



September 28, 2016

## **A Proposed Study of Agriculture and Resource Protection in Auburn**

1. **Current Situation-** Rural Auburn has a unique Agricultural and Resource Protection (AGRP) zoning district, which has been in place since the early 1960's that contains over 40% of the city's land area, or over 20,000 acres. The purpose of the AGRP regulations has been to limit development and to promote food, agricultural, timber and natural resource production and uses. The AGRP zoning regulations have significantly restricted development for the last 60 years. Today however, the nature and trends of farming and food production has drastically changed and the AGRP regulations have created unintended consequences and should be evaluated as part of the study.
2. **AGRP Value Statement-** The City of Auburn values it's agricultural heritage, protects it's natural beauty and promotes growing food, raising livestock, managing its forests and extracting mineral resources.
3. **Goals and Deliverables of the Study-**
  - A. GOAL- Gain an understanding of how AGRP property owners and producers are utilizing their land, what their future plans are and find out if there are barriers to successful operations through property owner interviews and surveys. DELIVERABLES- Database of property owners and a summary report of AGRP interviews.
  - B. GOAL- Build a broad community and stakeholder consensus on the future of the AGRP district through an open public forum and readily available study information. DELIVERABLES- Public meetings are held, input gathered and utilized in final report
  - C. GOAL- Determine the economic and community development potential for Auburn's AGRP district and rural areas both at the local and regional level and create policies and regulations that meet that potential. DELIVERABLES- Final report with recommendations and implementation strategy to maximize rural Auburn's community and economic development potential.
4. **Scope of Work-** The staff recommends hiring a consultant or consultant group that specializes in agricultural policies and rural economic and community development for critical work elements. This outside expertise is needed to provide technical assistance and remove a perception that staff might be biased towards any pre-determined results. In addition, hiring outside help is necessary as the staff does not have the capacity to complete the AGRP study by themselves.
  - A. Staff Role- The staff will:
    - Develop RFP(s) for the selection of a qualified consultant(s)
    - Oversee a selection process for the selection of consultants selection
    - Oversee a city website dedicated to the AGRP study
    - Provide project oversight

**B. Consultant Role-** A selected consultant or consultant group will:

- Conduct an initial assessment and report on existing AGRP and rural Auburn conditions
- Facilitate public and stakeholder meetings
- Conduct AGRP property owner interviews and surveys and submit report a report on their findings
- Assist in gathering input from Maine Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Conservation, Maine Farmland Trust and Cultivating Community on agricultural trends the State of Maine
- Explore the economic and community development potential of Auburn's AGRP and it potential to complement downtown living and development
- Prepare a final report with recommendations and implementation plan

**5. Ag Study Timeline- Total time 13 months**

**A. Consultant Selection**

- Staff develops RFP(s) (month 1)
- Consultant selection (months 2 to 3)

**B. Property Owner and Stakeholder Outreach**

- Begin in month 3 and continue to month 10

**C. Public Meetings**

- Begin in month 4, the number of public meetings to be determined

**D. Data and Information Analysis and Draft Report**

- Gather data and public input (months 3-8)
- Develop and revise alternatives based on public response (month 10)
- Submit final draft report and recommendations (month 11)

**E. Adoption Process**

- Final draft to Planning Board (month 11)
- Planning Board recommendation to City Council (month 12)
- City Council adoption (month 13)

**6. Budget**

The city council is being asked to appropriate \$40,000 towards the study. These funds would come from unallocated bond proceeds. The Environmental Funders Network (EFN) is offering \$10,000 to assist in the effort. The EFN is asking that the AGRP study prioritize agriculture and natural resources in its community and economic development strategies. They ask that steps be taken to listen to and engage farmers and producers and create a vision and values framework around the role of agriculture in our community and economy. In addition, the EFN supports the importance of a strategic review of the AGRP regulations and wants to support and build staff capacity by means of their contribution.