

Town of Salem Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan
Steering Committee Meeting

MINUTES

Monday, October 10, 7:00 – 8:30 pm
Salem Town Office
214 Main Street

Present: Dottie Schneider, Bill Eberle, Eileen Ryan, Rob Laukaitis, Chuck Alexander, Steve Alexander, Joseph Childs, Karen Weinberg, Nancy Hand Higby, Anita Whitten, Liz Brock (consultant)

Steering Committee for the plan

The steering committee for the plan was discussed and updated accordingly. Still uncertain as to status of two potential members as Lissa was charged with contacting them and was not present at the meeting. The list is as below. In addition, we received a request to join the committee at our public kick off. Mr. Herb Perkins was added to the list.

1. Dottie Schneider - yes
2. Lissa Chambers - yes
3. Phil Lewis – yes? – Liz to follow up and confirm with him
4. Karen Weinberg - yes
5. Chuck Alexander – yes
6. Herb Perkins – yes
7. Seth McEachron – yes but can't attend meetings on Mondays
8. Sheldon Brown - or Jim or Dan - ?? (Lissa to ask – no word yet)
9. Pat Sheldon - ?? (Lissa to ask – no word yet)
10. Meg Southerland – no
11. Bruce Ferguson – no

Agenda for public meeting 11/13

The status of outreach for the public meeting was discussed. Phone calls were successful in getting interest in the meeting and also in updating Chuck's spreadsheet. Anita's flyer was posted around town and in the local papers. Discussed the order of presenters at the meeting – including Steve, Dottie and Liz. Talked about whether or not to mention the challenges currently being faced in Cambridge – decision was made to try to steer our planning process to include the farmers as much as possible up front, rather than specifically address those issues. Eileen suggested we should use the website as much as possible to engage the community and make the planning process public. Also discussed the meaning of the word “protection”. Committee should develop agreed upon definition for the plan at our next meeting.

Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities and Threats to agriculture in Salem

Liz led the committee in an exercise discussing the current state of agriculture in Salem – including its challenges, and opportunities moving forward. The results of that brainstorming exercise are below, captured as stated by committee members with minimal editing simply for

clarity. These results will be combined with a similar conversation at the kick off public meeting and the interview summary to give an overview of public perception of agriculture in Salem.

Strengths

- Area is beautiful – the kind of agriculture here is visually appealing
- Awareness of and appreciation for agriculture here “Where will Karen’s sheep be today?”
- Tourism – ag is promoted as part of tourism to area
- Quality soils
- Strongest industry in town – critical mass of farmers
- Agricultural infrastructure is close by – equipment, Agrimark, Farm Supply
- Emphasis on food in current culture
- Good weather for growing crops
- Balance of hillside and flatland farms – all the area is good for ag
- Farmers and non-farmers cohabitate well
- Large quantities of land available for agriculture – most of the village even is still available land for ag.
- Ag is very diversified here – animals and crops
- Important employer in town
- Variety of ag commodities raised/grown
- Relatively pollution free (ie smog)
- Presence of County CCE/SWCD/ASA

Weaknesses

- Distance to markets
- Challenging to move equipment and animals on roads
- Weather – rainy summers/springs – short growing season
- Lack of zoning – someone can put a house wherever they want
- Development of farmland – land is being lost
- Decreasing profitability of farms
- Is there a younger generation to take over the farm?
- Difficult to find labor – people willing to work on farms
- Challenges with immigration – language barriers with labor
- Health insurance – don’t have access to for self and employees
- Taxes – the right type of farming makes town pretty yet taxes are high even with ag assessment – though not demanding services
- Land for sale goes out of ag because farmers can afford it – new landowners don’t keep it in ag or don’t know how
- Speed limits – too fast on back roads, not enough policing

Threats

- Increased regulations
- Land sold to non-farmers taken out of agriculture
- Climate change – changing growing cycles
- Development pressure – “death by 1,000 cuts” – small pieces being cut off here and there
- All costs of business are increasing – feed and fuel
- Luther Forest development
- Loss of income in farming – next generation may not take over and the land could be lost
- Land being developed on lots >1 acre – not subdivisions

- 1980's buyout spurred biggest development of region to date
- Lack of affordable housing for labor
- More land being rented to be worked vs. owned. This could continue with more farmers going out and farms getting bigger
- Manure management – handling farm wastes
- Big farms getting bigger and small farms going out
- Reduction in government programs to help

Opportunities

- Farm to Chef Express expansion/increase – increased opportunity to get product to markets
- Tourism
- General acceptance of sights/sounds/smells of ag
- Farmers market – Salem has year round market. In summer, about 12 producers there.
- Diversified/niche agriculture – specialized farms
- Direct retail
- Cargil has expanded workforce 2-3x
- Increase in appreciation of local products
- Farmers shifting from selling commodities to products
- Support system provided by Town to retail – ie. Chamber
- Non-farm public appreciates agriculture
- My land is my 401K – keeping value in farmland for the future.

Agricultural Interviews

Liz described that an interview list would be developed at the next committee meeting. AFT will do a series of at least 10 interviews with members of the agricultural community to include: farmers, agricultural landowners, agribusinesses and at Karen's suggestion, farmers who are no longer farming. The list will be diverse in order to capture the full range of agricultural products grown in town – from large commercial dairies to small scale niche farms. Two names already on the potential list are Bruce Ferguson and Meg Southerland as they were invited to be on the committee, but declined due to time constraints.

Action Items:

AFT to provide summary of public meeting to committee at December meeting
 AFT to confirm committee membership with Lissa and Phil Lewis

Next meeting – December 8, 2008, 7-8:30 pm at Town Offices on Main St.

Brainstorm interviewee list

Discuss definition of “agriculture and farmland protection”

Discuss draft maps of agriculture (if provided by County Planning)

Meeting adjourned: 8:30 pm