



## **CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

### **AGENDA**

**Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022**

**4:30 p.m.**

**The March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022 City Council work session will be held in-person at the  
Afton City Hall  
3033 St. Croix Trail  
Afton, MN 55001**

### **AGENDA**

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. ROLL CALL**
- 3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA – March 31, 2022 Council Work Session**
- 4. CITY COUNCIL BUSINESS**
  - A. 2022 Council Goal Setting Process
  - B. Ag Preservation Committee Report
  - C. Policy Regarding City Newsletter Articles
  - D. Ordinance Amendment Regarding Small Lot Simple Subdivisions for Lot Line Rearrangements
  - E. Use of Council Chambers for meetings by sanctioned groups, and any requirements
  - F. City Administrator Updates
- 5. ADJOURN**

**A quorum of one or more City commissions or committees may be present to receive information during this meeting**

City of Afton  
3033 St. Croix Trl, P.O. Box 219  
Afton, MN 55001

# Meeting Date March 31, 2022

## Council Action Memo

To: Mayor Palmquist and City Council Members

From: Ron Moorse, City Administrator

Date: March 24, 2022

Re: 2022 Goal Setting

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I have attached a listing of the priority goals of each Council member for discussion, prioritization and timing. The goals have been highlighted to show overlap across Councilmembers. Also attached is a listing of 2021 goals with the completed goals bolded.

## Priority 2022 Goals by Mayor and Council Members

(Goals highlighted in color are prioritized by multiple Council members)

### Mayor Palmquist

1. **Finalize and review the Ag Preservation Committee report and recommendations**
2. Resolve issues related to ensuring the city levee remains in the Corps of Engineers program
3. Create policies on the following topics
  - a. Post-pandemic staffing and remote work options
  - b. Use of City Hall and other city facilities, to include the old town hall
  - c. Newsletter and social media guidelines

### Council member Perkins

1. **EV Charging Stations** – Install electric vehicle charging stations in the Historic Village leveraging funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Possible locations could include Afton Town Square Park, Carver Park, and 33<sup>rd</sup> Street.
2. **Develop a Nature/Greenway Corridor Plan** – In collaboration with the Parks Committee, the Natural Resources, Groundwater Committee, Staff and Council, and by leveraging the process documented within the South Washington Watershed District's [Greenway Corridor Plan Final Report](#), begin the development of Afton's own Greenway Corridor Plan.
3. **This is a B.H.A.G. (Big Hairy Audacious Goal)** – my goal here is to simply begin talking about options that explore a more quiet, safe, peaceful, healthy *and economically thriving* Historic Village by way of adopting a car-free downtown. Obviously, I do not have all the answers to the numerous questions associated with this idea. However, successful scenarios exist throughout the United States and beyond. As our lives and world become increasingly more fast-paced, stressful and dangerous, and as people and families increasingly struggle with health and wellness challenges, Afton is uniquely positioned to offer a destination for visitors to sneak away from the hustle and bustle and experience a calm, relaxing getaway along the Wild and Scenic St. Croix River. The idea here is to foster economic growth by way of leveraging opportunities associated with a car-free village. Again, I envision this to be an extremely long-term goal, but one that I believe is definitely worth exploring and beginning conversations now. See successful examples below:

[Pedestrian only, 20 car free places in America](#) Of those, the ones most akin to Afton include:

- [Mackinac Island, Michigan](#) – quaint tourist town 3.8 square mile community designated a National Historic Landmark.
- [Fire Island, New York](#) – 31 communities on the car-free island all with own unique draw including bustling bar scene and bayside restaurants
- [Catalina Island, California](#) – 8 mile wide island southwest of Los Angeles
- [Daufuskie Island, South Carolina](#) – 400 person resort community, 8 square miles, golf carts permitted to get around local art galleries.

