



Dear Auburn City Council,

As we begin 2022 the Agriculture Committee would like to respectfully present an update on our activities and efforts to promote sustainable agriculture and forestry practices in the city of Auburn. We appreciate the efforts of all our members recognizing the lifetime commitment that our board members bring to the table. The nine active members of the committee have collectively amassed more than 280 years in agriculture and forestry. Further, by our charter it is an important component of membership in our committee that members be able to demonstrate their commitment and involvement in activities relating to local foods, farm, and forest products.

As of January 2022, our current members are Katie Boss (former chair), William Sylvester, Christopher Carson, David Griswold (recording secretary), Stanwood Gray, David Bell, Ed Michaud, and Kathy Shaw (current chair). We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of our departing members, Scott Blanchard and Michelle Melaragno for their collective efforts on our committee.

Additionally, we appreciate the liaison efforts between city staff and our members through Jay Brenchick. Jay has offered zoom links, some printing as needed and thoughtful advice in city policy.

In an ongoing effort to promote a sustainable agricultural and forestry culture in Auburn, we have initiated actions on the following items:

**Public meeting with City Assessor Karen Scammon.**

Karen presented at a public meeting to help our board members and members of the attending public understand the various methods and means available to preserve and protect agricultural and forest land through state tax incentive programs.

**Story Walk presentation**

Our committee worked on and collaborated with the Conservation Committee to present a vibrant and thoughtful story walk to help visitors understand some of the challenges facing our city in our efforts to be self-sustaining in woodlot production, local foods, invasive species and conserving and preserving our natural resources.

**Local Farm Snapshot tour**

The committee organized a diverse three farm tour in South Auburn in October featuring:

**Bell Farm** - a large, multi-generation farm specializing in potato and corn growing. The tour included the caves and processing facilities that have been incorporated to support their operation.

**The Farmers Garden at Caron Farm** - another multi-generational farm that specializes in creative small plot vegetable production offering a diversity in vegetable crops of high quality. This operation

specializes in hot peppers that they process into a tangy powder to add to various types of culinary dishes.

### **Compassionate Composting**

Michelle Melaragno guided attendees through her newly expanded large and small animal composting facility - one of only 2 in the state that successfully composts large animals, turning those remains into an eco-friendly garden compost for home gardens.

### **Public presentation by Eric Cousens on proposed Strip Zoning changes.**

Eric gave a presentation to public attending members and the Agriculture Committee concerning a proposal to expand lot depth from 450 feet to 750 feet along rural roads in the Agricultural and Resource Protection Zone in Auburn. After his presentation Eric asked for feedback and comments from all attending.

### **Outreach by Katie Boss to Auburn School Meals Program**

Katie contacted the Auburn School Department food procurement staff to discuss their needs and initiate a conversation to begin the process of incorporating local foods into their school meals menus.

### **Tour of the L/A composting facility on Penley Corner Road.**

Agriculture Committee members toured the LAWPCA Compost Facility and entered into a discussion with the plant manager about the possibility of turning that facility into a food processing/commercial kitchen operation.

### **Organized Tour of the NexAmp Solar facility on Riverside Drive**

An organized tour of the NexAmp solar facility by Agriculture Committee and Auburn City Council members was led by one of the company engineers. Attendees were offered an up-close view of the large facility, gaining a deeper understanding of what this solar farm will offer for up to 800 families when connected.

### **GIS mapping**

An expert in the field of GIS mapping provided education into the use of GIS for mapping agricultural and forestry practices to help understand the needs and current uses of protected areas of Auburn.

### **Current Use Tax Pamphlet**

Final proofing and printing of an educational pamphlet detailing the various land use classifications for state farm and forest land protections.

### **Presentation by Jim Johnson of the Soil and Water Conservation District.**

Via zoom, Jim Johnson discussed some of the many programs available to landowners in Auburn to help with water quality, farm and agriculture, forestry, and clean air solutions. He also spoke about a new federal program that will target rural property owners that might want to seek funding for small farm projects with less stringent standards than are usually faced by typical farm and forestry owners.

### **Ongoing discussions about initiating a combined regional Farmers Market**

Members of the Agriculture Committee are meeting with the Lewiston Farmers' Market representatives to see if there is interest in creating a regional farmers' market. The Lewiston Farmers Market is searching for a permanent location. They would like to buy land so that a year-round pavilion /small business incubator/demonstration gardens/educational facility could be erected that would be of benefit and use by both cities and their residents. Ideally, they are looking for land that would be close to the downtown areas with good parking and accessible by walking/biking.

Continuing and ongoing planning includes:

- 1) Finalization by Katie Boss and Jay Brenchick of the city council directive given to our committee to provide input into the status of Agriculture in our community.
- 2) Monthly outreach and updates from Senator Claxton on issues and funding opportunities relating to agriculture and forestry.
- 3) Monthly updates from the Dept of Agriculture on-going programs and possible grant opportunities.
- 4) Continuing collaboration with Auburn Conservation Committee on projects that would have some overlap and would benefit from focus by both boards.
- 5) Create another story walk board presentation.
- 6) Educational presentations for our community from leaders in the fields of agriculture, forestry and land use, and preservation and protection of natural resources.
- 7) Continuing investigation of the creation of a facility that would serve the community in food preservation, aggregate storage of local commodities, commercial kitchen space and local food access.
- 8) Create a local index of all large and small local food producers, homesteaders, forestry products producers, home good manufacturers and other cottage industries in Auburn and the surrounding areas.
- 9) Offer more Farm Snapshot tours in north, east and west Auburn neighborhoods in the months ahead.
- 10) We have identified the need for meat processing facilities and are exploring methods and grant funding to create possible facilities.
- 11) Given the current state of affordable food access and heating resources throughout the New England region we feel that there should be more emphasis on creating better opportunities and greater supply for our residents and the state.
- 12) The Agriculture Committee is working on a vision statement and plans to have that completed in the next few months.

In summary, the Agriculture Committee has been active and productive. We feel that we have offered much public benefit to our community and look forward to the year ahead.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Shaw  
Chair  
Auburn Agricultural Committee