

1. 10:00 A.M. Town Council Workshop Briefing Materials Agenda

Documents:

[TOWN COUNCIL WORKSHOP MEETING AGENDA 02-13-2023.PDF](#)

- 1.1. 10:00 AM Town Council Workshop Briefing Materials

Documents:

[FEBRUARY 13, 2023 WORKSHOP COMP PLAN. REVIEW OF CHAPTERS 6 - 8.PDF](#)

**TOWN OF BETHANY BEACH
TOWN COUNCIL
WORKSHOP/SPECIAL MEETING**

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2023
TOWN MEETING ROOM
10:00 A.M.**

Agenda

- I. Discussion between the Town Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission regarding the Comprehensive Plan Chapters 6 through 8

Posted: 2-6-2023

7-2a question “What are the multiple unit housing types?”

Answer – I can’t determine that from the available data. The chart is produced as a baseline from the U.S. Census American Communities Survey. The survey results are then projected (by Census demographers) to reflect the likely results for the whole community. Most likely. A handful of respondents answered incorrectly or saw their single-family condo as one unit in a multi-unit structure. If you suggest some language, a note can be placed below the chart, but I’m hesitant to edit or change official Census data.

7-4 Question “Why have sections of the town been left out of the text discussion?”

Answer – I assumed and was wrong. The text describing the varied neighborhoods and developments came directly from your previously adopted comp plan with mild updating. I was under the impression that very little had changed on the land-use front. Any additional detail or direction will be added. Also, I’ve inquired about the feasibility of creating a map of neighborhoods/developments to replace the pictures. A draft should be available early next week and I will forward it for your review.

8-3 Legend for Sidewalk figure

I found a simpler version of the map that shows only sidewalks and only in one color. Much of the plan will look better once we’ve finished text editing and send it to layout and graphic design.

Chapter 6. Economic Development & Redevelopment

This section of the Plan presents a profile of the Town’s economic and community resources, including man-made structures, places and objects as well as natural resources and community capacities. This section will also provide details regarding some current community-development projects being undertaken by the Town.

6-1. Economic Profile

6-1a. Labor Pool.

Although U.S. Census survey data has limitations in a seasonal community like Bethany Beach, the trend does point to modestly increasing jobs. Trends are less apparent in a category-by-category reading. Clearly, retail, finance, and professional services comprise the bulk of the Town’s employment. The observed volatility is most likely due to polling limitations and do not indicate massive, rapid shifts.

Table 13 - Occupation by Industry

Industry	2009 Jobs (% of total)	2015 Jobs (% of total)	2020 Jobs (% of total)
Agriculture	(<.01%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)
Construction	42 (12.3%)	6 (2%)	5 (1.3%)
Manufacturing	18 (5.3%)	14(4.7%)	10 (2.6%)
Wholesale Trade	5 (1.5%)	12(4.1%)	12 (3.1%)
Retail Trade	66 (19.4%)	28 (9.5%)	96 (24.6%)
Transportation	-(<0.1%)	0(0%)	5 (1.3%)
Information	9 (2.6%)	11 (3.7%)	3 (0.8%)
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	35 (10.2%)	20(6.8%)	61 (15.6%)
Professional Services	23 (6.7%)	60(20.3%)	57 (14.6%)
Education	60 (17.5%)	48(16.2%)	39 (8.7%)
Arts and Entertainment	37 (10.8%)	42(14.2%)	28 (7.2%)
Other Services	26 (7.6%)	46(15.5%)	41 (10.5%)
Public Administration	21 (6.1%)	9(3%)	34 (8.7%)
Total	342 (100.0%)	296 (100.0%)	391 (100%)
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2015, &2020 American Community Survey			

6-1b. Unemployment and Labor Force Participation

Table 14 - Unemployment and Labor Force Participation

Bethany Beach	Bethany Beach	Sussex County	Delaware	United States
Unemployed (20-64 yo)	6.20%	4.50%	5.40%	5.00%
Labor Force Participation Rate	61.40%	75.60%	78.30%	77.90%
Labor Force (20-64 yo)	396	119,399	556,328	192,294,395
Source: 2020 U.S. Census American Communities Survey, S2301				

Bethany Beach’s unemployment figures fell in line with figures for the State, County, and Nation, particularly given the significant margin for error (3.5%) indicated in the municipal level ACS survey. A comparatively smaller percentage of those who identify as full-time residents appear to be active in the labor force. This is not uncommon in a resort-style community.

6-1c. Travel to Work

Commute times for Bethany Beach residents were near identical to those for residents of Sussex and the State of Delaware. The median time reported by the 2020 ACS for each was approximately 27 minutes.

Bethany Beach workers were over twice as likely as their counterparts in the County or State to work from home (nearly 20%). Another outlier was the percentage of respondents (8.5%) that indicated “other means.” Perhaps this could be walking or bicycling. These aside, Bethany Beach residents mirrored the larger populations surveyed in that “drove alone,” was the most common means of travel.

6-2. Economic Overview

Including all categories of commercial enterprise, the Town of Bethany Beach hosts more than 100 businesses that comprise a fairly diverse local economy. Businesses in the Town operate in a wide range of categories, including retail, service, food, hospitality, recreation, and banking. Collectively, the Town’s economic sector employs hundreds of permanent, full-time workers and thousands of seasonal personnel. Bethany Beach has begun to see a trend in all sectors of an extended business season. Some business now operate year round and provide services to full time residents and visitors. The sections below detail the number and type of businesses that operate in the Town for each category, as defined by the Bethany-Fenwick Chamber of Commerce.

