and land usage.
- (d) Land above 2,000 feet in elevation should be maintained mainly for forestry.
- (e) In areas exhibiting significant or critical wildlife habitats, planning for development or subdivision must be sensitive to the economic, social, cultural, recreational, and other benefits to the public of these habitats.

- (f) Development of hiking, cross-country ski trails, or similar passive recreational facilities are appropriate uses, subject to meeting acceptable management practices. Additionally, snowmobile trails are encouraged to locate here subject to careful planning and attention to other land uses in the Area.

Flood Hazard Area

The Flood Hazard Area consists of a relatively narrow strip of low-lying land bordering the banks of the White River and its associated tributaries. They are important for retaining water that might cause damage or destruction elsewhere. Flood Hazard Areas also often contain the best agricultural lands. 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. Outlined below are planning policies for the Flood Hazard Area.

- (a) Development of lands adjacent to the river should conserve the resource value of the river and the floodplain. Design considerations for projects in the Flood Hazard Area should include:
- sufficient setback for structures and minimal ground disturbance in order to maintain the visual and natural integrity of the stream bank;
 - maintenance and improvement of public access to the river in key areas; and
 - maintenance of the flood storage capacity by having no net fill within the floodplain.
- (b) New structural development, such as the construction of homes and businesses within the limits of the 100-year floodplain is discouraged. Improvements to existing buildings or sites may be acceptable, provided that careful planning is undertaken to insure against loss of property, public endangerment, and increased flooding.
- (c) In consideration of the exceptional resource value of the White River, the preferred land use for the Flood Hazard Area is for passive outdoor recreation, agriculture, or open space.

VI TRANSPORTATION

A. LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION

Bethel's land use pattern over the past four or five decades, similar to the rest of Vermont, has been a steady trend of dispersal into low-density rural areas. This has resulted in a separation by longer and longer distances of where we live, shop, and work. Many residents work and conduct much of their business outside of Bethel in nearby towns. The result of this trend has major implications on our transportation needs and opportunities.

There is a great amount of anecdotal information that describes how our lives now involve more driving, longer trips to work, trips that involve multiple stops on the way, and higher volumes of traffic on what were once quiet back roads. U.S. Census data backs up these conclusions, showing that the average distance for commuters is longer and that a higher percentage of Bethel's workers drive to jobs outside of Bethel compared to 10 or 20 years ago.

If the pattern of low density dispersed growth continues, Bethel will become increasingly dependent on automobile travel and transportation will become more costly. Also, other trends might occur including:

- school bus transportation could increase;
- rural road maintenance costs could increase at a rate faster than increased tax revenues;
- residential development could consume important agricultural and forest land;
- air pollution will increase; and
- roadside scenery could deteriorate as new driveways and structures line back roads and state highways.

Bethel's land use planning can positively impact transportation planning priorities and costs. Bethel can advocate for high-density growth in or near existing growth centers (i.e. Bethel Village). By identifying centers that have good potential for dense development, numerous land uses can be concentrated together and be in walking distance from one another. Dependency on the automobile can be reduced. Additionally, development policies and zoning laws can create more incentives for cluster housing on smaller lots, reducing the transportation costs.

B. CURRENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

State and Local Highways - Presently, the Town of Bethel's highway system consists of approximately 83 miles of roads. Use and function vary from local access roads to minor regional collectors. In addition, the State of Vermont controls 14.3 miles of highways (Routes, 12, 14, and 107 and Interstate 89) within the Town. In sum, there is a total of 97.3 miles of road in Bethel (1996). Eighty percent (80%) of all highway mileage is part of the local system. This

is typical for most small rural Vermont towns. Approximately, 33 miles of Bethel's roads (state and local) have paved surfaces. Overall, road conditions in Bethel range from excellent to fair.

The State uses four classification formulas to distribute financial aid to towns for road repair and maintenance. These classifications are determined jointly by the Agency of Transportation and the Selectboard. Criteria used for the classifications include traffic volumes, road condition, and function. State aid to the Town is distributed on a per mile basis, decreasing from Class 1 to Class 3. No State aid is available for Class 4 roads.

Class 1 roads are the most heavily traveled town roads and are extensions of state highways. For Bethel, this includes Main Street, Church Street, and a portion of Pleasant Street in the village. Class 2 roads are the major town highways and serve oftentimes to link towns and high traffic areas such as village settlements and state highways. For Bethel, there are 11.15 miles of Class 2 roads. These are: Camp Brook Road (6.16 miles), Factory Hill-Randolph Center Road (0.56 miles), North Road (0.89 miles) and Peavine Boulevard (3.54 miles).

Class 3 roads include all town roads not Class 1 or 2 that can be driven under normal conditions all seasons of the year. They represent the "typical back road". Class 3 roads amount to a total of 57 miles. Class 4 roads represent the lowest order of importance to the Town. These roads are not generally maintained by the Town nor plowed in the winter. Some Class 4 roads are legal trails available mainly for pedestrians and recreational access.

The Town is not interested in expending tax dollars on improvements to Class 4 roads. These roads are usually in the poorest state and would require extensive reconstruction in order to bring them up to Class 3 standards. Furthermore, these roads are, in most cases, located in remote areas where major development is discouraged.

Rail Facilities – Bethel is traversed by the New England Central Railroad (NECR) which goes from New London, Connecticut, through White River Junction to Swanton. The NECR line serves both freight and Amtrak passenger traffic. The nearest passenger station is in Randolph. The NECR has approximately four (4) miles of single track within the Town's boundaries.

New England Central's (NECR) major business is in pulp/paper and lumber. The NECR line has picked up and delivered small amounts of lumber and other goods in Bethel and nearby towns. Another challenge facing the NECR line is the in balance between originating traffic and received traffic. This often means empty back-hauls, driving up the cost of rail transport.

In spite of the drawbacks, rail lines nationally are very strong. Historically, more tonnage is being hauled by rail than ever before, however trucks continue to carry the bulk of freight by far. As highways become more congested, rail could become a stronger part of Bethel's and Vermont's transportation infrastructure. Bethel supports preservation of the existing rail infrastructure and its enhancement. The rail line through Bethel could, once again, play an important role in Bethel's economy. Bethel's land and transportation planning should continue to enable expansion of sidings along the line to provide direct access to industries, including the Vermont Casting assembly plant and the lumberyard at Bethel Mills.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities – These modes historically have been given low priority in small towns like Bethel. Very little data exists on the extent of travel by bicyclists and pedestrians. We do know that pedestrian transportation occurs mainly in the village, where people are able to park in one location and visit several businesses within the downtown area, or walk from their residence. Pedestrian facilities are vitally important for those who do not drive, especially children and the elderly.

It should be possible to walk safely within Bethel Village. Sidewalks should be planned within the villages or new growth centers. This could mean setting aside rights-of-way for sidewalks for construction in the future when warranted. Private developers in these areas should be required to incorporate pedestrian facilities into their projects as part of Bethel’s local zoning or subdivision review process.

Bicycling is not considered a practical year round means of transportation due to Bethel’s cold climate and hilly terrain. As noted above, many residents commute to work at distances outside of Bethel, too far for biking. In spite of these limitations, bicycling is an important form of recreational transportation and for short trips, especially by children. Where development density is high, such as in the Village, planning for bicyclists should be considered. This could include bicycle paths, incorporating traffic calming techniques along the major roads or streets to make biking safer, and incorporating wide shoulders along some of the roads to make biking more “user friendly”.

The Bethel Downtown Project is an excellent local initiative in support of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The new parking area allows convenient parking and walking to all downtown destinations.

Scenic Roads – Bethel has numerous scenic roads which exhibit special qualities worth preserving or enhancing. Bethel residents and visitors enjoy their country roads. As development occurs along these roads, the State or the Town oftentimes sees a need to improve them. This could mean the loss of majestic trees, stonewalls, other important roadside features, and once pleasant views for the sake of safety and increased carrying capacity. It is in the interest of Bethel to prudently evaluate the relationship between road improvements and the potential loss of scenery. It is the goal of the Town to maintain or improve its roads in a manner that does not unnecessarily result in a loss of their scenic character. Where major modifications are being proposed to a state or town road, planning should incorporate the scenic attributes of the roadway. The public should have an opportunity to discuss proposed changes with the Agency of Transportation or the Town, as appropriate.

Public Transportation – Public transit service alternatives are needed by people without access to a car or the ability to drive. Public transportation, as an alternative to the car, is limited in Bethel and the immediate area. Stagecoach Transportation Services, Inc. (STSI) offers both a local fixed route and human services transportation to Bethel residents. Vermont Transit Lines provides inter-city services with stops in nearby Randolph with destinations to all major cities and towns throughout the Northeast. Residential and commercial land use development patterns

that concentrate growth within or close by the village can help make public transit alternatives more feasible and useful in the future.

Ride-sharing informally occurs, as evidenced by the high usage of nearby park and ride lots and other parking areas. A statewide study of park and ride users indicates that people like the ride-share concept, especially for commuters working jobs in the Upper Valley Area. One of the most important facilities to promote or maintain for Bethel are well marked, easy-to-find places to park and leave a vehicle for a day. The Town supports the Vermont Agency of Transportation's plans to construct a Park and Ride Area at the Exit 3/Route 107 interchange area.

