

April 8, 2024

Ethel Bisbee Lot Land Use Ad Hoc Committee Final Report

Executive summary

In April 2023, the Town of Bethel Board of Selectpersons (“Select Board” or “Board”) established the Ethel Bisbee Lot Land Use Ad Hoc Committee (“Ethel Bisbee Committee” or “the Committee”) for a term of one year, with the following mandate:

To consider and evaluate possible uses for the Ethel Bisbee Lot. Such use may include municipal use, sale, or lease of all or a portion of the land. The Committee should consider a wide range of impacts and benefits to the Town.

Members: Bridget Remington (Chair), Katie Getchell (Vice Chair), Beth Allen, Travis Brooks, Faye Christoforo, Sarah DeCato, Lee Hughes, Charlie Raymond, Tom Zicarelli. Non Voting members: Meryl Kelly (Select Board Member), Jim Bennett (former chair of the first Ethel Bisbee Committee circa 2017)

Issue to Be Addressed

The Ethel Bisbee Lot is currently a field and a parking lot comprising 1.5 acres. It is served by Town water and sewer and has electric service. Its uniqueness lies in its location and characteristics. It is in a walkable location central to town. It sits at the end of a mostly residential, dead-end street that intersects with Main Street, adjacent to the local grocery store, post office, and hardware store. It is bordered by four residential streets, with 19 residential abutters, in the Bethel Village.

The Town of Bethel owns very little land. Of the land that the Town of Bethel owns, the Ethel Bisbee Lot is the only space not developed or dedicated to another use. The Ethel Bisbee Lot is currently vacant and not in permanent

use. As such, it presents an opportunity for use by the Town to meet any number of community needs.

Because of its location, any use of the Ethel Bisbee Lot has the potential to significantly impact the character of both the Town and the surrounding neighborhood and residents.

In following our mandate, the Committee was mindful of both the needs of the Town and townspeople and the impact of any potential use on the neighborhood and town character.

Efforts

The Committee met bi-weekly for 90 minutes (a total of 21 meetings); these meetings were open to the public, and various Select Board members and community members have attended to ask questions and share input, including Michele Cole, Meryl Kelly, Sarah Southam, Frank Del Duca, and former Town Manager Natalie Andrews.

The Committee put significant effort into outreach to the greater community, including through posting flyers, having a presence at numerous public events, making formal presentations to civic and community groups, giving interviews to the local newspaper, and through social media and other digital posts. We collected email addresses of 167 residents through these efforts, to whom we sent regular electronic newsletters regarding our progress. As a result, we garnered over 200 responses to an input survey that asked respondents what they would like - and not like - to see the Lot used for. The survey responses are presented in the Methodology section, and we believe they will be useful to the Select Board for other applications as well.

Individual committee members also had conversations with representatives of 23 organizations operating in the community to get an understanding of their work, how it overlaps with ideas for usage of the Ethel Bisbee Lot, and what they consider to be important and needed in the community.

We also had robust discussions and debates within our Committee about what considerations and factors the Select Board should consider when making the ultimate decision/recommendation to the voters about the use of the Lot.

Results

The culmination of our outreach efforts, community discussions, analysis of the survey data, and intra-Committee discussions is two-fold.

First, we have reached consensus on the most important factors the Select Board should consider when evaluating potential uses of the Ethel Bisbee Lot. These factors are not weighted; we leave the weight to be given to each to the Select Board. However, we strongly recommend that all be considered:

- Usable by/accessible to the public, in particular those groups identified by residents (youth; seniors; low income households; local workers);
- Supports needs expressed by the Town that are not met anywhere else;
- Has no negative impact on pedestrian or vehicular traffic;
- Creates little or no increased noise or lighting;
- Maximizes the unique characteristics of the property (central location; no through traffic; water & sewer; electricity);
- Has neutral or positive financial impact on the Town; and
- Adds cultural or historical value or significance to the Town.

Second, we have created tools that will allow the Select Board to consistently and transparently evaluate future proposed uses of the Ethel Bisbee Lot according to the factors we have identified. The tools are in the form of an application packet, to be completed by an individual or entity submitting a proposal, consisting of a self-screening worksheet and application. Our thought was that the application process itself would serve as a means to communicate the important factors to the applicant.

While we do not believe the Town is ready to receive proposals yet, we have made several recommendations that we believe should be implemented in the

near term in order to build on the momentum and goodwill created by our work. We thank you for the opportunity.

Methodology

[The Ethel Bisbee Lot Input Form](#) was published as a Google form in early May 2023 and closed on January 1, 2024. The form anonymously asked two simple questions: “What are some uses for the lot that you would be excited to see?” and “What are some uses for the lot that you would NOT like to see?” A total of 212 submissions were recorded on the form. Throughout the 8 months this form was accepting submissions, the Committee conducted significant outreach to ensure community members were aware of this opportunity. Outreach methods included: flyering of 15+ locations in town, tabling during voting on 11/7 and June Town Meeting, posting on social media and in the local newspaper, direct outreach to local schools, presentations to the Rotary Club, Select Board (7/5/23 + 11/15/23) and Town Meeting (6/14/23), direct outreach to representatives of 23 organizations operating in the region, and regular communication with 167 newsletter subscribers.

Responses to the form were read fully by Committee members, and then repeated words or phrases were tallied and categorized. This resulted in two distinct data sets: a tally of *functional uses* that community members either do or do not want to see and a tally of *impacts* community members either do or do not want the space to have. Most submissions mentioned multiple ideas, and each idea was tallied individually. While the presentation of data in discrete parts removes the individual “flavor” of each individual response, we concluded that this method was the simplest way to visually capture both the wide variety of responses and the trends in opinion. The raw data of direct anonymous submissions will be shared with the Select Board.

