



STATE OF DELAWARE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
TATNALL BUILDING, SECOND FLOOR
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BOULEVARD SOUTH
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901

MATT MEYER
GOVERNOR

PHONE: 302-744-4101
FAX: 302-739-2775

The Honorable Pat Kough
President, Bethel Town Council
7769 Main Street
Bethel, DE 19931

RE: Certification of 2025 Town of Bethel Comprehensive Plan

Dear President Kough:

I am pleased to inform that the Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Bethel, adopted April 1, 2025, is hereby certified.

The certification signifies that:

- (1) The Office of State Planning Coordination has applied all aspects of the Comprehensive Plan review process, evaluated the components of the plan, and provided a recommendation regarding the certification status of the plan.
- (2) The submitted Comprehensive Plan complies with the requirements of Title 22, Section 702 of the [Delaware Code](#).
- (3) The Town of Bethel will continue working with the Office of State Planning Coordination to address next steps and recommendations, as provided by the Office of State Planning Coordination.
- (4) The Town of Bethel has worked with the State to incorporate comments before adopting the Comprehensive Plan and will not enact any significant or substantive changes to the Comprehensive Plan adopted April 1, 2025.

Thank you for working with the State to complete this process and for the Town's diligence to ensure the implementation of this Comprehensive Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Matt'.

Governor, State of Delaware

Town of
Bethel

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



April, 2025

Prepared by: Bethel Planning & Zoning Commission

Town of Bethel Comprehensive Plan – April, 2025

Town Officials

Town of Bethel

Town council

President

March 2025

Pat Kough

President Pro Tem

Kevin Phillips

Treasurer

Mark Shaver

Council Secretary

Linda Crawshaw

Council Member

Kathy Layfield

May 2024

Vernon Proctor

Kevin Phillips

Kathy Layfield

Pat Kough

Mark Shaver

March 2023

Vernon Proctor

Kevin Phillips

Kathy Layfield

Pat Kough

Mark Shaver

Planning and Zoning

Commission

Stephen Beers, Chair - Howard Vanderslice, Past Chair (Deceased)

Linda Crawshaw, Secretary - Duane Campfield, Past Secretary (~2024)

John Galaska

Hank Graves

Vernon Proctor

Ed Witalec

Town Solicitor

Mike Smith, Esq.

County and State Officials

Sussex County

County Council

Matt Lloyd, Council – 1st District

Steve C. McCarron, Council – 2nd District

Jane Gruenebaum, Council – 3rd District

Douglas B. Hudson, President– 4th District

John L. Rieley, Vice President – 5th District

County Administrator:

Todd F. Lawson

Director of Planning

Jamie Whitehouse

State of Delaware

Governor:

The Honorable Matt Meyer

Lt. Governor:

The Honorable Kyle Evans Gay

Senate:

Bryant Richardson

House of Representative

Timothy Dukes

Office of State Planning

Dorothy L. Morris, AICP, Principal Planner

REVISED MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE TOWN OF BETHEL, DELAWARE

INTRODUCTION

The initial Town of Bethel Delaware's Comprehensive Plan was developed between June, 2006 and August, 2007, adopted and certified July, 2008. This document is a required revision to the original plan. A Comprehensive Plan is designed to provide a framework for development and growth and for improved land development codes for the Town. The Comprehensive Plan also serves as an official statement about the future of the Town and as a unified advisory document for the Town Council and the Planning Commission to address land use and growth issues. The plan will continue to be used as a guide for future decisions regarding development, zoning issues, annexations, storm water runoff, public safety, capital improvements and general ordinances throughout the community.

The Plan is also used as an informational document for the public. Citizens, businesses, and government officials can refer to the Plan to learn more about Bethel and its policies for future land use and other operational decisions. Potential new residents may use this document as an informational resource about the Town, its characteristics, and facilities. This revised document contains the most current information available on population, transportation, housing, employment, and the environmental conditions and issues existing within the town.

The Bethel Comprehensive Plan is also a legal document. The Delaware Code (Title 22, Section 702) specifies that "...any incorporated municipality under this chapter shall prepare a comprehensive plan for the city or town or portions thereof as the commission deems appropriate." The Code further specifies that "after a comprehensive plan or portion thereof has been adopted by the municipality in accordance to this chapter, the comprehensive plan shall have the force of law, and no development shall be permitted except as consistent with the plan."

1.1 The Authority of the Plan

Delaware law requires that municipalities engage in the comprehensive plan process “to encourage the most appropriate use of the fiscal and physical resources of the municipality and coordination of municipal growth, development and infrastructure investment actions with those of other municipalities, counties, and the State...” This plan complies with the requirements for a municipal development strategy – for towns with a population of 2000 or less – as described in the Delaware Code.

The municipal development strategy for small communities such as Bethel with fewer than 2000 people (as required in Laws, C. 415 Sec. 1) is to be “a document in text and maps containing at a minimum a municipal development strategy setting forth the jurisdiction’s position on population, housing growth within the community, expansion of its boundaries, development of adjacent areas, redevelopment potential, community character, and the general uses of land within the community and critical community development and infrastructure issues.” In addition, the Town’s comprehensive planning process must demonstrate coordination with other municipalities, the county, and the state during the Plan preparation.

In January 2006, the Town Council for Bethel contacted the Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination (OSPC) to prepare the Town’s first Comprehensive Plan. The OSPC assembled a team of staff to work with the Town of Bethel, the Town Council, and the Planning Commission to cooperate on crafting the Town’s Comprehensive Plan

State law requires that planning be an ongoing process and that municipalities identify future planning activities. This document is a revision to Bethel’s municipal development strategy as required by law.

Severability Clause

Should a court decide that any section or provision of this comprehensive land use plan is unconstitutional or invalid, such decision shall not affect the validity of this comprehensive land use plan, or any part other than the part judged unconstitutional or invalid.

1.2 A Brief Overview of the Community

Location

The Town of Bethel is in Sussex County, Delaware, a few miles west of the Town of Laurel. Bethel is situated in a largely agricultural area along Broad Creek and is now recognized as a destination on the Captain John Smith Chesapeake Bay National Historic Water Trail. Bethel is also included on the Nanticoke Heritage Byway (See Maps 1 and 2 in Appendix A)

History of the Town of Bethel

Bethel began as a town called Lewisville in 1840, when Kendall M. Lewis laid out 12 building lots in the farmland along an area on Broad Creek. Lewis had built a simple wharf along Broad Creek in 1795 called “Lewis Wharf”. Since the Creek became shallower past the site of the wharf large vessels coming up Broad Creek were forced to unload their goods and transfer them to shallow draft vessels to move the goods to the town of Laurel. The area quickly had a booming trade as ships arrived from Baltimore and other Chesapeake Bay ports with housewares, tools, and other goods that could not be found in this rural area.

Because of the deep water in Broad Creek up to this point and extensive stands of virgin oak and pine forests nearby, Lewisville became a shipbuilding town with the construction of a shipyard in 1869. The bustling shipyard repaired schooners, sloops, and pungies. In 1874, the first large vessel, a 105-foot schooner constructed at the shipyard, was commissioned. In 1880, as a U.S. Post Office was being established to avoid confusion with another town in Delaware with a similar name (Lewes), the name of the Town was changed to Bethel. (The Bible refers to Bethel, “sailor’s retreat” so they felt the name was appropriate due to the number of ship carpenters, ship captains and general sailors or crew members who made Bethel their home).

The historical significance of Bethel is its connection to Delaware's maritime history, according to Brian Page, Sussex County's historic preservation planner. A unique and highly specialized sailing schooner, known as the "Ram," was created at the shipyard in Bethel. "It required less water depth to navigate, and its use opened trade to remote and often inaccessible areas of the Chesapeake Bay," Page said. The shipbuilders used oak and then pine from local forests until they were exhausted and then used teams of oxen to haul lumber from the Great Cypress Swamp Forest near Gumboro, Delaware. (The area is now known as Shaft Ox Corner). When the pine there was exhausted, lumber was sent in by rail from North Carolina. The giant masts – huge cedar logs – were also brought in on rail cars from Oregon.

It took 90 days to build a sailing ram, a ship that was often 100 feet long or more, according to Dr. James Marvil's 1961 book, *Sailing Rams: A History of Sailing Ships Built in and Near Sussex County, Delaware*. When a ship was launched, schools closed, and a crowd would gather as the ship was pushed down a greased ramp into the creek. "It hit the water with a big splash, causing a very large wave to travel up and down the river," Marvil wrote.

The last sailing ram was built in Bethel in 1911. The last ship was launched in 1918. By that time, Bethel had built and launched some thirty ships. Rail transportation had taken the place of sailing ships in the region. Many of the area's captains and seamen continued to work in transatlantic shipping, and some of the ship carpenters worked in local construction. With the end of shipbuilding, the population of the town continued to drop significantly from approximately 400 to the level today. The Bethel shipyard was used to manufacture baskets for a time, but it was dismantled in 1940.

To look at Bethel today, "one would never know that at one time a thriving shipbuilding trade ever existed there," wrote Robert H. Burgess, in his preface to Dr. Marvil's book.

"At one time, this little town was known around the world, next to Wilmington, because of the shipyard," said Rudolph Hastings, a local historian who was born and raised in Bethel.

National Historic Area

With the shipbuilding came the rise of master carpenters. Mr. Page said that the Bethel shipbuilders used their extensive carpentry skills not only on boats, but also their houses – filling them with fine and detailed trim. “In a place like Bethel, you find these extremely beautiful, well-built houses,” he said. Bethel has so much history within its boundaries (the Town is just 1.6 miles long) that the entire municipality was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The Register offers some protection from development projects that get federal dollars – such as road improvement – but it doesn’t protect historic properties when individual developers or property owners are involved, Page said.

Other positives of the Town, in addition to the quaint architecture, are the tree-lined streets, as well as the low property taxes found throughout Sussex County. Jeff’s Greenhouses and the Bethel Market on Main Street are the two main businesses in the Town, along with some small home businesses. There is no theater, arcade, or dominant industry in the Town. The Bethel Historical Society, which was established in 1975, maintains a museum which houses artifacts from ship building and the early area settlers, ship models, paintings, and other items related to the history of the Town. Also included is a significant collection of artifacts from the Native American populations that had previously resided in the general area.

As noted, due to the efforts of Bethel residents and the State, in September 1975, the Bethel Historic District was created. (See Map 3 in Appendix A) The district contains all land within the Town boundaries and specifies that historical consideration be given to all homes over 50 years old. As examples, several homes have been designated of significant historical value.

Some of examples of these homes are:

LOCATION IN BETHEL	HOMES
11885 Main Street	Williams House - The oldest section was built about 1830.
513 Vine Street	Moore House dating from the early 19 th century
531 Vine Street	“4 R’s House” influenced by the Italianate Style built in the 1870’s.
7731 Main Street	“Homeport” Twin Ship Carpenter’s House, home of Captain John B. Quillin
7725 Main Street	“Snug Harbor” Built by ship captain Caleb Insley; House is typical of a Ship Carpenter house.

1.3 Existing Land Uses

An overview of the current land use situation in Bethel is shown on the Existing land use map. (See Map 4 in Appendix A) The most common land use is residential, followed next by agricultural/natural resources/open space. The existing open spaces controlled by the Town were very minimal. They consisted of a small lot in front of the Town Dock and the Town Parks at the junction of Main Street and Bethel Road. The Town recently acquired land across from the Community House to be used primarily for parking. Several acres of farmland on School Road and High Street were recently rezoned residential, bringing the total number of residential lots at this time to 145. Of these 118 are occupied and 27 are vacant. Commercial land consists of Jeff's Greenhouses on Main Street (actual greenhouses and land currently cultivated for greenhouse plants and agriculture) and the Bethel Store also located on Main Street. Two other parcels are also zoned commercial and used for storage and parking. Noncommercial areas are the Post Office, Sailors Bethel Church, Bethel Community House (all on Main Street) and the Bethel Historical Society Museum and Playground on First Street. (Note: Map 5 in Appendix A shows the environmental features of the Town)

Adjacent Land Uses

A portion of the lands adjacent to the community that were strictly rural, or agricultural, have changed somewhat since the original plan. Land directly to the North is now partially residential, but several residences also raise horses. The housing development to the Northeast (Cypress Pointe) has expanded greatly since the original plan was written. There are now about 80 individual residents in the community. The southern portion of the Town is bordered by Broad Creek. Lands to the southwest of Town are mostly residential, composed of a mix of single-family homes in a major subdivision named "Broad Creek Estates" and a mixture of state wildlife management lands and single-family homes.

All the lands surrounding the Town are within the jurisdiction of Sussex County and are zoned AR-1. This zoning classification allows agricultural use and residential use on lots as small as a half-acre, depending on the subdivision size and the types of public utilities available.

However, both the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan and the Strategies for State Policies and Spending designated the area surrounding Bethel as a predominantly rural area. Because of this designation, no new major infrastructure improvements are currently proposed by the State or the County. (See Map 6 in Appendix A)

Some areas surrounding Bethel are either part of the State's Agricultural Preservation Program (where development rights have been purchased); or are part of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) Division of Fish and Wildlife (such as the Nanticoke Wildlife Management Area).

1.4 Public Participation

The original plan adopted in 2008 used data from a comprehensive public survey conducted in 2007 to help shape the plan, as well as a second public survey was conducted in 2013 as part of a five year review. A similar public survey was conducted by Planning and Zoning in 2018 which included some of the same and additional questions regarding the character of the town, and the direction in which the town should be going regarding development, businesses, and government. It also included prospective challenges for the future of the Town, which included recreation, animals held within the Town limits, use and treatment of Broad Creek, and other comments from individuals dealing with items that were not included in the survey. The Planning and Zoning Commission reviewed both surveys and concluded that an additional survey would not only significantly delay this revision, but the data seemed very consistent between the two surveys and would be sufficient for this revision. An additional survey will be conducted in the future before any future revision to this Plan. This recommendation was presented to the Town Council and approved. Where appropriate in the individual sections of the Plan, the results of the 2018 survey will be referenced. Throughout 2023 and 2024 the Planning and Zoning Commission meetings as well as the monthly town meetings where the Comprehensive Plan was on the agenda were posted in advance per open meeting requirements with attendance welcomed as well as encouraged. A final meeting of the Planning and Zoning commission was held on February 26, 2025 and voted to present the Town Council with the updated plan in March or April pending any recommendations from the Office of State Planning Coordination. Subsequently changes were

incorporated and the Town Council of Bethel adopted the plan by resolution during the monthly Town Meeting April 1, 2025 unanimously.

Review of Relevant Planning Documents

In addition to public participation by way of surveys, opportunities for comment at commission and town meetings, the President, the Town Council, and the Planning Commission consulted a variety of local and regional planning documents to develop positions and actions in this plan. These included, but were not limited to:

- The State Strategies for Policy and Spending, which identifies the core community as Level One and Two investment areas, with the surrounding town as Level Four (areas that are better suited for preservation and no large new development) as seen in Map 6
- The Town of Laurel Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which discusses the future growth for Laurel and its impact on the Town of Bethel
- The Sussex County Comprehensive Land Use Plan discusses future growth within the County as well as future sewers and other services to support the community of Bethel and the surrounding area.
- Providing Sussex County with a draft of this plan for review and comment. (See Appendix B)
- Providing The Town of Laurel with a draft of this plan for review and comment. (See Appendix B)

1.5 Bethel's Planning Goals and Vision (The Public Surveys were used as guidance)

Planning Goals

Goal: To maintain the small-town atmosphere and rural setting through the adoption of appropriate zoning and land use ordinances.

Goal: To encourage modest growth that is in tune with existing growth of the community.

Goal: To preserve the rural atmosphere by balancing the protection of rural land with the needs of residents.

Goal: To restore and maintain Broad Creek so it continues to be a source of recreation and economic opportunity for the community.

Goal: To ensure the protection of natural resources for the enjoyment and health of the existing and future residents of the community.

Goal: To encourage the development and implementation of a historic preservation program to protect these cultural resources within the community.

A Vision for Bethel

Bethel is a small, historic, rural town with a rich history of agricultural and maritime heritage that will maintain its small-town character while allowing for modest growth and redevelopment that is consistent with its surroundings and current community character. This vision is consistent with most of the citizens of the Town, based on the public participation.

Municipal Development Strategy

2.1 Town Governance, Land Use Planning and Regulation Process

The Town of Bethel was incorporated in 1886 by the Delaware General Assembly. A five-member Town Council governs Bethel, and elections are held on the third Saturday in February. Council members are elected for rotating terms lasting three years each. Elections are held annually by the town. The minimum requirements for Council members are determined by the Town's Charter, and any person considered for the Town Council must be a Delaware resident, a Bethel resident, and over the age of eighteen.

The Town of Bethel Community House is located at 7769 Main Street and serves as the town hall for all public meetings. Various organizations use this facility to conduct business supporting the Town. One example is the Planning and Zoning Commission. In addition, the Town operates a small part-time office in the Community House.

The Bethel Historical Society operates a museum at the old Bethel Schoolhouse site, dedicated to the history of Bethel and the surrounding region. The group provides

insight into the Town, into certain historical uses, and supplements the activities of the Town. It also provides a playground for the area's children.