C. FUTURE HIGHWAY PROJECTS

Camp Brook Road – Until the late 1980's, Camp Brook Road primarily served local traffic, providing access to part of Bethel and to Rochester via a narrow twisting unpaved road. At this time, the road was used very little as an alternative through route between Bethel/Route 12 and Rochester. However, in the late 1980's, improvements to the upper section in Bethel made this road more "truck friendly". This has caused increased traffic that now use this route as a convenient short-cut. This poses a great burden on the Town of Bethel as it is now maintaining a road that has construction standards inadequate to support the increased car and truck volumes that use it. Problems with potholes, cracks, and soft crumbling shoulders, poorly banked curbs, and other conditions are the result. There are also many sections of the road which are simply unsafe for all forms of traffic, particularly heavy trucks, especially during winter storms. The present conditions and design of the road do not match with its present use.

In 1995, the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission conducted a vehicle classification count on the road to determine the volume of trucks using it as a through route. It was determined that daily volumes of trucks amounted to 48 or 6.3% of total traffic. For a town road, truck volume on Camp Brook Road is high and has grown substantially in recent years. (See Camp Brook Road: Transportation Study, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission, 1995.)

The Study, coupled with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VAOT) scoping report, identified options for improvement to the road. The following course of action was recommended and approved by the Selectboard.

- undertake rehabilitation of the lower section of the road, improving the road base drainage systems, and adding guardrails; and
- maintain existing alignment, without widening, to keep the road aesthetically as close as possible to what is there now.

Recently, the Town of Bethel was awarded a construction grant from the VAOT to underwrite some of the improvements noted above. Actual construction will commence during 2001 according to the VAOT.

River Street Bridge – In 1997, the Vermont Agency of Transportation, in cooperation with the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission, initiated a study to prepare an Environmental

Assessment of Alternative Strategies for improving the Vermont Route 12/107 crossing over the White River in Bethel Village. This project involved establishment of a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) consisting of local and area officials. Several public informational meetings were held and alternatives developed

Each of the above alternatives was evaluated by the PAC and building a new truss bridge on alignment was the selected option. This will involve building a new wider, safer, and stronger steel truss bridge in place of the existing bridge, widening the approaches to the bridge and other improvements. Currently, the VAOT is proceeding with a more detailed engineering plan for the project. These plans will be reviewed with local officials and citizens prior to final design and construction.

It should be noted that the selected alternative was contrary to a 1991 vote taken by the voters of the Town of Bethel. Voters selected an off-alignment alternative downstream of the present River Street Bridge.

Routes 100 and 107 – Vermont Routes 100 and 107 are primary state routes across central Vermont linking I-89 to Route 4. They have been identified as an alternative to U.S. Route 4 for Vermont's east/west highway. However, no formal designation has taken place by the VAOT due in part to concerns expressed by residents along the Route 100 and Route 107 corridors. Therefore, U.S. Route 4 remains designated as part of the National Highway System (NHS) and Route 100/107 is classed as a road of lesser importance. Presently, allowable truck length limits on Route 107 are for 48' trailers. The Town does not support formal designation of Routes 100/107 as an east/west truck route across Vermont.

The State of Vermont has no plans for improvements to or reconstruction of Routes 100/107. No projects will be initiated, unless requested locally and regionally through the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission. It has been suggested that Routes 100/107 be considered for NHS designation and be a primary route across Vermont due to constraints and safety issues on Route 4. In April 1999, the Regional Commission's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and town representatives voted not to recommend changing the designation of either road at this time. Both Routes are far from ideal. Over the next couple of years, the Commission, in cooperation with the Agency, will conduct a long-range planning and improvement study on each of these corridors. This will include long-range forecasting of car and truck volumes and recommendations for road widening, access management, passing lanes, and similar activities.

There is much evidence that Vermont inadequately enforces truck safety laws. This has prompted several towns along the Route 100/107 corridor to object to becoming a designated east/west truck route. Improved safety inspections and enforcement overall will divert through trucks to other routes.

Access Management – One concern growing statewide is access management – limiting access on key corridors to preserve capacity. Access management planning can forestall or prevent costly upgrading or replacement of roads and bridges and promote a more desirable and efficient land use pattern complementing the goals and planning principles set forth in this Plan. Through the control of the location and number of curb cuts on Bethel's major roads (Routes 12, 14, and

107), traffic flow can be better managed and major improvements, such as turning lanes, avoided. The greater the number of access points onto a highway, the higher the number of accidents. By combining access points, sharing parking, and constructing interior road systems between uses, congestion can be reduced and function of these roads maintained.

Regulatory authority for access management rests with the VAOT for state roads and the Selectboard for town highways. The law (19 V.S.A. Section 1111) provides, in addition to a reasonable safe access test, that compliance be found with the Town Plan and local regulations related to land use. Therefore, use of this Plan in determining the appropriateness of new access onto a highway should be employed.

GOALS

1. To promote and maintain a transportation system that is safe, efficient, and complements the other goals and planning principles of this Plan.
2. To ensure that future development does not unnecessarily or unreasonably endanger the public investment in the Town and regional transportation systems, including highway, bridges, rail, bike and pedestrian facilities, public transit, and trails.
3. To support and coordinate land use and transportation planning initiatives at the local, regional, and state levels.
4. To minimize transportation energy consumption.

PLANNING POLICIES

1. The Town should maintain current highways, bridges, and related facilities as necessary to ensure the current level of service.
2. The Town, as written in 19 V.S.A. Section 310, is not obligated to maintain Class 4 Highways, excepting bridges and culverts. Before the Town adopts a new road or upgrades an existing highway, the abutting property owners should be responsible for the cost of improving and/or building the road to town specifications. Final decision regarding the nature of the improvement rests with the Selectboard.
3. Given the interest in and benefits from biking, hiking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and similar outdoor recreational activities, the Town should retain Class 4 roads for recreational use, or downgrade their status to a legal trail.
4. If improvements to backroads are needed to accommodate increased traffic or utilities such as electric or telephone lines, the relationship of these improvements to the contributing features of immediate landscape should be evaluated. These improvements should be designed to be compatible with the setting and enhance aesthetic quality, whenever practical.
5. Strip development is not supported as a land use pattern. Such development occurs in a linear path along a right-of-way which often restricts visual and physical access to interior lands and lacks pedestrian amenities, such as sidewalks.
6. Road improvements should only be conducted on roads leading into areas where the Town desires to encourage development. By keeping remote areas less conveniently accessed, the Town is helping keep future residential and non-residential development where most appropriate.

7. Prospective developments should not only evaluate traffic impacts, but also their impacts on other modes of transportation. For example, proposed developments within the downtown or walking distance should consider planning for pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks.
8. Institutional and civic land uses should remain in or adjacent to the village/downtown area or designated areas adjacent to it. These uses include: post offices, public schools, banks, civic buildings, the Town Hall, town offices, senior centers, and retail stores.
9. Curb cuts should be minimized to ensure the proper mobility function and performance of a roadway. Concepts that should be employed in evaluating access for new developments are:
 - limit the number curb cuts per parcel or per linear feet of roadway;
 - rule out direct access onto a primary road, if a reasonable alternative access exists via a secondary road or shared driveway;
 - provide for separation between curb cuts and public road intersections to ensure the efficiency and safety of a roadway; and
 - consolidate or reconfiguring existing curb cuts or access roads to improve or maintain efficiency, safety, and the function of a roadway.
 - require shared access and parking, whenever, feasible;
 - require connecting roads between parcels or prohibit direct parking access from a parking space to an arterial or collector road;
 - encourage use of municipal parking areas or flexible parking standards (i.e. shared parking) to reduce the amount of parking required for individual developments; and
 - require sidewalks or reserve land for future sidewalks along roads in the villages or developing areas, and between buildings and parking areas.
10. Any plan for improvements to Routes 12, 14, and 107 should not unduly compromise the historic, scenic, rural, and cultural characteristics of these routes. Economic development objectives or new growth, creating increased demand for upgrading of these routes need to be balanced with the preservation of Bethel's downtown, other built-up areas or planned expansion areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. Continue participation in the Regional Transportation Planning Program through the Two Rivers - Ottauquechee Regional Commission and the TAC.
2. Participate, along with neighboring communities in the White River Valley, in the long-range planning for possible improvements to Routes 100 and 107.
3. Consider incorporating access management policies and standards into the Bethel Zoning Regulations and Subdivision Regulations to ensure better control over developments potentially impacting the function and character of Bethel's roadways.
4. Invest in appropriate improvements to parking, pedestrian, and transit facilities in Bethel village to enable it to continue to function as a town center.
5. Investigate areas suitable for high-density development in close proximity to existing or planned infrastructure to maximize efficiency in transportation facilities.

V PUBLIC UTILITIES AND FACILITIES

A. BACKGROUND

One of the primary goals of this Plan is to avoid the ill effects of scattered development and to preserve the rural landscape. Another is to promote Bethel village as the town center with a densely settled area for residential, civic, service, and commercial uses. The availability, timing, and location of public investments throughout the Town directly affect future land use patterns. An area with a full complement of public services, such as water supply, sewage disposal, roads, electric service, and similar utilities or services will attract private investment benefiting the entire community. Conversely, inadequate or poorly planned capital investments will lead to a land use pattern that is contrary to the goals of this Plan and at levels uneconomic to the long-term well being of the Town.

The following sections consist of an inventory and analysis of the principal utilities and facilities serving the Town.

B. HIGHWAYS

The Town of Bethel Highway Department presently has the necessary equipment to adequately maintain town highways and bridges. Major equipment includes three 7-yard dump trucks with plows, one 1-ton truck, two road graders, one front-end loader, and one bulldozer. All equipment is presently in good condition. The Town annually appropriates monies to an Equipment Replacement Fund which is used to replace older equipment. Currently, \$40,000 is placed into this fund annually. The Town Garage, located just outside of the village on Sand Hill Road, houses the equipment and is adequate for current needs. A separate salt storage shed is located on this site as well.

In recent years, the Town has replaced its fuel storage tanks so as to be in compliance with State underground tank storage tank laws. While these facilities are adequate for the present level of service, an increase in town highway maintenance duties would more than likely require additional equipment and workers.

C. EMERGENCY SERVICES

Fire Protection - The Town is served by a single volunteer fire department that responds to fires and other emergencies in Bethel and neighboring towns. Neighboring communities' departments are called in on large fires requiring outside resources. The Bethel Fire Department is located in a new station house on Pleasant Street (VT 12) near the school. This space should be adequate for the foreseeable future. Water pressure and the location of hydrants throughout town are adequate.

The fire Department is adequately staffed by volunteers. The Department's emergency vehicles – 2001 Eagle One pumper, 1981 Chevrolet First Response van, 1973 Maxim Fire Truck, 1976 International Water Tanker, 1954 General Pumper and 1964 Dodge 4-Wheel Drive Equipment Vehicle – are considered adequate to meet the needs of the Town for the foreseeable future, with minor modifications.

The Department has developed a five-year capital budget that addresses the need to upgrade equipment.

Law Enforcement -The Town of Bethel does not need a full time police force, and none is contemplated for the next five years. Currently, appointed constables provide limited police security and traffic control services when needed. All other police functions are performed by the Windsor County Sheriff or Vermont State Police, Troop "E" which is located off Route 107 immediately south of the Bethel/Royalton Town Line in Royalton.

Emergency Medical Services - Medical emergencies are handled well by the private, non-profit White River Valley Ambulance, Inc. located in Bethel. They have three ambulances and a rescue truck with extraction equipment that are fairly new. The closest hospital is Gifford Medical Center, located in Randolph. Medivac services are available by the DHART helicopter.

Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Response - The Town has just completed a Rapid Response Plan (RRP) that covers the procedures for Bethel's response to a disaster. In brief, the Selectboard will formally declare a state of emergency in the event of a disaster that the Selectboard feels is beyond town forces to adequately cope with. This declaration will be faxed to Vermont Emergency Management and a local emergency operation center will be set up in the Town Office. The Town Office should be equipped with backup power so that it can function during an emergency. Delbert Cloud, the Town Manager, is the Town's Emergency Management Coordinator and would be assisted by several people who have been identified in the RRP in coordinating the Town's response to a disaster.

In the event that emergency shelters are needed, the Town has identified the high school, Vermont Castings, and the St. Anthony's Parish Catholic Church for such use. None of these currently have backup power and this is needed for these sites to properly function during an emergency.

In order to avoid disasters as much as possible, the Town should continue to develop an all-hazards plan which will also address mitigation and education needs. In the short term, the Town should ensure that all new private roads and driveways are properly constructed so that they do not contribute to damage on town roads from runoff. The Selectboard should also review the Town of Bethel's codes and standards policy for improvements to transportation infrastructure to ensure that it is appropriate for the Town and will serve the Town well when applied by the Federal Emergency Management Agency following the next disaster. The proposed density, type, and location of future land uses set forth elsewhere in this Plan should take into account the predictable consequences of any additional buildings in the floodplain, on steep slopes, or on inadequate roads that could further aggravate flooding or require increased efforts and expenditures by the Town for emergency response.

D. MUNICIPAL OFFICES

The Town Offices are located in the former Creamery Building on South Main Street in the village. Space in the building is used for the Town Clerk, Town Manager, and other town officers. A small conference room is available for meetings. This facility is inadequate for present needs. The building is too small to adequately house all town governmental functions. Off-street parking is very limited as well as meeting space. The building is not in compliance with the requirements of the American Disabilities Act and other public building requirements. Expansion of the building on this site is limited due to the lack of land.

In 1999, the Selectboard engaged the services of an architect to evaluate the feasibility of retrofitting the former Town Hall/Fire Station for town offices. This building, located on Main Street, was constructed in 1891. It is included on the National Register of Historic Places and currently the upstairs is occupied by the Bethel Masons. Presently, architectural and engineering plans are being developed by the Town Hall Finance Committee (also known as the Friends of the Town Hall) for consideration by the Selectboard. This has involved numerous meetings with townspeople and the Bethel Masons who rent the space in the building. During 2001, the Committee hopes to have completed its work and to finalize its report with recommendations to the Selectboard. No other alternative locations for town offices are being considered by the Town at this time.

E. PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The Bethel Public Library (1893), located on Main Street, is owned and operated by the Bethel Library Association. The Association is administered by a Board of Trustees. The Association is a non-profit corporation and receives funding from private foundations and individuals. In addition, the Town appropriates funds in order for the Library to remain eligible as part of the State Library System and to enable the Association to receive grants and other benefits. The Library employs a librarian and offers several programs for the community. The Library presently serves the immediate needs of the community. It, however, does not meet public library baseline guidelines recommended by the Vermont Department of Libraries.

F. RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND PUBLIC LANDS

Pleasant Street Recreation Park - The Town of Bethel owns and maintains a community recreational facility on Pleasant Street with the village. This facility is situated on an eleven-acre parcel acquired by the Town in 1972. The facility consisted of an asphalt-lined swimming pool, approximately 350 feet in circumference, one tennis court, and restrooms. In 1974, the pool was improved with the addition of a bathhouse and a modern filtration system.

Further improvements were made in 1978. The old tennis courts were removed and replaced with two new courts. The parking area was expanded with space for approximately thirty cars, improvements made to the access road, and new grass provided for a recreational area. Approximately four acres of the parcel are dedicated for the facility and improvements. The remainder or approximately seven acres are located on a heavily wooded slope to the rear of the parcel. These lands are open for hiking and picnicking.

Church Street Common - The Town owns a small park on the south side of Church Street in the village. This one-and-one-quarter acre lot serves as a “town common”. Improvements consist of benches, a water fountain, night lighting, and a band shell erected in 1986. This "Common" is used for summer concerts organized by the Bethel Council on the Arts and for other open-air gatherings.

Peavine Park - This 3.5 acre Park is located at the confluence of the Third Branch and Main Branch of the White River. Facilities include a riverside picnic area, a small gazebo, and parking. Peavine Park is open to the public and is frequently used by civic organizations for events. Water and electricity are available on site. Direct access to the river is provided at two locations. The Bethel Business Association has been active in developing and maintaining the Park. A well building for the Town’s water supply is also located at the Park.

River Street Bridge Access - Directly opposite Peavine Park and across the River is a 1.8 acre parcel owned by the Town of Bethel. Access to this parcel is from River Street on the westerly end of the Bridge. This site fronts on the River and is used as a place for fishing and canoe access.

Municipal Forests - In addition to the above recreational facilities, the Town owns three municipal forests. These are a 230-acre tract in the Camp Brook area, a 160-acre parcel near Lilliesville, and a 70-acre tract east of Bethel Village. These forests are frequently used by the public for hiking, hunting, and similar uses. The Town periodically conducts timber harvesting in consultation with the Windsor County Forester.

G. SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

The Towns of Bethel and Royalton have jointly owned and operated a solid waste facility off Waterman Road in Royalton since 1970. Situated on a 22-acre parcel, it served as landfill until closed in the early 1990’s and capped in 1993 in accordance with State closure standards.

In 1993, the two towns designed and constructed a new facility for this site which is in operation today. This consists of a recycling building and a sheltered transfer station for receiving and loading residual wastes. In conjunction with neighboring towns, comprising the White River Solid Waste Alliance, Bethel and Royalton hosts a household hazardous waste program and other special collection events as necessary. The Town of Bethel does not provide curbside pickup. Collection services are handled by the private sector.

Current solid waste management facilities are adequate for the immediate needs of the community.

H. WASTEWATER TREATMENT

The Town owns and operates a wastewater treatment plant with a collection system. This system became operational in 1988 and is overseen by a certified plant operator employed by the Town. The system consists of a secondary level treatment plant employing oxidation canals and ultra-violet disaffecting systems. The plant is complemented by four pumping stations located along the collection system. The service area for the system is within the built-up area of the village and immediately adjoining residential areas except the westerly side of the main branch of the White River (River Street).

Design capacity of the plant is 115,000 gallons per day. As of April, 1999 reserve capacity of the plant was approximately 33,300 gallons per day. Bethel's wastewater treatment facilities are managed by the Board of Sewer Commissioners (Selectboard) who have the responsibility of allocating sewer reserves on a case-by case basis. Reserve capacity allocation priorities and principals are set forth in the Wastewater Reserve Capacity Allocation Ordinance adopted by the Commissioners in November, 1990. The Town of Bethel wastewater treatment facilities are adequate for the current and planned needs of the community. No major capital expansions or extensions of the system are planned. It should be noted that during the summer of 2000 the treatment facilities experienced breakdowns for unknown reasons, prompting discharge levels in excess of State water quality standards. This matter has, however, been corrected by the Town and its engineers.

Bio-solids resulting from the facility are managed according to the Town's permit issued by the State. It is the practice of the Selectboard to manage the treatment and disposal of bio-solids using the best available technology.

In addition to the municipal sewage system noted above which serves primarily the village area of the Town, privately owned on-site, underground septic systems cover the remaining areas. Bethel has a Town Health Regulation which regulates the design and location of these systems and requires a permit prior to construction of any disposal facility. All facilities must be designed and approved by a certified Site Technician or Professional Engineer. Review and approvals are conducted by the Town Health Office or Board of Health. In addition, State Subdivision Regulations require that new lots under 10 acres demonstrate compliance with these regulations and that permits be granted prior to construction or creation of a lot.

