

May 5, 2009

To: Auburn Comprehensive Plan Committee

From: Antje Kablitz and Mark Eyerman

Subject: Possible Agricultural/Rural District Description

A key element of the updated Comprehensive Plan is the Future Land Use Plan. This plan sets out the desired use of various areas of the City and acts as a guide for updating the zoning ordinance.

The Future Land Use Plan will include a map showing the various land use designations (industrial, low density residential, etc) and a general description of the type of land use in each designated areas. We might think of the Future Land Use Plan as a general blueprint of the zoning ordinance and map. For example, if we think about the old pocket neighborhoods along Center Street, we may include in a “commercial transition” designation that might say these areas should be rezoned to commercial over time on a case-by-case basis. This lays the foundation for future rezonings that are then consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Similarly, the Agricultural/Rural Description needs to lay out how the current AG/RP district should be modified in the future.

The description of each land use designation needs to strike a balance – it needs to be somewhat general to provide some flexibility in drafting the zoning ordinance provisions while at the same time provide clear guidance for what the zoning provisions should be. This is not always an easy balance to find.

Taking the results from the committee’s vote on the policy direction for the Agricultural District, Mark and I have put together a preliminary Agriculture/Rural District description. It provides (A) the **purpose** defining the intent of the district, (B) the preliminary list of **allowed uses**, and (C) an overview of proposed **development standards**.

Agriculture/Rural District

A. Purpose

The purpose of the Agriculture/Rural District is to preserve and enhance the agricultural heritage of Auburn and protect the City’s natural resources and scenic open space while maintaining the economic value of the land. The district is characterized by

a rural, very low-density development pattern that limits sprawl and minimizes the City's service costs.

The District maintains the current rural development pattern allowing for a broad range of agriculture and natural resource related uses while restricting residential development. Recreational development is encouraged both as a means of protecting open space and to provide reasonable public access to outdoor destinations such as Lake Auburn and the Androscoggin River. The Agriculture/Rural District continues its role as a land reserve, protecting community valued open space and rural landscapes, while maintaining the potential for appropriate future development.

B. Allowed Uses

The Agriculture/Rural District should continue to include the uses currently allowed in the AG/RP zoning district. In addition, a broader range of rural uses should be allowed. Agriculturally related businesses including retail and service activities and natural resource industries should be permitted. The reuse of existing agricultural buildings should be allowed for low-intensity non-agriculture related uses.

Residential uses should continue to be limited to accessory residential development as part of a commercial agriculture or natural resource use not just traditional farms. The criteria for determining when an accessory residential use is permitted should be based on updated standards that take into account the economic realities of today's commercial agricultural activities including outside sources of income and part-time and small-scale commercial operations. Residential development may also be part of a commercial recreational use as part of a planned development in which the recreational open space is permanently preserved.

C. Development Standards

All new development, redevelopment, and expanded uses in the Agriculture/Rural District should be required to meet "best management practices" for stormwater management and environmental protection to ensure adequate protection of natural resources. All development activities in the Agricultural/Rural District should be subject to low impact development (LID) standards such as limiting impervious surfaces, minimizing lot disturbances, creating natural buffers, and capturing and treating runoff through filtration measures.

The City should continue to encourage a very low-density development pattern as a means of protecting natural resources and preserving the rural character. The basic residential density standard for the current AG/RP zoning district should be maintained. The standards for the development of accessory residential units should provide greater flexibility in the siting of those units. In an effort to place accessory residential development in areas where it will have the least impact on natural resource and/or the agricultural value of the land, the standards should allow for a waiver or elimination of road frontage requirements and access from a private driveway.

Residential development that is proposed as part of a master planned commercial recreational development should be limited to the same density standard (one unit per 10 acres) as other accessory residential uses. A recreational master plan should be required outlining the scope, scale, and location of residential units and ensuring a cluster development pattern in which the majority of the land is retained as recreation/open space. A conservation easement, or other legally binding preservation measure, should be required to permanently conserve the recreation/open space areas.

Where a parcel that is located in the Agriculture/Rural District land also includes residentially zoned land, a residential unit should be allowed to be transferred from the residentially zoned portion of the parcel to the Agriculture/Rural portion as long as the relocation does not negatively impact natural resources or the agricultural potential of the land. As with other residential development in the Agriculture/Rural District, the development standards should encourage flexibility in the location and size of the lot, allow for a waiver of road frontage requirements, and allow access from a private driveway. When a transfer occurs, the land in the residential zone from which a residential unit is transferred must be permanently protected from development through a legally binding preservation measure such as a conservation easement.