

Agricultural Lands Preservation in Littleton

Options discussion

5-16-13



Origin of this meeting



This meeting arose from discussions between the Planning Board and the Selectmen regarding the need to update the Extensive Recreation Bylaw, in time for the fall special town meeting.

Goals



The purpose of this meeting is to obtain input and guidance from the public and from the Agricultural Commission to the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen as they consider options to preserve farmlands in Littleton

A few of the reasons to Preserve Farmlands:



- Helps to define the character of the town
- Supports active farmlands and production farmers as part of a diverse local economy
- Protects local food supply
- Protects significant wildlife habitats

History



Littleton has a long history of support for agricultural lands protection

- Public support for protection is embodied in Open Space and Recreation Plans prepared by the town
- At a 2009 forum to address the future of agricultural lands east of the village, more than 75% of participants indicated support for farmland protection

History



More recent support includes:

- 2011: Approval of zoning bylaw expanding uses allowed by special permit on working farms
- 2011: Approval of zoning bylaw providing incentives for preservation of roadside farmlands in cluster developments
- 2013: Approval for town purchase of Congregational Church Meadows property farmland on Route 2A

Is it a Community Goal to protect farmland in Littleton?



Which of the following do you support?

(You can vote for all you agree with):

- The town should preserve, to the maximum extent possible, all farmlands in town for current and future agricultural uses.
- The town should preserve roadside farmlands primarily for visual open space or scenic vistas, and may allow the use of some of these lands for recreational uses, cemeteries and other permanent non-agricultural uses.
- Keep a balance of open space and farmland

Options for preservation of Farmlands



- Donations of fee title or conservation restriction to the town or to non-profit (e.g., the Littleton Conservation Trust)
- Purchase of fee title or development rights, usually by the municipality, sometimes with assistance of the state
- Zoning: providing incentives to preserve farmlands while (sometimes) developing other lands
 - Keep farming economically viable
 - Transfer of Development Rights program
 - Residential or commercial cluster

Option: Expand the Community Preservation Act



The CPA is a surcharge on most property taxes in town, matched (currently at 26%) by the state, that can be used for open space protection, affordable housing, historic preservation and recreation.

- At current surcharge of 1%, the town has limited capacity to purchase land. 1% generates \$150,000 to \$200,000 per year (including state match)
- Littleton ATM 2013 voted to expand CPA to include commercial and industrial properties; it was previously limited to residential properties.

Option: Expand the Community Preservation Act



Straw Poll:

- Would you support purchase of farmlands or development rights using town and /or CPA funds?
- Would you support an increase in the CPA from the current 1% up to 3% to increase funds available for farmland preservation?
- Will you support a fall 2013 proposal to allow the town to allocate additional local fund sources to increase the state match for CPA?

Option: Implement Transfer of Development Rights



Some MA communities allow for an increase in density in commercial zones if the developer preserves farmlands elsewhere in town.

- Would you support increases in density in commercial or industrial areas in exchange for open space/ farmland protection elsewhere in town?
- What area of town would you feel comfortable increasing in density (Where would the development rights be transferred to)?

Option: Allow commercial uses in residential zones in exchange for farmland protections



Littleton has already set some precedent in this type of development:

- Extensive Recreation bylaw: Allows, by special permit, commercial uses associated with extensive recreational uses in residential zones (e.g., golf course clubhouse).
- Farmland Protection bylaw: Allows, by special permit, accessory commercial uses on active farms (e.g., animal feed sales, veterinary clinic, machinery repair). The businesses must be farm-related and accessory to the farm use (not the main use of the site)

Option: Allow commercial uses in residential zones in exchange for farmland protections



Other MA towns have allowed for commercial uses in residential areas to preserve key open space features(e.g., The Ipswich Great Estates bylaw and Green Space Preservation District)

Example: Ipswich Green Space Preservation Development District



Enables development of professional business offices and services in a residential district, subject to requirements for:

- minimum 50% open space,
- minimum 100-foot naturally vegetated buffer to all streets and abutting lots,
- minimum 250-foot setback of structures from frontage street,
- maximum 30% impervious cover.
- square footage of commercial space is set at 3000 square feet times the number of building lots that could be built on the site, plus a potential bonus for additional open space above the 50% required, but with a maximum FAR of .1.
- Septic system may be located in preserved open space area.

Option: Allow commercial uses in residential zones in exchange for farmland protections



Would you support commercial development in residentially-zoned farmlands:

- IF 50% of the land was preserved for active farming or open space uses?
- What about at 60%?
- How about at 70%
- Would it make a difference if the commercial development was not visible from the roadway (except for a sign on the street)?

Other options?



What other options should the town consider for preserving agricultural lands in town?

- Outside review of bylaws by MAGIC Working Group comprised of experts in Agriculture, law and which offers and outside perspective
- Work with participants of MAGIC Agricultural Project to examine best practices from other communities
- Other????

Next Steps



**Continuing discussions with Planning Board,
Agricultural Commission and Selectmen**