

Bethel Township Strategic Land Use Plan and Ten-Year Plan Update Phase I Report – Citizen Input Sessions and SWOT Analysis September 3, 2021

Introduction

The Bethel Township Trustees engaged JT Development Consulting, LLC to assist the township with a strategic review of the current Land Use Plan and the development of recommended updates and modifications to the Plan. The current Land Use Plan was adopted in 2009, and in keeping with generally accepted planning practices, is due for a periodic review and update.

The first phase of the engagement was the collection of citizen input regarding the Land Use Plan and the citizen's vision for the township and how that may be reflected in the update of the Land Use Plan. That initial activity is described in this Phase I report.

Citizen Input and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Process

The first phase of the process was to hold two citizen input sessions and conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) process to gather specific citizen input in response to three questions:

1. Vision of the current Land Use Plan - Does the current plan reflect the vision for the township in 2021?
2. How has the plan worked – Does the plan provide the township trustees and administration the guidance and tools they need to administer and implement the plan?
3. Has the plan been followed – How has development since the plan was adopted in 2009 impacted the plan?

The citizen input sessions were held on Monday, August 2nd and Tuesday, August 3rd from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm. A brief overview of the current Land Use Plan and its various components was presented prior to the SWOT exercise. The SWOT resulted in a total of 148 responses from the citizens in attendance, 85 from the Monday session and 63 from the Tuesday session.

The citizen input and responses were compiled from the flip chart sheets and are provided as Attachment A to this report. The original flip chart sheets have been preserved and have been provided to the township administrator to retain as part of the record of the Land Use Plan review and update.

SWOT Analysis and Themes

The SWOT responses were analyzed and categorized into groups based upon their similarity and subject matter. The analysis identified 10 recurring themes or subject areas.

1. Land Use Plan – Implementation and Accountability
2. Communication – Community Consensus
3. Infrastructure – Roads, Traffic, Utilities, Township Services
4. Quality of Life – Rural Character of the Township
5. Targeted Development – Clustering Compatible Uses
6. Interjurisdictional Coordination – Township, County, MVRPC, State
7. Schools – Impact of Residential Development
8. Farmland – Rural Preservation
9. Property Values and Tax Base
10. Annexation – Development Pressure

Attachment A identifies which SWOT responses were categorized under each Theme. An acronym representing each of the 10 Themes is indicated at the end of each SWOT response. The categorization is subjective in nature and has been determined by the consultant. Some responses could be interpreted to fit into more than one Theme category, however, even some minor shifting of responses between categories does not materially affect the overall outcome of the Theme analysis.

The Theme analysis with the number of responses from each of the two sessions and the total number of responses is provided in Table 1. Table 1 lists the Themes in priority order based upon the total number of citizen responses in each of the Theme categories.

Table 1 provides a clear picture of the priority issues that are of concern to the citizens in attendance at the input sessions. 75% of all SWOT responses were clustered under the top five Themes in Table 1, and 46% were captured under the top two Themes. It is recommended that these top 5 areas should be a primary focus the next phase of the Strategic Land Use Plan update.

1. Land Use Plan – Implementation and Accountability
2. Communication – Community Consensus
3. Infrastructure – Roads, Traffic, Utilities, Township Services
4. Quality of Life – Rural Character of the Township
5. Targeted Development – Clustering Compatible Uses

Using the 5 priority Themes from Table 1, the SWOT responses were compiled for each of the top 5 Themes in Attachment B. Based on the review and analysis of the SWOT responses in Attachment B, the following areas should be considered in the next phase of the Strategic Land Use Plan and 10-Year review process.

Land Use Plan – Implementation and Accountability

1. The plan, designated planning areas and the policies for implementation need clear definition and more detail.
2. Policies should provide clear guidelines for the use and application of the Land Use Plan to specific zoning requests.
3. Criteria or policies should be established for exceptions.
4. Conservation Development should describe how this approach can work, potential for incentives to encourage its use.
5. Policy and process to bring existing zoning into conformance with the Land Use Plan.
6. Minimum lot size clarification and strict adherence.
7. Periodic review of actual zoning decisions and development to determine conformance and viability of the Land Use Plan.
8. Establishment of specific geographic areas to encourage clustering of uses, target development and ensure rural preservation.

Communication and Consensus

1. Better use of existing township communication channels regarding land use, zoning decisions and development issues – website, Facebook, newsletter.
2. Examine ways to better educate citizens on zoning and land use – how it works, limits of local jurisdiction, etc. – online/in-person citizen seminars?
3. Gather data on land use, development, demographics, and growth trends and distribute them to citizens, township boards etc.

Infrastructure – Roads, Traffic, Utilities, Twp. Services

1. Define infrastructure needs in relation to the Land Use Plan categories, what exists and what needs to be provided to implement the plan.
2. Clearly define areas for further infrastructure improvements and conversely, areas where minimum services to retain the rural character will be maintained.

Quality of Life – Rural Character

1. Clear definition and establishment of land use category for rural preservation.
2. Clarify and simplify minimum lot sizes – particularly residential.
3. Conservation Development – designate specific areas of the township in the plan.
4. Clear definition and limits for development areas within the township incorporated as policy in the Land Use Plan.

Targeted Development – Clustering Compatible Uses

1. Designate specific development areas or corridors where development will be encouraged.
2. Designate specific preservation areas where development will be discouraged.
3. Conform existing zoning to the Land Use Plan proactively wherever possible.
4. Cluster similar uses in specific geographic areas in the plan and define/designate buffer or transition areas.
5. Explore opportunities to designate areas for housing for young families within the plan (that are not Carriage Trails).

One last item to consider from the SWOT analysis is a clear divergence between responses about Quality of Life – Rural Character of the Township as compared to responses about Farmland – Rural Preservation. There were over twice as many citizen responses regarding preserving the rural character and quality of life of the township as compared to farmland preservation. It is recommended that these two areas be further clarified and understood so that they can be accurately reflected in the Land Use Plan.

Recommendations for Phase II

Reconvene the citizens who participated in the SWOT as well as any other interested citizens for a second round of community meetings. The meetings would be structured to cover two areas:

1. Presentation of the results and analysis of the SWOT process
2. Presentation of DRAFT samples of land use categories, definitions, and policies for citizen input.

This will allow for early input from citizens to determine whether the draft samples are responsive to citizen input from the SWOT, prior to undertaking any significant work on the actual updates to the plan.

TABLE 1 - Phase I Report
Theme Analysis from Bethel Twp SWOT

	Theme	Acronym	Monday Session	Tuesday Session	Total
1	Land Use Plan - Implementation and Accountability	LUP	24	22	46
2	Communication - Community Consensus	CC	8	11	19
3	Infrastructure - Roads, Traffic, Utilities, Twp Services	IN	13	4	17
4	Quality of Life - Rural Character	QOL	7	8	15
5	Targeted Development -Clustering Compatible Uses	TD	10	4	14
6	Interjurisdictional Coordination - Twp, County, MVRPC, State	JC	8	2	10
7	Schools	SC	5	4	9
8	Farmland - Rural Preservation	FR	5	1	6
9	Property Values and Tax Base	PV	3	3	6
10	Annexation - Development Pressure	AN	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>
	Total Responses		85	63	148

ATTACHMENT A

Session: Monday, August 2, Township Fire Department

DOES THE VISION OF THE CURRENT LAND USE PLAN REFLECT THE VISION TODAY?

STRENGTHS

Route 201 Business Corridor is apparent - **TD**

Attractive, rural nature of community with emphasis on rural - **QOL**

Township has a plan - **LUP**

Bethel is a quiet and safe place to live - **QOL**

Good schools - **SC**

Wildlife is evident - **QOL**

Land is used for agriculture/food production - **FR**

Residential gardens are pleasant - **QOL**

Land has ability for functional septic systems - **IN**

Township staff and can approve/deny zoning requests utilizing the current land use plan - **LUP**

Land use plan outlines principles for zoning - **LUP**

Water wells are functioning soundly - **IN**

Good, caring, positive community - **QOL**

Roads are decent - **IN**

WEAKNESSES

Land Use Plan is only a guide, lacks "teeth" - **LUP**

Needs more residential categories - **LUP**

Categories need more definition (e.g., what does rural settlement really mean?) - **LUP**

Does not impact annexation - **AN**

Agricultural land at risk due to sale/transfer - **FR**

Needs a mechanism for a Land Trust option - **FR**

Need to include emerging trends: large production solar, fiber utilities, other technology that could affect land use - **TD**

Plan needs more organization: Cluster areas for like uses such as commercial, light industrial - **TD**

Historical zoning is incompatible with current land use plan - **LUP**

Loss of light industrial and tax base has occurred - **PV**

New housing development has caused pressure on school and costs - **SC**

OPPORTUNITIES

Utilize Planned Unit Development process - **LUP**

Population growth can spur business opportunities - **PV**

Carriage Trails development to Bethel Schools: Connectivity and development opportunities for Brandt - **TD**

Re-think development assumptions - **LUP**

Availability of land - **TD**

Ability for buffers for commercial/agricultural boundaries - **TD**

Re-think floodplains, other public use areas for development - **LUP**

Other uses for floodplain: Recreation, etc. - **LUP**

THREATS

Eminent domain by utility and/or private companies - **IN**

Loss of township identity - **QOL**

Retention pond regulations/septic interference/environment degradation/aquifer protection - **JC**

Effect of housing development on well capacity - **IN**

Large tracts of land available for undesirable development - **LUP**

Increased traffic: Safety and road repair concerns - **IN**

Climate change effects on land - **QOL**

School capacity - **SC**

HAS THE LAND USE PLAN WORKED? DOES THE PLAN PROVIDE THE TOWNSHIP TRUSTEES AND ADMINISTRATION WITH THE GUIDANCE AND TOOLS NEEDED TO ADMINISTER AND IMPLEMENT LAND USE IN BETHEL TOWNSHIP?

STRENGTHS

Zoning Board - **LUP**

Some guidance vs. nothing - **LUP**

Voter approval - **CC**

WEAKNESSES

Land Use Plan is not followed - **LUP**

Subjective - **CC**

Lack of outlining actions/communications of actions taken - **CC**

Referendum remedy only - **CC**

Lack of knowledge of law - **CC**

10 years may be too long - **LUP**

Decrease of property values (put under threats?) - **PV**

OPPORTUNITIES

Listen to residents - **CC**

Make Land Use Plan enforceable - **LUP**

Define/clarify residential and other groups - **LUP**

Re-think minimum lot sizes - **LUP**

Reflect current zoning - **LUP**

Establish policies for land use - **LUP**

THREATS

Highest/best use - **TD**

Conflict with Miami County Planning Commission - **JC**

Annexation by Huber Heights - **AN**

Land geology factors: Limestone, high groundwater, soil, other water issues - **IN**

Height limit for buildings - **LUP**

Miami County implications of approvals for Bethel Township - **JC**

Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC) subdivision regulations may be inconsistent with land use desires - **JC**

HOW HAS DEVELOPMENT SINCE 2010 IMPACTED THE LAND USE PLAN? HAS DEVELOPMENT FOLLOWED THE LAND USE PLAN?

STRENGTHS

Good availability of water pressure/fire flow - **IN**

Good reuse of commercial buildings - **TD**

Interest generated for land use - **CC**

Allows for new development with established guidelines - **LUP**

Good fire department - **IN**

WEAKNESSES

Roads in need of repair - **IN**

Increase of discipline issues at Bethel schools - **SC**

Development too fast to be sustained - **TD**

OPPORTUNITIES

Growth of school population - **SC**

Definition and creation of commercial and other business opportunities - **TD**

Land Use Plan can be coordinated and in cooperation with Dayton Development Coalition, Miami County, MVRPC - **JC**

Use of public use/green space/floodplain for increasing population - **LUP**

Better traffic flow and proper sizing for Rt. 201/Rt. 571 and other County roads - **IN**

Provide incentives to continue farm/agriculture - **FR**

THREATS

Development may cause traffic issues: Speeding, traffic flow, accidents - **IN**

Scare tactics by Trustees - **CC**

Additional need for police/fire services - **IN**

Farmland stranded by development (landlocked) – ensure adequate access - **FR**

PARKING LOT

Outline Carriage Trails development statistics with Bethel Township statistics:

Single family, Senior, Multi-family, etc.

of units, year constructed – **NOT CLASSIFIED - THESE ARE DATA ISSUES**

How to control annexation or type of annexation (multi-family units) - **JC**

Mechanism to hold developers accountable: What they say are going to build, quality of construction - **JC**

Review Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission actions in Bethel Township - **JC**

Outline what has Bethel Township lost due to annexation – **NOT CLASSIFIED – DATA ISSUE**

ATTACHMENT A

Session: Tuesday, August 3, Bethel United Methodist Church

DOES THE VISION OF THE CURRENT LAND USE PLAN REFLECT THE VISION TODAY?

STRENGTHS

Property has been set aside as rural designation - **QOL**

Implementation of Land Use Plan effect on households - **LUP**

Plan has saved Bethel school system - **SC**

Maintains school as a community hub - **SC**

Areas of township have been segmented in clusters: Commercial, residential, industrial, etc. - **TD**

Allows for commercial/industrial growth which helps township tax base - **PV**

WEAKNESSES

Some combining of residential and industrial in neighborhoods - **LUP**

Need retail development in township - **TD**

Need strategy for large, agricultural properties - **FR**

Execution of rural settlement properties - **QOL**

Need to address infrastructure: Roads, water, etc. - **IN**

OPPORTUNITIES

Desirable community: Bethel people want to maintain roots here - **QOL**

Development of school area as hub for community and sense of place - **SC**

Affect affordable housing for young families - **TD**

THREATS

Ability to develop/change property to ward off annexation - **AN**

Lack of understanding about zoning or plan implementation - **CC**

Need for community agreement about Plan and actions taken - **CC**

Inconsistencies of Plan between Township and Miami County - **JC**

Referendums can derail Plan - **CC**

Federal/State mandates that can impact Plan - **JC**

Development pressure of landowners - **AN**

Lack of infrastructure in rural areas - **IN**

HAS THE LAND USE PLAN WORKED? DOES THE PLAN PROVIDE THE TOWNSHIP TRUSTEES AND ADMINISTRATION WITH THE GUIDANCE AND TOOLS NEEDED TO ADMINISTER AND IMPLEMENT LAND USE IN BETHEL TOWNSHIP?

STRENGTHS

Allows for flexibility - **LUP**

Conservation development - **LUP**

Outlines planning categories - **LUP**

WEAKNESSES

Planning categories could be more specific - **LUP**

Explanation of how to implement conservation development to meet landowners needs: Are there other options for residential properties while keeping a sense of community? - **LUP**

Minimum lot size challenges - **LUP**

Need for community gathering space - **QOL**

Lack of understanding about Land Use Plan and why/how categories are designated - **CC**

OPPORTUNITIES

Creates and allows for zoning and is consistent - **LUP**

Conservation development: Tool that can reserve rural character - **LUP**

Outline categories with specific residents needs/wants/understanding - **CC**

THREATS

Annexation enables exercising options in conflict with Plan - **AN**

School overgrowth, capacity issues - **SC**

What does public/community want in Plan?: Ideas change over time, new concepts change views - **CC**

Communication/education to citizens about land use: Drive citizens to use information that is in place (website, newsletter, Facebook page) - **CC**

Incentivize/provide economic value for farmers for conservation development - **QOL**

Fear of change: "Not the Bethel way". Legacy feelings of how things are and how they will change - **CC**

HOW HAS DEVELOPMENT SINCE 2010 IMPACTED THE LAND USE PLAN? HAS DEVELOPMENT FOLLOWED THE LAND USE PLAN?

STRENGTHS

Interest in Land Use Plan by citizens - **LUP**

Succeeded in perceived slowing of development in Township - **QOL**

Size of lots were consistent in Plan - **LUP**

Land Use Plan has held off some annexation - **LUP**

WEAKNESSES

Need clarity on categories for existing and future growth - **LUP**

Conservation development hasn't occurred as desired - **LUP**

Conservation development difficult to apply to traditional agricultural areas - **LUP**

Financial inability for development - **PV**

Make conservation development stronger part of Land Use Plan - **LUP**

Make rural settlement a core part of Plan: Clarify category, how used, purpose, viability - **LUP**

OPPORTUNITIES

Land Use Plan reviewed/updated more frequently - **LUP**

Could help with education/communication - **CC**

Use current communication channels for Land Use Plan education - **CC**

THREATS

Development has occurred though not in the Township - **TD**

Changing demographics of Township - **QOL**

Infrastructure issue for development: Utilities/drainage - **IN**

Management of resources or implementation of Plan that may negatively affect Township: Need for utilities, property values - **IN**

Not enough community involvement in land use - **CC**

Financial resources to implement Plan - **PV**

PARKING LOT

Development pressure - **AN**

Desirable community: Affects all SWOT - **QOL**

Nomenclature: Clarity and examples - **LUP**

What does rural mean? - **LUP**

Conservation development - **LUP**

History of land use over time – **NOT CLASSIFIED – DATA ISSUE**

Attachment B

Top Five Priority Themes from SWOT

No. 1. Land Use Plan – Implementation and Accountability

Strengths – Land Use Plan

1. Township has a plan – LUP
2. Township staff can approve/deny zoning requests utilizing the current land use plan - LUP
3. Land use plan outlines principles for zoning – LUP
4. Zoning Board - LUP
5. Some guidance vs. nothing - LUP
6. Allows for new development with established guidelines - LUP
7. Implementation of Land Use Plan effect on households - LUP
8. Allows for flexibility - LUP
9. Conservation development - LUP
10. Outlines planning categories - LUP
11. Interest in Land Use Plan by citizens - LUP
12. Size of lots were consistent in Plan - LUP
13. Land Use Plan has held off some annexation - LUP

Weaknesses - Land Use Plan

1. Land Use Plan is only a guide, lacks “teeth” - LUP
2. Needs more residential categories - LUP
3. Categories need more definition (e.g., what does rural settlement really mean?) - LUP
4. Historical zoning is incompatible with current land use plan – LUP
5. Land Use Plan is not followed - LUP
6. 10 years may be too long - LUP
7. Some combining of residential and industrial in neighborhoods - LUP
8. Planning categories could be more specific - LUP
9. Explanation of how to implement conservation development to meet landowners needs: Are there other options for residential properties while keeping a sense of community? - LUP
10. Minimum lot size challenges - LUP
11. Need clarity on categories for existing and future growth - LUP
12. Conservation development hasn't occurred as desired - LUP
13. Conservation development difficult to apply to traditional agricultural areas - LUP
14. Make conservation development stronger part of Land Use Plan - LUP
15. Make rural settlement a core part of Plan: Clarify category, how used, purpose, viability - LUP

Opportunities – Land Use Plan

1. Utilize Planned Unit Development process - LUP
2. Re-think development assumptions - LUP
3. Re-think floodplains, other public use areas for development - LUP
4. Other uses for floodplain: Recreation, etc. – LUP
5. Make Land Use Plan enforceable - LUP
6. Define/clarify residential and other groups - LUP

7. Re-think minimum lot sizes - LUP

Opportunities – Land Use Plan (cont.)

8. Reflect current zoning - LUP
9. Establish policies for land use - LUP
10. Use of public use/green space/floodplain for increasing population - LUP
11. Creates and allows for zoning and is consistent - LUP
12. Conservation development: Tool that can reserve rural character - LUP
13. Land Use Plan reviewed/updated more frequently - LUP

Threats – Land Use Plan

1. Large tracts of land available for undesirable development – LUP
2. Height limit for buildings – LUP

Parking Lot

1. Nomenclature: Clarity and examples - LUP
2. What does rural mean? - LUP
3. Conservation development - LUP

Top Five Priority Themes from SWOT

No. 2. Communication – Community Consensus

Strengths – Communications

1. Voter approval - CC
2. Interest generated for land use - CC

Weakness – Communications

1. Subjective - CC
2. Lack of outlining actions/communications of actions taken - CC
3. Referendum remedy only - CC
4. Lack of knowledge of law - CC
5. Lack of understanding about Land Use Plan and why/how categories are designated - CC

