

# Richmond Planning Commission

## Public Session for Town Plan Update

April 18, 2012

### *Approved Minutes*

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**Members Present:** Gary Bressor (Chair), Lou Borie (Vice-Chair), Mark Fausel, Joe McHugh, Dan Renaud, Christy Witters

**Members Absent:** One vacancy

**Others Present:** Cathleen Gent (Town Planner/Staff to the DRB); Sharon Murray (consultant with Front Porch Community Planning & Design); Ruth Miller, taping for MMCTV Comcast 15; Jack Linn, Henry Moultroup, Jeff Moultroup, *See attached list*

**7:07 PM** Call to order by the Chair.

#### Introductions

Bressor welcomed the group and briefly discussed the purpose of the meeting, namely to gather public input regarding tools to encourage local agriculture within the town plan.

#### Food System Planning Considerations

Consultant Sharon Murray said that town plans typically address land use considerations. More recently, town plans are incorporating food system planning considerations, such as access to local healthy food and shifts from commodity to specialty food production, for instance. Murray said that Richmond is well positioned because of the amount of local food production and access to a regional market. She noted that the town plan might focus on gaps in the food system over the next 5 to 10 years. Murray briefly discussed the Vermont Food System flow chart as presented in the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan. She then reviewed a draft listing of the elements of the Richmond food system. There were no suggested changes to the draft Richmond food system list.

#### References to Local Agriculture in Current Town Plan

Gent reviewed the references to local agriculture in the current town plan, beginning with references to farms and working rural landscapes within two general goals. She then discussed references to agriculture within the existing land use section (Section 2), economic development (Section 4), natural resources (Section 5), historic resources (Section 6) and future land use (Section 11). Key points included the following: Richmond has excellent river valley soils and a relatively moderate climate for agriculture; Richmond has had and continues to have an active agricultural community; farms protect the open space that defines Richmond's rural landscapes; Richmond residents are in favor of the continued operations of Richmond's working farms and forests; it's becoming more expensive to purchase and maintain open land; development within Richmond's rural areas should be carefully sited and clustered in a manner that will allow preservation of significant open space parcels.

Gent then reviewed a handout with specific objectives and implementation strategies related to agriculture in the current town plan.

#### Maps & Resource Studies

Murray reviewed the map showing prime agricultural soils, agricultural soils of statewide significance, Richmond farms identified at this time, and lands in the current use program. She also referenced a list of the Richmond farms, which was handed out to participants. Murray noted that some of the prime agriculture soils are used for farming, some may be in forest use, and some may already be developed.

Murray then provided an update about the studies and projects that have been done since the 2007 Town Plan was prepared. She specifically discussed recommendations from the Richmond Area Creative Communities Report which was prepared by the Vermont Council for Rural Development in 2007. Those recommendations included holding a harvest festival to celebrate local agriculture, launching a buy local campaign, and establishing an agricultural business incubator. Murray briefly reviewed a report done by PlaceSense (Brandy Saxton) in 2009 as part of the planning project to revise the zoning and subdivision bylaws. The PlaceSense report provided a variety of tools in rural areas to preserve rural areas. Murray also discussed the Richmond Barn Census that was done in 2009 by the University of Vermont historic preservation program. Although still preliminary, the barn census provides specific information about individual barns in Richmond, whether historic or new. Finally, Murray briefly discussed the results of a survey done by the Richmond Farmers Market earlier this year.

**Regulatory Tools to Encourage Local Agriculture – Proposed Zoning**

Gent reviewed a handout which described a set of changes to the proposed zoning and subdivision regulations which will help support and encourage local agriculture. Those changes include new uses such as agri-tourism, farm product sales, and farm enterprises. Gent also mentioned other regulatory tools which have not been pursued in the proposed Richmond bylaws, including farm worker housing, density bonuses specifically to protect farmland, or restrictions in the use of prime agricultural soils.

**Questions for Participants**

Murray opened up the session for a general discussion of several questions:

*Question # 6 – How should priorities for the use of prime farm land – for food production, biofuel production, and/or solar facility siting – be handled in the town plan?*

*Question # 7 – Policies/Objectives: what other considerations to promote local agriculture should be included in the town plan?*

*Question # 8 – Implementation Strategies: what implementation strategies to promote local agriculture should be incorporated should be included in the town plan?*

