

Town of XXX

Agricultural Commission Charter

Our town/city has adopted a comprehensive plan and land use ordinances, which create the policy and regulatory framework for protecting the health, safety and welfare of our property owners, residents, and conserve our natural resources. In recent years, farming as a way of life has experienced a resurgence in our community and across Maine. Community members have expressed an interest in reviewing municipal policies and ordinances relating to farming with a goal of ensuring that the town is friendly to agriculture while continuing to protect the health, safety and welfare of all residents.

The Select Board/Town Council hereby creates an Agricultural Commission to undertake this work. The Agricultural Commission shall be comprised of 5 (or 7) members appointed for three (3) year terms by the Select Board/Town Council, and representing a broad spectrum of active and retired farmers, and include a representative from the Conservation Commission and Planning Board.

Agricultural Commission Roles and Responsibilities

- Act as an advisory and recommending body to the Select Board/Town Council, Planning Board and other municipal committees on matters relating to agriculture in our community.
- Reviews the comprehensive plan and land use ordinances for provisions that relate to farming in order identify potential barriers for farming and identify opportunities to modify the documents to better support farming.
- Propose modifications or amendments to the comprehensive plan and ordinances to better support farming while protecting the health, safety and welfare of all residents.
- Recommend and facilitate broad public participation and provide multiple opportunities for public input as each change is proposed.
- Research methods other communities are using to support agriculture and share information and ideas with community leaders.
- Sponsor events related to local farming such as community suppers, farm forums or workshops, or a harvest festival.

Procedures

The following guidelines and procedures are intended to guide the Agricultural Commission in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities.

1. The group should elect a chair and agree to a committee structure and process for decision-making.
2. A detailed work plan and timeline will be developed that reflects any priorities agreed to by the Commission members. This work plan and timeline will be distributed to the Select Board/Town Council, Planning Board and other committees as appropriate for comments.
3. The Commission should strive to achieve consensus on all recommendations while remaining sensitive to diverse citizen views.
4. The Commission should keep any proposed changes or amendments to municipal documents as simple and straightforward as possible while ensuring that all proposed changes meet minimum State requirements for land use regulation.
5. All meetings of the Commission shall be posted with required public notice and open to the public with the appropriate level of public participation to be decided by the Committee. At a minimum, an opportunity for public comment should be provided at each meeting.

From Threshold to Maine RC&D Area:

<http://www.thresholdtomaine.org/images/Ag%20Commission%20Guidelines.pdf>

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION GUIDELINES

Goals of an Agricultural Commission

1. Revitalize and sustain a community's agricultural businesses and its lands.
2. Encourage the pursuit of agriculture as a career choice and lifestyle.
3. Promote agricultural-based economic opportunities.

Background

1. Helping the community understand the usefulness of an Agriculture Commission is the first step. It is important to hold a public meeting for local farmers and residents to discuss the Agricultural Commission concept. Forming a Steering Committee to help set up an Agriculture Commission is a good next step.
2. If a community is to retain and expand agricultural lands and businesses, it needs to focus on agriculture as a key economic development strategy. The Agriculture Commission can help develop this focus and facilitate the development of the strategy.
3. Residents of most rural communities want to retain a sustainable local economy, not just rural character. Residents need a choice and an opportunity to pursue and retain farming businesses as part of an overall economic development strategy.

What will the Agricultural Commission do:

1. Provide a voice for farmers and visibility of farming as a business.
2. Inventory, identify and map agricultural assets and trends in the community.
3. Complete an Agricultural Needs Assessment which will be used to set priorities and direct activities of the Agricultural Commission.
4. Connect farmers to assistance which may consist of the following: technology and research, technical assistance, financial assistance, business planning and assistance, grants, loans, and estate planning.
5. Network farmers and managers to available farmland, educational opportunities and agriculturally related information.
6. Serve as an advocate, mediator, and or negotiator with respect to farming issues.
7. Foster healthy agricultural business management.
8. Further farmland protection efforts by assisting farmers with access to state, federal and private funding.
9. Request full use of a town's zoning and taxation mechanisms such as the Farm and Open Space Tax Law to benefit existing and future farming businesses. Evaluate value of property for protection and publicize opportunity for its agricultural use.
10. Develop lines of communication with the Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, and Planning and Zoning Boards, and their staff. Provide expert input on agricultural issues brought before these boards.
11. Develop relationships with state and federal legislators.
12. Write and implement an economic development plan for the community focused on agriculture.

GRANBY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION ORDINANCE

Be it ORDAINED that:

1. There is hereby established an Agricultural Commission, consisting of seven members to be appointed by the Board of Selectmen, each for a term of four years to expire on the second Monday in January, except that three of the members initially appointed shall serve until the second Monday in January 2009 and four of the members initially appointed shall serve until the second Monday in January 2011. In making appointments to the Agricultural Commission, the Board of Selectmen shall consider persons engaged or interested in agriculture, farm management, and the promotion of agriculture.
2. The Agricultural Commission shall support, promote, and encourage agriculture and agricultural pursuits. It shall serve as a conduit between non-profit agencies and persons engaged in agricultural pursuits locally. It shall advise the Board of Selectmen on issues relating to agriculture, the Planning and Zoning Commission on land uses and areas deemed especially useful for agricultural purposes and other zoning and planning concerns related to agriculture and other town officials, officers, departments, boards, commissions, and agencies on agricultural issues within their respective purview and shall serve as a resource regarding laws and regulations dealing with agriculture and agricultural equipment. The Commission shall search out and support opportunities for young farmers and new farmers and support local, regional, and state vocational agricultural education programs. It shall assist in the resolution of any conflicts between agricultural interests and organs of town government. It shall serve a role in public education about the value and desirability of agricultural pursuits.
3. The members of the Commission, at their first meeting and annually thereafter on their first meeting after the second Monday in January, shall elect from among themselves a Chairperson and a Secretary. They shall establish and from time to time reestablish a regular schedule of meetings. They may adopt rules for the conduct of their business and shall file with the Town Clerk the minutes of their meetings.
4. The Commission shall report to the Board of Selectmen annually or as may be requested by the Board.