6-2a. Accommodations

The Town of Bethany Beach boasts a large number of single-family homes and townhouses that are rented periodically during the summer months, as well as an upscale hotel and a quaint bed and

breakfast. In 2015 a 112 room Marriott Residence Inn (Bethany Beach Ocean Suites) opened at the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Hollywood Street.

With the increasing number of permanent residents in the Town and the subsequent expected decrease in available rental homes, the market demand for such formal accommodations may increase substantially. However, the maintenance of the existing accommodations in the Town coupled with the decreasing availability of rental houses may contribute significantly to the Town's overall goal of establishing a family-oriented, quiet, residential community.

6-2b. Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation

Bethany Beach has seen an increase in a variety of programs being offered locally through the Cultural and Historical Affairs Committee (CHAC) in Bethany Beach (Films, Lectures). The Town offers bandstand performances beginning in April through October and partners with the local chamber of commerce to host holiday programs, and winter events such as Fire and Ice. Additional venues are available at the South Coastal Library (Plays, Arm-Chair Traveler, Lectures, Poetry at the Beach), and the Nature Center Museum and Lectures) that are offered year-round.

There are other venues available (Milton Theater, Rehoboth Theatre of the Arts, plays presented by Clear Space Productions, events at the Ocean City Convention Center). However, in many cases it requires Bethany Beach residents to travel to other communities to attend. The Town's objective is to create an atmosphere that will attract residents of the Town, visitors, and members from nearby communities to enjoy and shop in Bethany Beach on a more year-round basis. This objective is being fulfilled by providing a variety of successful events in the shoulder seasons (April-May and September-December). It is important for the business community to be convinced that it is cost effective to remain open year-round. This could also be helped if working families feel they could live in Bethany Beach and work remotely or find other vocational opportunities.

6-2c. Restaurants and Eateries

The Town of Bethany Beach hosts more than 30 restaurants and eateries, offering a range of options from fast food to elegant dining. In addition, approximately a third of these establishments remain open all year, providing year-round Town residents with a substantive selection of dining experiences throughout the year.

The variety of cuisine offered by the Town's restaurants is impressive, including Italian, Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, vegetarian, seafood, pizza, deli and subs, steakhouse grill, and many others. During the summer season, Town eateries offer a wide range of snack foods, frozen novelties and specialty candies in addition to many more restaurant options. In all, the Town of Bethany Beach features many dining options that provide year-round services for seasonal residents and visitors as well as permanent residents.

6-2d. Professional Services

The Town hosts relatively few establishments that offer professional services, which may be due to the seasonal nature of the Town as well as the high cost of renting space in the downtown commercial district. More than a dozen real estate brokers operate in Town (many in home offices), other services

seem conspicuously absent. Banking, repair and maintenance, clothing cleaning and tailoring, and design services are available but very limited due to Bethany's small size. Most of these services are provided in the surrounding communities. An extensive list of professional services that are currently available in Bethany Beach and in the surrounding communities can be found at the Bethany-Fenwick Area Chamber of Commerce website. (thequietresorts.com)

6-2e. Retail Stores

Bethany Beach boasts more than 60 retail stores that offer a very diverse mix of products and services. While this may seem to be a very good number for the small community of Bethany Beach, most of these retail establishments are specialty stores that are open only a few months during the year. Bethany Beach is beginning to see a trend of businesses remaining open beyond the summer months. While some essential retail shops such as convenience stores and grocery stores in nearby communities remain open all year, most of the specialty clothing and gift shops that provide diversity and richness to the retail business sector in Bethany Beach cater specifically to the summer crowds. The Town works with the Bethany-Fenwick Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Bethany Beach businesses to continue to create ongoing shoulder and off-season events to help develop Bethany Beach's business district as a year round shopping and dining destination.

6-3. Economic Development and Redevelopment Plan

6-3a. Recent Accomplishments

Garfield Avenue Streetscaping

Bethany Beach has worked hard to attract and direct public and private investment. In 2015, the Town and DelDOT completed a major streetscaping project along Garfield Avenue, improving sidewalks, burying utilities, enhancing access to those with disabilities, adding bicycle amenities, and adding traffic calming.

Bethany Beach Central Park

In 2019 the Town broke ground on Bethany Beach Central Park. It was completed in 2020. Bethany Beach Central Park is a 6.8-acre site located at the northwest corner of S.R.-1 and S.R. -26 in Bethany Beach. It is the largest public passive park in the area and serves as the prime gateway into the Town. The Town through much public outreach turned empty fields into a walkable, community-centered park.

The Park includes a pavilion and large open lawn for special events, benches, and a community garden. There are approximately .75 miles of walking paths in the park. The park utilizes rain gardens as a means of stormwater management.

Comcast Franchise Agreement

In November 2020, The Town Council signed a ten-year franchise agreement with Comcast for cable television services. In 2022, Comcast finished installation throughout the community and is now offering cable, internet and phone services to all of Bethany Beach. The Bethany Beach community now has two options for cable and telecommunication service. It is hopeful that this accomplishment will assist toward growing our goal of becoming a thriving year-round residential community.

Mediacom Franchise Agreement

The Town also renewed its existing cable franchise agreement with Mediacom for four years. The Town was able to work with Mediacom during these negotiations to obtain improvements to Mediacom's existing infrastructure, equipment, rates, network and service throughout Bethany Beach.

The Dinker- Irvin Museum

In April 2022, the town dedicated the Dinker-Irvin Museum. The Town moved the Dinker cottage from its original location approximately 150-200 feet 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.

6-3b. Planned Investments

The Town invests considerable time and effort into developing and promoting a full slate of year-round cultural, historic, civic, and outdoors activities designed to stimulate economic activity during the off months. This work, much of it by the Cultural and Historical Affairs Committee, is ongoing.

The Town is developing on pedestrian and bicycle safety upgrades throughout. A major scoping effort is underway for the development of a mechanically activated steel dam in the Loop Canal and a tidal gate at Fresh Pond. It is discussed fully in the environmental sustainability chapter.

6-3c. Overriding Issues

Bethany Beach's most obvious avenue for economic growth, undoubtedly, lies in extending its peak season of economic activity (beach season). This fits well with the Town's stated aim to incrementally transition into a year-round community. During the busy season, the Town's businesses and services operate at or near capacity.

There can be no argument that the town's location, beach, and amenities comprise the core of its economic draw. Maintaining the beach strand and combatting persistent flooding and sustainability issues will be paramount in securing Bethany Beach's long-term economic appeal. Each of these issues is discussed in detail in the environmental sustainability chapter.

6-3d. 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.

Recommendation

Continue to examine and explore ways to mitigate nuisance and high tide flooding in our commercial district. The Town is actively pursuing the study of a potential mechanically activated steel dam in the Loop Canal and tidal gate at Fresh Pond and has retained a consultant to produce a 30% preliminary design and cost estimate. If the results of the 30% study are positive, then securing funding for this investment will become a high priority to the Town. The Town's storm resilience fund, the existence of an active Town committee on stormwater and tidal flooding, the "Green Bethany" initiative, and the project to identify ways to minimize stormwater impacts are examples of the forward-thinking steps the community has, and will, take to address flooding.

Chapter 7. Housing

This section of the Plan addresses the current and future housing needs of Bethany Beach, including a detailed analysis of the Town's housing stock and a plan for future housing based on the most recent U.S. Census data and Town records.

7-1. Overview

Housing is an important issue in Bethany Beach. Like many resort towns, housing is, in fact, one of the major revenue-producing assets in the beach economy. Issues such as flood insurance rates and sustainability are critical, not only to the Town's environment and natural features, but to its economic well-being.

Also, the number of homes in Town and Bethany Beach's full-time population do not appear to strongly impact each other. Put simply, there are far more homes than people who consider themselves year-round residents. In Bethany Beach, discussions regarding growth center around attracting more full-time residents, not on building homes or developments to accommodate new arrivals. Affordability, also, is a significant concern.

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."

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.

7-2. Housing Stock

Table 15 shows data on the various housing types in Bethany Beach as of 2020. Single-family housing is the most prevalent (72.7%) followed by single-family attached (23.9%). Taken together, nearly 97 percent of the community's housing stock is single-family. Both figures are considerably higher than figures for the State, or Sussex County.

7-2a. Housing Stock Composition

Table 15 - Housing Stock

Housing Type	Bethany Beach	%	Sussex County	%	Delaware	%
Single Family, Detached	2,024	72.7%	91,310	64.7%	256,679	58.5%
Single Family, Attached	665	23.9%	13,884	9.8%	69,530	15.9%
2 to 4 Units	53	1.9%	3,693	2.6%	16,604	3.8%
5 to 9 Units	19	0.7%	4,724	3.3%	17,369	4.0%
10 to 19 Units	1	0.5%	2,826	2.0%	21,723	5.0%
20+ Units	0	0%	3,536	2.5%	22,205	5.1%
Total	2,784		141,123		438,438	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 American Communities Survey, DP04

7-2b. Age of Housing Stock

Table 16 - Year Structure Built

Year	Bethany Beach		Sussex County		Delaware	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Built 2014 or later	125	4.5%	13,398	9.5%	23,761	5.4%
Built 2010 to 2013	61	2.2%	8,978	6.4%	17,846	4.1%
Built 2000 to 2009	395	14.2%	38,304	27.1%	81,865	18.7%
Built 1990 to 1999	501	18.0%	23,801	16.9%	66,102	15.1%
Built 1980 to 1989	911	32.7%	19,419	13.8%	55,293	12.6%
Built 1970 to 1979	487	17.5%	14,216	10.1%	50,127	11.4%
Built 1960 to 1969	202	7.3%	6,753	4.8%	44,048	10.0%
Built 1950 to 1959	47	1.7%	6,573	4.7%	43,606	9.9%
Built 1940 to 1949	19	0.7%	3,072	2.2%	19,918	4.5%
Built 1939 or earlier	36	1.3%	6,609	4.7%	35,872	8.2%
Total housing units	2,784		141,123		438,438	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 American Communities Survey, DP04

Despite consistent growth in recent years, the 1980s still represent the building boom for Bethany Beach. The Town has comparatively fewer “old” structures (built before 1959) than either Sussex County

or the State. Development since 2000, as a percentage of total housing stock, has also trailed the County and the State. Sussex County, in particular, has seen sustained growth of newer homes.