[Why Oslo Is Saying No to Cars in Its City Center](#)

## [14 gorgeous car-free cities around the world](#)

### [Here are 11 more cities that have joined the car-free revolution](#)

Council member Wroblewski

1. **Develop zoning enforcement, investigative and follow up** (whatever it takes to come to a resolution that stops the violations from occurring whether it's merely an official letter and cease and desist, citations and/or formal criminal complaints and meaningful prosecutions, civil remedies such as getting court orders etc...) **policies and procedures** that include the following:
  - a. Real-time or timely notification by Wash Co sheriff's Dpt to City Hall regarding significant/priority and problem property incidents and reports to include Case Numbers of the incident, brief summary, and whether or not a report was written.
  - b. Implementing a simple process for the City Clerk or designee to follow to request a timely copy of the above incident reports from Wash Co Records Unit.
  - c. A records and notification process the Clerk follows in which two things happen: the complete report is saved in our Laserfiche system and the Mayor and CC are all notified of the incident(s).
  - d. Developing and implementing a City process and expectation for timely follow up, investigation, and prosecution of code enforcement violations. (Currently reports are made and go nowhere but some ethereal "cloud" and this is untenable for dealing with problem properties and scofflaws.) This includes a process to identify who will be doing the follow up (Jeff? Wash Co deputy or Wash Co Investigator?) and a communication protocol between our City Attorney and the entity following up about what the attorney needs from them to successfully prosecute or obtain civil relief. The communication needs to include clear and specific information the attorney needs from them regarding follow up, ordinance or statute requirements, and details to be included in the report.
2. Relatedly and specifically, **to develop a formal and regular update protocol for all ongoing and pending enforcement and investigative matters from the City Attorney to our City Administrator and disseminated in a timely manner to the Mayor and entire City Council.** This way everyone knows what ongoing issues are happening in the City and no one is unaware.
3. **Completing all the ongoing prosecution and enforcement matters that are pending.**
4. **Updating parcel boundary maps, updating ward boundary maps, and obtaining any maps identifying current Ag land and/or Open Space** that our Ag Committee, NRGWC, and Parks Committees would assist them in their work. I'm thinking it would be useful for Staff and Mayor/CC as well.
5. Continue to **identify and update ordinances that are in need of revision so we close loopholes or gaps** that make enforcement impossible or difficult. Examples include:
  - a. Domestic animal/pet licensing ordinances (which we will be starting to work on in concert with Animal Control, Wash Co and Fritz).

- b. Noise ordinance – really needs to be looked at. Make sure Construction activities include the operating of Construction trucks regardless of activity. Do we have any dumping ordinances and should we be concerned about truckloads of snow from city parking lots being dumped in our City?
- c. Revisions to STR ordinance that have been identified as a result of Fleetwood situation. Advertising, ongoing operation
- d. Wedding event rentals – do we need to tighten up on that?

6. **Identifying and implementing a plan for a Wildlife and/or Ped/non motorized corridor system** is a big picture item that is very important goal for me. I think it would make our city healthier, more environmentally friendly, and I believe it would make our city an even more desirable place for people to want to live.

To that end I think it's important to have Parks committee with perhaps the NRGWC involved.

We should also include a discussion on the pros and cons of allowing land dedication and/or easement donation in lieu of park dedication fee if a large parcel of land is being developed and that donated land could be utilized and tied into a trail or corridor system that the City has identified or is interested in including or developing or initiating as part of an integrated system.

Council member Nelson

1. Be fiscally responsible with every dollar that comes through Afton City Hall, including grant funds or matching funds from outside government entities or programs along with our own residents' tax dollars.
2. **Continue to work towards positive resolutions for our residents on any and all outstanding litigation issues facing the city.**
3. **Work collaboratively with the Agriculture Preservation Committee to identify tools the city can use/implement that would encourage long term preservation of agricultural uses in Afton. These tools may include contiguous (connections) with city property and/or PLCD type developments the city already allows.**
4. Work with our partners at Washington County to continue/finish our internet buildout.
5. Continue to navigate funding options and implement our long term road and infrastructure projects in the most fiscally responsible way possible.

Council member Ross

1. Add monthly Sheriff's trouble call logs to Laserfiche.
2. Add monthly legal reporting to Laserfiche.

3. Complete Phase 2 of the Critter crossing at Valley Creek.
4. Replace picnic shelter in Town Square Park.
5. Scan files in staff's office into Laserfiche.
6. Confirm - creation of Laserfiche workflow for ordinance violations.

## 2021 Priority Goals With Goals Accomplished Shown in Bold

### Mayor Palmquist

- **Complete the technology improvements that are underway, i.e. Council Chambers A/V System with interactive meetings and updated City website with on-line payments, and update the City's residents and businesses regarding the improvements.**
- **Implement zoning enforcement policies and practices, including staff coordination with internal and external partners to meet our zoning enforcement goals**
- **Traffic calming (While this goal is not fully accomplished, additional extra speed patrols were provided and a speed trailer was purchased and deployed in coordination with Washington County's speed trailers.)**

### Councilmember Perkins

- **Dimmer capability for downtown lights. (Dimmer system selected and ordered for installation in early spring.)**
- **Firm up our strategy around citywide non paved, natural park land (for all-purpose non-motorized trail access).**
- **Elevate diversity in Afton. Open to ideas - maybe a Hmong festival in the park as I think we have a large Hmong population.**

### Councilmember Nelson

- **Settling all of the lawsuits and having a handle on and plan for the financial results.**
- **Protecting the appropriated dollars dedicated to Afton's potential long term well filtration needs as a result of the PFC's pollution.**
- **Limiting any new spending while fully funding our special reserve fund.**

### Councilmember Wroblewski

- **Code enforcement but also some system/organizational process that would notify staff, Jeff, and whatever council person or Mayor is involved with complaint or ordinance violation whenever a follow up needs to be done along with a timeline etc... and process set up.**
- **Traffic/speed issues and enforcement – which ties into possible purchase of equipment as force multiplier as well as strategic planning with Wash Co Sheriff's office to get the best bang for our buck.**
- **Making sure we have maps that are needed by staff and CC/Mayor for application/proposal/planning purposes to include:**
  - a. **¼ ¼ section maps (Jenny forwarded me one so I think we have that but it may not be in printed form**
  - b. **Parcel boundary map (I don't know when the last one was created or what the date on that one is but would it be a good idea to update now and as needed)**

- c. Perhaps a **map that overlays both parcel and ¼ ¼ section lines** – if that is a good idea.
- d. Clearly we need a **zoning map as well – perhaps that needs updating?**
- e. Any other kinds of things we need to have mapped – especially as regards environmental concerns with VBWD or SWCD, etc... I’m thinking for our and Parks/Open Space planning
- **Open space planning with Parks and NGRWC committees and CC – start an actual planning process which may include looking at land parcels and potential opportunities for conservation or open space/wildlife corridor/ped trail future planning. Identification of ownership of parcels in those areas or for links could be where that kind of planning leads us. I know it’s a bit pie in the sky but if we don’t think and plan now all opportunities will be lost.**
- **Examining our fee schedules and code violation sections and updating as needed.**

#### Councilmember Ross

- **Create a Laserfiche work flow to help enforce ordinance violations:**
  - a. **Create a workflow, contracted with City’s Digital supervised by Julie Yoho.**
  - b. Paid for through the city’s franchise fees fund.
  - c. Need an expected outcome and expected completion in workflow.
  - d. Jenny will be the point person to input and track complaints.
  - e. Email chain to include Ordinance Enforcement contractor(Jeff), City Attorney(Fritz), Public Works(Ken), Wash Co. Sheriff(Marc).
  - f. Reports generated monthly to distribution list and council.
  - g. Include tracking status and final outcome.
  - h. Require sign off by each person the distribution list.
  - i. Communications via email.
- **Critter crossing at Valley Creek.**
- **Replace picnic shelter in Town Square Park (TSP).**
- **Replace TSP ballfield infield.**
- **Continue to build upon Laserfiche with more scanned documents.**
- **Create a master plan for Steamboat Park.**
- **Improve TSP grass. (Approved for implementation in the spring)**

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# Meeting Date March 31, 2022

## Council Memo

To: Mayor Palmquist and City Council Members  
From: Ron Moore, City Administrator  
Date: March 24, 2022  
Re: Ag Preservation Committee Update

The Ag Preservation Committee has reviewed and provided feedback regarding a potential roadmap toward ag land preservation, including a set of tools that could be beneficial to an effort to preserve agricultural land in Afton. The feedback is reflected in the attached report. One key to enabling these tools to be effective is to identify the quality ag land to be preserved, so that the ag preservation plan and tools can be targeted toward those properties. Staff is coordinating a process with the Washington Conservation District and Ag Preservation committee members to define the scope of a land survey/mapping analysis that enables the identification of the quality ag land to be preserved.

### Agricultural Land Preservation Tools

The Ag Preservation Committee has identified 7 potential tools for an effort to preserve agricultural land. While these tools have been used by various jurisdictions at various times, some are substantially more feasible than others. The feasibility of these tools is significantly dependent upon whether the ag land owners and the developers see substantial benefits in them. In addition, these tools will need to be planned and implemented as part of a robust plan and strategy for long term growth and preservation that identifies the highest priority land for agricultural preservation and areas most suitable for residential development. The following is a brief explanation of the tools.

