

Bethel & Liberty Farmland Protection Plan Committee Meeting, April 28, 2009.

Present:

Maureen Barber	Robert Blais	David Biren
Denise Frangipane	Paul Hahn	Dean Farrand
Melinda Ketcham	Jennifer Mall	Willie Hughson
Don Meltz	Bob Franklin	Ray Kelly
Peter Stettner	Dan Sturm	Fred Michel
Joe Walsh	Jill Weyer	Jennifer Young

1) Review and Discuss Draft 2 of Vision Statement and Goals: Suggested changes

a. Vision Statement

1. Remove the word “alternative” from description of farms
2. Add the word “livestock” in the description of traditional farming operations

b. Goals

1. Add to Goal #3: “implement *and promote* local policies and programs”
2. Add to Goal #3: “support *and encourage* a diversity of *viable* farm operations” or something similar

c. Separate vision statements or one for both?

1. Differences in the characteristics of open space in Liberty and Bethel

- a. Liberty’s open space is predominantly wooded. Should Liberty’s vision statement stress the woodlot management aspects of agriculture? Should Liberty add a goal about encouraging landowners not to sell wooded land to developers?

- b. Bethel also has a strong desire to protect wooded land. The Forest Conservation Zone encompasses most of the area south of 17B. So both towns need a goal about woodland, if we define forestry as agriculture.

1. note that there is a difference between commercial forestry (not agriculture) and woodlot management (agriculture)

2. maybe, as we move into strategies, our plans could encourage brush hogging to keep fields open—keeps land suitable for agriculture and provides wildlife habitat

- c. Liberty has a relatively small number of operating farms, but some are quite large. Seems that active agriculture accounts for a small percentage of the town’s acreage.

2. Differences in the reasons for protecting farmland, between Liberty and Bethel.

- a. Liberty survey results seem to show that people value farms because they provide open space and preserve the rural character of the Town.

- b. But farmers all know they need to be economically viable.

- c. And survey respondents (from our survey and several others) might immediately think of open space, but if they think a bit more they would probably also indicate that they want farms to be productive (because if they are not productive, then they cease to exist).

- d. If local policies are not conducive to helping farms stay in business, then this plan must address that problem and help them.

2). Discuss Definition of Agriculture in Context of Plan.

a. White Creek Definition

1. focuses on three things: what is produced, the location of production, and the means and practices.

2. Suggestion that we add “manure processing and handling” to this definition, to protect these practices against complaints from neighbors.

3. Suggestion that we add woodland management to the definition of agriculture.

b. Bethel Zoning Law Definitions

1. agriculture, on-site processing:

- a. do “agricultural commodities” include poultry? Yes.

2. farm stand:

a. why does a farm stand need to be temporary? Perhaps because different regulations are needed to govern permanent retail operations. We'll look into this.

3. Local zoning:

Remember that our plan does not supersede local zoning. Ag District activities supersedes local zoning, but otherwise zoning governs land uses. Our plan is designed to encourage and support agriculture in our towns.

c. Ag and Markets Law:

1. Farm woodland:

a. why are Christmas tree operations excluded? Because Christmas trees are a crop, and are covered in the definition of crops

2. Land used in agricultural production:

a. see section (f), which states that "land of not less than seven acres..." is considered land used in agricultural production. Remember, this is the definition that Ag & Mkts uses for determining eligibility for an ag assessment. Our plan can define agriculture and farming operations in any way we want, and we don't need to set a minimum size for farms. These definitions are just here to help us generate a good definition for our own plan.

3. Farm operation:

a. "manure processing and handling facilities":

1. good to include this because it can decrease the number of complaints

b. "commercial enterprise":

1. Do we want to include hobby and subsistence farms also? Yes, probably..

c. "horse boarding operation":

1. what about people who just have a couple of horses of their own? Are they farms? Yes, probably, because they buy hay, use veterinarians, etc. Maybe our plan should include protecting operations like this, which might not produce anything but definitely support the agricultural economy. Again, this keeps our definition inclusive, not exclusive.

d. What about size? Do we care about a 50 by 75 foot garden? Maybe not, but we do care about someone with two horses. Where to draw the line? Or leave it open so we can catch everyone? There is no drawback to being as inclusive as possible. In the other hand, if our definition is too specific and narrow we might end up excluding lands that deserve protections under this plan.

e. "compost, mulch or other biomass crops":

1. Include these? They are more industrial than commercial, and they often truck in green waste from other areas. If we include these facilities, we will want to define them so that we only include operations that compost materials generated on-site.

4. Agriculture:

a. Ag & Mkts defines a farm operation, but does not seem to define agriculture in a broader sense. A full definition of agriculture should include more on *how* you use the land.

b. The White Creek definition focuses more on the activity. Our definition could include a revised version the Ag & Mkts definition of "farm operation," and the White Creek definition of ag.

3). Overview of Profile/ Inventory: Table of Contents

a. Nan and Don are beginning to lay out the document in this fashion.

b. The section on "Prioritizing Farmlands" will include the LESA.

c. "Strategies for Viable Agriculture" section will come out of two or three meetings of brainstorming and generating strategies.

4). Upcoming Tasks

1. May: Profile and Inventory Data/ Document

Buildout (use the zoning code, look at existing development, and identify potential new developments based on zoning)

2. June: Strategies and Actions

3. July: Strategies and Actions, continued

5). Prioritization Model

Next Meeting: Tuesday, May 26, Liberty Town Hall, 8:00 pm (note new time!)

Mark your calendar for the following two meetings: Tuesday, June 23, 8:00 pm and Tuesday, July 28, 8:00 pm