City of Auburn, Maine
Office of Planning & Permitting
Eric Cousens, Director
60 Court Street | Auburn, Maine 04210
www.auburnmaine.gov | 207.333.6601

To: Auburn Planning Board
From: Eric J. Cousens, Director of Planning and Permitting
Re: Proposed Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan: Promoting Food Access and Production and Growing the Agriculture Economy Chapter
Date: August 10, 2021

I. **PROPOSAL**: The proposed amendments to the Promoting Food Access and Production and Growing the Agriculture Economy Chapter are attached. This is a new chapter that sets policies that the Council and Planning Board have been discussing over the past few years into a formal Comprehensive Plan Chapter.

Please review the attached draft chapter for details and staff will provide an over view of the Chapter at the meeting.

II. In November of 2020, the City Council voted to create a Comprehensive Plan Workgroup to focus on revising the following topics in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan:

1. Future Land Use Map – Potential Turnpike Exit near 136 and/or South Main Street.
2. Future Land Use Map – Industrial Transition Zone near Broad and South Witham Road. Council, Planning Board, Staff and Landowners have considered this as a potential residential growth area that would require less infrastructure than an industrial change. Easy Turnpike access from Exit 75.
3. Future Land Use Map – Consider expanded downtown form-based code to reduce setbacks and density limitations in urban neighborhoods. Ensure consistency with existing development patterns or forge new direction in certain areas.
4. Future Land Use Plan/Map - Review to see if a reduction in the number of proposed Zoning Districts is feasible.
5. Future Land Use Map – Downtown. Review current tasks, progress to date and adjust policy as needed with a focus on walkability, livability and economic expansion opportunities.
6. Gateways/Fragmentation - Looking at the proposed Future Land Use Map for access points to the City and their designated zoning to reduce fragmentation in the City.
7. Recreation and River Access. Review status, identify opportunities, needs and update implementation plans. Include recreation open space priorities, resource access and policy towards subdivision requirements that currently pose a challenge to urban developments.
8. Promoting Food Access and Growing the Agricultural Economy.
9. Equity - Researching to see if anything in the Comprehensive Plan currently promotes inequity in the City.

The workgroup split up into three "sub-workgroups" to focus on the three topic areas identified above: Turnpike Interchange, Future Land Use Map Updates and Recreation/Food Economy. At their May 20, 2021 meeting the group voted to move the revisions to the Recreation/Open Space chapter forward to City Council and Planning Board. The City Council began discussing the draft at their June 7, 2021 meeting and the Planning Board discussed as a workshop at their June 8, 2021 meeting.

At the June 16, 2021 meeting of the Comprehensive Plan Workgroup, the group voted unanimously to move the Transportation Chapter (with edits reflecting the turnpike interchange), Future Land Use Plan (Chapter 2) and the

accompanying map (link: https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/dde78bd6cd23476e9c9ec53744b9f6ab) and a new chapter Food Access/Growing the Agriculture Economy forward to the City Council and Planning Board.

The City Council has since voted to move all three chapters to the Planning Board for Review.

III. PLANNING BOARD ACTION/STAFF SUGGESTIONS: Review, hold a Public Hearing and forward a recommendation to the Council with any suggested edits.

K. Promoting Food Access and Production and Growing the Agriculture Economy Policies

Goal K.1: Ensure that fresh, local food is equitably accessible to everyone regardless of income or geography.

Purpose

The purpose of the Food Access and Production/Growing the Agriculture Economy section is to consider how greater equity in accessing healthy food can be established in Auburn, and to identify tools and strategies for ensuring the continuing existence and growth of the farming and agriculture economy as a way of life in our city, which in turn sustains our population with locally produced and healthy foods. We know that food insecurity is unfortunately a challenge faced by Auburn residents. Income is the greatest indicator of one's health, and US Census data from 2012-2016 indicates on average that 32% of Auburn's population -- nearly 1 of every 3 people -- lives in a household earning less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, which is typically the highest threshold for receiving household income-based support such as food assistance and medical coverage (Source: Auburn Economic Data Book, Crossroads Resource Center, 2018). Auburn can work to ensure healthy food is available and accessible to all its residents while also building an economy, including the agricultural sector, which provides households with the adequate wages they need to purchase healthy food.

Vision

Local planning and zoning policies can reduce or reinforce structural barriers that prevent our food supply from being as healthy, equitable, affordable, and resilient as we would like it to be. Policy change that promotes greater access to healthy foods can significantly reduce these barriers. Planning and Economic Development staff, boards and committees, and elected/appointed officials can make and implement long-term decisions for the design of the City and the surrounding region to improve healthy food access, food skills of community members, and the surrounding region's food infrastructure. Systematic assessments that identify barriers and track progress over time are essential for informing all of the goals and strategies below. By including food, equity, and health-related policy and systems changes in planning documents and zoning codes, Auburn can establish:

** Support for food and farm enterprises of all sizes*

** Zoning that supports a healthy food infrastructure*

** Access to and preservation of land for food production*

** Development of community food assets (such as community gardens, farmers' markets, food hubs, and pollinator-friendly habitats)*

** Affordable, safe and reliable transportation to food sources*

** Support for growth of local markets that are critical for farm businesses to succeed*

POLICIES

K.1 FOOD IS EQUITABLY ACCESSIBLE

Goal K.1: Ensure that fresh, local food is equitably accessible to all, regardless of income or geography.

Objective K.1.1:
Work with organizational partners to gather baseline data about Auburn's food access picture that will help inform future planning.

Strategies to achieve this objective:

Strategy K.1.1.a: Compile data from existing resources and if needed, conduct new research on Auburn's food security indicators (refer to inventories).

Objective K.1.2:
Continue to expand the customer base, accessibility, and affordability of the Auburn Farmers' Market
Strategies to achieve this objective:

Strategy K.1.2.a: Establish programs for low-income customers, vendor recruitment, marketing/promotion investments, and permanent year round indoor/outdoor locations.

Objective K.1.3:
Support practices that facilitate access to healthy food in residential settings:
Strategies to achieve this objective:

***Strategy K.1.3.a*:** Build and encourage partnerships that work to expand residential access to healthy food.
Strategy K.1.3.b: Use a food system lens when planning housing developments to inform site layout, landscape design, residential amenities, and access to retail food sources.
Strategy K.1.3.c: Ensure that future land use designations provide flexibility for sufficient open space for community gardens and private residential gardening plots.

Objective K.1.4:
Review and simplify or remove regulation of food- and farm-related land uses in order to improve the variety and availability of healthy food outlets.
Strategies to achieve this objective:

Strategy K.1.4.a: Support updating local ordinances governing food processing businesses—such as commercial kitchens, flash freezing businesses, small scale home kitchen businesses, and meat processing/butchering enterprises —to increase business growth.
Strategy K.1.4.b: Support updating local ordinances concerning food outlets, such as grocery stores, small food stores, farmers' markets, seasonal food stands, and farm/food trucks to support growth in the types and number of food outlets throughout the City and their hours and locations.
Strategy K.1.4.c: Support a buy local food campaign that includes a directory of local food producers, where to purchase goods and highlights the value of buying local for economic benefits. Information and advertising about the campaign should be widely distributed to the public using avenues such as social media/websites, public transportation, city buildings and paper handouts.
Strategy K.1.4.d: Support a local food pledge to increase local purchasing by institutions.
Strategy K.1.4.e: Work with producers to determine if a "Grown in Auburn" label/logo for their products would be valuable.
Strategy K.1.4.f: Collaborate with the Auburn School Department to coordinate and increase local food sourcing, utilizing the following programs created to support this work:

- Maine Harvest of the Month
- Local Produce Fund (matching fund for schools to leverage)
- Maine Farm to School Network

Strategy K.1.4.g: Promote Auburn as a regional center for agriculture.
Strategy K.1.4.h: Reliable markets are critical to any business. The City's Economic & Community Development Department should assist in developing local markets for agricultural products. This could include discussions with grocery store chains, discussions with restaurants and efforts to use more locally produced products in Auburn's school lunch program.

Objective K.1.5:
Improve access to healthy foods by enhancing transportation systems and infrastructure for transit riders, pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.
Strategies to achieve this objective:

Strategy K.1.5.a: Undertake a systematic assessment of the bicycle and pedestrian routes that connect consumers to healthy food sources, including priorities for snow removal during the winter (because some pedestrian routes disappear altogether after a storm), and address deficiencies through physical improvements to bicycle and pedestrian networks.
Strategy K.1.5.b: Assess transportation needs and whether current public transit provides adequate service to stores selling healthy food, and/or farmers markets. Support transit service improvements to connect people at peak times to healthy food sources.
Strategy K.1.5.c: Adopt site design standards for food stores that provide safe and convenient pedestrian access to the front door and bicycle parking.
Strategy K.1.5.d: Collaborate with regional economic development agencies, such as AVCOG, the LA Metro Chamber, and others, on efforts to improve food distribution infrastructure.
Strategy K.1.5.e: Support innovative practices such as mobile food markets and mobile food pantries/food shelves that can bring food closer to under-resourced customers.

K.2 FARMING CAPACITY

GOAL K.2 Strengthen and grow Auburn's existing subsistence, community, and commercial gardening and farming capacity.

Objective K.2.1:
Support the development of ordinance and zoning changes that decrease barriers to food production in all areas of the City.
Strategies to achieve this objective:

Strategy K.2.1.a: As part of this initiative particular emphasis should be placed on permitting season-extension structures (e.g. hoophouses), supporting edible and pollinator-friendly landscaping, allowing on-site sale of goods, and allowances for livestock/fowl (e.g. for chickens, ducks, goats, bees, etc.), and any accessory structure they require, that do not conflict with existing residential land uses

Objective K.2.2:
Grow the productive capacity of commercial farms.
Strategies to achieve this objective:

Strategy K.2.2.a: Inventory existing commercial farms to identify productive capacity, current needs, and anticipated succession plans to support continuity of production.
Strategy K.2.2.b: Work with producers, buyers, and food sector service providers to strengthen existing and develop new local and regional markets, including direct sales, wholesale, and institutional buyers.
Strategy K.2.2.c: Establish economic programs that support the viability of existing and new farms such as:

- Establish a low- or no-interest revolving loan fund to assist new and beginning farmers with getting stable access to land and with equipment startup capital by partnering with businesses, government, farming, banking, land trusts and other organizations;
- Establish a voluntary municipal support program to allow for tax incentives and increased investments;
- Adopt policies and economic incentives needed to attract commercial infrastructure such as storage, refrigeration, processing, or any other type of food infrastructure.

<u>Objective K.2.3:</u>
Continue to support the establishment and maintenance of community gardens throughout the city to provide residents with easy access to healthy food.
Strategies to achieve this objective:

***Strategy K.2.3.a*:** Establish clear policy support for community gardens, while determining the appropriate balance between community gardens and land redevelopment.
***Strategy K.2.3.b*:** Ensure permanent sites and a "no net loss" policy for community gardening space in underserved areas if relocation is necessary.
***Strategy K.2.3.c*:** Where relocation is necessary, strive to relocate in off-seasons, provide clear and early disclosure, and help gardens get established in new locations.
***Strategy K.2.3.d*:** Support a process to add community gardens as a permitted use in all residential areas, with clear site and operational standards.
***Strategy K.2.3.e*:** Continue to utilize organizational partnerships to proactively support community gardens through soil testing, water provision, and continue leasing publicly owned property to community gardens.
***Strategy K.2.3.f*:** Incentivize the integration of community gardens into housing developments and create incentives through density bonuses for community gardens in housing developments.
***Strategy K.2.3.g*:** Encourage single-family subdivisions and multi-family development models that incorporate community gardens.

<u>Objective K.2.4:</u>
Create a land use map that inventories Auburn's existing and potential food production and processing capacity, which identifies existing food production,

processing and sales locations, and determines good locations for future development of food systems activities.
Strategies to achieve this objective:

Strategy K. 2.4.a: This map would include the following information:

- Prime and statewide significant soils
- Existing farmlands and active farms
- Existing community gardens
- Existing food retail/market/farm stand locations
- Designated areas that are being held for future commercial and industrial development (for more information, refer to Comprehensive Plan Section I.2.3.b)
- Open spaces currently owned by the public, land trusts, or other organizations where farming could take place.
- Possible locations for food processing and other "in demand" agricultural services, based on factors such as available resources needed like utilities, transportation access, and land appropriate for development.

Strategy K.2.4.b: Utilize the above map for future land use planning and for identifying priority development locations. This can be used by the City to encourage in-demand food systems development in beneficial areas, and to identify areas where more food production and access can be provided.

K.3 DEVELOPMENT OF PROCESSORS OF ALL SIZES

Goal K.3: Facilitate and support the development of processors of all sizes of healthy food, with special focus on developing those that provide a service which is not adequately available within the region (e.g. involves significant transportation distances or time delays).

Objective K.3.1:
Support the development of local food-processing businesses.
Strategies to achieve this objective:

***Strategy K.3.1.a*:** Develop or expand business grant and loan programs to help with start-up and capital costs.
***Strategy K.3.1.b*:** Support efforts and work to clarify and streamline business-licensing processes for food-processing businesses.
***Strategy K.3.1.c*:** Review local land use restrictions on food-processing businesses to determine whether additional locational flexibility can be provided under appropriate conditions.

K.4 FOOD RELATED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal K.4 *Support food-related businesses and initiatives that equitably advance the development of local and regional economies.*

Objective K.4.1:
Seek the establishment of more essential service-providing small scale commercial development in the downtown (such as those that offer a variety of healthy, locally-sourced foods).

Objective K.4.2:
Allow production of food on open land, e.g. green spaces, and within/on structures to increase the opportunity for urban farm businesses.

Objective K.4.3:
Pursue activities that both improve healthy food access and advance economic development to include value added venues to existing and new farms.
Strategies to achieve this objective:

Strategy K.4.3.a: Support agritourism efforts as a means of enhancing income streams for small farmers and producers.
Strategy K.4.3.b: Purchase healthy foods from local food businesses when catering events, meetings, and other gatherings.
Strategy K.4.3.c: Review local ordinances to ensure that they do not unduly restrict sidewalk and rooftop dining.
Strategy K.4.3.d: Highlight the region's food culture as a community branding strategy.
Strategy K.4.3.e: Partner with neighboring communities to pursue a regional food marketing strategy.
Strategy K.4.3.f: Support the development of jobs that pay adequate wages ensuring community members can afford to purchase healthy food and support local businesses.

Objective K.4.4:
Take steps to identify and reduce barriers to business creation by other historically marginalized communities (e.g. people of color, low-income, Veterans).