

Chapter 1. Background—DRAFT to Council Oct.24

1-1. Authority to Plan

According to the provisions of Title 22, Chapter 7 and Title 29, Chapter 92 of the Delaware Code, a comprehensive plan is a document prepared and adopted by a Town, coordinated with its County and reviewed and certified by the State of Delaware. A Comprehensive Plan contains a long-term community vision; goals and objectives; and policies and projects for the physical growth, revitalization, conservation, preservation, and development of the community. A plan respects tradition and upholds individual property rights. It is general interest in nature, based on community participation and open communication. It contains text, data analysis, maps, and graphics. A plan defines a municipal development strategy, setting forth the jurisdiction's position on population and housing growth within the municipality. It also details existing and future land use, often making general recommendations on potential zoning and regulatory approaches. Community economic development, community design, expansion of boundaries through potential annexation, development in adjacent areas, redevelopment of existing deteriorated and blighted areas, existing and enhanced community character, community facilities, public utilities, historic preservation, town center revitalization, conservation of natural resources, hydrology, open space, transportation, and critical community development and infrastructure issues are also commonly addressed.

The comprehensive planning process must demonstrate consideration of and coordination with adjacent areas, with the county of jurisdiction and with the State of Delaware. The Plan is subject to the state review and certification process set forth in §9103 of Title 29 of the Delaware Code. All annexations by the municipality must be consistent with its most recently adopted and certified Comprehensive Plan meeting the requirements of Title 22, Chapter 7 of the Delaware Code. An area being considered for annexation must be depicted as an area for potential annexation in the adopted and certified plan. The Comprehensive Plan must be reviewed every 5 years and updated every 10 years. Comprehensive Plans are prepared and updated under the direction of the municipal Planning Commission, if there is one, adopted by Ordinance of the Town Council after public hearing, and certified by the State of Delaware. The Comprehensive Plan guides the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision and Land Development Regulations, other codes and ordinances as applicable, annexation policy and procedure, planning and zoning review fees, development impact fees, and capital improvements projects for the municipality.

1-2. Planning Process

Delaware law requires that municipalities engage in comprehensive planning activities for the purpose of encouraging “the most appropriate uses of the physical and fiscal resources of the municipality and the coordination of municipal growth, development, and infrastructure investment actions with those of other municipalities, counties and the State...” This plan was written to fulfill the requirements of a municipal development strategy as described in the Delaware Code for towns with a population of 2,000 or fewer persons.

The municipal development strategy for a community such as Bethany Beach is to be a “development strategy setting forth the jurisdiction's position on population and housing growth within the jurisdiction,

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, Sussex County, and the State of Delaware during plan preparation (22 Del. C. 1953, § 702; 49 Del. Laws, c. 415, § 1).

Bethany Beach’s Planning Commission, with regular input and participation from members of Council, and a subset of volunteers from each, served as the guiding agency for the preparation of this Comprehensive Plan. This collaboration has been invaluable. The Comprehensive Plan project has enabled the Planning Commission to work closely with Council and to engage the citizenry in a united fashion.

1-2a. Reason for Plan Update

The most recent update to the 2012 Comprehensive Plan for Bethany Beach was adopted in 2017. An updated 10-year plan is now required. This document is intended to fulfill that requirement through 2032. Though there has not been significant growth or development pressures within the municipality, external development pressures as well as growing effects of environmental changes significantly affect the Town. Bethany Beach remains steadfastly committed to the vitality and sustainability of the beach and the community. Flooding, beach replenishment, stormwater management, sustainability, resiliency and increasing seasonal vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle traffic remain important concerns the Town continues to prioritize.

1-2b. Comprehensive Planning Approach

Planning is a continuous process. It involves establishing goals for the future of a municipal government, analyzing current and projected conditions, and laying out steps that may help a municipality reach its goals. Bethany Beach (staff and volunteers) thoroughly reviewed the existing comprehensive plan, updated critical information and policy statements, and contracted for professional planning and design assistance in completing the drafting, public participation, and intergovernmental coordination steps.

1-3. Public Participation

Bethany Beach strives for transparency, public participation, and consideration of public comments in the planning process. Aside from numerous open Planning and Zoning Commission (the Commission) meetings held since November 2020, the Commission conducted an open public meeting on Saturday, July 16, 2022, for orientation purposes.

PC Public hearing/workshop – date TBD, Public hearings and ordinance readings, TBD

1-4. Overall Community Vision and Goals

Community Vision

A thriving year-round residential community that seeks to preserve its family-friendly, small-town character and beauty while maintaining its roots as a quiet and safe beach resort for all.

Position on Housing Growth

“Bethany Beach’s welcomes ongoing investment, care, and renovation of its existing residential properties, as well as conscientious redevelopment consistent with the town’s code and the community character.”

Position on Population Growth

“Bethany Beach is in the somewhat unique position where the full-time residential population does not correspond closely to the number of homes. The population is actually far less than would be expected, given the number of homes. However, more property owners are moving to Bethany Beach as full-time residents. The Town cherishes its identity as a quiet, family-friendly beach community and is open for such year-round population increases and welcomes all who would consider making this wonderful community their home.

1-4a. Community Character, Design and Sense of Community Goals and Recommendations

Goal

While Bethany Beach incrementally transitions into a year-round family-friendly destination, it strives to preserve the Town’s existing community character and ambiance while continuing to build a sense of community for all.

Recommendation

Encourage development and redevelopment compatible with the existing community fabric – Bethany Beach has taken regulatory steps in its R-1 and R-1B Zoning Districts to encourage development of residential homes that are consistent with the historic character of Bethany Beach as a family-friendly beach resort and that are compatible with the residential homes in the surrounding neighborhood without blocking light and air flow to adjacent homes. The Town should track and analyze building permit applications to determine if its efforts are having the desired effect, if they are in need of adjustment and if there is any need to propose a similar approach for the R-2 District. The Town will monitor developments in the R-2 District to determine if a similar approach is needed.

Recommendation

Preserve and enhance the Town’s historic and cultural assets – The Town should continue to maintain an active Cultural and Historical Affairs Committee; play a direct role in historic/cultural asset preservation; and maintain the Dinker-Irvin Museum, now listed on the National Registry of Historic Places as well as the Museum in Town Hall to preserve and pass on the Town’s history.

Recommendation

Promote engagement with the Cultural and Historic Resources Survey – Having recently (2017) completed a comprehensive survey, the town’s Cultural and Historic Committee should consider the next step of activating further public interest and developing potential further preservation strategies.

Goal

People are Bethany’s greatest asset. The Town’s goal is to provide high quality of life experiences and opportunities to residents, property and business owners and visitors.

Recommendation

Continue to provide, sponsor, or approve appropriate civic, arts, entertainment and other events that contribute to a sense of community, engagement and economic vitality as the Town determines to be appropriate, safe and affordable. – Such events may include holiday celebrations, patriotic programs and parades, music events, arts and craft shows, recreation and fitness activities and educational and cultural programs.

1-4b. Government and Community Services Goals and Recommendations

Goal – Intergovernmental Coordination

Work collaboratively to address local and regional challenges that impact the future of the Town and other Delaware coastal communities.

Recommendation

Continue Intergovernmental Coordination and Cooperation – The Town should continue to work regionally to address common challenges, particularly as related to beach communities to include, for example, continuing to be an active participant in the Sussex County Association of Towns (SCAT), the Delaware League of Local Governments (DLLG), the Association of Coastal Towns (ACT), the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA), as well as informal workgroups and formal training and networking opportunities, such as those provided by the Institute for Public Administration (IPA) at the University of Delaware. In addition, the Town should continue its close relationship and ongoing communications with local, state and federal representatives, officials and agencies.

Recommendation

Maintain the 50-year Beach Replenishment Project. The importance of Bethany’s beach and dune structure to the Town cannot be overstated. Aside from the obvious economic impact and community identity the beach strand provides, the beach and dunes are vital buffers in protecting lives, property and infrastructure from waves and tidal surges, especially during storms. The Town should continue its efforts to ensure the beach is replenished, consistent with existing assurances. Examples of effective engagement are the Town’s ongoing relationship and communication with local, state and federal representatives, agencies and officials, as well as participation in the Association of Coastal Towns (ACT) and the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA).

Goal – Public Safety Services

As a priority responsibility and goal, continue to provide for necessary police, fire and rescue, emergency medical response and other protective services for the community.

Recommendation

Continue to provide high level of professional law enforcement services. The Bethany Beach Police Department (BBPD), which has consistently met and exceeded the strict professional standards of the Commission on the Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) (one of the smallest departments in the United States and the smallest in Delaware accredited by CALEA) serves and protects the Town year-round. The permanent full-time officers in the Department are augmented by well-trained seasonal officers during the tourist season from Memorial Day to Labor Day and other designated days. In order to continue to provide this high level of professional law enforcement services, the Town should consider incentives to attract qualified candidates in order to maintain an appropriate level of staffing and training for both full-time and seasonal positions to meet law enforcement needs in the community.

Recommendation

Continue to support the Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Company and Its Emergency Medical Services Division. The BBVFC and EMS are not part of the Town government. The BBVFC provides fire protection and rescue services for an approximate 17-square mile area that includes the Town of Bethany Beach. The Town provides financial support to the BBVFC, in addition to what it and the EMS receive from the State, County and other sources. The EMS receives funding from Bethany Beach, South Bethany, Fenwick Island, Sea Colony Recreational Association and homeowner associations within the Bethany Beach Fire District under terms of any agreement to provide EMS services. The current Agreement expires in December 2023 and the Town and other parties to the Agreement should review and negotiate a new agreement with the BBVFC EMS to ensure continued professional EMS services for Bethany Beach residents and visitors.

Recommendation

Continue to maintain necessary level of staffing and training for Bethany Beach Patrol Lifeguards. The Bethany Beach Patrol has a well-established record of providing the highest level of performance in protecting beachgoers, to include monitoring beach and ocean conditions, educating the public, maintaining safe conditions on the beach and saving lives. In order to continue to provide this high level of protection for beachgoers, consideration should be given to providing incentives to attract qualified candidates to maintain the necessary level of staffing and training for Patrol lifeguards.

Recommendation

Continue to explore and pursue grants and low-interest loans for the Town. As a faithful steward of taxpayer dollars, the Town government routinely seeks state and federal grants and loans. At various times, these have been applicable to infrastructure, town services, the beach, and a host of other areas.

Goal – Additional Services

Continue to update and improve the Town’s technology to provide convenient, reliable, secure communications and services needed by for residents, businesses and visitors to sustain the Town and its future growth.

Recommendation

Continue to provide accessible, seamless, secure “Electronic Government” services. The Town has provided for electronic payment of some financial obligations, such as bills and fines; online applications for a number of services such as rental licenses, and fillable forms for various applications. Further progress, refinements and updating should be considered.

Recommendation

Continue to update and secure the technology and equipment that its departments need to carry out their responsibilities efficiently and effectively. The Town provides a wide range of services with few employees. Due to the uncertainty of the future labor market and as the number of visitors and residents inside and outside the Town increase in the coming years, advanced technologies will become vital in allowing Town staff to focus on mission-critical services and activities. New, advanced technologies may also help in improving the quality of life and public safety.

Recommendation

Continue to explore ways to provide seamless government services in the event of emergencies and natural disasters. In order to continue to provide government services seamlessly in the event of such emergencies, the Town purchased approximately seven acres of land outside the flood plain in Frankford in 2016. Since then, the Town has constructed a large metal building to store vehicles as well as space, which has been fully equipped to serve as offices in the event of an emergency. The Town should continue to explore means to sustain services and assist property owners during an emergency.

Recommendation

Continue to explore and pursue grants and low-interest loans for the Town. As a faithful steward of taxpayer dollars, the Town government routinely seeks state and federal grants and loans. At various times, these have been applicable to infrastructure, town services, the beach, and a host of other areas.

Recommendation

Continue the transition to an accessible, seamless, Electronic Government – Bethany Beach boasts an impressive citizen interface, allowing bill and fine payments, online applications for a number of services such as rental licenses, and fillable forms for various applications. Further progress and refinements are expected.

Goal – Water and Wastewater

Recommendation

Ensure sufficient drinking water supply and storage – Continue to use data such as construction permits and water demand to anticipate and prepare for increases in demand. The Town's recent construction of a half million-gallon water tower is an excellent example of this proactive approach, as is the installation of conductivity transducers to provide for real time monitoring of Town wells to detect saltwater intrusion in the aquifers from which the Town's water supply is drawn. The Town will continue to embrace the use of science, data, and technology to ensure adequate and safe water to meet its needs.

Recommendation

Maintain water system plans and replacement/repair policies – The Town has as-built technical schematics for its water system. It is imperative that these plans are maintained and kept up-to-date. The Town would like to ensure that maps and schematics for the water system continue to be maintained by investing in Geographical Information System (G.I.S.) mapping and plan digitization. Further, the Town is satisfied with its existing policy on transmission line failure and replacement.

Recommendation

Continue Intergovernmental Coordination and Cooperation – Wastewater collection and treatment services are performed by Sussex County through an agreement with the Town of Bethany Beach. The Town is in the Bethany Beach Sanitary Sewer District, which feeds into the Sussex County Regional Wastewater Facility near Ocean View. The Town has an agreement with Sussex County for the treatment of up to 3 million gallons per day (mgd). Considering that the Town's current maximum finished water-delivery capacity is 2.3 mgd, this arrangement fits well with the current and future needs of the Town. The Town should continue to work with Sussex County to ensure adequate and uninterrupted services.

Recommendation

Continue to meet or exceed Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) stormwater regulations. The Town has a detailed stormwater management improvements strategy and regularly performs necessary upgrades and repairs. Significant updates to the Town's Flood Damage Prevention Code (Chapter 453 of the Town Code) have been modified to meet or exceed state and federal standards. Further code adjustments could be required if state or federal standards are amended.

Recommendation

Continue to explore infrastructure and policy approaches to ameliorate flooding and drainage problems. The Town's storm resilience fund, study of a potential mechanically activated steel dam in the Loop Canal and tidal gate at Fresh Pond, the existence of an active committee on stormwater and tidal flooding, the "Green Bethany" initiative, and the project to identify ways for residents to minimize stormwater impacts, are examples of the forward-thinking steps the community has, and will, take to address flooding. The Town may also consider policies developed by other coastal communities, such as

Lewes' recent sea-level rise initiative. The "Green Bethany" initiative and this subject are addressed further in the "Environment and Sustainability" chapter of this Comprehensive Plan.

Recommendation

Maintain National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS) Class 8 (or better) rating. Flood insurance is a significant cost for property owners in Bethany Beach. Because of this, the Town participates in NFIP's voluntary CRS incentive program which recognizes community floodplain management activities that exceed minimum program requirements. As a result of the Town's actions, FEMA has approved a 10 percent rate reduction for properties in Special Hazard Flood areas. The Town should continue to adhere and adapt to NFIP requirements in order to retain the current discount.

1-4c. *Housing Goals and Recommendations*

Goal –

Support local, affordable housing initiatives by working with surrounding communities and the Sussex County government, as well as limiting, wherever possible, insurance costs to resident families.

Recommendation

Support local affordable housing initiatives. Continue to explore avenues of encouraging or supporting affordable housing within, or in proximity to Bethany Beach, particularly for the vital workforce needed as the Town evolves into a year-round destination.

Recommendation

Maintain National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS) Class 8 (or better) rating. Flood insurance is a significant cost for property owners in Bethany Beach. Because of this, the Town participates in NFIP's voluntary CRS incentive program which recognizes community floodplain management activities that exceed minimum program requirements. As a result of the Town's actions, FEMA has approved a 10 percent rate reduction for properties in Special Hazard Flood areas. The Town should continue to adhere and adapt to NFIP requirements in order to retain the current discount.

1-4d. *Transportation Goals and Recommendations*

Goal

Improve the flow of multi-modal transportation throughout the Town.

Recommendation

Continue to Coordinate with the Delaware Department of Transportation (DeIDOT) to improve traffic safety. The SR 26 streetscape project is one example of local coordination with DeIDOT to promote traffic safety. Other examples include: the installation of overhead lights in the median and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) at several intersections on SR 1. The Town should also continue working with DeIDOT on a plan to build a pedestrian pathway along the west side of Kent Avenue, connecting the Town's planned pedestrian and bicycle pathway along the south side of Collins Street with

another pathway along the south side of the 300 block of Wellington Parkway with another RRFB on Kent Avenue at the Library. The Town should continue this partnership by coordinating with DeIDOT's designated planner for Sussex County. The Town values its relationship with DeIDOT and has consulted with DeIDOT during the development of this plan.

Recommendation

Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Program. Continue the well-regarded programs offered by the Bethany Beach Police Department providing safety equipment and advice for cyclists and pedestrians.

Recommendation

Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Improvements. Continue to study conditions and implement safety improvements such as those developed and recommended by the Bethany Beach Police Department and the Town's Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Committee. These have included: educational videos and safety campaigns. In addition, a comprehensive traffic and bike/pedestrian safety study and analysis for the Town is expected to develop alternative roadway improvements to enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety while maintaining vehicular traffic flow. The study may also evolve into the development of an action plan for the purpose of applying for a Federal SS4A (Safe Streets and Roads for All) Implementation Grant.

Recommendation

Local Roadway Safety. The Town should continue to work with South Bethany, Sea Colony and Middlesex and DeIDOT on a study of traffic on SR 1 with a goal of lowering the speed limit through those communities to 30 mph from 35 mph and another study of traffic on SR 26 to determine if the data justifies the lowering of the speed limit on that State Road as well. The Town should also continue to work with DeIDOT on its goal of lowering the speed limit on municipal streets from 25 mph to 20 mph.

Recommendation

Enforcement. Continue effective enforcement of speed and crosswalk regulations, as well as addressing citizen concerns about traffic calming measures (often seasonal).

Recommendation

Intergovernmental Coordination. Funding for local roadway maintenance and improvement (most notably through the Municipal Street Aid Fund and the Community Transportation Fund), are critical to towns like Bethany Beach. In addition to working closely with DeIDOT, the Town should continue to pursue political avenues, including working with elected State representatives and the Delaware League of Local Government (DLLG), to secure adequate funding.

Recommendation

Support Local Transit. The Town's trolley service, a beloved part of the Town's character, reduces vehicular traffic in Town. The trolleys transport over 30,000 passengers annually during the summer

season. Though this alone does not prevent congestion, it is well worth continuing or possibly expanding, depending on circumstances. The Town continues to pursue opportunities for increasing ridership.

Recommendation

Parking management. Continue to effectively manage the Town's parking inventory and provide for any needed policy or Town Code revision, as well as continuing to support local transit.

1-4e. Economic Development and Redevelopment Goals and Recommendations

Goal

Encourage a vibrant business community in the Town's Business Districts, consistent with the Town's overall vision and applicable provisions of the Town Code.

Recommendation

Maintain the Town's active Business Districts. The Town has two distinct and thriving business districts: the Central Commercial District (C-1) east of Route 1 and the Neighborhood Commercial District (C-2) on Route 26 west of Route 1. There is also a Commercial Lodging District (CL-1) adjacent to the C-1 District. The Garfield Parkway and Atlantic Avenue projects have, and will, continue to bolster the Town's businesses. Business placement and development have also been favorable for the past several years. The Town should continue to meet with and consider the needs and interests of the business community in all decisions related to those districts and ensure that its land use and development regulations enable the type and character of businesses it desires now and in the future.

Recommendation

Continue to provide, sponsor or approve appropriate civic, arts, entertainment and other events that contribute to a sense of community, engagement and economic vitality as the Town determines to be appropriate, safe and affordable. Such events may include holiday celebrations, patriotic programs and parades, music events, arts and craft shows, recreation and fitness activities and educational and cultural programs.

Recommendation

Continue to provide opportunities for and encourage community input for future projects. The Town should continue its policy of soliciting public input via surveys, public meetings, workshops, and notices, as appropriate, for upcoming projects. This approach was proven effective in developing plans for the Town Park and other projects.

1-4f. *Environmental and Sustainability Goals and Recommendations*

Goal

To conserve, sustain, and enhance natural areas and resources for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations and to encourage, promote, and educate citizens and visitors in achieving a “Green Bethany.”

Recommendation

Continue to explore the acquisition of properties of unique environmental value. The Town has invested in the acquisition of historical and environmentally valuable properties for Town stewardship and to protect them from residential development. The 2019 purchase and preservation of 15 acres of undeveloped property, which include non-tidal wetlands, is one example.

Recommendation

Continue regional cooperation regarding Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL). A TMDL is the maximum level of pollution allowed for a given pollutant, below which a target water body can assimilate and still meet water-quality standards necessary to support activities such as swimming, fishing, providing drinking water, and shellfish harvesting. The Town continues to comply with TMDL standards and requirements as delineated by the State of Delaware and Sussex County. The Town should continue to engage with DNREC when a revision to the relevant pollution control strategy is developed and continue coordination with the relevant tributary action team.

Recommendation

Continue to maintain and improve the Town’s stormwater drainage system. Efficient and effective stormwater drainage remains a high priority for the Town. Drainage systems throughout the Town consist of both open swales/ditches as well as closed pipes. Open swales/ditches are considered best management practices (BMP) for stormwater management and are strongly encouraged. Vegetative swales/ditches help filter out pollutants from runoff and reduce Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) levels. Phosphorous and nitrogen have been identified as two of the major pollutants of our Inland Bays. The majority of the stormwater in the Town drains either directly or indirectly into the Loop Canal, with a lesser amount into the Assawoman Canal. The Town should continue to maintain and improve the stormwater drainage infrastructure throughout the Town and educate property owners to the importance of keeping swales and culverts on their property free from debris.

Recommendation

Maintain the 50-year Beach Replenishment Project. The importance of Bethany’s beach and dune structure to the Town cannot be overstated. Aside from the obvious economic impact and community identity the beach strand provides, the beach and dunes are vital buffers in protecting lives, property and infrastructure from waves and tidal surges, especially during storms. The Town should continue its efforts to ensure the beach is replenished, consistent with existing assurances. Examples of effective engagement are the Town’s ongoing relationship and communication with local, state and federal representatives, agencies and officials, as well as participation in the Association of Coastal Towns (ACT) and the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA).

Goal

Continue to assess the Town's vulnerability to sea level rise and explore ways to adapt and mitigate risks.

