The Dublin Planning Board met for its regular meeting and public hearing on Agricultural use changes to the Dublin Ordinance on September 18, 2014, at 7:00 PM in the basement meeting room of the town hall. Present were Chairman Bruce Simpson, Steve Baldwin, Dale Gabel, John Morris, Bill Goodwin, and Selectmen’s Representative Sterling Abram. Alternates Gregg Fletcher, Todd Bennett, and alternate/secretary Neil Sandford were present. Alternate Donna Garner attended after the start of the meeting.

Bruce Simpson introduced the planning board members and shared the purpose of the meeting which was to hear public input concerning agricultural uses. He mentioned that our ordinance makes provisions for agricultural in conservation land use development. The state law now requires that tilling be allowed in all districts which calls for a change in our ordinances since it is presently forbidden in the Neighborhood Commercial and Village districts. John Morris mentioned that the state law allows farm stands for selling farm produce. Bruce Simpson asked the audience what they would like to see in Dublin.

Peter Tuttle spoke about an article in the New York Times about barns in the mid-west being used for various events and its negative impact on the neighbors with rock music late at night. He asked if it really was a farm use? He shared it because it is being faced in various parts of the country.

Bruce Simpson clarified that current use is a NH provision which doesn’t apply in other states. Bruce mentioned the problem in Wilton where a farm café is having an effect on neighbors and this is what the board is facing about how far agricultural use should be expanded. John Sandri mentioned that they were not allowed to have events at Stonelea because of fire code issues. Mary Loftis asked how that was different from the Cornicopea fund-raiser. Bill Goodwin pointed out that the Stonelea issue also had to do with its proximity to Dublin Lake and the special requirements which does not allow commercial activity within 1500 feet of Dublin Lake.

Sterling Abram spoke about how these issues are exactly why the select board needs clarification because they are not sure how to enforce what is presently going on in Dublin. Paul Tuller shared his background in farming and how hard it is to make farming economically viable with rising costs of equipment, fuel, etc. He felt that this is what is driving agri-tourism because of the pressure on farmers to survive economically. He felt there was a great benefit to have things grown locally. He felt that impact on the neighbors should be factored in as well to find a balance between successful farming and impacts on neighbors.

Joan Griffin asked how much land in Dublin is farmland and the contrast to Peterborough and the reasons why they passed an agri-tourism provision. Paul Tuller encouraged thinking toward the
future where people might want to develop more land because of the chemicals in food and shipping costs. He mentioned that he has prime farm land which he is not presently using but might be something that could be used for farming in the future. John Sandri mentioned that they farm and use about 20 acres but there are a lot of fields that are used for cutting hay or grazing animals by farmers in neighboring towns. Bruce Simpson shared that there needs to be a line drawn between farming and gardening. Peter Tuttle shared that he has 9 acres that could be used for grazing sheep in the future. He mentioned that a neighbor has a lot of noise on one day of the year. They call him to let him know so he won’t invite friends over to his “quiet spot” so he finds it OK for once a year but not something he would want on a more frequent basis.

Bruce asked the farmers to say what would help them stay in business.

John Sandri feels that less regulations are always easier, but otherwise they are able to do the things they need to. Their restriction to not allow fundraisers hampers their ability to keep viable.

Archie McIntyre echoed Paul Tuller’s comments that where farming should go in the next 15-20 years because he sees that the trend in New England is to raise their own food. A New England Food Vision is an article he recommends the board read because farming has a real future here. He felt an important issue was to clearly define farm and what is allowed on a farm.

Edith Tuttle spoke about her concern that there be a distinction between farmers that need the breaks to survive and those who would take advantage of special allowances when it was really gravy or extra money. Bruce Simpson shared the problem about how various tax issues come up over how property is assessed and taxed, but recognized that it was a state issue, not one for the Planning Board.

Karl Eckilson felt the article in the Advocate showed an anti-farm bias. Bruce shared that he was indicating different reasons people support local agriculture, including dislike for pesticides and chemical fertilizer. The Board was not considering banning these things, though they might request farmers follow the ‘best practices’ suggested by the state Department of Agriculture. Karl shared that he has used fertilizer for many years and didn’t think anyone was concerned with fertilizer use. Celeste Snitko had a different viewpoint toward fertilizers and pesticides. She shared a concern about a commercial chicken farm and Bruce explained that the town could control operations larger than tilling and silviculture.

Joan Griffin expressed that she is concerned about estates that would have events for weddings and other events every weekend. She felt that the Lake was protected from commercial activities, but she felt that the new regulations should not allow these kind of operations in the large estates that are not really farms. Tim Stillman shared that the Dublin estates were historically farms and the rest of the land was too poor to farm so he felt that they could potentially be returned to active farming as well as venues for events. Bruce Simpson explained that purpose of any changes was primarily to help farmers farm not to encourage events if they were the primary activity. John Sandri felt that should be addressed in the definition of a farm. Sterling Abram pointed out that the state has already defined farms so our definition should build upon what the state has already determined. He was concerned about what is happening right now so that everyone is in agreement on what presently is proper or not.

Edith Tuttle asked what was going to be done and Bruce explained that the board was gathering information before presenting a proposal. John Sandri pointed out that many towns in our region have Agricultural Commissions that work on this issue and advise the Planning Board. Paul Tuller suggested that a commission could look into what other towns were doing to gather information about how other towns are addressing these issues. This could really help Dublin to figure out what is the best approach and gather information about who is farming in Dublin. They could take a farming
census which would really help to understand the scope of the issue. Bruce Simpson explained that the Peterborough ordinance was brought by petition and it caught the Peterborough Planning Board by surprise and he felt it was not well written. The Dublin Planning Board is trying to address it first and make sure what is passed by the town is well crafted.

John Morris raised the question about other small businesses in town that are also struggling to stay alive. Why should there not be special allowances for those who are involved in other small business enterprises? They may be struggling just as much as farms and they don’t have the extra protection that the state law already grants farms. He just wanted input from the public on this issue. Edith Tuttle felt it was a good point and a question of fairness. Bruce explained that as the board develops proposals they would expect to come back to the public to get further input on what they would like when there were concrete proposals to consider.

Colin Kennard shared that they have several commissions in Harrisville that have addressed these kind of questions. The result of their agricultural commission has started a farmers market as well as has taken a poll on how many farms in town. They found they had 28 farms and so he thought Dubliners might be surprised at how many farms there might be presently in Dublin. Dale Gabel asked if they have addressed the issues of non-farm uses like special events and restaurants. He was not aware of anything like that regularly going on in Harrisville. Bruce Simpson suggested that the way forward might be to form an agricultural commission to present recommendations to the Planning Board as a first step. Colin Kennard mentioned that their farm does an annual open house which isn’t really agritourism but is an expanded farm use and those that had attended it expressed that it was a positive experience.

Bruce shared that the board would be working on this and would share information for the public in the Dublin Advocate.

Dale Gabel moved and Bill Goodwin seconded a motion for adjournment at 8:00 PM. The motion passed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Neil R. Sandford, Secretary