

MEMORANDUM

To: Town Board Members

From: Daniel Sturm, Town Supervisor

Date: September 17, 2026

Re: Proposed Local Law – Conservation Subdivisions and Residential Developments

The purpose of this memorandum is to explain the proposed amendments to Chapter 345 of the Town of Bethel Zoning Law concerning conservation subdivisions and residential developments.

The proposed local law is intended to provide the Town with a clearer and more comprehensive framework for reviewing residential development while protecting Bethel's rural character, natural resources, agricultural lands, scenic areas, wetlands, waterways and other environmentally sensitive areas.

The proposal builds upon the Town's existing conservation-subdivision provisions and provides more specific standards for the planning and design of major subdivisions and large residential developments. Rather than relying solely on conventional lot layouts, the proposed regulations requires development to be designed around the land's important natural and community features. This is proposed to be applicable in the AG, FC, G-17B, RD, RDR, R-17B, RS, and PA Zoning Districts.

Among the principal provisions are:

- **Protection of important open space and natural resources**, including agricultural land, wetlands, water bodies, steep slopes, scenic areas and significant habitat.
- A general requirement that **at least 50% of the development area be preserved as open space**, subject to the specific exceptions contained in the proposed law.
- Greater flexibility in **lot layout, lot dimensions and residential design** where appropriate, while maintaining overall zoning and density controls.
- A more detailed **four-step design process** requiring consideration of conservation areas, potential building sites, roads and trails, and final lot lines.
- Requirements for **yield plans, sketch plans and site analysis** so that the Planning Board has sufficient information to evaluate the land before a final development layout is established.
- Provisions addressing the **permanent protection, ownership and maintenance of required open space**, including conservation easements, deed restrictions and homeowners' associations where appropriate.
- Standards intended to encourage **connected open space, pedestrian circulation and trails** and to reduce unnecessary disturbance of environmentally sensitive areas.

- Additional standards concerning **roads, access, stormwater areas, buffers and future subdivision** of property.

The proposed law also adds definitions to Chapter 345 so that important terms used throughout the regulations have consistent meanings.

This is not intended to stop residential development in the Town. Rather, the goal is to establish a predictable process that allows appropriate development while making better use of the land and protecting the qualities that make Bethel an attractive place to live, work and invest.

If the Town Board introduces the local law, it will then proceed through the required review process, including referral to the Town Planning Board, review pursuant to General Municipal Law §239-m where applicable, SEQRA review, and a public hearing before the Town Board considers final adoption.

I believe it is appropriate for the Town to update these provisions now so that we have a modern, comprehensive set of standards to guide future residential development while continuing to protect Bethel's character and resources.

Daniel Sturm

Town Supervisor

Town of Bethel