



CITY OF BETHEL

PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2024, 5:30 PM

LOCATION: 300 CHIEF EDDIE HOFFMAN HIGHWAY, BETHEL, ALASKA

JOIN MEETING AT ZOOM.US:

[HTTPS://US06WEB.ZOOM.US/J/3350154000?PWD=HYFLQJB5BBF9IUAXHBN9SOZQAFWPLS.1&OMN=81314125060](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/3350154000?pwd=HYFLQJB5BBF9IUAXHBN9SOZQAFWPLS.1&OMN=81314125060)

MEETING ID: 335 015 4000

PASSCODE: 140569

US TOLL-FREE PHONE NUMBERS: 888 475 4499; 833 548 0276; 833 548 0282; 877 853 5257

MEMBERS

Ryan Butte, Juan Delgado, John Llyod, Council Rep. Mark Springer

STAFF

Ex-Officio Members: Bill Arnold, Public Works Director

Colin Atti, Public Works Admin Assistant

pwadmin@cityofbethel.net

907-543-3110

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

III. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD – FIVE MINUTES PER PERSON

- A. Please submit written public comments to pwadmin@cityofbethel.net by 4:00 p.m. the day of the meeting.

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

V. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

- A. November 20, 2024 Meeting Minutes

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Review of Committee Duties and Responsibilities and Determination of Committee Topics of Interest for 2024
- B. Commission Consideration Of Draft Ordinance to Reduce The Frequency Of Meetings For Committees and Commissions (Administration) ADOPTED BY CITY COUNCIL
- C. Commission Consideration of Draft Ordinance Modifying Membership Requirements From Seven To Five Temporarily When Less Than Five Members Are Appointed (Administration) NOT ADOPTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL
- D. Captial Project Update
- E. Mass Notification for Utility Customers (Butte)

VII. NEW BUSINESS

- A. 2023 Comprehensive Plan Draft

VIII. EX OFFICIO REPORT

Posted December 12, 2024 at City Hall, AC Co., Swanson's, and the Post Office.

Ex-Officio Staff

IX. MEMBER COMMENTS

X. ADJOURNMENT

Posted December 12, 2024 at City Hall, AC Co., Swanson's, and the Post Office.

Ex-Officio Staff

City of Bethel, Alaska

Public Works Committee Minutes

November 20, 2024	Regular Meeting	Bethel, Alaska
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I. CALL TO ORDER:

A regular Public Works Committee Meeting was held on November 20, 2024. The meeting was called to order at 5:34 pm.

The following members were present during roll call: Juan Delgado, John Lloyd
The following members were excused:

Also Present: William Arnold

Due to a lack of a quorum, the meeting adjourned at 5:35 PM.

Mark Springer
Committee Chair

Colin Atti
Recorder of Minutes

APPROVED THIS _____ DAY OF _____, 2024.

Article VIII. Public Works Committee

2.60.200 Establishment of public works committee.

There is established a public works committee for the purpose of advising the city council on city roads, facilities, utility operations, vehicle and equipment operations, and other public works-related matters. [Ord. 21-20 § 4, 2021.]

2.60.210 Public works committee duties.

A. The public works committee may review and make recommendations to the council on:

1. The operations of the city's water and wastewater collection, distribution, treatment and compliance; and solid waste planning, collection, disposal and compliance.
2. The development, operations, and maintenance of city properties, roads, traffic, drainage, snow removal, parks, cemeteries, grounds, and trails.
3. The operations of the transit system.
4. The operations and maintenance of the city's vehicle fleet and heavy equipment.
5. The budget as it relates to public works operations and capital projects.
6. City capital planning and implementation of projects related to public works.
7. Energy and environmental improvements for city operations.
8. The progress toward achieving the goals set out in the city's comprehensive plan as they relate to public works.

B. The public works committee may perform other such duties as the city council may from time to time refer. [Ord. 21-20 § 4, 2021.]

CITY OF BETHEL, ALASKA

ORDINANCE #24-07

AN ORDINANCE BY THE BETHEL CITY COUNCIL AMENDING BETHEL MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTER 2.60, COMMITTEES, COMMISSIONS AND AD HOC COMMITTEES TO REDUCE THE MEETING SCHEDULE REQUIREMENT TO EVERY OTHER MONTH

WHEREAS, Bethel Municipal Code 2.60 creates seven committees and commissions that act as advisory bodies to the Council: the Planning Commission, the Port Commission, the Public Safety and Transportation Commission, the Community Action Grant Committee, the Finance Committee, the Community Parks and Recreation Committee, and the Public Works Committee;

WHEREAS, Bethel Municipal Code 2.60.060 Notice of Public Meetings, requires regular meetings of the committees and commissions to be scheduled once a month unless otherwise authorized by council;

WHEREAS, reducing the meeting schedule requirement to every other month will provide administration more time to work directly with the ex officio members to develop meaningful agendas and packets, this will result in public meetings with more developed action items for our committee/commission volunteers to discuss;

WHEREAS, a reduction in the meeting frequency will also relieve operational takes during a time of significant staff shortages ensuring the operational tasks of the municipality are carried out while still supporting strong government through public engagement;

WHEREAS, the City hoped that through the reduction in regular scheduled meetings, and a focus on more developed agendas and packet materials, the City will attract more volunteer participation in our public meeting process;

WHEREAS, although each committee and commission will be required to have regular meetings every other month, at any point, a special meeting may be called in accordance with BMC;

Introduced by: Acting City Manager Strickler
Introduction Date: August 13, 2024
Public Hearing Date: August 27, 2024
Action: Passed
Vote: 4-0

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ENACTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BETHEL, ALASKA,

Section 1. Classification. This ordinance is permanent in nature and shall be placed in the Bethel Municipal Code.

Section 2. Amendment. Bethel Municipal Code 2.60 is amended, old language is stricken, and new language is underlined.

2.60.060. Notice of public meetings.

A. Regular meetings shall be scheduled ~~once a month~~, at a minimum, every other month unless otherwise authorized by council. A regular meeting may be postponed or rescheduled to another date upon a vote of the majority of the members at a previous regular or special meeting.

B. Special meetings are called to transact business held outside the regular meeting schedule. Special meetings may be called at any date and time by the chair, or by three (3) voting members.

C. Meetings shall be held at City Hall, 300 Chief Eddie Hoffman Highway, whenever reasonably possible, and shall comply with BMC 2.04.070, in providing teleconference and written participation to all public meetings. Agendas constitute the meeting notice and shall contain, at a minimum, the date, place and time of the meeting, the name of the body, the names of the members of the body, people to be heard, and any item to be discussed by the body.

D. Public notice of meetings shall be prepared and posted in at least four (4) conspicuous public places within the city, including at the location of the meeting. Notice of a regular meeting shall be posted no later than five (5) days before the meeting. Notice of a special meeting shall be posted no later than three (3) days before the meeting, except the planning commission special meeting agenda shall be posted no later than five (5) days before the meeting.

E. The meetings of all bodies shall be open to the public in accordance with the Alaska Open Meetings Act, and shall permit teleconference and written participation in accordance with BMC 2.04.080.

F. Each committee, commission, and ad hoc committee shall follow Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised; however, the rules of debate may be relaxed by the body to promote discussion.

Introduced by: Acting City Manager Strickler
Introduction Date: August 13, 2024
Public Hearing Date: August 27, 2024
Action: Passed
Vote: 4-0

G. Committee, commission, and ad hoc committee reports and recommendations shall be decided by a quorum of the body at a public meeting.

H. Any committee, commission and ad hoc committee may appoint seated members of its body to a subcommittee. The number of members appointed to a subcommittee shall be three (3) or fewer, to avoid creating a quorum of the body. The subcommittee can make such investigation or exercise such authority as may be delegated to it by the advisory board. A subcommittee reports to the body from which it was appointed, and not to the council. No action of the subcommittee is official until approved by a majority vote of the advisory body.

SECTION 3. Effective Date. This ordinance shall become effective upon passage by the Bethel City Council.

ENACTED THIS 27th DAY OF AUGUST 2024, BY A VOTE OF 4 IN FAVOR AND 0 OPPOSED.

ATTEST:


Kevin Morgan, Acting City Clerk


Mark Springer, Mayor

Introduced by: Council Member Snow
Introduction Date: July 9, 2024
Public Hearing Date: August 13, 2024
August 27, 2024
Action: Does not Carry
Vote: 0-4

CITY OF BETHEL, ALASKA

ORDINANCE #24-06

AN ORDINANCE BY THE BETHEL CITY COUNCIL AMENDING BETHEL MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTER 2.60, COMMITTEES, COMMISSIONS AND AD HOC COMMITTEES TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF ADULT VOTING MEMBERS AND QUORUM STANDARDS FOR COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

WHEREAS, Bethel Municipal Code 2.60 creates seven committees and commissions that act as advisory bodies to the Council: the Planning Commission, the Port Commission, the Public Safety and Transportation Commission, the Community Action Grant Committee, the Finance Committee, the Community Parks and Recreation Committee, and the Public Works Committee;

WHEREAS, BMC 2.60.010 defines a “quorum” as the minimum number of members of a committee, commission, or ad hoc committee that must be present at any meeting to conduct business;

WHEREAS, BMC 2.60.040 provides that “all committees and commissions shall consist of seven (7) appointed adult voting members;

WHEREAS, BMC 2.60.050 provides that “four (4) members shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business for committees and commissions”; and

WHEREAS, numerous committees and commissions are having consistent trouble meeting quorum, which prevents these bodies from conducting business;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ENACTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BETHEL, ALASKA,

Section 1. Classification. This ordinance is permanent in nature and shall be placed in the Bethel Municipal Code.

Introduced by: Council Member Snow
Introduction Date: July 9, 2024
Public Hearing Date: August 13, 2024
August 27, 2024
Action: Does not Carry
Vote: 0-4

Section 2. Amendment. Bethel Municipal Code 2.60 is amended, old language is stricken, and new language is underlined.

2.60.040 Composition of committees, commissions, and ad hoc committees.

A. All committees and commissions shall consist of seven (7) council-appointed adult voting members. One (1) member shall be a member of the city council and act as the council representative to provide a direct line of communication between the advisory board and the city council. Each council member shall be appointed to only one (1) committee, commission, and/or ad hoc committee.

B. In addition to the seven (7) adult voting members, the council may appoint up to two (2) alternative members and one (1) youth member to any advisory committee or commission.

C. An ad hoc committee may have fewer but not more members than the number provided under subsections [A](#) and [B](#) of this section, and in no event less than five (5) members.

D. Each committee or commission shall annually elect a chair and a vice chair from its membership. An ad hoc committee shall elect a chair and vice chair at the first (1st) meeting of the body. The vice chair shall act in the absence of the chair or in the event the chair is unable to act.

E. The city manager is responsible for the effective management of committee, commission, and ad hoc committee operations and shall provide the staff required to assist the body in discharging its duties. The city manager shall appoint at least one (1) ex officio member to provide staff support to each committee, commission, and ad hoc committee. Ex officio members report to and take direction from the city manager and not from the body to which they are appointed.

The duties of the ex officio member include but are not limited to: preparation and posting of agendas, packet materials, meeting minutes, and other relevant documents

Introduced by: Council Member Snow
Introduction Date: July 9, 2024
Public Hearing Date: August 13, 2024
August 27, 2024
Action: Does not Carry
Vote: 0-4

in accordance with Alaska Statutes ([44.62.310](#) through [44.62.319](#)), Bethel Municipal Code, and city policy. The ex officio member appointed to the body shall also provide subject matter expertise to the body.

An ex officio member is a nonvoting member of the body, but may add items to the agenda and participate in discussion.

F. If a committee or commission has five or less council appointed adult voting members, the city council may by resolution authorize a temporary exemption to Section 2.06.040 A, reducing council appointed membership requirement to five (5). The exemption shall expire when the exempted committee exceeds five council appointed adult voting members or on the date provided by the resolution. Under the five-member exemption, three (3) members shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business and three (3) affirmative votes shall be necessary to carry any question.

SECTION 3. Effective Date. This ordinance shall become effective upon passage by the Bethel City Council.



July 12, 2024

Bill Arnold
City of Bethel
P.O. Box 1388
Bethel, Alaska 99559

**Subject: DOWL Term Contract
Planning and Engineering Services
Project Billing Summary Report**

Dear Mr. Arnold:

DOWL appreciates the opportunity to assist the City of Bethel with all your planning and engineering needs. In accordance with the term contract requirements, we are providing a monthly summary of active Task Orders and their Budget Status. See the attached table.

Sincerely,
DOWL

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chase A. Nelson".

Chase A. Nelson, P.E.
Term Contract Project Manager

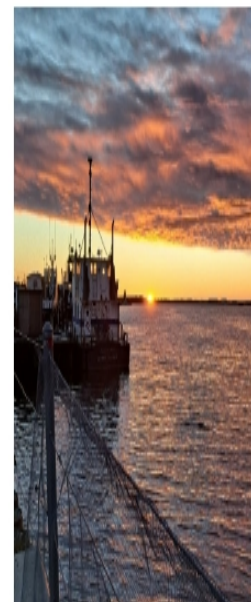
Attachment(s): Budget Status Table

Project Description	Task Order	GL Code	Total Budget	Billed	Remaining
Lead and Copper Issues at City Sub	TO #17	510-84-6335	\$49,000.00	\$31,966.06	\$16,271.44
Yukon Kuskokwim Health and Fitness Center Repairs	TO #28	400-50-9692	\$124,266.00	\$120,388.38	\$3,877.62
Utility Rate Study	TO #39	100-51-6325	\$94,431.00	\$89,860.36	\$4,570.64
Chemical Storage Building	TO #45	660-70-6892	\$415,034.00	\$354,247.73	\$75,549.52
Transit Center Boiler Replacement	TO #46	560-50-6890	\$85,320.00	\$59,587.60	\$25,732.40
Dog Pound Facility Concept Design	TO #49	100-61-6890	\$209,349.00	\$209,349.00	\$0.00
General Planning Services	TO #52	100-54-6320	\$165,180.00	\$164,558.75	\$621.25
QFC#2 Lift Station	TO #55	660-50-6320	\$107,855.00	\$96,843.00	\$14,492.00
WTP Automation Study	TO #56	510-84-6890	\$67,630.00	\$42,792.80	\$24,837.20
Police Tower Estimate	TO #59	100-61-6890	\$69,347.00	\$39,329.50	\$30,017.50
Well Testing	TO #61	510-83-6335	\$24,197.00	\$23,994.51	\$202.49
Bethel Hts/Martina Oscar W&S Ph. 1	TO #63	631-50-6324	\$656,803.00	\$245,597.50	\$411,205.50
Lagoon Assessment	TO #66	510-87-6320	\$56,101.00	\$33,298.79	\$22,802.21
YK Fitness Gym Expansion	TO #67	780-50-6324	\$150,182.00	\$21,220.61	\$139,156.91

Posted on: May 8, 2023

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Bethel 2045 Comprehensive Plan

JULY 2023

Prepared for:



City of Bethel
300 State Highway
Bethel, AK 99559

Prepared by:



5015 Business Park Boulevard, Suite 4000
Anchorage, AK 99503

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Appendix 10: Planning Department Action Items

Appendix 11: Police Department Action Items

Appendix 12: Port of Bethel Action Items

Appendix 13: Public Works Department Action Items

Appendix 14: Transit Manager Action Items

Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgment:

The City of Bethel is located on the traditional lands of the Yup'ik People. We respectfully acknowledge the Yup'ik People's deep connection and stewardship with this land and honor their enduring presence and contributions to this community.

Thank you to all Bethel community members who contributed to the planning process through Community Meetings, written comments, and the online Public Comment Map. The following groups and individuals also participated in the planning process through stakeholder meetings and other formal engagements:

City of Bethel	Stakeholder Working Group	Other Groups
Peter Williams, City Manager	Ryan Butte	City Council
John Sargent, Grant Manager	Gisela Chapa	Planning Commission
Lori Strickler, City Clerk	Calvin Cockroft	Community Parks and Recreation Committee
Ted Meyer, Planning Director (<i>retired</i>)	Clarence Daniel	Port Commission
Pauline Boratko, Planning Assistant	Michelle DeWitt	Public Safety and Transportation Commission
Bill Arnold, Public Works Director	Kimberly Hankins	Public Works Committee
Xavier Mason, Finance Director	Ana Hoffman	
Leonard Hicks, Police Chief	Joseph Laroux	
Daron Solesbee, Fire Chief	Deanna Latham	
Ed Flores, Port Director	Brian Lefferts	
Evon Fox, Transit Manager	Philana Miles	
Stacey Reardon, Fitness Center Director	Stacey Reardon	



CITY OF BETHEL

P.O. Box 1388 • Bethel, Alaska 99559

907-543-1373

Fax: 907-543-1394

June 7, 2023
Bethel Residents
Bethel, AK 99559

Dear Community Member:

The City of Bethel is proud to present the Bethel 2045 Comprehensive Plan. The Plan is meant to guide development decisions over the next twenty years. It should be a useful tool for the City Planner, developers, and organizations as we work to secure funds for projects that improve the quality of life for residents, visitors, and provide an incentive for future employees and entrepreneurs to relocate to Bethel.

One consistent characteristic of Bethel is its ever-changing workforce. People move in and out of town on a regular basis. Recruitment and retention are major concerns for all employers in town, from the largest employers like the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation and the Lower Kuskokwim School District to the smallest employers like auto repair businesses, restaurants, and hotels. The Comprehensive Plan will help us improve the roads, utilities, parks, and other critical infrastructure so that the social, economic, and educational life of Bethel inhabitants is not just acceptable, but preferable.

The City must move away from hauled water and sewer services as fast as possible and toward piped infrastructure. The City is under tremendous pressure to recruit and retain those with commercial driver's licenses with tanker endorsements to drive water and sewer haul trucks. There are 18 positions in the budget for drivers, but typically only 9 positions are occupied. The long-term solution to this problem is to purchase, install, and operate a piped water and sewer system and this is reflected in the Plan. In the short-term, the revenue generated from the 3% increase in water and sewer rates every July 1st will not be enough to sustain the water and sewer enterprise fund and keep it in

the black. The pending rate study by DOWL will show that the water system pays for itself, while the cost of the sewer system is increasing faster than the sewer system revenue contribution. Bethel City Council will have to take a hard look at the study once it is published and see if they have the political will to increase rates.

City administrators and council members will have to answer some hard questions like these: (1) Should we raise the sales tax rate? (2) Should we reallocate the .05% sales tax portion currently going to the YK Fitness Center back to the General Fund? (3) Should the City stop giving away a portion of the alcohol tax revenues in the form of Community Action Grants and dedicate that money to the General Fund?

Hardening the City-owned gravel roads with new palliatives like EK35 in Bethel is vital for dust control. Minimizing dust reduces the harmful respiratory effects on people (especially pedestrians and bicyclists), improves visibility, and keeps the roads intact.

The City faces the challenge of working with federal and state rules and regulations that often function as barriers to small communities like Bethel. The City continually seeks grant funds with minimal match requirements or loans with large forgiveness provisions. The City hopes it gets traction with its recently expressed criticisms of USDA-RD program conditions and EPA-funded State Village Safe Water provisions to federal congressional delegates and State commissioners.

The community of Bethel needs more low-income housing. The recent Covid-19 pandemic years and high inflation aftermath have hurt low-income families. The City must work to assist developers in planning, design, and constructing safe, affordable homes and apartments.

The City Dock, Petro Port, Seawall, Small Boat Harbor, and Float Plane Landing Area represent the collective waterfront responsibilities of the Port of Bethel. Seeking funding to repair and replace these facilities is essential. Waterfront operations impact neighboring river communities and regional villages through transshipments and access to Bethel by boat.

As inflation skyrockets, Bethel must search for alternative revenue sources and exploit current revenue streams to its advantage. It must purchase gravel and road implements to maintain 18 miles of gravel roads that increase in number every time a new subdivision comes online. It must operate and maintain its 31 buildings and 30 pieces of heavy equipment. The General Fund consists of sale taxes and fees. It's these funds that are used to maintain buildings and roads belonging to the City. The City might need to raise the sales tax in the future to maintain these services.

The 2045 Comprehensive Plan is full of goals, strategies, and action plans to accomplish the goals. It is truly comprehensive in nature. It covers housing and land use, local and regional transportation, public facilities and services, people, and the economy. The Plan provides historical context as it weaves in the diverse human elements that form the Bethel community and lays out logical paths for future development.



Bethel is the largest rural community in Alaska. It is the heart of the YK Delta region, home to 26,000 Yup'ik people in 56 village communities. Bethel will continue to grow as a hub community and serve as a prominent place for regional organizations, state and federal agencies, and new businesses to thrive.

Thank you to all the stakeholders who contributed to the development of the Comprehensive Plan. Your voices were heard and incorporated into the plan. DOWL did an excellent job soliciting input from the community, asking questions that only we could answer for ourselves, putting our ideas on paper, and editing those ideas to shape the final version of the plan. This plan is truly a collaborative effort that we can all use to for our mutual betterment.

As I retire from City of Bethel employment, I hope those that come after me delve into the Bethel 2045 Comprehensive Plan and the City's Long Range Transportation Plan and use them in their work to make practical decisions that make Bethel a fantastic place to live, work, and play.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Peter A. Williams". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Peter A. Williams

City Manager



The background is a solid blue color. On the right side, there are several overlapping white circles of different sizes. A white line, resembling a stylized 'e' or a continuous curve, starts from the right edge and loops back towards the center, passing through the circles.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1: Introduction

1.1 Plan Purpose

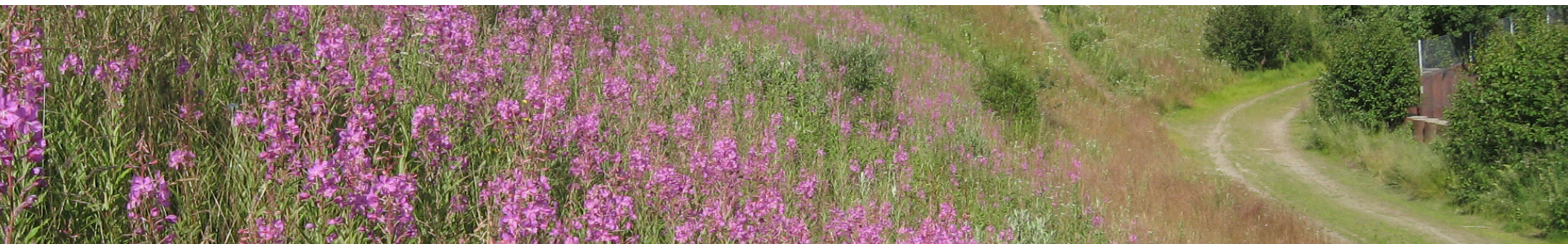
A comprehensive plan guides the long-term physical, social, and economic development of a community. Because it can be difficult to keep long-term community goals in sight while working on day-to-day functions, cities use the comprehensive plan as a reference tool that guides community decisions and actions. That is the critical function of the Comprehensive Plan: it serves as a tool to spotlight community goals and identify the strategies and specific actions that are needed to work towards those goals.

The authority for land use regulations in Alaska is detailed in the Alaska Statutes Title 29, Municipal Government. Per Alaska state law, incorporated cities such as Bethel are required to prepare comprehensive plans that are reviewed and updated as necessary – usually every ten years. A comprehensive plan should be adopted by ordinance, and it may be reviewed and revised as needed. Bethel's Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2011 and set goals for the City looking towards 2035. Using the 2035 plan as a

starting point, the plan has been updated to consider and identify the community's vision for Bethel in 2045.

The typical comprehensive plan is based on a 20-year horizon and is intended to be flexible enough to adjust to unanticipated changes in social or economic conditions, while providing sufficient guidance to move the community in the desired direction.

A comprehensive plan is a policy document that guides the long-term physical, social and economic development of a community. As suggested by the word “comprehensive,” this type of plan looks at a variety of issues that contribute to or are affected by land use development patterns. The comprehensive plan outlines the City's vision and goals, and explores policies intended to guide decision making by the City government. Most importantly, the purpose of the plan is to inspire action and be incorporated into everyday decision making. The Comprehensive Plan will continually play an active role in community planning and decisions.

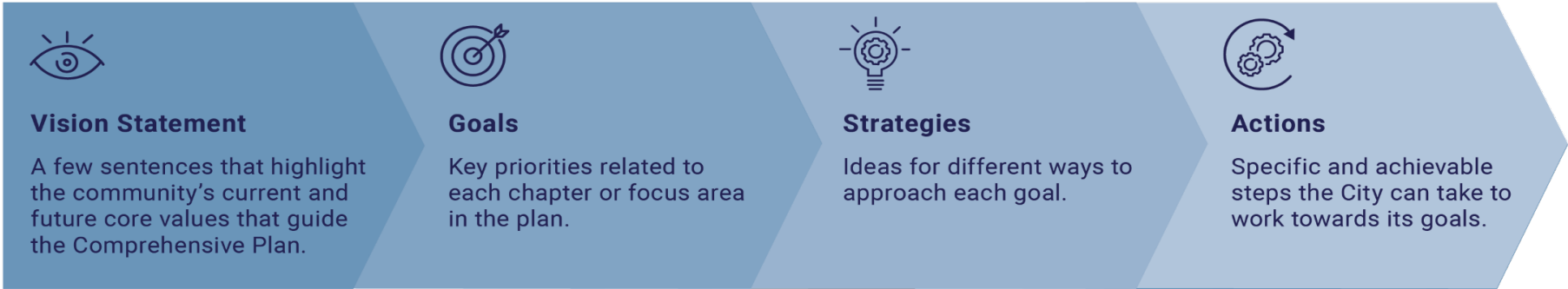


1.2 Components of this Plan

A thorough examination of existing community conditions is critical to inform the comprehensive plan update. Chapter 2 of this document provides the existing conditions basis for this document. The baseline conditions described in Chapter 2 inform the Vision

Statement of this document and the Goals, Strategies, and Actions for each plan chapter. The Vision Statement, Goals, Strategies, and Actions components are defined in the graphic below.

How does a Comprehensive Plan work?



The chapters in this plan are organized by topic: Housing and Land Use (Chapter 3), Local Transportation (Chapter 4), Regional Transportation (Chapter 5), Utility Infrastructure (Chapter 6), Public Facilities and Services (Chapter 7) and People and Economy (Chapter 8). Each chapter identifies several goals, or high-level priorities, related

to the topic for that chapter. Under each goal, strategies bridge the gap between the goal and the actions needed to achieve the goal. Lastly, actions serve as a “to-do list” for the City to work towards its goals and vision.

1.3 Plan Development Process

To update the Comprehensive Plan, the project team reviewed each section of the past plan and conducted research on changes within the community and its priorities. This process included extensive discussions with City staff, committees, commissions, stakeholder organizations, and community members. The focus of the update was to write action items that are concise, implementable, and in line with City goals for 2045.

Community input was critical to the update process. A Stakeholder Working Group was formed with representatives from various organizations in Bethel, including:

City of Bethel <i>(the City)</i>	Bethel Native Corporation <i>(BNC)</i>
Orutsararmiut Traditional Native Council (ONC)	Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD)
Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP)	Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT)
Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC)	Yukon-Kuskokwim Fitness Center

Two Community Meetings to collect public input were held in March of 2022 and April of 2023. Presentations or work sessions were completed with most of the City Commissions and Committees, as well as City Council. The project team created a public project website with information and an interactive Public Comment Map to collect place-specific input. Other feedback and input was gathered through direct communication from community members.



Vision Statement

Bethel is the hub that connects the communities of the rural Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region.

Bethel is a growing, diverse community that strives to improve quality of life, affordability, and opportunities through strategic development that responds to Bethel's remote location.

1.4 Vision Statement

Stakeholder input was received through workshops with the City of Bethel and conversations with the Bethel community to establish a vision statement. This vision statement serves as the foundation for the updated Comprehensive Plan's goals, strategies, and action items – the guiding idea as Bethel looks towards how it will grow and change in the future.

1.5 Plan Overview and Organization

The main body of the Comprehensive Plan is organized by areas of interest, providing background information and relevant goals, strategies, and action items in each chapter. To assist with the implementation of the plan, the appendices of this document organize the action items by the department that would be responsible for leading the implementation. Even as the people in City leadership and community members involved in planning may change over time, the organization of the Comprehensive Plan can provide continuity.

The Plan Chapters and the Plan Appendices are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Plan Chapters and Plan Appendices

	Plan Chapters	Plan Appendices
Organization	Organized into chapters that focus on different topics (like Housing & Land Use, Local Transportation, etc.), as well as more focused sections (like GIS Mapping, Public Transportation, etc.)	Organized into lists for each City department (like City Clerk, Grant Manager, Planning Department, etc.)
Contents	■ Background information and map figures ■ Goals, Strategies, and Actions relevant to each chapter. <i>Actions have symbols indicating which department is responsible, or which Appendix to reference for more notes about implementation.</i>	■ Goals, Strategies, and Actions relevant to each department ■ Detailed additional notes to help with implementing the Actions – past context, clarifications, new ideas, other departments to collaborate with, etc.

The areas of interest from Chapters 3 through 8 are outlined below:

Chapter 3: Housing & Land Use

1. Address potential barriers to housing development.
2. Facilitate more affordable housing development and access to affordable housing.
3. Reserve land to accommodate community needs and desired development.
4. Identify areas that are good candidates for infill development and take steps to facilitate their development.
5. Using the Future Land Use Plan Map and its land use designations, encourage future development to have an organization of uses that is compatible.
6. Make spatial information and maps available to the public online using GIS.

Chapter 4: Local Transportation

1. Use the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) to guide all local transportation facility planning.
2. Plan for an organized, proactive approach to surface transportation facility maintenance.
3. Develop the surface transportation network to reduce travel times, alleviate congestion, and support future development.
4. Design new and reconstructed streets with a focus on providing safe and comfortable routes for all transportation modes and all users.
5. Improve and expand the trail system.
6. Strategically seek funding for transportation facility construction and maintenance.
7. Improve the public transit system to be more convenient and responsive to the community's needs.
8. Evaluate site development codes to better support safe access for all transportation modes.

Chapter 5: Regional Transportation

1. Create a well-functioning airport area for travelers and businesses.
2. Support DOT&PF in airport operations and planning.
3. Study and plan for potential changes to the river's course that may impact port operations.
4. Maintain adequate port infrastructure to support shipping operations.
5. Maintain infrastructure to support the use of small boats and float planes for transportation, commerce, subsistence, and recreation.
6. Support the improvement and expansion of other modes of regional transportation.

Chapter 6: Utility Infrastructure

1. Advance projects in Bethel to increase electricity production from alternative energy sources to reduce both costs and generation of greenhouse gases.
2. Regularly seek ways to lower water and sewer bills for customers.
3. Transition Bethel's water and sewer utilities to fully piped systems serving all residences and businesses.
4. Facilitate broadband development within the City of Bethel to advance community access to reliable internet service.
5. Prolong the life of the existing landfill.

Chapter 7: Public Facilities & Services

1. Enhance the reliability and efficiency of the City workforce.
2. Communicate regularly and effectively with the community through various channels.
3. Optimize the management of City revenue and spending.
4. Manage City-owned land in an efficient, cost-effective, and forward-thinking manner.
5. Manage updates to City facilities and equipment in an efficient, cost-effective, and forward-thinking manner.
6. Improve public safety facilities and services in Bethel.
7. Target specific public safety concerns within Bethel.
8. Enhance the role of parks in the Bethel community.
9. Enhance recreational facilities and programs in Bethel.
10. Enhance the network of trails and open spaces in Bethel.

Chapter 8: People & Economy

1. Promote broad access to high-quality education, training, and employment opportunities in Bethel.
2. Minimize potential negative impacts to Bethel from the Donlin Mine efforts and maximize potential benefits.
3. Support subsistence rights and access to subsistence resources in Bethel and the surrounding region.
4. Prepare the City for a broad range of potential climate change impacts.
5. Support locally-specific cultural activities and attractions in Bethel.
6. Foster a thriving local business community.
7. Support and expand tourism and visitation to Bethel.

Appendices

As discussed above, the Appendices repeat action items from the Plan Chapters, but categorized by which City department is responsible for leading the implementation. Each appendix serves as a “to-do list” for a separate City department, along with additional context or ideas gathered during plan development that are not included in the chapters.

The Appendices are listed in order below. To show which department is responsible for each action in the Plan Chapters, the circular icons below are used throughout the plan.

Appendix 1:	City Clerk		
Appendix 2:	City Manager	 	<i>If action items in plan chapters are listed as CM*, they are not intended to be City Manager actions; the City Manager should assign them to the appropriate party.</i>
Appendix 3:	Finance Department		
Appendix 4:	Fire Department		
Appendix 5:	Grant Manager		
Appendix 6:	Human Resources		
Appendix 7:	Information Technology		
Appendix 8:	Landfill Manager		
Appendix 9:	Parks and Recreation		<i>Some action items are assigned to Parks and Recreation although this is not currently a City department, recognizing that the community is advocating for greater emphasis on the management of parks and recreation. In the interim, Public Works and the City Manager should continue to work together to track and work on these action items until a Parks and Recreation department is created. The Community Parks and Recreation Committee can also assist with providing input on delegation of responsibilities.</i>
Appendix 10:	Planning Department		
Appendix 11:	Police Department		
Appendix 12:	Port of Bethel		
Appendix 13:	Public Works Department		
Appendix 14:	Transit Manager		

An abstract graphic on a dark green background. It features three overlapping circles of increasing size from left to right, each a lighter shade of green. A thick white line starts from the right edge, curves downwards and to the left, then curves back to the right, ending near the bottom right corner.

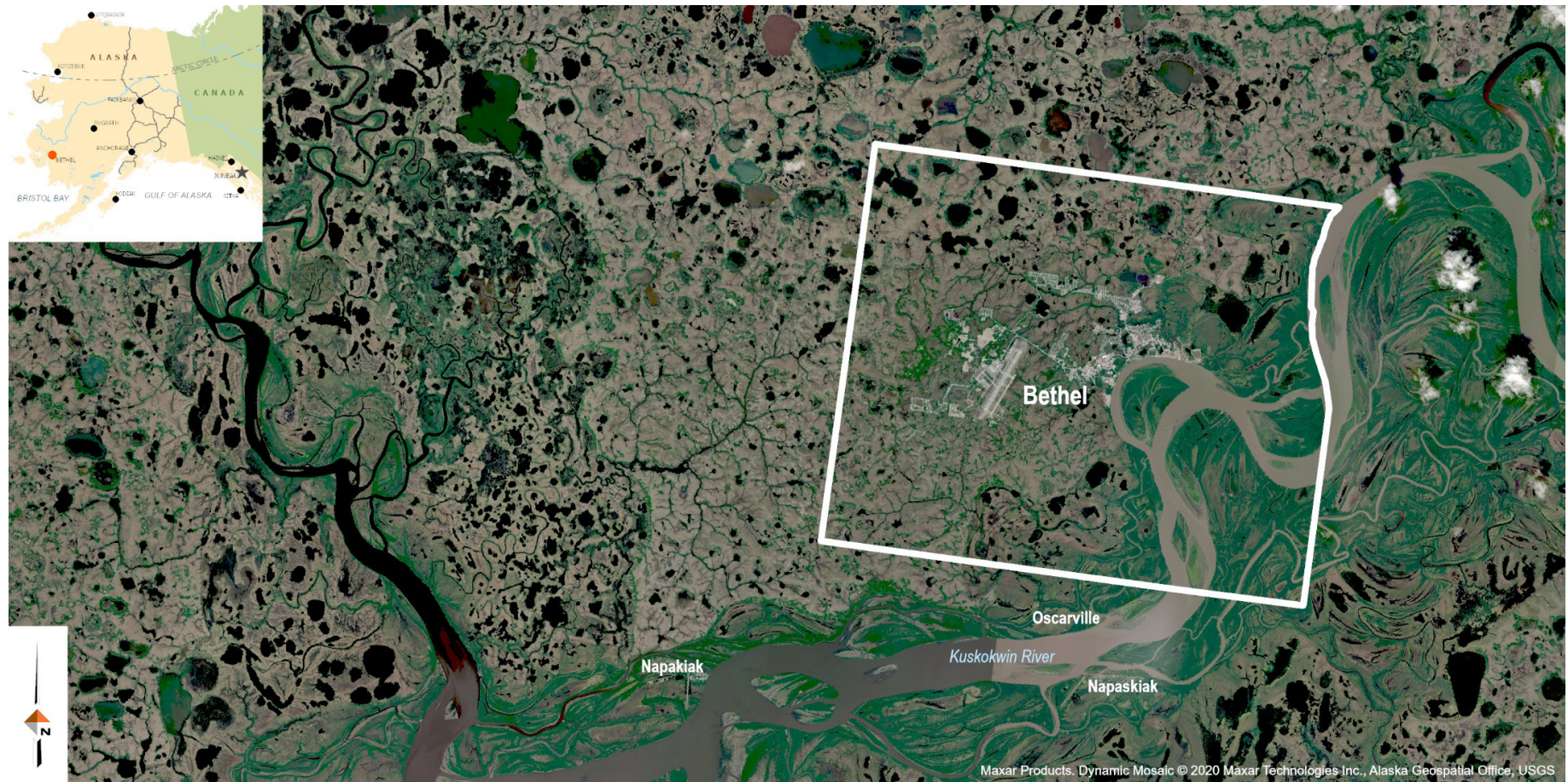
CHAPTER 2

Existing Conditions

2: Existing Conditions

The City of Bethel is the regional hub of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (Y-K Delta). The city is situated on the outer bank of a bend in the Kuskokwim River, approximately 40 miles inland from the Bering Sea. Much of Bethel's 44 square miles is undeveloped land within the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, and the city is remotely located off the Alaskan road network, about 400 air miles from Anchorage.

The delta region stretches across 59,000 square miles and is the historic home of the Yup'ik people; 56 villages across the region rely on Bethel as a major resource for transportation, government, education, health services, and commerce.



Aerial view of Bethel, its city limits, and the locations of a few of the surrounding communities.

2.1 History of Bethel

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region has been home to Native cultures, including Yup'ik, Siberian Yup'ik, and Cup'ik people, for thousands of years. Several Yup'ik settlements were located near present-day Bethel's location. In 1867, shortly after the United States purchased Alaska from Russia, the Alaska Commercial Company opened three trading posts on the Kuskokwim River. In 1885, the Moravian Church established a mission, store, and school near one of these trading posts and a Yup'ik village called "Mumtrekhlogamute" or "Mamterillermuit" (translated to "smokehouse people" or "village of many fish caches").

In the early twentieth century, Bethel began to emerge as the regional hub it is today, with the establishment of a post office, the mapping of a key deep-water channel for freight, the opening of federal and state agency offices, and the establishment of schools to serve families moving to the region. After a series of epidemics in the area, many native children from villages across the region were placed in orphanages in Bethel, further expanding the Bethel population. Building on existing aviation and government activities, the U.S. Military had a presence in Bethel since World War II and the Cold War era.

Bethel was incorporated as a city in 1957. A regional high school was built in the early 1970s. By the 1980s, Bethel had grown to be the largest town in western and arctic Alaska; public and private industry increased, and subdivision development boomed. Today, Bethel is the eighth most populous city in Alaska.

2.2 Population and Demographic Information

According to U.S. Census Bureau data for 2020, the population of Bethel is approximately 6,325 people. The table below shows a general trend of population growth over the decades of the past century, as well as an increasing percent of the census area living within

Bethel city limits. However, Bethel's population and percentage of the census area population decreased between 2009 and 2020. Recent acceleration of migration out of villages and rural Alaska is likely the result of high energy and food costs and changing generational expectations. This trend is both drawing people from villages to regional hubs like Bethel, and from regional hubs like Bethel to Anchorage.

Bethel is a growing and diverse community. According to the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS), 79 percent of the population identify as people of color, and 63 percent identify as Alaska Native. Alaska Native organizations in the area include tribal government Orutsararmiut Traditional Native Council (ONC), village corporation Bethel Native Corporation (BNC), and regional corporation Calista Corporation. As of 2019, only six percent of Bethel residents were born outside of Alaska (down from 30 percent in 2000).

The median age of the Bethel region is 29, with people 17 years and under contributing to 31 percent of the population. According to the ONC and City of Bethel 2010 Long Range Transportation Plan, two important and fast-growing population subgroups in Bethel are seniors and youth. It is anticipated that Bethel will continue to evolve as a center for education and workforce development for area youth, and as a center for specialized facilities and services for the region's elderly residents, further accelerating the growth of these population subgroups.

According to the 2020 ACS, there are approximately 1,618 households in Bethel, with an average of 3.3 people per household (significantly above the U.S. average of 2.51 people per household). The median household income in Bethel is \$86,624 (including income outside of work such as Alaska Permanent Fund or Native corporation dividends) and the median household earnings for work is \$42,247.

Table 2: City of Bethel and Bethel Census Area Population over Time

Year	City of Bethel	Bethel Census Area	Bethel as % of Census Area
1920	221	-	-
1930	178	-	-
1939	376	4,026	9.3
1950	651	4,670	13.9
1960	1,258	6,360	19.8
1970	2,416	8,917	27.1
1980	3,576	10,999	32.5
1990	4,674	13,656	34.2
2000	5,471	16,006	34.2
2009	6,522	17,352	37.6
2020	6,325	18,666	33.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. The Y-K Delta includes the approximately 37 villages of the Bethel Census Area and 19 additional villages of the Wade Hampton Census Area at the north end of the Delta. The data above does not include the population of the Wade Hampton Census Area.

2.3 Economy

Bethel's status as a regional hub has driven the growth of its population over the city's history. For this to continue, available local opportunities will need to be able to support residents in the face of a very high cost of living. The cost of fuel increases the cost of household or business expenses like heating, electricity, and transportation. Most goods bear an extra cost since they must be shipped to the city by barge or plane.

According to 2020 ACS data, just over 30 percent of the employed population in Bethel works in Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance. Other prominent employment sectors include Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities (about 10 percent of the working population) and Professional, Scientific, and Management,

and Administrative and Waste Management Services (another approximately 10 percent). While there is some overlap with the previously mentioned industries, it is also notable that almost 30 percent of the workforce is classified as government workers.

Economic activity in Bethel extends beyond employment with larger organizations. There are currently over 500 businesses licensed in Bethel. Several local artisans produce artwork, jewelry, clothing, and other items that are sold locally, in Anchorage, and worldwide. Some of the economy is supported by visitors including business travelers and people visiting friends and relatives, and some tourists come for outdoor recreation activities including bird watching and sport fishing. Subsistence activities including fishing, hunting, and berry

picking are an important part of life in Bethel and supplement many residents' incomes.

According to 2022 labor statistics from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Bethel unemployment rate has recently been hovering around 10 to 11 percent, while the statewide unemployment rate is currently closer to approximately 4 or 5 percent. The City has noted shortages of certain types of skilled workers, such as for jobs in the Public Works department. This indicates an opportunity to improve local career training and help connect people with work, which would also help with retaining homegrown talent in the Bethel workforce.

2.4 Land Use and Transportation Patterns

Bethel's role as a regional transportation hub has shaped its development. Historically, the city grew around its port and along the Kuskokwim River, with older neighborhoods, parks, trails, and water access for the port, small boat harbor, float plane access, and seasonal ice road access on the eastern side of town. Further inland, the Chief Eddie Hoffman Highway extends from the airport at the west side of town and east towards the civic and commercial center of Bethel; this highway is the only road in Bethel that is classified as an Alaska State Highway and connects the airport to critical destinations such as the post office, hospital, and government offices. The airport is Part 139 certified by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and typically ranked the second-busiest general aviation airport in the state due to its role as the primary hub for the region. Transportation within Bethel includes a variety of modes, including personal vehicle; public transportation (City bus service); foot transportation along roads, trails, and boardwalks; bicycle; four-wheeler or snowmachine; or taxicab.

Bethel's "downtown" is primarily oriented along the highway; this corridor also includes the cultural center, tribal organization offices, the University of Alaska-Fairbanks Kuskokwim Campus, stores, restaurants, and religious institutions. At the end of the highway, Ridgecrest Drive curves north to provide access to the Lower Kuskokwim School District campus, public works facilities including the sewage lagoon and landfill, the Fitness Center, Pinky's Park, and many residential subdivisions. Other residential subdivisions have emerged throughout Bethel, sprouting from other locations along the highway.

An aerial view of Bethel shows development along a curved "spine" of the highway and other major roads, with a large undeveloped area north of the highway, south of Ptarmigan Street, west of the part of town along Ridgecrest Drive, and east Tundra Ridge Road (currently in progress) and H-Marker Lake. This area is often referred to as the "Donut Hole." It includes some areas of tundra that are likely to remain open space, but also City, BNC, and other privately-owned land or native allotments that could potentially be developed, especially if more road connections are made through the space. For example, the City plans to support infill opportunities and improved connectivity with a new north-south road that would connect the highway north to the Fitness Center and beyond to Ptarmigan Street (currently being nicknamed "Donut Hole Road" during the planning process).

2.5 Environmental Challenges

Climate Change and Thawing Permafrost

Weather and climate in Bethel are characterized by "high humidity, frequent fogs, considerable cloudiness and many periods of rain or snow (ONC LRTP, 2020)." Summer temperatures typically range from 40 to 62 degrees Fahrenheit, and winter temperatures typically

range from -2 to 19 degrees. Frost in Bethel averages from around early September to the end of May. According to a 2011 study of communities in the surrounding region by Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), annual temperatures in the region are expected to get warmer and wetter. For example, annual temperatures are expected to rise by five to eight degrees, and four to twelve degrees in the winter (depending on timeframe and greenhouse gas emissions scenarios). Residents are reporting climate change impacts already, with an earlier spring breakup season and different weather patterns including periods with more rain than had been typical, but also dry periods with fires.

The warming climate is already having an impact on the built environment in Bethel. Permafrost in the area is characterized as “warm” permafrost, averaging around 31.2 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the City. Community members are now observing permafrost at 4 to 6 feet below ground surface. This poses a problem to local construction and increases maintenance costs, as thawing permafrost impacts building foundations, roads, and utility infrastructure. Local soil types already pose challenges to development, so the changing permafrost may only make construction and maintenance more complicated in the future.

Winter travel on frozen lakes and the river is also becoming more challenging as annual temperatures rise. The Kuskokwim River is freezing later and breaking up earlier. Ice conditions throughout the winter are becoming more variable, which prevents reliable and safe ice road routes. Recent winters have brought less snow, so road surfaces have been exposed and dry, causing dust problems which were typically only an issue during the summer.

Erosion and Flooding

Bethel has experienced erosion along the river since the community was originally founded; it is natural for rivers to change over time. The community was once protected by a series of small islands in the main channel of the Kuskokwim River. As of 1939, the river eroded these protective islands. Bethel has a steep riverbank, made up of easily erodible materials, often exacerbating the erosion problem. Other factors contributing to erosion are direct sunlight in the south-east portion of the bank which causes melting of permafrost, as well as high foot traffic which destroys protective vegetation. Climate change impacts are anticipated to exacerbate riverbank erosion.

Bethel experiences seasonal flooding due to ice jams during “break up,” the springtime melting season. This has led to the riverbank adjacent to Bethel eroding over the last 40 years. A historic flood in 1995 created a cove measuring 350 feet wide and 200 feet inland, which posed a danger to structures within the city. Later in 1995, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) installed a rock seawall along 600 linear feet of the dock and riverbank. To combat further erosion, USACE initiated a \$24 million project which included an 8,000-foot bank stabilization. The City reports there is always more work to be done to improve and maintain the critical seawall infrastructure.

Due to the changing course of the river and the eroding riverbank, there will likely be impacts to the deep water channel and Port of Bethel. As the region relies on the river for the delivery of fuel and other cargo, further study and mitigation planning is necessary.

Subsistence Resources and Environmental Impacts

Bethel is situated in a generally flat area of the tundra. Vegetation includes low-growing shrubs, herbs, grasses, and sedges rooted

in a mat of mosses and lichens. Commonly found plants include sphagnum moss and Labrador tea, crowberry, birch, willow, and berries, such as currants, blueberries, cranberries, blackberries, and salmonberries – the environment is rich with foods that can be harvested. There are abundant waterfowl and other bird habitats around Bethel. Moose are one of the most common subsistence land mammals (comprising of over half of land mammals harvested), followed by caribou. Commonly harvested furbearers include rabbits, beaver, fox, wolves, and mink.

No federally listed endangered species or critical habitats currently exist in Bethel. However, Bethel is among many coastal Alaskan communities being impacted by decreasing fish populations. Bethel's rivers and lakes are home to several types of fish including arctic char, all five salmon species, lake trout, dolly varden, rainbow trout, arctic grayling, northern pike, sculpin, whitefish, burbot, stickleback, and blackfish. Fish have been significantly less abundant, and those who rely on fish for their livelihood or supplementing their diet are subject to sometimes unpredictable closures in order to protect fish populations. Overfishing, changing migration patterns, warming water temperatures, environmental contamination, and melting permafrost are all anticipated to continue to have impacts on subsistence resources across the region, which will in turn impact communities such as Bethel that rely on subsistence foods to keep the cost of living more manageable.

2.6 Public Facilities and Services

The city is governed by a Mayor, City Manager, and seven-member City Council. All council members are elected at large for 2-year terms. The Mayor is elected by the City Council, and the City Manager oversees the daily operations of the City.

Commissions and Committees include the Board of Ethics, Community Action Grant Committee, Finance Committee, Port Commission, Planning Commission, Public Safety and Transportation Commission, Public Works Committee, and Community Parks and Recreation Committee.

Administrative services for the City of Bethel are provided by the City Manager, Grants Manager, and Human Resources Department. Other departments focus on specific City facilities and/or services.

Administration:

The City Manager is appointed by the City Council and serves as the chief executive officer for the City, directing the day-to-day operations of the City in accordance with municipal law. The City Manager hires and supervises department heads, carries out implementation of the annual budget with the Capital Improvement Plan, manages City property, and is responsible for managing quality service delivery to City residents, as well as other interdisciplinary programs and initiatives.

The Grants Manager obtains grant funding for various City capital and operating needs.

The Human Resources Department organizes City hiring and human resources.

Other City Departments:

The City Clerk is appointed by City Council and acts as their parliamentary advisor, responsible for assuring compliance with local and state laws associated with municipal records and public meetings. The Clerk's Office also conducts research and processing of Council requests and actions, prepares agenda packets, administers municipal elections, serves as notary public, manages and writes City ordinances and resolutions, manages City Council and Clerk budgets, manages City public relations (currently assisted by a contractor), and works with other governmental representatives and agencies.

The City Attorney is appointed by City Council and is the legal advisor of the governing body, representing the City in civil and criminal proceedings. The Legal Department (led by the City Attorney) advises City leases, contracts, and other matters such as ordinances.

The Finance Department is led by the Finance Director, who is appointed by the City Manager to be the ex officio treasurer, data processing manager, city accountant, and internal auditor responsible for supervising fiscal operations of other departments and employees. The Finance Department manages City money and investments, administering tax collections as well as payments made by the City.

The Technology Department maintains the information and communications technology for all City departments.

The Planning Department provides guidance and reviews for all new development and redevelopment in the City to ensure code compliance. The department also manages permit records and makes recommendations for changes to code when needed to

better promote health, safety, and responsible development in the community.

The Port of Bethel oversees shipping, receiving, and distribution of petroleum products and barged freight for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Port infrastructure includes the Cargo Dock, Petro Port, Small Boat Harbor, Float Plane Beach, and Seawall.

The Fire Department oversees emergency fire, hazardous materials, and medical response.

The Police Department oversees public safety and law enforcement, in collaboration with regional and state law enforcement and safety entities. The Police Department also oversees animal care and control (including in collaboration with the non-profit organization **Bethel Friends of Canines** (BFK9)).

The Public Works Department oversees City services (water, wastewater, and solid waste), transportation and other infrastructure, buildings, vehicles, equipment, and Parks and Recreation.

Other utilities and services provided by other public agencies or private entities include:

Fuel: Crowley, Delta Western, and Vitus currently supply fuel to Bethel.

Electricity: Alaska Village Electric Cooperative (AVEC), a member-owned rural electric cooperative, provides electricity for Bethel and nearby villages.

Telephone: In-state telephone services are provided by United Utilities, Inc., a GCI company. GCI provides long-distance service.

Internet: Internet is available locally to community members through

GCI. At the time of updating this Comprehensive Plan, satellite internet providers such as Starlink were rapidly expanding into the region.

Health services: Health services are provided by the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Center (YKHC), and the Bethel Family Clinic (a federally funded community health center).

Homelessness services: Bethel Winter House is a non-profit organization that provides services for individuals and families at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Other human services: Bethel Community Services Foundation (BCSF) is a non-profit organization that provides other community-based programs and services across the YK Delta region.

Post office: The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) operates a full post office in Bethel.

Education: Bethel is home of the Kuskokwim Campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Adult Basic Education, the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD), Bethel Regional High School, Mikelnguut Elitnaurviat School, Bethel Alternative Boarding School, a Yupik Immersion School (Ayaprun Elitnaurvik), Involved Parents Preschool, Headstart, and Junior ROTC. Yuut Elitnaurviat (People's Learning Center) provides vocational training, and Bethel also has a flight school.

Museum and community center: The Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center and Museum provides a gathering space for community-wide events in Bethel. The museum was founded in 1965 as the "Bethel Museum" by the City and transferred to the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) in 1995. Galleries display exhibits of Yup'ik, Cup'ik, and Athabascan people of the YK Delta in ancient and contemporary times.

Library: In conjunction with the University of Alaska, Bethel operates the Kuskokwim Consortium Library.

Fitness Center: The YK Fitness Center is a community multipurpose gym and swimming pool facility owned by the City and currently operated by contractors.



Bethel City Hall.



CHAPTER 3

Housing & Land Use

3: Housing & Land Use

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2: Existing Conditions, land use in Bethel has been shaped by a variety of factors including the changing riverfront, soil conditions, or ownership. These factors have helped shape Bethel's development, with a mixed-use core and a small number of major roads spreading out in different directions to serve primarily residential development further out.

Any development in Bethel is challenging and expensive. Materials must be shipped in, buildings must be constructed on piles to respond to permafrost and wetlands, and there are not always enough people available locally who have skills to design and/or construct buildings and the infrastructure to serve them. Due to the spread-out development pattern, roads and utilities must travel farther, increasing construction and maintenance cost.

This can create insurmountable challenges for potential developers, homeowners, renters, and business owners. The City's vision for 2045 focuses on easing the high cost of living and improving quality of life, and facilitating land use development that is more efficient will play a significant role in this effort. This plan seeks to identify ways the City can streamline land use processes, lessen barriers that the City code may pose, provide helpful land use information, and shape development patterns to move the City towards its goals.

3.2 Housing

Need for More Housing

Bethel homes are in short supply and are difficult for buyers and renters to afford. Finding ways to assist with the development of more (and particularly more affordable) housing is a major priority for the City. Community members have observed that housing is urgently needed for those who wish to live in Bethel, but there is also a need for shorter-term housing for workers on temporary contracts or visiting Bethel for shorter periods of time to work. Generally, a variety of housing is needed to serve a variety of user groups and make it easier to find a suitable place to live or stay.

In 2021, a team including Orutsararmiut Traditional Native Council (ONC), NeighborWorks America and Alaska, Enterprise Community Foundation, the City of Bethel, Cook Inlet Housing Authority and Cook Inlet Lending Center, Agnew::Beck, DOWL, and SALT published "Clean Water Makes a Healthy Home: A Concept Paper for an Innovative Approach to Infrastructure Investment in Rural Alaska." This concept paper included a study of housing needs in Bethel and the infrastructure needed to support more housing. The project focused on how to reduce costs and expand revenue sources for housing development, developing partnerships, and providing adequate water and sewer infrastructure. The water and sewer findings are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6: Utility Infrastructure.

Per the study, 11 percent of households are severely overcrowded, and there is a potential demand for an additional 577 units of housing over the next 10 to 20 years. This will need to include both devel-

oping new housing and replacing aging and substandard units. The rental market is limited, and approximately 38 percent of households pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing. Lack of available and affordable housing could discourage people from staying in Bethel or moving to Bethel, in turn negatively impacting local economic sustainability.

Streamline Processes

There are several well-established residential subdivisions throughout Bethel, mostly including single- and two-family homes. These continue to be popular housing options for those who can afford them (whether to buy or rent). Though slowly, new subdivisions of this type continue to be developed in Bethel. There are also some multifamily options in various locations around Bethel. However, the pace of development for any of these housing options is not meeting the community's needs.

The City can help facilitate and/or encourage housing development through a variety of means, particularly through Planning Department actions. This could include sharing information on funding assistance, streamlining development and permitting processes, and proposing code changes (such as to clarify how Planned Unit Developments can be developed or to allow greater density in some areas). The City could also explore other ways to incentivize development.

It is important to note that facilitating development does not mean sacrificing processes that are in place to protect the quality of life in Bethel and the rights and interests of property owners. Ensuring compliance with code and working within existing regulatory processes is critical to avoiding delays in the housing pipeline, including the provision of necessary infrastructure like utilities and roads. For example, the Haroldson Subdivision (located to the northeast of town) was created prior to the adoption of the required subdivision agreement process. The access road to the subdivision traverses a City-owned parcel but without a public right-of-way. Neither the access road nor the roads within the subdivision were constructed to adequate standards to support public vehicular traffic, so the City was not able to take on ownership and maintain the roads until the issue was resolved, delaying the roll-out of much-needed residential lots. While the subdivision agreement process is an additional step in development, it helps protect the City and ensure adequate infrastructure is provided for future residents. Like any other process in Bethel Municipal Code (BMC), it may evolve over time to best suit the needs of the City and the community.

GOAL 1: Address potential barriers to housing development.

Strategy 1: Streamline the land use approval process.

Action A: Every five years, audit the Planning Department website and application forms used for land use processes and revise for clarity and ease of use. PL

Action B: If an element of the code or process repeatedly causes unnecessary difficulty or undue delay for housing developers, the City Planner should consider whether it would be of public benefit to make a change to the code and bring the suggested change forward to the Planning Commission and City Council. PL

Strategy 2: Ensure that subdivision, development, and design standards are enforced.

Action A: Require compliance with all subdivision standards for approval, including the standard subdivision agreement process. PL

Action B: Consider changes to the subdivision approval and agreement process to improve clarity and efficiency. PL

Action C: Develop a position description to potentially hire a code enforcement officer. PL

Action D: Examine code sections related to non-conformance and coming closer to compliance to determine if changes may be needed. PL

Strategy 3: Encourage development by collaboratively working with developers to install public infrastructure, including piped water and sewer systems and roads.

Action A: As part of the subdivision agreement process, consider designing a standardized “impact fee” mechanism to have developers participate in funding when their development will impact the overall system (water and sewer or other infrastructure such as roads). CM PL

Action B: Create a guide for infrastructure development grants or other funding assistance programs, in order to assist developers with finding information needed to pursue supplemental development financing. GM PL

Focus on Density

Denser housing typically costs less for developers and residents. Smaller homes require less materials to build and require less energy to heat. Denser development located closer to the center of town may also mean more residents don't have to travel as far to get to work, school, healthcare, food, or other destinations. To provide more affordable and workforce housing in Bethel, there should be a focus on facilitating multifamily developments such as apartment buildings or townhomes, as well as opportunities to build smaller homes on smaller lots for more accessible ownership or "starter home" opportunities.

Existing provisions in BMC, such as the Planned Unit Development (PUD) model, already allow greater development layout flexibility to help facilitate more compact residential development and the

potential for greater density balanced with shared open space. However, these code sections may need to be reviewed for clarity and/or promoted in the community, as they have not been frequently used. Other parts of zoning code could benefit from closer study and potential changes to encourage higher density and multifamily residential development.

Like any change to zoning code, creating a new zoning district would require the City to develop the proposed code changes. The proposed code changes would then be subject to a public review process. Finally, any code changes would need to be adopted by the Planning Commission and City Council as part of a public hearing process.

GOAL 2: Facilitate more affordable housing development and access to affordable housing.

Strategy 1: Use zoning to encourage multifamily and more dense housing development.

- Action A:** Develop a working group to assist the City Planner to study and create code changes and zoning map changes for a new Multifamily Residential zoning district that can be brought forward to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval. PL
- Action B:** Encourage the implementation of the new Multifamily Residential zone and existing Downtown Commercial and Neighborhood Commercial zones through the Future Land Use Plan Map. PL
- Action C:** Consider rezoning some City-owned land to Multifamily Residential where recommended in the Future Land Use Plan Map. PL
- Action D:** Encourage use of the Planned Unit Development model, which allows flexibility on dimensional standards for multifamily development to allow denser residential developments with shared open spaces (such as townhomes, "tiny home" communities, or other compact residential styles). PL

Strategy 2: Support access to information on housing assistance programs.

- Action A:** Consider completing a housing needs assessment in collaboration with community partners such as ONC or BNC. CM
- Action B:** Work with various community partners, potentially including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC), ONC, or BNC, to research potential economic housing assistance that could be available to Bethel residents. GM



Aerial view of the “Donut Hole” in Bethel.

3.3 Strategic Development

Housing is a priority, but the organization of other land uses within Bethel must also be strategically coordinated to ensure the City has the public infrastructure needed as it continues to grow. The available land and varying constraints must be considered while evaluating the land uses that the community will need in the future.

As discussed in the Housing section above, denser development has many benefits. Less utility and road infrastructure is needed to connect denser development, saving the City money. Shorter distances between developments also saves time and money spent on transportation for Bethel residents and public service providers.

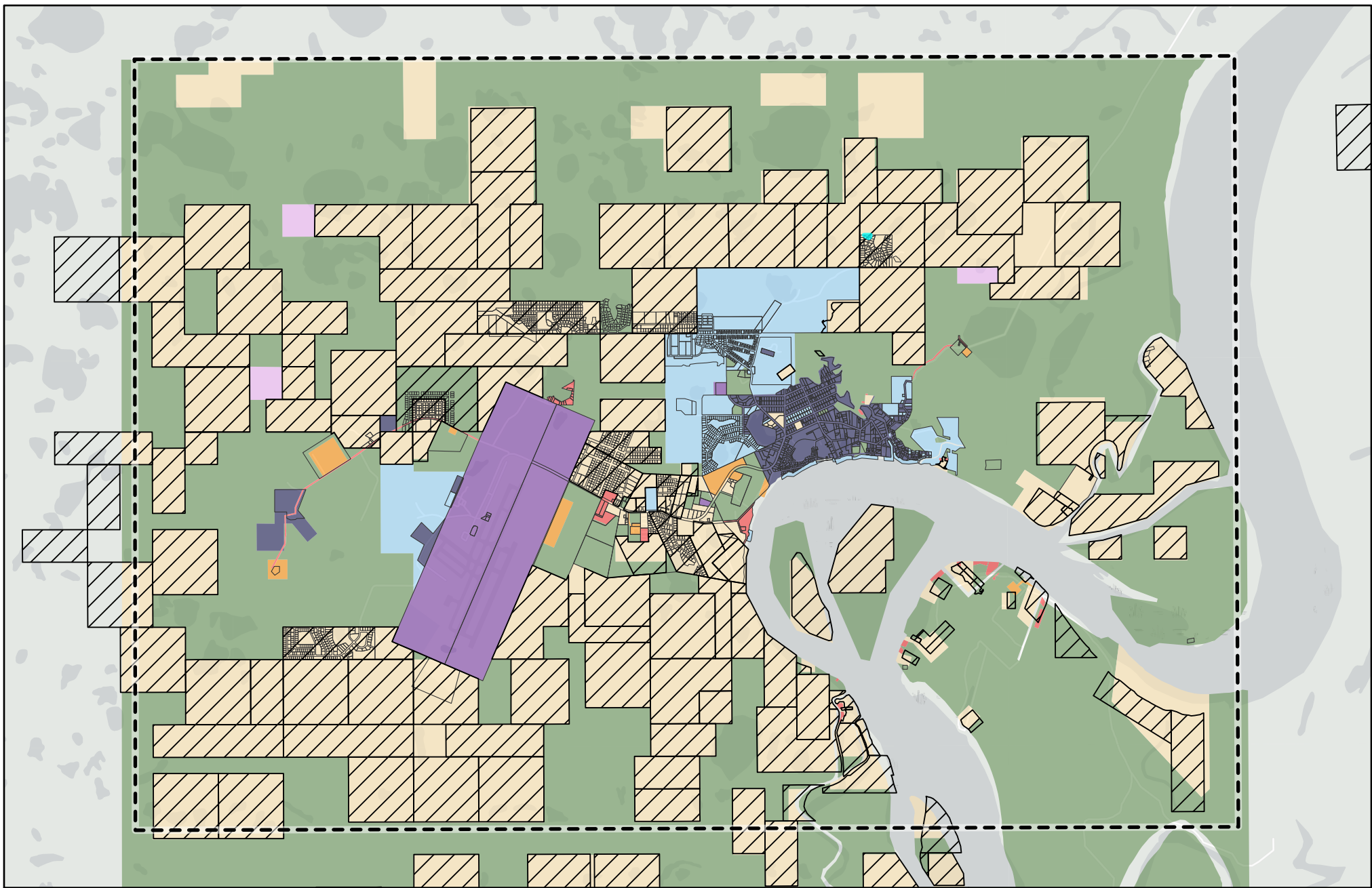
Yet, development in Bethel must respond to a variety of constraints, including varying ownership and soil types that complicate development. So far, the City has grown along a curved spine, with a largely undeveloped area nicknamed the “Donut Hole” in the middle. The community has expressed a desire to reserve valuable areas as open space (providing areas for recreation or berry picking, for example), but other properties might be better suited for development to continue.

Given the high cost of development in Bethel, along with the expense of expanding and maintaining infrastructure such as roads, infill development has become more common. The City should apply this principle to projects on land it owns or might seek to purchase, and can also seek ways to encourage private development to be located closer to already-developed areas of the City.

Current zoning dictates where more dense infill development would be allowed and most suitable. For example, more dense or mixed-use development would not generally be allowed in established Residential-zoned neighborhoods. However, areas that are not far from the center of town, are not developed, and are not yet zoned (or are zoned General Use) could be good candidates for new multi-family housing or mixed-use development (such as with a new Multifamily Residential zone, as discussed in Section 3.2 above). The Future Land Use Plan Map in Section 3.4, which is a planning tool to help inform how zoning could look in the future, was developed with these ideas in mind – established residential neighborhoods in the Residential zone and further-out areas are suggested to be less dense residential development, whereas areas in the Donut Hole are suggested to be “Mixed-Use Neighborhoods.”

On the next page is a map of land ownership in Bethel. Areas of existing development can be identified as denser concentrations of property lines in gray – primarily along the bend in the Kuskokwim River and extending west in two sections: along the Chief Eddie Hoffman Highway (CEHH) towards the airport to the south and along Ptarmigan Road to the north. H-Marker Lake and the in-progress Tundra Ridge Road form the western boundary of the “Donut Hole” of undeveloped land. As shown in the color coding on the map, this area consists of a mix of land owned by the City, Bethel Native Corporation (BNC), and private native allotment owners.

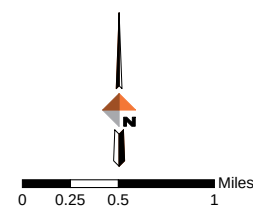
**** The map on the next page is not a full reflection of current ownership in Bethel and is included to show general land ownership patterns. The ownership data in the map is primarily sourced from a 1997 map; some information was not available or has changed. Because Bethel does not collect property taxes, current ownership is not regularly tracked and would require extensive title research.*



General Ownership (1997 City of Bethel Comprehensive Plan)

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ ANCSA^ | ■ State Selected |
| ■ Bethel Native Corporation* | ■ State of Alaska |
| ■ City of Bethel | ■ Information Unavailable |
| ■ Federal | <i>^includes ANCSA 14c1/c2 and ANCSA c3</i> |
| ■ Private | <i>*a small number of properties are also part federal or private ownership</i> |

- | |
|--|
| Conveyed Native Allotment
(BLM Published: 4/25/2020) |
| City of Bethel Parcel
Boundary |
| City of Bethel Boundary |



General Ownership

City of Bethel Comprehensive Plan



Date: July 2023

Figure 1

GOAL 3: Reserve land to accommodate community needs and desired development.

Strategy 1: Inventory City-owned properties.

Action A: Inventory all City-owned properties, including their current use or any use requirements/restrictions or other encumbrances associated with original BLM conveyance to the City. PW CM

Strategy 2: Create and regularly maintain a list of community facility and infrastructure needs that will require land.

Action A: Create and maintain a list of community facility and infrastructure needs in order of priority, and include specific spatial needs such as general location and approximate area of land required. PW CM

Action B: As applicable, identify and initiate coordination with entities that need to be involved in the implementation of community facilities and infrastructure (such as the Public Works department for wastewater facilities, or AVEC for alternative energy generation sites). PW CM

Action C: Research and identify if there are any City-owned sites that should be reserved for specific community facilities or infrastructure. PL

Action D: As needed, create a plan to obtain land or lease a property to satisfy each priority community infrastructure need. CM

Strategy 3: Use the Future Land Use Plan Map to designate priority areas for residential and commercial development.

See Future Land Use Plan Map section and Goal 5 below.

Strategy 4: Sell, trade, or lease City-owned properties that the City does not need in the future so that more private development can occur.

Action A: Evaluate City-owned properties that should be considered to sell or lease for private development. CM

Action B: Create a plan for how the City will dispose of (sell or lease) certain properties over time. CM

Action C: Initiate the process to dispose of these properties according to the plan. CM

GOAL 4: Identify areas that are good candidates for infill development and take steps to facilitate their development.

Strategy 1: Identify the best areas for infill development.

Action A: Create a map that highlights “priority development areas” including the best / most likely areas for infill development as Bethel grows (*more information on factors included in Appendix 10*). **PL**

Action B: Regularly update the priority development area map based on new developments and environmental information, such as changing permafrost and hydrologic information. **PL**

Strategy 2: Investigate how private landowners within priority development areas might be encouraged to participate in community development goals.

Action A: Explore partnership opportunities to achieve desired development, such as with BNC. **CM**

Action B: Compile and share information from BIA about how native allotment owners can prepare for potential development. **CM**

Action C: Coordinate with the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) Realty Department to learn more about potential land exchanges between BNC and native allotment owners for “in-town” native allotments. **CM**

Strategy 3: Decrease barriers to additional commercial development and incentivize development patterns that support more commercial activity.

Action A: Revise zoning code to allow shopping centers in appropriate zoning districts. **PL**

Action B: Consider setting aside a space to host markets where small businesses can rent booths and sell goods or services. **PL**

Strategy 4: Facilitate redevelopment of properties that are underutilized, dilapidated, or abandoned.

Action A: Compile a list of sites that appear to be underutilized, dilapidated, or vacant / abandoned. **PL**

Action B: Implement a vacant building registration ordinance. **PL**

Action C: Examine and revise the Public Nuisance Abatement code (BMC 9.36) to improve its effectiveness and the efficiency of enforcement. **PL**

Action D: Consider funding available for the purchase of dilapidated or abandoned properties, potentially for use in partnership developments. **GM**

3.4 Future Land Use Plan Map

The Future Land Use Plan Map is a key component of every Comprehensive Plan for every city. It is a tool used to help shape what types of land uses and neighborhoods develop in different parts of town in the future. It is important to note that land use designations in the Future Land Use Plan Map are not the same as zoning. Land

use designations are broader categories than zoning districts; multiple different zoning districts could be implemented depending on the future land use designation in an area. The table below outlines differences between the Zoning Map and the Future Land Use Plan Map.

Table 3: Zoning versus Future Land Use Plan

Zoning Map	Future Land Use Plan Map
Areas are called zoning districts.	Areas are called future land use designations .
Part of Bethel Municipal Code, which is law.	Part of the Comprehensive Plan, which is a planning document (not law) .
Shows current zoning.	Shows the community's vision for the future .
Dictates what land uses are currently legal on each property.	Does not impact current zoning. This is part of the consideration if a property owner is interested in applying to change the zoning on their property (which is a public hearing process). Suggests what zoning would be generally suitable in different areas, based on current conditions and expectations for how the City could change over time.
Sets requirements for lot sizes, setbacks, and whether other specific design elements or permits are required, based on which land use is being proposed in which zoning district.	Implies a general type of neighborhood – a variety of uses and zoning districts may be possible in each designation.

Both: Considered as part of every planning application review in the City, and used to provide compatibility amongst land uses.

The Future Land Use Plan Map is especially important in reviewing rezone applications; changes to the Zoning Map must be supported by the Future Land Use Plan Map and the contents of this section of the Comprehensive Plan in order to be approved.



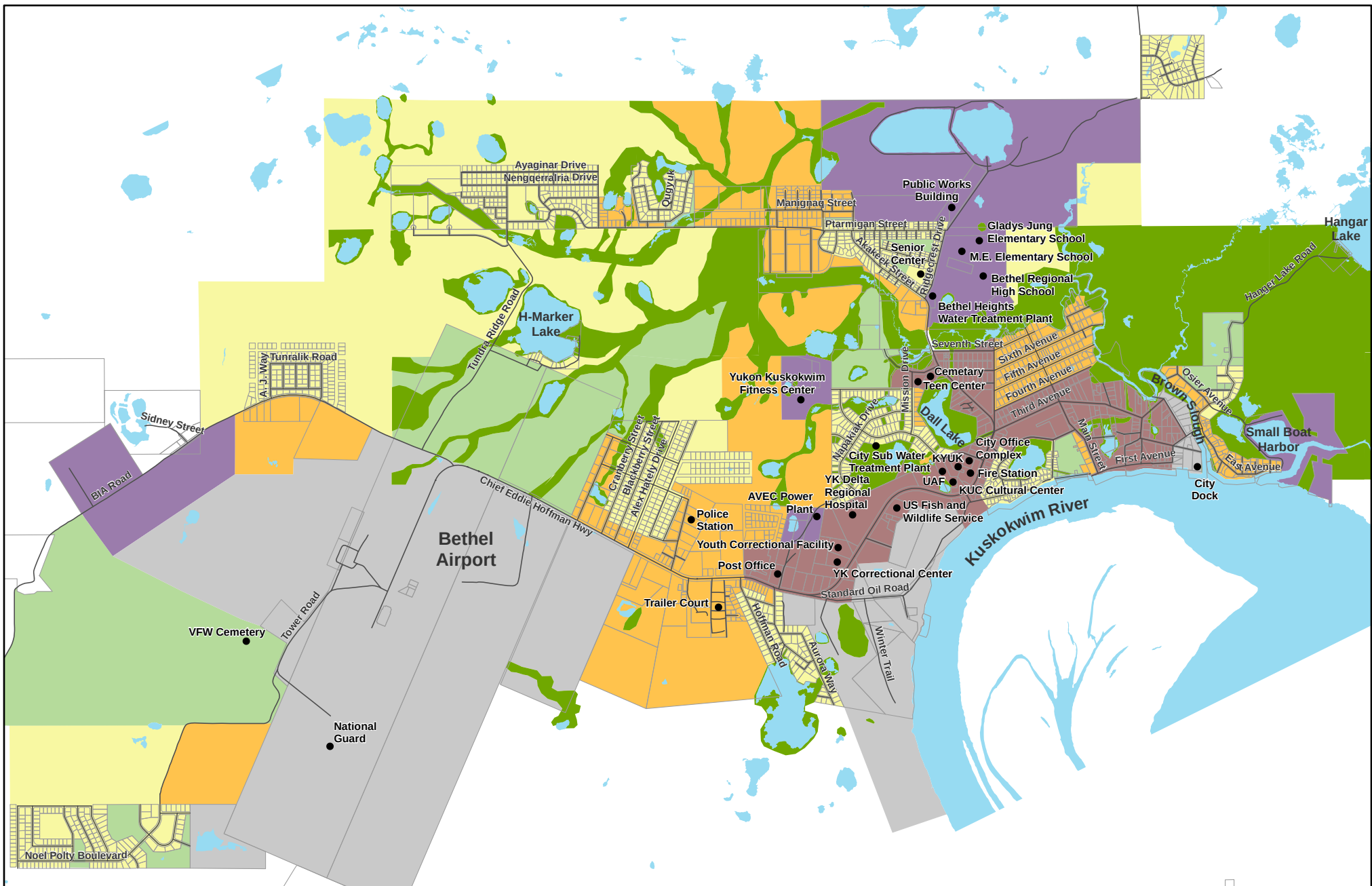
It is important to note that the Future Land Use Plan Map is not intended or able to dictate what development occurs. It is still up to individual landowners to determine how their property may be developed as it relates to the current zoning and allowed uses. Instead, the Future Land Use Plan Map serves to show community goals for land use patterns in different areas. Since the Comprehensive Plan itself is only a guiding document, the plan does not implement new zoning designations, but it can and should be used to guide rezones or future zoning for areas that are currently not zoned. Any changes to the currently adopted zoning map require a public hearing, and any changes to zoning code require an even more robust public process involving both the Planning Commission and City Council.

When considering both the current Zoning Map and the Future Land Use Plan Map created as part of the 2011 Comprehensive Plan, it was noted that the General Use zoning district and Mixed-Use future land use designations might be too general to help shape desired development. The designations created for this updated plan seek to improve clarity on which uses are encouraged where. The Future Land Use Plan Map and definitions below provide examples of land use designations that are consistent with community goals and potential zoning districts that could be considered for each future land use designation.

Table 4: Future Land Use Designations

Future Land Use Designation	Definition / Intent	Implementing Zoning Districts and Uses
 Single- and Two-Family Residential Neighborhood	Compared to the Multi-Use Neighborhood, this designation is more similar to traditional single-family and two-family neighborhoods. It is typically located farther from the commercial and civic center of town. R should be the most common zoning district in this designation, and lot sizes and homes tend to be larger as farther-out development is more expensive and better suited to this type of lower-density residential development. Multifamily and commercial development is possible, but should typically be reserved for the edges of neighborhoods or along major roads.	R Could include some R2 (<i>new zoning district recommended in this plan</i>) and NC along neighborhood edges or major roads Parks and recreation facilities, open space
 Multi-Use Neighborhood	Of the two main “neighborhood” designations, this is the more “urban” of the two. The most common implementing zoning district in this designation should be the new R2, Multifamily Residential district, which emphasizes higher density, multifamily housing types. This designation is typically located close to major roads and commercial / civic centers, so that more people may access transit and/or pedestrian-friendly areas. In line with the more “urban” and “walkable” feel, these neighborhoods are well-suited to including residential-compatible commercial uses, including mixed-use developments. (For example, restaurants and offices as opposed to auto-repair shops.) Parks and open space associated with multifamily developments or Planned Unit Developments are encouraged in every residential neighborhood, so space should be set aside for this in Multi-Use neighborhoods.	R2 (<i>new zoning district recommended in this Plan</i>) NC, mostly along neighborhood edges or roads but can include a mix of uses Could include some DC on major roads Parks and recreation facilities, open space
 Commercial / Civic Center	This designation is intended to generally follow the commercial and civic corridor along the highway and into the heart of “Old Bethel.” This is where most commercial and institutional activities are located. These areas typically contain employment centers or common “destinations” that people need or want to go, including the hospital, government offices, groceries, restaurants, and other gathering spaces. With the most convenient access to Bethel’s commercial and civic center, housing developed within or near to this area should typically emphasize higher density, multi-family options.	DC PLI NC and/or R2 Parks and recreation facilities

 Community Infrastructure	This designation is intended to include public infrastructure and facilities, such as the landfill, sewage lagoon, school district campus, fitness center, and small boat harbor. In the future, this could also include facilities for alternative energy generation.	PLI
		Parks and recreation facilities, open space
		<i>Other zones / uses are possible within Community Infrastructure, if compatible</i>
 Industrial / Heavy Commercial	This designation is intended to include industrial and heavy commercial uses that support Bethel's role as a hub for transportation and cargo for the region. This includes areas around the port and airport. This may also include land reserved for utilities-related uses.	I
		PLI
		DC
 Public Open Space	This designation indicates areas that are recommended to be reserved as larger public open spaces, such as for recreation uses. This does not necessarily include all parks in Bethel, as these can be smaller and within residential or commercial/civic areas. This designation is often used adjacent to the Preservation zone, such as in some areas of the “Donut Hole,” where the intent is to reserve areas for recreation and subsistence in “green belts” adjacent to areas that must be preserved. This designation also makes sense to be applied to areas on the periphery of Bethel that are unlikely to be developed and would remain as open space, such as a potential refuge at the end of BIA Road.	OS
		PLI
Zoning District	Definition / Intent	
 Preservation	Areas zoned P are likely to remain undeveloped given that they generally contain significant wetlands and drainageways that should be preserved. Thus, this zone represents areas that are unlikely to be developed in the future.	P
	It is the intent of the city that the boundaries of the P district be consistent with boundaries of general permit 83-4 issued by USACE, and that amendments to the official map will be made when the boundaries of the general permit are changed.	
	Permitted uses include greenbelts, trails, boardwalks, subsistence, recreational uses, or other accessory uses that do not require the use of fill material.	



Future Land Use Designation

- Single- and Two-Family Residential Neighborhood
- Multi-Use Neighborhood
- Commercial/Civic Center
- Community Infrastructure

- Industrial/Heavy Commercial
- Public Open Space

Zoning Designation

- Preservation

City of Bethel Parcel Boundary



0 0.13 0.25 0.5 Miles

Future Land Use Plan Map

City of Bethel Comprehensive Plan



Date: July 2023

Figure 2

As discussed above, the updated Future Land Use Plan Map emphasizes that denser (and generally more affordable) housing development should be located near the commercial and civic center of Bethel. This commercial and civic center is mostly the older core of Bethel, which has primarily General Use or PLI zoning. In order to encourage the use of newer and more focused zoning districts (including Neighborhood Commercial, Downtown Commercial, and the proposed higher-density residential district), which align better with the updated Future Land Use Plan Map, the General Use zone should be phased out of use. This will give the City more ability to shape the types and locations of development in the future. There is still flexibility through the use of conditional use permits where applicable.

As Bethel continues to expand, there will likely be more commercial and civic development needed to support farther-out residential development. The definitions provided in Table 3 above help describe the mix of uses intended for residential areas, along with guidance for where commercial uses could be located relative to the residential (such as along major roads). This will help commercial and residential development support each other but remain compatible.



GOAL 5: Using the Future Land Use Plan Map and its land use designations, encourage future development to have an organization of uses that is compatible.

Strategy 1: Implement and raise awareness about the Future Land Use Plan Map and how it is used.

Action A: Add the Future Land Use Plan Map to the City's GIS maps. PL

Action B: Post the explanation of Zoning versus Future Land Use Plan Map from this plan, as well as the table with Future Land Use designations, definitions, and implementing districts, to the Planning Department website. PL

Action C: Use the Future Land Use Plan Map as the basis for initiating discussions with landowners that could potentially develop their land in the priority development area. PL

Strategy 2: Create a working group to alter code for zoning designations so that future development is more strategically organized.

Action A: Create a working group to assist the City Planner on potential changes to zoning code that could be brought forward to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval. PL

Action B: Create an organized table for all uses and all zoning districts, clarifying which uses are permitted, and which require additional permitting or are not permitted. PL

Action C: Consider eliminating the General Use (GU) zone. PL

Action D: Once the new Multifamily Residential zone is created (see Goal 2, Strategy 1, Action B), consider altering the traditional R zoning district to emphasize its focus on a less dense model that would encourage single-family and duplex development. PL

Action E: Consider City-led rezones to help phase out the GU district and assign more specific zones (including newly implemented zoning districts) to applicable areas. PL

Action F: Examine the list of uses that require conditional use permits for all zoning districts and consider changes based on the intent of each district; the changes could be brought forward to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval. PL

3.5 GIS Mapping

GIS stands for Geographic Information Systems. Using contemporary GIS software, there are infinite possibilities of spatial information and maps that can be created and shared online. Many entities with a major stake in land within Bethel may already use GIS to track spatial data, including ONC, BNC, AVCP, BIA, and ADFG. The City already uses GIS as well but is currently working on the ability to share GIS information with the public online; the first GIS map planned to be released is the Current Zoning map.

Once each property within the City is represented in this digital space, any additional information can be added, including land use, ownership, address numbers, and more. Accessing the information will be much easier for the Planning Department, the Planning Commission, developers, members of the public, and anyone else who may need to reference it. This is a tool that is available and growing in many other communities and can make land use processes much clearer and more efficient.

GOAL 6: Make spatial information and maps available to the public online using GIS.

Strategy 1: Publish online GIS maps that provide information that was identified as the highest priority for stakeholders.

Action A: Publish the GIS version of the Zoning Map online. PL

Action B: Publish an online, interactive GIS map that can provide property lines, zoning, street addresses, and ownership information (when available). PL

Action C: Publish an online GIS version of the Future Land Use Plan Map. PL

Strategy 2: The Planning Department can continue to add to the GIS maps used internally or available to the public online, based on suggestions made by the community.

Action A: Create a map or maps showing easements for trails, rights-of-way, and utilities. PL

Action B: Create a map that shows wetlands, stream or floodplain setbacks, contaminated sites, or other limitations to development related to preservation. PL

Action C: Explore opportunities to collaborate with other entities with local GIS data (such as ONC, BNC, AVCP, BIA, ADFG), forming a joint database. PL



CHAPTER 4

Local Transportation

4: Local Transportation

4.1 Introduction

The primary mechanism for transportation planning decisions in Bethel is the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The LRTP is intended to be revised every five years and used in conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan. Based on traffic analysis and extensive public input, it provides more specific transportation engineering and planning guidance for the City. Each time the LRTP is revised, it should be reviewed by relevant committees and commissions, as well as City Council, and then be adopted as ordinance to help ensure it is implemented.

The most recent LRTP was fully prepared and finalized in 2020, but never officially adopted. It should be adopted by the City Council so that it can be publicly shared and used.

Future LRTP revisions should continue to involve extensive public input, as the LRTP informs what maintenance will be prioritized, along with new potential transportation facilities including roads, trails, and port facilities. The City should educate the community that the LRTP is a main opportunity to specifically provide input on transportation planning projects and needs.

GOAL 1: Use the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) to guide all local transportation facility planning.

Strategy 1: Emphasize the LRTP process and recommendations in Bethel.

Action A: Adopt the 2020 Draft LRTP. **CM**

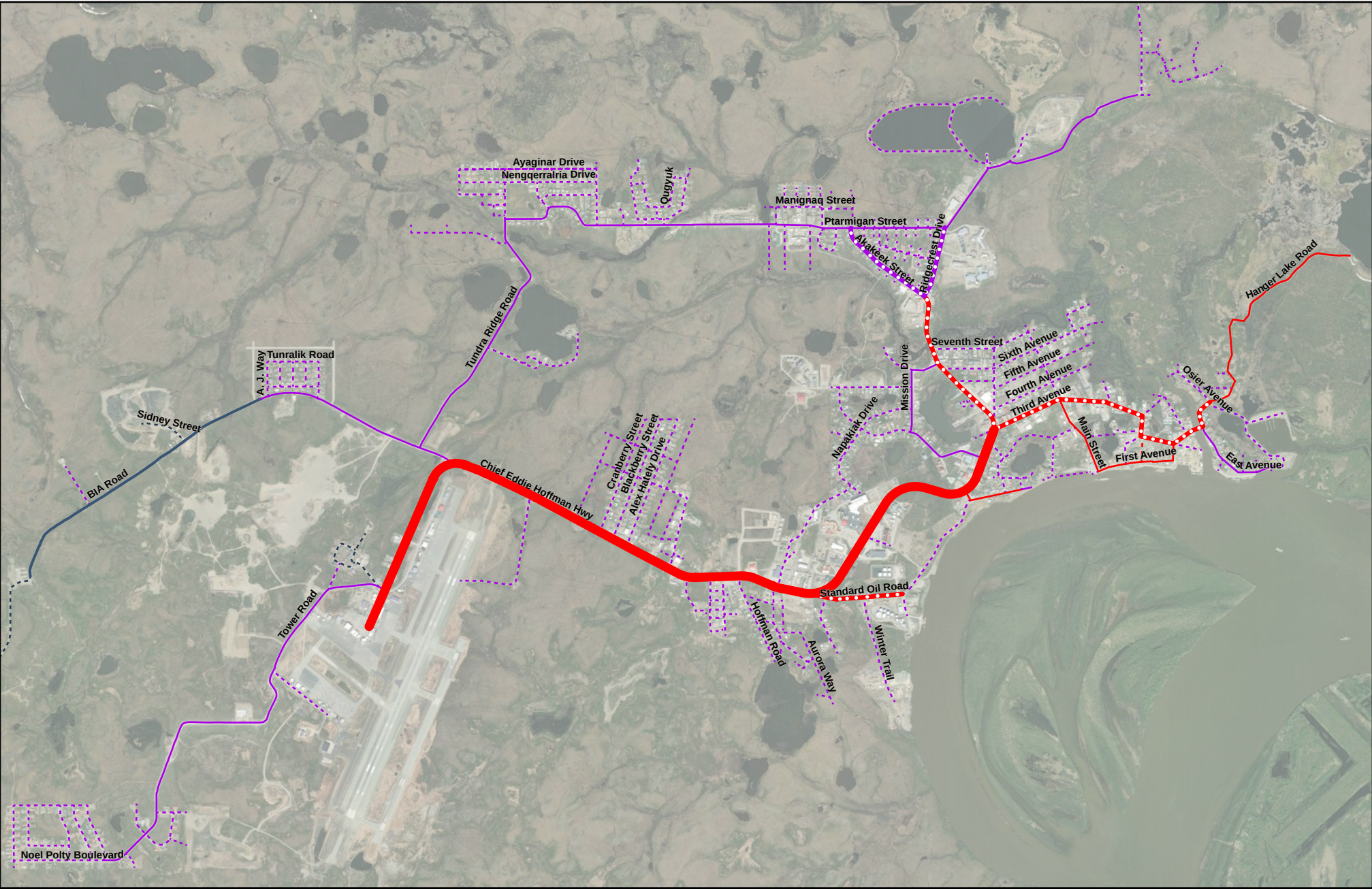
Action B: Every five years, revisit (through a public process) and update the LRTP. **CM**

Action C: Coordinate with other organizations that prepare transportation planning documents for the area, including DOT&PF and ONC, to find overlaps and collaboration opportunities. **CM**

4.2 Road System

As shown in the Road Classification and Maintenance Map on the next page, most roads in Bethel are classified as “collectors” or “local” roads, which refers to a relatively low amount of traffic (compared to major roads in places like Anchorage). Most are City-maintained and surfaced with gravel. Some of the major roads, including the Chief Eddie Hoffman Highway (the only Minor Arterial and the only Alaska State Highway in Bethel), are paved and maintained by the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public

Facilities (DOT&PF). Road maintenance is an ongoing funding and capacity challenge in Bethel, so this section has many action items focused on improving maintenance procedures to be more effective and efficient. After all, road maintenance is critical to public health and safety, and finding better ways to address issues such as dust and drainage in the longer term must continue to be priorities for the City.



Road Classification		Current Road Management Responsibility	
	Minor Arterial		State Highway Agency
	Major Collector		City or Municipal Agency
	Minor Collector		Federal Agency
	Local		

Road Classification and Management

City of Bethel Comprehensive Plan

DOWL

Date: July 2023

Figure 3

0 0.13 0.25 0.5 Miles

GOAL 2: Plan for an organized, proactive approach to surface transportation facility maintenance.

Strategy 1: Clarify surface transportation facility maintenance responsibilities.

Action A: Building on publicly available DOT&PF maps, create a maintenance responsibility map for all transportation facilities in Bethel (including roads and trails). PW

Action B: Maintain copies of maintenance agreements for transportation facilities that are not solely under City jurisdiction (such as DOT&PF roads or private facilities). CM

Action C: Work with DOT&PF to update existing state road MOUs, including exploring the possibility of the City assuming responsibility for maintenance of DOT&PF-managed roads in Bethel. CM

Strategy 2: Identify and address key transportation facility maintenance issues.

Action A: Prioritize identifying and implementing the most effective ways to control dust on gravel roads, shoulders, and trails, such as watering, emulsifiers, chip sealing, or other surface treatments. PW

Action B: Regularly inspect roads for major potholes that need to be filled / grated, and complete maintenance work as needed. PW

Action C: Regularly inspect transportation facilities for overgrowth, blockage, or freezing culverts and other drainage facilities, and complete maintenance work as needed. PW

Action D: As part of the snow removal prioritization plan, incorporate sites for storing snow, to avoid large berms building up within the road ROW. PW

Action E: Monitor City signage to ensure it meets public needs for wayfinding and safety. Maintain areas around signs to ensure that visibility is not impacted by vegetation overgrowth, snow/ice cover, vandalism, or other issues. PW

Action F: Enforce the removal of ROW encroachments that hinder road maintenance operations. PW

Strategy 3: Establish improved systems to track maintenance operations.

Action A: Raise awareness about the Report a Problem feature on the City website that should be used to report road maintenance needs. PW

Action B: Investigate and consider implementing a software program to track maintenance operations. PW IT

Action C: Create a typical maintenance schedule based on expected work needed on a seasonal basis, as well as best practices for responding to maintenance needs. PW

Action D: Create a map of all City transportation supporting elements such as signage, lighting, culverts, other drainage systems, etc. PW

Strategy 4: Create a prioritized City road maintenance plan.

Action A: Create a prioritized City road maintenance plan, and incorporate it into the transportation facility funding strategy and Capital Improvement Plan (see Goal 6 below). PW

Action B: Identify and prioritize more major road rehabilitation projects, and incorporate them into the transportation facility funding strategy (see Goal 6 below). PW

Strategy 5: Design new and rehabilitated road and other transportation facilities to proactively minimize maintenance needs.

Action A: Continually evaluate materials for road surfacing and other transportation facility construction to improve quality/durability and reduce dust, such as chip sealing, emulsifiers, or other innovative construction methods. ^{PW}

Action B: As paving technology continues to improve and become more available, use paved surfaces instead of gravel for new or rehabilitated roads of collector classification and above. ^{PW}

Action C: Improve the implementation of adequate drainage facilities, keeping in mind maintenance needs. ^{PW}

Action D: At the same time as undertaking road rehabilitation projects, assess whether there is additional ROW needed or encroachments that need to be addressed; address these as part of the design process. ^{PW}

Besides maintenance of existing roads, planning new connections to support current and future development is also an important consideration. The road system in Bethel has developed in response to the relatively spread-out development patterns described in Chapter 3 – Housing and Land Use. Large areas in the middle and western parts of town remain undeveloped, leaving a gap in the transportation network, with a particular lack of north-south connections. This creates issues for access, efficiency of travel, and emergency response; it is also tied to maintenance issues, as heavy and concentrated traffic wears down roads more quickly and makes it difficult for the City to close certain key roads for maintenance.

Tundra Ridge Road has recently been undergoing formalization and construction to provide a connection between the northwest residential areas along Ptarmigan Street and the airport area along the highway. The previous LRTP and Comprehensive Plan also recommended to connect the highway north through the central undeveloped area of Bethel (known as the “Donut Hole”), connecting to the Fitness Center and all the way to Ptarmigan Street. Not only would these new connections support current land uses, but they

may also help make new development more feasible in areas where it couldn’t be considered previously.

The map on the next page shows an updated version of the Transportation Priority Projects map from the 2020 Draft LRTP. As shown, some projects have been started or completed since the original map was created. Other projects have moved up the priority list. As part of the action items in this chapter, the City will identify new projects to add to this living list / map going forward. It is important to note that the routes shown on the Transportation Priority Projects Map are for planning purposes only; routes could change as these potential connections are studied more closely as part of a design process. A design process would involve more engineering and environmental considerations as well as assessing ROW property acquisition feasibility.

Surface Transportation Priority Projects

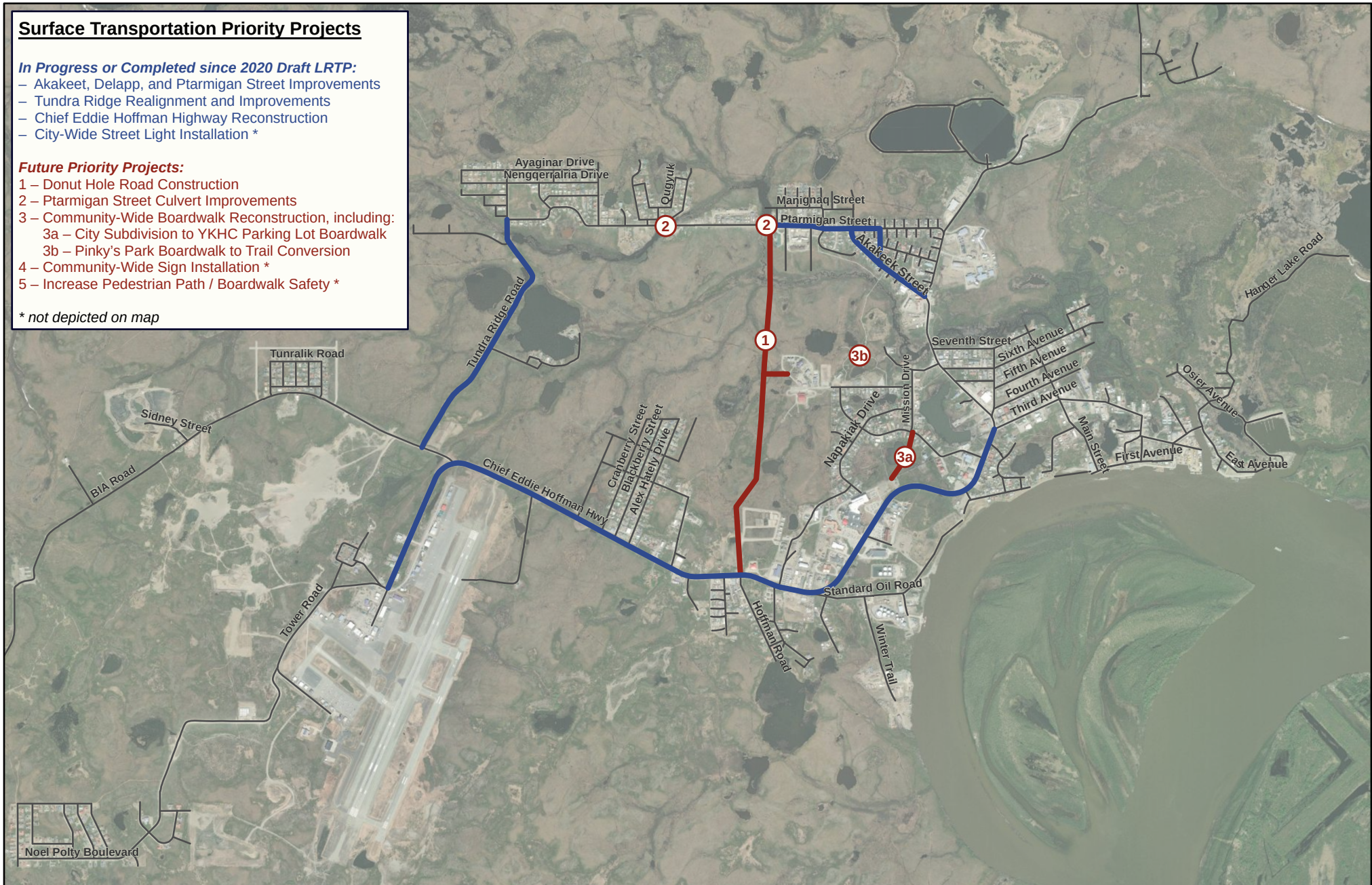
In Progress or Completed since 2020 Draft LRTP:

- Akakeet, Delapp, and Ptarmigan Street Improvements
- Tundra Ridge Realignment and Improvements
- Chief Eddie Hoffman Highway Reconstruction
- City-Wide Street Light Installation *

Future Priority Projects:

- 1 – Donut Hole Road Construction
- 2 – Ptarmigan Street Culvert Improvements
- 3 – Community-Wide Boardwalk Reconstruction, including:
 - 3a – City Subdivision to YKHC Parking Lot Boardwalk
 - 3b – Pinky's Park Boardwalk to Trail Conversion
- 4 – Community-Wide Sign Installation *
- 5 – Increase Pedestrian Path / Boardwalk Safety *

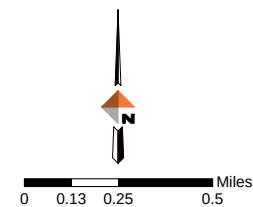
* not depicted on map



Project Type

- In Progress or Completed since 2020 Draft LRTP
- Future Priority Projects

— Road



Transportation Priority Projects

City of Bethel Comprehensive Plan



Date: July 2023

Figure 4

GOAL 3: Develop the surface transportation network to reduce travel times, alleviate congestion, and support future development.

Strategy 1: Identify missing links in the surface transportation network.

- Action A:** Track traffic data, population and traffic forecasts, and significant future development plans and use these to assist with the identification and prioritization of surface transportation projects through LRTP updates. *PW*
- Action B:** Starting with the Priority Projects map in the 2020 LRTP, create a map that shows new road connections that may be needed in the future. *PW*
- Action C:** Based on locations of likely future land development, add locations of potential future road and other surface transportation connections that would support connectivity for this additional development. *PW*

Strategy 2: Use the LRTP to prioritize and guide implementation of new surface transportation construction projects.

- Action A:** Based on the map, create a prioritized list of new surface transportation construction projects. *PW*
- Action B:** Incorporate the prioritized list of new transportation projects into the funding strategy – see *Goal 6 below*. *PW*
- Action C:** Working with key stakeholders and the community, use the five-year LRTP update cycle as an opportunity to revisit and update the prioritized list of new road projects. *PW*

4.3 Connectivity for All Users

The surface transportation network in Bethel includes a lot more than just vehicular transportation on roads. Bethel's roads and other routes are shared by a wide variety of users, and ensuring the safety of all users (including "motorized" and "non-motorized" users) is a top priority.

Many Bethel residents use non-motorized modes of transportation (such as walking, bicycling, etc. – basically any mode besides vehicles driving on the road) to get around town. There is a non-motorized transportation "system" made up of a combination of formal trails and boardwalks, paths or shoulders alongside roads, shared roads, and an infinite number of other informal routes people may use depending on their mode of transportation and/or the season. Non-motorized transportation is not always the most comfortable option in Bethel, as distances can be long and weather conditions can be harsh in the dark, cold winters and windy, dusty summers. To support non-motorized transportation in the future, community members had many suggestions to improve access, safety, and comfort.

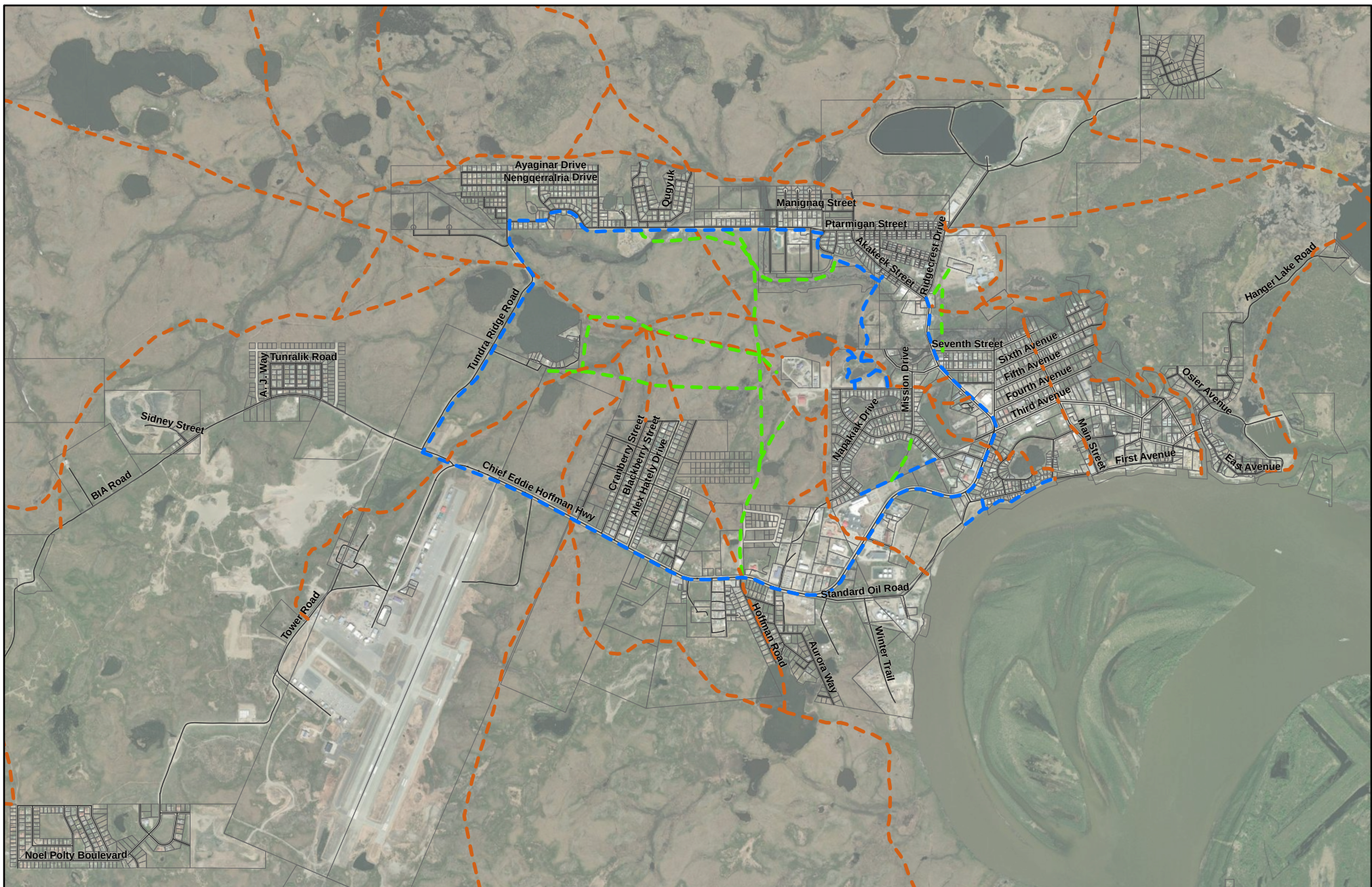
Progress has been made in designing reconstructed or new streets to provide safe and comfortable access for non-motorized users in addition to drivers on the road. Nationwide, the U.S. Department of Transportation has been increasingly emphasizing safety for all users with their Safe System Approach and grant programs such as Safe Streets and Roads for All, which provides funding opportunities for safety improvements ranging from city-wide safety action plans down to smaller projects like pedestrian safety improvements. A related concept growing in importance in transportation planning is Complete Streets, which emphasizes design features that contribute to a safe, convenient, or comfortable travel experience for all users;

transportation projects in Bethel are required to incorporate Complete Streets as part of BMC 12.05.

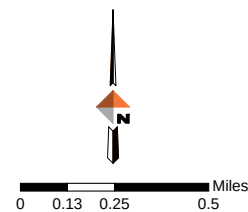
When it comes to trails, some projects are more complicated due to unclear ownership or maintenance responsibilities or other challenges. As such, many of the action items in this section focus on formalizing the trail system when possible and helpful to its users.

The map on the following page shows existing facilities that are formally established in blue (including paths/trails, boardwalks, and designated shoulders intended for non-motorized use) and potential future routes in green. The potential future routes shown are a starting point for future trail planning based on routes that the community has already been discussing. The rest of the routes shown in orange are "Approximate / Unconfirmed Snowmachine Routes," and attempt to paint a picture of common routes that some people may use, including to travel outside Bethel; it is important to note that many of these likely cross private properties. Other than showing approximate snowmachine routes, the map included in this plan does not distinguish between which facilities are dedicated to particular users and which facilities are multi-use; action items under Goal 5 in this chapter provide a roadmap for the City to create a more sophisticated trails map that can provide more detailed information and evolve over time.

In future revisions of the LRTP and through coordination with the Community Parks and Recreation Committee (which has a focus on the trail system in Bethel), the City should continue to edit the trail system map (as discussed in action items below) and identify its priorities for non-motorized facility improvements.



- Existing Formal Facilities
- Approximate/Informal Snowmachine Routes
- Potential New Routes
- City of Bethel Parcel Boundary



Trail System

City of Bethel Comprehensive Plan



Date: July 2023

Figure 5

GOAL 4: Design new and reconstructed streets with a focus on providing safe and comfortable routes for all transportation modes and all users.

Strategy 1: Throughout the local transportation system, increase the focus on safety for all users.

Action A: Regularly evaluate crash data; pedestrian, bicyclist, and motorist use; and other road safety data to identify areas for improvement. *PW*

Action B: Using community input, identify locations (especially along key routes for non-motorized users) that need safety improvements such as crosswalks, additional lighting, and/or signage. *PW*

Action C: Plan safety improvements as individual projects and/or as part of other transportation projects, keeping in mind that federal Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) funding may be available. *PW*

Strategy 2: Ensure adequate ROW for sharing the road and implementing Complete Streets.

Action A: Ensure that new ROWs created as part of subdivisions meet minimum width requirements per code. *PW*

Action B: When plats are submitted, require the dedication of additional ROW when the current ROW does not meet width requirements. *PL*

Action C: Consider developing a set of typical roadway cross-sections for reference in City or private development projects involving new or reconstructed roads. *PW*

Strategy 3: When implementing Complete Streets, prioritize the most safe and comfortable facilities for non-motorized transportation that space will allow.

Action A: Ensure that Complete Streets (BMC 12.05) is being considered and used to the extent possible in the design of new and reconstructed roads. *PW*

Action B: When deciding the location and type of non-motorized facilities to be included in a Complete Streets project, prioritize a separated pathway or boardwalk on at least one side over a shoulder for non-motorized users, when possible. *PW*

When there is insufficient space for a separated pathway or boardwalk, create a shoulder or shoulders for walkers, bicyclists, and other non-motorized users. *PW*

Action C: Along existing and new shoulders for non-motorized transportation, implement measures to discourage the shoulders' use as parking or an unofficial turn lane. *PW*

Action D: If a shoulder or separated path for non-motorized users will be gravel, consider implementing methods to reduce dust impacts. *PW*

GOAL 5: Improve and expand the trail system.

Strategy 1: Gradually and as funding is available, improve safety and comfort on the trail system.

Action A: Continually monitor and test new trail building techniques and materials that are affordable, easy to maintain, and suitable for the frequently changing character of the tundra ground. PW

Action B: Transition Bethel trail building methods (including reconstruction of existing routes) away from high-cost and difficult-to-maintain boardwalks and towards less expensive surface-level trails with footbridges and ramps to cross streams and pipes where necessary. PW

Action C: Add pedestrian amenities such as lighting and benches to more frequently used non-motorized routes. PW PR

Action D: Add amenities for bicyclists at parks and recreation facilities, such as bike racks and bike “fix-it” stations. PW PR

Strategy 2: Address trail and boardwalk maintenance needs more efficiently.

Action A: Encourage the use of the Report a Problem feature on the City website for the public to report trail and boardwalk maintenance issues, including hazards or vandalism. PW

Action B: Initiate an Adopt-a-Trail and/or boardwalk and trail maintenance volunteer group to assist when City maintenance staff does not have capacity to respond to trail / boardwalk maintenance issues. PW PR

Action C: As maintenance issues are reported and repairs are made, record any recurring maintenance issues (types of issues or problematic areas). PW

Action D: Alter trail maintenance and construction best practices over time to mitigate common maintenance issues. PW

Strategy 3: Clarify the existing City-managed trail system.

Action A: Create an updated and easy-to-read map of existing formal City trails. PR

Action B: On the City trails map, identify which users and modes of transportation are allowed on each trail. PR

Action C: On the trails map, include a layer that shows important community “centers” such as the hospital and other health centers, schools, parks, the Fitness Center, the library, and others. PR

Action D: Make the trails map and information (including type of facility, users allowed, accessibility information, and distances) easily available on the City website. PR

Action E: Post signs with the trails map and information at key points within the trail system, such as at parks and recreation facilities. PR

Strategy 4: Expand the trail system by formalizing popular trails and adding new trails.

Action A: For internal planning purposes, mark popular but informal trails on the map in dotted lines. PR

Action B: Based on community input and gaps in pedestrian access to important community “centers,” add other potential new trail / boardwalk routes to the map in dotted lines. PR

Action C: Investigate what would be needed to obtain easements to formalize informal and potential new trails. PW

Action D: Coordinate with owners of properties that have informal or potential new trails through them to obtain easements or agreements. PW

Action E: For trails within or through larger properties, consider forming agreements or partnerships for private management / maintenance of the trails. PW



Vehicles and pedestrians sharing a gravel road in Bethel.

4.4 Funding for Facility Construction and Maintenance

Transportation projects are complex and often span many years to plan, design, fund, and construct. The City must constantly adapt and prioritize to be able to fund both maintenance and new construction projects. Annually, the City prepares a Capital Improvement Plan, including prioritized projects to be funded by the City general fund. The City also collaborates with contractors and engineering support staff to prepare cost estimates and identify other funding that may be needed, such as from federal, state, or other sources.

Depending on funding sources, additional requirements and regulations from state or federal agencies may come into play and impact project cost and community impacts, such as the potential need for right-of-way acquisitions; the Grant Manager plays a critical role in identifying outside funding sources and tracking the additional considerations that may accompany them.

GOAL 6: Strategically seek funding for transportation facility construction and maintenance.

Strategy 1: Leverage opportunities available in Alaska to secure potential funding sources for implementing transportation projects.

Action A: Work with Alaska Municipal League and DOT&PF to use the Alaska Transportation Funding Opportunity Hub to identify potential funding sources for different types of surface transportation projects, and to prioritize Bethel's projects through the Hub Intake Survey. **GM**

Action B: Continue to leverage existing transportation construction support and funding through collaboration with other local entities, such as ONC. **CM**

Strategy 2: Create a prioritized list of all transportation facility construction and maintenance projects.

Action A: Combine the lists of maintenance / rehabilitation and new transportation facility projects created for roads and trails, and add details on estimated design and construction cost and grant-related considerations. **GM**

Action B: Order the list based on priority and when each project should be completed. **GM**

Strategy 3: Pursue funding to complete priority projects.

Action A: Continue to review priority projects annually to select those that could be funded through the Capital Improvement Plan. **GM**

Action B: Nominate priority projects for state owned / managed facilities to the STIP, and nominate City owned / managed facilities to other state programs for federal funding such as the Community Transportation Program (CTP). **GM**

Action C: Apply for grants to fund other priority projects, focusing on time-sensitive funding opportunities. **GM**

4.5 Public Transportation

The Bethel Transit System is an important means of transportation for those without vehicles, and its service should be improved and expanded in the future. (While there are many taxi cabs available to serve community and visitor needs, the bus is much less expensive.) Community members noted that while the Transit Manager currently collects some passenger data, there could be opportunities to collect more targeted data and start using it to inform decisions about priority changes as well as to support potential grant applications.

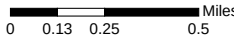
Over time, the transit system has already been making changes in response to community requests and ridership patterns. At times there were two routes instead of one, and some stops have been added and/or removed. The map on the next page includes current

Bethel Transit System routes and stops, as well as two potential new stops that have been commonly requested by community members: the airport and the fitness center. Both of these stops have been tested in the past, but there may be opportunities to improve their implementation if reestablished. Changes to the road system may influence routes, and more multifamily development in Bethel may help support shorter headways (time between buses at each particular stop). As more grant funding is secured, new buses can be purchased, both to replace buses that are quickly worn out on Bethel's difficult road conditions and to help expand routes to farther out areas like Kasayulie.



Bethel Transit System sheltered bus stop.



● Bus Stop ● Potential Future Bus Stop — Bus Route  	Transit System City of Bethel Comprehensive Plan  Date: July 2023 Figure 6
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GOAL 7: Improve the public transit system to be more convenient and responsive to the community's needs.

Strategy 1: Use data collection to inform changes to the transit system or back up capital needs and potential grant applications.

Action A: Expand data collected on ridership to reflect times of day and days of the week. TM

Action B: Expand data collected on ridership to reflect how many passengers enter or exit the bus at each stop. TM

Action C: Create a comment form on the City website's transit page to collect questions, comments, or issues reported by riders. TM

Strategy 2: Improve access to information about the transit system.

Action A: Post signs with schedules and routes at bus stops and inside key community facilities. TM

Action B: Continue to periodically print transit information in the newspaper, and also consider printing it in the City newsletter. TM

Action C: Incorporate transit information into visitor information on the City's website. TM

Action D: When there are updates to routes or schedules, share within the City to be posted on City social media (as well as in the newspaper and City newsletter to continue to remain accessible to those not using social media). TM

Strategy 3: Make changes or expansions to the transit services provided.

Action A: Consider adding a stop at the airport or partnering with another organization to add another transit link between the airport and the central city. TM

Action B: Annually, evaluate altering the transit route(s) to include additional stops that are commonly requested by community members, such as the Fitness Center. TM

Action C: Review ridership data and/or community comments to consider running the transit system later into the evening. TM

Action D: Consider decreasing headways from one hour to half an hour, either throughout the day or during times of peak use. TM

Strategy 4: Maintain and improve the transit fleet.

Action A: Use a database to track maintenance needs and expected lifespans of buses and make repairs and/or replace buses as needed. TM

Action B: Consider adding features to buses to improve accessibility and convenience. TM

4.6 Other Local Transportation Links

While roads and trails connect people with the places they live, work, and recreate in Bethel, sites need adequate driveways and parking facilities to avoid negative impacts on the adjacent roadways

and parcels. The actions in this section focus on parking facilities and the routes non-motorized travelers use to access their destinations.

GOAL 8: Evaluate site development codes to better support safe access for all transportation modes.

Strategy 1: Provide for adequate and safe parking facilities and practices.

- Action A:** Examine code to make sure appropriate numbers of parking spaces are provided for each type of land use. (If changes are warranted, see Action C below.) PL
- Action B:** Facilitate shared parking between adjacent properties and uses when appropriate. PL
- Action C:** If changes are warranted to parking requirements or shared parking provisions in code, provide changes to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval. PL
- Action D:** Using signage and/or announcements via various City channels, clarify locations where street parking is not permitted in areas with compliance issues. PW
- Action E:** Continue inter-departmental collaboration to enforce parking violations that impact road safety and maintenance. PD PW

Strategy 2: Provide for safe access for vehicles and non-motorized users.

- Action A:** Consider consolidating driveway and parking design provisions in code or creating a separate driveway standards worksheet. PL
- Action B:** Review commercial site design code to identify opportunities to improve safety provisions such as those encouraged by Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. PL

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CHAPTER 5

Regional Transportation

5: Regional Transportation

Like many communities in Alaska, Bethel is not accessible by any road system and is isolated from surrounding villages. However, Bethel has a critical role as the air and water transportation hub of the Y-K Delta region for both people and goods.

5.1 Airport

Practically everyone traveling to or from any community in the Y-K Delta must travel through the Bethel Airport at some point in their journey; as such, Bethel is sometimes nicknamed the “gateway to the region.” Bethel’s airport is typically ranked the second-busiest general aviation airport in the state, and it is owned and operated by DOT&PF. The airport in Bethel includes an Alaska Airlines terminal as well as other smaller airlines serving the region.

While DOT&PF manages airport facilities and operations, and individual airlines leasing within the airport have control over their own facilities, the City has an interest in participating in planning for the airport and surrounding area given its importance to the community.



GOAL 1: Create a well-functioning airport area for travelers and businesses.

Strategy 1: Facilitate efficient and organized access to the airport.

Action A: Between the City, DOT, and airline tenants leasing land and/or buildings on airport land, determine (and formalize in agreements if needed) which party is responsible for managing roads, parking, signage, and other elements within the airport area. **CM**

Action B: Advocate for clear loading and unloading areas for taxicabs and private vehicles at the main jet terminal. **PW**

Action C: Consider adding a transit stop around the airport. **TM**

Action D: Create a guide to transportation options available to/from the airport with a map of where to access them, to be distributed and displayed in buildings for the passenger airline(s). **CM***

Action E: Advocate for more wayfinding signage in the airport area to direct parking and pick-up / drop-off traffic, as well as pedestrian traffic between different airlines, parking areas, and other amenities. **PW**

Strategy 2: Facilitate adequate parking at the airport.

Action A: Once parking management is determined, advocate for exploring the potential of designating short-term and long-term parking lots and an associated parking fee system with time limits. **CM***

Action B: Once parking management is determined, advocate for the completion of a parking study to evaluate whether more parking is needed near the main jet terminal and if so, make plans to provide additional parking space. **CM***

Strategy 3: Support the development of relevant industrial uses and commercial amenities within the airport area.

Action A: Coordinate with DOT&PF to determine if an Airport zoning overlay district is needed, and what this overlay district would look like. **PL**

GOAL 2: Support DOT&PF in airport operations and planning.

Strategy 1: As requested by the FAA and/or DOT&PF, take actions that support smooth and secure airport operations.

Action A: Examine FAA requirements and recommendations when reviewing potential land uses near the airport. **PL**

Action B: If a new landfill or sewage lagoon is constructed, place it as far from the airport as practicable to avoid attracting wildlife that could be harmed, damage airport equipment, and disrupt operations. **LM PW**

Action C: Coordinate with the airport management / DOT&PF to schedule security drills. **CM**

Strategy 2: Participate in planning for the future of the airport.

Action A: Maintain regular coordination (such as quarterly meetings) with DOT&PF and representatives from airlines operating at the airport to track near- and long-term plans impacting the Bethel airport. **CM**

Action B: Encourage public participation in airport planning projects so that the City and community's needs are factored into plans. **PL**

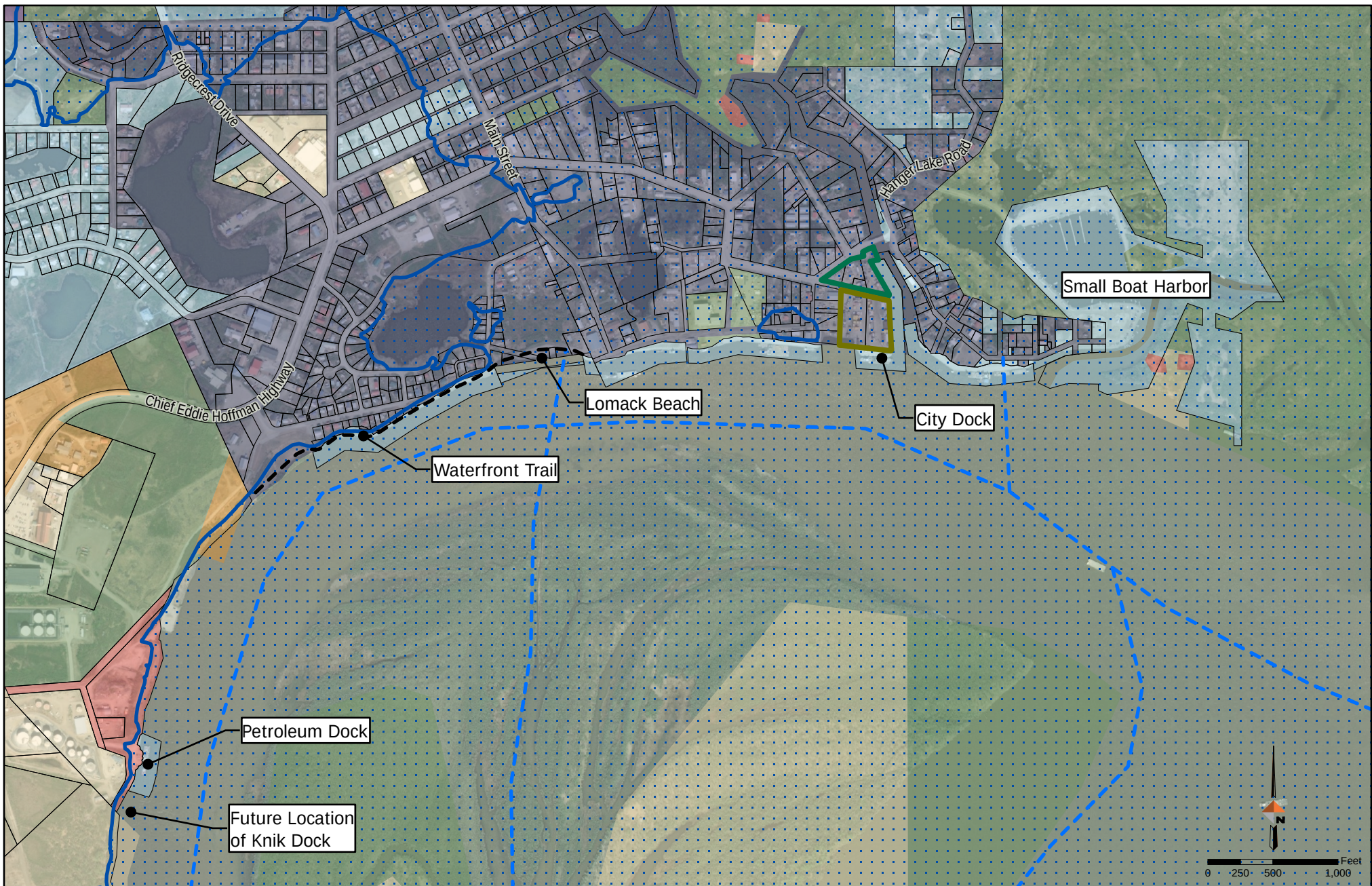


5.2 Port and River

The Port of Bethel, managed by the City, is the only port in Southwest Alaska that is not dependent on high tides for access; as such, it is the shipping hub for the region. The Port facilities include the Port Office, City Dock (for freight) and secure cargo storage yard, the small boat harbor, Lomack Beach (including float plane access), the petroleum port, and the seawall (which mitigates erosion along the riverbank). The City works closely with USACE to track changes in the course of the river that could impact all of this critical regional infrastructure and by extension access to the entire region; the City also works with USACE on dredging, studies, seawall maintenance, and other essential infrastructure improvements and repairs at the Port.

Besides the critical commercial and industrial uses of the cargo and petroleum port facilities (including 15-20 freight barges per year and smaller river barges to carry goods farther upriver), the Port facilities including the small boat harbor and Lomack Beach are vital to commercial fishing and subsistence activities, as well as transportation for the general public, government agencies, businesses, and non-profit organizations.

Given heavy use of Port of Bethel infrastructure and changes in the river, there is consistently more maintenance and planning needed.



General Ownership (1997 City of Bethel Comprehensive Plan)

- ANCSA^
- Bethel Native Corporation*
- City of Bethel
- Federal
- Private
- State of Alaska
- Information Unavailable

^includes ANCSA 14c1/c2 and ANCSA c3

*a small number of properties are also part federal or private ownership

Ownership from Other Sources (Unverified)

- City of Bethel
- State of Alaska

- Waterfront Trail
- Ice Road
- 100-Year Floodplain [FEMA]
- City of Bethel Parcel Boundary

Waterfront

City of Bethel Comprehensive Plan



Date: July 2023

Figure 7

GOAL 3: Study and plan for potential changes to the river's course that may impact port operations.

Strategy 1: Keep up with regular dredging operations.

Action A: Continue to complete hydrographic studies every two years, as required by USACE. **PO**

Action B: Continue to dredge Brown's Slough annually. **PO**

Action C: As needed and based on the hydrographic studies, dredge the river between the petroleum port and the entrance to the small boat harbor. **PO**

Strategy 2: Plan for potential future changes in the Kuskokwim River's course to mitigate potential impacts.

Action A: Request assistance from USACE for funding and conducting a feasibility study for a potential navigation study of the river. **PO**

Action B: Following the feasibility study, complete a navigation study to determine how changes in the river may impact larger ships' ability to access Bethel's port. **PO**

Action C: Continue to work with USACE to monitor the sea wall conditions to determine if, and at what rate, the river is undercutting the sea wall. **PO**

Action D: Develop an action plan for studies, monitoring, and maintenance activities needed to mitigate riverfront erosion and ensure navigability of the river around Bethel's port. **PO**

Action E: Incorporate the Port's mitigation efforts into the City's regularly-updated Hazard Mitigation Plan (*discussed further in Chapter 8 – People & Economy*). **PO**

Strategy 3: Collaborate with other major waterfront property owners on riverfront management efforts.

Action A: As part of coordination with the private entity constructing a new cargo dock near the petroleum port in Bethel, explore partnership opportunities to obtain funding for hydrographic or navigation studies, sea wall monitoring, and maintenance or dredging efforts. **PO**

Action B: If other major waterfront developments occur in Bethel, coordinate with the property owners / developers to incorporate measures to mitigate erosion and participate in City efforts to monitor and take action according to changes in the river. **PO**

Action C: Coordinate with other property owners along the Kuskokwim River to identify collaboration and cost-sharing opportunities for studies, dredging, and other maintenance. **PO**



Shipping containers on the City Dock and small boats in Browns Slough.

GOAL 4: Maintain adequate port infrastructure to support shipping operations.

Strategy 1: Efficiently manage port infrastructure maintenance and repairs.

Action A: Regularly inspect all public port infrastructure for a condition assessment and to predict future maintenance needs. **PO**

Action B: Create and maintain a list of maintenance needs at the port. **PO**

Action C: Prioritize the list, determine whether current maintenance staff have the skills and equipment to complete the work or if specialized contractors will be needed, and prepare cost estimates. **PO**

Action D: Pursue funding opportunities for more significant maintenance projects at the port, such as grants (which could be pursued in partnership with other entities such as tribal organizations), or partnership with private entities like Lynden. **PO**

Strategy 2: Identify new infrastructure that may be needed to improve port operations.

Action A: Coordinate with port management, current shipping operators, and other stakeholders to identify infrastructure needs to support current and future shipping operations. **PO**

Action B: As part of the regular LRTP process, document the port's existing conditions, issues, and needs; this would be used to create a prioritized list of infrastructure and maintenance needed. **PO**

Action C: Pursue funding opportunities for additional infrastructure expansions that would improve port operations, such as grants (which could be pursued in partnership with other entities such as tribal organizations), and partnership with private entities like Lynden. **PO**

GOAL 5: Maintain infrastructure to support the use of small boats and float planes for transportation, commerce, subsistence, and recreation.

Strategy 1: Maintain infrastructure for small boat users.

Action A: Regularly inspect the existing small boat harbor infrastructure and manage its use to help determine maintenance and/or expansion needs. **PO**

Action B: Consider developing additional parking at the small boat harbor. **PO**

Action C: Facilitate transit and taxi access to and from the small boat harbor by incorporating signage to direct passengers to appropriate loading areas. **PO**

Action D: Add any maintenance needs to the prioritized list created as part of Goal 4, Strategy 1 above. **PO**

Action E: Evaluate the costs associated with maintaining small boat harbor infrastructure and dredging. **PO**

Action F: Based on approximate yearly costs for maintenance as well as other longer-term projects that may need funding, consider gradual fee increases and/or creating new fees for various types of small boat harbor users (such as for businesses using the harbor, or vehicle parking fees) to help fund operations and improvements. **PO**

Strategy 2: Maintain infrastructure for float plane users.

Action A: Continue to place gravel on Lomack Beach to protect it from erosion associated with launching float planes. **PO**

Action B: Create a maintenance agreement with DOT&PF to clarify land and facility ownership and shared maintenance responsibility for Hangar Lake Road and the float plane docks at Hangar Lake. **PO**

Action C: Consider partnerships (with government agencies and/or private entities) or ways to levy user fees for float plane facilities on the river and lakes in and around Bethel to help fund erosion control measures. **PO**

5.3 Expanding Regional Access

As the transportation hub for the region, Bethel has an opportunity to play a leadership role in regional collaboration on transportation initiatives that can improve and expand the many ways people travel between Y-K Delta communities, including the ice road, trails, and

future opportunities for inter-community transit and new road development. Regular collaboration can help Bethel and its neighbors make connections and start sharing more ideas and funding for transportation projects that can benefit the entire region.

GOAL 6: Support the improvement and expansion of other modes of regional transportation.

Strategy 1: As the hub of regional transportation, organize a City-led regional transportation coordination group to plan routes, maintenance, and funding.

Action A: Establish a regional transportation coordination group, including DOT&PF, representatives from villages and tribal organizations, shipping companies, and transportation companies. **CM**

Action B: The group should meet regularly to discuss existing routes, maintenance responsibilities and issues, potential new routes or transportation methods, and grant opportunities. **CM**

Action C: Jointly create a funding strategy including participation from private entities as well as grant applications and pursuing tribal transportation and/or STIP funding. **GM**

Strategy 2: Work with the regional transportation coordination group to improve reliability of ice road maintenance.

Action A: Create a map of the typical ice road route, including all the villages it connects. **CM***

Action B: Create a typical snow-clearing schedule, including what party or parties are responsible for clearing and marking. **CM***

Action C: Collect data on past years' freezing and break up and monitor freezing, ice thickness, and break up each year. Share this data and changes over time to help reduce the risk of incidents where vehicles fall through the ice. **CM***

Strategy 3: Work with the regional transportation coordination group to improve the reliability of the trail network.

Action A: Work with the group and DOT&PF to develop a map of the most used trails between Bethel and the surrounding villages, including user groups, trail markers, hazards, and other landmarks. **CM***

Action B: Identify whether easements are needed for places where trails cross private property, and coordinate with property owners. **CM***

Action C: Create a regional trail maintenance strategy that is responsive to different seasons, various types of trail users (snowmachine versus ATV, for example), and changing conditions over time. **CM***

Strategy 4: Facilitate potential regional transit opportunities as they arise.

Action A: Coordinate with the hovercraft operator to determine if they may consider providing passenger transit again in the future. **CM***

Action B: If interest in a river (and/or ice road) transit or taxi service arises, explore how the City's port can help accommodate it. **PO**

Strategy 5: Explore potential road connections between Bethel, Oscarville, Napaskiak, and Napakiak.

Action A: Work specifically with Oscarville, Napaskiak, and Napakiak representatives in the transportation coordination group to gauge interest in pursuing surface road routes between each village and Bethel. **CM**

Action B: Explore partnership agreement opportunities to implement future road connections. **CM**



Passenger loading area in front of the Alaska Airlines terminal at the Bethel Airport.



CHAPTER 6

Utility Infrastructure

6: Utility Infrastructure

Contemporary homes need a network of utility services in order to function, including energy for electricity and heating, water and sewer service, internet access, and a way to dispose of solid waste. These utilities are central to quality of life. Providing the needed infrastructure can be challenging in remote communities like Bethel due to the lack of locally available materials and skilled labor, which has significant impacts on the cost of the infrastructure. However, updating infrastructure can bring savings and sustainability improvements.

6.1 Energy

Energy production in Bethel has historically relied on non-renewable, expensive methods such as diesel generators, which cost approximately 60 cents per kilowatt per hour. This is more than 300% higher than the national rate of approximately 14 cents. This high cost is added on top of an already high cost of living in Bethel including other essentials like housing, transportation, and groceries.

The Alaska Village Electric Cooperative (AVEC) is the largest source of energy for the region, and Bethel is AVEC's largest member community. As a member-owned rural electric cooperative, AVEC serves more than 50 remote member communities. Its Bethel power plant provides power to nearby communities of Oscarville and Napakiak in addition to Bethel.

The 2011 Comprehensive Plan outlined goals to reduce energy consumption, improve existing infrastructure, and develop new alternative energy sources to reduce costs. Stakeholders have stressed the importance of pursuing alternative energy sources; not only are they more environmentally sustainable, but they also will reduce costs in the long run.



A solar array near the Fitness Center in Bethel.

Since 2011, the following are some examples of progress made:

- Until 2014, Bethel electricity was provided by Bethel Utility Company (BUC, Inc.), a private, investor-owned utility, but the 2011 Comprehensive Plan identified a cooperative as the ideal model for Bethel. Now that AVEC provides energy since 2014, there may be more opportunities for regional coordination on alternative energy sources and infrastructure advancements.
- In 2014, one wind turbine capable of putting out 100 kW was constructed to help power the new Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Aquatic Health and Safety Center, which features a six-lane swimming pool, weight room, hot tub, and more for Bethel residents and surrounding communities. The wind turbine produces 40% of the facility's electricity.
- In 2020, a new 900 kilowatt-capacity wind turbine was constructed about 3.3 miles from the diesel-fired prime power plant. AVEC selected Bethel as the place to locate its first MW-range wind turbine due simply to the size of the grid. In its first 15

months of operation - October 2018 through December 2019 - it produced nearly 5% of all the power generated and consumed on the Bethel grid.

- In 2020, the 45-year-old power plant in Bethel was improved to maintain proper voltage regulation and provide more surge protection.

Stakeholders identified wind turbines, solar panels, hydroelectric facilities, natural gas, and small-scale nuclear power as avenues to pursue in order to diversify Bethel's energy sources away from diesel. The City can pursue integrating these energy sources for its own facilities, o. Even though the City is not responsible for electricity serving the community, the City should support AVEC system upgrades and alternative energy projects. For example, AVEC is interested in taking greater advantage of wind energy as Bethel experiences a significant amount of wind, so the City could help identify suitable sites for turbines or wind farms and help AVEC work through regulatory processes.



GOAL 1: Advance projects in Bethel to increase electricity production from alternative energy sources to reduce both costs and generation of greenhouse gases.

Strategy 1: Facilitate large-scale projects to introduce more alternative energy sources to the local network.

Action A: Assign a City “energy point person” to coordinate regularly with AVEC. **CM**

Action B: Working with AVEC, create a strategic plan that identifies ways for the City to support a transition to more alternative energy generation. **CM**

Action C: Create a guide to zoning code and permitting requirements that are applicable to alternative energy infrastructure such as wind turbines or solar panels, and work with AVEC to identify and propose changes to requirements that may create unnecessary barriers. **PL**

Action D: As part of the strategic plan discussed in Action B, identify the best locations in Bethel for wind, solar, or other alternative energy generation and storage, and examine City-owned sites for suitability. **PW**

Action E: Monitor and support AVEC in applying for grant opportunities for alternative energy generation and storage that could be implemented in Bethel. **GM**

Action F: Pursue partnerships with tribal entities to work together on grant applications and gain access to more potential funding. **GM**

Strategy 2: Update City facilities to be more energy efficient.

Action A: When updating existing City facilities or constructing new City facilities, design should consider including alternative energy sources, such as solar or wind power instead of diesel. **PW**



Water and sewer pipes serving homes in the Bethel Heights neighborhood.

6.2 Water and Sewer

Bethel currently has a mix of truck-hauled and piped water and sewer services. The truck-haul system serves approximately 1,100 residences, compared to approximately 500 served by piped water and sewer. Due to Bethel's high groundwater and discontinuous permafrost, pipes are installed above ground so they are better able to withstand ground movement.

The City is focused on upgrading to a fully piped system. Piped

water and sewer offer several advantages over the haul system, including improved public health, reduced road wear and safety concerns from haul trucks, and reduced risk of spills and leaks. The City experiences a chronic shortage of truck drivers, and operating the piped system costs the City about a third as much as the haul system. Residents generally prefer the unlimited capacity allowed by the piped system and support eliminating haul trucks from the roadways.

Recent price escalations of both materials and labor pushed the capital cost of water and sewer pipe construction to approximately \$2 million for every 1,000 feet, which could make future upgrades cost prohibitive for the City. However, piped water and sewer remain a top priority to reduce cost of living and improve quality of life for the City in the long run.

Since the 2011 Comprehensive Plan, the City has undertaken many water and sewer projects including:

- Extended and improved piped water and sewer in the Institutional Corridor (including facilities like the hospital and City Hall)
- New pumps, a generator, and a Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) mixer for the Main Lift Station
- Ongoing security improvements, including a fence around the City Subdivision Water Treatment Plant water tank
- Design of the Avenues Piped Water and Sewer project to serve 110 residences is underway, with construction anticipated to begin in 2023.

The Bethel Heights-Martina Oscar Piped Water and Sewer project, which includes new services to 25 houses, expansion of the Bethel Heights Water Treatment Plant, and repairs to existing pipes (in

response to frost jacking), is expected to begin in 2024. The City also implemented corrosion control measures to address water discoloration concerns in Bethel Heights.

Based on the most recent rate study, a new rate structure could be implemented to address the cost disparity between piped and hauled service. Looking ahead to Bethel's goal of a fully piped system, in 2022 the City completed a Community-Wide Piped Water and Wastewater Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) to evaluate potential buildout of the piped system to almost all Bethel households. This was a requirement in order to qualify for certain federal grants available for implementing water and sewer improvements.

The PER outlines a 12-phased approach to extending the piped utilities. The phases present more readily constructible and fundable projects than piping the entire community at once. The series of projects starts with a new truck fill and distribution center, followed by extending pipes and adding lift stations to each residential subdivision. There are a few alternatives possible for planning for sewer, such as adding an additional sewage lagoon cell when needed or using modular treatment plants for each subdivision. Another project recommended in the PER is the construction of a backup well for another water source for the City.

GOAL 2: Regularly seek ways to lower water and sewer bills for customers.

Strategy 1: While the hauled portion of the Bethel water and sewer system continues, evaluated hauled operations to look for efficiencies that may help reduce rates.

Action A: Seek grants to evaluate adding additional lift station points or watering points. GM

Action B: Work with DOT&PF to get exemptions to allow for heavier (more efficient) water and sewer haul trucks. PW

Strategy 2: Expand the piped water and sewer system, as it operates profitably and offsets losses from the hauled network.

Action A: Investigate and pursue funding options including grants, low interest loans, and bonds to expand the City's piped water and sewer network to reduce the amount of hauling. GM

Action B: Repair existing deficiencies to the existing piped water and sewer network to maximize the system's efficiencies. PW

Strategy 3: Evaluate and reduce costs associated with production and distribution of water and collection and treatment of wastewater.

Action A: Seek grants to conduct energy audits and make energy efficiency improvements at water treatment plants and amongst the haul fleet. GM

Action B: Request an audit of water and sewer operations and maintenance from the Alaska Rural Utility Collaborative with a focus on improving cost, efficiency, resilience, and reliability. PW

Action C: Increase financial efficiency, automate operations and billing, explore cost effective freeze protection efforts, and explore subsidized technical support through non-profits and state and federal agencies. PW

GOAL 3: Transition Bethel's water and sewer utilities to fully piped systems serving all residences and businesses.

Strategy 1: Complete each phase of projects outlined in the PER.

Action A: Obtain grant and loan funding for new water and sewer projects, including from the USDA. GM

Action B: Identify available land and begin acquiring easements (as needed) for future facilities, such as the truck fill station, pipes, and additional source water well. PW

Action C: Implement each phase of the PER. PW

Action D: As PER phases are implemented, monitor the capacity of the existing sewage lagoon to determine if another lagoon cell will be needed, and when it may be needed. PW

Strategy 2: Focus on maintenance to protect the City's utility investments and avoid unnecessary costs.

Action A: Construct security fences around all water treatment plants. PW

Action B: Improve Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) compatibility of Bethel's water treatment plants and lift stations to reduce the manual monitoring tasks performed by staff. PW

Action C: Provide information to the community on how to use the piped sewer system, restrictions on what can be dumped into the system, and who is responsible for maintenance costs associated with different elements of the system. PW

Strategy 3: During the phases of the PER and beyond, manage the piped system to be as efficient and accessible as possible, as well as equitable in cost.

Action A: Complete a rate study every 10 years; utilize results of the rate study to set rates appropriately. PW

Action B: Establish a process for non-residential properties to be informed about the piped system progress in their area and how and when to connect to the piped system. PW

Action C: For new development or redevelopment, work with industry experts to investigate how the City could implement an "impact fee" system in which there are clear expectations related to new or upgraded infrastructure cost to the developer. CM

Action D: Provide City assistance with finding potential grant or loan funding for new commercial connections or subdivision developments not currently included in the 2022 PER phases. GM

Action E: If water usage becomes an issue due to water supply or excessive usage, install meters in conjunction with a tiered rate system to encourage less water usage and increase revenue. PW

6.3 Internet

Bethel’s current lack of access to adequate broadband internet service limits economic development as well as the efficiency of services by health care providers, schools, tribal entities, businesses, and residents. Widespread access to broadband will remove barriers to public health innovation and schooling options and would stimulate economic growth.

Fast and reliable communications through deployment of broadband networks are a priority for the State of Alaska, which recently developed a State Office of Broadband Development and, along with other federal agencies, will be funding large scale deployment in the next 5-10 years. According to the State of Alaska Governor’s Task Force on Broadband, Alaska “must prioritize broadband service expansion in unserved and underserved areas” as 63.7% of Alaskans living in rural areas have access to fixed terrestrial broadband at speeds of at

least 25 Mbps. Additionally, Alaska will receive at least \$100 million through a new federal program to expand high-speed internet to underserved rural areas to promote workforce development.

GCI is currently the sole internet service provider for community members in Bethel, with microwave system-based speeds of 10 Megabits per second (Mbps), but GCI is planning to expand access to Bethel through a combination of projects. Though the City is not directly involved in providing internet service to residents, fast and reliable internet would greatly improve efficiency for City government, local businesses, and residents seeking to connect with those outside the region; the City should do what it can to help GCI bring in broadband. At the time of updating this Comprehensive Plan, satellite internet providers such as Starlink were also rapidly expanding into the region.

GOAL 4: Facilitate broadband development within the City of Bethel to advance community access to reliable internet service.

Strategy 1: Monitor the buildout of internet-related infrastructure in Bethel.
Action A: Request information from GCI regarding locations of existing fiber optic cable within Bethel. PW

Strategy 2: When possible, streamline permitting of internet-related infrastructure.
Action A: Prioritize facilitation of rights-of-way within city-owned land or city-held easements for laying fiber optic cable. PW
Action B: Review and amend tall tower permitting code to be simpler and more efficient. PL
Action C: If / as needed to help facilitate improved internet connectivity in Bethel, review and amend other sections of BMC that may impact permits required for different types of internet-related infrastructure (besides cables and towers). PL

6.4 Solid Waste

Part of the Public Works Department's maintenance and operations responsibilities for the City include solid waste management. Trash is primarily collected in residential and commercial dumpsters located throughout the city before being placed in the landfill.

The Bethel landfill was constructed in 1991 and has completed several studies throughout the years to determine its remaining capacity. Per a 2019 study, the landfill is projected to reach capacity in 2043. Landfill closure, continued monitoring that would be required after closure, and the opening of another landfill would be very expensive, so the City of Bethel is motivated to prolong the life of the existing landfill as much as possible. Reducing existing volume of waste and managing new waste entering the landfill are two main strategies to achieve this goal.

Based on Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation

(ADEC) inspections, Bethel has continued to improve landfill operations. The city has purchased a shredder to reduce waste volume. There are also opportunities to reduce the amount of waste that heads for the landfill in the first place. Since the latest Comprehensive Plan in 2011, the recycling program in Bethel has been discontinued due to the high cost of shipping out materials, which has led to an increase in reusable / recyclable material in the landfill.

Though the City is no longer recycling, there are other reuse, recycling, and specific types of waste collection programs that exist in the community, such as a recycling program run by ONC. These efforts could become more collaborative so that they can be amplified. Some of the strategies in this section focus on the City working with the community to find ways to divert more waste from the landfill, which both prolongs the landfill's life and protects the environment and public health of the community.



Refrigerators being stored separately from other waste at the Bethel Landfill.

GOAL 5: Manage the landfill to be useable as long as possible and with minimal environmental impacts, through more efficient and environmentally responsible practices.

Strategy 1: Continuously monitor the capacity of the landfill to assess if / when a new landfill might be needed in the future.

Action A: Conduct a new landfill closure study approximately every five years to measure and evaluate progress and determine what strategic changes might be necessary. LM

Strategy 2: Utilize best solid waste management practices and compliance with ADEC standards to reduce the volume of waste in the landfill.

Action A: Regularly review guidance on the ADEC Solid Waste website and incorporate recommendations based off of the annual state inspection and new technology as it becomes available. LM

Action B: Improve separation of waste by establishing cells (such as for lumber or scrap metal and vehicles). LM

Action C: Train personnel on the use of the shredder and other techniques to reduce volume of waste. LM

Action D: Provide continual education and staff training for properly disposing of hazardous materials, such as freon removal with Total Reclaim, the Rural Alaska Landfill Operator (RALO) course, and/or HAZWOPER. LM

Action E: In the longer term, consider building an additional storage garage to store and protect heavy equipment. LM

Strategy 3: Pursue ways to redirect more types of waste from the landfill, both to prolong the landfill's life and to minimize impacts to the environment and public health.

Action A: Provide regularly updated information to the public on existing City waste separation programs and what types of waste can and cannot be disposed in dumpsters. LM

Action B: Research types of waste that can be reused or recycled locally as well as the market for recyclables in Anchorage and/or Seattle; stage these items for public salvaging or separate for local recycling and/or shipping out in collaboration with ONC's recycling program or as part of a renewed City recycling program. LM

Action C: Research potential partners for a new City-wide e-waste collection and recycling program to build on periodic local collections. LM

Action D: Research how to implement a compost program for food waste and potentially cardboard and paper products; this could potentially be incorporated into Parks and Recreation and Community Garden programming. LM PR

Action E: As local recycling becomes more feasible, consider starting by working with organizations such as schools, hospitals, and businesses that may have a steady supply of uniform recyclable materials (like paper, certain types of packaging, etc.). LM

Action F: Research funding or partnership opportunities for barging out other kinds of waste, particularly harmful waste. LM GM

Action G: Research and initiate community discussions about ways to address negative impacts of junk vehicles located on private properties and in the landfill. LM

Action H: Pursue other funding opportunities geared towards environmentally friendly landfill and recycling programs for the City. GM

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CHAPTER 7

Public Facilities & Services

7: Public Facilities & Services

Details on the responsibilities of each City department are provided in Chapter 2 – Existing Conditions.

7.1 City Operations and Communications

The City has reported ongoing difficulty in finding people to work in City jobs, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic. Many departments are short-staffed, creating challenges when trying to keep up with the needs of the growing city. For example, there is little room for delaying delivery of Public Works Department services like water and sewer or road maintenance. Generally, the City should evaluate how each department operates to help determine whether services can be provided with existing staff and resources, or if there are ways to alter technology used or department structures to maintain reliability for the community while minimizing personnel costs (which in turn increase some service costs for the community).

Vacancies in City committees and commissions also reduce their ability to effectively meet and make decisions, as meetings cannot be held without a quorum. Strategies such as implementing new technology or establishing mentorship, chains of command, and transition plans can improve City operations in the face of staffing challenges and help retain and develop City employees and volunteers. The City should pursue new ways to recruit potential employees and volunteers. This will also require strategic bolstering of ways the City communicates with the community in order to increase engagement.

GOAL 1: Enhance the reliability and efficiency of the City workforce.

Strategy 1: Optimize and monitor the staffing and operations of each City department to ensure efficiency and support staff retention and hiring efforts.

Action A: Ensure every department has clearly outlined responsibilities with documented and regularly updated policies, procedures, and job descriptions to facilitate staff training and operations evaluations.  

Action B: Conduct an evaluation of each department's operational efficiency on an annual basis and when considering hiring additional personnel.  

Action C: As evaluations of operations are completed, consider altering the structure of departments (for example, implementing new technology to increase efficiency, or establishing mentorship and chains of command that facilitate staff advancement into leadership roles).  

Action D: Establish transition plans so that department operations are minimally impacted by the departure of key staff.  

Strategy 2: Implement new technology in order to save money spent on some City functions and decrease each City department's workload.

Action A: Transition the City to an online customer portal system with abilities to manage utility service preferences and pay bills. Over time, this self-serve system could expand to include the ability to manage business licensing and sales tax payments, submit site plans, and other potential applications. IT

Action B: Transition City departments to an electronic timekeeping system. IT

Action C: Explore more automated technology systems that could be used to track City department budgets and produce reports, in order to help departments manage their own budgets and lighten the load on the Finance Department. FI IT

Strategy 3: Regularly raise awareness about current and upcoming job and committee / commission openings within Bethel.

Action A: Informed by operations evaluations completed as part of Strategy 1, create a running list of staffing needs within the City, and order it based on priority. HR

Action B: Post open position advertisements to national recruitment websites, featuring the highest priority openings as identified in Action A. HR

Action C: Set up an automated email alert service that sends updates to potentially interested parties when there are openings at the City, featuring the highest priority openings as identified in Action A. IT

Action D: Organize an annual City of Bethel Opportunity Fair, where representatives from each department and committee / commission can raise awareness about their activities and meet potentially interested candidates. HR

Action E: Advertise current and upcoming openings as well as the opportunity fair and any other relevant events through typical channels within Bethel. HR

Strategy 4: Work with educational programs to create a pipeline of trained candidates for City jobs.

Action A: Work with local schools, including the high school, vocational school, and university, to create a pipeline of potential City employees. HR

Action B: Identify other vocational schools in Alaska and advertise job openings through their channels. HR

Action C: Request that the University of Alaska help share job openings with their network to broaden the reach across Alaska. HR

Strategy 5: Broaden recruitment channels around the region and Alaska.

Action A: Invite people from villages in the region to attend hiring events and apply for jobs at the City. HR

Action B: Work with tribal organizations and native corporations to raise awareness about jobs at the City with a statewide audience. HR

Action C: Consider working with recruiters to help find candidates. HR

GOAL 2: Communicate regularly and effectively with the community through various channels.

Strategy 1: Expand the reach of the City's newsletter, "In the Loop."

Action A: Maintain easy public access to the current month's newsletter on the homepage of the City website, with historical newsletters also available on the website. 

Action B: Create a City information flier to laminate and place around town, including URLs and QR codes for the current newsletter and other key sites to access. 

Action C: Print some copies of the newsletter to leave in key locations around town. 

Strategy 2: Expand the City's presence on social media.

Action A: Designate a social media "point person" within City staff, to be responsible for monitoring City activities that should be posted to social media and regularly checking in with all the departments for updates. (This could be the City Clerk or someone the Clerk designates.) 

Strategy 3: Optimize the City website and update it regularly.

Action A: Each year, conduct a review of the website to determine if there are particular pages or sections that need to be added, deleted, reorganized, or updated. 

Action B: As needed, update the home page (and/or other pages) with more new information and links. 

Action C: Make it easier to find contact information to use for different types of inquiries to the City. 

7.2 City Finances

The City of Bethel's financial structure includes certain types of revenue contributing to a general fund to pay for things like City employee salaries and building operation costs. Current funding sources include bed tax, sales tax (including selective sales tax on certain items like alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco), gaming fees, and payment in lieu of taxes. The Finance Department oversees business licensing and sales tax collection and is focusing on completing audits to improve compliance.

Other fees are structured as "enterprise funds" that fund services and facilities that are supposed to be self-supporting, such as water and sewer, solid waste services, or the municipal dock enterprise fund. The Fitness Center is also considered an enterprise fund for

auditing purposes, and most of its funding comes from sales taxes. Enterprise funds may not always be self-supporting as they could become too expensive to residents – they may require subsidizing through other revenue sources. This is something the Finance Department should take the lead on managing as discussed in Strategy 1 below. Generally, the Finance Department can play an active role in continually assessing the City's fiscal structure and making changes based on priorities and needs.

There are currently no property taxes in Bethel, unlike the large majority of Alaskan cities of Bethel's size. This is because there is such a mix of Native allotments and other privately owned land, and Native allotments are not taxable.

GOAL 3: Optimize the management of City revenue and spending.

Strategy 1: Continually evaluate and consider reshaping the City's fiscal structure for efficiency and as City priorities change over time.

Action A: Working with other City departments as well as the Finance Committee, consider ways to augment, diversify, and allocate City revenue sources, such as based on particular projects that may need funding. **FI**

Action B: In the longer term, conduct a comprehensive study of municipal finances to determine the most efficient and effective fiscal structure. **FI**

Strategy 2: Regularly update fees and other charges.

Action A: Continue annual updates to the City's fee schedule (as required by BMC 4.04.025), including consideration of whether new fees should be levied. **FI**

Action B: Keep up-to-date utility rates by completing utility rate studies every 10 years. **PW**

Strategy 3: Improve clarity and consistency of sales tax collection and business licensing.

Action A: Consolidate and improve clarity of information on the City website related to businesses, licensing, and sales tax collection. **FI**

Action B: Before local business licenses are issued or renewed, require a code compliance review from the Planning Department. **FI**

Action C: Enforce compliance with business licensing requirements and sales tax collection by completing 80 sales tax audits per year. **FI**

Action D: Expand resources to help people start local businesses. **FI**

Strategy 4: Shape sales taxes and fees to positively influence public health and sustainability and fund key community projects.

Action A: Over time, consider proposing expansions to taxes on alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco sales, as well as gambling. **CM**

Action B: Propose a "bag tax" for disposable bags from stores and restaurants. **CM**

Action C: Consider proposing vehicle parking fees in some areas, such as for long-term parking near the airport or boat harbor. **CM**

Strategy 5: Maximize grant funding that can be obtained.

Action A: Expand the grant writing and research capacity of the City beyond the Grants Manager, including assistance from other departments and/or hiring consultants to prepare some grant applications. **GM**

Action B: Explore partnerships with other organizations to fund some projects. **GM**

7.3 Public Facilities & Equipment

In addition to the revenue sources discussed above in Section 7.2, the City holds assets including land, equipment, transportation and other infrastructure, buildings, and other public facilities. To best serve the community, the City must manage potential land uses for its holdings or otherwise navigate leases or sales. Equipment, public utility, and building facilities must be maintained, updated, and expanded when necessary, but this requires advance planning to make sure there is adequate funding available and that public

services are not interrupted while the City waits for new equipment to arrive, for example. The City regularly completes a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to plan allocation of City funds, but this system might benefit from more strategic updates. Goals 4 and 5 below provide guidance for managing City-owned land and other assets as well as planning to prioritize where to obtain and/or allocate funding in the future.

GOAL 4: Manage City-owned land in an efficient, cost-effective, and forward-thinking manner.

Strategy 1: Maintain a map of City-owned lands and ownership changes.

Action A: Create a map of City-owned lands using GIS and an associated database. PL

Action B: Identify undeveloped or underutilized properties currently owned by the City on the map. PL

Action C: Using the community land use needs identified as part of the goals in Chapter 3 – Housing and Land Use, identify community needs that may be met with City-owned properties or underutilized properties. Use this information to identify where there are gaps, which could lead to identifying properties that may be pursued for acquisition by the City. CM

Action D: Update the map as properties are acquired or sold, also tracking properties identified as potential acquisitions or potential properties to sell. PL

Strategy 2: Improve processes for City property acquisition, sales, and leasing.

Action A: When the City needs to buy or lease land, release requests to negotiate lease or sale agreements with other property owners in order to help find available land that meets City purposes. CM

Action B: Work with the City Attorney to clarify appropriate options of processes for leasing land / facilities to non-profits, businesses, or other types of entities, including determining fair rental costs relative to appraised value, bid processes, or other ways to enter into lease agreements. CM

Action C: The City currently offers heavily discounted rental and utility rates for some non-profit lessees; evaluate the community value of these leases and consider evolving the practice to rent at appraised values, still with the potential for discounts depending on purpose. CM

Action D: Examine publicly owned lands for all potential uses, including open space use, before disposition. PL

GOAL 5: Manage updates to City facilities and equipment in an efficient, cost-effective, and forward-thinking manner.

Strategy 1: Maintain the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

Action A: Update the CIP every year. 

Action B: Ensure that items in the CIP advance City goals for improving energy efficiency and a transition to alternative energy sources in the future. 

Action C: Continue to use the insurance schedule to anticipate items that the City may need to spend money on in the future, such as repairing frozen pipes. 

Strategy 2: Continually seek funding for additions, improvements, and repairs to City facilities and equipment.

Action A: Remain up-to-date on funding opportunities, including special infrastructure funding through federal or state programs. 

Action B: Apply to grants to fund infrastructure, such as BUILD grants. 

Action C: Consider allocating other funding sources for some infrastructure improvements, including through collaboration and potentially facilities-sharing with organizations such as ONC. 



Bethel Heights water treatment plant.

7.4 Public Safety

The Bethel Fire Department currently includes the Fire Chief, the Fire Captain, three Fire Lieutenants, and six Firefighter / Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), in addition to approximately 20 volunteer firefighters, EMTs, and/or paramedics. The department operates two Class-A pumpers, one aerial apparatus, three Type-1 Advanced Life Support Ambulances, a fire rescue boat, two wildland firefighting ATVs, and several support vehicles out of the fire station in the middle of town (near City Hall and the Cultural Center). The City has a mutual aid agreement with the state-owned Bethel airport to provide services, as well as a cooperative agreement with the State of Alaska Bureau of Land Management, Division of Forestry and Fire Protection for access to additional equipment and personnel when needed.

Prevention and education programs include a home fire safety program, fire prevention classes, and fire drills for children through field trips and school visits (including Fire Prevention Month in October), and a program in which fire department personnel regularly examine commercial and residential properties in areas of the community where a significant fire problem might develop. Smoke detectors are available and can be tested year-round at the fire station; the department will also provide, test, or install detectors in homes for those without the means to do so themselves.

The Bethel Police Department currently includes 19 sworn personnel that handle a significantly larger number of calls for service than other cities of its size. Bethel police also respond to calls outside of city limits as the public safety answering point (PSAP) for the Alaska State Troopers.

In addition to police, Bethel has a state grant-funded Community Service Patrol program that currently includes three full-time employees.

This program helps with the police department's response load for certain types of cases, such as bringing intoxicated people to the sobering center operated in partnership with YKHC.

Capital improvements completed since the last Comprehensive Plan include a new police headquarters, a new Community Service Patrol vehicle (funded with Covid-19 relief money), a new ladder

truck, a new pumper-tender truck, and refurbishment of an existing ambulance. It is important to note that many improvements that fall under the Public Works department, including for improved roads and water systems, would also benefit the emergency response operations and help lengthen the life of equipment.

GOAL 6: Improve public safety facilities and services in Bethel.

Strategy 1: Continue to improve fire and emergency medical infrastructure and services.

Action A: Construct a new fire station near the airport. FD

Action B: As the City's piped water system is expanded, install fire hydrants. PW

Action C: Address maintenance needs for the fire station. FD

Action D: Continue to recruit and provide training to fire and EMS staff and volunteers. FD

Action E: Address other public safety capital improvement needs as they arise and new technology becomes needed and/or available. FD

Action F: Continue and increase the delivery of existing fire prevention and education programs. FD

Strategy 2: Continue to improve police service.

Action A: Continually upgrade public safety dispatch and communications equipment. PD

Action B: Purchase additional surveillance and other evidence collection equipment, as needed. PD

Action C: Provide additional training to Police and Community Service Patrol staff, as needed. PD

Action D: Make other upgrades and additions to police department facilities as needed, including the vehicle impound yard. PD



Bethel Fire Department trucks located outside of the fire station.

Other than general Fire and Police Department updates, locally specific, targeted initiatives have been successful at improving public safety in the past. One example is the progress made on the “Kids Don’t Float” program, which was listed as an action item in the previous Comprehensive Plan. To help prevent drowning, safety information signage and life jackets or other flotation devices have been placed near water access.

There could be other opportunities for public safety initiatives that respond to safety issues that are specific to Bethel, which may be spearheaded by the Fire and/or Police Departments or in partnership with other organizations, depending on the specific issue.

GOAL 7: Target specific public safety concerns within Bethel.

Strategy 1: Improve maritime safety through educational programs.

Action A: Continue to work with the Fitness Center to offer swim classes for all ages, including pursuing a partnership with the school district to incorporate swim lessons into their required physical education programming during elementary school. PR

Action B: Through the Port, organize boating safety classes. PO

Strategy 2: Improve ATV and snowmachine safety, on and off Bethel roads.

Action A: Pursue a partnership with the State of Alaska to offer ATV and snowmachine safety information and/or classes. PD

Action B: Require ATV registration to drive ATVs on roads within City limits. PD

Strategy 3: Reduce drug abuse in Bethel.

Action A: Through the renewed Parks and Recreation department (see *Section 7.5*), provide programming for all ages that focuses on physical and emotional wellbeing through recreation, including the potential for mentorship and volunteering opportunities. PR

Action B: Continue collaboration with the Western Alaska Alcohol and Narcotics Team (WAANT, which includes Bethel Police, Kotzebue Police, Kodiak Police, and the Alaska State Troopers) to penalize drug trafficking and illegal alcohol bootlegging. PD

Action C: Continue operation of the Community Service Patrol, the grant-funded service that picks up individuals under the influence and drops them off at places such as YKHC or their sobering center. PD

Strategy 4: Support organizations that provide services to people experiencing homelessness in Bethel.

Action A: Continue to support the Bethel Winter House nonprofit organization. CM*

Strategy 5: Improve animal care and control programs.

Action A: Continue discussions on whether to hire a dedicated City animal control staff person to catch loose dogs and issue citations for animal cruelty. PD

Action B: Support and coordinate with Bethel Friends of Canines (BFK9) on the new animal shelter project. PD

7.5 Parks and Recreation

Bethel's recreation facilities include parks, trails, the Fitness Center and pool, and other facilities. These facilities are heavily used by the community and identified as a key community resource that contributes to quality of life in Bethel. As such, there is a desire to expand recreational facilities for people of all ages. In the past, expansion efforts have involved grants, special funding allocation from City taxes, and community partnerships and volunteer efforts. Given the strong public interest in more parks, trails, and other facilities, it is likely similar collaborative efforts could be enacted for future projects. These projects will also improve the visitor experience of Bethel and provide more spaces for sports and cultural events held in the City, which is important to economic development, as discussed in Chapter 8 – People and Economy.

Bethel Parks and Recreation are currently managed by the Public Works department. In the past, there was a dedicated Parks and Recreation department, and the Community Parks and Recreation Committee (which advises City Council) is advocating for the recreation of this department to increase capacity for parks and

recreation planning and programming. An interim step could be working with a contractor to provide recreational services support to the community for desired programming expansion; the Committee is currently working with Public Works on an RFP to this effect. The Fitness Center is owned by the City but currently run by a contractor; the center could potentially be restructured as “headquarters” for a Parks and Recreation department.

Many of the action items in this section are assigned to Parks and Recreation despite this not being a City department at this time, recognizing that the community is advocating for greater emphasis on the management of parks and recreation. As a shift towards a greater focus on Parks and Recreation occurs, Public Works and the City Manager should continue to work together to track and work on these action items. The Community Parks and Recreation Committee can also assist with providing input on delegation of responsibilities.



Yukon-Kuskokwim Fitness Center.

GOAL 8: Enhance the role of parks in the Bethel community.

Strategy 1: Expand the City's capacity to manage and maintain parks.

Action A: Recreate the Parks and Recreation department and/or designate an interim Parks and Recreation manager within the City who will be responsible for leading coordination with contractors (current and potential future), parks and recreation improvement projects, and coordination with the Community Parks & Recreation Committee. **CM**

Action B: Continue efforts to hire and train Public Works maintenance staff, including for seasonal positions and/or potential for volunteer involvement. **HR**

Action C: Monitor general and ongoing maintenance issues related to parks (such as vandalism) and discuss ideas for solutions with the Community Parks & Recreation Committee. **PR**

Strategy 2: Expand and improve key central parks in Bethel with the goal of making them community landmarks and gathering spaces.

Action A: Create a new park on the former Kilbuck School site, as the neighborhood park for the Avenues / Alligator Acres area. **PR**

Action B: Identify waterfront park investment opportunities to create an iconic and central civic space that represents Bethel. **PR**

Action C: At Pinky's Park, add amenities that are focused on community gathering and comfort for all ages. **PR**

Strategy 3: Establish a network of Bethel parks to serve all neighborhoods.

Action A: Create and regularly update an online guide and map of all the parks in Bethel. **PL**

Action B: Using the development of the parks guide and map, identify areas with less access to nearby parks. **PL**

Action C: Pursue the development of new City parks in underserved areas. **PW**

Action D: Require that new residential subdivisions reserve space for a park or open space. **PL**

Strategy 4: Improve park facilities for sports and other recreational activities.

Action A: Continue to upgrade and add facilities to Pinky's Park, including new playground equipment and potentially new gravel trails to replace run-down boardwalks. **PR**

Action B: Consider creating additional facilities such as picnic shelters, a recreational campground, a dog park, non-motorized winter recreation such as cross-country skiing or mushing, additional skate park facilities, or new sports fields or courts. **PR**

Strategy 5: Pursue special funding and collaboration opportunities for enhancing Bethel parks.

Action A: Pursue Land and Water Conservation Fund or similar outdoors-related grant money to help with parks projects. **GM**

Action B: Add more community gardening opportunities to parks, potentially in partnership with Alaska Native organizations or other sponsor entities. **GM**

GOAL 9: Enhance recreational facilities and programs in Bethel.

Strategy 1: Expand the facilities and operations of the Fitness Center to accommodate more activities and all ages.

Action A: Expand the fitness center with potential improvements such as a gym and/or fitness track. PR

Action B: As the City is able, transition the City towards managing the Fitness Center (which is currently run by a contractor). PR

Action C: Develop programming within the fitness center oriented towards youth / younger people, such as classes or recreational sports leagues. PR

Action D: Develop programming within the fitness center and/or pool that is oriented towards seniors. PR

Action E: Based out of the Fitness Center but potentially including other facilities in town, consider establishing adult recreational sports leagues. PR

Strategy 2: Support expansions to childcare, teen activities, and senior activities.

Action A: Support upgrades and expansions to the Bethel 4-H Youth Center facilities and programming, including food programs, classes, and recreation for teens and afterschool youth. PR

Action B: Support recreational programming dedicated to seniors, such as upgrades to the existing Senior Center Park or other programs. PR

Strategy 3: Explore collaborations for recreational activities at other facilities in Bethel.

Action A: Coordinate with the school district to identify opportunities to use school facilities for programming outside of school hours. PR

Action B: Support expansions to recreational facilities and resources, such as the Cultural Center and the Kuskokwim Consortium Library. PR

GOAL 10: Enhance the network of trails and open spaces in Bethel.

Strategy 1: Improve access and comfort for trails.

See Chapter 4 – Local Transportation for trail and other non-motorized transportation goals.

Action A: Add trails to the map and guide of parks and recreation facilities. PL

Strategy 2: Maintain a network of open spaces.

Action A: Identify and map open spaces within and around the developed area of Bethel that can be used for public recreation. PL

Action B: Identify key future transportation connections across currently open areas such as the “Donut Hole.” PL

Action C: Based on the map of key future connections through currently open space, as well as mapped areas that must be pre-served due to wetlands or drainage, identify suitable locations for potential green belts. PL



CHAPTER 8

People & Economy

8: People & Economy

To restate the community's Vision Statement,

Bethel is the hub that connects the communities of the rural Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region.

Bethel is a growing, diverse community that strives to improve quality of life, affordability, and opportunities through strategic development that responds to Bethel's remote location.

As a remote hub city, Bethel provides opportunities to build businesses, careers, homes, and community connections. Its economic development strategy should be tied to attracting, retaining, and connecting the people who make the community great. The economy is dominated by employment in local government (city, tribal, and school) as well as government-funded organizations (like the Association of Village Council Presidents and Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation), but there are opportunities to expand local commercial activity. Partnerships between public and private entities, including non-profit organizations and businesses, can yield innovative new programs. With investments in local people and culture, locally generated economic growth is expected to follow.

8.1 Education and Career Training

As the regional hub of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Bethel is the also the de facto educational hub for the surrounding villages. Schools and career training are an important piece of Bethel's economic sustainability and growth. Bethel is home to many educational facilities, as listed in Chapter 2 – Existing Conditions. However, Bethel (like many remote Alaskan communities) struggles to fill job vacancies with local community members who have the appropriate training. It may be that residents with more education and training locally are moving to larger communities such as Anchorage, in part due to the high cost of living in Bethel.

Facing the continued rise in cost of living, Bethel should continue to encourage residents to seek out job training and explore new ideas for the retention and recruitment of local and regional talent. This will not only build local recruitment pipelines, but it will also give more Bethel residents higher-paying jobs and contribute to the overall resiliency of the community. These goals will require quality education at all levels.

GOAL 1: Promote broad access to education, training, and employment opportunities in Bethel.

Strategy 1: Identify community priorities for education and career training.

Action A: City of Bethel staffing is an important priority; see Chapter 7 – Public Facilities & Services, Goal 1: “*Enhance the reliability and efficiency of the City workforce.*” HR

Action B: Work with City departments and community partners to identify key community staffing needs. CM

Action C: Identify gaps between community unemployment and community job openings. CM*

Action D: Working with community partners and the business community, monitor which employment sectors are likely to increase in importance and which employment sectors are likely to decrease in importance in 2045. CM*

Strategy 2: Foster a city-wide culture of emphasizing local hiring and training for specific local opportunities.

Action A: Lead the community in the creation of a local “job board” that helps businesses find suitable hires. HR

Action B: Create a focused internship and apprenticeship program that offers introductory training and support leading to employment with City of Bethel or through partnerships with community organizations or businesses. HR

8.2 Donlin Mine

The Donlin Mine has long been discussed as a controversial project on the horizon that may have significant impacts on Bethel. After years of uncertainty about whether the project would proceed, it now seems to be moving forward; as such, it will be important to plan for the potential impacts. In the future, there could be other major projects in the Bethel region to prepare for and track.

The Donlin Gold Project would include development of an open pit mine approximately 150 miles northeast of Bethel. All key federal and state approvals have been obtained, and planning for construction is in progress. Bethel (along with a barge landing on the Kenai Peninsula) would be a primary accumulation point for pipeline materials during construction. Construction of the mine site, transportation facilities, and pipeline is anticipated to take about 3-4 years.

This would begin with moving equipment, supplies, and personnel to the project site using various transportation modes. The Donlin Mine is expected to cost approximately \$1.2 billion in labor; at peak construction, the proposed Donlin Gold Project would annually require up to 3,200 workers, including 2,500 for mine site and transportation facilities construction and 650 for natural gas pipeline construction.

The Donlin Gold Project would occur over a period of approximately 30 years, representing nearly a full generation of workers and residents. Approximately 50 to 60 percent of the peak year workforce would be drawn from communities within the Y-K region, and there are strong training programs to support local hiring. Employment during operations would be less but still substantial, estimated to impact 4 to 4.5 percent of households in the region. A portion of those

employees at the Donlin Gold Mine may relocate their household outside of the region. Based on experience at Red Dog Mine, about 50 percent of employees would out-migrate to Bethel or Anchorage.

As part of mine development, an EIS was conducted which evaluated potential impacts to Bethel, including the following:

- Increased employment and income from the mine may go to residents of Bethel, which could increase the population above current projections by the Alaska Department of Labor and may also change Bethel's cultural composition (e.g., percentage of Alaska Natives and non-Natives).
- Infrastructure improvements for the Port of Bethel would be necessary, as the project is expected to approximately double the number of freight and fuel barges annually.
- Some local businesses in the Y-K region could experience an increase in activity during construction (likely concentrated in Bethel, as there are few retail and service outlets in smaller communities).
- An influx of capital and labor to small communities such as Bethel (small when viewed from a state-wide perspective) as a result of project construction could also have a negative economic effect in the form of inflationary pressure. Basically, this could increase the prices of goods and services for residents, especially impacting those not employed by the project.

GOAL 2: Minimize potential negative impacts to Bethel from the Donlin Mine efforts and maximize potential benefits.

Strategy 1: Ensure effective coordination with the Donlin Mine Project.

Action A: Develop a Memorandum of Understanding with Donlin Mine project leaders for ongoing coordination, including holding annual strategy meeting for conflict resolution and identify partnering opportunities. **CM**

Action B: Establish a communications plan to outline ways to keep Bethel residents informed of construction schedules and status of barge traffic, as well as to keep Donlin informed of the location and timing of commercial and subsistence fishing activities and other concerns or questions. **CM**

Strategy 2: Work with the Donlin project to plan for additional traffic associated with Donlin Mine.

Action A: Obtain full details about the planned dock construction south of the Bethel petroleum dock (associated with the Donlin Mine project). **PO**

Action B: Given Donlin's significant anticipated impacts to the Port of Bethel, jointly work with Donlin on port and waterway studies and improvements needed. **PO**

Action C: Coordinate with DOT&PF to monitor potential impacts to the capacity of Chief Eddie Hoffman Highway and whether improvements would be needed. **PW**

8.3 Fishing and Subsistence

For decades, commercial fishing was a key source of income in Bethel. Recently, however, commercial fishing has declined significantly due to falling fish population and prices. Since the 1990s, revenue from commercial fishing in Bethel decreased by nearly 50 percent. In 2016, the Coastal Villages Region Fund (CVRF) stopped buying and processing fish from the Kuskokwim region. CVRF was the largest buyer for 20 villages surrounding Bethel in Western Alaska. Since 2016, the region has been without a processor, making it nearly impossible to sell fish. Local fishermen tried to organize a cooperative to work with an external fish processor but had no success.

Many residents in Bethel and the broader region participate in subsistence fishing, just as people in the Yup'ik villages in the area had done long before the establishment of Bethel. Many people have small boats and travel along the river to fish camps. Subsistence food, including fish, makes up nearly half of residents' annual diet. However, salmon runs have been extremely low in recent years, causing Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) to limit how many fish people can catch. This has put strain on Bethel and other river communities as they are forced to rely more heavily on expensive imported groceries and less on traditional subsistence ways of life.

In addition to fish in the river, there are many other subsistence foods harvested around Bethel that supplement residents' diets.

Beyond food, harvested materials can be used for clothing, tools, crafts, shelter, and more. These practices are important to the local culture and way of life for many Bethel residents, including but not limited to Alaska Natives. Most harvesting occurs during the summer and fall months, when the growing season and typical hunting season occur. Year-round, there is also informal sharing and trading of subsistence foods.

Many City of Bethel residents will continue to be impacted by the local salmon decline and other environmental challenges that are likely to impact subsistence resources (like climate change, which is already changing characteristics of the tundra). While the City cannot directly interfere with ADFG or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service resource management policies, there may be opportunities to provide information or other resources to assist with local organizations' research and advocacy efforts.

Several organizations in the region are involved in advocacy to address issues impacting salmon populations, including climate change, pollution, and salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. One example is the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, which advocates for stricter restrictions on salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea and continued coordination with Alaska Native tribes that can provide traditional ecological knowledge. Other groups include the ONC Fisheries Department and the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group.

GOAL 3: Support subsistence rights and access to subsistence resources in Bethel and the surrounding region.

Strategy 1: Protect physical access to subsistence resources around Bethel.

Action A: Maintain the small boat harbor facility, and identify future expansion needs and priorities for funding to ensure sufficient access for subsistence users. PO

Action B: Require the dedication of parks and/or open spaces, such as green belts, in new subdivisions in order to maintain access to the undeveloped tundra. PL

Action C: Work to obtain public access easements over trails used to access fishing, hunting, or plant harvesting areas. PL

Strategy 2: Support research and advocacy efforts that seek to protect access to subsistence resources.

Action A: As opportunities arise, provide information or resources to support the activities of subsistence resource advocacy groups. PO

8.4 Climate Resilience Planning

As discussed in Chapter 2 – Existing Conditions, and according to the Alaska Department of Community & Regional Affairs (DCRA), Bethel is considered an Environmentally Threatened Community at risk from infrastructure damage caused primarily by flood, erosion, and permafrost degradation exacerbated by climate change. DCRA assistance may be available to help Bethel plan for mitigating the impacts of climate change. The City should take advantage of this and other programs that may exist, as any of these efforts could help protect human life and property.

The primary assistance available to communities to mitigate natural and other hazards is from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through development of a Hazard Mitigation Plan. Bethel's Hazard Mitigation Plan was completed in 2017 and is overdue for an update. These collaborative plans include a risk and

capability assessment which identifies hazards and develops a mitigation strategy to be implemented by the City to prepare for natural and man-made hazards that could occur in the future.

Other communities have developed Climate Action Plans or Climate Adaptation Plans to more comprehensively address climate change. However, Hazard Mitigation Plans offer similar benefits as all are collaborative efforts involving various City departments as well as community members and other organizations. With more awareness of potential hazards, the community and surrounding region's people and local economies can be more prepared and resilient in the face of climate change. The City should also consult with DCRA to determine if a more focused Climate Adaptation Plan should be prepared as well.

GOAL 4: Prepare the City for a broad range of potential climate change impacts.

Strategy 1: Using the help of state and/or federal climate resilience resources, create City plans for climate adaptation and community resilience.

Action A: Update the City's Hazard Mitigation Plan every five years. CM PL

Action B: Consult with DCRA and consider preparing a Community Resilience and Climate Adaptation Plan. PL CM

Action C: Monitor other funding or support resources that may become available. GM

8.5 Local History and Culture

As the hub city for the YK Delta region, Bethel is both the gateway to the villages of the region and the gateway from the region to the rest of the world. Bethel represents a confluence of cultures, and community members referred to it as the “heartland of the Yup’ik people” and a very diverse community. Due to its remote location, community members describe a strong sense of interconnectedness, community, and self-reliance. At times, large numbers of people from around the region, state, and world come together in Bethel around

traditional activities and expressions of community and culture. The cultural environment in Bethel includes not only Yup’ik traditions that have existed for thousands of years, but also contemporary sports that bring people together and a common value for the beauty of the river and the tundra. The City can play a role in supporting the cultural fabric that makes Bethel a great community in which to live, with a strong sense of place and local identity and pride.



Bethel Farmers Market shed.

8.6 Local Businesses

Community members report that it is very difficult to start a small business in Bethel. The City should try to help foster a local business friendly environment, as local production and commerce is a great way to decrease reliance on imports, oftentimes lowering the cost of living and keeping money flowing in the local economy.

The right balance between regulations and policies that ease the way for small businesses needs to be found. In the past, it was sometimes difficult for the City to enforce business licensing that allows the City to collect sales tax, an important source of City revenue to fund public facilities and services. When Covid-19 relief money came into the community to assist businesses, more busi-

nesses were forced to get licenses in order to access funding; this is an example of an incentive that helped formalize more businesses in Bethel.

The City could start getting more involved with supporting local businesses by designating a Business Community Liaison. Currently, there is no Chamber of Commerce in Bethel, but a Business Community Liaison could work with business leaders to reinvigorate the Chamber, opening more regular lines of communication and opportunities for the City and business leaders to collaborate on community events and programs that build up the local economy.

GOAL 6: Foster a thriving local business community.

Strategy 1: Encourage the reinvigoration of the Chamber of Commerce.

- Action A:** Assign a staff person within the City (likely in the Finance Department) to serve as the Business Community Liaison. CM
- Action B:** Identify and reach out to business leaders in the community about the City's interest in more coordination with the business community, including potentially supporting the reinvigoration of the Chamber of Commerce. FI
- Action C:** Organize a City space for representatives from the business community / Chamber of Commerce to meet on a quarterly basis. FI

Strategy 2: Expand resources to help people start local businesses.

- Action A:** Continue to provide information on licensing and permitting required, as well as enforcement. FI
- Action B:** Pursue a partnership with an organization such as UAF to offer business planning assistance. FI
- Action C:** Raise awareness about resources available to help small businesses, such as the Alaska Small Business Development Center and related guides or workshops. FI

Strategy 3: Create a business-friendly environment in Bethel.

- Action A:** Identify any barriers that the City may be able to address to assist with starting and running businesses. FI
- Action B:** Examine BMC to consider allowing some small businesses to be a legal in residential zoned areas. PL
- Action C:** Develop a directory of local businesses that is updated regularly. FI
- Action D:** Work with the business community to organize events that highlight local businesses, such as markets or events that encourage people to visit businesses around town. CM*

8.7 Visitor Experience

People visit Bethel for a variety of reasons. The most common group visiting the area is made up of people visiting friends and relatives, known in tourism research as VFRs. Other common reasons for visiting Bethel include business trips, medical care, shopping, and community events. There is also a small segment of visitors seeking birdwatching, hunting, or flyfishing experiences. Each of these

groups may be encouraged to spend more time in Bethel if investments are made in marketing and better accessibility of information about local attractions and amenities. This should increase spending and in turn help fund improvements to attractions for visitors, also improving the local quality of life and community sense of pride.

GOAL 7: Support and expand tourism and visitation to Bethel.

Strategy 1: Expand information and marketing for visitors.

Action A: Provide general visitor information on the City website, including information such as lodging, dining, and transportation (in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce). 

Action B: Create regularly updated visitor marketing materials specific to different visitor groups:

Family-friendly – focused on people visiting friends and relatives (aka VFRs) with children and/or seniors in their groups

Business travelers – focused on coffee / breakfast, lunch and dinner dining, catering for meetings, wifi hangout spots, the fitness center, and “quick” attractions to visit

Nature tourists – focused on in-town attractions, equipment shops or rental services, and regional transportation and wilderness guiding services

Visitors from villages – focused on resources they may be coming to access and include Yup'ik translation

New residents – overview of key community resources as well as popular spots for locals and residents to help people who recently moved to “get to know Bethel” 

Action C: In collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, encourage businesses and community facilities to provide up-to-date contact, website information, and photos on Google Maps. 

Action D: In collaboration with organizers of large annual events and the Chamber of Commerce, assess the capacity of Bethel lodging available relative to expected peak demands to determine if shortages are anticipated and how the community could address this if/as visitation is expected to grow. 

Strategy 2: Improve attractions for visitors.

Action A: Emphasize locally specific natural and cultural attractions. PR

Action B: Work with the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to develop a calendar of community events. PR

Action C: Develop and implement a beautification plan for the downtown area (roughly between the Cultural Center and Brown's Slough) and the waterfront. PR



Waterfront trail in Bethel.