Emergent themes from survey data

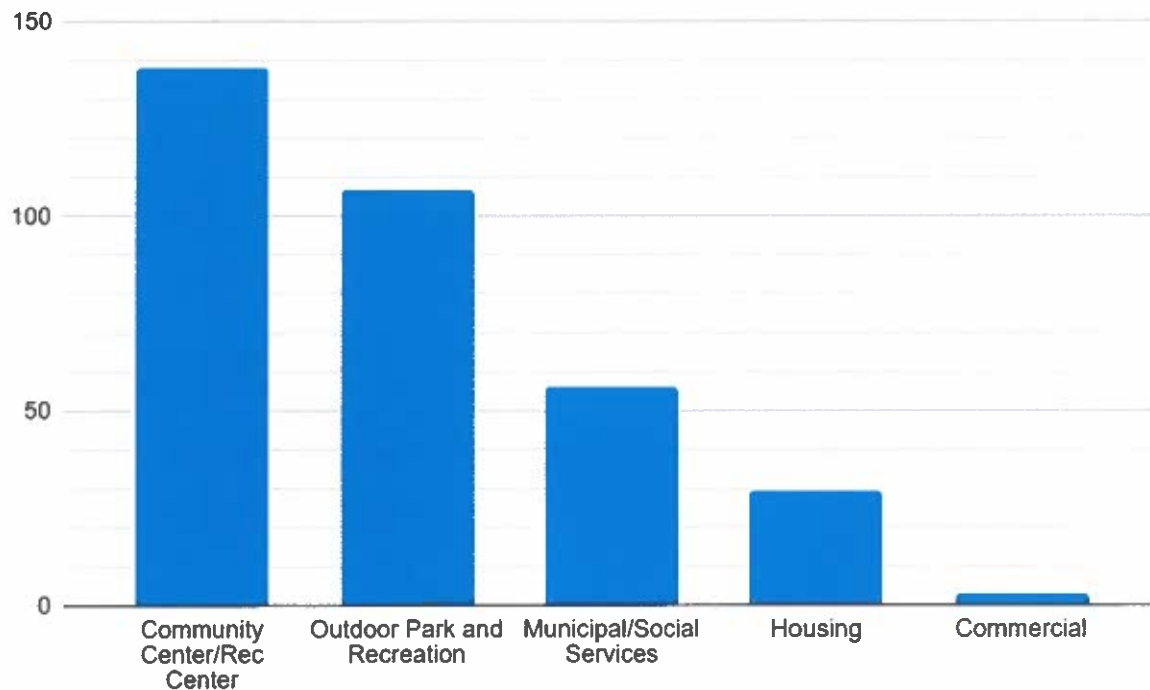
There is much that can be learned from the data included in this report. We wanted to focus on two significant findings:

1. The idea of building a community center received the most popular support. Submissions with this idea ranged in the amount of detail included, and we encourage Select Board members who are interested in learning more to review the range of ideas for a community center.
2. There was also significant support for the existing skating rink and other existing community efforts.

Data Compilation for Question 1: “What are some uses for the lot that you would be excited to see?”

In total we tallied 333 ideas for functional uses of the space and 256 ideas for the impact the space could have.

Functional use data:

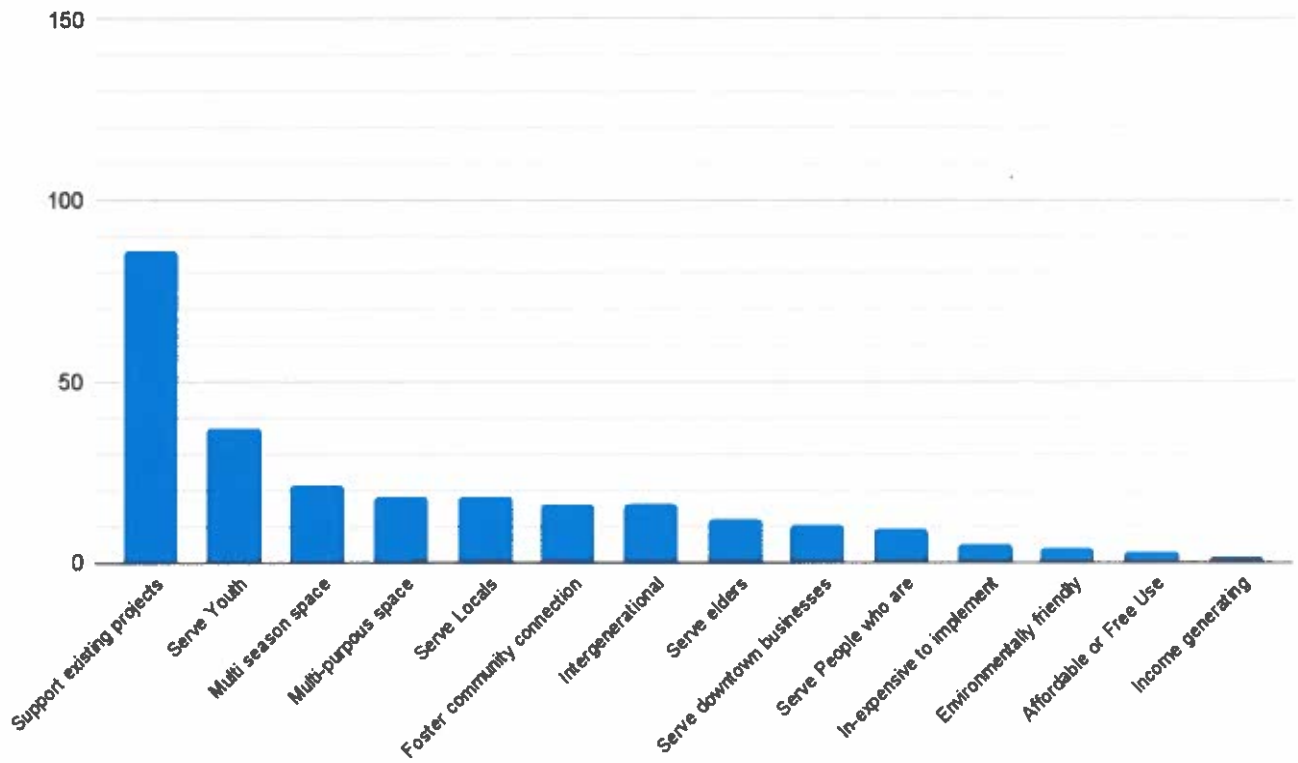


What are some uses for the lot that you would be excited to see?

Community Center/Rec Center	138	Community Center/Rec Center	123	The most popular response in the participant survey was for a community center/rec center. Submissions about a community center/rec center ranged broadly. There was a wide variety of ideas as to what this could look like, including an indoor pool, childcare services, commercial kitchen space, athletic facilities, and space for the arts.
		Early Childhood learning center	7	
		Maker Space	4	
		Youth Center	4	
Outdoor Park and Recreation	107	Ice Skating	43	The second highest area of interest in the participant survey was on the topic of outdoor park/recreation use. There was significant support shown for continuing and expanding the existing ice rink as well as making multi-season use of the space with practice fields, and/or creating a green space/park.
		Playing Field/courts	32	
		Green Space/Park	26	
		Dog Park	5	
		Hot Air balloon launch pad	1	
Municipal/Social Services	56	New Town Offices	12	The third most popular response on the participant survey was for municipal/social services. Top ideas in this category include a variety of updated and refurbished municipal service spaces. Specific ideas were: new town offices, space for town meetings, election space, parking for downtown, public bathroom space, and a library expansion.
		Parking	10	
		Library Expansion	9	
		Municipal building	7	
		Food Pantry	7	
		District Exchange	6	
		Health care building	3	
		Shelter	1	
Social Services	1			
Housing	29	Affordable housing	23	Most respondents in this category identified affordable housing as a significant need for this community. Multiple respondents repeated the need for workforce housing specifically. Several respondents mentioned senior-specific housing and daycare facilities.
		Senior Center	5	
		Housing	1	
Commercial	3	Leasing	1	Commercial space wasn't high on the list of survey responses, yet was mentioned enough to include as one of our top categories to report on. Respondents specifically mentioned an affordable restaurant and using money from a property sale to fund improvements on other town-owned buildings and schools.
		Restaurant	1	
		Sell the property	1	

Impact data:

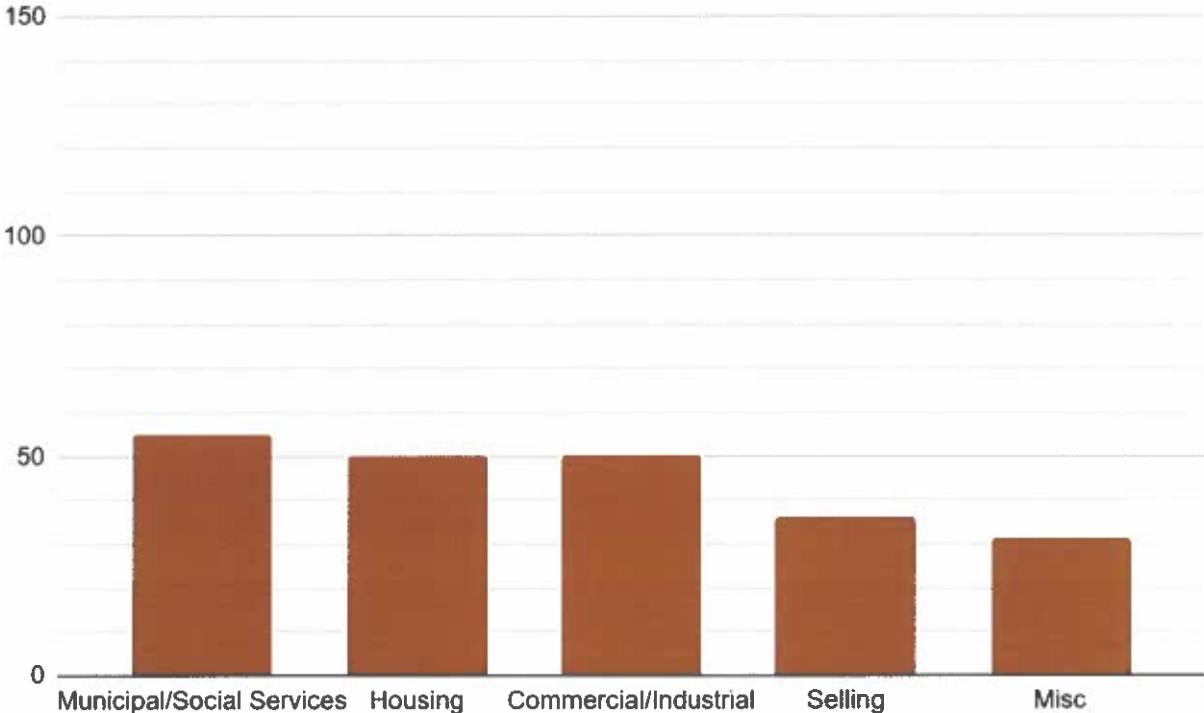
What are some uses for the lot that you would be excited to see?	Repeated Answer
Support existing projects	86
Serve Youth	37
Multi-season space	21
Multi-purpose space	18
Serve Locals	18
Foster community connection	16
Intergenerational	16
Serve elders	12
Serve downtown businesses	10
Serve People who are struggling	9
In-expensive to implement	5
Environmentally friendly	4
Affordable or Free Use	3
Income generating	1



Data Compilation for Question 2: “What are some uses for the lot that you would NOT like to see?”

In total we tallied 222 ideas for functional uses of the space that community members would not like and 57 ideas for impacts community members are concerned about.

Functional Use Data:

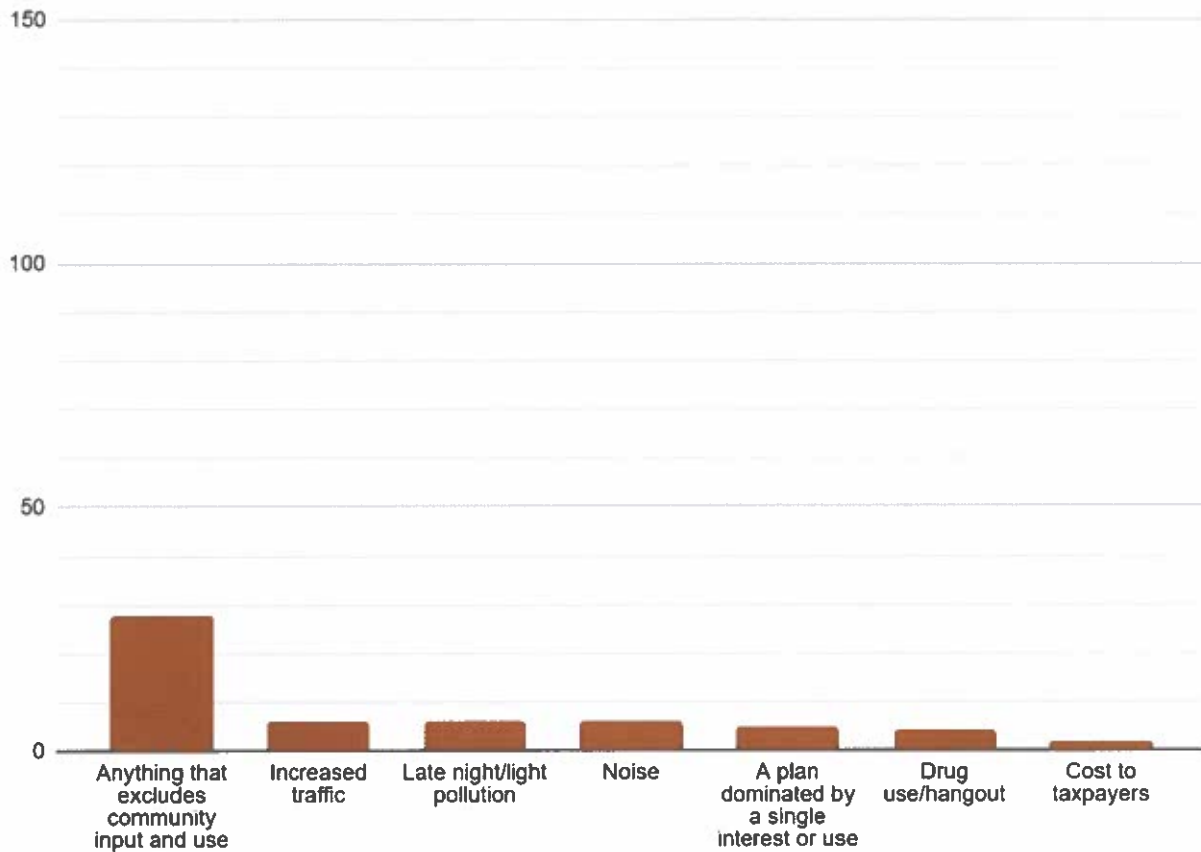


What are some uses for the lot that you would NOT like to see?				
Municipal/Social Services	55	Ambulance	21	The municipal/social services category was identified as the most popular area to avoid by respondents. More than half of respondents in this category shared concerns about the space being used for an ambulance garage or a town hall/town office.
		Town Hall or Office	20	
		Parking	9	
		Food Pantry/District Exchange	3	
		Town Storage	2	
Housing	50	Housing	39	Respondents in this category specifically noted they did not want to see housing that was designated for wealthy (i.e. condos, short-term rental, seasonal rental, etc.) Multiple respondents mentioned that they did not want this space to be utilized for low-income housing.
		Short Term Rental	11	
Commercial/Industrial	50	Commercial Space	35	This category was primarily respondents that generally said they did not want the space to be used for any kind of commercial use. Some specific commercial uses respondents were concerned about included a pot shop, an un-affordable restaurant, or anything catered to tourists. Other respondents in this category named industrial use concerns.
		Office building	4	
		Factory or industrial use	4	
		Used Car lot	2	
		Dump	1	
		Prison	1	
		Self storage	1	
		Shooting Range	1	
Gravel pit	1			
Selling	36	Sold	36	Respondents here indicated that they did not want the space to be utilized for personal or private use.

Misc	31	Dog Park	6	The miscellaneous category serves to encompass a wide variety of mentioned potential uses that individual community members shared concerns about. Most in this category were not repeated many times.
		Bus Garage	5	
		Community Center	4	
		Courts	3	
		Any Building	3	
		Pool	2	
		Noisy Events	2	
		Enclosed skating rink	1	
		Skate park	1	
		Homeless camp	1	
		Park	1	
		Community Kitchen	1	
Arts Center	1			

Impact data:

What are some uses for the lot that you would NOT like to see?	Repeated Answer
Anything that excludes community input and use	28
Increased traffic	6
Late night/light pollution	6
Noise	6
A plan dominated by a single interest or use	5
Drug use/hangout	4
Cost to taxpayers	2



Process and findings

The Committee submits this narrative of our process because it provides important context to our scope of work and the final product that is the culmination of one year of work. In addition, the Committee wishes to make a formal, institutional record of our work, as it likely will prove helpful for future committees, if necessary.¹ We recognize it is quite lengthy, which is why we also provide an Executive Summary at the beginning of this Report.

