

CTAP Agricultural Committee Technical Assistance – 2010

Litchfield Recommendations Based on Farm Friendly Survey

As part of a CTAP sub grant award through Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) to Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC), portions of the town of Litchfield, NH Master Plan (2002), Zoning ordinance, Subdivision and Site Plan regulations were reviewed as part of a local regulatory audit. Next, a survey titled “Is your Town Friendly – A Checklist for Sustaining Rural Character” was conducted. The following recommendations are presented below based on this audit.

- 1. Encourage participation on boards, commissions and committees.** Representation and participation by members of the farm and forestry community that are residents would be beneficial in advancing the viewpoint of this significant segment of Litchfield’s landscape and economic engine. Clearly, an intense seasonal commitment of time and effort is required to have a successful agricultural operation (farm). Due to this fact, representation on a land use board is difficult at best. Alternate membership is the most realistic compromise. Monitoring public hearing notices and then submitting comments in writing is an alternative that should be encouraged.
- 2. Consider formation of an Agriculture Commission as authorized under RSA 674:44-e** or even as a more informal local or regional committee. Issues affecting the farming and ranching community can be discussed; training, education, apprenticeships are a number of things a committee could facilitate. A local or regional committee should be considered because a number of agribusinesses are operated by owners that reside outside of Litchfield or the land is leased. Agricultural Commission members must be residents of Litchfield.
- 3. Encourage a sustainable Economic Development Committee with representation and information to promote agribusiness in Litchfield.** Utilize and improve the economic development website located on the Town site at <http://www.litchfield-nh.gov/business/index.htm>. It is important to promote local farms, ranches and associated businesses that support or supply local agriculture. Even part-time membership could promote local events, keep the website updated and educate newcomers and visitors about our agricultural heritage. Funding for preservation of land and buildings, reducing taxes using depreciation methods and land assessment based on the Soil Potential Index (SPI) are education topics with direct impact on the cost of farming. Regardless of the committee name, sharing knowledge can only help.
- 4. Update the Agriculture section of the Master Plan located in the Natural Resource chapter.** Adding an agriculture section to Land Use and cross referencing it to Natural Resources would emphasize agriculture’s importance. Also, Land Use is one of the required master plan chapters and an agriculture section seems appropriate. Currently there are two paragraphs with focus only on a comprehensive preservation plan, and nothing about regulatory changes to simplify and embrace the right to farm laws in support of existing agricultural land uses.
- 5. Update land use laws related to Agriculture.** The expedited review process offered in the Site Plan regulations is ineffective. A complete re-write that incorporates uses and structures that should be “by right” incorporated and exemption and expedited procedures that directly promote, respect the right to farm laws, and offer real cost and time savings to agribusiness in Litchfield. An effective way to update agricultural land use would be to consolidate everything into a separate Agriculture chapter in zoning and

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regulations. If an Agriculture Incentive innovative zoning ordinance was adopted, coordination with existing standards will be necessary to avoid repetition and conflicts. Whether through incentive zoning or as a stand-alone overlay district, an Agriculture district including the NH-3A corridor could have a big impact on preservation, viewshed, providing better support and procedures for addressing agricultural uses and accessory businesses and uses that often abut farms and ranches.

- 6. Develop an Agriculture Incentive zoning ordinance.** This is a more long range goal that can, and probably should be implemented in phases over a number of years. There are a number of tools that preserve and incentivize preservation and promotion of new agriculture and silviculture. The Master Plan mentions the importance of preservation, and can be expanded on in the next update to include agriculture incentive zoning as another method of achieving this and other related goals. Education and outreach to the Town and agriculture and silviculture community is critical at the time of development of an ordinance to insure support and prevent ineffective or overreaching measures that will only bring division and failure of the common goal of providing the conditions that will allow existing farms to continue and new agribusiness to develop in harmony with residential and other types of commercial development.
- 7. Offer a Land Use Boards Workshop on Agriculture, Land Use, and the Law.** Whether local regional or at the State level, a winter workshop series with regulators and farmers looking at farming law; over and under regulation; the impact on community and farmers from regulation and new development – recommendations & success stories. BMPs and environmental aspects of agribusiness – organic vs. traditional farming, pesticide and water use (State regulated), etc.; Resources to assist regulators and farmers; Funding for agriculture – grants for towns or farmers, taxes vs. town revenues; general discussion; A combination of RPC and State workshops?