The Town Council conducts Town business and provides review and comment on all current and future land use activities within the Town. Buildings and new developments must adhere to the zoning codes that were updated in 2012 and 2022.

The Town of Bethel Charter serves as the guiding legal document for the Town. The Charter was last revised and updated in 2016. The current version of the Charter is on the Town's website.

2.1a Recommendations, Town Governance, Land Use Planning and Regulation Process

Plan Adoption. It is recommended that the Town of Bethel adopt this revised plan and seek certification through the Office of State Planning Coordination. This plan will serve as a unified advisory document for land use and growth issues within Bethel. More importantly, it will serve as the basis for updating the Town's current zoning codes and land use regulations.

Develop and Improve Zoning and Land Use Regulation. For the Town to continue to allow development within the community, it is recommended that the Town update its current zoning code to meet community wishes and current building standards. These regulations must be in place within 18 months of the revised plan adoption in accordance with state law. These zoning codes and land use regulations should address coordination with local, county and state agencies; permitting design; and compliance with relevant environmental regulations.

Develop the capacity to administer land use regulation. When developing or improving the Town's land use regulations, Bethel should consider the capacity to administer these regulations in a fair and consistent manner. Since the Town has only volunteer part-time staff, it may consider further developing its partnership with local jurisdictions, such as Sussex County, or using a private consultant.

Evaluate governance capabilities. Currently, the Town relies on a part-time volunteer staff, contractual services, and volunteer efforts from the community. A part-time Town Clerk is employed. The Town office is currently open each Wednesday from 9am to 3pm. It is important for the Town to periodically ensure these services meet community needs.

Revise and Modernize the Town Charter. The Town Charter continues to serve as the guiding legal document for the Town. It is important that this “living document” be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure it continues to meet community needs and maintains a voter referendum as provided in the existing Charter.

2.2. Demographics, Future Population, and Housing Growth

Data on population, demographics, housing, and economic conditions in Bethel are outlined in the following section, along with the appropriate comparisons to Sussex County and the State of Delaware.

The United States Census has been the primary data source for such information. Data is taken from Summary File 1 (SF-1) and Summary File 3 (SF-3). SF-1 is a direct information count considered to be very reliable, while SF-3 is an estimate based upon sample data, which is less accurate for towns like Bethel with small populations.

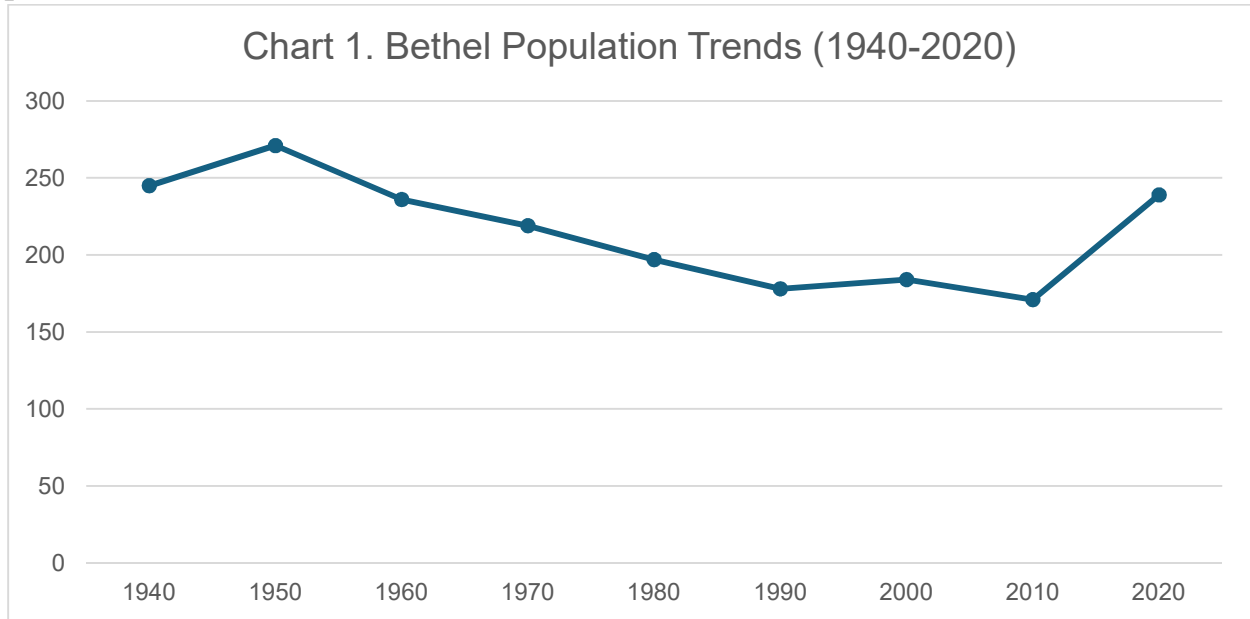
2-2a. Population and Housing

The data used throughout this section comes from the U.S. Decennial Census, and the American Community Survey (ACS). Although data collected for the U.S. Census has an extremely low margin of error, data collected for the ACS has a high margin of error especially for a town as small as Bethel. That being said the 2020 Census is also not without faults. The state of Delaware was found to have a 5% overcount at the conclusion of the Decennial Census.

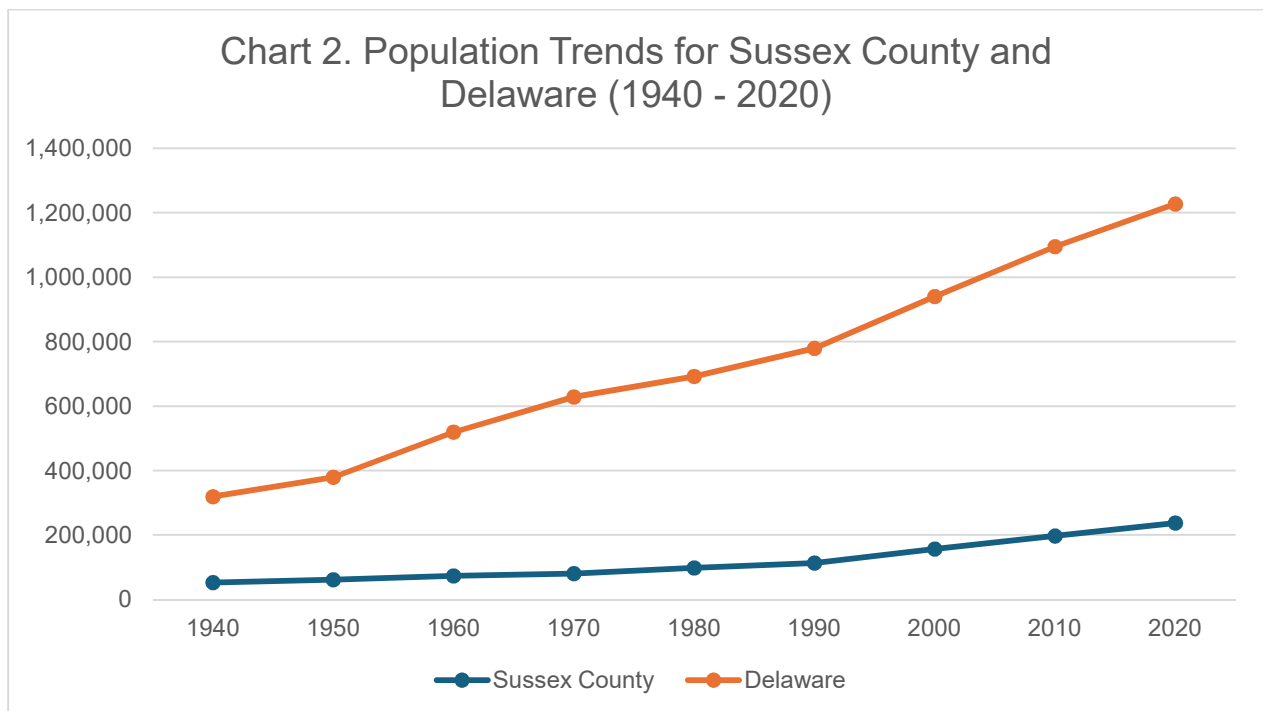
A review of information collected through the last 80 years from the United States Census indicates that from 1940 to 2020 the population in Delaware and Sussex County has steadily increased. In comparison, the population of Bethel has been decreasing until the last decade.

The 2010 Census reported there were 171 people living in Bethel. The total population for Sussex County in 2010 was 197,145 and 897,934 for the State of Delaware. Census 2020 data shows that Bethel’s population increased by 68 individuals to 239, an increase of about 40%. From 2010 to 2020 the state of Delaware population increased by about 10% to 989,948, while Sussex County grew about 20% to 237,378. Bethel had significantly more growth than both the state and Sussex County from 2010 to 2020. Bethel’s 2020 population is 48% male and 52% female.

The following charts show the population trends for Bethel, Sussex County, and the State. Chart 1 shows the population for Bethel from 1940 to 2020. Chart 2 shows the population trends for Sussex County and the State of Delaware during that same time period.



Source: U.S. Census



Source: U.S. Census

2.2b. Position on Population and Housing Growth

Bethel is a small community in a rural area of western Sussex County. Bethel contains actively farmed agricultural land and environmentally sensitive forest and wetlands. The Town has no central water system, and Bethel's location isn't conducive to substantial future growth. Bethel is interested in encouraging home ownership to new and existing Town residents. The Town will support modest housing growth for both first and second-time homebuyers on available lands within Town boundaries which further their goal to preserve the community's historic nature.

Table 2. Future Population Projections

Population by Year			Population Projection			
Year	2010	2015	2020	2023	2030	2040
Sussex	197,892	214,480	237,378		290,861	324,894
Bethel	173	187	240	264	299	322

Source: 2023 Delaware Population Consortium annual projections

The 2020 Census for Bethel reflected 106 housing units within the Town. For this reason, the housing projections below are based upon the September 2023 Land Use Survey, which showed 118 units in Bethel. The growth rate used in Table 3 was developed based upon current population trends. It was derived from several statistical equations assuming a similar growth rate, reflecting recent growth trends. This estimate assumes that Bethel will grow more slowly than Sussex County, due to its location and lack of key infrastructure elements such as central sewer and water.

Another population projection method is forecasting how many people a full buildout of Bethel's developable land would contribute to the population. Full development of agriculture and open space parcels within the Town would result in 250 new homes. Assuming these 250 homes have an average household size of 2.24 people, once all these homes are occupied, the total population in Bethel could increase by about 560 people, bringing the total population to 744. Combining the build-out analysis with the population projections shows that all available land in Bethel could be fully developed by the year 2050. Table 3 shows the housing projections for Bethel.

Table 3: Housing Projections Single Family Units

	Actual	Actual	Actual	Projected	Projected
Year	2010	2020	2023	2030	2040
Bethel	106	111	118	132	145

2-2c. Racial Composition

In 2020, Sussex County and the State of Delaware showed similar racial composition. Sussex County's population included 74.1% white, 10.7% black and 6% other; the State of Delaware's population included 60.4% white, 22.1% black and 4.9% other. Bethel's racial composition differed from both the county and the state in 2020, with 87.9% of residents being white.

Census 2020 data indicates that both Sussex County and the State of Delaware became more diverse over the past decade. The white population as a percentage of the total population in Sussex County decreased from 79% of the total in 2010 to 74.1% of the total in 2020 while the black population also decreased from 12.7% to 10.7% of the total, but those residents identifying as other, or two or more races increased from 4.1% to 6.0% and 2.3% to 7.2% respectively. Census 2020 data for the State of Delaware indicates that the white population decreased from 68.9% to 60.4% of the total while the black population increased slightly from 21.4% to 22.1%. Bethel's racial composition has not changed significantly between 2010, and 2020. The white population in Bethel decreased from 94.7% in 2010, to 87.9% in 2020, while the black population rose from 3.5% to 4.2% between 2010, and 2020.

Table 4 lists the population by racial composition for Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware.

Table 4. Racial Composition of Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware

	Bethel		Sussex County		Delaware	
Race	2010	2020	2010	2020	2010	2020
White	94.70%	87.9%	79%	74.1%	68.9%	60.4%
Black	3.50%	4.2%	12.7%	10.7%	21.4%	22.1%
Other	0.00%	0.8%	4.1%	6.0%	3.4%	4.9%
Two or more Races	1.20%	7.1%	2.3%	7.2%	2.7%	7.7%

Source: U.S. Census

2-2d. Age Profile

Bethel has maintained a marginally older population than the State of Delaware or Sussex County. The 2020 American Community Survey estimates that the median age of Bethel residents is 58.5 years, slightly older than that of Sussex County (50.3) and Delaware (41.0). In 2010, school age children (ages 5-19) accounted for 9.7% of the population, and the total child population (ages 0-19) was about 12.4%. Sussex County (22.9%) and the State of Delaware (26.4%) both had higher populations of children. The 2020 Census indicates that the youth population grew over the past decade in Bethel, currently 14.6% of the population is between the ages of 0-19, and about 10.2% of the population is school aged children (5-19). Over this same period of time, children as a percentage of population in Sussex County (20%) and the State of Delaware (24%) decreased despite fluctuations in the absolute number of children.

The current population of young working aged adults (20 – 34) does not comprise a significant proportion of people in Bethel – 7.67%, or 31 individuals. These figures were a lot lower compared to 2010, in which 23.8%, or 44 individuals, were in this age range. The percentages of individuals in this age group in Sussex County (14.7%) and the State (19.3%) in 2020 also decreased since 2010, but only slightly.

Table 5. 2020 ACS 5-year estimates (S0101)

	Bethel		Sussex County		State of Delaware	
Age	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<5	18	4.5	11613	5	54774	5.7
5-9	8	2.0	11375	4.9	55329	5.7
10-14	19	4.7	12800	5.6	59081	6.1
15-19	14	3.5	10822	4.7	60143	6.2
20-24	27	6.7	10365	4.5	58482	6
25-29	0	0.0	11886	5.2	66200	6.8
30-34	4	1.0	11626	5	62526	6.5
35-39	20	5.0	11126	4.8	56984	5.9
40-44	20	5.0	10689	4.6	54989	5.7
45-49	13	3.2	12079	5.2	57853	6
50-54	15	3.7	14238	6.2	64029	6.6
55-59	72	17.8	18459	8	68761	7.1
60-64	65	16.1	18931	8.2	66504	6.9
65-69	21	5.2	22308	9.7	61528	6.4
70-74	52	12.9	17662	7.7	47443	4.9
75-79	24	5.9	12029	5.2	33937	3.5
80-84	9	2.2	6857	3	20273	2.1
85+	3	0.7	5384	2.3	18843	1.9

Source: 2020 ACS 5-year estimates

2-2e. Educational Attainment

The average level of high school education of Bethel's population age 25 and over is generally equal to Sussex County and the State. Bethel's level of college education is lower than Sussex County and the State.

Table 6. Educational Attainment for Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware

Jurisdiction	High school graduate or higher	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Bethel	94%	27%
Sussex County	89%	29.4%
State of Delaware	90.6%	32.7%

Source: 2020 ACS 5 –year estimates. Please note the data referenced has a significant margin of error.

2-2f. Housing Stock

This section describes Bethel's housing stock. Table 7 compares changes in the number of dwelling units in Bethel, Sussex County and the State of Delaware as recorded by the U.S. Census Bureau. From 2010 to 2020, there was a net gain of 17 dwelling units in Bethel, an increase of 16.5%.

This was similar to the growth rate of housing in Sussex County (15.64%) and exceeded that of the State (10.56%). These changes are consistent with population trends that were seen in the last two decades.

Table 7. Dwelling Units in Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware, 1970-2020

Year	Bethel	Change	Sussex	Change	Delaware	Change
1970	78	-	34287	-	180233	-
1980	88	12.80%	54694	59.52%	238611	32.39%
1990	95	7.95%	74253	35.76%	289919	21.50%
2000	101	6.32%	93070	25.34%	343072	18.33%
2010	103	1.98%	123036	32.20%	405885	18.31%
2020	120	16.50%	142280	15.64%	448735	10.56%

Source: Census 1970 - 2020

There is some discrepancy between the 2010 ACS and the 2020 ACS. There is also a difference of 68 dwelling units between the number of dwellings reported in the 2020 census and the ACS 2020 5-year estimates, which is significant when the population is so small. In 2010 there were 5 multi-family dwelling units that were not present on the 2020 ACS and in 2020 there were 4 mobile homes that were not in the 2010 ACS.

The thing that did stay true is that most of the dwelling units continue to be single-family dwellings. The percentage of single-family dwelling units increased slightly from 94.7% to 97.0%. Both Sussex County and the State experienced increases in the percentage of its housing stock consisting of single-family homes during the ten-year period. Between 2010 and 2020, Bethel experienced an increase in the number of mobile homes in town (0 to 4 mobile homes). During the same period the percentage of mobile homes making up the total housing stock decreased in Sussex County and the State.

Table 8. Comparison of dwellings by type in Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware, ACS 2010

Housing Type	Bethel		Sussex County		State of Delaware	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Single Family Detached	87	91.6%	71,910	60.2%	230,363	57.8%
Single Family Attached	3	3.2%	9,118	7.6%	58,330	14.6%
Multi-Family	5	5.3%	13,026	10.8%	70,630	17.7%
Mobile Homes	-	-	25,417	21.3%	39,440	9.9%

Source: 2010 ACS 5 –year estimates. Please note the data referenced has a significant margin of error.

Table 9. Comparison of dwellings by type in Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware, ACS 2020

Housing Type	Bethel		Sussex County		State of Delaware	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Single Family Detached	182	96.8%	91,310	64.7%	256,679	58.8%
Single Family Attached	2	1.1%	13,884	9.8%	69,530	15.9%
Multi-Family	-	-	14,779	10.4%	77,901	17.9%
Mobile Homes	4	2.1%	21,043	14.9%	34,126	7.8%

Source: 2020 ACS 5 –year estimates. Please note the data referenced has a significant margin of error.

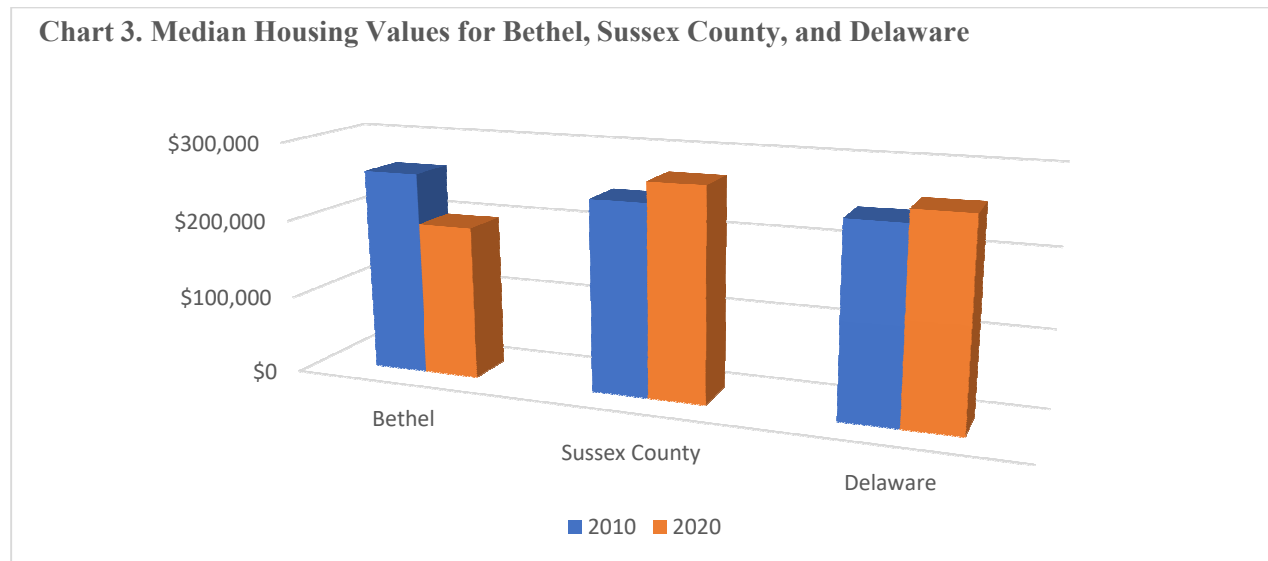
As of March 2025 there are 143 Single family homes, no multi-family homes, and no mobile homes inside the town limits of Bethel.

Age of Housing Stock

Bethel is a community that has retained many of its older structures. The American Community Survey 2020 estimates that 41% of Bethel’s housing was built before 1949. The greatest number of homes were built prior to 1940 (41%) with another boom between 1990 and 1999 (23.4%). As with all ACS data, please note that these estimates have a high margin of error and may not accurately capture the actual age of structures in town.

Housing Value

Bethel's median home value was reported by the 2020 American Community Survey to be \$195,500. This figure was lower than what was reported for Sussex County (\$269,700) and the State of Delaware (\$258,300).



Source: ACS 2010, ACS 2020

Ownership and Vacancy

When comparing vacant homes, owner occupied units and renter occupied units in Bethel with those in Sussex County and the State, the 2020 American Community Survey finds Bethel fares well with a higher percentage of homeowners than Sussex County and Delaware.

2-2g. Economic Profile

This section discusses selected economic information for Bethel, Sussex County, and Delaware. Bethel's estimated median household income in 2020 was \$72,283, which is 19.26% less than the estimated median income in the County and 24.3% less than the estimated median income in the State.

Table 10. Selected Income Data for Bethel, Sussex County and Delaware, 2020 ACS

Income Category	Bethel	Sussex	Delaware
Mean Household Income	\$72,283	\$87,691	\$92,308
Mean Wages or Salary Income	\$69,412	\$79,716	\$89,697
% of households with wage or salary income	45.0%	65.2%	73.8%
Mean Social Security Income	\$23,333	\$24,051	\$22,546
% of households with social security income	62.1%	47.3%	35.8%
Mean Retirement Income	\$27,869	\$35,017	\$31,283
% of households with retirement income	43.8%	36.3%	27.9%
Mean Public Assistance Income	-	\$2,581	\$2,213
% of households with public assistance income or Food Stamps/SNAP	8.3%	11.9%	11.5%
% of population below poverty level	1.7%	11.7%	11.4%
% of seniors (65+) below poverty level	3.7%	5.5%	6.5%

Source: 2020 ACS 5-year estimates

Of the 352 residents over the age of 16 estimated to be living in the town by the 2020 ACS, about 36.6% of them were employed according to the 2020 ACS. About 1.1% of the residents over the age of 16 were unemployed at that time. The ACS estimates that roughly 61.6% of the residents 16 and over were not considered part of the labor force. The overall percentage of people living below the poverty line in Bethel is very low compared to the County and State. The 3.7% of seniors in Bethel living below the poverty level is almost half of the percentage of seniors in Sussex County and the State.

Table 11 shows that workers in Bethel take part in a number of occupations, the most prevalent of which is service occupations (37.2%).

Table 11. Industry of Workers 16 Years and Older

Industry	Number	Percentage
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	2	2.13%
Construction	4	4.26%
Manufacturing	9	9.57%
Wholesale trade	0	0.00%
Retail trade	19	20.21%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	11	11.70%
Information	0	0.00%
Finance and insurance, real estate and rental and leasing	0	0.00%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	5	5.32%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	19	20.21%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, accommodation and food services	3	3.19%
Other services	13	13.83%
Public administration	9	9.57%
TOTAL	94	100%

Source: 2020 ACS 5-year estimates

Please note the data referenced has a significant margin of error.

2-2h. Conclusion

The population and demographic information derived from the US Census is not as reliable as would be desired due to the extremely small population size in Bethel. However, when compared to similar data at the County and State level, some interesting trends emerge. As of 2020, Bethel's population was aging at a greater rate than either Sussex County or the State. Also, Bethel's median housing values and mean household income trail both the County and the State. Bethel should seek to provide new housing opportunities consistent with the character of the Town, while using proven code enforcement and housing revitalization strategies to improve housing conditions for all residents.

2.3 Environmental Features

The Town of Bethel is located along Broad Creek within the larger Nanticoke Watershed in western Sussex County and was surrounded by a mix of forest and agricultural lands. There has been a significant increase in housing development around the Town in the last few years. Lands to the east and north are still either good or excellent areas for groundwater recharge. Having no improved water or sewer infrastructure, the Town relies on independent wells and stand-alone septic systems to meet the needs of its residents.

2.3a Wetlands

Located in proximity to Broad Creek, it is no surprise that the Town of Bethel contains wetlands. These wetlands follow Broad Creek and provide a mix of habitat, water quality benefits, and help to mitigate flooding from Broad Creek. In addition, adjacent to the Town are some pockets of non-tidal wetlands as identified by the DNREC SWAMP system. (See Map 7 in Appendix A) As the Town considers future growth, it will continue to work with DNREC to protect these resources through improved ordinances and regulations.

2.3b Soils

The *USDA-NRCS Soil Survey for Sussex County, Delaware (1972)* shows the majority of soil within and around Bethel is classified as Evesboro Series, Evesboro sandy loam, substratum, 0-2 slope (EvA), which consists of very deep, excessively drained, sandy soils on uplands dominated by mainly hardwood vegetation mixed with some Virginia and Loblolly pine. This soil is often dry and less fertile, but less so in Evesboro soils with a loamy stratum. This series is best suited for most major crops and less likely to erode from water. However, it is subject to wind erosion. In addition, as part of the State's efforts to continue to map and evaluate soil characteristics throughout the State, the 2002 soil survey now identifies soils within and around Bethel as Fort Mott (FM) soils, which have similar and like characteristics as those of Evesboro soils.

2.3c State Wildlife Areas

The community of Bethel is located near several Delaware Fish and Wildlife properties that are part of the Nanticoke Wildlife Area. At the west and south of Town, these properties provide a variety of recreational opportunities, with hunting and fishing as the most popular.

2.3d Broad Creek

Broad Creek is an asset to the community. Much of the Town's history is tied to the use of the waterway and its abundant mix of resources. Broad Creek is a tributary of the Nanticoke River which is connected to the Chesapeake Bay. The Town currently maintains only a water access point for fishing. One of the major concerns of the residents of the Town in the public surveys was the lack of actual access to water. In the past, the Town dock or pier was open to boats and other watercraft, but the pier was rebuilt to prevent any access except for fishing. This activity has been limited to Town residents in the past but has been made available to the public in 2025. The area where the dock is located is surrounded by private residences, so no additional public access is currently available in this area. There is parking available across from the town office if needed. Currently there is an effort to replace the aging dock; a taskforce has been established to work with state and nonprofit organizations to bring this to fruition. The Town is concerned with the long-term health of the water in addition to the adjacent marshes and wetlands. Agricultural and residential water runoffs and failed septic systems could also impair the health of the creek. In the effort to control runoff, the Town received a grant to construct several storm water bioretention areas that prevent the water from going directly into the creek. The Town also continues to partner with the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance (NWA). The organization collects water samples from the creek that are tested for various pollutants, the results of which are published on a yearly basis in a report on the health of the entire Nanticoke River watershed. (See Section 2.3e) The Town will continue to partner with DNREC, the NWA, the Chesapeake Bay Authority and other agencies, the upstream water source (Laurel, Delaware) and other downstream sources to protect this resource and improve the overall health and safety of the creek.

2.3e Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL's)

DNREC was working within the overall Nanticoke watershed to develop “Total Maximum Daily Load” (TMDL) values and pollution control strategies for Nitrogen, Phosphorous and Bacteria pollutants. The goal of this effort was to reduce the total maximum daily load of nutrient pollutants that enter the watershed to the following reduction values: Nitrogen 30%, Phosphorus 60%, and Bacteria 9%. A TMDL is the maximum level of pollution which a water body may assimilate without compromising its quality, drinking water, shellfish harvest, and recreational goals such as swimming and fishing.

TMDL's and Best Management Practices to protect the Nanticoke/Broad Creek watershed resource are still in development. To support this effort, DNREC recommends Best Management Practices (BMPs) for all land uses. Pollution Control Strategies being developed by DNREC will help to pinpoint some of these BMPs that will work to reduce both point and non-point source pollutants such as agricultural runoff and the removal of failing septic systems. Recognizing that Bethel is a small town with limited resources, the Town will continue to work in partnership with DNREC to implement local land use regulations to protect these valuable water resources as part of the implementation of a comprehensive land use plan. NWA produces a yearly report on the status of Nanticoke and its tributaries. It currently uses the Mid-Atlantic Tributary Assessment Coalition's (MTAC) Tidal and Non-Tidal Protocols (ian.umces.edu) to assess the health of the water. The overall grade of Broad Creek was a C in 2021. This is from samples collected at two sites in Laurel, DE, Bethel (Bethel Dock) and Phillips Landing, which is located where Broad Creek's water enters the Nanticoke.

2.3f Urban and Community Forestry Program

The Delaware Department of Agriculture Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program provides technical, educational, and financial resources to develop and improve urban forest resources. Urban forest resources provide a mix of benefits such as increased property values, reduced air and water pollution, reduced crime, and improved quality of life for residents.

The Town of Bethel will continue to investigate ways to increase these resources by raising the forest canopy value (the Town's percent of land covered by trees) from 14% to 20% over the next ten years by developing local ordinances, encouraging the planting of trees within new development projects and becoming a Tree City USA Community. Most of the Town residents favored this plan in our surveys.

2.3g Trash/Litter Control and the Burning of Yard Waste/Debris

The Town recognizes the importance of controlling waste of all types, as well as the need to manage the impacts of waste removal, recycling efforts, and burning of trash/debris. Many of the Town residents have a private waste hauler to remove trash and other debris. To facilitate waste removal and recycling, the Town negotiated a favorable cost benefit agreement with a local waste hauler that reduced the costs considerably for Bethel residents. Waste removal occurs weekly and recycling biweekly. The Town has also provided the annual cost-free collection of solid waste and natural materials (limbs and bushes, etc.). Because of its rural character, some Town residents may continue to burn trash and debris. Due to the rural location of the Town, these methods of removal of waste are not likely to change unless the individual residents choose to change on their own. Over time, if State and County programs improve, then the Town may enter into formal agreements to require the pick-up of waste and recyclable materials.

2.3h Use of energy-efficient home materials for reducing greenhouse gases

The Town and its residents recognize the need to protect air quality and overall health of the environment, both locally and globally. As the Town considers future growth, it may choose to create ordinances requiring green building technologies, less construction waste, and energy-efficient appliances. Several residents in the Town currently have solar devices. There are currently no wind turbines. Several years ago, the Planning and Zoning Commission produced a proposal for the use of wind and solar units within the Town. This proposal was tabled, primarily due to potential noise issues with wind devices and the fact that the entire Town is a Historical District. Other regulations address the location of both solar and wind devices within such a District.

2.4 Future Land Use

The Town contains a variety of land uses as described in Section 1.3. While most of the land use is either residential or agricultural, several properties are devoted to commercial and institutional purposes. The future land uses for the Town are shown on Map 8 in Appendix A. The following is a description of each land use category and the policies that will guide the Town when implementing land use regulations and future development proposals in each area. The Future Land Use plan is comprised of both written policies and the map, and neither should be used without reviewing the other.

2.4a Growth inside Bethel

There are currently less than 200 acres that are vacant and in agricultural use inside the Town boundaries of Bethel, representing roughly half of the total area of the Town. While not all this land is available for development due to environmental constraints, it does represent a substantial amount of land that can be developed for residential or commercial uses. The Town of Bethel will consider development of these lands consistent with the Future Land Use plan described in this section and within the constraints of the utility infrastructure described in Section 2.6.

2.4b Residential Land Uses

Most of the Town is designated for future residential land use. This includes all lands with existing single-family homes and lands currently in agricultural production. The Town intends that these areas will either remain as single-family homes or be developed from agricultural use into housing consistent with the character of the Town. General policies that will guide residential land uses in Bethel are:

- The preservation and rehabilitation of existing homes in Bethel will be encouraged.
- Home ownership in Town will be encouraged.
- Modest growth controls will be encouraged.
- Tree and shrubbery maintenance will be encouraged.

2.4c Commercial Land Uses

Most commercial uses in Bethel are located along Bethel Road and Main Street in the northern and central parts of Town. The future land use plan proposes concentrating the Town's commercial activity in these areas. Currently, there are only a few commercial properties. Future commercial uses will be encouraged to occupy the central and northern end of Town. The following are some general policies that will guide commercial properties in Bethel:

- Promote and encourage continued agricultural businesses within the Town.
- Allow continued operation of existing commercial uses.
- Promote restaurants, retail stores and recreational uses that provide needed goods, services, and jobs to the Town; but be aware that Town residents do not desire large-scale regional retail uses.

2.4d Institutional Land Uses

There are several institutional uses in Town. It is the intent of the Town to encourage their continued operation and role in the community by designating them for future institutional purposes. The institutional properties include the Sailor's Bethel United Methodist Church, the Bethel Community House, Bethel Post Office, the Bethel Museum and Playground, Community Park, and Bethel Community Dock. Some general policies that will guide institutional land uses in Bethel are:

- Existing institutional properties will be encouraged to continue their roles in the community and be allowed to grow and expand in a reasonable fashion consistent with the character of Bethel.
- New institutional uses will be considered by the Bethel Town Council and the Bethel Planning and Zoning Commission through a conditional use process.

2.4e Cottage Industries

The residents of Bethel have a strong entrepreneurial spirit, which is seen in several home-based businesses throughout the Town. Often called "cottage industries," these are small-scale businesses that residents operate from their homes.

While not specified on the land use map, these businesses do have a presence in Town. Bethel wants to encourage cottage industries, while ensuring they don't infringe on the rights of other residents. Some general policies that will guide cottage industries in Bethel are:

- Cottage industries are encouraged to promote entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency among the residents of Bethel.
- Cottage industries should be regulated by the future land use regulations in Bethel, perhaps as a "conditional use" allowed in all zones.
- In future land use regulations, the Town should define some parameters to guide the establishment and operation of cottage industries. The parameters should include, but not be limited to, noise and parking regulations, storage requirements for heavy equipment, and requirements for hours of operation. The goal will be to ensure that cottage industries are compatible with their neighbors, but still have the flexibility to operate and flourish economically.

2.4f Agricultural/Natural Resources/Residential

The proposed future land use is intended to allow for a mix of uses to preserve and maintain the existing community's character, while allowing for modest residential growth, the continued growth and prosperity of the agricultural industry, and the protection of natural resources within and near the community. Through the development of the revised zoning code for the Town, this future land use will be further defined to describe acceptable agricultural activities; encourage and provide incentives to protect establish natural resources; and allow for residential development that is in keeping with the historic and rural characteristic of the community.

2.4g Recommendations, Future Land Use

Follow the Land Use Policies in Section 2.4. Bethel should follow the land use policies listed in this section when considering any land development application and when developing land use regulations.

2.5 - Growth and Annexation

2.5a Annexation

Approximately 20 public meetings and surveys completed by more than half of the residents of Bethel showed no interest in annexation of any additional land parcels. Thus, the Town will still not delineate a future growth area at this time. If, in the future, the Town residents deem annexation desirable, then an amendment to the Town's adopted Comprehensive Plan will be required. This amendment should include the creation and delineation of a future growth area, assigning prospective uses to the lands within the future growth area, and the creation of an annexation policy/procedure.

Yet, the Town of Bethel still recognizes the possibility of growth in areas around their jurisdiction, particularly in boundary-divided parcels. These parcels as currently defined in Map 9 in Appendix A could be developed using development codes and standards, from both the Town of Bethel and Sussex County. This could create a conflict situation where future growth, directly adjacent to Town, would be developed out of character with the Bethel community. Because of this possibility and the lack of interest in annexation, Bethel will delineate an "Area of Concern" reflecting those parcels that are boundary divided. (See Map 9 in Appendix A) This effort will raise awareness of new development proposals adjacent to the Town and allow for future annexation once the community has completed the following:

- Update the Adopted and Certified Town of Bethel Comprehensive Plan.
- Review and amend the Town's Charter.
- Review and amend the Town's Zoning and Subdivision Codes.
- Amend the Comprehensive Plan, in accordance with Delaware Code, Title 9, Chapter 22.

2.5b Preservation of the Rural Character of Bethel

A. Transfer of Development Rights

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is a program that provides a mechanism for governments to concentrate residential and other development in desired areas (such as those served by sewer, water, roads, and other public facilities) while protecting the rural landscapes and environmentally sensitive areas. Under a TDR program, the development rights vested in a zoned property (the “sending area”) can be sold to a TDR bank or to a specific developer. Those rights are transferred to another location (the “receiving area”), where they can be applied to increase the density of a development above the maximum specified by that property’s zoning district.

If Sussex County adopts a TDR program or participates in a statewide TDR program in the future, Bethel intends to become a sending area for the TDR program and will encourage its Area of Concern as shown on Map 9 in Appendix A, to do the same. This would result in development elsewhere while protecting the Town’s character and natural habitat. This is consistent with supporting the Town’s goal of preserving its unique character and environmental attributes.

B. Ag Preservation

The Town supports the continuation of agricultural land uses in the area surrounding the Town where farming has been practiced for centuries. Farming preserves open space for the benefit of residents and visitors and provides a buffer between the Town and encroaching development. Keeping this land in farming restricts the amount of impervious surface cover in the watershed and provides habitat for a variety of species. Agricultural preservation programs should continue to be used to preserve farmland adjacent to and surrounding the Town of Bethel. The Town encourages the farming community to practice conservation measures, such as the use of adequate stream buffers to protect riparian zones and absorb runoff and pollutants; no-till and contour plowing to reduce soil erosion and runoff; and organic and sustainable farming practices that reduce the impact that farming has on critical environmental resources in the Bethel area.

2.5c Recommendations, Growth and Annexation

The Town's priority should be the updating and reviewing of the current Zoning and Subdivision Codes. 22 Del Code; section 702(c) states: "The comprehensive plan shall be the basis for the development of zoning regulations as permitted pursuant to Chapter 3 of this title.

Should a jurisdiction exercise its authority to establish municipal zoning regulations pursuant to Chapter 3 of this title, it shall, within 18 months of the adoption of a comprehensive development plan or revision thereof, amend its official zoning map to rezone all lands within the municipality in accordance with uses of land provided for in the comprehensive development plan. The Code can serve as a tool for the Town to preserve and enhance its many assets, to regulate land use, and to make the goals of the Comprehensive Plan a reality.

- A. Part of what makes Bethel unique is its rural context and surrounding farmlands. There are many tools and programs the Town can utilize for agricultural preservation. The Delaware Agriculture Lands Preservation Program protects thousands of acres of farmland each year. There are other programs through the County and private conservation Organizations that have the same goals. Agricultural zoning is another option the Town should explore for agricultural preservation. Bethel should start a dialogue with citizens, local farmers, and the Department of Agriculture to determine what role farmland protection can play in the Town's development and the development in adjacent areas of the County.
- B. The Town should enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with Sussex County for reciprocal notification and coordination of land use and development activities with the defined Area of Concern for boundary divided parcels.

2.6 Public Utilities and Services

2.6a Water System

There is no public water system in Bethel. Water supply in the Town is currently provided by individual wells located on each property. During the public participation process, Town residents were asked their opinions regarding a public water system with a very mixed response. Of those who responded to the Survey, some felt a public water system was most important, while others felt it was the least important issue of those listed on the Survey. Further inquiry would be needed before determining whether the Town should pursue a private water system. It is important to note that any new large development project in or around Bethel would be required to install a public water system. In this event, the town should consider incorporating Town residents into the public water system.

2.6b Wastewater Treatment System

There is no wastewater treatment provided by either Sussex County or a private wastewater treatment facility. All wastewater services are stand-alone systems maintained by property owners.

2.6c Solid Waste Disposal

Refuse collection services are the responsibility of each individual property owner. Residents and businesses in Bethel arrange for collection through one of several private companies operating in the area. The Delaware Solid Waste Authority (DSWA) operates public “Recycle Delaware” centers within the Town of Laurel, at the Woodland Ferry Terminal, and in the Town of Seaford. Also, residents may choose to pay for curbside recycling through a private provider. DSWA also operates a collection and transfer station in Hardscrabble, Delaware. Finally, the Town of Georgetown holds a DSWA Household Hazardous Waste Collection each spring to assist County residents with the disposal of waste and debris. As noted earlier (2.3g) the Town negotiated a favorable agreement with a local waste management company.

2.6d Stormwater Management

Stormwater management is an issue for many towns -- specifically in Bethel, where residents are located near the flood-prone river areas. However, few residents complain about the flooding in the southern portion of Town near the creek and flood plain areas. Some flooding may be caused by high tides or stormwater drainage issues on specific properties. As more impervious surfaces are added to the landscape, the storm runoff can increase and cause problems. Currently, there are a few storm drains and ditches within the Town. The Bioretention Areas installed to limit runoff into Broad Creek also addressed some areas where there were issues with standing water. Additional development should include measures to address similar stormwater management that address both issues, although the Town should continue to be cautious in assuming responsibility for maintaining these facilities. All new developments must meet State of Delaware standards for stormwater management. No new development projects (such as new subdivisions on large tracts of vacant land) may be approved without Sussex County Conservation District approval.

2.6e Plan Recommendations: Public Utilities and Services

- 1. Evaluate the need for a public water system.** In the future, Bethel should consider the need for a public water system and evaluate the options for providing this service for residents. Currently, the Town has an exceedingly small budget, and individual wells seem to be working adequately. Should any of these conditions change, Bethel could undertake a study to determine how best to address the needs for a public water system.
- 2. Evaluate Stormwater issues.** Stormwater problems in Bethel are mainly the result of the runoff from impervious areas. It is recommended that Bethel continue to evaluate what can be done to address the stormwater problems regarding the drainage into the creek and consider developing a master stormwater plan in cooperation with the State and Sussex County to address regional flooding concerns. An evaluation of the success of the current Bioretention sites should also be done.

3. **Develop a formal relationship with Sussex County to evaluate the impact of County Sewer Service.** It is recommended that Bethel's town leadership contact the relevant officials of Sussex County to discuss the County's plans for future expansion of sewer service to the Bethel area. At a minimum, the results of this dialogue could be a Memorandum of Understanding describing the policy for providing and extending sewer service to properties in and around Bethel at a pace acceptable to the community.

2.7 Community Services and Facilities

2.7a Police

The Delaware State Police provide 24-hour police protection for the residents of Bethel when there is an emergency. Bethel has contracted with the Delaware State Police to provide 10-18 hours of law enforcement per week.

2.7b Fire Service

The Laurel Volunteer Fire Company provides both fire protection and emergency medical services for the residents of Bethel. This is one of 24 volunteer fire companies operating in Sussex County. Although each has its own district, they all provide mutual assistance when needed. The Laurel Volunteer Fire Company consists of 60 +/- active paid and volunteer firefighters. The fire company operates seven fire engines, one brush truck, one rescue truck, one water rescue boat, and a decontamination truck/trailer. There are no fire water systems within Bethel, and the Town will develop a cooperative partnership to develop potential dry hydrant sites within the Town to provide a source of water.

2.7c Emergency Medical Services

Bethel residents receive basic life support services from the Laurel Fire Department. Emergencies needing advanced life support are handled by Sussex County.

2.7d Education and Library Facilities

The Town of Bethel is located within the Laurel School District, which provides elementary, middle, and high schools to residents. Bethel residents have access to the services of the Laurel Public Library, located off Central Avenue.

2.7e Senior Services

No senior services are available in Bethel; however, there are resources for seniors outside of the Town. Nearby, Laurel Senior Center can meet the needs of Bethel residents.

2.7f Health Care

There are no health care facilities located in Bethel. The Nanticoke Memorial Hospital in Seaford provides health care for Bethel residents. Outpatient intermediate care is offered in Laurel, and a major hospital is in nearby Salisbury, Maryland.

2.7g Postal Service

The US Postal Service has an office located on Main Street in Bethel, which is open Monday through Friday from 12 pm to 4:30 pm and Saturday 8 am to 12pm. The postal zip code for Bethel is 19931.

2.7h Parks and Recreation

There are two parks in Bethel: one is the Town dock located along the river maintained by the Town, and there is a playground located and owned and maintained solely by the Bethel Historical Society. This area is also used for events such as an annual Town picnic sponsored jointly by the Town, the Historical Society and Sailor's Church. Recently Town management recognized the continued value of the playground area to the Town and awarded the Historical Society a grant to refurbish the playground area.

In the 2007 and 2018 public participation surveys, many residents mentioned the need for a better Town Park situation which would include access to Broad Creek.

Improving and expanding a Town Park could work in conjunction with other public requests, such as providing recreational opportunities for younger residents and possibly providing canoe/kayak access at the local dock or elsewhere. The Town might also want to continue to partner with the Historical Society using the vacant land adjacent to the Museum playground as part of a park expansion process.

2.7i Plan Recommendations: Community Services and Facilities

1. Evaluate the feasibility of improving existing Town parks and/or developing new ones. In surveys and during participation in public meetings, Town residents often mentioned the desirability of an expanded Town Park with additional recreational facilities.
2. Bethel should evaluate the need for and investigate the funding of such a facility in the future to include a canoe and kayak launch into Broad Creek. Canoe and kayak launch sites are now available on the Nanticoke in Seaford and Woodland and on Broad Creek at Phillips Landing and Laurel. A Bethel site would be between Phillips Landing and Laurel. Since Bethel is an important part of the general Chesapeake Bay Watershed, the Town should look at funding through some of the organizations or government entities dedicated to the continued enhancement of the recreational aspect of the Watershed.

2.8 Transportation

2.8a Regional Transportation

The main roads in Bethel are maintained by the State through the Delaware Department of Transportation (DELDOT). Bethel Road (Sussex County Road 493) and Vine Street/Beagle Club Road (Sussex County Road 487A) are the primary roads connecting the Town to Business Route 13A, serving as the route to Seaford, Laurel, and the rest of Delaware. (See Map 10 in Appendix A)

2.8b Local Roads

The Town of Bethel maintains several streets (totaling about 2.0 miles) within the Town limits. These streets serve residential uses rather than regional traffic needs. The Town streets are Community Lane, School Road, First Street, West Street, Pine Street, Main Street, Moore Street, Shady Lane, Hopkins Lane, Colbourne Lane, South Street, Sailor's Path, and Lewis Street. The Town Charter needs to be updated to reflect the currently designated street names.

2.8c Transit

There are no State-operated DART bus routes passing through the Town. Residents who desire access to public transportation may use DART bus route #212 connecting Georgetown, Bridgeville, Seaford, Laurel, and Delmar. From Georgetown bus route #303 goes to Dover, where connections exist to the rest of the State. As in all of Delaware, demand response services are available through DART by reservation to eligible elderly and disabled residents.

2.8d Transportation Issues

There are several transportation issues for the community:

- **The maintenance of local roads to improve health, safety, and welfare of residents.** Main Street experiences large volumes of truck traffic, since the road is often used as an alternate to US Route 13 and US Route 50 in Maryland, causing noise, and additional pollution. Excess speed is also a major problem that is recognized in the public surveys.
- **The maintenance and upkeep of the bridge on Bethel Road (Sussex County Road 493).** Over the past several years, this bridge has seen an increase in traffic, as it serves as a major connector between the Town and Sussex County. This had affected the safety and appearance of the bridge. The surface of the bridge was repaired in 2022.
- **The intersection of Woodland Ferry Road (Sussex County Road 78) and Bethel Road (Sussex County Road 493).** This serves as a major intersection for the community that resulted in several traffic accidents each year. Improvements were requested and were considered to address public safety. The County recently converted this intersection from the two-way stop to a four-way stop.

This change added a stop to Bethel Road, which might also reduce the tendency to speed through Bethel from the East.

- The community is encouraged to work with DELDOT to develop short-term and long-term solutions to their concerns.
- Traffic volume along Vine Street/Beagle Club Road (Sussex County Road 487A) has also increased markedly, due to increased development along that road.
- Many Bethel residents work outside of the Town. Dover, DE is a one-hour commute and Salisbury, MD is a half-hour away. Seaford, DE is just to the northeast, and Laurel, DE is just to the southeast. Traffic on Main Street continues to be a growing problem for the community, as more people from Delaware and Maryland use the Street to travel through Sussex County. In addition, new construction (primarily in the surrounding areas) has contributed to a significant increase in traffic through the Town. As noted, the main problem is speeding.

2.8e Woodland Ferry

The DELDOT Woodland Ferry Terminal offers limited fishing and recreational access to the Nanticoke River. An additional park situated on the West side of Woodland Ferry Road was recently added to the terminal site that, once fully developed, will greatly enhance the recreational aspects of the area. In addition, the daily operated ferry provides a more scenic route to Seaford and a shorter route to sites west of Seaford and points in Maryland. A park site was recently developed on Woodland Ferry Road near the Ferry where the County plans to add quite a few new features.

2.8f Recommendations: Transportation

- 1. Evaluate solutions to traffic and heavy truck usage on Main Street and Bethel Road.** Bethel should evaluate both enforcement and design based solutions to traffic on Main Street and the high volume of heavy trucks that pass through the Town along this road at high speed, in order to improve safety, reduce noise, and lessen pollution.
- 2. Update the street names in the Town Charter.** Bethel should update the Town Charter to list the Town's Street names as they are currently being used.

2.9 Community Character and Design

2.9a Context

The Town of Bethel was originally established around the “Lewis Wharf”, which provided boat access to Broad Creek. Bethel residents enjoy a tranquil, rural atmosphere in one of the smallest communities in Delaware. Just west of Laurel, Bethel’s small-town atmosphere is enhanced by agricultural areas to the north, east, and west of Town. The Town of Bethel is defined as a Rural Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This District is recognized for its agricultural landscape. The Town of Bethel has four properties with individual listings in the National Register of Historic Places. The Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs staff has determined that the historic core of the Town is eligible for the list because of compliance with federal environmental laws. Bethel’s historical context, strong maritime heritage, and small-town atmosphere set it apart from other Delaware municipalities.

2.9b Land Use and Design

The predominant land uses within Bethel are residential and agricultural. The Town is also surrounded by agriculture and open space. One of the Town’s defining features is its rural character. In Bethel, many of the houses are of the single-family, detached variety. Typical of most historic homes, they sit on a mix of both large and small lots, contrasting the regular shape of modern home lots. Another characteristic of historic houses and buildings is the small setbacks from the streets, apparent in most homes located in the Town. Bethel has identified an intention to maintain this valuable, historic character. Accordingly, in 2022, the Bethel Town Council adopted a Building and Site Design Standards Ordinance. However, Bethel is vulnerable to inappropriate development on the Town’s remaining open land since insufficient zoning codes are currently in place. In this scenario, a single-out-of-character development could disrupt the historic nature of the Town. It is imperative that the Town develop land use regulations that permit appropriate development and encourage it to fit in with the character of this unique, small Town.

2.9c Recommendations: Community Character

1. Preserve the Town's historic character. Bethel should protect its historic character by maintaining the current historic structures within Town by creating a historical commission. In addition, Bethel should encourage any new construction to be consistent with the historical style of the current homes. The Town of Bethel should consider working with the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs to list the eligible historical core in the National Register of Historic Places. The Town could also maintain its historical character through the adoption of further historical architectural guidelines and/or standards.
2. Encourage new development to fit in with the Town of Bethel. New developments should be designed to fit in with Bethel. This can be accomplished by connecting new streets to the existing Town street system and arranging lots and setbacks consistent with the existing homes in Town. Bethel can write land use regulations that permit and encourage these techniques.
3. Explore Agricultural Preservation Options. Part of what makes Bethel unique is its rural context and surrounding farmlands. The Delaware Agriculture Lands Preservation Program protects thousands of acres of farmland each year. There are other programs throughout the County and private conservation organizations that have the same goals. Bethel should start a dialogue with citizens, local farmers, and the Department of Agriculture to determine the role that farmland protection can play in maintaining the rural character of the Town.

2.10 Redevelopment

2.10a Redevelopment Potential

Although most houses in Bethel are well maintained, several residential properties in Town are in poor condition and in need of repair/maintenance. Their redevelopment will improve the Town's aesthetic appeal and potentially improve property values in Bethel.

The Town needs to remain cognizant of property maintenance issues since the older homes, which make up most of the housing stock in Bethel, often have more maintenance issues than the newer ones.

2.10b Recommendations

- 1. Code Enforcement.** Bethel should develop a code enforcement plan which includes penalties to ensure the housing stock is properly maintained. To be effective, it is crucial that any inspections be systematic, fair, and consistent. Due to Bethel's small size, it is unlikely that a full-time enforcement officer is necessary or affordable. Bethel should explore other options, such as hiring a part-time code enforcement officer or working with Sussex County on enhanced enforcement in the Town.

3.0 Implementation Actions and Recommendations

3.1 Planning Goals

Goal: To develop and implement a historical preservation program which provides options to protect cultural resources within the community.

Goal: To maintain the small-town, rural atmosphere through the adoption of appropriate zoning and land use ordinances.

Goal: To encourage modest growth that is in tune with existing community growth.

Goal: To preserve the rural atmosphere by balancing the needs of residents with the protection of rural land.

Goal: To restore and maintain Broad Creek and the Town dock, and seek resources to improve public access, so they continue to be sources of recreation and economic opportunity to the community.

Goal: To ensure the protection of natural resources for the enjoyment and health of existing and future residents of the community.

3.2 Vision for Bethel

Bethel is a small, historic, rural town with a rich history of agricultural and maritime heritage that will maintain its small-town character while allowing for modest growth and redevelopment that are consistent with Bethel's surroundings and current community character.

3.3 Short-Term, Mid-Range, and Long-Term Objectives.

Short-Term Goals:

Update Town Charter: Section 2.5 recommends the revision and modernization of the Town Charter. The Charter should be amended before annexation is considered.

Develop ordinances and regulations: The ordinances and regulations recommended in Section 2.5 should be in place to guide development before annexation is considered.

Update the street names in the Town Charter: Bethel should update the Charter to list the Town's Street names as they are currently being used.

Encourage new development to fit in with the Town of Bethel. New developments should be designed to fit in with Bethel. This can be accomplished by connecting new streets to the existing Town street system and arranging lots and setbacks consistent with the existing homes in Town. Bethel can adopt land use regulations that permit and encourage these techniques.

Work with the Delaware Forest Service to encourage Urban Forestry activities. This partnership would provide the opportunity to encourage forest resources while educating residents. The community should work to become a "Tree City USA" community which will further enhance the quality of life for residents.

Evaluate solutions to traffic and heavy truck usage on Main Street and Bethel Road, and on Vine Street and Beagle Club Roads. Bethel should evaluate both enforcement and design-based solutions to traffic on Main Street and Bethel Road, and on Vine Street and Beagle Club Road, and the high volume of heavy trucks that pass through the Town along these roads, to improve safety, reduce noise, and lessen pollution.

Mid-Range Goals:

Code Enforcement: Bethel should develop a code enforcement plan which includes penalties to ensure the housing stock is properly maintained. It is crucial that the inspections be systematic, fair, and consistent to be effective. Due to Bethel's small size, it is unlikely that a full-time enforcement officer is needed or could be funded by the Town. Bethel should explore other options, such as hiring part-time code enforcement officers or working with Sussex County on enhanced enforcement in the Town.

Work with Sussex County on the Transfer of Development Rights program. Most of the agricultural land surrounding the Town is either part of the Purchase Development Rights (PDR) program or an agricultural district. Bethel should work with Sussex County to explore Transfer Development Rights (TDR) options to further the farmland preservation efforts currently taking place around Bethel.

Evaluate storm water issues related to wetlands. Storm water problems in Bethel are generally the result of the runoff from impervious areas. It is recommended that Bethel evaluate if anything further needs to be done to address storm water problems regarding drainage into the creek and wetlands.

Evaluate the need for street lighting: In the future, Bethel should consider the need for additional street lighting and evaluate the options for providing this service to residents.

Long-Term Goals:

Preserve the Town's historical character. Bethel should protect its historical character by maintaining the current historical structures within the Town by consulting with the Bethel Historical Society. In addition, Bethel should encourage any new construction to be consistent with the historical style of the current homes. The Town of Bethel should consider working with the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs to list the eligible historic core in the National Register of Historic Places. The Town could also maintain its historical character through the adoption of additional historical architectural guidelines and/or standards.

Explore Agricultural Preservation Options. Part of what makes Bethel unique is its rural context and surrounding farmlands. The Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Program protects thousands of acres of farmland each year. There are other programs throughout the County and private conservation organizations that have the same goals. Bethel should start a dialogue with citizens, local farmers, and the Department of Agriculture to determine what role farmland protection can play in maintaining the rural character and setting of the Town.

Work with DNREC and Sussex County to protect natural resources. The community would meet many of the residents' interests by expanding this partnership to further protect and enhance these resources.

Continue to utilize, protect, and conserve Broad Creek. The community's history and heritage are tied to this resource. The community should explore opportunities to promote this resource while providing possible protective measures.

Work with DNREC to develop TMDLs for the Nanticoke/Broad Creek Watershed. The Nanticoke River and Broad Creek are under review for pollutants. The community should consider how to best address this issue through conservation measures and possible regulations.

Evaluate the need for a public water system. In the future, Bethel should consider the need for a public water system and evaluate the options for providing this service for residents. Currently, the Town has an exceedingly small budget and individual wells seem to be working adequately. Should any of these conditions change, Bethel could undertake a study to determine how best to address the needs for a public water system.

Develop a formal relationship with Sussex County to explore sewer service. It is recommended that the leadership of the Town of Bethel contact relevant officials at Sussex County to enter into a dialogue about the expansion of sewer service to the Bethel area. At a minimum, the results of this dialogue could be a Memorandum of Understanding that describes the policy for providing and extending sewer service to properties in and around Bethel.

Evaluate the need for a Town Park. During the 2007 and 2018 public participation surveys and the community meetings, the desirability of an expanded Town Park with recreational facilities was often mentioned and rated highly. This feature was especially related to access to Broad Creek. Bethel should evaluate the need for and investigate the funding of such a facility in the future. The Town should also consider the advantages of continuing to partner with the Historical Society to maintain and enhance the public playground.

APPENDIX

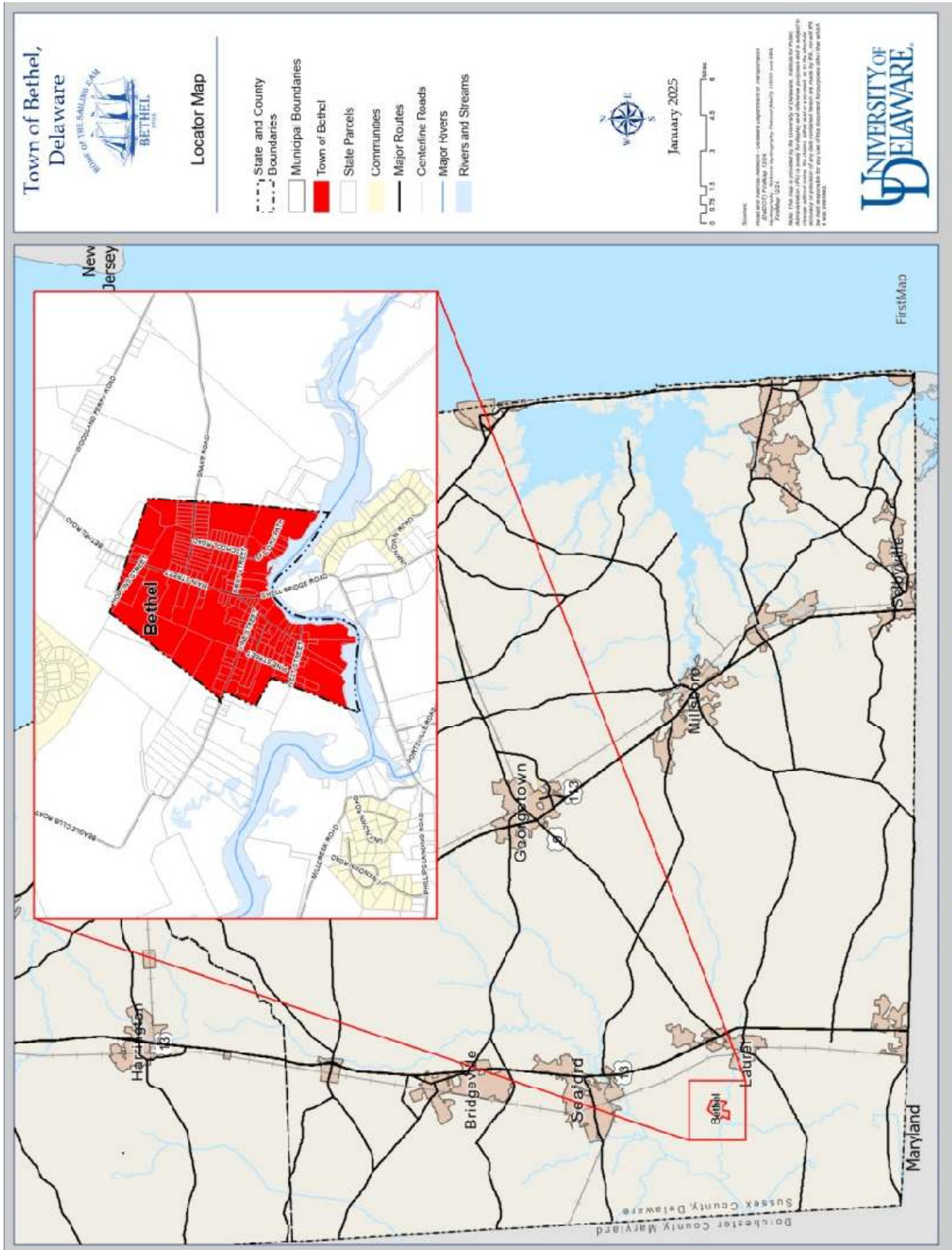
- A. MAPS**
- B. PLUS RESPONSE**
- C. PUBLIC COMMENTS**
- D. ADOPTION RESOLUTION**

APPENDIX A

MAPS

- 1. LOCATOR MAP**
- 2. AERIAL VIEW**
- 3. HISTORIC DISTRICT MAP**
- 4. EXISTING LAND USE**
- 5. ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES**
- 6. STRATEGIES FOR STATE POLICY & SPENDING**
- 7. FEMA FLOOD MAP**
- 8. FUTURE LAND USE**
- 9. AREA OF CONCERN**
- 10. TRANSPORTATION NETWORK**

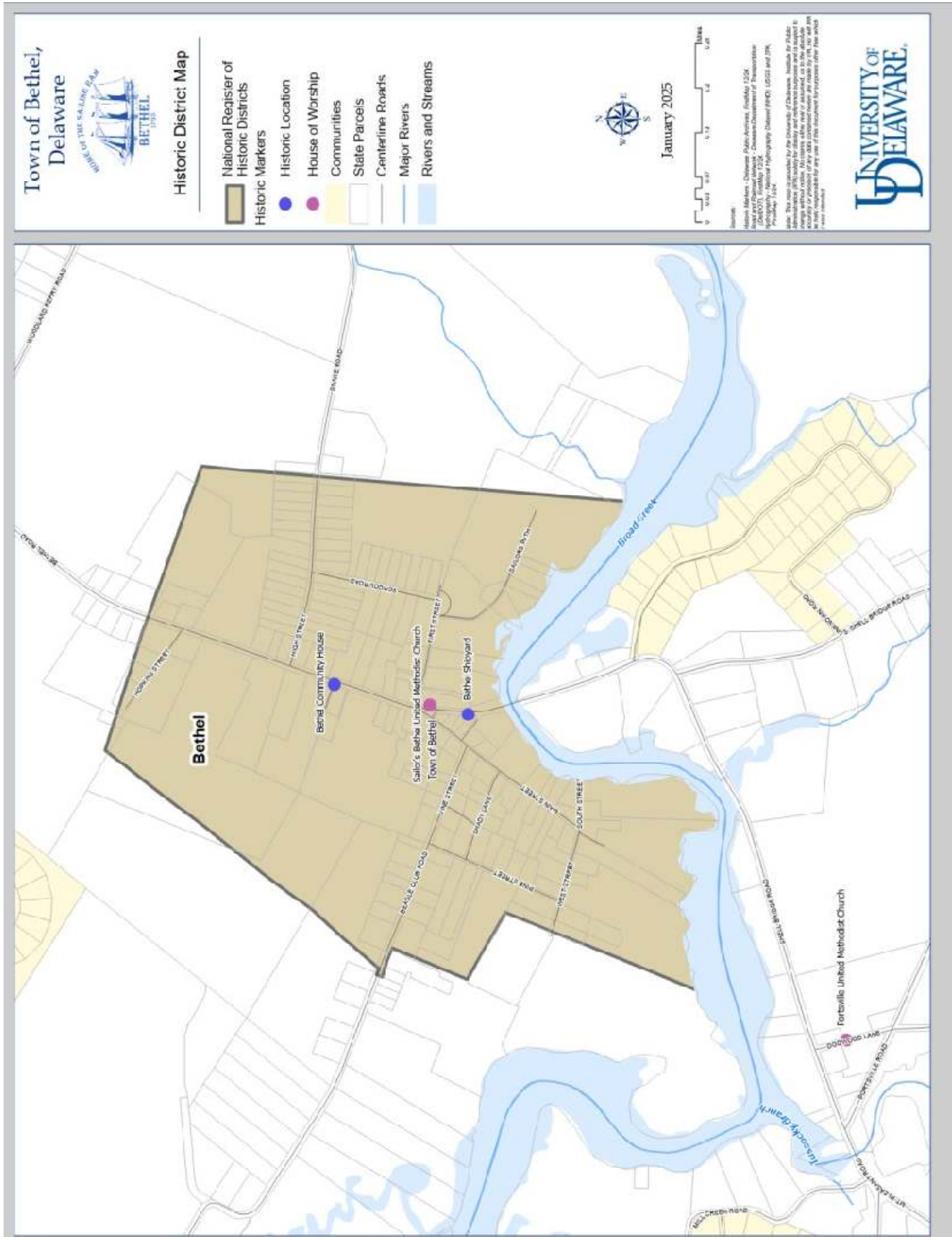
MAP 1



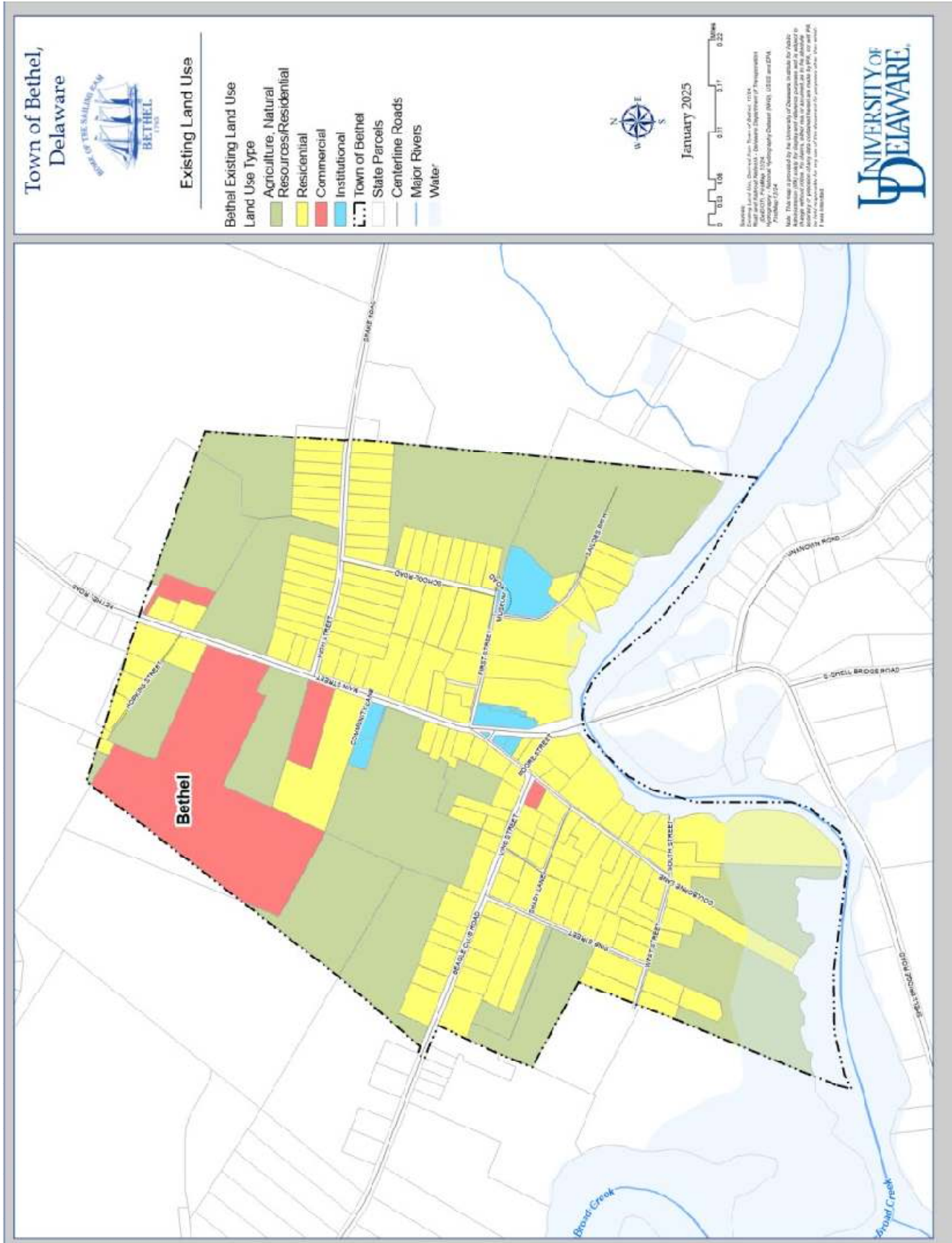
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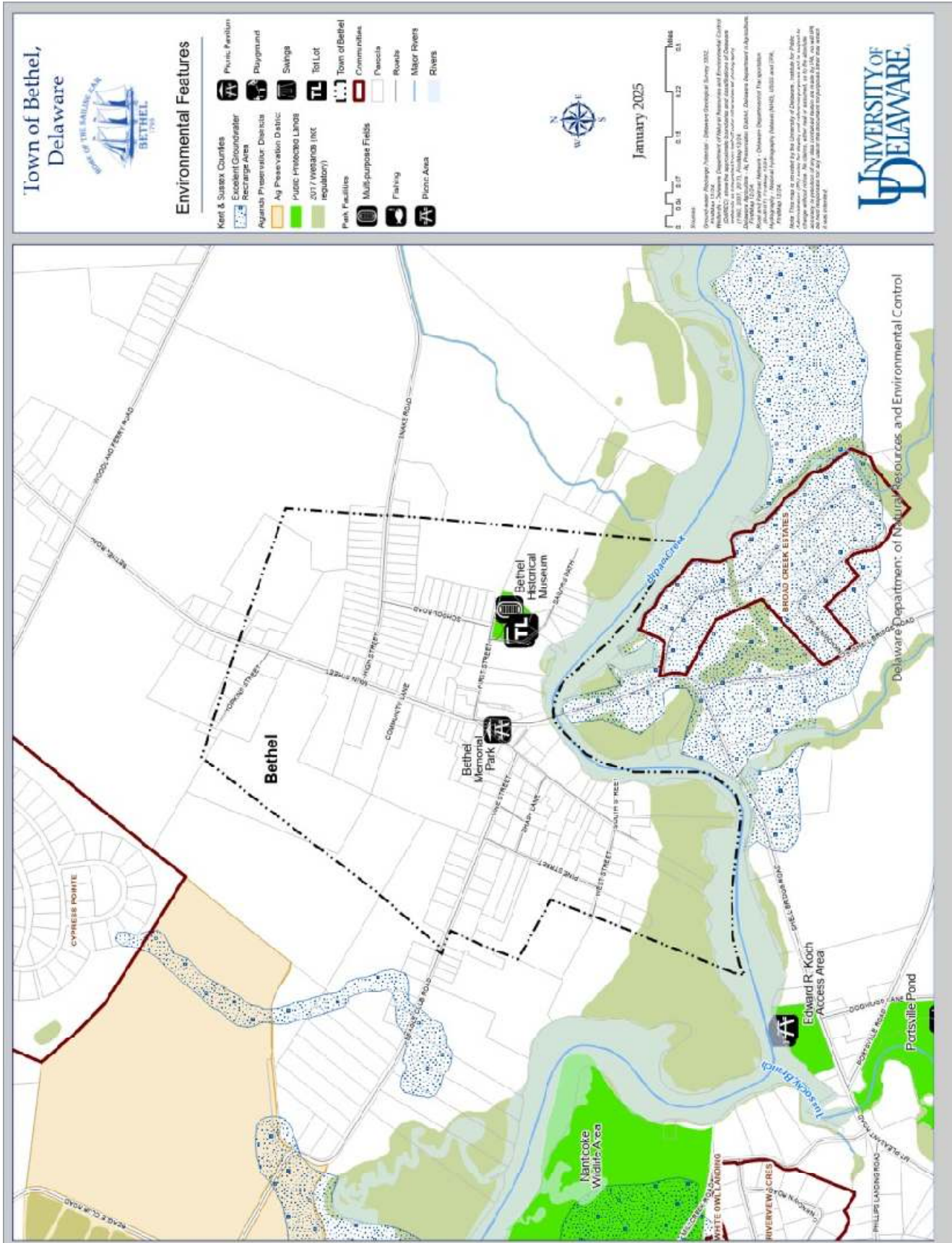
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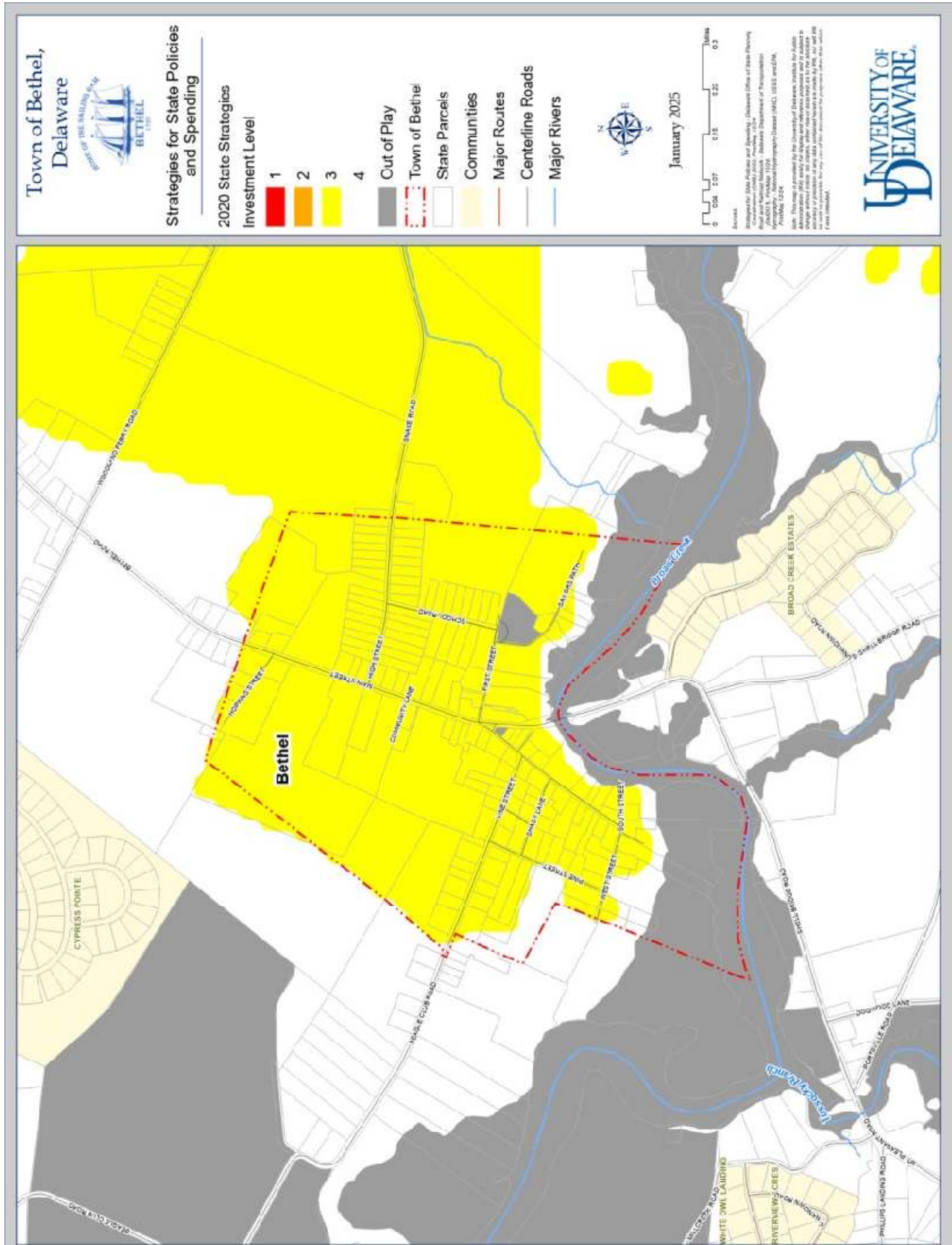
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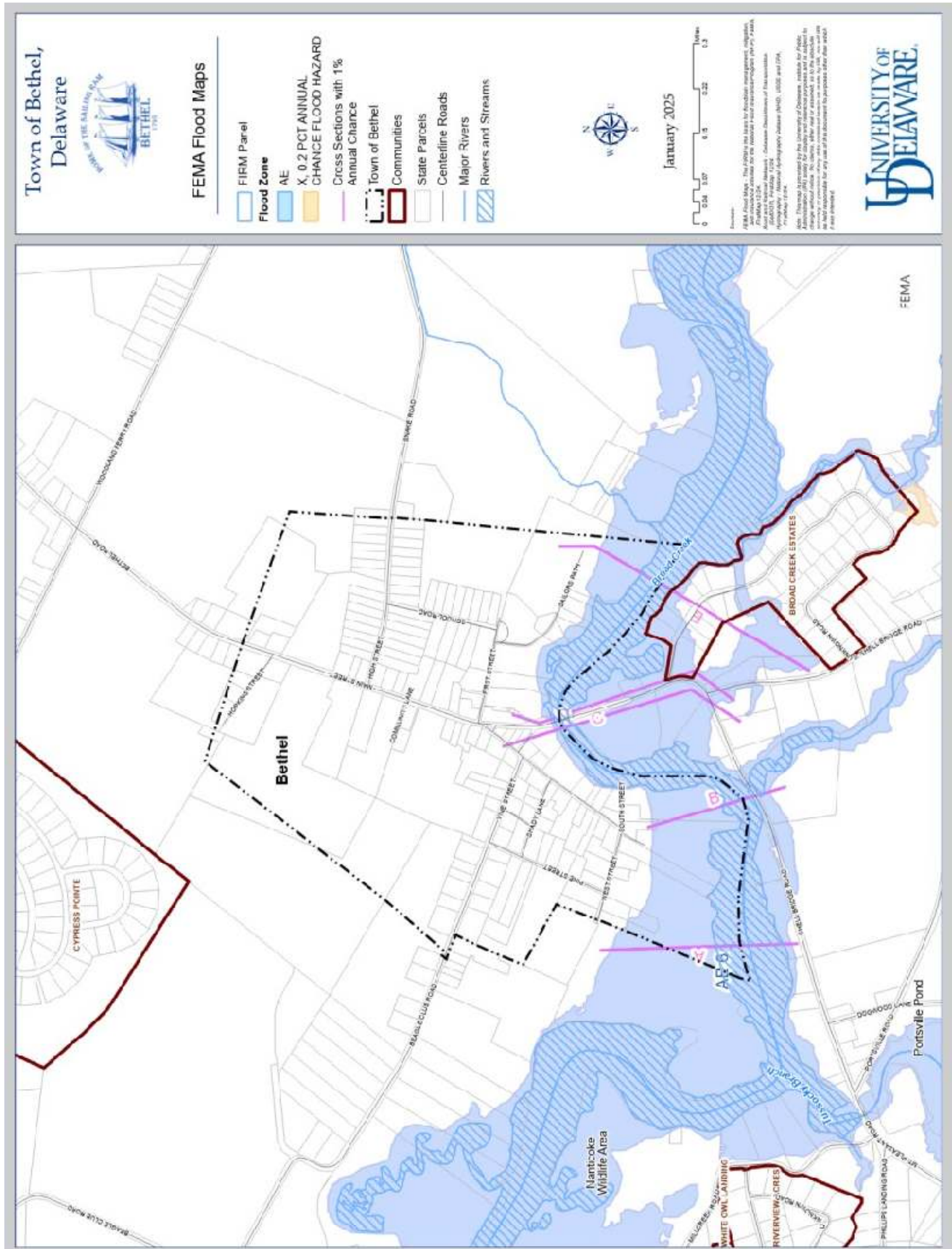
MAP 5



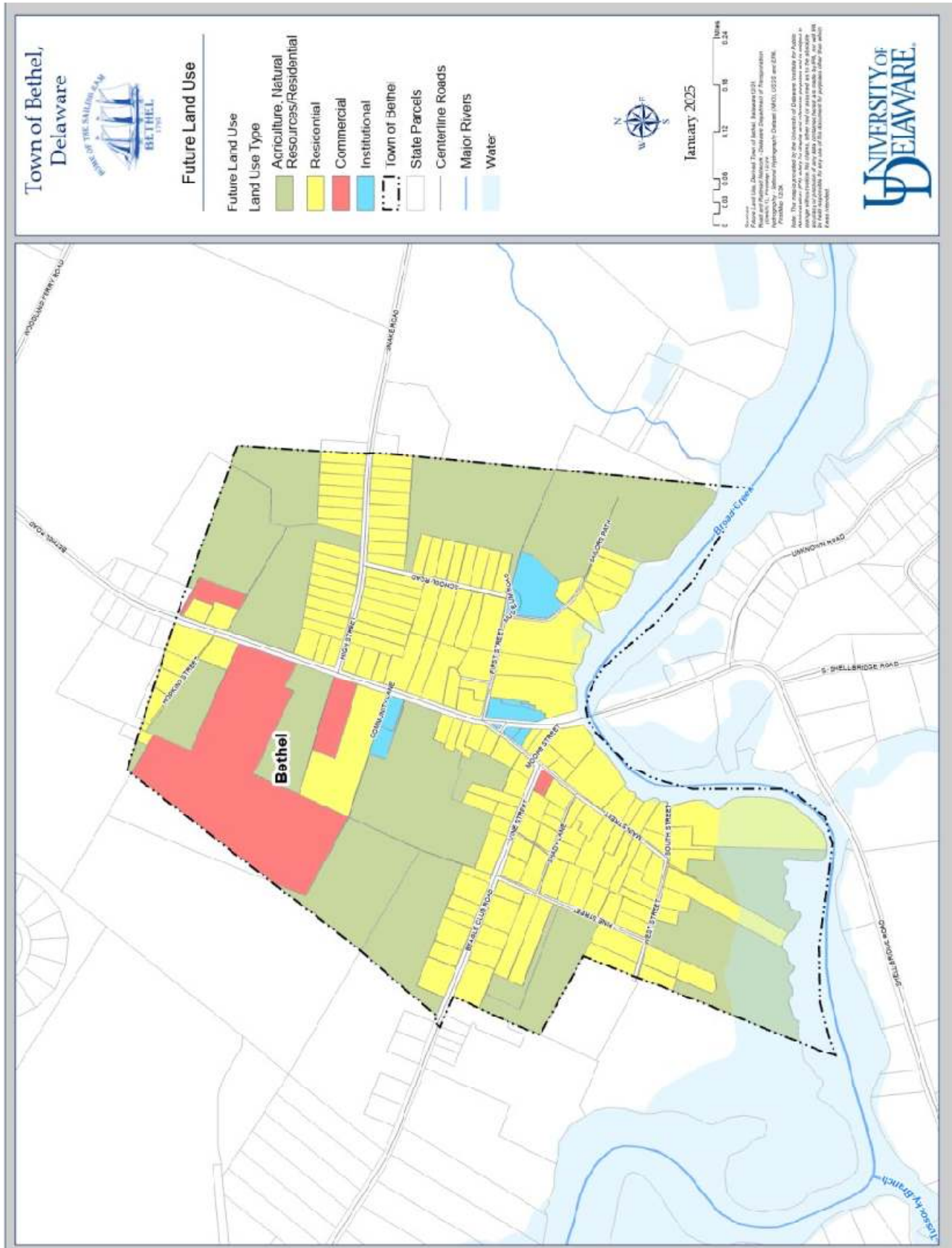
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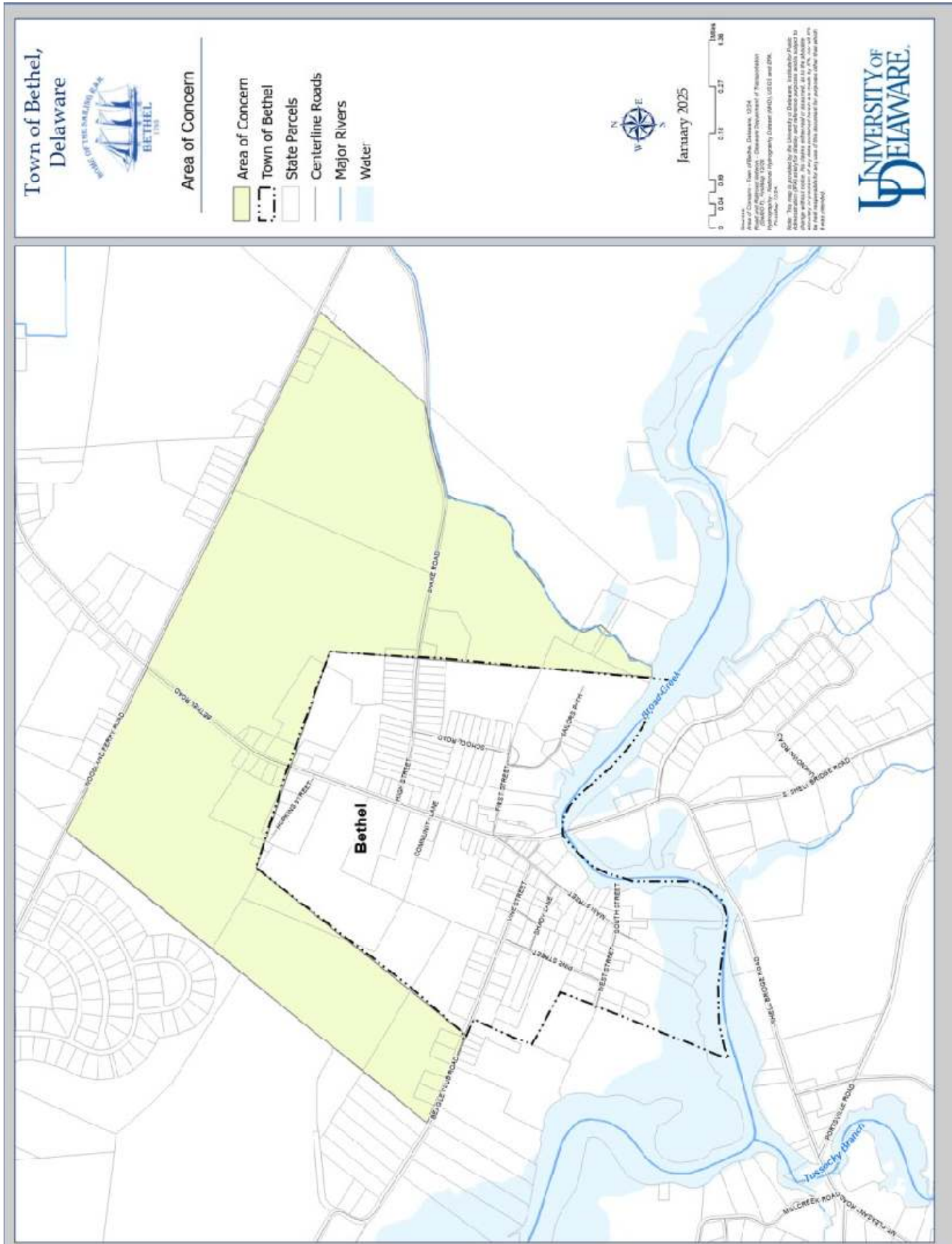
MAP 7



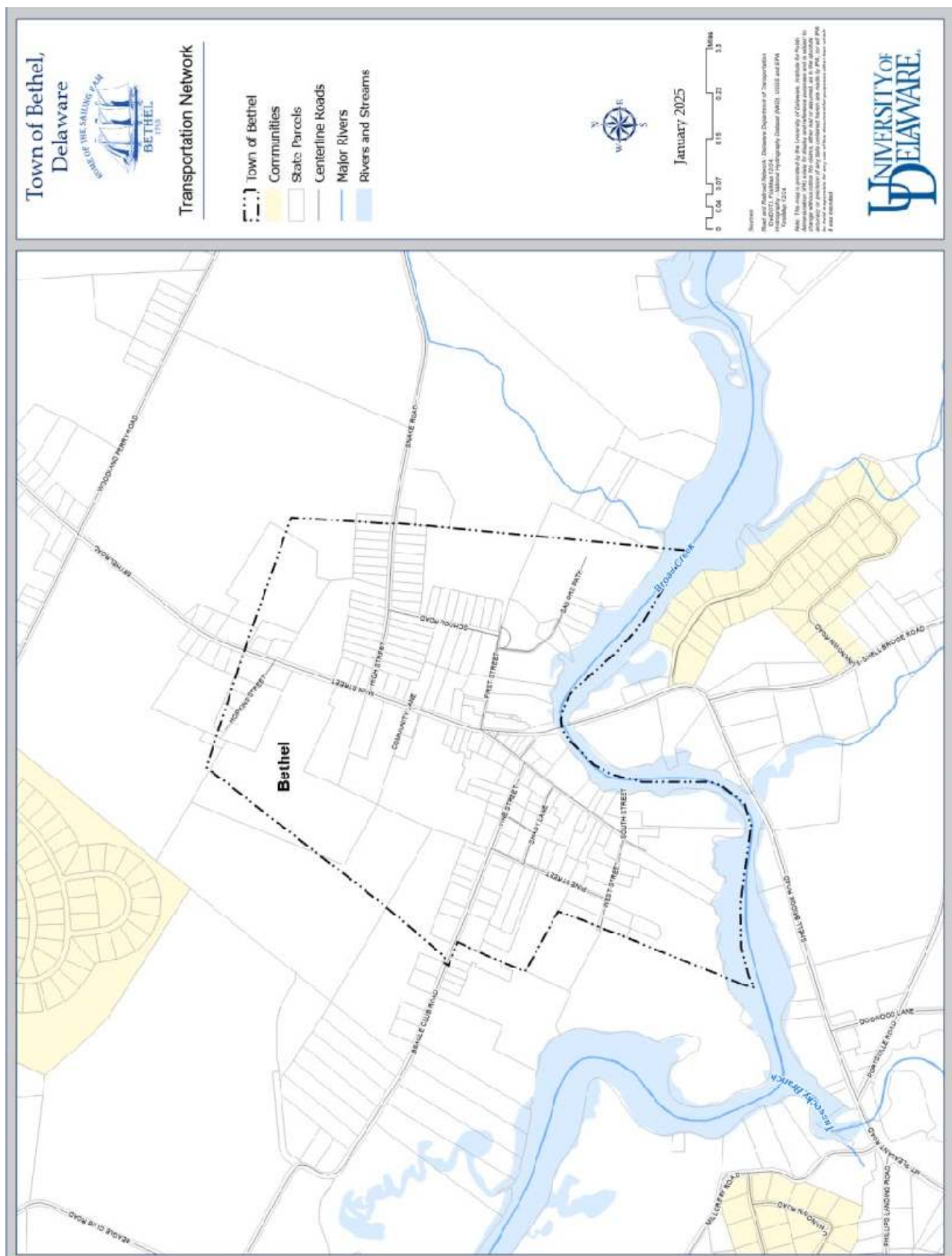
MAP 8



MAP 9



MAP 10



APPENDIX B

PLUS RESPONSE



STATE OF DELAWARE
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
OFFICE OF STATE PLANNING COORDINATION

October 22, 2024

Town of Bethel
Attn: Vernon Proctor
P.O. Box 310
Bethel, DE 19931

RE: 2024-09-01 Town of Bethel Comp Plan Update

Dear Mr. Proctor:

Thank you for meeting with State agency planners on September 25th, 2024 to discuss the proposed Town of Bethel draft comprehensive plan update.

Please note that changes to the plan, other than those suggested in this letter, could result in additional comments from the State. Additionally, these comments reflect only issues that are the responsibility of the agencies represented at the meeting.

Kudos to the town for submitting a plan to the office for certification and I commend the town for pushing through and getting this plan completed. The Town of Bethel is a small town of only about 118 homes and 260 people. The town has done an excellent job of setting actionable goals for the town to move them toward keeping Bethel as a small historic town. The office of State Planning looks forward to working with the town as you move toward certification and then implementing your plan.

Certification Comments: These comments must be addressed in order for our office to consider the plan amendment consistent with the terms of your certification and the requirements of Title 22, § 702 of the Del. Code.

Certification Issues

1. Page 8, Section 1.4 Public Participation – Please give an overview of the update process and either list or give an overview of public meetings and events held where the public had a chance to participate in or comment on the comprehensive plan update
2. All demographic tables should cite the source of the information. In addition, the town is required to use the Delaware Population Consortium data for the population projections. If the projection data came from this office, the source would be the 2021 Population Consortium data.

122 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. South – Haslet Armory · Third Floor · Dover, DE 19901
Phone (302)739-3090 · Fax (302) 739-5661 · www.stateplanning.delaware.gov

3. The plan must be sent to Laurel and Sussex County for the opportunity to review and comment. Any comments received or letter of no comments should be included in the final plan submitted for certification. In addition, the review and any comments received should be included in the public participation section of the plan.
4. Maps. The Plan should contain the following list of maps:
 - a. Municipal Boundary map
 - b. State Strategies map
 - c. Street map
 - d. Environmental Features map
 - e. Existing Land Use Map – Is included in the plan
 - f. Future Land Use map - No distinction in color – all yellow.
 - g. Annexation map – While the town does not wish to annex, this would be the map to identify the area of concern.

In 2022, the town worked with Nicole Minni of the University of Delaware on a set of maps for the plan. I have reached out to Nicole and she has the maps completed. Please reach out to Nicole and review the maps for approval by the town. Once the town has agreed to the maps, the maps must be submitted to this office for review. When reviewing the maps, please pay special attention to the boundary map to ensure the municipal boundaries are depicted correctly. Nicole can be reached at Nminni@udel.edu

5. Page 31, Section 2.5 c states “The Delaware Code requires the town to update its zoning code within eighteen months of the comprehensive plan adoption if it wishes to exercise zoning control”. Please correct statement. 22 Del Code; section 702 (c) states The comprehensive plan shall be the basis for the development of zoning regulations as permitted pursuant to Chapter 3 of this title. Should a jurisdiction exercise its authority to establish municipal zoning regulations pursuant to Chapter 3 of this title, it shall, within 18 months of the adoption of a comprehensive development plan or revision thereof, amend its official zoning map to rezone all lands within the municipality in accordance with the uses of land provided for in the comprehensive development plan. The town is not required to update your zoning code, but you are required to amend your zoning map to match your Future Land Use Map

Recommendations: Our office strongly recommends that the Town consider these recommendations from the various State agencies as you review your plan for final approval.

Office of State Planning Coordination – Contact Dorothy Morris: 302-739-3090

- Page 35 discusses improving and expanding the town park. The Town should be aware of the Outdoor Recreation, Parks, and Trails program grants which is a matching grant program assisting with park land acquisition and outdoor recreation facility development. Additional information on the grant can be found at [Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Trails Program - DNREC \(delaware.gov\)](https://dnrec.delaware.gov/Outdoor-Recreation-Parks-and-Trails-Program)

- Based on the comment on page 29 regarding parcel split by the municipal boundary, it is recommended that the town include a goal to clean up the town boundaries by approaching landowners with boundary divided parcels to have them annex into/or out of the town. This would require the town to include this portion of the parcel in their annexation area but could also resolve the issue of a property being developed under town and county control.

This office has also received the following comments from State agencies:

State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) – Contact: Carlton Hall 302-736-7400

- The Town of Bethel has a history section in their plan which begins on page 3. The town has an established Historic District which is listed in The National Register of Historic Places.
- A major benefit of listing is that the properties become eligible for financial incentives in the form of federal and state historic preservation tax credits and occasional grants. The State Historic Preservation Office is available to assist the town when they are ready to conduct an updated architectural survey of buildings within their town. Note also that the new statewide historic preservation plan, Partners in Preservation: Planning for the Future, Delaware's Historic Preservation Plan 2018-2022, is now available online at: <https://history.delaware.gov/pdfs/2018-2022DelawareSHPOPlan.pdf> (single-page version for printing also available). The new plan emphasizes partnering to achieve common goals and connecting with other planning efforts. The Delaware SHPO encourages all municipalities to consider how the goals, strategies and actions outlined in the new plan may support and be coordinated with their local planning efforts.

If there are any questions, inquiries, or concerns, feel free to contact the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office for assistance at 302-736-7400.

Department of Transportation – Contact: Stephen Bayer 302-760-4834

- DelDOT congratulates the Town on a well drafted document. The Transportation elements of the plan evidence a comprehensive approach that should serve the Town well. If in going forward with the development and implementation of this Plan the Town requires the assistance of DelDOT please feel free to contact our offices.

DART – Contact Jared Kauffman 302-576-6062

- DART's demand response is available throughout Delaware, not paratransit.
- Please note that the closest DART bus route is the 212 in Laurel. Please describe that route's service (e.g., how often it runs and on what days), and connections to other services in Sussex.
- Please describe the town's vision and goals of public transit for the town if any.

**The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control – Contact: Beth Krumrine
302-735-3480**

Staff from the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) reviewed the plan submitted for PLUS review. Developers and municipal officials are encouraged to reach out to Beth Krumrine at (302) 735-3480 or Beth.Krumrine@delaware.gov if they have any specific requests for information.

Section 2.3 Environmental Features

Open Space

- It is recommended that the Town adopt an “open space” ordinance which specifically excludes areas set aside for stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as wet ponds and wastewater treatment areas.

Buffers

- It is recommended that the Town adopt an ordinance requiring a 30-foot upland buffer (planted with native vegetation) from all wetlands and waterways.

Wetlands

- It is recommended that the Town adopt an ordinance requiring all applicants to submit a United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)-approved wetlands delineation to the Town of Bethel as a condition of approval for any new commercial and/or residential development for all potential impacts to wetlands.
- Additionally, it is recommended to issue a conditional approval for any project associated with a DNREC assessment of impacts to tidally influenced wetlands (where applicable).
- It is recommended that the Town adopt an ordinance prohibiting the placement of lot lines within wetlands for all “new” commercial and/or residential developments. Existing or established lots should maximize, to the greatest degree practicable, the distance from building structures and the wetlands line.

Floodplain/Special Flood Hazard Area (section to be added)

- As a community participating in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), Bethel has agreed to follow the minimum floodplain requirements set by FEMA (see 44 CFR §60.3). This includes reviewing all development for properties within the special flood hazard area (SFHA) along with informing residents of NFIP requirements. Bethel has participated in the NFIP since 1981 and has residents with flood insurance policies.
- Additionally, there are several properties along Broad Creek which are in a SFHA. If Bethel does not comply with their own floodplain ordinances, FEMA might drop Bethel from the NFIP, meaning that Bethel wouldn't receive any disaster aid in a presidentially declared disaster.

Stormwater Management

- It is strongly recommended that the town implement stormwater BMPs to reduce or mitigate adverse impacts of flooding.
- Bethel's Comprehensive Plan does not make any specific recommendations for reducing surface imperviousness. Studies have shown a strong relationship between increases in impervious cover to decreases in a watershed's overall water quality. Some examples to reduce the amount of impervious cover include the use of pervious paving materials ("pervious pavers") in lieu of asphalt or concrete, in conjunction with forest preservation or additional tree plantings.
- It is strongly recommended that the Town enact an ordinance which requires a BMP implementation plan for all residential and/or commercial development when surface imperviousness exceeds 20%. Additionally, the comprehensive plan should recommend adopting an ordinance that specifically defines how developers may calculate surface imperviousness. This ordinance should specify and require that the calculation for surface imperviousness include all of the following forms of constructed surface imperviousness: roads, rooftops, sidewalks and stormwater management structures.

Plan Recommendations: Public Utilities and Services

- 2.6e (2): Request to remove "mainly the result of the Town's location near a wetland." Stormwater issues are not caused by wetlands, rather by the runoff from impervious areas.

Section 3.3 Short-Term, Mid-Range, and Long-Term Objectives

Long-Term Goal: Work with DNREC and Sussex County to protect natural resources.

- Contact the DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife's Environmental Review Program to acquire additional information toward achieving this goal.
- For development proposals, the Town, landowners, and their consultants are encouraged to request an environmental review by DNREC Fish and Wildlife during the project planning phase. Requests can be sent directly to DNREC_EnvReview@delaware.gov. Send a full project description, scope of work, and maps clearly delineating the boundaries and limits of disturbance where work is to occur. A response providing species, vegetation communities, and potential impacts of the project will be returned within 30 days.
- Additional information can be found at: <https://dnrec.alpha.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/conservation/reviews/>.

