

**Auburn Agriculture Committee Meeting**  
**12/29/2020, 5:30PM**

In attendance: Joe Gray, Kathy Shaw, Scott Blanchard, Bill Sylvester, Katie Boss, Ed Michaud, Dave Griswold, Dave Bell, Senator Ned Claxton (excused absence: Michelle Melaragno)

1. Meeting called to order at 5:32pm
2. Motion by Scott with second by Joe to accept minutes from December 1, 2020 meeting. All voting members in attendance voted in favor (7-0-0).
3. Welcome and introduction to Senator Ned Claxton, joining us tonight to hear about our work and offer support. Senator Claxton provided a general update on the legislature - doing remote meetings and anticipating remote and/or hybrid sessions through mid-June. As of now 5 or 6 weeks will be held in person at Augusta Civic Center scattered over the 6-month period.

Joe's question for Senator Claxton: is the State going to do anything with the Jay plant? Senator Claxton doesn't know anything yet, but will do some asking and follow up.

207-576-8082 is Senator Claxton's cell phone number, and he welcomed Ag Committee members to reach out to him if he can be of help. (Phone number shared in these minutes with permission from Senator Claxton.)

CEI grant funding for farmers: successful applications were submitted by Valley View Farm. Application was easy, time consuming, but ultimately worth it. Senator Claxton will share future opportunities with Ag Committee to share out to local ag community.

Conversation about local processing infrastructure being built in Auburn. This conversation started before COVID in early 2020, but has since stopped. Senator Claxton will go back to the Maine Commissioner of Agriculture and restart the conversation for us.

Dave Griswold: Digester in Jay that went out in Spring in a real hindrance to utilization, and it is hurting local forestry business. Senator Claxton will follow up to see if there are opportunities for CARES act or other funds to support local forestry. Opportunities to promote products that use softwood pulp could be a real opportunity.

4. Review of Mercatus report: Question from Committee – did this consider the impact of any changes to taxes with the proposed changes to the AGRP Zone? Katie will follow up to ask. Feedback from Scott – overall, the report was helpful. One point of feedback was that the author assumed that the primary concern regarding development of the AGRP Zone was the look of potential future housing (reference to McMansions in the report). There are many other reasons to protect ag land and be concerned about its development that were not represented in the report.

Redeveloping Center Street is brought up in the report, but Center Street is state owned. Joe asked Senator Claxton if there is any flexibility regarding Center Street, and if locally we would even have the authority act on any of the recommendations that are in the Mercatus report. Senator Claxton believed that we would not be granted additional local authority, but will follow up.

Senator Claxton added that he has put together a recommendation to create a committee to review solar siting, and the associated impact on and potential loss of significant agricultural land to solar

fields. Senator Claxton recommended the formation of a study group of stakeholders to review this issue. There is some existing language from other northern states that we can borrow from.

Ag Soils GIS map from Auburn – Katie to follow up with Rosemary to see what data this is pulling from.

5. Auburn Comp Plan: Katie gave an update on Comp Plan Review Committee progress and next steps.

Is there an opportunity for the school department to buy more local foods? Proposed to connect with Maine Farm to Institution (MEFTI) inviting School Dept and other local orgs to see WHAT and how they purchase now, and how could we increase local purchasing.

Next steps: everyone read the GFCLA proposal and the sample municipal comp plans, offer general recommendations instead of the detail that GFCLA offered. We will review together during our next meeting and formalize a recommendation.

Joe would like to see the development transfer fee referenced in the Gorham comp plan added to the Auburn Comp Plan.

6. Review of Committee on Committee recommendations: Dave G does not think Forestry sub-committee should move from Conservation Commission to Agriculture Committee. The Forestry sub-committee deals in Arbor day, community forest and street trees, and not private sector forestry as we do in Ag Committee. It's not a good fit. Kathy and Katie offered similar feedback. The recommendation to keep the Forestry sub-committee with the Conservation Commission was fully supported by the rest of the Committee.

