

PURPOSE FOR AMENDMENT OF THE 2007 PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The 2007 Plan of Conservation and Development refers to agriculture only in a chart describing changes in land use over time. It does not provide a summary, goal or objective for agriculture in the community. The Conservation Commission and Planning and Zoning Commission have reviewed and recommended this amendment to the current POCD.

The Town of Windsor Locks is geographically small and largely developed. The amount of farm acres continue to decrease and development pressures are increasing. Windsor Locks, known to be an industrial mill town, shares that history with acres of tobacco, horse pasture, vineyards and vegetable crop. Agriculture and farming are a part of the fabric of the Windsor Locks community, helping to create the Town's and Region's character and economy. Windsor Locks' residents and farmers, especially since 2014, have expressed interest in establishing a formal agency for promoting the preservation of agricultural lands. It is important that the Town include goals and objectives in this Plan to protect existing farms, to encourage their continuance and provide support to the farmers and residents who desire farm preservation.

In 2014 the Town in partnership with the Capitol Region Council of Governments and the Environmental Protection Authority – Office of Smart Growth held an interactive public workshop on Open Space and Agriculture. At this workshop a diverse group of participants (residents, young students, farmers, business professionals, staff) developed a list of assets, desires and priorities which were scored and analyzed. One outcome of this workshop was a recommendation to consider the establishment of an Agricultural Commission. The Conservation Commission has agreed to take on this role of agricultural preservation in their existing membership. A local farmer has continued to show interest in preserving his farm. In exploring ways to support this iconic community farm, the Town has reflected on the empowering statutes, has gained support of the Conservation Commission, has asked for staff assistance in drafting an outline for agricultural preservation. Additionally the residents and members have sought the support of the Board of Selectman in seeking opportunities to preserve farmland. Such an important effort needs to be given a place in the POCD, with a summary, goals and objectives.

Further, it is recommended that Agriculture in Windsor Locks be added as a theme in the upcoming 2017 POCD update. A POCD workshop on Conservation of Open Space and Agriculture has been scheduled for Tuesday May 24th at 7:00 pm as part of the Conservation Commission's regular meeting.

FOR INSERTION IN THE 2007 POCD UNDER SECTION IV. NATURAL RESOURCES BETWEEN NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE AND OPEN SPACE SECTIONS

Approved Amendment below:

Agriculture and Farming

The Town of Windsor Locks is geographically small and largely developed. The amount of farm acres continue to decrease and development pressures are increasing. Windsor Locks, known to be an industrial mill town, shares that history with acres of tobacco, horse pasture, vineyards and vegetable crop. Agriculture and farming are a part of the fabric of the Windsor Locks community, helping to create the Town's and Region's character and economy. Windsor Locks' residents and farmers, especially since 2014, have expressed interest in establishing a formal agency for promoting the preservation of agricultural lands. It is important that the Town include goals and objectives in this Plan to inventory, rank and protect existing farms, to seek balance between development and the continuance of agriculture and provide support to the farmers and residents who desire farm preservation.

Several CT municipalities have created a formal town commission or a less formal committee to both provide the farmer's input into town policies and to help develop initiatives that will keep farming in the community viable. In Windsor Locks, the Conservation Commission has agreed to take on the role of the Agricultural Commission and has voted to also work in conjunction with an Agricultural Advisory Committee. The Conservation Commission would, as it does now, keep agendas and minutes and all other recording requirements for such business which may happen within both special meetings and regularly scheduled meetings.

Municipalities may establish a local agricultural council by vote of the Board of Selectmen per Section 7-131v. CGS. Such council would:

- Provide information to local farmers and to municipal boards and commissions about the benefits of a balance between agriculture and other land uses
- Educate municipal officials about agricultural laws and safety issues
- Identify grant sources for farmers and municipalities
- Enable a common understanding of agriculture among all municipal departments
- Provide information and guidance about zoning issues relating to agriculture
- Support local, regional and state vocational agricultural programs concerning agricultural matters
- Provide economic viability of agriculture in the municipality

It is recommended that this language be used if the Board of Selectmen moves to designate the Conservation Commission as the agency which will advise on agricultural preservation matters.

The First Selectman must request in writing identification of locally important farmland soils through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. NRCS runs an analysis of community soils and develops a spatial map layer of designated soils. A list and map are sent to the town for review and once accepted becomes official and may be used for planning and land preservation efforts.

Per CGS Section 7-131q, any municipality, by vote of its legislative body (Town Meeting in WL), may establish a special fund, which shall be known as the Agricultural Land Preservation Fund. All moneys received by the municipality from whatever source and by whatever means, as grants or loans as gifts for agricultural land preservation purposes, or by the municipality shall be deposited in this fund. The fund needs to be established to be eligible to seek grant awards for community farm preservation. This language in this paragraph should be reflected during the Town Meeting vote.

1. Farmland Inventory and Ranking System

Eighteen (18) properties were identified during the initial farmland inventory. Agricultural uses include tobacco, corn/other vegetable crop and horse/pasture. Some confirmation through property owner outreach, site visits and Assessor involvement should take place in order to more fully understand the community's agricultural offerings and utilize a ranking system for preservation efforts. The following criteria is common for inventory ranking:

- Parcel Size
- Percent of Prime or Important Soils
- Percent Active Cropland
- Contribution to availability of local fresh foods
- Development Pressures
- Natural Significance (waterways, endangered species, vernal pools)
- Cultural Significance (community support, historic recognition, iconic features)
- Nearness to open space land (preserved through deed or restriction for recreation or farming)
- View from Town Road, Access, Character and Placemaking Opportunity

2. Creating a Supportive Agricultural Business Environment

A summary of benefits of agricultural preservation should be prepared for review by the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Economic Development Commission.

This summary might answer the following questions about the Town's agricultural properties/opportunities:

- Does the farm provide on-site and/or off-site sales?
- Does the farm contribute to a farmers market or other farm related celebration or festival?
- Do the Zoning Regulations permit agriculture related stands and signage?
- Do the Zoning Regulations promote smart growth principles, allowing for a balance between development and farm property development pressures? (Example: Flexible Residential Development, Conservation Subdivision)
Visual Reference: <http://www.landchoices.org/conservationsubs.htm>
- How does the Town publicize state tax exemptions for the local farmers?

3. Preservation Plan and Strategies

It is recommended that the Town create a Preservation Plan for Open Space and Agriculture in tandem with the drafting of a Section on Agriculture in the 2017 Plan of Conservation and Development. There are a number of resources for collaboration and planning for preservation.

Resources:

- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/ct/home/>
- University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR)
<http://clear.uconn.edu/>
- State of CT Community Preservations Program
- A Guide For Connecticut Municipalities www.ctplanningforagriculture.com
- CRCOG Sustainable Region http://crcog.org/community_dev/sustainable-dev.html
- EPA Smart Growth <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth>