

Agricultural Commissions



Background:

Connecticut municipalities have paid staff that are responsible for the everyday operations of the town such as selectmen, tax collectors, assessors, town clerks, building inspectors, public works, public safety, and other departments depending on the size and services of the town.

The work of municipal government is supported by volunteers within the community that are either elected or appointed to various town boards, commissions and committees. These boards and commissions are responsible for a variety of functions within each town. Some commissions such as the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Inland Wetlands Commission are regulatory in nature and are responsible for administering specific regulations. Other Commissions such as the Conservation Commission and Economic Development Commission are advisory in nature and are responsible for advising town officials and other boards and commissions relative to their function.

Agricultural Commissions can help promote and support local agriculture in their communities and provide guidance to other municipal boards and commissions on agriculturally related issues.

Key Points:

- Agricultural commissions are advisory, not regulatory.
- Members of the commission are generally appointed by the Board of Selectmen or Town Council.
- Agricultural commissions are adopted by town ordinance by vote of the legislative authority in that town.
- The ordinance should include: a) Date of adoption of the commission; b) A statement of purpose; c) Powers and duties of the commission; d) Membership; e) Length of terms of membership.
- Towns may choose to adopt a committee or sub-committee of an existing commission to address agricultural issues and interests rather than a formal agricultural commission. Committees tend to be less permanent in nature. Commissions can only be disbanded through revocation of the ordinance that created the commission.
- Multiple towns may choose to collaborate to form a regional agricultural council.
- Connecticut General Statute Section 7-131v enables municipalities to establish local or regional agricultural councils and provides model language that may be assimilated into a municipal ordinance.

(Over)

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Statute:

(Public Act 11-188) CGS Section 7-131v. Local and regional agricultural councils.

(a) Any municipality may, by vote of its legislative body or, in a municipality where the legislative body is a town meeting, by vote of the board of selectmen, establish a local

agricultural council to: (1) Provide information to local farmers and to municipal boards and commissions about the benefits of a balance between agriculture and other land uses; (2) educate municipal officials about agricultural laws and safety issues; (3) identify grant sources for farmers and municipalities; (4) enable a common understanding of agriculture among all municipal departments; (5) provide information and guidance about zoning issues relating to agriculture; (6) support local, regional and state vocational agricultural programs concerning agricultural matters; (7) provide conflict resolution and advisory services; (8) identify innovative opportunities for agriculture; and (9) create a climate that supports the economic viability of agriculture in the municipality.

(b) Any two or more municipalities may form a regional agricultural council for the purposes set forth in subsection (a) of this section by vote of the legislative body or, in a municipality where the legislative body is a town meeting, by vote of the board of selectmen, of each municipality.

FAQs:

Q: Why form an agricultural commission?

A: The interests of agriculture span the work of many regulatory and advisory municipal boards and commissions. Agricultural commissions can advise these various boards on issues they are working on that may have an impact on local agriculture. Agricultural commissions can help provide farmer input into town policies that impact local agriculture and help develop initiatives to keep farming in the community viable.

Q: What are some of the tasks of agricultural commissions?

A: Here are some examples of tasks agricultural commissions can take on:

- Help promote local agriculture by developing marketing materials such as a farm map or website to showcase all of the farms in town.
- Help coordinate farm tours.
- Help to include local agriculture in town wide events.
- Be a clearinghouse of information for local farmers on various programs and grants available on the state and local level.
- Help secure grants for the town for specific agriculturally related projects.
- Provide input to the Planning and Zoning Commission on zoning issues affecting agriculture.
- Support local farmers' markets.
- Support farmland preservation efforts.

- Support opportunities for young and new farmers.
- Work with local zoning enforcement officers, boards of selectmen or boards of health to help mediate conflict.
- Educate the non-farming community on agriculture.
- Help to adopt optional tax reduction programs for farms and local right to farm ordinances.
- Make recommendations for how to support local agriculture in their municipality's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). (See Section on POCDs).

Notes: