

Steering Committee
Agriculture and Resource Economy Project
City of Auburn, Maine
DISCUSSION DRAFT
Minutes of the December 7, 2017 Meeting (6 pm)

Notes taken by Ken Meter, Crossroads Resource Center

Members Present: Chair Mary Sylvester, Vice Chair David Haines, David Bell, Karen Bolduc, Kim Finnerty, Joe Gray, Dan Herrick, Rita Polin, Mia Poliquin Pross, and Bill Sylvester

Others Present: Councilmember Leroy Walker, City Manager Peter Crichton, Deputy Director of Planning Eric Cousens, Consultant Ken Meter, Terry Dailey, and John Jones

A. The Committee decided to set an expectation that regular meetings will last 90 minutes.

B. Ken Meter reviewed the purposes of the Committee, as spelled out in the November 29 memo written by the Consultants:

- 1. Understand the agricultural and natural resource economic context in which Auburn farmers and consumers lead their daily lives.**
- 2. Consider and possibly make recommendations for refining the Agriculture and Resource Protection District adopted by the City of Auburn in 1964 and amended in later years.**

In particular, the following two provisions have been identified as problematic by many parties in Auburn:

- Requirement that to build a new house, 50% of one's household income must be earned in agriculture or natural resource extraction.
- Requirement that to build a new house, at least 10 acres must be available for a "houselot."

C. The Committee discussed whether to invite additional members to represent additional stakeholders. Kim Finnerty recommended that one delegate from the Somali Bantu community of 60 farmers be invited to join. It was suggested that adding someone from this community would assist the Committee to learn about new models for agriculture and thus help in understanding future trends. Others felt that the Committee is already quite large and no new members should be added. The Committee voted 6-3 to invite one Somali Bantu delegate. Finnerty will ask which person the community would like to nominate for this position.

D. Mary Sylvester suggested a framework for future meetings. This was developed by Mary Sylvester, David Haines, and Ken Meter earlier in the day. The timetable for future meetings was refined by the Committee and adopted as follows:

Next meeting will be January 18, 2017 at 6 pm. It will cover the following topics:

1. The new member of the Committee will be introduced (assuming someone agrees to serve). This new member will be oriented to the purpose and work plan of the Committee.
2. Dan Herrick will develop a list of provisions in the current ARPD Ordinance that are causing difficulties. Ken Meter offered to assist him in putting this list together for the Committee's use.

On a date to be determined in late January or early February, Consultants will present highlights of their economic research and investigation into alternatives to the 50% income regulation and the 10-acre houselot limit. The Mayor and all City Council members will be invited to attend this meeting.

About 2-4 weeks later (date TBD), Consultants will lead a discussion of potential alternatives to these two provisions of the Ordinance. Other issues may also be addressed if the Committee requests any to be discussed.

The next meeting will be a public meeting (the broader public will be invited to attend) Consultants will make specific recommendations for alternative provisions for the ARPD Ordinance. Committee members will take any action they feel is appropriate at that time.

Once it has decided what it wishes to recommend, the Committee will present its recommendations to the City Council. One possible format for this would be to request that the Council hold a education session focused on this topic. The Committee has the option of asking the Planning Board to review its recommendations first, but is not required to do so. Some Committee members felt the Planning Board could not play a significant role in these deliberations.

E. Dan Herrick commented that he had the impression that the work of the Committee was to go line-by-line through the ARPD Ordinance to suggest detailed changes. Something like 50% of the provisions of the ARPD Ordinance should be scrapped, he added. Mary Sylvester requested that no decisions be made until the Committee reviews the data that Consultants will compile.

F. Mary Sylvester asked Committee members to direct their attention to the 20 potential purposes listed in the November 29 memo from the Consultants. She reminded Committee members that ultimately, despite the rich diversity of points of view on the Committee, it will need to establish what its shared goals are so it can take effective action.

Ken Meter reviewed each of these purpose statements briefly. Each was drawn from comments heard in interviews conducted so far, as a result of a review of a survey of City residents conducted by the City late in 2016, or from the professional experiences

of the Consultants. He suggested that Committee members use this list to consider which priorities each member has for revisions to the ARPD Ordinance. He added that unless the group adopts a clear set of priorities, it will very difficult for them to decide how to revise the Ordinance. As one example, if the committee values protecting agriculture more than protecting open space, it would make different revisions than if these priorities were reversed.

Ken Meter first asked whether there were any potential priorities that were missing from the list (that is, were there other issues to be addressed). He added that in a telephone conversation he had with David Bell earlier in the week, Bell mentioned that when he was expanding his farm operation, city staff were less helpful than they could have been. Terry Dailey added that this was also an issue for new farmers who might want to start a farm in Auburn. Bill Sylvester added that it would be important for City staff to be knowledgeable about agriculture if they were to play such a role.

Issue Number 21, then, became: “Ensure that farmers who wish to start a new farm or expand an existing one are aided in their pursuits by City staff, who will help them address and remove potential obstacles rather than simply informing them of what they cannot do. Staff reviews will be made quickly.”