Contact: DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife, Species Conservation and Research Program at (302) 735-3600. Website: <https://dnrec.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/conservation/>

Department of Agriculture - Contact: Milton Melendez 302-698-4500

- No Delaware Department of Agriculture code or regulations apply to this PLUS review.

Delaware State Housing Authority – Contact Alex Modeas 302-574-3656

All comments that relate to permit requirements, adopted policies or other State regulations. For comments to be included, they must be based on Delaware Code, executive order, or regulation.

- The Delaware Code (Title 22, Section 702) specifies that “any incorporated municipality under this chapter shall prepare a comprehensive plan for the city or town or portions thereof as the commission deems appropriate.” The Code further specifies that “after a comprehensive plan or portion thereof has been adopted by the municipality in accordance with this chapter, the comprehensive plan shall have the force of law, and no development shall be permitted except as consistent with the plan.”
- DSHA has reviewed the Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Bethel to determine how the Municipality has incorporated the State’s goals, policies, and strategies as they relate to housing. DSHA finds the Town of Bethel in compliance.

Delaware State Fire Marshall’s Office – Contact Duane Fox 739-4394

- This Agency has no objection to the update.
- Updating the established MOU between the DE State Fire Marshal’s Office and Bethel is suggested.

Approval Procedures:

1. Once all edits, changes and corrections have been made to the plan, please submit the completed document (text and maps) to our office for review. **Your PLUS response letter should accompany this submission.** Also include documentation about the public review process.
2. Our office will require a maximum of 20 working days to complete this review.
 - a. If our review determines that the revisions have adequately addressed all certification items, we will forward you a letter to this effect.
 - b. If there are outstanding items, we will document them in a letter and ask the town to resubmit the plan once the items are addressed. Once all items are addressed, we will send you the letter as described above.
3. Once you receive our letter stating that all certification items have been addressed, the Planning Commission and Council should adopt the plan pending State certification. We strongly recommend that your Council adopt the plan by ordinance. The ordinance should be written so that the plan will go into effect upon receipt of the certification letter from the Governor.

PLUS Review – 2024-09-01

Page 7 of 7

4. Send our office a copy of the adopted plan along with the ordinance (or other documentation) that formally adopts your plan. We will forward these materials to the Governor for his consideration.
5. At his discretion, the Governor will issue a certification letter to your city.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Town of Bethel Comprehensive Plan Update. If you have any questions, please contact me at 302-739-3090.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Edgell', is positioned above the typed name.

David L. Edgell, AICP
Director, Office of State Planning Coordination

APPENDIX C – PUBLIC COMMENTS

- 1. COMMUNITY SURVEY – 2018 W/ Results**
- 2. SUSSEX COUNTY CORRESPONDENCE**
- 3. TOWN of LAUREL CORRESPONDENCE**

COMMUNITY SURVEY – 2018 W/ Results

Town of Bethel

Planning and Zoning Commission

P.O. Box 310

Bethel, DE 19931

June 11, 2018

Dear Property Owners,

As many of you may recall, the Town Council approved the original Bethel Comprehensive Plan in 2007, and it was certified by the State of Delaware in July of 2008. This Plan has to be reviewed every 5 years by Bethel and State. The Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) sent a survey to all property owners in 2007 and again in 2013. The responses to these surveys were important and very helpful.

Recently, the Town Council asked the (PZC) to initiate the 10 year review of the Comprehensive Plan and suggest changes for its improvement. An important part of the review is to receive your thoughts and concerns for Bethel as it grows and changes in the future. Enclosed is a survey, in duplicate, asking for your input on several topics. With this information, the (PZC) can develop suggestions to implement many of the things which are important to Bethel residents in this 10-year review.

Please complete one copy of the survey and return it in the envelope provided to, Town of Bethel P.O. Box 310 Bethel, DE 1993 by July 25th. You can also use the drop box at the town hall. In August or September, the survey results will be available for your review. With this information, the PZC will finalize the recommendations and sent them to the Town Council for their review. The Town Council meets on the first Tuesday of each month a 7:00 p.m. in the Community House. You are urged to attend their meetings and find out what is happening in Bethel, both now and in the future.

Please take a few moments to make suggestions and comments on how to make Bethel a special place for all of us. **Again, your input is a very important part of this review.** If you would like to sign the survey, it would be fine, or you may remain anonymous. There is only one survey for each property owner, even if there are multiple properties owned by the same person or persons.

Thank you for taking time to participate in this important project. If you have any questions, kindly contact any of the PZC members: Tom McCoy, President 302-542-7615 and at TMcCoy8585@aol.com, Vern Proctor, Vice President, Duane Campfield, Secretary, Hank Graves, David Hillegas, Ron Perry, John Galaska and Mike Calloway.

Very truly yours,

/s/ Tom McCoy

Survey for June 2018 Ten-Year Review of the Bethel Comprehensive Plan

The Bethel Town Council asked the Bethel Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) to initiate the 10-year review of this document as required by the State. The PZC needs your help with this project to address such matters as the town character, visual appeal, preservation, growth, history as well as other areas you would like see addressed. We have some specific for you.

PRINTED ON BOTH SIDES

Please complete the survey and return it to the PZC by **July 25, 2018** as the Town Council has to respond to the State in September.

1. How would you like Bethel to look in five to ten years? Please circle all applicable bullet points.

A. Residential

- Landscaping around house and yard (31)
- Front of house facing street (25)
- Some architectural details (26)
- Trees along street (19)
- Front porches (20)
- Driveways (20)
- Shutters on windows (19)
- Entryway over front door (13)
- Garage (9)
- Other _____ (See Addendum)

B. Businesses

- Doctors' and Lawyers' offices (7)
- Churches (17)
- Gas stations / Quick market (5)
- Specialty stores like antique, gift or art gallery (18)
- Day care center (9)
- Bed and Breakfast (22)
- Other _____ (See Addendum)

C. Municipal and Government

- Police (17)
- Fire (4)
- Water and Sewer (4)
- Code enforcement (18)
- Other _____ (See Addendum)

2. Do you think there should be design guidelines for construction of new buildings, so they fit in with Bethel's character and historic atmosphere?

- Yes (23)
- No (15)

3. If yes, should the Town of Bethel designate a specific geographic area for historic preservation and have specific ordinances for that area?

- Yes (20)
- No (5)

4. What challenges do you see in Bethel's future that you would like to see addressed? Circle all applicable bullet points.

- The increase of cars and trucks on Bethel's roads. (22)
- Maintaining environmental quality in Bethel and Broad Creek. (18)
- Unoccupied houses and buildings. (30)
- Properties that are not maintained (building exteriors, yards, abandoned vehicles). (32)
- Maintain and repair Bethel roads. (15)
- Canoe and kayak access to Broad Creek. (22)
- Drinking water quality. (12)
- Septic System problems. (11)
- Enforce Bethel's rules and regulations, including fines. (23)
- Unattended dogs and cats. (22)
- Storm water runoff. (11)
- Other _____ (See Addendum)

5. In addition to Dogs and Cats, what other types of animals should be permitted in Bethel?

- Chickens (19)
- Roosters (5)
- Horses (5)
- Cows (0)
- Rabbits (10)
- Sheep (6)
- Goats (7)
- Other _____ (See Addendum)

6. Should the Town of Bethel have a registration system for keeping track of rental properties in the town?

- Yes (16)
- No (5)

7. Are you interested in participating in a Bethel Emergency Notification System, for matters such as missing children and weather emergencies, and would you be willing to submit your contact information to the Town of Bethel for this purpose?

- Yes (24)
- No (15)

Thank you very much for participating in the survey portion of the Bethel Comprehensive Plan.

(Optional)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone number: _____

Results in parentheses (xx)

ADDENDUM

Survey had 40 property owner responses.

Section 1:

A. Residential

OTHER: Fences (White Picket), Grass cutting

B. Businesses

OTHER: ATM, Existing businesses only, No halfway houses, No more businesses, any cottage industry

C. Municipal Government

OTHER: Radar speed signs, Speed limit enforcement, Faster/cheaper internet, Term limits, Better cell service, Code enforcement on properties, Fire hydrants.

Section 4:

What challenges do you see in Bethel's future that you would like to see addressed? Circle all applicable bullet points.

OTHER: Speeding on Vine St., Enforcement of animal ordinances, Code enforcement on properties, Feral cat population, Cell tower needed.

Section 5:

In addition to Dogs and Cats, what other types of animals should be permitted in Bethel?

OTHER: Pet pig (1), Guinea fowl (1)

General comments:

Code enforcement is needed, increase wharf (dock) size, Encourage native plants, Ivy is too invasive, no trees on streets, County building codes are sufficient, No water and sewer, Police and code enforcement are needed, Accurate list of rentals, Work on infrastructure and enforcement of codes, Limit cat population, residential and feral, Stop telling people what to do with property.

SUSSEX COUNTY CORRESPONDENCE



Janelle M. Comwell
Planning and Zoning Director
2 The Circle
Georgetown DE, 19947
302-855-7878
janelle.comwell@sussexcountyde.gov

December 20, 2024

Good Afternoon,

Attached you will find the *Town of Bethel "DRAFT" Comprehensive Plan Update and draft maps* along with the **PLUS REVIEW COMMENTS** for the County's review and input. We would like to thank you for your time and consideration during this review. Once the recommendations have been received, we will make necessary changes before completing the plan for final submission to the state.

We kindly request your comments and input be received via email no later than Monday, January 17, if possible. This would allow time to complete the changes prior to the document release. Please contact me anytime with any concerns or clarifications and thank you for your assistance.

Best regards,

Stephen Beers, Chairman
Planning and Zoning Commission
Town of Bethel
PO BOX 310
Bethel, DE 19931
beersgmwd@comcast.net
(317)446-2928 (cell)

Stephen Beers

From: Jamie Whitehouse [jamie.whitehouse@sussexcountyde.gov]
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2025 9:52 AM
To: beersgmwd@comcast.net
Cc: Mike Harmer [mike.harmer@sussexcountyde.gov]
Subject: Sussex County Comments on Draft Town of Bethel Comprehensive Plan
Attachments: UpdateUpdated_Bethel_Comp_Plan_Revised_12_19_24.pdf

Chairman Beers, Good morning,

Thank you for offering Sussex County an opportunity to review the proposed Comprehensive Plan Update. The Planning & Zoning Department has the following comments:

- Ms. Cornwell left the County in 2020 and therefore the Town's initial email to us of December 20, 2024, did not reach us. The County has set up a general mailbox at pandz@sussexcountyde.gov that can be used for future emails.
- The Council Member names for Sussex County have been updated following the recent elections. Full name spellings can be found here: [County Council | Sussex County](#)
- The County applauds the Town's efforts to increase the extent of its forest canopy. This goal aligns with increased with multiple Comprehensive Plan Strategies within the County's 2019 Comprehensive Plan. In 2024, Sussex County adopted an Ordinance to increase the depth and quality of forested buffers for residential subdivisions.
- As there is no significant change proposed in relation to potential areas annexation, the County's Planning & Zoning Department has no comments to add in relation to potential annexation. The County's Engineering Department has been copied in on this email in case there are any additional comments.
- The Town's TDR strategies are noted. TDR's have been discussed by the Sussex County Council as a potential planning tool for the future but are not currently under active exploration. However, the possibility remains that they may be used as a potential tool in the future and knowing that Town's such as Bethel has a potential inventory of sending parcels will help with any potential future discussions on TDRs at the County level.
- In relation to the proposed area of concern, the County is willing and able to agree to notify the Town's staff regarding new development proposals within this area, if this is the preference of the Town. The County's policy is to automatically notify all owners of record located within 200 feet of any parcel subject to a public hearing. In addition to postcard notifications by mail, newspaper notices are placed in a minimum of two newspapers in general circulation in the County, and a site notice displayed on the site. In 2022, the County doubled the size of its site notice postings for major developments. These are now fixed to the ground in steel frames and are far more noticeable.

I hope that these comments are of assistance. Please could I congratulate all the staff and stakeholders involved in this update, which appears to be of a high quality. I have copied in the County Engineer Mike Harmer in case he has any Engineering-related additional comments.

If you have any further questions, or if we can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,

Jamie

Mr. Jamie Whitehouse, AICP, MRTPI
Director, Department of Planning & Zoning
Sussex County
2 The Circle, P.O. Box 417, Georgetown, DE, 19947
Tel: 302-855-7878, Fax: 302-854-5079

Much of the County's Planning and Zoning Information can be found online at:
<https://sussexcountyde.gov/sussex-county-mapping-applications>

Information on the 2018 Sussex County Comprehensive Plan can be found at:
<https://sussexcountyde.gov/2018-comp-plan-documents>

Stephen Beers

From: John J. Ashman [jashman@sussexcountyde.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, January 21, 2025 9:03 AM
To: beersgrnwd@comcast.net
Subject: RE: Sussex County Comments on Draft Town of Bethel Comprehensive Plan Update

Chairman Beers,

The engineering department has reviewed the draft comp plan amendment, see comments below:

2.6e, Item 3 – The county will not extend sewer service into the Bethel town boundary or the designated growth and annexation area without prior discussion with the town.

As far as extending sewer to the town, we held a meeting to simply ask if there was interest and we were not greeted very favorably. Therefore, without a request from the town we will not consider sewer service to the area.

John J. Ashman
Director of Utility Planning & Design Review
Sussex County Engineering Department
302-855-7370

From: Mike Harmer <mike.harmer@sussexcountyde.gov>
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2025 4:13 PM
To: John J. Ashman <jashman@sussexcountyde.gov>
Subject: FW: Sussex County Comments on Draft Town of Bethel Comprehensive Plan Update

John: Please send Mr. Beers any Engineering comments when you get back.

Mike Harmer, P.E.
Sussex County Engineer
Mike.harmer@sussexcountyde.gov

TOWN of LAUREL CORRESPONDENCE



Jamie Smith,
Town Manager Town of Laurel
201 Mechanic Street
Laurel, Delaware 19956
302-875-2277
LaurelTM@comcast.net

December 20, 2024

Good Afternoon,

Attached you will find the *Town of Bethel "DRAFT" Comprehensive Plan Update and draft maps* along with the **PLUS REVIEW COMMENTS** for the City of Laurel's review and input. We would like to thank you for your time and consideration during this review. Once any recommendations have been received, we will make necessary changes before finalizing the plan for final submission to the state.

We kindly request your comments and input be received via email no later than Monday, January 13, if possible. This would allow time to complete the changes prior to the document release. Please contact me anytime with any concerns or clarifications and thank you for your assistance.

Best regards,

Stephen Beers, Chairman
Planning and Zoning Commission
Town of Bethel
PO BOX 310
Bethel, DE 19931
beersgmwd@comcast.net
(317)446-2928 (cell)

Stephen Beers

From: Jamie Smith [laureltm@comcast.net]
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2025 1:49 PM
To: Stephen Beers
Subject: Re: Town of Bethel "DRAFT" Comprehensive Plan Update

Steve

Good afternoon. I apologize for the delay in getting back with you. I was out during the holidays and ended up out last week due to being ill. I have looked at your map and reviewed draft and have no comments Jamie

Jamie Smith

Town Manager

Town of Laurel

Sent from my phone, please excuse any typos

APPENDIX D

ADOPTION RESOLUTION



TOWN OF BETHEL, DELAWARE

Resolution #2025-001- Comprehensive Plan Update Resolution

2025 UPDATE TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

WHEREAS, 22 Del. C. §702 empowers municipalities to develop Comprehensive Plans to guide their futures; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Bethel has a Comprehensive Plan that was certified July, 2008 pursuant to the aforementioned statute; and

WHEREAS, 22 Del. C. §702(e) requires that municipalities review their Comprehensive Plans at least every five years, and the Council wishes to make updates to the existing Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Planning and Zoning Commission held a public hearing on the 2024 Plan update on July 10, 2024, at which all interested parties were given a chance to be heard; and

WHEREAS, a notice of this public hearing was posted on the town website and town bulletin boards on or before July 3, 2024, which is sufficient notice under 22 Del. C. §304;

WHEREAS, the Town Council authorized submission of the 2024 Plan update for State review at a Preliminary Land Use Service (PLUS) meeting on September 23, 2024; and

WHEREAS, in a letter dated October 22, 2024, the Office of State Planning Coordination stated the revisions necessary for State certification, and the Comprehensive Plan update has been revised accordingly.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Town Council of the Town of Bethel on this 1st day of April 2025, this public body hereby adopts the "Town of Bethel 2025 Update to the Comprehensive Plan", a copy of which is attached hereto and made a part hereof.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED by the Town Council that a copy of the attached update shall be submitted to the Office of State Planning Coordination.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that minor editing to correct mistakes, incorrect information, or typing errors is authorized.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2025 Town of Bethel Comprehensive Plan Update shall be forwarded to the Office of State Planning Coordination for certification by Governor Meyer.

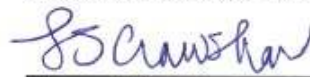
THE TOWN COUNCIL FURTHER RESOLVES THAT THE 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update shall take effect upon adoption this 1st day of April, 2025.

ATTEST:


Town Clerk


Council President


Council President – Pro Tem


Council Secretary


Council Treasurer


Councilperson