I. **Formation of Committee**

On March 15, 2023, the Select Board voted unanimously to approve the formation of an ad hoc Committee, the Ethel Bisbee Lot Land Use Ad Hoc Committee (“Ethel Bisbee Committee” or “the Committee”), to serve as an

¹ We note that a prior ad hoc committee was appointed in circa 2017 to address this same topic, and unfortunately no formal record of their work was maintained or could be provided to us, so there may have been a duplication of efforts.

advisory committee from April 5, 2023 to April 5, 2024. According to a public posting by the then-Town Manager, Natalie Andrews, the purpose of the 9-member Committee was as follows:

[T]o consider and recommend possible uses for Map 25, Lot 139, also known as the Ethel Bisbee Lot. Such use may include municipal use, sale, or lease of all or portion of the land. The Committee should consider the financial impact to the Town including the potential costs, revenue opportunities, and overall economic benefits to the Town as part of its recommended possible uses.”² (Appendix 1)

Committee applicants submitted a written Letter of Interest to the Board c/o the Town Manager. The Select Board then voted to approve individual applicants. A Committee of nine was then formed. The Committee members were Beth Allen, Travis Brooks, Faye Christoforo, Sarah DeCato³, Katie Getchell, Lee Hughes, Charles Raymond, Bridget Remington, and Tom Zicarelli. Selectperson Meryl Kelly was appointed to serve as liaison between the Committee and the Select Board. Jim Bennett, who had served on a previous iteration of an advisory committee on the same topic, was appointed as a non-voting member.

Two Committee members are homeowners who directly abutt the subject property. Three members grew up in the Town of Bethel. Six have lived in

² The mandate as described by the Town Manager in the public posting differed from Selectperson Kelly’s recollection of the mandate voted on at the Select Board meeting, which was unfortunately not recorded. Further, the minutes of that meeting do not contain any specificity. Selectperson Kelly believed that the mandate was to create an evaluation tool for proposed uses, or a rubric, with categories and scoring scales. We understood our mandate was to make recommendations about hypothetical uses. Frequently, our interactions with the public suggested the public understanding was that the Committee would actually be deciding on a use, which was never our understanding. Ultimately, we made recommendations for a process for the Board to use in evaluating proposed uses, along with an analysis of the important considerations for making a decision.

³ Maryvonne Wheeler was originally appointed to serve but resigned shortly after the Committee’s formation due to professional obligations when a permanent site for the food pantry and district exchange was located; Sarah DeCato took her place and served for the remainder of the term.

Bethel for more than 20 years. Two have lived in Bethel for less than 5 years. Six currently work or worked in Bethel. Without exception, no member had a personal agenda or preconceived idea for the best use of the lot. We believe this was reflected in our individual Letters of Interest. It was definitely reflected in our work together. We wish to praise the Select Board for selecting a diverse team of individuals to represent the diverse interests of the Town of Bethel.

II. Initial Stages - Information Gathering

The Committee's first meeting was held on April 19, 2023. Selectperson Kelly set the agenda and led the meeting. Ms. Kelly provided a site history and a Town map showing the lot and its abutters, which is included at the end of this report. The Committee referenced this visual aid numerous times during its work - it was never lost on us that the use of the Lot directly impacts many families and businesses. Jim Bennett provided his understanding, from previous committee work, of the historic and more recent uses of the lot. He emphasized that any future use of the Lot would have an impact on numerous Town functions, as the Lot had been used (informally) to assist in other municipal functions.

The Committee decided that the first phase of its work would be to gather information about the needs and wants of the community. Our goal was to learn as much as possible about not just the community's ideas for the use of the space, but also any needs that had already been identified by community groups representing various populations in the community. We wanted to cast a wide net, and we did not want to duplicate work. Therefore, we decided to first gather information from already existing sources, as we developed means for gathering new information. The information we gathered about existing studies is included in our digital deliverables to the Board.

A. Existing Information/Studies

We were aware of existing comprehensive projects that involved evaluation of the Town's wants and needs and began by reference to those. First was the Mahoosuc Heart & Soul project that took place in 2017 and 2018 and that culminated in a community action plan, with action items derived from the values of the community after hundreds of interviews and numerous public meetings, which were then sorted by priority and feasibility. We believe the action plan was presented to the Select Board in 2018. The action plan is a "living document," meaning it is updated as necessary; the version we referenced was updated June 11, 2021.⁴ We do not know who the keeper of this document is. As of the June 2021 update, action had begun on many of the expressed needs and goals of the community, mostly by local nonprofits and other organizations. Indeed, the Age Friendly Community Initiative ("AFCI") adopted some of the action items with relevance to its target population and made its own action plan; the AFCI has made significant progress on many of these items. Other local organizations have taken responsibility for addressing many of the identified needs. Nevertheless, some notable needs still in existence were for a community center, for recreational space - both for children and adults - and for opportunities for adults and children to do things together (indoors and outside), and for better access to healthy food.

We also looked at the Mahoosuc Region Sustainable Tourism Plan, prepared in April 2020. Notable themes from that report were the need for affordable housing for local tourism-related workforce, the need for creation of year-round, living wage jobs - i.e, striving for a balanced, year-round economy, protecting the character and lifestyle of the region, and the importance of enhancing the "visitor experience" - including interactions with locals - so that visitors form a long-term connection to the area.

⁴ We do not know who the keeper of this document is. Amy Scott, currently of the Northern Forest Center, provided valuable institutional knowledge and context about the work done in the community since the project was completed.

We were hopeful that a report would have been made by the previous (circa 2017) Ethel Bisbee Committee, and although Jim Bennett's recollection of the work done by that committee was somewhat helpful, we were dismayed that there was no formal, written record of the work performed or a report of the outcome, or if it exists, we were never able to access it.

Because Bethel enjoys a wealth of community organizations that work in service of the community, we also met with the principals of numerous community organizations in order to gain an understanding of the goals they were working on, the population(s) they served, the still-unmet needs for their population(s), and whether their organization had any ideas for the use of the Ethel Bisbee Lot. In all, we spoke with representatives of approximately 30 organizations. So that these representatives would speak freely with us, we did not transcribe these conversations. We provide our anecdotal takeaways from these conversations in Section B.

B. Gathering New Information

Because any proposed use of the Ethel Bisbee lot will require the approval of the Town voters, we wanted to hear directly from them. We created a simple, two-question, open-ended survey that asked the responder to state what they did want to see at the site as well as what they did not want. The first problem we had to solve was how to reach the voters. The Town does not maintain an electronic mailing list of voters, we were told, and using the postal service would have been cost-prohibitive. Therefore, we posted physical flyers, posted on social media, attended public gatherings, made announcements at Town Meetings, staffed a table at the voting site on election day, and spread the word to our friends and acquaintances. People were invited to opt-in to our newsletter and to answer the survey via an electronic link that we provided. Ultimately, we received 214 individual responses.

We also searched Facebook Bethel-specific pages like "Team Bethel" for discussions about the Ethel Bisbee site and compiled a list of those responses. Although we know that there is not always a correlation between

vocal social media response and voting results, we did not want to ignore anyone's opinion.

We spoke with representatives of approximately 30 organizations operating in this region to get an understanding of their work, how it overlaps with ideas for use of the Ethel Bisbee lot, and what they consider to be important and needed in our community. Above and beyond that, each of us has had several to a dozen conversations with neighbors and friends, and the anecdotal information gathered, while subjective, is summarized as follows:

- Residents are not aware of the spaces and resources available to them for meetings, events, groups, etc (airport meeting room, church community rooms, Telstar spaces, Bethel Inn spaces, Library, Food Bank, District Exchange, for example).
- The Chamber of Commerce did a comprehensive inventory of available spaces many years ago and considered hiring a scheduler to help connect users with spaces, including the creation of a website, but was never pursued.
- There is a general lack of communication between individual community members, community organizations, and the Town of Bethel about existing resources, developing projects, and the needs/desires of the residents.
- While there is a common refrain - both in our conversations and in the survey data - for a "community center":
 - There is not a unity of understanding about what a "community center" comprises - although loosely it would appear to include a space that would involve "shared use" and "bringing together youth and seniors," according to some of our survey responses. We recommend, below, further exploration of this idea.
 - We understand there are various models for funding a community center, and none of our conversations delved into that level of detail - again, we recommend further exploration of that idea.
 - There are ongoing conversations among some organizations about a community center to meet their organizational needs.

- One member of the community shared with us a conceptual plan for a community center, which is included in our deliverables.
- The failing bus garage and outdated ambulance barn are generally understood as needs; there was a sense that these and other municipal needs should be looked at together and combined in an existing/expanded facility elsewhere. The lack of a comprehensive plan for the Town and its facilities for public services was noted and informed our recommendations below.
 - During our tenure, a proposal for a new ambulance barn was submitted to the Select Board. We include it in our deliverables for purposes of completeness.
- Flexible, open recreation and gardening were mentioned several times, as was the idea of a small structure providing water and electricity for bathrooms (that would build on the “walkable Main Street” initiative), warming (during skating season), and catering staging for event rentals.
- It was suggested that there was need for an urgent care facility to alleviate Bethel Community Health Center and minimize the need for emergency room visits at Rumford or Stephen’s hospitals.
- It was noted that the Mahoosuc Kids Association has grown beyond available space at Crescent Park School and is seeking space for expansion that meets their needs.

Throughout the process, we sent electronic newsletters to the people who had opted in to such communication, explaining our mandate and sharing our progress as a Committee. It was important for us to be transparent and to keep the public up-to-date on what we were doing in order to inform and engage everyone who had expressed interest. We also shared these newsletters with the heads of local organizations and asked them to share them with their mailing lists. We were often surprised to learn that, in spite of our efforts, people continued to be under the impression that we would be deciding the future of the Lot. We were also surprised, at times, by the general apathy we encountered. Although many individuals were excited about the possibilities for the Lot, and voiced strong opinions, it was not unusual for us to interact with people whose attitude was “Whatever you decide, it will probably be fine.”

C. Consideration of Existing Uses

We wanted to make sure any use we recommended would take into consideration the impact on existing uses, whether those uses were ongoing or occasional.

For example, we learned that in recent years, the Lot had been used as a parking area for school buses when the bus garage flooded. The Public Works Department also uses the Lot for various occasional purposes including the gathering of debris from spring street sweeping. In the winter, for the past few years, the Recreation Department has used the Lot for a skating rink that is used by local youth and families.

One question we had, that has not been answered thus far, is what the current procedure is for approval of temporary use of the Lot. Does the public have a right to use it, with or without a permit? Is there a permitting process? Is municipal use allowed without a plan or permit? Is the public required to approve temporary uses?

III. Evaluation Stage

We knew at the beginning stages of our process that we would need a method for taking information and formulating a recommendation. We were mindful of the need for any evaluation tool to be objective, while also recognizing that for an evaluation tool to be useful, it needs to be tailored to the individual circumstances, which can be subjective. In addition, taking data such as survey responses and creating a summary requires independent judgment and therefore will have a subjective component. None of us is a data analyst. Therefore, coming up with the means of evaluating the information was as challenging to us as any other part of the project. As we continued to collect information, we began the process of crafting a method for evaluating it.

