



OCTOBER 6, 2008 PUBLIC MEETING
SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

On the evening of October 6, 2008, the Department of Economic Development (DEDP) and Planning in association with the Citizens Advisory Committee on Conservation (CACC) hosted a public meeting to educate Bethlehem landowners with parcels greater than 7 acres on farmland and open space tools. The Town's consulting team of American Farmland Trust and Behan Planning Associates provided an overview of the various tools and facilitated four group discussions to identify concerns of the landowners and gauge interest in the tools.

The DEDP and CACC received excellent feedback from the sixty attendees at this meeting. The facilitators (American Farmland Trust and Behan Planning Associates) recorded the comments and DEDP staff assembled and organized the comments into several topical categories. While the comments may not be recorded verbatim, the DEDP believes that this summary accurately captures the spirit of the comments made at the meeting. Also, in presenting these comments, the intent is purely objective and should not be interpreted as reflecting the opinion of the DEDP and CACC or of any of its members.

Solutions/Interest in Tools:

- Education of landowners or program benefits is needed
- Address lack of trust in town government
- Incentive Zoning
- Term easements are a good start
- Assistance with land posting requirements
- Landowners might benefit by being matched with renters to qualify for agriculture assessment
- Tax abatement in exchange for term easements
- Right to Farm law should be accompanied by requirement to use best practices
- Landowner/farmer representation on planning and/or zoning board
- Residential zoned property allowed to have some small low-impact agriculture
- Town/County could require written permission to drive ATV – registration
- Town enforcement of laws for illegal trespassing and dumping
- Organization of large landowners to get better communication
- Town officials need to become more familiar with rural part of Town
- Assessment – fairness – inconsistency for people who have a lot of land
- Needs of non-agricultural landowners may not be addressed by current programs



Concerns Regarding Tools:

- Right to Farm law that creates another group to interact with Town not helpful because don't need more bureaucracy
- Smaller, "hobby" farms currently not eligible for agriculture assessments and run into zoning problems
- Tools will raise taxes for conservation purposes
- Right to Farm law would be a problem and is not needed
- Incentive Zoning – developer will just pass the cost on to the buyer
- Layers of regulations not desired
- Don't want to be penalized
- Open Space preservation hurts people who bought open land for investment

Programmatic/Operational:

- Long history of land ownership by one family becoming difficult to hold onto it
- Lack of respect and trust
- Would like to see areas for denser development to take pressure off rural land – mix of land uses
- Land on river with no heirs and would like to keep it green. How can Town develop options to do so?
- Next generation would like to keep the family land undeveloped.
- Like how Town is now – mix of uses. Equitable way to keep it that way.
- Opportunity between interested community and interested landowners
- Liability for public access – who is held liable?
- Who will pay to maintain trails?
- What can we really afford to do (priorities – infrastructure)
- Issue with non-profits and reduced taxes putting tax burden on others
- Losing Freedom – vocal minority wants open space
- Protect cemetery from misuse
- Trails need to be monitored and maintained

Rights of Property Owners (Willing Landowners):

- Initiating trail program – Town must take responsibility for when it is abused – Attractive Nuisance
- Respect for private property – keep trespassers off private land
- Problem with the town requiring other people coming onto my property
- Encroachment and trespassing
- Don't want government telling me what to do
- Open Space preservation will make trespassing on private property worse – liability