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Jane Costlow: Residential development in Auburn's AGRP zone will increase everyone's property taxes

As land values rise — as surely they will, once residential development is allowed in the zone — farmers and woodlot owners who have called Auburn's rural neighborhoods home may well find themselves priced off of their land.



Jane Costlow

Maine.

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To build a house in the AGRP zone you needed to derive at least a set percentage of your income from farming. It was a simple way to protect the land; if you owned land in the AGRP zone it was taxed at a lower rate than land in residential districts, but there were also significant restrictions on what you could do with it.

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farming shifted,

with fewer families supporting themselves through agriculture, it became clear that the income standard needed to be changed. Numerous task forces and consultants have recommended it be replaced, but only once other provisions ensured the zone remains true to its explicit purpose: to encourage agriculture, forestry and recreational uses, and to conserve natural resources and open land.

Last September the City Council passed a resolve asking Auburn's Sustainability and Natural Resources Board and Planning Board to weigh in on eliminating the income requirement pure and simple — without putting anything in its place. The SNRB responded in early December with a clear call to keep the income standard until adequate protections for agriculture and open space could be agreed to.

community in the study showed a cost of \$1.29 in municipal services for every tax dollar received from residential development. In the same community, municipal services for agricultural and open land cost only 6 cents for every tax dollar received.

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There is absolutely no reason to think that Auburn will be any different. If we use the AFT study to do some local arithmetic, here's what we get: a residential dwelling that currently pays \$4,000 in taxes costs the municipality \$5,160 in municipal services ($\$1.29 \times \$4,000$). That's an extra \$1,160 per dwelling unit compared with the revenue generated.

If you build hundreds of new dwelling units, the additional cost will be paid by property owners all over Auburn. Everyone's property taxes will go up.

Earlier this year, over 300 Auburn residents responded to a survey about the future of the AGRP zone. When asked where new development should be located, the response was crystal clear: new development should be located close to existing services.

Seventy-seven percent of respondents said "Auburn's open spaces should remain open." Auburn's own planning documents advise the same thing: build out from the city core and existing neighborhoods, protect open lands and keep the cost of services down. Are