A tool for assessing the wide variety of suggestions would require a list of the many consequences each would incur for the Town. The Committee was ever aware of the unique characteristics of the Ethel Bisbee Lot located close to the center of Town, with 19 neighbors abutting the site. Each idea recorded offered widely divergent consequences for the property, the abutters, the Town, and the townspeople.

We began by brainstorming general areas of impact, such as financial impacts, impacts to neighbors, meeting existing/known needs, popularity, and environmental. As we organized these areas thematically, we drilled down into greater detail - for example, financial impacts comprised not only capital costs, but loss of income, decommissioning costs, and ongoing costs. We also looked at other municipal evaluation tools, such as for evaluating Requests for Proposals, for guidance.

This moment in our work clarified our mandate - rather than making a recommendation about a specific use, our time would be best spent developing tools that the Select Board could use to evaluate any potential projects with actual, specific projects. We sought and received clarification that this work would meet the requirements of our mandate. Thereafter, our work involved fine-tuning the evaluation tools. These tools represent our consensus, reached after many hours of analysis and discussion, of what factors should be considered for any future use of the Lot. The Self Screening Worksheet is designed to help an applicant assess the strength of their proposal, and guide them to improving it before submitting an Application Form.

The self-screening tool and application we created are included following our recommendation section.

Recommendations

Based on our work over the past year, we conclude that the Town should:

- Create a Comprehensive Plan to address, at a minimum, meeting future needs for the Town services/facilities (bus garage, ambulance garage, fire station, etc.), but which also ideally would address meeting non-municipal community needs.
- Develop and publish standards and procedures for current use of the Lot.
 - For example, the Lot has now been used as a skating rink for two years. Is the Lot available for use by other members of the public? When the Town uses the Lot for storing materials or equipment, is there a procedure for notifying abutters? The public would benefit from having clearly communicated information about the use of the Lot.
 - In addition to guidelines for current use, the board should consider maintenance issues, including trash removal, landscaping, repairing the parking lot, and provisions for public restrooms.
- Consider forming an ad hoc committee or series of public meetings to study the need for and feasibility of a community center, whether at this location or elsewhere. This process should include defining “community center.”
- Identify and implement a mechanism for archiving the data collected in this process, which would include:
 - Moving the most important deliverables from our Committee to another accessible location; and
 - Determining how to use the contacts on the newsletter list.
- Consider consolidating and promoting available meeting/gathering spaces and resources on the Town website and/or in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce

If/when the Select Board determines it is ready to issue an RFP for the site, it should:

- Determine the actual buildable space on the Lot and current parking/traffic standards.
- Consider contracting for the development of an evaluation tool similar to the one we attempted to create. It must be reliable and valid. We highly recommend that the tool evaluate the factors we considered most important and capture the questions and ideas expressed in the Application Form.
- Develop a process for submission of proposed uses and evaluation, public feedback, and the like.

Tools for the Evaluation of Uses

The Committee has developed tools to be utilized in the evaluation of possible uses of the lot. The tools are:

- Self Screening Worksheet: This worksheet consists of 10 questions that are based on the topics/criteria that emerged in the community input process. The responses to each question are ranked from most to least desirable for the town at large. Respondents to the screening tool will be expected to rank their answers and add corresponding comments.
- Application Form: This form consists of all questions this Committee deems important for proposals to be considered. Parties interested in proposing uses for the lot will be expected to complete all questions in this proposal.

The recommended process for implementing these tools is as follows. Any interested parties must complete the Self Screening Worksheet. Based on the outcome of the screening worksheet, the applicant will decide whether or not to submit an Application Form. All proposals to the Select Board will include a completed Self Screening Worksheet, Application Form, and Lot Plan.

Self Screening Worksheet

Self Screening Worksheet for Project Ideas for the Ethel Bisbee Lot

This worksheet consists of 10 questions that are based on the topics/criteria that emerged in the community input process. The responses to each question are ranked from most desirable (top checkbox) to least desirable (bottom checkbox) for the town at large. Respondents to the screening tool will be expected to rank their answers and add corresponding comments. Please use your responses to this screening tool to determine if your idea might be a good fit for this location.

		Most desirable response ↓ Least desirable response	Select the one that most aligns with your project idea	Explain your response
1	How much of the time (day/week/year) would this be a usable space for the public?	Always Frequently Occasionally Rarely Never	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
2	Are there other town spaces where this need is currently being met?	No Possibly Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
3	Will this idea impact pedestrian and vehicular traffic? (A parking plan would be required based on anticipated usage by the planning board)	No increase Occasional increase Seasonal increase Multi seasonal increase Year round increase	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
4	Will this idea increase noise at the site?	No increase Occasional increase Seasonal increase Multi seasonal increase Year round increase	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
5	Will this idea increase exterior lighting at the site?	No increase Occasional increase Seasonal increase Multi seasonal increase Year round increase	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

6	<p>Does this idea support the groups that have been identified in the survey (youth; seniors; low income households; local workers)?</p>	<p>Actively serves all 4</p> <p>Serves 3 groups</p> <p>Serves 2 groups</p> <p>Serves 1 group</p> <p>Does not serve listed groups</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
7	<p>Does this idea support known needs, or those identified in community conversations?</p>	<p>Supports needs identified by multiple groups</p> <p>Supports needs identified by one group</p> <p>Does not serve any identified needs</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
8	<p>Does this idea maximize the unique characteristics of the property (central location; no through traffic; water&sewer; electricity)?</p>	<p>4 characteristics</p> <p>3 characteristics</p> <p>2 characteristics</p> <p>1 characteristic</p> <p>None of the listed characteristics</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
9	<p>What financial impact will this idea have on the town (capital costs, ongoing costs, lost revenue, income)?</p>	<p>Generates revenue for the town</p> <p>Breaks even on an annual basis</p> <p>Creates cost for the town</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
10	<p>Does this project increase the value/desirability of adjacent properties in keeping with the cultural value and historical significance of the town?</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Possibly</p> <p>No</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>

