BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Clifford J. Hurgin Municipal Center, 1 School Street
Bethel, Connecticut 06801 Telephone: (203) 794-8501

Matthew S. Knickerbocker, First Selectman
Richard C. Straiton, Selectman
Paul R. Szatkowski, Selectman

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2014 MAY 28 P 2: 3
TOWN OF BETHEL
TOWN CLERK

Minutes of Special Meeting

Wednesday, May 28, 2014
11:30 a.m.
Clifford J. Hurgin Municipal Center
Meeting Room "A"

PRESENT: First Selectman, Matthew S. Knickerbocker, Selectman, Richard C. Straiton, and Selectman, Paul R. Szatkowski.
Also Present: Janice Chrzescijanek, Director of Economic Development, and Phyllis Kansky, Human Resource Director/Grants Administrator.

Call to order: First Selectman, Matthew S. Knickerbocker called the Special Meeting to order 11:30 a.m.

1. **Adoption of the Town Commercial Center Plan**

   Phyllis Kansky explained P.A. 111-1- Provision to Provide for Economic Growth Grant-Main Street Investment fund for up to $500,000 for Street Scape Improvements and up to $50,000 of the grant money can be utilized for private commercial property owners to fix or improve facades or any permanent improvement. Phyllis explained there will be a phase I and a phase II.

   Janice Chrzescijanek presented to the selectmen the Town Commercial Improvement Plan (see attached). Janice explained that the Downtown Advisory Committee consisting of downtown business and property owners had been meeting twice a month, a downtown improvement subcommittee was formed. The plan is to work on improvements on Greenwood Avenue down to Grassy Plain Street. A community gathering place is planned for

the front lawn of the Library. Many other improvements are planned (see attachment).
Janice went on to explain that she had been working with business owner Donna Boylan for a facade improvement.

First Selectman Knickerbocker made a motion to adopt the "Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan" as presented by the Director of Economic Development. The motion was seconded by Paul Szatkowski. Vote was taken, the motion was approved.

2. **Adoption of Resolution – Main Street Investment Fund Program-Streetscape Enhancements.**

First Selectman Knickerbocker made a motion, which was seconded by Selectmen Straiton to adopt the Main Street Investment Fund Program Streetscapes Enhancements as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Selectmen authorizes submission of the funding application STREETSCAPE ENHANCEMENTS under the Main Street Investment Fund Program referenced in Section 78 and 79 of the Public Act 11-1; and further identifies Matthew S. Knickerbocker, First Selectman , as the individual authorized to sign the Main Street Investment Fund application and administer the grant and the project.

Adopted by the Board of Selectmen on this the 28th day of May, 2014

Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved.

A motion to adjourn was made by First Selectman Knickerbocker, which was seconded by Selectman Szatkowski. Vote all in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 12:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Bergh,
Recording Secretary

Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan

Adopted: DRAFT

Acknowledgements

Board of Selectman

Economic Development Commission

Planning & Zoning Commission

Parks & Recreation Commission

Downtown Advisory Committee

Chamber of Commerce

Town Commercial Center Planning Committee:

Steve Palmer, Town Planner

Andrew Morosky, Town Engineer

Bill Dwinells, Staff Engineer

Eileen Earle, Parks & Recreation Director

Phyllis Kansky, Grants Administrator

Janice Chrzescijanek, Director of Economic Development

Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan – Phase I.....8

Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan – Phase II.....12

Implementation.....15

Conclusion.....16

Introduction

This Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan (hereinafter known as The Plan) for Bethel written by the Town Commercial Center Planning Committee and adopted by the Board of Selectman, sets forth a road map for improving Bethel's commercial center. It provides detailed initiatives for achieving the defined goals to improve Bethel's commercial center.

Bethel's commercial center, also referred to as "Historic Downtown Bethel" and "Village Center", is home to commercial retail and offices, financial institutions, community facilities (e.g., library, post office, municipal center), transportation (e.g., Metro-North train station, HART bus service) and a mix of housing. It is also the place where community events and activities take place.

Over the past years, Bethel's commercial center has struggled to keep its commercial center businesses. At any given time, there are many vacant commercial properties in our commercial center. Its inherent walk-able nature and prime location to transit and local facilities/amenities should provide a sense of connection amongst the residents, businesses and visitors. But like many other commercial centers, Bethel is a downtown with older infrastructure and in the need of many improvements.

As land values in surrounding communities increase, developers and investors are starting to look more seriously at Bethel for its lower property costs. We are starting to see an increase in development surrounding our commercial center, but still haven't seen the needed private investment in this area.

We believe that in order to encourage private investment, the Town of Bethel needs to invest in the commercial center. We recognize that pedestrian accessibility and safety, streetscape and aesthetics improvements, and community spirit are important to the economic health and growth of the downtown. We believe that as we make these improvements, the commercial center will began to take place which will promote commercial viability, bring new investment, and attract into downtown small businesses and people who want to experience the culture and charm a traditional downtown brings. However, being a small town that needs much improvement to support our goals, we realize we cannot do it alone.

Through partnerships with the state and private investment, we have been able to do some of the projects to improve our commercial center. However, lack of funding has resulted in projects not taking place. In order to carry out future planning, the Town of Bethel will continue to pursue alternative funding opportunities in the way of grants and private funding.

Support and Prior Planning

The goals and initiatives included in this plan incorporate and expand upon prior commercial center planning and support local and state C&D planning and state priorities. They also incorporate the work of the Downtown Advisory Committee and the Town Commercial Planning Committee.

State Conservation & Development Plan
The town's plan to expand the streetscape maintains consistency with the 2013-2018 State Conservation and Development Policies Plan. Specifically, it is consistent with the *Growth Management Principle #1: Redevelop and revitalize regional centers and areas of mixed-land uses with existing or planned physical infrastructure.* Within this principle are State Agency policies (pg. 8) which are applicable to this project including (1) ENSURING the safety and integrity of existing infrastructure over its useful life through the timely budgeting for maintenance, repairs and necessary upgrades, (2) FOCUSING on infill development and redevelopment opportunities in areas with existing infrastructure, such as in city, or town centers, which are at an appropriate scale and density for the particular area, (3) PROACTIVELEY IDENTIFY AND MARKET available properties that are currently served by infrastructure and that could meet the needs of new or expanding businesses, especially those within close proximity to existing industry clusters, and (4) PROMOTE urban areas as centers for arts, entertainment and culture, while also supporting historic preservation.

The Plan is also consistent with the *Growth Management Principle #3: Concentrate Development around Transportation Nodes and Along Major Transportation Corridors to Support the Viability of Transportation Options.* The outlined improvements are within one-quarter mile of the Bethel Train Station which is on the Danbury Branch of the Metro-North Commuter Rail Line. Extensive town planning is in place to transform the area into transit oriented development (TOD). In accordance with Principle #3, The Plan is consistent with the State Agency policies (pg. 15) to (1) PROMOTE compact pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development patterns around existing public transportation stations and other viable locations within transportation corridors and village centers, (2) ENCOURAGE a network of pedestrian and bicycle paths and greenways that provide convenient inter- and intra-town access, including access to the regional transportation network, and (3) IMPROVE transit service and linkages to attract customers through better integration of all transportation options and advances in technology while providing convenience, reliability, safety and competitive modal choices.

Bethel Conservation and Development Plan
In 1997 and 2007, the Town of Bethel developed plans of conservation and development that outlined a vision, goals and actions for the enhancement of the Village Center. The Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan's vision and goals are in direct alignment with and incorporate the actions that to date were not implemented in the 2007 Plan of Conservation and Development.

Streetscape
In 1997, the commercial center property owners invested in streetscape that included paver sidewalks, lighting, street furniture and trees. The streetscape only occurred in the most central area of the commercial center. Our vision is to expand the streetscape to include our entire commercial center.

Transit Oriented Development
In 2010, the town, in partnership with HVCEO, completed an initial study of the potential for TOD in Bethel's commercial center. The study identifies the limits of the area and the positive aspects of TOD, provides an inventory of existing conditions, identifies certain areas that need

further investigation including: traffic, environmental, and sewer capacity, includes three conceptual development scenarios and an analysis to determine potential economic impact, and proposes regulation changes. The town's goal is to develop a master plan for TOD.

Zoning Changes

In 2010, the town re-zoned the commercial center from a general "Commercial" Zone to a "Village Center" Zone. This change was a philosophical one to better protect the historic resources while still permitting traditional mixed-use use buildings in the historic transit oriented development (TOD) model. This area is also now contained within the "Village District Overlay Zone" which provides further protection and enhancement capabilities of the commercial center historic assets.

The town and our regional planning agency (HVCEO) and CTDOT have extensively studied the suitability of TOD in the downtown. The Planning & Zoning Commission is considering a framework of proposed regulations and new zoning boundary lines. This proposal is consistent with our planning and will provide missing pedestrian connections and accessibility.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Plan

From 2010-2013, the town participated in the development of a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy plan. The plan is a 5-year blueprint for a variety of actions in support of economic development. Included in the plan are improvements that support Bethel's commercial center including improvements to the water system and Transit Oriented Development.