- There is a socio-economic gap in terms of access to CSAs and the farmers market
  - Local produce is expensive
  - Community garden would provide economic opportunity for multiple socio-economic groups.
    - VYCC, NOFA, UVM – could all be brought in to provide educational programming
    - Gleaning the harvest can also be done
    - Use the produce for the free and reduced lunch program
  - Lower-income families which purchase local food are getting higher nutrition – some families are intentionally purchasing local food for the nutritional value
  - A question is how to fill the gap. Where does the farmer get a fair market value at reasonable prices?
- Farms which raise specific product lines can be more successful.
- Richmond food hub
  - There is no current drop off
  - The web for the food hub has not been established yet
- Richmond Farmers Market – received feedback from the survey that people could not get to the market during the hours, so the market is going to stay open a little later this year.
- Parking is a persistent problem for the Richmond Farmers Market
- Richmond’s market area – is getting saturated with small farms and there is no expansion in terms of people buying the products.
  - The market for local products has been at 5% for several years now.
- How can Richmond food producers grow products for the region?
  - Get information about food preferences and then figure out what is available locally
  - The struggle is to identify demands for products
  - What can the public buy in Richmond?
- How to get beyond the 5% penetration into the market?
  - Get local produce or meats into local stores
  - There is a price point issue – people don’t buy at the price that the producer has to earn.
  - Economies of scale – we can’t capture the economies of scale locally
    - Difficult to sell wholesale or through distributors because there is not enough supply
    - Schools are in the same financial bind as the general market in terms of needing economies of scale.
  - Now we are in a position where the Richmond market is bumping into other markets (Jericho, Hinesburg, etc.)
  - There is also a distribution issue
- The rates for CSA markets in Chittenden County are much higher than other parts of the state.
- Value-added markets have helped
  - eg. – for meats – beef jerky, sausage
  - The key is the ability to process the products oneself
  - VYCC did a frozen food CSA and they did about half the volume that they expected

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- 3 - For frozen foods – Sunshine Orchard in Cornwall picked a few crops
- 4 - Freezing facility
- 5 - Gleaning available
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- 7 - Web based agriculture – has not been tried in this area
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- 9 - Access to land
- 10 - Land is expensive. For a young farmer with college loans, it is very difficult to purchase land in
- 11 this region. More likely to be able to purchase land somewhere else (like upstate NY)
- 12 - Renting land is the best option for young growers.
- 13 - Consider creating a local registry of available land.
- 14 - Even conserved land for farming comes with a steep cost
- 15 - Farmers are not secure with leasing land, even with a long-term lease, since the land may end
- 16 up being sold or used for some other purpose
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- 18 - Permanent conservation is short-sighted
- 19 - Really need to have plan to help one generation at a time – permanent conservation makes it
- 20 difficult to sell of a building lot for the next generation
- 21 - The money obtained by the farmers who conserve the land is not available for the next
- 22 generation and the next generation needs an asset.
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- 24 - What is prime agriculture land? Just because the soil is a particular type does not make it prime land
- 25 for agricultural purposes.
- 26 - Murray suggested that Richmond may wish to consider participating in the national agricultural Land
- 27 Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) program to facilitate identification and protection of important
- 28 agricultural land and to assist in implementing farmland protection policies
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- 30 - Why put regulations in place related to prime ag land in the floodplain? 90% of the farm land is in the
- 31 floodplain and can't be built upon.
- 32 - The land should be valued in relation to the use that it is in (if it can't be built upon)
- 33 - Consider a local tax abatement program?
- 34 - General sentiment -- the state current use program is very good and a local program is not
- 35 needed.
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- 37 - Need to look at bio-diversity in the region
- 38 - prime ag soils and wildlife corridors/movement
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- 40 - With the vacant lots and buildings in the village – consider developing systems for freezing and
- 41 canning for year-round sales
- 42 - We need a creative/holistic system and should work with the UVM extension system as resources
- 43 - With attention toward water quality improvements
- 44
- 45 - Define what sustainable agriculture means? Create a broader definition.
- 46 - There is a local food system group in Jericho and Underhill – perhaps the town plan should
- 47 recommend that a local food council be started in Richmond (work with Jericho and Underhill)
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- 49 - Jobs funded program
- 50 - Work with UVM Extension to create a program
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- 52 - Dairy industry – needs massive infrastructure changes
- 53 - Dairy is perishable
- 54 - Hard for farmers to bottle dairy products on own
- 55 - Severe lack of handling facilities at a large enough scale (eg. – soybeans)
- 56 - Vermont has a small land base for grain infrastructure
- 57 - Intensive grazing – hard to deal with logistics some times (roads, for instance)
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- 59 - Solar farms on prime ag soils – there was no clear direction from the group regarding pros or cons

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**Wrap-Up and Adjournment**

The public session ended at 8:45 PM.

The Planning Commission discussed plans to meet with Murray prior to the end of the Municipal Planning Grant. Murray will attend the Planning Commission’s meeting on May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Fausel made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Borie. So voted. The meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Cathleen Gent, Town Planner/Staff to the DRB