7-2c. *Housing Value*

Homes in Bethany Beach continue to command a significant price. According to the 2020 American Communities Survey, the median home value for an owner-occupied unit in Bethany Beach was \$557,000, roughly twice the comparable figures for the State (\$258,300) and Sussex County (\$269,700.)

However, data on values over time isn't as clear cut. According to the same ACS dataset from 2010, homes in the State and Sussex County have increased somewhat from 2010 figures of \$242,300 and \$243,700, respectively, to their present levels. Bethany Beach's 2010 figure was \$596,000, somewhat higher than the 2020 value. Drawing conclusions from small sample-size surveys can be problematic. Anecdotally, home prices in Bethany Beach seem robust. Further data releases from the Census may paint a fuller picture in the coming years.

Re-assessments are also underway in Bethany Beach, and throughout Sussex County, for the first time since the 1970s. The process is expected to continue at least through the Spring of 2023. Though the assessments and subsequent rate adjustments are intended to be revenue neutral overall, this does not mean they will necessarily have a uniform effect in Bethany Beach. As table 16 shows, nearly half of the Town's homes were built between 1970 and 1989.

7-2d. *Ownership and Vacancy*

The Town's vacancy rate (82.4%) is much higher than that of Sussex County (36.6%), and the State of Delaware (16.9%), according to the 2020 American Communities Survey. The primary reason for the Town's high vacancy rate is that the U.S. Census includes seasonal, occasional, and summer rental properties under the vacant classification.

7-3. Housing Pipeline include 2022?

Table 17 - Home Construction

Housing Type	2016	%	2020	%
Single Family, Detached	1,995	74.5	2,066	74.99
Single Family, Attached	457	17.1	463	16.81
Multi-Family	226	8.4	226	8.2
Total	2,678	100	2,755	100
Source: Bethany Beach Building Inspector documents, reviewed January 2023				

Single-family attached and detached homes accounted for all new construction over the course of the past planning period. From 2016 to 2020, the Town added, roughly, eight homes a year. According to

the Town, this picked up some in 2021, when 29 new permits were issued, including one permit for a duplex. Nine permits were issued the same year for demolition. Data for 2022 showed 29 permits for construction and 15 for demolition.

7-4. Housing Needs

As discussed previously, Bethany Beach is not in need of housing, per-se. Though local experience and casual observation do tend to give the picture that the town is more active in the off-season than official data points suggest, the fact remains that, officially, the Town has more homes than it does full-time residents. No new homes would be required for the municipality to gain significant population, consistent with its stated desire to accommodate an increasing percentage of year-round residents and families. Any discussion of housing must recognize that, to Bethany Beach, housing is more of an economic issue than it is the provision of an adequate supply. The town is comfortable with the observed trends in housing development and redevelopment, as they are entirely consistent with its stated position on housing growth and its description of its preferred community character.

Still, affordability and seasonality are important considerations. While renting in Bethany Beach is often far more affordable in the winter months, this does little to offset the considerable costs associated with living year-round in the Town, particularly for working families or the many young people who work in the beach's tourism industry in the height of summer. The Town fully recognizes the importance of the availability of affordable housing to working families, but it believes that the historic and prevailing development and housing trends all but preclude a feasible solution within the Town. Sussex County recently updated its Sussex County Rental Program (SCRIP) ordinance, which promotes the creation of affordably priced workforce housing units within market-rate rental projects, using a variety of incentives such as expedited reviews and density bonuses, and design criteria. Bethany Beach is eager to discuss regional affordable housing opportunities with the County, or other interested municipalities.

7-5. Bethany Beach's Neighborhoods and Homes.

Downtown Bethany Beach – Bounded by Ocean View Parkway on the north, Wellington Parkway on the south, the beach on the east, and S.R. 1 on the west, the central downtown area of Bethany Beach comprises the Town's oldest and most traditionally developed structures and infrastructure. The area is marked by moderately dense residential development and a tight, grid-like street pattern. In addition, the residents in this area live in close proximity to the central commercial district, the beach, and the boardwalk, all of which are contained in this neighborhood. The area contains approximately 450 structures, including commercial buildings, multi-family complexes, and large single-family beach homes.

Northeast Bethany Beach – Bounded by the municipal boundary on the north, Ocean View Parkway on the south, the beach on the east, and S.R. 1 on the west, this area of the Town lies just north of the downtown area. This area contains a pattern of development similar to the downtown area—moderate density, grid-like street pattern—but it contains neither commercial areas nor the same variety of housing types. The area contains approximately 100 structures, nearly all of which are large single-family beach homes.

Southeast Bethany Beach – Bounded by Wellington Parkway on the north, the municipal boundary on the south, the beach on the east, and S.R. 1 on the west, this area of Bethany Beach lies just south of the downtown area. Like the Northeast Bethany Beach area, this area is similar in character to the downtown area but contains no commercial or multi-family-residential land uses. The area is composed of approximately 225 structures, most of which are single-family homes.