Transit Improvements

In 2012, the Town of Bethel, in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, installed seven bicycle racks. Four of the bicycle racks were installed in Bethel's commercial center to support and encourage bicycle transportation to the commercial center, where parking is a premium.

In the spring 2014, the Town of Bethel will install two dual station electronic vehicle charging stations in its commercial center. These charging stations add a new transit option to Bethel's commercial center. The charging stations were a result of a partnership between the Town of Bethel and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

In 2015, the State Department of Transportation will expand the parking at the Metro-North train station located in Bethel's commercial center. This will allow adequate vehicle parking for commuters choosing to use train transportation.

Economic Development

In 2013, the Economic Development Commission expanded its mission to cover all of Bethel and hired a part-time Director of Economic Development to develop a plan for the improvement of Bethel's commercial center. In June 2013, the Director of Economic Development formed a Downtown Advisory Committee consisting of residents and property

and business owners tasked with developing a commercial center improvement plan. The committee's vision, goals and improvement recommendations are represented in this plan. The Downtown Advisory Committee continues to meet to review the progress and improve the Plan.

Sidewalk Improvements
In 2013, the town developed a sidewalk improvement plan. The goal of the plan was to connect housing to the town's commercial center. In partnership with The State Office of Policy Management, the town is in the process of implementing the sidewalk improvement plan.

Road Improvements
In the summer 2014, the Department of Transportation plans to pave Greenwood Avenue which runs through Bethel's commercial center. This will improve the access, safety and aesthetics of the commercial center.

Town Capital Improvement Plan
The 2014-2015 Capital Improvement Plan includes improvements to the historic Seeley House in Bethel's commercial center. The improvements include painting the exterior of the home and the replacement of shutters.

HVCEO
Bethel is currently working with HVCEO to develop a Hazard Mitigation Plan in order to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to life and property from a hazard event. The plan will cover the commercial center and surrounding areas.

Water System Capital Improvement Plan
The Town of Bethel is in the process of developing a five-year plan for the improvement of the water system. The plan includes Bethel's commercial center.

Inflow and Infiltration System Plan
The Town of Bethel is in the process of developing a plan for the improvement of the sewer system. The plan includes Bethel's commercial center.

The Plan
The Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan represents an effort to move forward and to expand the planning for Bethel's commercial center. The Plan respects the town's historical character and creates economic opportunities and incentives for a sustainable, walk-able mixed-use development that attracts residents and visitors.

In an effort to establish our ***goals*** for The Plan, the town studied previous planning documents and actively enlisted input from Bethel's residents, commercial center business and property owners, local leaders, town commissions and boards, municipal staff, and the Chamber of Commerce.

The following ***goals*** have been established to plan, implement, and improve the town of Bethel's commercial center:

- Improve our commercial center through community planning.
- Encourage a pedestrian-friendly, one-stop environment.
- Promote community spirit and stimulate economic development by developing a community gathering place, community events and a culture and arts presence.
- Develop *Complete Streets* to improve public safety, pedestrian, bicyclist, motorist and transit rider access and create a community that is ADA compliant.
- Increase green space and recreational opportunities.
- Develop a pedestrian network by connecting the commercial center to all types of housing and transportation (bus, train, bicycle, cars).
- Support transportation options.
- Encourage the mix of goods and services to meet the market needs of residents and improve business activity in Bethel.
- Preserve and enhance the commercial center character and improve the aesthetics by developing a look and feel that defines our commercial center.
- Provide incentives for property and façade improvements.
- Identify the commercial center and its facilities/amenities for residents and visitors.
- Develop a plan that supports the future needs of Transit Oriented Development.
- Develop integrated parking strategies.

It has been established by the Town Commercial Center Planning Committee that the defined goals and initiatives in The Plan will be implemented in two phases. Phase I will focus on municipal-owned property and priority areas as determined by the committee.

Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan – Phase I

The Town Commercial Center Planning Committee has outlined the following initiatives for Phase I of the Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan. These initiatives are illustrated on the ***Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan - Phase 1***, SP-1 and SP-2 maps and support The Plans goals.

I. Expansion of Streetscape
The expansion of our streetscape will allow us to define the entire commercial center with a consistent look and feel, while preserving and enhancing its character and aesthetics.