Mary Sylvester suggested another issue to be addressed: how to ensure that children and adults know where their food comes from, so they can make good choices as residents and consumers. This can be accomplished through farm to school activities. Rita Polin added that Americorps volunteers can help teach children about food choices. Mia Pross reminded the Committee that 8 of the 10 Auburn schools have school gardens already. David Bell said that he welcomes busloads of students to his farm, even though it takes considerable time, because it helps them be more informed about where their food comes from.

Issue Number 22, then, became: “Ensure that children and adults living in Auburn know where their food comes from so they can make healthy food choices and better support farmers.”

Rita Polin said that members of her family are deeply concerned about maintaining their status as farmers as they age, and can no longer work long days. Will the City inspect their farm and potentially force them off their land because they no longer meet the 50% income requirement? Ken Meter asked her whether anyone in her family had ever been inspected or threatened with eviction from their farm, and Polin said no, but they were fearful that this would happen, because the regulations specify a certain income level. Meter pointed out that this income level only applies when a new house is planned. Eric Cousens added that he was not aware of any actions the City had ever taken against aging farmers.

Issue Number 23, then, because: “Ensure that aging farm family members can age in place without fear of losing their agricultural status.”

Mia Pross suggested that it was important to ensure that future Ordinances would be both workable and flexible to avoid putting people into difficult positions.

Issue Number 24, then, became: “Ensure that City regulations concerning agriculture and resource development are workable, effective, and flexible.”

Rita Polin further added that the City has several historical farm properties that should be protected.

Issue Number 25, then, became: “Protect and renovate historical farm properties in the City of Auburn.”

G. Following this discussion, Mary Sylvester asked each Committee member to list the top priorities they have, as of tonight, from this list of 25 possible priorities. These would be personal preferences at the current time, without the benefit of research the Consultants are currently performing. Individual members may certainly change their positions over time, and the group will attempt to set a single set of priorities at a later date.

Mary Sylvester

Protect open space to protect rural character (2)

Ensure food security for all Auburn residents (8)

Mia Poliquin Pross

Brand Auburn as an agricultural city (17)

Expand the City’s tax base (18)

Promote recreational opportunities (6)

Promote food security (8) and Ensure that adequate land is available to feed all residents (9) combined

Ensure that new farmers have an opportunity to establish farms (12)

Kim Finnerty

Promote sustainable and diversified family farming and forestry (4)

Protect environmental quality, especially in the Lake Auburn watershed (5)

Promote recreational opportunities (6)

Promote food security (8)

Ensure that new farmers have an opportunity to establish farms (12)

Promote robust community-based food systems (13)

David Haines

Protect open space to protect rural character (2)

Protect agricultural lands for future generations of farmers (3)

Protect environmental quality (5)

Ensure that new farmers have an opportunity to establish farms (12)

Promote food security (8)

Bill Sylvester

Protect open space to protect rural character (2)

Promote forestry as well as agriculture (4)

Taxes will go up if there are lots of little lots everywhere – if we develop to increase the tax base, we will lose our rural character (new)

Bill also requested that Consultants research how many taxes the City collects from tree growth areas (new)

Rita Polin

Protect rural character (2)

Protect agricultural lands for future generations of farmers (3)

Protect environmental quality (5)

Promote food security (8)

Ensure that families having significant heritage can maintain ownership (11)

Karen Bolduc

Brand Auburn as an agricultural city (17) (This was my suggestion!)

Protect open space to protect rural character (2)

Protect agricultural lands for future generations of farmers (3)

The Committee should take the long view (new)

David Bell

Protect open space to protect rural character (2)

Protect agricultural lands for future generations of farmers (3) (I am 3rd generation)

Promote food safety (new)

We need a strong economy for farmers so they get a good return. Perhaps the City of Auburn could buy crops from Auburn farms and direct them to schools and colleges (new)

Brand Auburn as an agricultural city (17)

Dan Herrick

The City puts obstacles on raising livestock through space requirements (new)

The Planning Board specified that you could not operate an abbatoir from 8 pm to 6 am (new)

Agricultural land taxes (new)

We need to fix the tree growth taxation (new)

David wants to grow vegetables in Lewiston, and so do I (new)

Joe Gray

I don't understand what we are doing (new)

Terry Dailey

We need specific standards for what constitutes "open space." (new) (David Haines says that the state has programs that includes guidelines on what open space is.)

John Jones

Protect rural character (2)

We have restored an historic home for a Bed and Breakfast (new)

Leroy Walker

As Councilmember from Ward 5, I am deeply interested in the work of the Committee (new)

Rita Polin (second time)

Our farm is still growing and the City needs to support farms that are still growing (new)

Ken Meter noted that none of the Committee members had mentioned food sovereignty, and asked if they wanted to eliminate this as a priority. Two members said it was certainly an important concern among many others. Another said food sovereignty was very important to their family farm's growth.

H. Committee members suggested additional research priorities:

Mia Pross asked for case studies of what other communities are doing to address these zoning issues

Karen Bolduc asked Consultants to identify 3-4 bright spots where there have been good successes, not just a review of a single policy