

**Agricultural Commission**  
**August 21, 2007**

Meeting room 104, 2 Jabish St., Lawrence Memorial Hall

Members: G. Adzima, J. Gillan, J. Clements --  
Associate Members: S. Gay, A. Page and R. Reidy

Also present: D. Beaudette

The meeting was called to order at 7:15 pm



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Discussed reviewing the Zoning Bylaw Schedule of Use section regarding agricultural uses. The AgComm will propose changes to this section.

D. Beaudette, member of the planning board has met with the AgComm on the schedule of use section of the bylaw, and is here to show the AgComm the process for proposing bylaw amendments. He noted the AgComm may bring these amendments to the planning board, to show the amendments to them as a general idea, and get input prior to formally sending changes to the Board of Selectmen.

The AgComm will send a statement regarding these changes. The changes are proposed to enhance and allow new business opportunities and use natural resources. J. Clements, a member of AgComm, is also on the Community Plan Steering Committee. He noted that the Community Plan (Master Plan) does not have a section for the Agricultural Commission. He will note that at the next Steering Committee meeting, and have them add in the AgComm to the community plan. At that time, a note to the new AgComm section of the community plan will show these Zoning Bylaw changes, and note that the changes meet a primary goal of the community plan.

The conversation proceeded to agriculture within the Town of Belchertown; how it fits in, where it is restricted, and amounts of acreage necessary to allow certain uses. Discussed agri-tourism. Discussed a formula which has been set by court systems, what they consider a primary economic income for a farm. What brings in 50% of the income to a farm, is what constitutes if it is or isn't a farm operation, or, if it is agricultural or not.

Discussed agricultural exemptions for farms. A member of the AgComm had a concern that when a board or commission start to use a formula, such as the 50% of income from an item may head directly in preventing a farming direction, and may targeting people with large land areas, which if land is removed from chapter land, may make it susceptible to sale to keep up with the taxes. These are farms that may terrace, might plant pine and spruce trees, which need little to no topsoil. There are a variety of incidental uses that farmers may pursue that do not need a permit. Compost was brought up, and within a 3 year period, would it be considered for sale as a commercial product or a farm product?

A member noted he spoke with a member of the Conservation Commission regarding an issue with a small farmer, and a culvert replacement issue. A neighbor of the small farmer had called the town hall, and said they felt this farmer would put in houses after they replaced a culvert. The small farmer said they are not able to afford hiring the engineers, surveyors and/or wetland scientists to upgrade their culvert. This AgComm member said he had a similar project, 10 years or so ago, which cost him thousands of dollars, and now costs have risen dramatically.

This AgComm member said he attended the recent Con. Com. meeting with the small farmer regarding this culvert. At the meeting, it was said and assumed that if this person was upgrading a culvert, it was not being upgraded for their farm or horses as a pasture, but that it would be used for "development".

The schedule of use review of the bylaw continued. Each line item regarding agriculture under open and general uses was reviewed. The changes will be to help a farmer remain in, or begin a business. It was noted that the face of farming has changed and that farmers can produce crops with greenhouses, use resources to have public entertainment (i.e., hayrides, small animal pets, hay field maze, etc.). Discussed butterfly and fish farms.

A member asked if every town uses a schedule of use for agricultural purposes? Discussed small farm stands, and noted that when primary agricultural, and rural residential areas eventually get split up on the zoning map, it will help.

The members thanked G. Adzima for sending them information via e-mail and ask for the members to review a useful document.. G. Adzima went over the form with Douglas Albertson, Town Planner here in Belchertown. It is a New Hampshire Planning Document form and asks, is your town farm friendly?

Discussed the Town Fair and putting out farm maps for people, to be aware of where the farms are located in town. It was noted that there were farmers that came forward and wanted to be on the map, but it was too late and it will be updated in the future. The AgComm website would be a good place to put the map as well. A member noted that the foresters and farmers in town should be the first people asked to speak or promote the farming community. A press release will be sent out for a seminar to be given on the New England Small Farm Institute property.

D. Beaudette will bring the changes of the Schedule of Use section of the Zoning Bylaw to the Planning Board on September 11, 2007.

September 18, 2007 is the next AgComm meeting.

Adjourned at 9:00 pm.