Phase I of the streetscape expansion will occur on School Street, Library Place and Durant Avenue, which are core areas of the commercial center. Community facilities such as the Bethel Public Library, Post Office, Train Station, and the Municipal Center, which is home to our town offices, Teen Center and Senior Center, are located on these streets.

Location/s:

1. School Street –
Incorporate streetscape (lighting, trees and lawn furniture) on the Municipal Center side of School Street.

2. Library Place –
Build a sidewalk in front of 2 Library Place for pedestrian access and public safety, and incorporating streetscape.

Incorporate streetscape (lighting and trees) in front of the Post Office - 10 Library Place.

3. Durant Avenue –
Incorporate streetscape (lighting and trees).

II. Improve Public Safety, Pedestrian Access, and Create a Walk-able Commercial Center that is ADA Compliant
An area of focus for the Plan is to ensure that our commercial center is a safe and inviting environment for those who work, live and visit. The following improvements have been determined for Phase I of the Plan.

Location/s:

1. P.T. Barnum Square –
Remove four pathways of bricks that radiate from the center island, increasing open green space and improving safety.

2. Durant Avenue –
Add a sidewalk ramp at the far end of 9 Durant Avenue parking lot to make it ADA compliant.

Install a bus shelter at the Municipal Center lawn on Durant Avenue.
Note/Funding: The town will be applying for a grant, in Spring 2015, from HART for a customized bus shelter.

3. Library Place –
Add a sidewalk ramp at the far entrance of the Post Office (10 Library Place) parking lot to make it ADA compliant.

4. School Street –
Build a sidewalk on the opposite side of the Municipal Center for safer pedestrian access and streetscape expansion.

5. Front Street –
Install an attractive fence barrier incorporating landscape, lighting and lined parking for safety, aesthetics and streetscape expansion.

III. Identify the Commercial Center - Signage

An important part of improving Bethel's commercial center is defining the commercial center and its facilities/amenities through the incorporation of signage. Signage will improve navigation for residents and tourists. Incorporating signage into our commercial center will make residents and tourists feel welcome and will direct people where to park and find facilities and amenities in our commercial center (i.e. Bethel Public Library, Municipal Center, public parking). Our goal is to provide attractive, uniform and complementary signs throughout our town that will create a positive feeling for tourists and residents, show community pride, and facilitate an easy visitor experience. People are more likely to return if they feel comfortable and are not stressed when visiting.

Location/s:

1. Municipal Center –
Install a Municipal Center sign w/landscaping on the corner of School Street and Durant Avenue, and on the corner of Wooster Street and School Street.

Install a Municipal Center Public Parking sign at the entrance of the Municipal Center parking lot on Wooster Street, and at the corner of Wooster Street and Main Street.

2. School Street and Library Place –
Install a Bethel Public Library sign on corner of School Street and Library Place.

Install a Public Parking sign at the entrance of the Bethel Public Library back parking lot on School Street.

3. Library Place and Greenwood Avenue –
Install a Public Parking sign at the corner of Library Place and Greenwood Avenue.

4. Depot Place –
Install a Public Parking sign at the entrances of the parking lot on Greenwood Avenue and one on Depot Place.

IV. Public Space - Community Gathering Place

The commercial center does not have a defined public/community gathering space. The town would like to develop a space in the commercial center that enhances the vibrancy of the area by encouraging residents and visitors to meet, shop, eat and walk. Businesses in the commercial center will benefit from amenities that attract people to visit and stay in the downtown area.

The Public/Community Gathering Place will be located in a central location where it is walk-able from all forms of transit (bus, bicycle racks, train, public parking) and public amenities. Our goal is to improve the commercial center by providing a space that improves the downtown appeal and aesthetics, promotes community gathering, makes it a place to visit and spend the day, provides the walking traffic to support commercial viability, and attracts new small businesses to our vacant commercial center locations. The Public/Community Gathering Place will also be an area to host small events and social activities, and to support the events and programs of the Bethel Public Library.

The Community Gathering Place will consist of a patio, grass area and landscaped border strips, and planters that enhance the environment and natural features of the existing area. It will be handicapped accessible and offer café style seating, free wifi, and an outdoor reading room. In the future, we will include public art that incorporates Bethel's culture and history, and further promotes the area and improves the aesthetics.

V. Façade Improvement Program

Offer a façade improvement program to encourage property owners to improve the exterior appearance of their commercial buildings and storefronts. The program will include a financial incentive, in the form of a one-time reimbursement, to help improve the aesthetics of the commercial center. The grant will be funded through the Main Street Investment Fund that the town is applying for through the Department of Housing. If the town is awarded grant money, the property owner will be able to receive a one-time reimbursement for eligible expenses. The one-time reimbursement amount is calculated based on the cost of the improvements and has a maximum allowable reimbursement amount.

Timeline to Implementation

Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan – Phase I

DESCRIPTION	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10	Month 11
Phase I											
Permitting/Final Design											
Bid / Award											
Construction											
Punch List/Closeout											

Commercial Center Improvement Plan – Phase II

The Town Commercial Center Planning Committee has outlined the following initiatives for Phase II of the Commercial Center Improvement Plan.

I. Expansion of Streetscape

Location/s:

1. Main Street –
Expand streetscape lighting to Housing Authority property.

2. Greenwood Avenue –
Continue streetscape to Chestnut Street on both sides of the street.

Continue streetscape from Dolan Plaza and Greenwood to Grassy Plain Street on both sides of Greenwood Avenue.

II. Improve Public Safety, Pedestrian Access, and Create a Walk-able Commercial Center that is ADA Compliant

Location/s:

1. Greenwood Avenue –
Increase the sidewalk width starting in front of 95 Greenwood Avenue towards Chestnut Street to make it ADA compliant.

Increase the sidewalk width in front of 131 Greenwood Avenue to make it ADA compliant.

Increase the sidewalk width in front of 154 Greenwood Avenue to make it ADA compliant.

Increase the sidewalk width in front of 153-159 Greenwood Avenue to make it ADA compliant

Install a bus shelter on Greenwood Avenue.

Remove five (5) double light posts in front of 186 Greenwood Avenue and reuse them in another streetscape expansion area.

Add ramps to both sides of the railroad crossing to allow pedestrian wheelchair and strollers to cross over to the businesses located on the other side of Greenwood Avenue.

Move bus stop closer to gas station, in front of Newtown Savings Bank, to improve safety of riders getting on and off the bus.

III. Develop a Culture and Art Presence to Stimulate Economic Development in Bethel's Commercial Center

In late 2013, a Bethel Arts Committee was formed to establish a viable self-sustaining cultural presence that will serve the Bethel community. By working with institutions such as local businesses and schools, their goal is to spur economic development and to broaden and enrich the community experience through the arts. In order to help develop the commercial center, they have utilized empty commercial center spaces for temporary art galleries, studios and art walks. The committee is currently developing other initiatives to develop a culture and arts presence in Bethel's commercial center. One of their initiatives is to incorporate public art into the commercial center.

Location/s:

1. Community Gathering Space –
Incorporate public art.

IV. Increase Recreational Opportunities

Currently, Bethel does not have significant recreational opportunities in the commercial center. In Phase II, we would like to incorporate a recreational opportunity for residents, visitors, and employees working in our commercial center.

Location/s:

1. Wooster Street, and Durant Avenue –
Develop a recreational one-mile walking loop in the commercial center, leading from all areas of transportation to the commercial center. This project would include the addition and connection of sidewalks on Wooster Street and Durant Avenue.

V. Develop a Master Plan for Transit Oriented Development

The TOD master plan will provide a plan for the orderly development of TOD, clarity with regard to building size, height, location and design, and specify densities for both residential and commercial uses. The plan will delineate locations, based on such features as existing residential neighborhoods and proximity to the train station and commercial center, and also provide details on what common elements are necessary, where they will be proposed, and who will be responsible for constructing them.

Location/s:

1. Numerous properties in the commercial center surrounding the train station.

VI. Develop Integrated Parking Strategies

Location/s:

1. Commercial Center –
Parking study and parking plan.

Implementation

The First Selectman is the steward of The Plan and has the primary responsibility of ensuring that The Plan's recommendations are implemented. The First Selectman, in coordination with the Office of Economic Development, the Planning & Zoning, Public Works, and Parks & Recreation departments and staff, will implement the initiatives outlined in The Plan.

Conclusion

The Town Commercial Center Improvement Plan is the documentation of the community's vision, goals and initiatives for the improvement of the town's commercial center. The Plan is a result of the combined effort of residents, commercial center property and business owners, local leaders, town commissions and boards, municipal staff, and the Chamber of Commerce.

The Plan outlines specific actions that have been determined to be in the best interest of the Bethel community and its commercial center in a way that respects and enhances its historical character while creating economic opportunities and incentives for a sustainable, walk-able mixed-use development that attracts residents and visitors.