

**TOWN OF JAFFREY  
Jaffrey, New Hampshire**

**Ad hoc Open Space Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
March 17, 2010**

**Present:** Chairman Kresge, Members Graf, Garretson, Doane

**Absent:**

**WORKING SESSION**

Chairman Kresge called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Minutes from the March 3 meeting were approved without changes. Future draft minutes will be posted on the committee website and can be amended as necessary.

Names of potential contacts for hunting focus group were discussed and Chairman Kresge offered to contact Bruce Pelletier and other members of the hunting community prior to the March 17 meeting.

Diffuse interests in the remaining groups looking at natural resources, conservation, rural character, etc. will be harder to define, and will probably require more concerted effort by committee in order to encourage attendees. Members Graf and Garretson suggested contacting some of the pond associations in town due to their interest in preventing invasive species, wetland protection, etc.

Current status of conservation easements at Grey Goose Farm was discussed, Member Graf confirmed that easements had been executed on both lots, one 31-acre lot has been sold, uncertain on status of other 25-acre lot.

**WORKING LANDS FOCUS GROUP 7:30 p.m.**

Citizens involved with agricultural, livestock and forestry activities attended the meeting. Chairman Kresge provided a brief introduction on the objectives for the committee and described the process being used for the focus group sessions. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to conversation regarding the state of agriculture and forestry in Jaffrey and general issues and concerns for people working the land. Specific discussion items are summarized below.

**Focus Group Discussion Topics:**

*1. What are the land values most important to your group?*

One important characteristic for this group is that land is viewed in terms of function. This can be either naturally occurring processes or human-based processes, but the value is seen as being derived from these functions (as opposed to just intrinsic or aesthetic values).

Emphasis on stewardship of the land, sustainable crops (agricultural or forest).

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*2. What is the current availability/adequacy of resources for your activity?*

In general, there aren't a lot of prime agricultural soils in Jaffrey, and many of those that do exist have already been built on.

*3. Are there any particular areas of vulnerability for resources required for your activity?*

One of the main challenges for agriculture is more related to taxation policy rather than land use policy, per se. Erecting agricultural structures such as greenhouses or barns requires taking land out of current use and reclassifies it as residential, which creates a financial burden on farmers. It was noted that Vermont's regulatory/policy climate is typically much more farm-friendly than in New Hampshire. Suggestion was made that it would be helpful to petition Board of Selectmen to establish a special agricultural zone in which land would be taxed at a lower rate.

Productive land should be used for growing food, not for residential development –

“You go to Europe and think you're going to build a house in a field, and you'll go to the gallows. There, you put the houses up in the rocks and the trees where they belong. This country hasn't got there yet.”

Support was voiced for notion of more concentrated residential densities in town center, rather than large lot zoning that consumes otherwise productive land.

*4. Where are the lands in Jaffrey most suitable for your activity?*

Several fields at end of Great Road were noted for haying activity. Desirable soil types and exposures for agriculture depend upon the crop being raised. Advances in agricultural practices and shifts in economy were noted which make profitable operations in this area more likely to be small boutique operations, possibly greenhouse-based, niche marketing, not necessarily dependent upon large tracts of land. Access to a water source is important, also exposure to drive-by traffic for a farm-stand type operation.

*5. Does your activity lend itself to a multiple use scenario?*

Not all working land is necessarily worked by the landowner. Land may be rented out (in cash or in kind) to other operations such as sheep grazing, maple sugaring, haying, etc. Although this isn't a primary livelihood for the landowner, it provides other benefits and active land maintenance/stewardship for the landowner that would like to keep the land open but doesn't plan to work it himself. Active working of the land tends to preserve viewsheds and character of the land that would otherwise be lost to overgrowth.

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Forested lands can also host things like equestrian riding trails, and more generally contribute to attractiveness of the area as a destination recreational/tourism area.

*6. Are there other uses that are incompatible with your activity?*

Observation was made that 100 acres of farmland will make the town a lot more money than 100 acres of houses, due to cost of providing services to residential properties.

Careless use of skidders for logging operations can cause major rutting and erosion problems, if not done properly and at the right time of year.

*7. What is the general sense of future participation in your activity? Expanding? Contracting?*

The economic returns on haying and wide-scale agriculture in Jaffrey are marginal due to the generally poor soils. It's unlikely that a young person starting a family would choose haying as an occupation, so not an expanding use in town. For those that choose it as a way of life, however, can be rewarding.

“If I’m working on top of a hill on a nice sunny day, I enjoy it better than any day you ever took off from work. If I’m up there and it’s going to rain in 5 minutes, I’m having a miserable day. It’s a way of life, and I’m not asking anybody to treat me special, but don’t do away with what makes this part of the country unique.”

Potential for smaller scale boutique operations, however, may provide opportunities for a continuing role of agriculture in town. In general, it's important to retain both the knowledge and the available land for producing local food supplies in order to adapt to potential future shifts in world-wide food production patterns.

Economic returns for woodlot management are slim – there probably isn't anyone in town that makes a living from cutting wood off their land. Generally the bare land has a higher economic value than the wood growing on it. Timber sales usually just one piece of the puzzle for landowners trying to maintain their land in undeveloped state.

Possible expansion of biomass forestry products for pellets or other feedstock for heating/electrical generation.

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In addition to the specific interests of working lands, there was also general discussion on the desirability of establishing corridors for movement of wildlife and people between unfragmented areas of undeveloped land. Fitting the town's strategy into a more regional system of interconnected greenways and corridors could be an important consideration for the development of the open space plan. Overall, it's important to develop a shared vision for the town that people can buy into – why is open space important, how does it affect the town's sense of its own character, how does it affect attractiveness of the town as a tourist destination.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m. Next meeting will be on March 31.

Submitted:

Mark W. Kresge  
Chairman, Ad hoc Open Space Committee