East Central Bethany Beach – Lying just west of the downtown Bethany Beach area across S.R. 1 is the East Central Bethany Beach area, bounded on the east by S.R. 1, on the south by Wellington Parkway, on the north by Second Street, and on the west by Gibson and Kent Avenues. While this area is not located adjacent to the beach, it displays many of the same characteristics observed in the areas of Town to the east of S.R. 1. The area contains a number of housing types but maintains the same grid-like street pattern and moderately dense residential land use that typify the central area of Bethany Beach. The area contains approximately 150 structures, nearly all of which are single-family homes.

Bethany West – Comprising a considerable section of the southwest area of Bethany Beach, the Bethany West development is the largest residential subdivision in the Town in both land area and number of structures. The neighborhood hosts a unique suburban design and layout, composed of several semi-circular main roads and multiple cul-de-sac sections. Bethany West is composed of single-family homes on suburban-style lots. The area contains more than 500 total structures and hosts its own community recreation area.

Villas of Bethany West – This development is the largest medium-density residential area in Bethany Beach, comprising 128 individual multi-family residential units (32 buildings) over a large land area. The Villas of Bethany West development is located in the north-central portion of the Town, just south of Salt Pond. Combining a garden-like natural environment, curvilinear streets, and a moderately dense residential pattern, this development is certainly unique in Bethany Beach.

Turtle Walk – Located just west of the Bethany West development is Turtle Walk, a suburban subdivision neighborhood similar in character to Bethany West. The development consists entirely of single-family homes on suburban lots, and there is a noticeable consistency to both the style and design of the homes here. This development contains approximately 119 structures and hosts no commercial or recreational areas.

Lake Bethany – The Lake Bethany development comprises approximately 100 structures located in a conventional suburban development pattern in the northwest corner of Bethany Beach. This subdivision consists solely of relatively large single-family beach homes in a very naturalistic setting. At the center of this development is a lake that offers both a scenic view and boat recreation for the approximately 25 properties that have direct access to it. The design of the homes here is much more in line with the coastal location as compared to Bethany West or Turtle Walk, as many of the homes are constructed with traditional coastal materials and are on pilings.

7-6. 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, flood and homeowners' 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.

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.

Chapter 8. Transportation

This chapter provides an inventory of the transportation system in Bethany Beach and identifies issues that may need to be addressed. It details planned transportation improvements and makes recommendations to foster maximum mobility, via all modes, for residents and visitors using the Town's transportation network.

The Roads and Boundaries Map in the appendix shows Bethany Beach's transportation network. It includes streets, roads, sidewalks, trails, and bicycle routes.

8-1. Transportation Planning Environment

Delaware has increasingly focused on non-motorized transportation modes, namely walking and cycling, in many of its planning and policy initiatives. Motor vehicle projects are, and likely will continue to be, the largest recipient of infrastructure projects. However, the State of Delaware has made significant investments in a series of trails and paths within major population and employment centers. Moreover, updated planning and engineering procedures have been enacted with the goal of ensuring bicycle and pedestrian improvements are incrementally built into the state's transportation network as regularly scheduled maintenance and construction is carried out.

In 2011, the State of Delaware established dedicated funding with the passage of Senate Concurrent Resolution 13, to explore and plan how "to create contiguous systems or networks of walkways and bikeways within and between cities and towns in Delaware in order to provide travelers with the opportunity for safe, convenient, cost-effective and healthy transportation via walking and bicycling." Later that year, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between DNREC and DeIDOT was initiated to implement the resolution. A number of projects have been completed, are underway, or are being planned. Over 75 miles of trails and pathways have reportedly been installed since 2011 alone, according to DNREC and the most recent statewide outdoor comprehensive recreation plan (SCORP).

Operationally, DeIDOT has been making a concerted effort to connect directly and electronically with its customers. In addition to traditional tools like variable message signs, traffic hotlines, and traffic radio, the State of Delaware has deployed an interactive website and, more recently, the DeIDOT App, a smartphone traffic application. The department has also developed a considerable social media presence, which it leverages to provide real-time updates.

The Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC), commonly known as DART, has a bus tracker tool on its app. The tool, allows transit users to see when their bus will arrive and also to track their bus in real time. DeIDOT also shares this data with Google, benefitting both services. DART's app also facilitates fare payment via smartphone.

In May 2016, Senate Bill 130 was signed into law, creating the framework for Complete Community Enterprise Districts. These districts would encourage master planning, development supportive of transit, and an interior transportation network conducive to the first- and last-mile pedestrian and cycling trips that are so often the weakest link in fixed-route transit. Creation of said districts would

require one or several jurisdictions to enter into an MOU with DelDOT. No initiatives were yet underway at the time of this plan's completion.

Another planning step of note is the availability of Transportation Improvement Districts (TID) as an alternative to numerous traffic impact studies (TIS) that are traditionally required in the approval process of developments of significant scale. The regulations and procedures required for a TID are laid out in DelDOT's 2016 Development Coordination Manual.¹

According to the manual, TIDs are "a geographic area defined for the purpose of securing desired improvements to transportation facilities in the area." Instead of required improvements being identified piecemeal, as development comes online, a municipal master plan may identify, in partnership with DelDOT, all of the improvements that an area will need to achieve build-out. These may then be addressed systematically.

Finally, DelDOT has created a team of circuit-rider planners (one for each county). These planners engage directly with municipalities and act as a point of contact for all DelDOT-related inquiries a town might have. Crucially, one of their primary responsibilities is to engage with municipalities early in any relevant planning projects, whether they be major subdivisions, comprehensive plan updates, master plans, or roadway or sidewalk studies. Given that the State maintains the vast majority of lane miles in Delaware, and within most municipalities, early input from DelDOT should prove invaluable in allowing town's to develop an implementable transportation and development plan. This planning document is an example of the above approach.

8-2. Bethany Beach Overview

The future of the Town of Bethany Beach will be impacted by the quality of its transportation facilities and the successful integration of land use and transportation decisions. The recent and ongoing surge in growth and development in Sussex County, particularly in and around its coastal areas, will continue to challenge the Town's transportation infrastructure. An extremely popular destination in its own right, the Town of Bethany Beach sits squarely along the route to larger resort towns to the north and south, most notably, Rehoboth Beach to the north and Ocean City, Maryland, to the south. S.R. 1, the State's major regional transportation corridor, bisects the Town north-to-south, while S.R. 26) is the major east-to-west arterial route. The seasonal nature of Delaware's coastal area and its recreational population creates unique challenges to transportation planning and management. During most of the year, use of the existing infrastructure is limited to the small, but growing, year-round population.

During the summer months, this infrastructure is highly utilized and stressed due to local and regional recreational traffic. Considering the growing permanent population and the sheer size of the growing recreational summer population it is not only sensible, but also crucial, to plan for the needs of the summer population.

This approach will allow for the provision of necessary capacity and facilities during peak months and provide for the increasing number of year-round residents into the foreseeable future. The capacity to

¹ Report available online at: https://deldot.gov/Business/subdivisions/pdfs/changes/Development_Coordination_Manual-Chapter_2.pdf?041116

preserve and/or enhance these routes to insure adequate and convenient mobility for the Town's year-round populace and seasonal residents is critical to maintaining the Town's charm and the quality of life of its inhabitants. This concept is applied in the sections below, which include research and discussion regarding the Town's major roadways, municipal streets, public transportation services, pedestrians and bicycle infrastructure and other related issues.

A number of unique issues exist regarding both S.R. 1 and S.R. 26, including access, regional traffic, local traffic and vehicle speed. In addition, a significant level of need exists regarding pedestrian access in Town, pedestrian and bicycle safety and local vehicle speed. The following sections discuss each of these issues in detail, providing specific data where needed to allow a comprehensive analysis of all transportation-related issues.

8-3. Roads and Traffic

The transportation system in Bethany Beach consists of roadways, sidewalks, and rideable shoulders. This section of the transportation chapter provides a brief overview of the major modes of transportation in Town.

8-3a. Roadways

The Town of Bethany Beach sits squarely along the route to larger resort towns to the north and south, most notably, Rehoboth Beach to the north and Ocean City, Maryland, to the south. S.R. 1, the State's major regional transportation corridor, bisects the Town north-to-south, while S.R. 26 is the major east-to-west arterial route. Kent Avenue and North Pennsylvania Avenue (town-owned roadway) provide local connectivity to points North and South.

The multi-year S.R. 26 Atlantic Avenue Clarksville to the Assawoman Canal construction project was completed in 2016. The existing roadway was widened to provide one eleven-foot travel lane in each direction with the addition of five-foot wide bike lanes on the shoulders of the roadway in each direction. A twelve-foot shared center left turn lane was also added along the entire length of the project. Separate right turn lanes and left turn lanes were included at each intersection. Sidewalks and drainage systems were also constructed for most of the roadway segments through Ocean View and Millville.

Kent Avenue (S.R. Alt 54) is a two-lane highway that extends to and from Route 26 to the Town limits. It is approximately ½ mile in length and is a well-traveled vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian thoroughfare. DelDOT has reduced the speed limit from 35 to 25 miles per hour as requested by the Town.

Municipal Streets

As of late 2022, Bethany Beach was responsible for nearly 20 (19.93) miles of roadway maintenance. The list of street names is too extensive to list or illustrate in the body of the plan, but it is included in the appendix. On the other hand, the State is responsible for 4.08 miles of roadway. Citizens interested in a high-def view of state versus municipally maintained streets may visit <https://deldot.gov/Programs/gate/index.shtml> and choose "Road Maintenance Responsibility."

Two issues are readily noted regarding municipal streets. First, drainage and flooding along streets north of Route 26 and Garfield Parkway have been indicated as an area of major concern for many residents. One third of the Town is subject to flooding approximately 10% of the year. This is basically every street north of Garfield Parkway and route 26.] The periodic flooding of these streets prevents local mobility and creates safety hazards for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists. The issue of drainage and flooding is addressed in more detail in the environmental sustainability chapter. Second, the issue of speed enforcement along some local streets has been cited as an issue. Residents cited Collins Street, Pennsylvania, and Atlantic Avenues as the most critical areas in need of better speed enforcement.

Vehicle speeds have a significant impact on the number and severity of vehicle-pedestrian accidents that occur, and reduced vehicle speeds have been connected to increases in community health and welfare, especially for the elderly and children. The Town will continue to work with legislators to pass legislation enabling municipalities to set reasonable, safe, and enforceable speed limits on their streets. Speed enforcement is not the issue. The inability of the town to set a reasonable and safe enforceable speed is the issue.

Table 18 - Traffic Counts

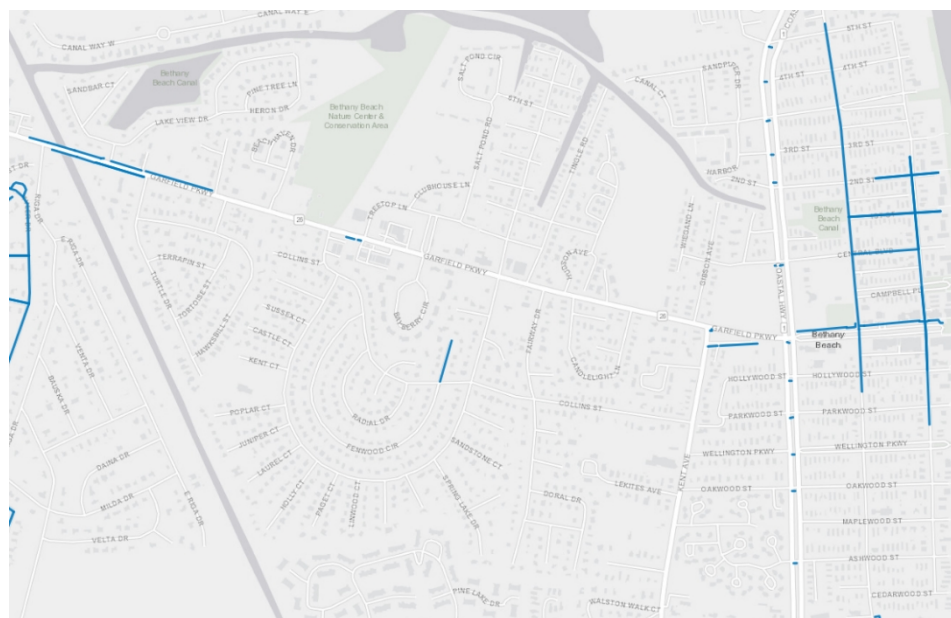
S.R. 1 Coastal Highway			S.R. 26 Garfield Parkway		
Year	Count	% +/-	Year	Count	% +/-
2021	33,420	22.31%	2021	12,937	22.31%
2020	27,324	-20.50%	2020	10,577	-20.50%
2019	34,370	3.43%	2019	13,305	3.43%
2018	33,231	-1.22%	2018	12,864	-3.78%
2017	33,642	2.35%	2017	13,370	16.53%
2016	32,871	1.58%	2016	11,473	1.58%
2015	32,360	4.20%	2015	11,295	4.03%
2014	31,056	1.10%	2014	10,857	-6.90%
2013	30,718	1.60%	2013	11,662	-0.77%
2012	30,234		2012	11,752	

Source: DeIDOT, 2022

Traffic on S.R. 1 and Garfield Parkway have increased modestly over the past ten years with dips and rebounds associated with Covid restrictions clearly seen in the data. In both cases, slow and relatively steady increases are seen with traffic volumes on each road segment almost precisely ten percent higher than a decade ago.

8-3b. Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Figure 2 - Bethany Beach Sidewalk Network



Source: FirstMap 2022 – Sidewalks shown in blue

As Figure 2 shows, sidewalk coverage is not uniform in Town. This leads to the concern of pedestrians and cyclists interacting, competing, and potentially conflicting with vehicular traffic and each other. In 2017, the Town completed a traffic calming study that concluded as much. It is recommended the Town provide additional bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure within the study area where none exists in a prioritized fashion. Specific recommendations ranged from enhancing crosswalks and adding speed bumps to the more extensive; widening the paved areas and edge striping for pedestrians, or the outright construction of sidewalks/pathways.

The study itself is somewhat dated, with some recommendations having already been carried out. As recently as July 2022, the Town's Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Committee recommended a new, comprehensive traffic study for the Town. It is recommended the study incorporate more than technical reviews of the infrastructure within Bethany Beach. Homeowners, business owners, and relevant trade or civic associations should be fully engaged in order to arrive at a broad consensus on the desirability of sidewalks/pathways, bike lanes, and similar infrastructure throughout the Town.

Separate facilities for cyclists and pedestrians are important, but are not always unanimously popular, particularly with property owners potentially impacted by easements, construction, or disturbances to landscaping. Others may prefer not to be responsible for routine maintenance. A deliberative public process, as well as grant monies and municipal acceptance of maintenance responsibility, may go a long way towards creating a unified vision for the municipality. Once accomplished, this vision is more easily phased into a capital improvements plan.

8-3c. Level of Traffic Stress

From a technical point of view, the Town's streets appear quite favorable for cycling. Recently, DeIDOT has implemented a "Level of Traffic Stress" system that ranks roadways as to their bikeability. Very generally speaking, the streets are classified one through four based on a variety of factors such as traffic volume, speed, width of shoulder, intersections, etc. Level one is generally suitable for novice cyclists (children, renters), level two for the casual cyclist riding for recreation or the odd errand. Levels three and four are reserved for the dedicated, even fearless, variety who routinely commute or competitively ride. According to DeIDOT's analysis, virtually all of Bethany Beach's local and collector streets are level one. However, the Town doesn't believe this methodology is always accurate in illustrating bikeability in and around Bethany Beach. In particular, residents believe that S.R. 26 doesn't "feel" particularly safe, citing narrow cycling lanes and a significant percentage of cyclists choosing to utilize the sidewalks. The Town understands that the Level of Traffic Stress methodology is a broad brush. The Town has currently contracted with the Traffic Group to conduct an overarching Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Study to attempt to address these issues in coordination with DeIDOT.

8-3d. Public Transportation

Year-round public transportation is unavailable in Bethany Beach. While several taxi companies and other Internet connected car services operate from neighboring resort towns to provide some transportation service, residents are largely limited to private automobiles, bicycles or walking.

During the summer season, the Town operates a shuttle service that provides local transportation to residents and visitors. The Town's shuttle service route and schedule can be viewed at <http://www.townofbethanybeach.com/268/Trolley>.

A public survey indicated that the vast majority of residents were very satisfied with the Town’s shuttle service. The Town may wish to consider expansion of the existing successful service to accommodate growing demand in the coming years. DeIDOT provides DART bus service to and through Bethany Beach during the summer/early fall months.

While the DART and Bethany Beach services provide an alternative to driving and walking, they also facilitate a significant influx of beachgoers to the Town’s already crowded beachfront.

DART stops in or near Town are spread out along S.R. 1. and Pennsylvania Avenue. To the North, near the Salt Pond, there is a pair of stops at Fred Hudson Road. Another pair are situated at the intersection of Garfield Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue. Several blocks to the South, there is another pair on either side of Pennsylvania Avenue at Maplewood Street. There are also stops on Pennsylvania Avenue at Sea Colony.

According to DeIDOT, all the stops are simple concrete pads without shelters or benches. All are served by DART Route 208. This route, the “Blue Line,” runs between the Rehoboth Park and Ride and Ocean City, Maryland. Service begins shortly before 8a.m. and ceases in the early morning hours, as of Summer 2022.

Ridership on the Bethany Beach Trolley had been robust and generally increasing over the past ten years, but did see a significant decline during the Covid restrictions, see Table 20.

Table 19 - Bethany Beach Trolley Stops

1	Atlantic Avenue & Garfield Parkway
2	Atlantic Avenue & First Street
3	Atlantic Avenue & Ocean View Parkway
4	Armory Training Center
5	Canal Development & Ocean View Parkway
6	Town Park & Central Boulevard
7	Second Street & Tingle Avenue
8	Villas at Bethany West @ Pool
9	Nature Center & Tree Top Lane
10	Turtle Walk, Turtle Drive
11	Turtle Walk, Leatherback Lane
12	Bethany West, Half Moon Drive @ Tennis Court.
13	Bethany West, Half Moon Drive & Tudor Court
14	Collins Street.
15	Bethany Proper & Pool
16	Atlantic Avenue & Ashwood Street
17	Atlantic Avenue & Wellington Parkway

Source: Town of Bethany Beach

Table 20 - Bethany Beach Trolley Ridership

Fiscal Year Ending	Memorial Day	Labor Day	Total Riders	Change from prior year
2022	5/30/2022	9/5/2022	34,084	10%
2021	5/31/2021	9/6/2021	31,030	-30% note Covid
2020	5/25/2020	9/7/2020	NA	NA
2019	5/27/2019	9/2/2019	44,597	9%
2018	5/28/2018	9/3/2018	40,757	0.50%
2017	5/29/2017	9/4/2017	40,501	-1%
2016	5/30/2016	9/5/2016	40,889	1%
2015	5/25/2015	9/7/2015	40,295	1%
2014	5/26/2014	9/1/2014	39,821	5%
2013	5/27/2013	9/2/2013	37,813	13%
2012	5/28/2012	9/3/2012	32,993	

Source: Town of Bethany Beach, 2022.

Trolley routes and schedules continue to be monitored for safety and convenience, with appropriate modifications made accordingly. During the 2017 summer season the Town began using a GPS based Internet application that can be used by residents and summer visitors for locating Town trolleys. In addition to the routine trolley service, the Town also makes arrangements and transportation on special occasions, such as Sussex Counties Returns Day, Christmas Caroling, Dignitary, Field Trips, Parades and other Special Events as requested by Town Council and the Town Manager.

8-4. Planned Transportation Improvements and Studies

8-4a. Studies

In mid 2022, The Town contracted with The Traffic Group to perform a comprehensive Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety study. The last study was performed in 2005 and was done and funded by DeIDOT. The number of pedestrians and bicyclists has increased significantly since then. The issue of pedestrian and bicycle safety is of major concern to residents and visitors of Bethany Beach. The study will focus on and investigate how pedestrians and cyclists interact with traffic, with the goal of providing a more detailed list of recommendations which are more relevant to current conditions.

8-4b. Planned Improvements

A DeIDOT review of planned capital improvements for Bethany Beach showed no significant new projects planned or anticipated for the next five years. Suggestions on possible improvements will likely come from the 2022 Traffic Group Study, above. At that time, the town will endeavor to build community consensus and explore feasibility and funding options, in partnership with DeIDOT.

8-5. 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. Continue to work with other municipalities through the Delaware League of Local Governments to effect a legislative change which would enable local jurisdictions to set a speed limit of 20 mph on its own streets without an engineering and traffic investigation so long as the jurisdiction has developed procedures for doing so based on a revised Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices. (MUTCD)

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.