Opportunities – Communications

1. Listen to residents - CC
2. Outline categories with specific residents needs/wants/understanding - CC
3. Could help with education/communication - CC
4. Use current communication channels for Land Use Plan education - CC

Threats – Communications

1. Scare tactics by Trustees - CC
2. Lack of understanding about zoning or plan implementation - CC
3. Need for community agreement about Plan and actions taken - CC
4. Referendums can derail Plan - CC
5. What does public/community want in Plan?: Ideas change over time, new concepts change views - CC
6. Communication/education to citizens about land use: Drive citizens to use information that is in place (website, newsletter, Facebook page) - CC
7. Fear of change: “Not the Bethel way”. Legacy feelings of how things are and how they will change - CC
8. Not enough community involvement in land use - CC

Top Five Priority Themes from SWOT

No 3. Infrastructure – Roads, Traffic, Utilities, Twp. Services

Strengths - Infrastructure

1. Land has ability for functional septic systems - IN
2. Water wells are functioning soundly - IN
3. Roads are decent - IN
4. Good availability of water pressure/fire flow - IN
5. Good fire department - IN

Weaknesses – Infrastructure

1. Roads in need of repair - IN
2. Need to address infrastructure: Roads, water, etc. - IN

Opportunities – Infrastructure

1. Better traffic flow and proper sizing for Rt. 201/Rt. 571 and other County roads - IN

Threats – Infrastructure

1. Eminent domain by utility and/or private companies - IN
2. Effect of housing development on well capacity - IN
3. Increased traffic: Safety and road repair concerns - IN
4. Land geology factors: Limestone, high groundwater, soil, other water issues - IN
5. Development may cause traffic issues: Speeding, traffic flow, accidents - IN
6. Additional need for police/fire services - IN
7. Lack of infrastructure in rural areas - IN
8. Infrastructure issue for development: Utilities/drainage - IN
9. Management of resources or implementation of Plan that may negatively affect Township: Need for utilities, property values - IN

Top Five Priority Themes from SWOT

No. 4. Quality of Life – Rural Character

Strengths – Quality of Life

1. Attractive, rural nature of community with emphasis on rural - QOL
2. Bethel is a quiet and safe place to live - QOL
3. Wildlife is evident - QOL
4. Residential gardens are pleasant - QOL
5. Good, caring, positive community - QOL
6. Property has been set aside as rural designation - QOL
7. Succeeded in perceived slowing of development in Township - QOL

Weaknesses – Quality of Life

1. Execution of rural settlement properties - QOL
2. Need for community gathering space - QOL

Opportunities – Quality of Life

1. Desirable community: Bethel people want to maintain roots here - QOL

Threats – Quality of Life

1. Loss of township identity - QOL
2. Climate change effects on land - QOL
3. Incentivize/provide economic value for farmers for conservation development - QOL
4. Changing demographics of Township - QOL

Parking Lot

1. Desirable community: Affects all SWOT - QOL

Top Five Priority Themes from SWOT

No. 5. Targeted Development – Clustering Compatible Uses

Strengths – Targeted Development

1. Route 201 Business Corridor is apparent - TD
2. Good reuse of commercial buildings - TD
3. Areas of township have been segmented in clusters: Commercial, residential, industrial, etc. - TD

Weaknesses – Targeted Development

1. Need to include emerging trends: large production solar, fiber utilities, other technology that could affect land use - TD
2. Plan needs more organization: Cluster areas for like uses such as commercial, light industrial - TD
3. Development too fast to be sustained - TD
4. Need retail development in township - TD

Opportunities – Targeted Development

1. Carriage Trails development to Bethel Schools: Connectivity and development opportunities for Brandt - TD
2. Availability of land - TD
3. Ability for buffers for commercial/agricultural boundaries - TD
4. Definition and creation of commercial and other business opportunities - TD
5. Affect affordable housing for young families - TD

Threats – Targeted Development

1. Highest/best use – TD
2. Development has occurred though not in the Township - TD