Question for Senator Claxton from Joe: How do State committees communicate? Mostly informal. If a bill comes up that involves multiple committees there is an invitation for reports to be shared. Caucus Chairs also sit down together and go through bill by bill and look for overlap and opportunities for connecting dots. Historically this is done daily, from 9am-10am. In Auburn we could replicate this by getting together the chairs of all committees regularly, and they should be reviewing the meeting minutes by all other relevant committees.

Ag Committee and Conservation Commission should come together to connect on issues going forward.

7. Local Food Procurement Pledge – recommendation that a certain percentage of institutions food comes from local sources. Is this something we want to consider? Can we draft a pledge, start an exploratory conversation with local institutions to see what people are willing to do to support local/regional producers? We can follow up on this during our proposed meeting with MEFTI.

8. Updates on City Council order progress, by item:

- a. *Inventory current commercial farm and value-added production in Auburn*

- i. Kathy connecting with Liz Allen to push notices out through city Facebook page, asking producers to share information about their businesses

- ii. Joe working on a list of known producers

- b. *Formulate a plan for increasing local and regional market opportunities*

- i. Katie attending Maine Agriculture Commission meetings to be aware of state-level opportunities for Auburn to tap into, and to share information about Auburn's ag and forest economy with this statewide network
  - ii. Committee is (currently) meeting with Senator Ned Claxton to brainstorm opportunities to increase market opportunities
  - iii. Proposed meeting with MEFTI to create additional markets for local products
- c. *Create a local/regional awareness campaign for Auburn's food and fuel products*
  - i. Katie met with a working group of the Local Foods Local Places effort, that is tasked with forming a "grow it here" local foods brand for Lewiston-Auburn
- d. *Calculate the long- and short-term food needs of Auburn residents*
  - i. Katie is in contact with the Good Shepherd Food Bank to review data on food insecurity, and assess if reliable formulas exist to calculate food needs at the population level
- e. *Assess local food systems impacts from COVID and projected shortages/disruptions in food access*
  - i. Katie found a resource that has done this work already, impact assessments available by sector:  
[https://lfscovid.localfoodeconomics.com/impact\\_assessments/](https://lfscovid.localfoodeconomics.com/impact_assessments/)
- f. *Investigate and provide recommendations on zoning and economic incentives needed to attract commercial infrastructure including: storage, refrigeration, processing, or any other type of food infrastructure.*
  - i. Research being conducted to find appropriate resources to guide Committee recommendations.
- g. *Propose zoning amendments that would facilitate, with minimal conflict, subsistence and commercial agriculture production in all non-ARP zones*
  - i. Reviewed and discussed Mercatus report and recommended zoning changes. More information needed on associated changes.

9. Other updates:

Is there CARES money available for State staff/Ag Commission to work with CEI and/or Maine Farm & Sea? Senator Claxton will be looking into this – we need product promotion and also technical assistance to know where we should focus our efforts to grow the ag economy at the state-level.

Auburn Farmer's Market still happening on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday from 11-2pm at Senior Community Center. Lewiston's market is no longer happening in this timeslot. Lewiston is doing an online ordering system that is for pick up at St. Mary's Nutrition Center. Traffic has been slow at the Auburn market, location at Senior Community Center is not great. COVID restrictions reduces the number of vendors allowed inside – only 10 vendors allowed at maximum.

Katie will send survey on 2021 goals for the Ag Committee, so Committee members can share their vision for impact in the new year.

10. Agenda items for next meeting:

- Review of GFCLA comp plan recommendation, municipal examples. Dave will provide a review of all documents and offer suggestions for our formal recommendation to the Comp Plan Committee.
- MEFTI meeting, plan to engage institutions
- Review survey results, top 1-2 things we'd like to accomplish in 2021

Dave Griswold made a motion to adjourn at 6:51pm, Joe seconded, all voting members present voted in favor (5-0-0).