

Meeting Minutes, Mayor's Bona Fide Agricultural, Recreation and Natural Resource Land Use Ad-Hoc Committee

Meeting Information

- Date & Time: 2024-10-29 17:35:05
- Location: Community Room, City Hall, 60 Court Street
Attendees: Chris Carson, Dave Bell, Dave Griswold, Joe Gray, John Blais, John Cleveland, Barbara Mitchell, Philip Savignano, David Trask
Public: Steve Beale Absent Amy Dieterich

Meeting Minutes

1. Ag Zone Land Conversion and Development Criteria

- **Meeting Initiation**
John Blais initiated the meeting, noted the time, and mentioned that Dave Griswold might be late or absent due to a family issue. Attendees introduced themselves.
- **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**
The minutes from the last meeting on October 24th were reviewed and approved without any amendments or corrections other than to include "Minutes".
- **Ag Zone Land Conversion**
Discussion on the criteria for land conversion in the Ag Zone, including a specific case where a parcel of land increased in value due to ordinance changes.
- **Development Criteria**
Discussion on the criteria for developing parcels under 10 acres in the Ag Zone, including the need for a farming or agriculture plan.
- **Ordinance and Planning**
Discussion on the ordinance requirements and the planning board's role in approving land use plans, including the need for written findings and the involvement of NRCS.

Conclusion

1. Minutes approved.

2. Bona Fide Farm Planning

- **Financial and Farm Planning**
Discussion on the importance of having a financial plan and farm plan, including necessary structures, equipment, and inputs.
- **Feasibility and Sustainability**
Discussion on the feasibility and sustainability of land use, including practical evidence and examples like David Bell's rock pile analysis.
- **Topography and Contour Intervals**
Discussion on the appropriate contour intervals (2-foot or 10-foot) for topographic maps and their relevance to farming and home siting.
- **Site Plan Requirements**
Discussion on the requirements for site plans, including the need for a topo map, boundary information, and the inclusion of slopes and wetlands.
- **Ordinance Compliance**
Discussion on compliance with ordinances, particularly the 20% or 2-acre limit for house portions on a farm lot.
- **Principal Use of Land**
Discussion on determining the principal use of land, especially in cases where only a portion of the land is used for farming.
- **Additional Land Uses**
Discussion on other potential uses of land, such as tree growth, CO2 sequestration, and sugar bush, and their impact on the principal use determination.
- **Septic and Infrastructure**
Discussion on the inclusion of septic systems and other infrastructure in the 20% land use calculation for house portions.

3. Land Use and Farming Requirements

- **Land Use and Farming**
Discussion on the use of land for farming, including the percentage of land to be used for different purposes and the requirements for bona fide farming.
- **Subsistence Farming**
Debate on whether two acres of land can be considered sufficient for subsistence farming and the requirements for proving bona fide use.
- **Agricultural Use Documentation**
Discussion on the need for documentation to prove that the land will be used for bona fide farming, including market identification and sustainability plans.
- **Recreation and Farming**
Brief mention of the overlap between recreational use and farming, and the need to focus on farming for the current discussion.

- **Sustainability and Feasibility**
Discussion on the importance of sustainability and feasibility in farming operations, including the need for knowledge, skill, and experience.
- **Contract Farming**
Explanation of how contract farming can be part of a farming operation, using other farmers' land or services.
- **Property Rights and Planning**
Discussion on the importance of having rights to property and planning before starting a review process by City staff to determine the principal use of the parcel and if the proposed farming operation is a bona fide farm.

Other Considerations:

- **Wildlife and Environmental Considerations**
Discussion on the need to consider wildlife habitats, endangered species, and environmental regulations when planning farming operations.
- **Historic Preservation**
Mention of the need to consider historic preservation and archaeological information when planning farming operations.
- **Tax Programs and Land Use**
Discussion on various tax programs like the Maine tree growth tax program and their implications for land use.
- **Checklist for Agricultural Use**
Proposal to create a checklist for agricultural use to ensure consistency and objectivity in evaluations.
- **Council Reporting**
Discussion on how to report the committee's work to the council, including the use of a checklist.

4. Defining and regulating recreational uses and requirements in land use planning.

- **Checklist for Decision Making**
Discussion on the use of a checklist to aid in decision-making, emphasizing that not all boxes need to be checked but should guide discussions.
- **Recreation Definition and Requirements**
Brainstorming session on defining recreational uses and their requirements, including examples like golf courses, day camps, and community gardens.
- **Business Plan for Recreational Uses**
Discussion on the necessity of a business plan for recreational uses to ensure they are legitimate and tied to a business.

- **Land Use and Deed Restrictions**
Consideration of deed restrictions to ensure land remains used for its intended purpose, such as recreation or farming, even after being sold.
- **Small-Scale vs. Large-Scale Recreation**
Discussion on differentiating between small-scale and large-scale recreational uses and the need for clear definitions.
- **Accessory Facilities for Recreational Use**
Discussion on the necessity of accessory facilities like parking for recreational uses and ensuring they are present on-site.
- **Natural Resources and Habitat Development**
Discussion on the development of habitats for species like woodcock and the need for a long-term commitment and conservation easements.
- **Public Input**
A member of the public provided input on the distinctions between recreational and natural resource uses versus agricultural and farming uses.
- **Meeting Schedule**
Discussion on extending the meeting schedule to ensure all topics are covered, with suggestions for additional meeting dates.

Conclusion

1. The committee Agreed to extend the meeting schedule with potential dates being December 16th, 2024.

Next Arrangements

- Extend reporting back to City Council December 16th, 2024.
- Update council on the request to extend the meeting schedule.(Complete)
- Provide an outline checklist from John J. Cleveland draft criteria for Agriculture and Resource Protection District
- Next meeting November 7, 2024.
- Set two more dates at the next meeting.