

## **Aroostook CGPZ Planning Committee Meeting Minutes September 17, 2014**

**Attendance:** Mark Draper, Cheryl St. Peter, Fred Corey, Sarah Medina, Bill Paterson, Paul Bernier

**Others Present:** Paul Underwood, Billie MacLean, Hugh Coxe, Ben Godsoe, and Jay Kamm

### **Presentations**

Home Occupations: Jay presented an overview of how home occupations are generally dealt with in both in Municipalities and the Unorganized Territories (U.T.). He presented in detail the differences between major and minor home occupations (HO), similarities and differences in municipal vs. LUPC Chapter 10 permitting approaches and standards. One key difference between municipal standards and Chapter 10 is that in municipalities HOs normally are only allowed in the home or an accessory structure, there is no outside storage or processing of materials. In the U.T., outside storage for equipment or material related to the business can sometimes be allowed. As an example, independently owned log trucks are generally stored outside. However, when multiple trucks are located on the property, the use becomes a commercial operation and may require a re-zoning effort.

Jay asked the committee to consider the following:

- Should the number of employees at a HO be increased from 3 to a higher number? Nationally some municipalities allow up to 7-8 employees.
- At what point does a HO become a commercial operation requiring a re-zoning petition?
- Is Agricultural Processing an HO, or should it fall into a different/new category?

Jay led the group through a brief planning exercise in Connor TWP. The group looked at geographic planning opportunities and constraints using GIS layers. General discussion about home occupations included the following points:

- Several committee members had questions regarding specific businesses such as log trucks maintenance and inspection or firewood production (does seasonality matter?).
- One purpose in looking at H.O. Standards is, in part, not to penalize small business owners for successfully growing and diversifying their business (which happens to be a home occupation).
- The Committee did not want to change the statewide and generally accepted definition of a HO.
- A new small business zone (maybe just specific to Aroostook County) could be somewhere between a commercial zone and current definition of a home occupation. The new zone would come into effect if businesses met certain criteria, thereby giving business owners a “third way” to grow their business without having to apply for re-zoning and have to meet the adjacency requirement. The committee could work on developing such a sub district or determining criteria for the kinds of businesses for which this zone would apply.

It was noted that the Rangeley Plan included sub-districts that could also be applied successfully in Aroostook such as D-GN3 (Rural Settlement Development Sub district). The group discussed Sinclair (T-17, R-4) as an example.

- It was noted that another goal of this process is to increase the predictability of LUPC rules and standards for development in the jurisdiction.
- The group expressed interest in developing a pre-amble as part of their final product that would describe the process and make it easy for an outsider to trace their decision-making process and figure out how they ended up where they did. It was noted that currently in Chapter 10, sub-districts include a short purpose statement that describes what the rule is supposed to do, where it applies, etc. Developing short purpose statements and then testing them out on stakeholders may be a good way to gather public input on potential changes.
- Mark Draper noted that next steps will include defining more concretely what the changes in HO, or a new “small business zone”, or new standards may be, and where it will apply. Townships with rural settlements could be identified to narrow the field a little bit.

The group briefly discussed public participation and when they might engage the public to get feedback about proposed changes. It was commented that the suggested changes around HO and agricultural processing might need to be further developed before going to the public for comments/feedback.

Jay briefly presented agricultural processing and asked the group to think about what they may be able to do around this issue. Agricultural processing rule changes would make it easier for small farmers in the U.T. to add value to their products through additional processing without applying for a commercial re-zoning from LUPC. Such re-zonings would currently have to meet the adjacency requirement, which can be difficult given the nature of farming where facilities are often remote.

Some important considerations for the committee include:

- At what point does agricultural processing become a full-blown commercial activity?
- It is important to allow businesses to grow and diversify, but not create negative impacts on residential neighborhoods (e.g. a slaughterhouse vs. butcher).

General discussion about agricultural processing included the following points:

- The group discussed several specific examples of agricultural processing including some nearby farms that also have corn-mazes, sell ice cream and other products, sometimes process meat (domestic farm animals as well as venison), etc.
- There was some discussion about the potential impacts of agricultural processing on transportation and other infrastructure. It was noted that perhaps businesses would be required to grow a certain percent of their product on site, ensuring that it is first-and-foremost maintained as a farm, with value-added products being produced from raw product grown on-site. This could potentially minimize impacts on transportation systems.

- There was some discussion about whether or not agricultural processing is most appropriate in a new zone, or as a revised set of standards that could be met anywhere in the county. Revised standards could take the shape of a checklist where a business could take advantage of the new standards if they met certain criteria (like producing a certain percentage of raw material needed for processing on-site).
- There was some discussion about an example re-zoning petition. LUPC will try to provide an example of a comparable case in Aroostook County where businesses have had to petition for a re-zoning (where perhaps different standards would have been a more efficient and predictable means of achieving the same result).
- It was noted that Aroostook County is lucky to have such significant prime farmland soil resources. This is a resource that should be protected for future generations from sprawl and inappropriate development. The County will play an important role in Maine's food system in the future and one of the goals of the group should be protection of the economic and environmental viability/sustainability of farming in northern Maine.

The next meeting will further detail zones vs. criteria Meeting adjourned at 11:07

The next meeting will be at NMDC on October 15 from 9 a.m. to noon.