I. WATER SUPPLY

The Bethel village area is served by a municipally owned water supply system. This system was privately operated until 1948 when it was acquired by the Town. Groundwater serves as the source of supply for the community from two gravel packed wells. They have a combined yield of 420 gallons per minute and 604,000 gallons per day. Water is stored in two 250,000 gallon reservoirs. One is located east of the village and was constructed in 1957. Another, constructed in 1988, is a two-celled unit and is located on a hill near Valley Motors and G-W Plastics. This construction project included installation of new water mains connecting the reservoir to the well located across the road from the school.

In 1982, water recharge areas surrounding the two gravel packed wells were mapped by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. These are referred to as Aquifer Protection Areas or underground regions determined to encompass water recharge or primary sources of groundwater to the wells. The Bethel Planning Commission is presently developing a Source Protection Plan for the water supply system. Such a plan is required by the State Water Supply Rules and consists of an inventory and assessment of potential sources or threatening activities in the recharge area and a plan for minimizing existing or future sources of contamination. Upon completion, this Plan will be submitted to the State and adopted by the Town as its official protection plan. Land use activities within the Protection Areas should be carefully evaluated or controlled to minimize the potential threat to our water supply. A map delineating the aquifers is included as part of this Plan.

The water distribution system serves the village center and areas adjoining the village. Portions of the distribution system are old and inadequate for the current and prospective water supply requirements within the service area. In 1999, the Town upgraded approximately 3600 feet of distribution line to an eight-inch diameter ductile iron pipe along Church Street and north along Route 12 to the Fire Station. Other sections of the system are planned for upgrading. This includes a replacement cover to the storage reservoir, pump rebuilding, and additional line replacements.

Total average daily use is estimated at 285,000 gallons per day. Approximately 315 households connected to the system using 175,000 gallons per day or 62% of the total flow. The remainder is industrial or commercial users.

Water supply in areas not served by the municipal water system is from individual wells or springs.

J. EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

Providing quality education to Bethel's children is a fundamental community goal. A successful school system depends on up-to-date facilities, dynamic administrators and teachers, involved parents and challenging educational programs. Planning decisions on the type and extent of future growth have implications on the current and future ability of Bethel's schools to provide quality services.

The Bethel school system cover grades Kindergarten to 12. The schools are situated on a 38 acre parcel, one half mile northwest of the village center. One building houses both the elementary school and the high school. The elementary school and the high school are physically separated within the building, but share the use of common facilities, including the gymnasium, cafeteria, and music room.

Whitcomb High School was constructed in 1958. In 1972, two science rooms and library/media center were added to the school, increasing the total floor area of the high school to 30,000 square feet. The School houses fifteen classrooms, including an art room and a large technology education room. The portion of the school building used for the Bethel Elementary School

(grades K-6) was constructed in 1971. This brick structure is 25,000 square feet in area, houses ten classrooms, and a large resources area which includes the library and a music room.

Restructuring efforts within the school system and the way educational programs are to be delivered in the next decade have created the need to consider additional space for classrooms and other facilities. Assessment of space needs is an ongoing effort and may result in plans for major renovations. Whitcomb High School and the Elementary School enrollment histories are listed below. The high school enrollments are influenced by tuition-paying students from the neighboring towns of Stockbridge and Pittsfield. During the past few years, students from these towns have accounted for approximately one third of the total high school student enrollment.

**Whitcomb School Enrollment
1993-1999 (Bethel Annual Report, 1999)**

1999 - 226
1997 - 227
1995 - 206
1993 - 197

**Bethel Elementary School Enrollment
1993-1999 (Bethel Annual Report, 1999)**

1999 - 191
1997 - 208
1995 - 260
1993 - 238

As can be seen, the elementary student population has decreased over the past several years. Notwithstanding, space is still needed for instructional space and for other programs. It is expected that in future years' enrollments levels will increase, prompting a need to evaluate the adequacy of the elementary school. If and when expanded facilities are required, the existing site appears to have sufficient space to accommodate expansion.

K. CEMETERIES

The Town owns and maintains five public cemeteries. These are the Cherry Hill Cemetery on Christian Hill, the East Bethel Cemetery on Route 14, Fairview Cemetery off Route 12, Gilead Cemetery, and Lympus Cemetery. Lots are available in the Cherry Hill and Fairview Cemeteries. Expansion of the other cemeteries is limited. The Town annually appropriates funds for maintenance, including mowing and trimming. The cemeteries are overseen by the Selectboard. There are no immediate plans for major improvements to these cemeteries nor acquisition of additional land.

L. OTHER FACILITIES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service operates the White River National Fish Hatchery on the White River westerly of the village area off Route 107. This facility has been located here since the 1970's and is open to the public at various times during the year. Additionally, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources owns and maintains Ansel Pond, located at the intersection of Christian Hill Road and Sanders Road. There are no immediate plans for expansion of either of these facilities.

GOALS

1. To encourage public investments in governmental facilities, services, and lands which support existing and future development within the village area and other designated growth areas.
2. To foster a partnership between public investment planning and implementation activities and the private sector in a manner which advances the goals and objectives of this Plan.
3. To promote effective, efficient, and accessible public services, including schools, highways, and recreational facilities.
4. To ensure that the expansion or construction of new utilities and facilities do not impose an undue financial burden on governmental resources.
5. To oppose new development which causes an unreasonable burden on the ability of the Town or School District to provide municipal or educational services.
6. To support innovative and stable sources of public facility funding sources to supplement traditional resources which have become limited or no longer available.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Major public investments in schools, libraries, sewage treatment works, and water facilities should be located within existing or planned settlement areas identified in this Plan and designed to complement the recommended future land use patterns expressed in this Plan.
2. Upgrade and improve the existing water supply systems and wastewater treatment facilities when such proposals enhance the viability of the Village to function as the community center.
3. Land development within public wellhead protection areas should be prohibited when it would pose a threat to potable water supplies.
4. Public investments in highways, water and wastewater treatment systems which prompt sprawl, strip development, or scattered development inconsistent with this Plan are discouraged.
5. Water conservation measures and programs to reduce the water demand, thereby extending the useful life and efficiency of water and sewer facilities are encouraged.

6. New development should be discouraged when it is determined that the necessary governmental facilities are unavailable or have not been planned for as part of the Town's capital budgeting process or when new development places an excessive or uneconomic demand on such services. As a means to mitigate such unreasonable burdens, use of project phasing or similar methods are acceptable alternatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. The Town and School District are encouraged to continue their efforts on capital improvement plans and budgets. Periodic consultation with the Planning Commission on the land use implications of major capital investments is recommended.
2. The Town should continue to support efforts to promote and enhance Bethel's downtown as the center for community services, commerce, and governmental services.
3. Relocate the Bethel Town Offices to a site that provides sufficient space for the long-term governmental needs of the community. Such a site should be within the village area such as the Town Hall.

VIII NATURAL RESOURCES

A. BACKGROUND

The citizens of Bethel desire to maintain the rural character of the Town while allowing appropriate development compatible with the natural resources goals and policies outlined below. Bethel's forested, farmed, and open land resources as well as its water and wildlife resources are key elements in defining rural character. The quality and quantity of Bethel's natural resources and the character of place they create are primary ingredients in maintaining a healthy economy for the Town.

It shall be the fundamental goal of this Plan to sustain and enhance the integrity and diversity of the natural resource system within the Town. In advancing this goal, it is the policy of the Town to develop and implement practices that conserve these resources and to insure that future land use activities are not detrimental to the environment.

B. GROUNDWATER

The primary water supply to the Town is and will continue to be groundwater from wells. Accordingly, protective and preventative measures to ensure the quality and sustainability of this resource are critical. The quality of Bethel's groundwater is generally excellent; however, there is a risk for groundwater contamination from a variety of sources. These include hazardous waste sites, failing septic systems, old industrial sites, town dumps, industrial floor drains, poor agricultural practices, road salt, leaking underground fuel tanks, and landfill leachate.

GOALS

1. To preserve or enhance the quality and quantity of groundwater sources and their associated resource protection values between user equitably.
2. To evaluate potential groundwater impacts associated with development and to regulate land use activities in accordance with acceptable management practices.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Major water withdrawals should be evaluated to ensure that aquifers are not significantly depleted and that water is allocated between users equitably.
2. Land use activities, which have a relatively high risk or threat to groundwater quality, must be carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis to ensure that they are located, designed, and maintained in a manner as to minimize the loss of groundwater quality.
3. All new, expanded, or altered sewage disposal systems shall be evaluated using technical standards and permitting requirements promulgated by the State and Town.

4. Class One groundwater resources should be permanently protected from incompatible land uses including subsurface waste disposal systems, underground storage tanks, toxic wastes, and similar hazards. Class One groundwater consists of the areas identified in the Town's Source Protection Plan (SPP) for its public water supply system and other areas identified as suitable for a public water supply by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Uses deemed acceptable within Class One areas are winter outdoor recreational activities, low density pasturing of livestock, forestry, and similar passive uses with limited human activity.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. The Town, upon completion and acceptance of the Bethel Source Protection Plan, should seek to implement its recommendations to limit or prohibit land use activities that unduly threaten the resource.
2. The Planning Commission, as part of future revisions to the Bethel Zoning Regulations, should consider development of an Aquifer Recharge Overlay Zoning District wherein all uses proposed within the District would be subjected to close examination as to their likely impacts on the resource.
3. The Planning Commission or Conservation Commission, in cooperation with the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, and other resource agencies, should identify and map significant aquifer protection areas in Bethel. New or revised plan policies should be developed as necessary to protect and monitor land use development activities on these resources.

D. SURFACE WATER

The quality and character of surface waters in Bethel are among the primary components of quality of life deemed important to the Town. The White River, and its associated tributaries, comprise the major surface water body for the Bethel. Overall water quality of the River is excellent. High water quality attracts users of the River and thus provides a source of income for many town residents and businesses. The White River is classified as a Class B water. Class B waters are managed for aesthetic values, recreation, public water supply with treatment, high quality habitat for biota, fish and wildlife, and agricultural uses. Notwithstanding the above, a portion of the White River downstream of the village area is designated as a Class B "Waste Management Zone" by the Agency to enable treated wastewater from the Bethel Sewer Plant to be lawfully discharged into this section of the River. Within this Zone water conditions must not create a health standard nor constitute a barrier to the passage of fish or interfere with any existing use of the River.

Non-point pollution sources represent the remaining primary pollution sources of water quality impairment in the White River now that wastewater treatment facilities have been constructed to treat point pollution sources. Sources of non-point pollution are agricultural runoff, streambank erosion, removal of riparian vegetation, upstream impoundments, land development, and highway runoff. It is in the public interest to manage land use activities within the watershed of the White River in a manner as to maintain or enhance the benefits and values of the water quality objectives set forth above and as consistent with the water standards promulgated by the

State of Vermont. Future land use decisions should evaluate the probable water quality impacts associated with each development proposal.

GOALS

1. To maintain or improve surface water quality and quantity for the purposes of recreation, and aquatic habitat within the watershed of the White River.
2. To support the on-going designation of Class B “Waste Management Zone” for the main stem of the River for the disposal and treatment of effluent from Bethel’s wastewater treatment facilities.
3. To support ongoing monitoring and educational programs for improvement of surface water quality throughout the community and to participate in activities which are intended to maintain or improve water quality.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Water based recreation, fisheries, and aquatic habitat are high priorities for conservation. Decisions affecting these resources should reflect the public’s high interest in the use and enjoyment of rivers and streams.
2. The Town supports efforts to abate non-point source pollution affecting water quality in the rivers, streams, and ponds in Bethel. Priority areas for abatement include agricultural runoff, sedimentation and erosion resulting from construction and logging, and failing on-site wastewater disposal systems.
3. Vegetated buffer strips should be maintained along the White River, its tributaries, and streams to filter runoff, stabilize banks and otherwise protect and maintain water quality and aquatic habitat.
4. Upland watersheds should be predominantly maintained in forest or passive recreational use to ensure high water quality within streams and the White River.
5. The creation of intermittent or diverted stream flows should be allowed only upon finding that these actions do not adversely impact aquatic communities, and stream functions.

E. WETLANDS

Wetlands are vital components in maintaining ecological integrity. The benefits of wetlands include flood and storm water storage, maintenance of surface and ground water quality, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities for fishing, hunting, and bird watching. The State of Vermont defines wetlands as areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support significant vegetation or aquatic life that depend on saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. The State regulates land use activities affecting Class 1 and Class 2 Wetlands in order to protect their values and functions and to ensure that there is no net loss of these. Class 1 and 2 Wetlands have been mapped by the State of Vermont and maps are available from the Agency of Natural Resources or the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission.

GOALS

1. To identify and protect Class 1 and 2 Wetlands and similar wetlands in a manner as to achieve their functions and values as well as to ensure no net loss of such wetlands.
2. To implement land use strategies in a manner as to avoid impacts associated with development of wetlands.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Development should be prohibited within Class 1 and Class 2 wetlands and an undisturbed buffer strip of vegetated cover maintained around the delineated edge of the wetland to prevent direct discharges into these wetlands. The width of the buffer strip should be determined using the standards and practices developed by Agency of Natural Resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. The Planning Commission, as part of its next revision of the Zoning Regulations and Subdivision Regulations, should evaluate the adequacy of these regulations to enhance and protect wetlands. Where necessary, revisions to these bylaws should be developed.

F. WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Bethel's forests, fields, marshes, streams, riverbanks, and ponds are homes for a variety of species and vegetation. There are areas in Bethel which provide critical habitats for certain species including white tailed deer, birds, black bear, and bobcat. Every new development in town results in an incremental loss or change to wildlife habitats. Sensitive land use planning can lessen or mitigate the impact on wildlife habitats. For example, housing development or excessive logging can have detrimental effects on deer wintering areas. If an area proposed for development encompasses a deeryard, utilizing certain planning strategies can lessen the impact on the area. Should the entire area be winter cover, clustering of homes within an area of the project site will still enable deer to retain most of their habitat. State biologists are available to work with landowners and developers interested in planning projects in ways that reduce the impact on critical wildlife habitats, rare and endangered species, and other critical natural communities.

GOALS

1. To maintain or enhance the natural diversity and population wildlife by maintaining critical habitats, large blocks of forest and wildlife corridors.
2. To promote an environment for rare and endangered species to function.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Development should be designed and sited to preserve contiguous areas of critical wildlife habitat, such as productive bear habitat and deer wintering areas, and to maintain connecting links between such blocks. Use of cluster planning concepts or similar mitigation measures are encouraged and should be incorporated into the planning decision-making process.
2. Large contiguous tracts of forest should be managed so as to maintain a diversity of ages and species of tree necessary for shelter and food supply for deer, black bear, and other large mammals as well as birds.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. In cooperation with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and other conservation agencies or organizations, the Town should consider undertaking a more detail inventory of wildlife and critical habitats as well as rare and endangered species. Revisions to zoning regulations and use of land conservation techniques to address development options should be considered following the inventory.

G. AIR QUALITY

The quality of the air in Bethel is excellent. Sometimes taken for granted, clean air is a fundamental component to good health and the environment. In Bethel the most likely threat to air quality is a result of conditions from outside of the Region and in other states to the west. However, large developments could cause pollution concentrations in selected areas in Bethel. Responsible local planning and development review can reduce the potential for threats to air quality affecting Bethel.

GOALS

1. To maintain or improve air quality standards consistent with State and Federal laws.
2. To evaluate large developments or subdivisions for their potential affects on air quality.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Large new commercial and industrial projects should be reviewed to insure that Bethel's air quality is not degraded.

H. MINERAL RESOURCES

Maintenance of sustainable quantities of gravel, sand, rock, and other minerals are essential to development as well as for state and local highways. It is in the interest of Bethel to enable the utilization of these resources when such uses do not unduly threaten or significantly inhibit or conflict with other existing land uses or are not in conflict with other stated goals or planning principles in this Plan.

Issues incidental to mineral extraction include creation of excessive dust and noise, increased truck traffic through residential neighborhoods, surface and groundwater contamination, degradation of the site, loss of scenic character in the immediate area, and undue deterioration on state and town roads.

GOALS

1. To enable appropriate utilization of mineral resources.
2. To accommodate the extraction and processing of the resource where such activities are appropriately managed.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Mineral extraction and processing facilities should be planned, constructed, and managed:
 - (a) so as not to unduly impact the character of existing or planned uses within the vicinity of the site, including scenic resources;
 - (b) to provide direct access to Class III or better highways;
 - (c) to not unduly interfere with the function and safety of existing road systems serving the project site nor unreasonably endanger the public's investment in these facilities;
 - (d) to not unduly impact the continued use or function of agricultural or forestry operations, and historic buildings or districts; and
 - (e) to minimize any adverse effects on water quality, fish or wildlife habitats.
2. Mineral extraction operations should be required to rehabilitate the site, either as needed during use or before closing, by providing replacement of soil cover, re-vegetation and reducing slopes in areas that are excessively steep.
3. Projects that result in an undue adverse visual impact on scenic resources or do not address plans for site restoration or rehabilitation should be prohibited.

IX HISTORIC AND SCENIC RESOURCES

A. BACKGROUND

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.

A community survey conducted by the Commission in June 1999 identified those resources or features that added to the quality of life in Bethel and how important they were to the future of the Town. Retention of our small town rural character was determined to be very important. Rural character consists not only of undeveloped land but how groups of buildings are arranged on the landscape in a comfortable and familiar fashion. The Commission believes that conservation of buildings and landscapes serves a purpose of maintaining rural character.

Bethel Village is a major resource for the Town, lending a major element to the visual character of the community. The downtown area with its stores, homes, and public buildings and land comprise a central focal point to the whole Town. Studies have shown that the village center is the place to go to relate to others in the community, to shop, attend meetings or church. It is important for people living in rural areas of town as it helps define their sense of place. Likewise, it is important for people living within the village to have a sense of the surrounding sparsely settled countryside with its farms, homes, fields, and forests. This balance between countryside and village, between busy places and quiet spaces, is important to all within the community in terms of giving all a sense of belonging to a community.

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.

GOALS

1. To preserve and enhance historic buildings and sites where there is a clear public interest including the Town Hall.
2. To promote sensitive economic development in historic areas such as in Bethel village.
3. To set forth design guidelines to be used by those involved in the review and preparation of development proposals as a means of ensuring the conservation of historic, scenic, and cultural resources.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Future development within or adjacent to historic buildings or sites of recognized significance should be permitted when the design of the project fits the context of the dominant character of the immediate area.
2. Restoration and adaptive reuse of historic buildings or sites should not significantly diminish the distinguishing qualities of the buildings or sites.
3. Unnecessary destruction or removal of recognized or documented historic buildings, structures, or sites are discouraged.
4. Public improvements such as bridge replacement or rehabilitation, street widening, roadway reconstruction, signage, utility distribution systems, and outdoor lighting should be designed to avoid unnecessary degradation of historic places or sites. Such public investments should be planned in consultation with local and state officials, including the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation, to ensure consistency with its planning objectives and programs.
5. An integral scenic element of the Bethel's countryside is the extensive network of roads. These roads, particularly Class 3 town roads, are characterized by relatively narrow roadways of diverse and contrasting features in close proximity to the road itself. These features combined provide a unique visual experience and an awareness of the landscape. With some exception for arterial roads, it is goal of the community to retain these special features. Improvements to roads of high scenic value should be undertaken with consideration of the special scenic qualities inherent to the roadway and roadway fringe. Substantial modifications or off-alignment options that unnecessarily destroy the special characteristics of such roadways are not consistent with the Plan. Use of design standards appropriate to the functional classification of the road is encouraged.

6. Archeological resources in town should be maintained as key components of our heritage.
7. As a means of maintaining our scenery, the following design elements should generally be employed in planning for development, and especially for areas immediately adjacent to Route 107 and Route 12:
 - design buildings or structures so that they are reasonably compatible with the traditional patterns, scale, size, bulk, and form of existing building or structures;
 - locate buildings and structures away from highly visible ridgelines to a lower backdrop on a hillside;
 - break up large parking areas into smaller lots with ample landscaping or screening from off-site views, and locate the project on less scenic areas of the site.
 - place street trees which act as buffers between traffic arteries and internal drives;
 - layout the project site to allow for coordinated future use of the entire parcel;
 - employ screening plans for visually objectionable features on the site; and
 - minimize curb cuts onto public highways and promote the use of access drives.
8. The Town acknowledges the use of the Town's ridges for telecommunication towers and related facilities only when such uses are undertaken in a manner as not to adversely affect scenic or wildlife resources. To minimize conflict with scenic values, facility design and construction should employ the following principles:
 - be sited in areas not highly visible to the traveling public, or residential areas, historic districts, and public use areas or outdoor recreation areas such as trails, roads, or water bodies;
 - be located in forested areas or be sufficiently landscaped to screen the lower section of towers and related ground features from public vantage points;
 - avoid peaks or ridges which function as regional focal points;
 - be co-located on existing towers unless due diligence efforts demonstrate that such an alternative is not technically feasible; and
 - be constructed so as to be readily removed from the site by the owner following a period of disuse or abandonment.
9. Projects outdoor lighting should be designed to minimize glare, and to not directly light beyond the boundaries of the area to be illuminated or onto adjacent properties. Excessively high lighting levels in rural or very low residential areas are discouraged. Project planners should give due consideration to the guidelines set forth in the "*Outdoor Lighting Manual for Vermont Municipalities*" published by the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (1996).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. To enable a more complete understanding and evaluation of scenic resources, the Planning Commission or Conservation Commission (if one is formed) should inventory and analyze scenic resource areas throughout the Town. This effort should be done in consultation with the townspeople. Following completion, this section of the Plan should be reviewed and perhaps amended.
2. The Planning Commission should consider incorporating a lighting section into the Bethel Zoning Regulations to cover outdoor lighting installations.

3. The Planning Commission should continue to support efforts to promote downtown Bethel as the center for economic and civic activity. Efforts should continue to strengthen the viability of the village as the town center through work with business owners, Bethel Business Association, local officials, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission and other organizations.

X AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

A. BACKGROUND

Agriculture and forestry are key elements that define the character of Bethel. However, the farming and timber industries have changed. This poses difficult challenges not only to landowners, but also for those who desire a rural lifestyle and the working landscape. The amount of land devoted to farming in Bethel has decreased over the years. The number of dairy farms shipping milk in Bethel in 1999 was five.

While overall farm numbers have dropped, the size and production of the farms remaining has increased. At the other end of the scale, small and part-time farm pursuits have increased throughout Vermont. These include lamb, beef, vegetables, maple syrup, and Christmas trees, all of which have kept some operations going.

In most areas of Vermont, land parcels are increasingly being subdivided into smaller lots, some of which threaten the viability of forestry. This trend has been more evident in areas closer to Vermont's major towns and cities. This trend of moving land out of forest use to other uses will continue particularly where development suitability and road access is good. Another factor affecting the long-term sustainability of forestry is the relatively high level of taxation on the land compared to the low rate of return on the investment. Compounding the problem are Federal and State estate tax laws which can place family landowners into financial predicaments where they need to subdivide or develop forestland in order to cover taxes.

Vermont's current use taxation program has helped ease the burden on Bethel's farms and timber landowners. The level of enrollments and number of parcels participating statewide, as well as in Bethel, have increased steadily since the inception of the Current Use Appraisal Program in 1980. In 1994 there were approximately 9,250 acres of land enrolled in the Program in Bethel consisting of 85 parcels. Of this, 8,000 acres (86%) were in forestry use and the remainder or 1,250 acres (14%) were in agricultural use. Forestry is a significant part of the area's economy, providing jobs for the lumber and wood products industries. Agriculture continues to employ area residents, providing food products, keeping local money in the local economy, providing open space and scenic views, and continuing a land use tradition characteristic of Bethel.

Local planning should help to sustain agriculture and forestry. The goal should not be to just conserve the resource but work to reduce the overall tax burdens facing large property owners. This is not only the way to keep the land open, but the community realizes that industries are critical to the economy and social well-being of Bethel.

GOALS

1. To encourage wise use and management of the Town's agricultural and forestry resources, to maintain their environmental integrity, and to protect their unique and fragile natural features.
2. To protect rural agricultural resources from unplanned or poorly designed land development.
3. To employ planning and taxation principles which sustain agriculture and forestry land, and their associated industries.
4. To promote agriculture and forestry in those areas of Bethel where they are the predominant land uses and where soils, site conditions, and other factors enable them to remain economically viable.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Where contiguous areas of farming or forestry exist, fragmentation of these areas into small lots or uses is discouraged.
2. Major subdivisions or tract developments on prime agricultural land or quality timberland should be discouraged. Limited residential or non-residential development or expansion into these areas may be acceptable if laid out and planned at a density so that they conserve a major portion of meadowland or woodland.
3. New land development should be sited to promote retention of forestland. To minimize conflicts between forestry/wildlife uses and other uses, project should be designed with the following in mind:
 - use of the cluster residential planning concept where intensive development of a tract is an acceptable alternative when balanced by conservation of land for open space; and
 - in areas exhibiting highly scenic or sensitive landscapes, placement of buildings and structures should be done to minimize visual disruption of its natural appearance.
4. Construction of utilities or roads should skirt tracts of productive agricultural land rather than to divide them.
5. Agricultural and forestland form physical separations between Bethel's villages and hamlets, supporting the Town's traditional settlement pattern. Tangible efforts should be made to promote and preserve this balance of open and forested space with a compact settlement pattern.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. The Planning Commission, as part of an update to the Bethel Zoning Regulations, should evaluate the regulations to determine what provisions, if any, might be developed to more effectively review developments potentially impacting farm and forestland. Planning concepts that could be employed include overlay districts, cluster development, area-based allocation, and performance standards.
2. The Town should consider reestablishing the Conservation Commission to work with town officials, landowners, and non-profit land conservation organizations to inventory and conserve key farm and forestland in Bethel.
3. Local land use planning activities and programs affecting agriculture and forestry should consider using USDA's Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) method as a means of objectively evaluating land for conservation. This method utilizes soils data and local determined criteria to rank land parcels for conservation.

XI HOUSING

A. BACKGROUND

A major function of local housing planning is to meet two community objectives – first, to provide safe and affordable housing for our present and future population and second, to enable a suitable density and distribution of housing throughout the community. Additionally, growth in housing affects the capacity to provide facilities and services. Housing built in the absence of adequate planning for its impact on schools, roads, and other public services can overburden the ability of the taxpayers to pay for these services.

This section discusses the amount, type, location, and affordability of existing housing and the needs for future housing. Other sections of this Plan also include information on housing. The data presented in this section are extracted from two sources – U.S. Census and Town Grand List Records (Form 411). Data collected from these sources do not match exactly due to variations in record keeping and classifications. Notwithstanding, they are considered relevant and reliable data sets for analysis. Much better data will be available in the next few years from the 2000 Census.

B. NUMBER OF HOUSING UNITS

A housing unit is a house, an apartment, a mobile home, or a room that is intended as separate living quarters. According to the U.S. Census Reports, there were 741 year-round housing units and 127 seasonal housing units in Bethel in 1990, totaling 888. In 1980, there were 823 units. The overall increase during this period (1980 – 1990) was 7.9%. The overall increase for the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Region during this period was 17.8%.

A 1997 report fixed the total year-round housing units in Bethel at 785, a 4.4% increase from 1990, with seasonal housing decreasing from 156 to 141 or down 9.6% during the same period. The decrease in seasonal housing estimates is unlike most communities in Windsor County.

TABLE 8: Change In Housing Units, 1980 – 1997 (U.S. Census/1997 VDOH Estimates)

	1980	1997 Estimate	Change In Percent
Stockbridge	413	559	+35
Royalton	975	1159	+19
Rochester	662	770	+16
Randolph	1669	1891	+13
Bethel	823	926	+13
Barnard	555	614	+11

C. HOUSING TYPE AND OWNERSHIP

Data from the 1990 U.S. Census for Bethel indicated that 582 units or 66% of its housing consisted of single-family homes. This represented the largest component of the Town's housing stock followed next by mobile homes (99 at 11%). As might be expected for a rural bedroom community, two-family and multiple family units represented a smaller percentage of the total (17%) or 155 units.

For those housing units that were occupied, 80% (713 units) were owner-occupied and the balance 20% (175) renter-occupied. These rates included mobile homes as well as conventional homes. Vacant housing units including seasonal and vacation home properties, were determined to be 175 or 20% of the total available housing stock.

Grand List Reports filed annually with the Vermont Department of Taxes (Form 411) provide valuable information regarding ownership characteristics in addition to valuations. For 1995, approximately 38% of the Grand List aggregated property values were owned by non-residents or corporations. Year-round, vacation, and mobile homes valuations are represented in the table below:

TABLE 9: Valuations of Residential Property, Bethel – 1995 (1995 Form 411)

Housing Type	Listed Value	Percent of Total
Residential (Year Round)	46.8 m	79%
Vacation Homes	9.6 m	17%
Farms	1.0 m	2%
Mobile Homes	1.6 m	3%

Farms and residential properties combined represented eighty-one percent (81%) of the total Grand List values according to the 1995 report. These valuations, however, are inclusive of the acreage of the entire parcels on which the properties are located.

D. AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Affordable housing is defined as that which a household making the county's median income could afford if no more than 30% of its income were spent on housing costs. For homeowners, housing costs include payments for principal and interest on a mortgage, taxes, etc. For renters, housing costs include rent and utilities. Despite a healthy economy, as is the case for most of Vermont, Bethel has more households with low to moderate incomes than it has housing with low to moderate prices.

E. HOUSING AVAILABILITY AND COUNTY TRENDS

Compared to area towns, property values and sales activity in Bethel are typical, excepting Barnard and Pomfret, which have substantially higher values in both the year-round and second-home market. Information on market rents for housing shows that the rental housing market in Bethel for primary housing is small and that second-home market rentals are active. In 1998, the Vermont Housing Council commissioned a series of county housing studies for the entire State (1998 Housing Demand Analysis by Planning Decisions, Inc.). The study for Windsor County included an analysis of housing supply and demand, some of which may be relevant to Bethel's future planning for housing. Outlined below are key points from the report.

1. The regional economy has changed. Overall employment numbers have increased, creating a demand for housing, particularly low to moderate priced homes.
2. Despite a relatively slow period in population growth since 1990, the household mix has changed. The “baby boom” group is expected to become a more dominant household group over the next few years.
3. The “baby boom echo” group (children of the “boomers”) is likely to create a renewed interest for apartments and starter homes.
4. Income distribution is spreading out. This means that there is more growth in incomes at the top of the scale than at the bottom, resulting in an increased demand for expensive homes. This could drive up prices in some areas.
5. The demand for mobile home lots continues to increase. The vacancy rate for mobile home lots is low.
6. Rent levels are slightly higher than the rest of the State. Median rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Windsor County, including utilities was listed at \$612 in 1997 according to the study. Rental housing is in short supply relative to demand. Rental levels can be expected to increase creating affordability gaps for young households and lower income elderly households.

F. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

The trends in housing have raised several issues that the Town should address in its future planning and development if it is to meet town-wide goals. They are:

- how to meet the needs of affordable housing to promote social and economic diversity in the community;
- how to meet special housing needs and elderly housing needs;
- how to maximize the location of future housing in ways that protect the Town's quality landscape, environment, historic resources, and to minimize conflicts with agricultural and forestry uses; and
- how to participate in meeting the housing needs of the overall region in cooperation with neighboring communities and housing providers.

GOALS

1. To provide the opportunity for Bethel residents to have access to decent and affordable housing.
2. To encourage the retention of existing housing and construction of new housing.
3. To encourage the preservation of historic structures in ways that serves housing needs.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. The timing and rate of new housing construction or rehabilitation should not exceed the community's ability to provide adequate public facilities (e.g. schools and municipal services).
2. The Town should help to keep housing affordable by planning for appropriately sized lots, accessory apartments, and clustered developments.
3. The provision of housing for special needs populations, such as the elderly and physically handicapped, is encouraged.
4. The location of future housing should complement existing or planned employment patterns, travel times, and energy requirements.
5. Affordable housing should not be directed exclusively into selected areas.
6. Developers and town officials are encouraged to work toward strategies that promote mixed income housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. The Planning Commission should evaluate and possibly recommend revisions to the Bethel Zoning Regulations and Subdivision Regulations to promote more compatibility with the goals and planning principles of this Section.
2. Affordable elderly and family housing is needed. The Town, in cooperation with housing development and housing non-profit groups, should continue to evaluate the extent of need and the options available to address this need.
3. More comprehensive information will be available in over the next two years as housing studies and new Census information are available. This new data should be reviewed by the Planning Commission to see if revisions to the Plan are necessary.

XII ENERGY

A. BACKGROUND

Bethel is probably similar to many Vermont rural towns in regard to energy use. Most residential, commercial, and municipal buildings are heated with oil. However, with ample hardwood forests in the area, many residential homes heat extensively with wood or use wood as a backup source. Propane has been making in-roads on oil for heating purposes and will probably continue to do so due to its clean burning properties. Natural gas lines traverse the State on the western side and, at this time, there are no plans to bring pipelines over into this part of the State.

The Town lies within the service area of Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS) which supplies electrical power to all sections of town. At present, the Town receives its power from a substation located in Royalton. A new 12 kv line has been constructed parallel to Route 12 north of the town center. Eventually, this will connect into the Pleasant Street Randolph substation. Two benefits will be derived from this. Line serviceability will be greatly enhanced and a second source of power will be available to the Town in times of power outages.

CVPS has a good mix of power sources – hydro, nuclear, fossil (purchased – Merrimack Power Company) and purchases from sources such as New York Power Authority, Hydro Quebec and other sources within the New England Power grid. This should allow for stable pricing for the foreseeable future.

Within the Town, there is a hydro power plant (owned by Bethel Mills) which recently underwent improvement. The power produced is purchased by CVPS. A future source of additional electrical power could come from “low head” turbine generators. These could be located on the White River and the Third Branch. The goal here would be to develop small sources of power instead of large. Wind and solar power may also be feasible depending on advancements in new technologies.

In the past, the Town has received grant monies for energy conservation for low-income housing. This involved insulating and weatherizing homes. The school complex has had an ongoing program for conserving energy. The Town garage utilizes used oil from its vehicles as a fuel for heating. Energy conservation programs are ongoing by the CVPS. One program encourages the use of energy efficient light bulbs by issuing discount coupons. Another program promotes the use of more efficient heating and cooling systems. There is also a residential new construction program that promotes the inclusion of energy efficient systems that will insure long-term energy savings.

GOALS

1. To encourage a pattern of settlement and land use that uses energy efficiently.
2. To promote the design and construction of buildings and structures which are energy efficient.
3. To encourage the development of local renewable energy sources and to reduce dependence on outside foreign energy sources.
4. To increase public awareness and use of energy conservation practices through educational efforts.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. Use of design principles and practices with the lowest life-cycle costs are encouraged in the rehabilitation or the development of new buildings and equipment.
2. New generation, transmission, and distribution facilities or service areas should be encouraged only when they complement the recommended land use patterns set forth in this Plan.
3. Design plans for development or subdivisions should work towards the goal of locating structures and buildings on the site to reflect sound energy conservation principles, such as solar and slope orientation and protective wind barriers.
4. To lessen the energy used by automobiles, the future development of bikeways and footpaths is encouraged in the village areas or other areas connecting settlements.
5. Continuation of the New England Central and Amtrak rail line extending from southern Vermont to St. Albans and beyond is supported.
6. Efforts to reduce the demand for energy used for commuting, such as the development of energy efficient home occupations and small-scale home businesses, are encouraged.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. The Town, when undertaking review of its existing bylaws, should consider enacting provisions that encourage energy conservation and concentrate development in the best locations (e.g., grant density bonuses to projects that employ advanced energy design and efficiency).
2. The Town should consider conducting an energy audit for town buildings and implement conservation measures, where feasible.

XIII BETHEL AND THE REGION

A. PLAN RELEVANCY

The goals and planning principles for guiding future growth in Bethel represent values of the people of Bethel. This Plan is intended to articulate a clear view of their vision for the future over the next five years, the life of this Plan. The public has a responsibility to remain involved in implementing this Plan. This Plan will serve to guide not only actions by town agencies, but also help to make clear our desires to developers planning projects in Bethel, neighboring communities, Vermont State agencies, federal agencies and others so that their activities can better respect our needs.

B. NEIGHBORING TOWN PLANNING ACTIVITIES

Bethel is bounded by five towns: Rochester to the west, Randolph to north, Royalton to the east, Stockbridge, and Barnard to the south.

Stockbridge's Plan was adopted in May 1998, and provides for five distinct future land use areas: Village Area, Small Enterprise Area, Rural Residential Area, Upland Conservation and Public Lands Area, and the White River and Tweed River Conservation Area. The general intent to the Stockbridge Plan is to promote the existing settlement pattern of densely settled villages surrounded by low-density rural and agricultural areas. The Barnard Plan was adopted in September 1998, and proposes four land use areas, in addition to a Silver Lake Overlay District. These are a Delectable Mountain Preserve Area, Farm Lands Area, Rural Area, and Village Area. The overall goals are to continue moderate development that favors expansion in the villages and encourages cluster development in open areas. Protection of natural resources is a primary objective as well.

The Town of Royalton adopted a Plan in March 1997, which provides for a variety of future land use areas which promote retention of the villages and limited development in rural areas. The Royalton Plan does establish a Commercial/Industrial District adjacent to Route 107 and the I-89 Interchange area to provide for commercial, industrial, and institutional uses. Growth in this area has been strong over the past several years. The Royalton Planning Commission has evaluating future development options for Exit 3 and has developed a plan scenario for this area. This area includes the full length of Route 107 at the Bethel/Royalton Town Line to the intersection of Route 14 at Eaton's Sugar House. Depending on the type and extent of development that is likely to occur along this section of roadway, the two towns should work together to explore common strategies for this area.

The Randolph Town Plan, adopted in late 1994, establishes selected areas for new growth to occur. The primary objective, as in the case of other towns above, is to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact villages separated by rural countryside. Randolph's efforts to encourage growth in its village areas are outstanding given its revitalization efforts since the series of tragic fires in 1992. Some commercial/industrial type uses are provided along Route 12 south of Randolph village to the Bethel Town Line. This type of development could contribute to sprawl and create pressures for land use changes in Bethel.

Rochester's Town Plan (1996) expresses similar values and planning goals as Bethel's Plan. These two towns share common land uses along their border; an upland area largely undeveloped with limited access. Future planning in Rochester does not contemplate intense development of this area. Such a land use pattern is consistent with Bethel's future land use goals for this area as well. Efforts are being coordinated between Rochester and Bethel for the upgrading of Camp Brook Road with the common objective that these improvements do not make it into a regional east/west connector across this area of Vermont.

In sum, generally the planning policies of Bethel's neighbors match well with those expressed in this Plan. All are intent in closely monitoring development on a case-by-case basis. With the exception of Royalton, Bethel's neighbors have permanent zoning and subdivision regulations similar in content to Bethel's. Also, it should be noted that all of these communities are active participants in the activities of the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission which works to address problems and opportunities common to the Region.

C. REGIONAL PLANNING

Bethel is a member of the Two River-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission. It is one of 27 municipalities that comprise the Region. One of the Commission's primary purposes is to provide technical assistance to town officials in a wide range of activities, including a regional planning program. The Regional Commission revised its Plan in June, 1999. This Plan, like local town plans, will remain in effect for a period of five years. The land use policies of the Regional Plan are compatible with the Bethel Plan. Transportation planning for the Region has the active participation of the Town. The Region and Town have worked together on planning for the replacement of the River Street Bridge, reconstruction of portions of the Camp Brook Road, and proposals for Route 107 improvements. It is fair to conclude that the Bethel Plan and the Regional Plan are compatible with one another. Copies of the *Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan* are available at the Bethel Town Offices or the Regional Commission offices in Woodstock (802-457-3188).

XIV IMPLEMENTATION

A. ADOPTION OF THE PLAN

This Plan is centered on the existing conditions and probable trends that will affect the Town, and then gives goals and planning principles that should be used to guide development. Collectively, it represents a vision for the kind of community Bethel desires for the future. One thing is certain - the Town will change. The opportunity here is that citizens and town officials can attempt to direct this change using a variety of methods. Adoption of the Plan by the Selectboard is the first step in putting the Plan into action. By its adoption, the Town affirms that the principles set forth in the Plan shall guide future growth and development decisions affecting Bethel.

B. ON-GOING PLANNING

The Bethel Plan is not a permanent document. Its life is limited by statute for a period of five years from date of adoption. The Planning Commission has the primary responsibility to maintain or update the Plan, which means that within the next five years the Commission should evaluate the Plan in light of new conditions and needs. Any future amendments or re-adoption of the Plan will require a new round of notices and hearings to the citizens of Bethel. In addition to Plan adoption, the Selectboard can formally request the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission to review and approve the Plan. The most recent Plan for Bethel was approved by the Regional Commission in April 1995, but it has expired. Towns that have adopted and approved town plans are eligible for planning grants from the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and have improved legal standing to influence and integrate planning policies with proposed State actions affecting land use.

C. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations - Vermont law enables municipalities to implement plans through a variety of ways. Local regulation of land use development through rules or ordinances adopted by the Selectboard is one method. The most well recognized land use regulations are zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations. Bethel has had zoning bylaws in effect since the early 1970's. Subdivision regulations were adopted in 1990. They are administered by the Administrative Officer and the Development Review Board which are appointed by the Selectboard. The Vermont Planning and Development Act requires that these regulations further the purposes set forth in the Town's Plan.

Flood Hazard Bylaws - Federal and State law enables municipalities to regulate the use of land defined as a flood hazard area. Under these provisions, the Town can regulate development to ensure that the placement, design and construction of buildings are done in a manner as to minimize the potential for flood damage. As a prerequisite to enrollment in the National Flood

Insurance Program (NFIP), towns must have a bylaw in effect, approved by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA). Bethel has been a participant in the NFIP since 1973. The flood hazard bylaws are included as part of the Zoning Regulations. Permits are required prior to the commencement of construction in the flood hazard area.

Town Health Ordinance - The Town has in effect a sewer ordinance that regulates the design and development of on-site sewage systems in Bethel. Under this ordinance, prior to the installation or replacement of a system, the landowner is required to submit plans to the Bethel Board of Health who evaluates them for consistency with minimum standards. Given the importance of maintaining high water quality standards and the high dependence on sub-surface sewage disposal systems, it is very important that the Town continue to monitor and regulate all types of sewage disposal.

Town Highways - The Town uses standards and conditions for the maintenance, improvement, discontinuance, laying out, reclassification, and acceptance of Town Highways, mostly as drawn from Vermont Statutes. The Town also retains authority for access management (curb cuts) onto town highways. The present law (19 V.S.A. Section 1111) requires permits for access to a highway. In the case of a town road, the Selectboard must find that the proposed access meets with required safety standards and that it complies with the goals and planning principles of this Plan. Given that this Plan includes access management goals and planning principles, the Town has control over the location and type of curb cuts on town roads. The effect of this can lead to a more desirable land use pattern for the Town.

Capital Budget and Program - The Town has developed a capital budget and program as a financial management tool for major expenditures. This greatly assists the Town in the selection, prioritization, and costing of capital projects. The budget and program has assisted the Town in implementation of this Plan because it makes it clear the extent of the Town's legal obligations to finance future growth. The budget is updated annually and approved by the voters. Accordingly, the capital budget provides a financial planning link to the planning principles and priorities set forth in the Plan.

Vermont Community Development Program - Since the mid-1970's, the Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) has made grant funds available to towns for community development projects. This Plan can function as the Community Development Plan that is required for grant applications. Historically, Bethel has been successful in accessing funds under this Program, including funding for: planning efforts in developing re-use of the Bethel Town Hall (2000), revitalization of downtown Bethel (parking lot, lights, sidewalks)(1995), expansion of the Vermont Casting facility off Route 107 (1991), water line extension and water storage reservoir construction new GW Plastics (1988), housing rehabilitation programs (early 1980's).

Act 250 - Since 1970, Vermont has administered Act 250 (10 V.S.A. Chapter 151). This law sets in place a state review system for major developments and subdivisions of land. What comprise a development or subdivision is subject to a rather complex set of laws, rules, and case determinations. However, for Bethel, commercial or industrial projects on more than 10 acres of land; construction of 10 or more units of housing; subdivision of land into 10 or more lots;

construction of a road over 800 feet in length or which serves as access to five or more lots; and development over 2,500 feet elevation are Act 250 projects. Prior to any of these activities being commenced, a Land Use Permit must be granted by the District Environmental Commission. In determining whether or not to grant a Permit, the Commission must evaluate the project in relation to ten criteria.

These criteria relate to the environmental, economic, and social impacts of the proposed project on the community and the Region. The Town Selectboard and Planning Commission, along with the State and the Regional Commission, are parties to these proceedings and are afforded the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the appropriateness of the project. Criterion 10 specifically provides that the District Commission find that the project be in conformance with the *Bethel Town Plan* and the *Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Plan* prior to granting a Permit.

Land Conservation Activities - Land conservation programs are a means of securing the long-term protection of valuable farm and forestland or significant natural resources. Conservation efforts by land trusts provide a viable means, outside of the regulatory process, of bringing together the needs of property owners with public interests. Techniques available involve agreements between a landowner and a conservation organization, including donation of conservation easements and limited development schemes.

The Vermont Land Trust is very active throughout the State and has worked with landowners and local officials in conserving key properties. The Nature Conservancy is also a well-recognized organization. The reestablished Bethel Conservation Commission would be the best vehicle to consider land conservation options for the community.

Public Participation and Involvement - Local officials, citizens, and businesses must understand the goals and planning principles that the Plan establishes for the future development of the Town. Without public involvement and coordination between the various interest groups in the community, the Plan's purpose will be compromised. Education on the overall values of community planning needs to continue. This can be accomplished through a variety of means including, newsletters, community forums, and media announcements.

State Legislative Processes - Another means of assuring that the Plan is implemented is to continue coordination with the Legislature and State Agencies on matters of local or regional concern. A good example of this is planning effort between the Town, Agency of Transportation, and the Regional Planning Commission for the so-called River Street Bridge/By-Pass Study in 1997. Oftentimes, state laws or programs can conflict with local needs or desires. By maintaining an open dialogue with the State, policy makers and agency staff can be more informed about Bethel.

XVI MAPS