Recommendation

Continue exploring infrastructure and policy approaches to ameliorate flooding and drainage problems. The Town's storm resilience fund, study of a potential mechanically activated steel dam in the Loop Canal and tidal gate at Fresh Pond, the existence of an active Town committee on stormwater and tidal flooding, the "Green Bethany" initiative, and the project to identify ways for residents to minimize stormwater impacts are examples of the forward-thinking steps the community has, and will, take to address flooding. The Town may also consider policies developed by other coastal communities, such as Lewes' recent sea-level rise initiative. This subject is addressed further in the "Environment and Sustainability" chapter of the Comprehensive Development Plan.

Recommendation

Continue "Green Bethany" initiatives. As evidence of its ongoing commitment to sustainability, the Town has taken steps to create a more environmentally friendly community, including by providing a trash recycling service, converting to solar power at some Town facilities, providing charging stations for electric vehicles, and creating more green space. The Town should continue to explore opportunities to be more sustainable and resilient. Examples include stormwater management, tree preservation, green building, renewable energy, and green vehicles. Such initiatives not only contribute to a more healthy, sustainable environment, but may serve as positive examples for other Delaware municipalities. Moreover, as evidence of the Town's environmental stewardship, they would also lend support to any future Town request for Federal or State funding for environmental projects.

1-4g. *Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Goals and Recommendations*

Goal

Provide areas and opportunities for outdoor relaxation and recreation.

Recommendation

Maintain the 50-year Beach Replenishment Project. The importance of Bethany's beach and dune structure to the Town cannot be overstated. Aside from the obvious economic impact and community identity the beach strand provides, the beach and dunes are vital buffers in protecting lives, property and infrastructure from waves and tidal surges, especially during storms. The Town should continue its efforts to ensure the beach is replenished, consistent with existing assurances. Examples of effective engagement are the Town's ongoing relationship and communication with local, state and federal representatives, agencies and officials, as well as participation in the Association of Coastal Towns (ACT) and the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA).

Recommendation

Continue to conserve, sustain, and enhance natural areas and resources for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. The Town should also encourage, promote, and educate citizens and visitors in achieving a "Green Bethany" by offering educational programs at its Nature Center and adopting best management practices as appropriate.

Recommendation

Evaluate Off-Season Recreational Opportunities. During the peak and "shoulder" seasons, the Town provides spaces and permits numerous outdoor recreation opportunities. However, many businesses are seasonal, as is the attraction of the beach. Consideration should be given to surveying year-round residents to determine their interests and suggestions regarding off-season recreation opportunities.

1-4h. *Future Land Use and Annexation Goals and Recommendations*

Goal

Preserve and enhance the established character of the Town, continue effective land use policies, and remain engaged in addressing development in the surrounding area that may affect the Town.

Recommendation

Maintain effective land-use ordinances and provide for appropriate development. The Town should continue to consider regulatory efforts to incentivize appropriate development and redevelopment of homes consistent with the community character. The Town zoning map and related ordinance should be updated, as needed, to reflect the future land use changes.

Recommendation

Continue to base any requests for annexation on the best interests of the Town and its property owners. The Town is satisfied with its established municipal boundaries and there are no current areas of annexation concern. As in the past, any request for annexation by communities outside the corporate limits of Bethany Beach will be based on an informed assessment of the best interests of the Town, its residents and property-owners.

1-5. Interpreting Plan Goals and Recommendations

Because of the importance of the Comprehensive Plan as a planning guide, and because of the sometimes-challenging task of interpreting and harmonizing the various goals and recommendations, the document has been carefully crafted to identify those provisions in the Plan that the Town is legally required to pursue because of the Plan's force of law. All other provisions not specifically directing affirmative and mandatory action by the Town are expressly intended to be optional and aspirational.

Chapter 2. Community Character: Draft to Council

Oct. 24, 2022

Community Character Statement

A thriving year-round residential community that seeks to preserve its family-friendly, small-town character and beauty while maintaining its roots as a quiet and safe beach resort for all.

2-1. Location

The Town of Bethany Beach is an incorporated town in Sussex County, Delaware, located on a headland that extends approximately one mile along the Delaware Bay barrier island complex. It is located approximately six miles north of the Maryland state line and approximately four miles south of the Indian River Inlet. The Town is bounded on the east by the Atlantic Ocean and on the west by the Town of Ocean View. It encompasses an area of approximately one square-mile. The Town is bisected by S.R. 1 and S.R. 26 (Garfield Parkway).

2-2. History and Historic and Cultural Resources

The community of Bethany Beach was founded in 1901 through the joint efforts of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ of Maryland, Delaware and Washington D.C. and the newly formed Bethany Beach Improvement Company. The Disciples, with the approval of the Christian Missionary Society, had founded the site in 1894 as a summer camp retreat during the popular Chautauqua Movement.

By 1902, the Improvement Company fell into difficulties and was subsequently bought out by a group of six Pittsburgh-area businessmen, now along with the Disciples of Christ credited as the Town founders. Through their efforts successful development of new housing, a boardwalk, and other improvements were created. In 1909, the Town was incorporated, and in 1910, the Loop Canal was dug permitting travel to Bethany Beach on a single boat ride from Rehoboth.

The original Improvement Company had appointed a mayor and six commissioners in 1901 on the formal founding of the Town. Now elected by popular vote of the Town property owners, the Town Council is comprised of seven members. Each year these elected officials choose from among themselves the mayor, vice-mayor and secretary-treasurer. Over the years, efforts of the Town councils and homeowners have continued to keep Bethany a family-oriented resort community.

Since its founding, several nearby large urban areas have brought visitors and new property owners that have influenced the growth of Bethany Beach. The automobile in the early 1900's and eventually the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1952 made travel to the area faster and more desirable. The current Bethany Beach fulltime population of just under 1,000 grows to approximately 21,000 during the summer season each year.

Bethany Beach has a continuous involvement with government installations. A U.S. Coast Guard station was manned in the area from 1907 until 1947. A naval radio-compass station operated for years from Bethany Beach. Coastal Defense troops were quartered in the Town during World War II, and the Delaware National Guard training installation, still active in Bethany Beach, was used as a POW camp during the war years.

The Town of Bethany Beach is waging a continual struggle with the natural forces of wind and water, which have threatened the Town throughout its history. The Town's boardwalk has been rebuilt six times since 1903, and many of the Town's homes and businesses have fallen victim to the fury of a storm. The famous coastal storm of 1962 ravaged the Town. Waves estimated to be 20-30 feet high hammered the boardwalk area, and a tidal storm surge destroyed over 30 homes. Despite these intermittent storms, the Town of Bethany Beach continues to make history as one of Delaware's finest coastal communities

2-2a. Historic Structures

The Delaware State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) completed a historic and cultural resources inventory in the Town of Bethany Beach. SHPO staff members surveyed structures, monuments, parks, and other cultural resources in the Town to identify those with remarkable historic significance and integrity. Experts found that the Town itself has a rich history but few resources remain with the integrity required by the National Register of Historic Places.

Due to the growing popularity of Delaware's coastal communities, the physical integrity of many of the local historic resources has been compromised over the years by multiple additions, significant renovations and demolition. However, SHPO was able to identify several significant historic resources in Bethany Beach that have been well preserved. Of the 141 total properties surveyed, SHPO identified 12 that could be considered "eligible resources" for preservation under federal National Historic Preservation Act guidelines. In addition, the Town of Bethany Beach Planning and Zoning Commission identified additional resources that were not identified by SHPO but are considered significant to the Bethany Beach community.

104 Second Street (John M. Addy House)

During the summer of 1901, six Pittsburgh-area businessmen and their families began to build cottages in Bethany Beach. Built between 1901 and 1905, six of the original cottages of the “Pittsburgh Six” businessmen still survive. Three Addy, one Dinker, one Errett and one Latimer cottages remain. John M. Addy, who was one of the original “Pittsburgh Six”, built this folk Victorian cottage in 1901. Later the house became the Williams’ Inn, renting rooms. Currently the house is a private residence.

109 First Street (Errett Cottage)

Nearly identical to the John M. Addy House is this symmetrical, one-and-a-half-story folk Victorian cottage, built by W.R. Errett, one of the original “Pittsburgh Six.” The house is still owned by members of his family.

48 North Atlantic Avenue (Latimer House)

Standing at the northeast corner of Atlantic Avenue and Second Street is the house built by R.S. Latimer who was the last surviving member of the original “Pittsburgh Six.” It is a cross-gable, three-bay house with a side hall entrance and a wrap-around porch.

101 Parkwood Street (Journey’s End)

This large beach cottage, known as “Journey’s End,” is a popular guesthouse that dates back to 1927. During the Second World War, the house was used to board troops and was known as Fort Maggie after the owner, Margaret Hughes. Appearing to be two, two-and-a-half-story houses connected by a common roof, Journey’s End maintains much of its historic integrity. The ownership of the house remains with the original family.

99 Campbell Place (Drexler House)

Built in 1905, the Drexler House stands at the northeast corner of Campbell Place and Atlantic Avenue and was the home of former state senator Louis Drexler. Moved two times in its lifetime, the house has now been reoriented to allow easy access to the beach from its front entrance.

9 South Pennsylvania Avenue

This small folk Victorian house at the northwest corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Hollywood Street was built around 1902 and is a surviving example of the Town's historic architecture.

Loop Canal

The Bethany Beach Improvement Company dug the Bethany Beach Loop Canal, located at the foot of First Street, in 1910. The mile-long canal connected the Town with the Assawoman Canal, which was dug in 1890 to connect the Indian River Bay and Little Assawoman Bay. The waterway eliminated very difficult over land travel to the Town and ended in a loop to give access to the *Allie May*, a steamship designed to travel in shallow waters. Since it could not reverse, a loop was needed in the canal. On the 8th of July 2010, the Town celebrated the 100th year anniversary of the Loop Canal by having a celebration at the site that was attended by members of the current and former Bethany Beach Town Council, State Senator George Bunting, and State Representative Gerald Hocker as well as members of the Bethany Beach community. At the ceremony the newly reconstructed Loop-Canal dock was unveiled.

The Addy Sea

Currently operating as a popular bed and breakfast establishment, the Addy Sea attracts many hundreds of visitors to the Delaware seashore's "Quiet Resort" each year.

The proprietor proudly describes it as a late Victorian exterior, clothed in the classic cedar shingles the Town's early houses wore and trimmed with lacy gingerbread, bringing to mind a bygone era in which visitors came to the beach by steamer and horse drawn buggy. John Addy, one of Bethany's original settlers, built the Addy Sea for his family in 1902. The family began renting it to church groups during the depression. It changed hands in the 70's and the Gravattes, who have been welcoming guests for 25 years, continue to operate the Addy Sea as a bed and breakfast inn. The Addy Sea has 13 guestrooms and accommodates 37 guests comfortably.

Addy 3

The small beach cottage was built circa 1902-1903 and was originally located on the northeast corner of Atlantic Avenue and Ocean View Parkway. In 1927, the structure was moved to the south side of Ocean View Parkway and the beach. In 2003, the structure was again moved to the former Natter property on Route 26 and now serves as the educational center for the Bethany Beach Nature Center and Conservation Area.

310 Garfield Parkway (First Dinker - Irvin Cottage, now the Dinker-Irvin Town Museum)

The Dinker cottage was built between 1902-1903 on First Street along with five other beach cottages that were all virtually identical in design. In 1911, the cottage was moved to its present location on Garfield Parkway, west of Route One. From 1922 to 1925, it served as the post office for the Town of Bethany Beach and then was sold by William Short to Ida May Irvin in 1925. In 2016, the Edgar family donated the Dinker Cottage to the Town. The Town moved the cottage approximately 150-200 feet west onto Town property. The cottage, now the Dinker-Irvin Museum, presents the history of the house as well as early Bethany Beach

history. The Bethany Beach Cultural and Historical Affairs Committee succeeded in its efforts to have the cottage included on the National Registry of Historic Places.

“The Clubhouse”

The structure was built in 1905 by D. C. France of Philadelphia, as a recreation center for members of the Christian Church. The building was originally located on Maplewood Street between Pennsylvania Avenue and Delaware Avenue (Route 1). The structure was moved to the south side of Garfield Parkway, between Pennsylvania and Atlantic Avenues where during the 1930’s and 1940’s it was operated as the Townsend Hotel and later became a private residence. In 1981 Mr. and Mrs. J.P Connor purchased the building and donated it to the Christian Church and moved it onto the church grounds.

21 Kent Avenue (Evans Homestead)

The “Evans Homestead” built circa 1908 was the home of the Evans family patriarch Alonzo Evans, founder of the Evans Clan. The building today is named “Tranquil” with a new owner.

98 Parkwood Street (Townsend/Rogers/Ewing/Bowden House)

A large Dutch Colonial style house built on the southeast corner of Parkwood Avenue and the beach by Priney Townsend of Ocean View in the 1920’s. In the 1950’s the house was purchased by the Rogers family of Washington, DC and was turned 180 degrees so that the house would now face the ocean

99 Parkwood Street (Scott/Spargo House)

In 1928 the Scott sisters of Pittsburgh, PA built the house on the northeast corner of Parkwood and Atlantic Avenues. Originally named the “Sco-Hi-Tay” house after Ann Scott, Belle Scott, and Maize Scott Taylor. A later owner was their daughter/niece, Mary Lou Hieber.

2-2b. Historic and Cultural Resource Inventory

The Town has a standing Cultural and Historical Affairs Committee (CHAC). The purpose of the committee includes overseeing the Bethany Beach Town Museum, located in Town Hall and the Dinker-Irvin Museum located on Route 26, as well as initiating projects that are related to historical and cultural resources of the Town.

An historic district or area does not exist in the Town. Most of the early Bethany Beach cottages have long been gone and replaced with larger and modern year-round homes. Those that remain and have been identified are few and are located throughout the Town. In discussions with owners of these homes, the view expressed was that they would be opposed to any attempt to infringe on their property rights. They wanted themselves and their heirs to be fully able to alter or even remove their homes and rebuild should that be their desire for any reason.

Therefore, the committee concluded that an alternative to actual preservation might be a better choice for Bethany Beach. A project was initiated to place a bronze plaque at the site of each original structure dating back to 1930 or before. The plaque would display when the house was built as well as some historical facts relating to the home. Current homeowner written permission was required that included the wording that

would appear on the plaque. A “Walking Tour” map displaying the locations was also made available in the Town Hall Lobby Museum.

Bronze plaques have been placed throughout the Town identifying places of historic significance, including four on the boardwalk depicting locations of “gone but not forgotten.” Locations currently displaying bronze plaques are as follows:

- Addy 1
- Addy 3
- Addy Sea
- The Bowling Alley
- First Dinker Cottage
- Drexler House
- Errett Cottage
- Evans Homestead
- Ringler Theatre
- Journey's End
- Scott/Spargo House
- Seaside Inn
- Sloan Cottage
- Townsend/Rogers/Ewing/Bowden House
- Warren Restaurant and Holiday House Restaurant (Same location for both restaurants but only one Historic Marker)

In July 2010, the 100th Anniversary of the completion of the Canal was recognized and a dock was constructed depicting where early travelers to Bethany Beach boarded the steamer that brought them to and from the Town.

The Christian Church located in the central part of the Town and is bordered by Route 1, Garfield Parkway, Pennsylvania Avenue and Central Avenue is a valuable historic resource of the Town. It is the location of the original “tabernacle” where the founders and early property owners regularly gathered for both worship and recreation. An almost exact replica has replaced the original tabernacle and the Church is still attended by residents of both Bethany Beach and the surrounding area.

Although the Church maintains individual ownership of this property, it continues to be viewed as an important monument to the beginnings of the Town. Being the largest space available, accommodations are made for several Town events to make use of the property and a portion of the land is provided for a Town playground that is well utilized and much appreciated by residents and visitors alike.

2-2c. The Town's Forever Lost But Not Forgotten Heritage

Over the course of Bethany Beach's relatively short history a significant number of important and memorable locations and structures have been lost by a combination of natural and man-made forces. Some of the more memorable structures/places of the Town's past are the following:

“Tabernacle”

Built in 1901 on the Disciples of Christ assembly ground, the uniquely eight-sided shaped building was used for holding summer religious retreats. It was torn down in 1964 and a new "Tabernacle" was erected on the Disciple of Christ assembly ground in 2001. The location of the Tabernacle was on the property bounded by Garfield Parkway, Pennsylvania Avenue, Central Boulevard and Route 1.

"Cedar Grove School"

Probably built in the early 1900's and was located on Kent Avenue near Wellington Parkway across from the present day South Coastal Library. It was Bethany Beach's one room schoolhouse for grades one through six. It remained in operation probably through the 1920's.

"Log Cabin"

An elegant house that was formerly located on the southeast corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Garfield Parkway. The house was built over a log cabin that was constructed by D.C. France of Philadelphia in the early 1900's. It was lost in a fire in the 1920's and it is the present site of the PNC Bank.

"Life-Saving Station"

The Life Saving Station was built on the beach in 1907 and was located just north of the "Pilot House" which is now in the community of Sussex Shores. The Station was commanded by Captain Washington A. Vickers and officially became a U.S. Coast Guard Station in 1909. The structure was demolished in 1960.

"Addy Boathouse"

The Boathouse was built in the early 1900's on the southwest corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Second Street. It rented boats to crabbers and fishermen.

"Seaside Inn"

Located off the north end of the boardwalk (Second Street and the Beach). R.R. Bulgin who was a Disciples of Christ preacher built the hotel in the early 1900's and at that time it was known as the "Bellevue-Atlantic Hotel." In the 1920's the hotel was purchased by Cal and Alice Jagger and was renamed the "Seaside Inn." The Jagger's rented rooms and served three meals a day. The Inn was totally destroyed in the 1962 storm and has been replaced by the "Seaside Village."

"Ringler's Theatre"

The theatre was built in 1923 by Raymond Ringler and was located at the southeast corner of Garfield Parkway and the boardwalk. The theatre was destroyed by a storm in 1944. Currently at that location is the Blue Surf Condominiums and Shops.

"The Bowling Alley"

The bowling alley was located on the boardwalk between First and Second Streets. Thomas Granville and Minnie Ann Walston built the bowling alley in 1930. The bowling alley was later owned and operated by their daughter and her husband, Zada and Bill Wilgus and family. The bowling alley was the social center for the younger generation in the Town and was destroyed by the storm of 1962.

“Warren’s Restaurant”

The restaurant was built in 1933 and was located at the northwest corner of Garfield Parkway and the boardwalk and is the present location of Mango’s Restaurant. It was the first restaurant on the boardwalk and was destroyed by a fire in 1953.

“Holiday House Restaurant”

The Holiday House was the first “upscale” restaurant in Bethany Beach. It was originally located on the north side of Hollywood Street between Pennsylvania and S.R. 1 in the home of Karl Klais and James Popham who both owned and operated the restaurant. In 1953, the business was relocated to the northwest corner of Garfield Parkway and the boardwalk. The restaurant was destroyed in the 1962 storm, but the same owners immediately rebuilt the restaurant. In 1982 under a new owner, Arnold Brown, it was the first Bethany Beach establishment to obtain a liquor license. In 1998, the Holiday House Restaurant was torn down and replaced by Mango’s Restaurant and a shopping complex.

99 First Street (Dinker House)

This house, situated on the ocean side of Atlantic Avenue, was the second home built by W.A. Dinker and another of the “Pittsburgh Six.” This hip-roofed, two-and-a-half-story cottage was originally called “The Oriole” because of its orange and black paint.

98 Central Avenue (Drexler West)

This two-and-a-half-story folk Victorian cottage known as “Drexler West” is another early example of the Town’s historic architecture. Around 2005 the original house was demolished and a larger house was constructed on the property with an almost exact replication of the original house.

Campbell Hall, Disciples of Christ Assembly

Located on the Disciples of Christ Assembly grounds, Campbell Hall was built in 1938 and became the conference center for the Capital Area Disciples of Christ. During the Second World War, the building was leased by the War Department, which controlled the property through the fall of 1944. Following the end of the war, the conference grounds reopened and resumed hosting conferences and camps for the Capital Area Disciples of Christ. In 2015 Campbell Hall was torn down and at the same location was replaced by a modern “state of the art” conference facility.

2-3. Community Design

Bethany Beach is a classic example of the prevalent development pattern in many beach towns. Bisected by SR 1 and Garfield Parkway (SR 26), the beach side (east) of town is comprised of cottages in a grid pattern on modestly sized lots. Historical and ongoing renovations have gradually changed the overall character from “small summer cottage,” to “beach homes”. The western half of the Town is decidedly more suburban in layout, featuring a curvilinear street pattern and relatively larger lots.

2-4. Community Character and Design Goals and Objectives

Community Vision

A thriving year-round residential community that seeks to preserve its family-friendly, small-town character and beauty while maintaining its roots as a quiet and safe beach resort for all.

Goal

While Bethany Beach incrementally transitions into a year-round family-friendly destination, it strives to preserve the Town's existing community character and ambiance while continuing to build a sense of community for all.

Recommendation

Encourage development and redevelopment compatible with the existing community fabric – Bethany Beach has taken regulatory steps in its R-1 and R-1B Zoning Districts to encourage development of residential homes that are consistent with the historic character of Bethany Beach as a family-friendly beach resort and that are compatible with the residential homes in the surrounding neighborhood without blocking light and air flow to adjacent homes. The Town should track and analyze building permit applications to determine if its efforts are having the desired effect, if they are in need of adjustment and if there is any need to propose a similar approach for the R-2 District. The Town will monitor developments in the R-2 District to determine if a similar approach is needed.

Recommendation

Preserve and enhance the Town's historic and cultural assets – The Town should continue to maintain an active Cultural and Historical Affairs Committee; play a direct role in historic/cultural asset preservation; and maintain the Dinker-Irvin Museum, now listed on the National Registry of Historic Places as well as the Museum in Town Hall to preserve and pass on the Town's history.

Recommendation

Promote engagement with the Cultural and Historic Resources Survey – Having recently (2017) completed a comprehensive survey, the Town's Cultural and Historic Affairs Committee should consider the next step of activating further public interest and developing potential further preservation strategies.

Goal

People are Bethany's greatest asset. The Town's goal is to provide high quality of life experiences and opportunities to residents, property and business owners and visitors.

Recommendation

Continue to provide, sponsor, or approve appropriate civic, arts, entertainment and other events that contribute to a sense of community, engagement and economic vitality as the Town determines to be appropriate, safe and affordable. – Such events may include holiday celebrations,

patriotic programs and parades, music events, arts and craft shows, recreation and fitness activities and educational and cultural programs.

Chapter 3. Community Profile-Draft to Council Oct. 24, 2022

3-1. Population Trends

Table 1 summarizes the Town’s population and housing units between 1960 and 2020, alongside those of Sussex County and Delaware as a whole.

Table 1. Population and Housing Units, 1960 to 2020

Year	Population			Housing Units		
	Bethany Beach	Sussex County	Delaware	Bethany Beach	Sussex County	Delaware
1960	170	73,195	446,292			143,725
1970	189	80,356	548,104		34,287	180,233
1980	330	98,004	594,338		54,694	238,611
1990	326	113,847	666,168	2,063	74,253	289,919
2000	903	157,430	783,600	2,371	93,070	343,072
2010	1060	197,145	897,934	2,356	123,036	405,885
2020	957	237,378	989,948	2,784	141,123	448,735

Source: 1960 through 2020 Decennial Censuses and 2010 & 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) Estimates

Bethany Beach has grown considerably, transitioning from the “quiet beach” of decades ago into a modestly sized, year-round Town. The largest growth can easily be seen between the years of 1990 and 2000, when the year-round population nearly tripled. Sussex’s growth has also routinely outpaced the state. Note that Bethany Beach’s growth appears to have plateaued and shows no strong correlation to the available housing stock.

According to the Town’s Planning and Zoning Commission and staff, there is considerable skepticism that the U.S. Census figures accurately reflect the true number of people inhabiting the Town for the majority of the year. This difficulty likely stems from the preponderance of seasonal homes and the reporting ambiguities encountered when a respondent is compelled to choose one location as “home.”

3-1a. Population Projections

For the purposes of this demographic section, population projections will rely upon the established methodology used by the Delaware Population Consortium (DPC) and estimates derived from the U.S. Census. Table 2, below, shows the projected population for Bethany Beach by year 2050.

Table 2. Bethany Beach Growth Projections

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
Population	330	326	903	1,060	957			
40-year Annual Rate = 4.84%						1,522	2,421	3,851
20-year Annual Rate = .3%						986	1,016	1,047
Paces Sussex County = .99%						1,056	1,164	1,284
DPC Projection						1,422	1,549	1,655

Notes: "Paces Sussex County" represents the county's annual growth rate since 1990.
 Source: Delaware Population Consortium 2021 Estimates and U.S. Census 2020

Population projections for small communities like Bethany Beach are difficult. With limited data points to draw from, even small errors in projected growth rates can equal wild swings in potential population levels over 20 or 30 years. Moreover, recent history has shown that growth and population are indeed often influenced by political events, market forces, or other factors beyond the purview of traditional demography. Compounding this difficulty is the "full-time resident" factor. All Census data is derived from the respondent's choice of permanent address. With an ample available housing supply, the Town's future population will likely be much more a function of how many people choose to call it their primary residence.

This analysis calculated the Town's 20- and 40-year average annual growth rates and, in turn, projected each over a 30-year span. The third option was to mirror the proposed average annual growth rate for Sussex, derived from the DPC 2021 estimates for Sussex County, and assume Bethany Beach would grow at the same annual rate.

The 40- and 20-year projections produced considerably varied results. This is due to the 40-year projection including the boom in full-time residents recorded between 1990 and 2000. Framed simply, the 40-year projection may be considered the "high." Should the Town experience another wave of part-time residents opting for year-round status, akin to the surge of the 90's, this scenario is not that far-fetched, particularly when one considers that there are already 2,800 housing units that could easily house 3,851 residents and leave significant rental opportunities available. The 20-year projection serves as the "low." The assumption here is that (since the construction of SR 1) Bethany Beach has settled into a relative equilibrium of very modest growth. Tracking projected growth in Sussex County yields a slightly higher figure by 2050. The official DPC projections, which account for migration, births, deaths, retirements, etc., envision a fair bit of growth, even in the near-term.

Position on Population Growth

"Bethany Beach is in the somewhat unique position where the full-time residential population does not correspond closely to the number of homes. The population is actually far less than would be expected, given the number of homes. However, more property owners are moving to Bethany Beach as full-time residents. The Town cherishes its identity as a quiet, family-friendly beach community and is open for such year-round population increases and welcomes all who would consider making this wonderful community their home."

3-1b. Demographic Characteristics

The Census Bureau has changed the method by which it now collects and disseminates much of its information. The Bureau no longer distributes the old long-form survey that historically provided data on a number of demographic factors that were published as “Summary Files 3 & 4.” These included indicators on social statistics such as education, poverty, income, and commuting patterns. These summary files were replaced by the American Community Survey (ACS) data, available in one-, three-, and five-year estimates.

The difference in the ACS (survey) and the old long-form (count) data is analogous to polls versus elections. A poll extrapolates likely data based on a sampling of respondents. Whereas a full-on counting of all respondents is akin to tallying votes. Obviously, a full count is much more accurate, but is also more costly. Surveys can be conducted more often. Unfortunately, in the case of municipalities or geographic areas below a threshold population of 50,000, the margin of error for the survey data can be very significant.

Household and Families

Table 3 summarizes household and family characteristics for Bethany Beach, Sussex County, and the State of Delaware. A household is any occupied housing unit comprising all of those people living in the unit. A family is a household with a householder and at least one other related person, whether it is by marriage, birth, or adoption. Families are also households, but households can sometimes consist of unrelated persons.

Bethany Beach’s average family and household sizes were both somewhat smaller than those either of the state, or even Sussex County. Of all households in Bethany Beach, 72.8 percent are families. For Sussex County, that figure is 68.5 percent; for the State, 65.5 percent.

Table 3. Bethany Beach’s Household and Family Characteristics, 2020

Item	Bethany Beach	Sussex County	Delaware
Total Population	957	237,378	989,948
Total Households	574	94,223	370,953
Total Families	418	64,499	243,012
Average Household Size	2.00	2.41	2.54
Average Family Size	2.28	2.86	3.11

Source: 2020 ACS 5-year estimates

Racial Composition, Hispanic or Latino Origin

Table 4 summarizes racial composition in Bethany Beach, Sussex County and the State in 2020.

Table 4. Racial Composition Bethany Beach, Sussex County, and State, 2020

Race	Bethany Beach		Sussex County		Delaware	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
White	896	93.92%	175,847	74.08%	597,763	59.84%
Black	3	0.31%	25,357	10.68%	218,899	21.91%
Other	7	0.73%	14,137	5.96%	48,509	4.86%
Asian	14	1.47%	3,070	1.29%	42,699	4.27%
Multiple Race	31	3.25%	17,012	7.17%	76,518	7.66%
Totals	954	100%	237,378	100%	998,948	100%

Source: 2020 U.S. Census, P1-Race

As would be expected, Bethany Beach's racial diversity has increased over the past thirty years. Also, note that the "two or more races" convention now used by the ACS was not in use in 1990. Such respondents were likely included in "other," or chose one of the existing categories. Table 5 summarizes the changes in racial composition in Bethany Beach between 1990 and 2020.

Table 5. Bethany Beach Racial Composition Change, 1990–2020

Race	1990	2020
White	99%	93.92%
Black	<1%	0.31%
Other	<1%	0.73%
Multiple Race	##	3.25%
Asian	<1%	1.47%

Source: 2000 and 1990 U.S. Census, P1: Race, 2005 Bethany Beach Comp Plan.

Table 6 summarizes the changes in Bethany Beach's population reporting Hispanic or Latino origin between 2000 and 2020.

Table 6. Bethany Beach's Population Reporting Hispanic or Latino Origin, 2000–2020

	2000		2020	
	#	%	#	%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	11	1.2%	20	2.1%
Not Hispanic or Latino	892	98.8%	934	97.9%
Total Population	903	100%	954	100%

Source: 2000, 2020 U.S. Census

According to the ACS, Bethany Beach's population of all races identifying as Hispanic has roughly doubled in the past twenty years, but still accounts for a small fraction of the total population.

Table 7 shows the age distribution of Bethany Beach's population.

Table 7. Bethany Beach's Age Distribution, 2020

Age	Bethany Beach		Sussex County		Delaware	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Under 5	11	1.0%	11,613	5.0%	54,774	5.7%
5 to 19	62	5.4%	34,997	15.2%	174,553	18.0%
20 to 24	52	4.5%	10,365	4.5%	58,482	6.0%
25 to 64	344	29.9%	109,034	47.4%	497,846	51.4%
65 to 79	529	46.0%	51,999	22.6%	142,908	14.8%
80+	152	13.2%	12,241	5.3%	39,116	4.0%
Total	1,150		230,249		967,679	
Median	66.8		50.3		41.0	

Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate (Note: ACS Populations not equal to full count data, but are used to determine percentages).

Unsurprisingly, the Bethany Beach area, extremely popular amongst retirees, skews more mature than the State overall, or even Sussex County. School-aged children account for only five percent of the population, roughly a third of the comparable figure for the County and State. College-aged adults are comparable across all geographies. Prime working-aged adults account for less than a third of Bethany Beach's population, compared to 47.4 percent and 51.4 percent for Sussex County and the State, respectively. Nearly half of the Town's population falls into the 65 to 79 year old category.

Table 8 shows which age cohorts grew fastest in Bethany Beach from 2000 to 2020.

Table 8. Bethany Beach's Age Distribution Change, 2000–2020

Age	2000		2020	
	#	%	#	%
Under 5 Years	14	1.6%	11	1.0%
5 to 19 Years	86	9.5%	62	5.4%
20 to 24	24	2.7%	52	4.5%
25 to 64	425	47.1%	344	29.9%
65 to 79	291	32.2%	529	46.0%
80+	63	7.0%	152	13.2%
Totals	903		1,150	
Median		58.9	66.8	

Source: 2000 and 2020 Censuses (Note: ACS Populations not equal to full count data, but are used to determine percentages).

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the median age was 58.9 years twenty years ago. As of 2020, the median age sat at 66.8. The change was apparent across all age classifications. Bethany Beach has fewer young children and fewer school-aged children than it had 20 years ago. It also has fewer prime working aged residents and considerably higher percentages of recent retirees and those over 80.

Education

Table 9 compares Bethany Beach's educational attainment for the population age 25 years or more with that of Sussex County and the State. As the table shows, Bethany Beach compares favorably against the County and State. As reported by the 2020 ACS, Bethany has a much lower percentage of individuals reporting not having completed high school, or having not gone on for further education afterward. The Town also easily outpaces the State and County in regards to four-year degrees and beyond. The comparison is especially stark when one factors in the median age in Bethany Beach, nearly 67 years old. The "median" citizen graduated high school in the late 70s or early 80s, a time when pursuing a bachelor's (or advanced) degree was by no means considered essential.

Table 9. Bethany Beach's Educational Attainment, 2020

Educational Level	Bethany Beach		Sussex County		Delaware	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Not HS Graduates	19	1.9%	19034	11.00%	63843	7.40%
Graduated HS, No Degree	188	18.3%	53,368	30.8%	210,998	31.0%
Some College	136	13.3%	33,487	19.3%	128,397	18.9%
Associate Degree	87	8.5%	16,484	9.5%	54,589	8.0%
Bachelor's Degree	363	35.4%	29,406	17.0%	129,092	19.0%
Graduate or Prof. Degree	232	22.6%	21,495	12.4%	92,951	13.7%
Total 25 and above	1,025		173,274		679,870	

Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate

Economic Characteristics

Tables 10 summarizes the 2020 ACS income data for Bethany Beach, Sussex County, the State, and Nation. ACS data show that Bethany Beach compares favorably on all accounts.

Table 10. Household and Family Annual Income, 2020

Income	Bethany Beach	Sussex County	Delaware	United States
Median Household Income	\$96,700	\$64,905	\$69,110	\$64,994
Median Family Income	\$123,750	\$77,499	\$84,825	\$80,069

Source: 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimate

Table 11 summarizes the 2020 ACS on income distribution and poverty data comparing Bethany Beach, Sussex County, Delaware, and the United States. The ACS data suggests poverty is less of an issue in Bethany Beach than in the County, State, or Nation. Only one percent of the Town's families reported incomes designated as below the poverty line. Additionally, racial, ethnic, or educational, and demographic factors (age) were not readily apparent. The only sub-group reporting a significant (57%) poverty rate was single mother families with multiple children. As with all sub-classifications of small populations, these survey results are subject to significant margins for error.

Table 11. Selected Poverty Data for Families

		Bethany Beach	Sussex County	Delaware	U.S.
All Family	#	418	64,499	243,012	79,849,830
	%	1.0%	7.6%	7.7%	9.1%
With kids aged 18 and below	#	45	22,315	102,327	37,082,652
	%	8.9%	15.9%	13.50%	14.3%
Black	#	0	6,164	47,429	9,040,538
	%	0%	16.7%	15.0%	18.3%
Hispanic	#	0	4,164	18,730	12,303,195
	%	0%	20.4%	15.0%	15.9%
65 +	#	284	24,641	64,291	17,366,084
	%	0%	3.1%	3.8%	5.20%
No High School Diploma	#	40	6,028	17,796	7,701,409
	%	0%	24.8%	21.1%	24.0%

Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate

3-2. Summary of Key Issues

From a demographic point of view, Bethany Beach is somewhat unique. Yes, it has a more mature population than most other communities in the State or County. However, the citizens’ relative affluence gives less cause for concern regarding the elderly “aging in place.” Still, as an aspiring year-round community, the Town will likely want to attract more working-aged adults. Even its own working-aged cohort leans heavily towards the semi-retired side of the spectrum.

The accuracy and utility of national-level data to a small, resort-style community is likely the biggest demographic issue facing Bethany Beach. As mentioned previously, volunteer and paid Town officials were skeptical of the population data because of the Census’ inherent need to determine the location of a respondent’s primary residence. There is a strong likelihood that the Census/ACS data is most successful in gathering data from the subset of respondents who have chosen to live, invest, and semi-retire in properties in Bethany Beach. In this scenario, their age isn’t a red flag, but instead is simply an indication that this generation is yet to fully retire and sell off, or pass on, their assets to the subsequent generation.

Those who live and work in the Town can see with their own eyes the vibrancy and diversity present, certainly throughout the summer, but also during much of the shoulder seasons. Some have recommended tracking seasonal water usage to gain a fuller understanding of the likely population in (but perhaps not claiming it as their home) Bethany at various points of the year. A fuller picture of the demography of semi-residents would likely require a sustained survey effort.

Recommendation

Explore local data sources to better understand the seasonal population – Continue to use data such as construction permits and water demand to gain a fuller understanding of the Town’s population. The U.S. Census figures reliably collect persons claiming the Town as their full-time residence. However, this number does not appear to correlate to the number of people in Town.