



CITY OF FITCHBURG

Planning Department

5520 Lacy Road
Fitchburg, WI 53711-5318

Phone: (608) 270-4256 ■ Fax: (608) 270-4275

www.fitchburgwi.gov

MINUTES

Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee
Tuesday, May 19, 2015

Members Present: Roger Cohee, Ed Kinney, Tony Hartmann, Bill Horns, and George Vroman
(Excused absences: Marc Jones and Tom O'Brien)

Staff Present: Wade Thompson – Resource/Project Planner

1. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes

Chair Ed Kinney called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

Motion by Bill Horns, second by George Vroman, to approve the minutes of April 21, 2015, carried unanimously.

2. Public Appearances – Non-agenda items

None.

3. Designation of Committee Chair and Vice-Chair

The Committee discussed tabling this item until all new appointments have been made to the Committee. Motion by Roger Cohee, second by Bill Horns, to table this item until all new appointments have been made to the Committee, carried unanimously.

4. Review of Fitchburg Agriculture Route Interpretive Signs

Thompson presented drafts of the Fitchburg Agriculture Route interpretive signs.

Chair Kinney asked if the signs would weather and retain their color. Thompson stated the signs will have a protective coating and that similar signs in the City Hall parking lot have held up well. Thompson stated he would discuss this issue with the sign designer and sign manufacturer.

Cohee asked that text on the sign referring to agricultural yields on Stoner Prairie soils be generalized, as yields change on an annual basis. Thompson stated he would work with Cohee to revise this text.

Thompson stated there were a few edits yet to be done on the signs, and that they should be ready for installation sometime this summer.

5. City of Fitchburg Comprehensive Agriculture Plan Work Session

Thompson presented a draft Common Council resolution he prepared, per Mayor Arnold's request, directing the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee to develop the Agriculture Plan. Thompson stated Arnold had requested the resolution come before the Council at their May 26 meeting, to be referred out to Plan Commission and the Committee.

The Committee discussed the draft resolution. Horns asked that reference to the City's long-term growth boundary be included in the resolution. The Committee agreed and directed Thompson to add this text to the resolution.

Horns also asked Thompson about the Plan approval/adoption process. Thompson stated he thought it would be beneficial for the Common Council to adopt the Plan, at their discretion. Thompson also stated he was waiting to hear back from City Attorney Mark Sewell as to whether the Plan would be best served as an appendix to the City's Comprehensive Plan or as a "stand-alone" document, similar to the City's Comprehensive Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan.

The Committee discussed the desired approval/adoption process and agreed on the following, subject to Council approval:

1. Committee recommendation for Council adoption to Plan Commission;
2. Plan Commission recommendation for Council adoption to Council;
3. Council adoption;

The Committee directed Thompson to add the aforementioned desired approval/adoption process to the draft resolution.

The Committee also discussed the Council referral process and agreed on the following:

1. Referral of resolution by Council on May 26 to Plan Commission for their June 16 meeting (No Council referral to Ag and Rural);
2. Plan Commission review of resolution at their June 16 meeting. If no "major" changes, resolution would go back to Council for their June 23 meeting;
3. If "major" changes by Plan Commission, the Committee would schedule a meeting for June 22 or 23 to review changes, with resolution then going back to Council for their June 23 meeting;

Thompson stated he would prepare the referral of resolution in the aforementioned manner.

Thompson handed out some questions he had prepared related to agricultural issues to be discussed/addressed in the Agriculture Plan. The Committee discussed the questions.

Horns asked if proximity to urban areas had an effect on where large farming operations, including dairies, would potentially locate. Cohee stated yes, that proximity to urban areas would not be ideal for these types of operations, given future land use uncertainty and associated "urban" issues (traffic, etc.).

Vroman stated he thought the plan should reflect the desires of City agricultural landowners. Thompson agreed and stated the general intent of the plan was to identify new opportunities for City agricultural landowners, and to serve as a sort of agricultural "economic development" plan.

The Committee discussed issues related to costs in the agricultural industry, including fluctuating commodity prices, interest rates, and land prices.

Horns stated he thought the national, state, and regional context of agriculture should be identified in the plan, including opportunities for regional cooperation. Thompson stated he planned to incorporate this information in to the Plan.

Hartmann stated he had some entrepreneurial and governmental contacts throughout the region, and that he would reach out to them on the various agricultural issues that the Committee will be examining over the next few months.

Thompson asked if the lack of support services and infrastructure in the City was having a drastic negative effect on existing or potential future farmers in the City. Cohee stated he didn't think so, and that this lack of services/infrastructure is more of an inconvenience.

The Committee also discussed the desire to encourage more small-scale fruit/vegetable/livestock production for local production/consumption, given the City's unique attributes, including geography, local market demand, and predominance of small agricultural parcels. Thompson stated there are many more small-scale growers in the region looking for land to rent/buy than there are small-scale landowners looking to rent/sell to said growers. The Committee discussed various methods in which to encourage small-scale landowners to rent/sell to small-scale growers.

Cohee stated educating both agricultural landowners and general consumers is the key to advancing the agricultural industry. Kinney stated a "co-op" model in which multiple entities work one land parcel, overseen by a "land manager" type might be a model that could potentially work in the City. Thompson stated this model was being utilized in other areas of the country, and he could bring in some examples at the next Committee meeting.

Thompson asked Cohee what the future of the Hageman family dairy might be. Cohee stated that there is a younger generation in the family that will likely continue the operation in to the foreseeable future.

6. Staff Report

Thompson announced the Agriculture Past and Present Bike Tour, held on May 16, went well, with a turnout of approximately 30 people. Cohee stated that some tour participants mentioned they had trouble hearing the tour speakers, and that having the speakers utilize a microphone might be a good idea for future tours.

7. Announcements.

None.

a. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting was scheduled for July 21, 2015 at 4:00 p.m.

8. Adjournment

Motion by Horns, second by Jones, to adjourn at 5:42 p.m., carried unanimously.

Submitted by: Wade Thompson, Resource/Project Planner

Approved: July 14, 2015