Application Form

The Town of Bethel owns very little land. Of the land that the Town of Bethel owns, the Ethel Bisbee Lot is the only space not developed or dedicated to another use (such as cemeteries). The Ethel Bisbee Lot is currently a field and a parking lot comprising 1.5 acres. It is served by Town water and sewer and has electric service. Its uniqueness lies in its location and characteristics. It is in a walkable location central to town. It sits at the end of a mostly residential, dead-end street that intersects with Main Street, adjacent to the local grocery store, post office, and hardware store. It is bordered by four residential streets, with 19 residential abutters, in the Bethel Village. Any use of the Ethel Bisbee Lot impacts the character of the town and quality of life, in particular for the neighborhood. Applicants should consider these factors when proposing a project. Please complete the Self Screening Worksheet before the following application and include it along with a site plan.

Project Title:

Contact Name:

Contact Info:

1. Give a brief overview of the project you are proposing.
 - a. Is this a temporary or permanent use? If temporary, what is the expected duration? Would the use be year-round?
 - b. Is this use already in existence in the Bethel community? If so, why is the Ethel Bisbee site better than the current site?
 - c. Who is the target population for this project?
 - d. How does this project meet the needs of our community?

2. How will this project impact local vehicular and pedestrian traffic? Please include the following:
 - a. What type and volume of traffic would be generated by your proposed project?
 - b. Would the existing infrastructure/roads meet the traffic volume/type?
 - c. What accommodations would have to be made to meet the traffic needs?
 - d. What about parking for staff/visitors? (Parking plans are subject to code requirements and Planning Board review and approval.)
 - e. How many visitors per day would you estimate?

3. How will this project impact abutters? Please include information on the following:
 - a. What would be the hours of use for this proposed project?
 - b. How will this project increase noise at the site? Will that be different day vs night and weekday vs weekend? Other seasonal variations? What kind of noise? (children playing vs emergency vehicle sirens, for example)
 - c. Will this project increase light at the site? Please include the following details: Will that be different day vs night and weekday vs weekend? Other seasonal variations? What kind of light? (string lights vs flood lights, light from traffic...etc.)
 - d. Will this impede existing views?
 - e. Does this project include artistic/aesthetic/architectural qualities that will add cultural value or historical significance to the character of town?

4. Keeping in mind the unique nature of this property and the limited land the Town owns, is this proposal the best use of the property? How? In answering this question, consider the following:
 - a. Location

- b. Impacts to abutters
- c. Size
- d. Availability of other locations
- e. Impact on future use/development
- f. Pre-existing services: water, sewer, electricity
- g. No through traffic

5. What financial impact will this project have on the town? Please include information on the following:

- a. Is the town expected to contribute to any cost?
 - i. If not, do you have financial backing for the project? What does this cover? For what time period?
 - ii. If yes, estimate the following: capital costs, ongoing costs, staffing, lost revenue.
 - iii. Calculate the annual cost per taxpayer.
- b. Will the project raise revenue for the town, whether directly through taxes or indirectly through increased revenue to the town?
- c. If this project includes a permanent structure, what is the reasonable lifespan of this project? How does this factor affect the costs to the town? Will the town be responsible for maintenance, decommissioning costs, liability insurance, etc. when the site is no longer in use?

6. To what extent, if any, will this project be usable by the residents and taxpayers of Bethel? Please include information on the following:

- a. Does this project allow public use? If not, describe how such non-public use will nevertheless benefit the community as a whole?
- b. Does this project target a specific demographic, and if so, which and why? Will such use, even if it targets a specific population, still benefit the community as a whole? How?
- c. Does this project exclude any population? Projects that exclude any population may not be considered.

- d. Is this project accessible?
- e. Exclusive of any tax impact, will this project have any cost for users?

Site Plan



Town Office Posting for Letters of Interest



To all interested parties,

On March 15, 2023 the Board of Selectmen voted unanimously, "To see if the Board would vote to approve a recommendation for an Ethel Bisbee Lot Land Use Ad Hoc Committee. This committee will be an advisory committee to the Board of Selectmen from April 5, 2023 until April 5, 2024"

The purpose of the 9-member Committee is to consider and recommend possible uses for Map 25, Lot 139, also known as the Ethel Bisbee Lot. Such use may include municipal use, sale, or lease of all or portion of the land. The Committee should consider the financial impact to the Town including the potential costs, revenue opportunities, and overall economic benefits to the Town as part of its recommended possible uses.

As part of its deliberations, the Committee should consider the following:

- Hold public workshops/input sessions to evaluate public opinion, develop feasible options, and determine the financial impact to the public
- Conduct a public opinion poll to gauge community preferences
- Consult with appropriate town employees, boards and commissions, and governmental agencies to assist in developing recommendations
- Co-ordinate with any town strategic planning and/or facility planning initiatives

The proposed meeting schedule was once every other week, or as often as needed, beginning after selection at the April 5, 2023 Board of Selectmen meeting.

Please submit your Letter of Interest to be considered by the Board of Selectmen to the Town Office, c/o the Town Manager, No Later Than March 31, 2023.

Thank you,
Respectfully,
Natalie Andrews
Town Manager

Committee Deliverables to the Select Board shared digitally:

Newsletter and subscriber list

Meeting minutes

Survey form + responses

Ambulance proposal

Townsperson proposal

Interim reports to Select Board

Surveys and newsletters sent by the Committee

Prior related studies

RFP templates

EBS background info