

Greenbelt Advisory Commission



Small Farm Subcommittee

Overview of Subcommittee Meetings

- Discussions focused on 2 major topics
 - Easement Terms
 - Pervious vs. Impervious surfaces
 - Future Ownership of Property
 - Concern if transferred to non-farm owner

Conservation Easement Considerations

- Current Impervious Limitation is 2%
 - Not large area for small farms
- Concern: How to allow for hoop houses for small farms and still protect land and minimize soil disturbance and development?
- Met with group of local growers to discuss solutions

Easement Terms

- Solution:
 - Separate out permanent and non-permanent buildings
 - Keep 2% impervious limitation for permanent buildings
 - Allow up to 20% for non-permanent buildings
- Define non-permanent building as:
 - Structures where the soil surface is not disturbed, including, but not limited to, hoop houses and farm structures without a floor or alterations to the soils such as gravel or concrete paths.

Future Ownership

- Concern: If protected small farm, sold to non-farmer in future, land becoming part of estate – not in agriculture production.
 - Is this a concern?
 - Will it continue to be a concern in the future?
 - Resource (land) still protected

Research – American Farmland Trust

- Evaluation of Agricultural Easement programs
 - 1 Criteria that AFT evaluated: Perceived affordability for resale of ag easement parcels
 - In some areas resale of easement parcels not affordable for farmers
- However, in those areas, the land continued to be in farm use, even if not farmer owned
 - Leased to farmers
 - Some higher value crops and horses

Research – Equity Trust

□ Equity Trust

- Non-profit in MA working with land trusts and exploring alternative land ownership options and to help local land trusts preserve the affordability of farms for farmers

□ Preserving Farms for Farmers

- Case Studies
- Model Language
 - Agricultural Easement with Option to Purchase
 - Model long-term leases

Affirmative Easement Language

- Very new concept for land trusts
- Few land trusts including the language in easements
- Affirmative language would state:
 - Land MUST be sold to a qualified farmer at the agriculture value
 - Qualified farmer = certain % of household income from farm production
 - If not, city have the right to purchase land and sell to farmer

Affirmative language

□ Pros:

- Added level of protection that farmland would be available for new farmers

□ Cons:

- Need to verify State Statues would allow it
- Increased responsibility from City with Affirmative language
- No one knows what the future of farming in the area will look like
- Too soon to know if this is a concern in the area

Possible solutions

- Prioritize small farm applications, by either
 - 1.) time farmer has been on the land or
 - 2.) time that the land has been in production
 - Pro-know that land has good agricultural record
 - Con-barrier for farmers wanting to take land not currently in production and have it immediately organic certified
- Give priority to small farms that are adjacent to other already protected farms

Staff Recommendations

- Move forward with additional language
 - Work with attorney's office:
 - If State Statue allow the City to do so
 - Draft similar language, giving the city option, but not mandatory

- Additionally: There is an amendment clause in Conservation Easement and future easement could be amended