1. Acquisition of Perpetual Agriculture Easements. This tool involves a governmental jurisdiction purchasing an easement that requires the land to be used for agriculture in perpetuity. The value of the agricultural easement is the difference between the value of the land if it continues to be used for agriculture and the value of the land if it was sold for (residential) development. This value difference is generally substantial, which makes this tool expensive, unless multiple sources of funding are available. This tool may be of interest to a property owner who wants to divide the land, or the value of the land, between several heirs, some of which are not interested in continuing to farm the land. The revenue from the easement can be provided to the heirs who are not interested in farming, and the farm itself is still owned and able to be farmed by the other heirs.
2. Offset – Transfer of Development Rights. A developer can currently use a PLCD subdivision to develop a large ag parcel i.e. 80 acres, at a density of 4 lots per quarter-quarter section, for a total of 8 lots, with 40 acres placed in a conservation easement. The offset tool would allow the developer to develop the entire 80 acres at a density of 8 lots per quarter-quarter section, for a total of 16 lots, if the developer purchased another 80 acre parcel of quality ag land and placed an agricultural easement on it so that it could only be used for agriculture. This offset example would result in the preservation of 80 acres of quality ag land. While 80 acres divided by 5 acres per lot is 16, the lots would be somewhat less than 5 acres in size, (i.e. 4,5 acres) due to the area required for a cul de sac to serve the lots.
  - a. The goal of preserving the 80-acre parcel for ag use in perpetuity could also be accomplished by the developer buying an agricultural easement on the 80-acre ag parcel, rather than purchasing the parcel outright. This would be substantially less costly and may be more desirable to the property owner, if the property owner wants to continue to farm the property.

3. PLCD with an agricultural easement. This tool preserves ag land by requiring 50% of the land in a PLCD to be preserved with an agricultural easement rather than with a conservation easement. With this tool, it is important that the conserved land be quality ag land, and it would be preferable that the ag land be adjacent to other ag land.
4. Agricultural Preservation Fund. This tool would be used to generate funding for acquisition of agricultural easements. The revenue could come from a tax levy and/or from other governmental jurisdictions, and/or organizations with an interest in ag land preservation.
5. Bonus lot with Agricultural Easement. This tool allows a quarter-quarter section to have 3 lots, plus a 4<sup>th</sup> lot if that lot is unbuildable and placed into an agricultural easement. While this lot could be as small as 5-acres, it could be as large as 25 acres (three 5-acre lots and one 25-acre lot). This would enable an ag property owner to get the full financial benefits of the sale of three lots, but still retain an ag lot that could be farmed by the current land owner, or could be rented to another farmer, or could be sold to a new owner to be farmed. Again, it would be preferable if the ag lot could be adjacent to other ag property.
6. Conversion of existing “open space” or parkland to ag production. Afton does not have significant parkland that could be converted. However, it already has Rinta Park that is used for community gardens. One possible open space area that could be pursued is the Cedar Bluffs conservation easement open space area along Manning. This area was farmed prior to the Cedar Bluffs development. If the homeowners association and the Minnesota Land Trust would agree, the conservation easement could be converted to an agricultural easement. The homeowners association may be agreeable, because it would remove their responsibility for maintaining the open space area and would provide a revenue stream if they were to rent the land to a farmer.
7. 1:1 Offset +PLCD + Ag Zoning Bonus Lot. This tool is similar to tool #3, except that 50% of the property is not sold to the developer, but continues to be held by the current land owner and placed into an agricultural easement. The current land owner can then continue to farm the land, or could rent the land to another farmer, or could sell the land to another farmer. This could be a preferred option to both the seller and the buyer. This would also ensure that the quality ag land was preserved.

## Afton Agricultural Land Preservation Committee Report March 2022

### **Agriculture Preservation: *Roadmap, Options and Evaluation***

#### ***Introduction***

The City of Afton needs to consider and clarify what it means to preserve agricultural land in Afton. We believe this can best be done by evaluating which tools identified within this committee's report to invest in and further investigate. These actions can propel the city forward by putting forth a framework that will enable proactive planning and consensus building that will effectively impact decisions by farmland owners regarding their property, as well as decisions on future land use proposals that come before the planning commission or city council.

The Afton Agricultural Land Preservation Committee has prepared the findings of a 5 month exploration period where we heard from county officials, reviewed plans & lawsuits, and explored what governments in similar situations have done. With that experience, came an understanding that there is a limited expectation that Federal, State and County level guidance or funding will help Afton preserve farmland in meaningful ways. It is also clear to this committee that the goal of preserving agriculture in our community is challenging on many fronts. This is why changes at the city level, through ordinances and intent, that match a comprehensive plan, is the most likely course of action.

The completion of a survey to evaluate parcels the City of Afton has an opportunity to preserve for farmland, is an essential part of choosing what options will fit best. The committee recommends this as the first step towards building a decision framework and comprehensive plan to inform the most suitable ordinances. The survey has an opportunity to explore a scoring system for the quality of a parcel (including soils & productivity features), desirability to be developed for residential, and size. Examples of these surveys done at the Township, or city level are included in the resource page.

The existing conservation easements and development ordinances in Ag zoned areas, available to land owners and developers, do not adequately promote the preservation of Afton's rural farming heritage, but do offer a framework for improved incentives. A combination of time horizons and incentives attached to parcels should be considered in pioneering new farming easements. Considerations for the number of potential homes or lot sizes mixed with extended (50 year) terms or permanent terms for farming easements is also recommended. Additionally important, and part-and-parcel of developing improved tools/incentives for Ag land preservation, is an evaluation mechanism that can help guide the City Council in an effort to build consensus around change.

## **Roadmap**

A Comprehensive Agricultural Preservation Plan, including a land survey, is an important precursor to any viable effort to substantially change the trajectory of agricultural land loss in Afton. However, since this committee was convened to make initial recommendations; defining with broad brush strokes, various options is an important process. Without a guiding plan however, these strategies are more corruptible and thinly defended should they be adopted. *Furthermore, supportive revisions to the language in our Afton Comp Plan should be considered. If we are going to codify new agricultural preservation strategies, we should state clearly and passionately our commitment to protecting our farm land for farming, embracing and inviting new and aspiring farmers and celebrating farming in all its best forms.*

☐ The options listed in this document should be considered with the input and inclusion of farmers, ag landowners, and the broader community, should they be recommended for further action. Because this is a very complex and challenging issue, Afton's leaders must be persistent, deliberate, creative and committed to support potentially controversial options if we are to make meaningful progress towards protecting our agricultural lands. It cannot be overstated that **no agricultural preservation plan will get traction without the support of farmstead landowners and a thorough and robust commitment from the city council to champion the public benefits and act boldly.**

The following examples offer a sampling of tools for further consideration. Some have been used with varying degrees of success in other communities, others are untested ideas generated through this committee's work. It is by no means an exhaustive list but does start the "build-out" of strategies to consider for a range of parcels. Tools that have a more mission, philosophy, or idea-driven component should also be worked into the City's Comp Plan statements regarding the value of agriculture in our community. Additionally, if we value farming in all its forms, we must generate and expand a more community centric agricultural base.

The lack of federal, state or county funding programs is a disappointing reality that will have to be overcome. Alternatives such as the donations of land, funds derived from grants, or other strategies utilized by individual landowners are not detailed in this document but should be identified and promoted by the city through some type of community resource mechanism.

## ***Options***

### **#1-Purchase of Agricultural Easements**

The City of Afton could purchase the development rights to an agricultural parcel directly from a landowner. That parcel would then be held in a permanent agricultural easement. The landowner would be able to continue to farm the parcel, would have funds in hand from the sale of those development rights and at the time of transfer would sell the parcel with the permanent easement attached. A fair market value would be established on the parcel based on its current status and paid to the landowner using a farmed value vs developed value calculation. The landowner would be paid the difference between the two or some negotiated amount. This option has been the primary tool used by communities to preserve larger parcels. Funding from either the State or County has been the primary resource mechanism. Considering the current lack of funding sources available to Afton, under most circumstances this would be a very cost prohibitive option. However, Afton would be smart to reach out to landowners to gauge interest in this type of arrangement. It may even be smart to flush out and document a plan to pursue these easements. Should funds or interest from a surprising or unknown source become available the City would be positioned to act swiftly.

### **#2-1:1 Offset**

1:1 Offset is a concept that allows for the transfer of development rights from one parcel to another in exchange for the protection of further development on one of the parcels. In other words, if a developer wants to buy and develop an 80-acre parcel that currently allows for 8 subdivisions and 50% conserved land (parcel A), they can purchase an additional 80 acre parcel (parcel B), transfer those 8 subdivisions to the initial parcel (A), buildout on one parcel with 16 subdivisions while preserving the entire 80 acres (parcel B) in an agricultural easement. This strategy would be part of a larger more defined development plan. The city would need to identify highest priority land for agricultural preservation, areas to focus development and design a robust strategy for long term growth and preservation. This can be a very effective tool but is rarely used due to its potential for a perceived negative impact to some landowners and a potentially complicated purchasing process. A Comprehensive Agricultural Preservation Plan would certainly be needed to guide this process.

### **#3-PLCD Incentives/Requirements**

While PLCD's (Preservation and Land Conservation Developments) in the past have only focused on the "open space" benefits through use of conservation easements, the set aside land may have more present and future value in agricultural production and should be prioritized as a first option. The city could adopt a set of provision that would encourage the open space be put into agricultural easement, rather than conservation easement. Where appropriate, an incentive could be offered such as a reduction in parcel size, an additional parcel or infrastructure flexibility. There would be a potential rental income to cover the city's management cost. Alternatively, requirements could be instituted such as buffer zones to support the continuation of farming amongst non-farming homesteads, platting that requires conservation easement land be contiguous or platting that considers future adjacent land use and prioritizes continued agricultural production options. Communities have utilized this type of planned use zoning to help protect agricultural land.

### **#4-City Agricultural Preservation Fund- tax, levy or community foundation**

A Tax, levy or establishment of a community foundation could be used to generate funds held for the specific purpose of acquisition and enforcement of agricultural easements, grants for farming enterprises or the funding of other community based agricultural preservation. This would require a long-term commitment, creative thinking and/or engaging with partners in order to create a meaningful program designed to enhance agricultural opportunities for the citizen of Afton.

### **#5-Agricultural Easement- Agricultural Zoning Bonus PID**

One additional (unbuildable PID) subdivision could be allowed on Ag Zoned lands to preserve current, or encourage future, agricultural enterprises. A permanent or long term (think MFL- 25-50 year) agricultural easement would be applied to the parcel regardless of its transfer in ownership. In this scenario, a 3 per 40 could be maintained, with the additional parcel held in an agricultural preservation easement, thereby being unbuildable. This would have minimal impact for years to come to the current philosophy regarding subdivision options in Ag zoned areas. It does, however, offer an additional option to landowners who wish to have their land retain most of its market value, but do not just want to sell out to a developer. In effect, this relieves the city from having to purchase easements now, in the hopes that there are funding options down the road for larger impact projects. While it could allow quarter quarters an additional PID, it also provides a middle ground for the 8 per 80 now available for PLCD development. Many details would have to be worked out, but with a 25-50 year preservation option, any future tax forfeiture burden that the city may incur would eventually have a buildable value that the city holds, thereby reducing the city's risk for being responsible for fallow property. An appeal to landowners to consider this option would likely help determine its viability.

## **#6-Conversion of existing “Open Space” or Parkland to Ag production**

The city could evaluate the viability of current property held in the Park and Open space inventory being converted to ag production such as pasture land or high value crop production. Additionally, we should investigate if there is any legal option to convert a conservation easement to an agricultural easement, as there may be options should that be possible. The city could lease the land out for the establishment of a productive agricultural enterprise. This would give the Afton some experience in managing ag land without the overhead cost of acquisition.

## **#7- 1:1 Offset + PLCD + Ag Zoning Bonus PID= PALD (Combine these three concepts to create a Preservation of Agricultural Land Development Ordinance)**

Example: A landowner wants to sell an 80-acre parcel based on the availability of utilizing the PLCD ordinance. Instead of selling the entire 80 as a single PID, the 40 acres that are required to be preserved to get an additional 2 parcels, is held in an agricultural easement. Rather than being part of the Homeowner’s Association, that parcel has a separate PID and can be held and farmed by the landowner, rented by the landowner to another farmer, sold by the homeowner to another farmer or donated to the city to be rented or sold to a farmer. This should in theory not substantially influence the overall value of the property and may even be a preferred option to both seller and buyer. The Ag easement would be permanent and could be encumbered with some “best practice” farming requirements. Like conservation easement requirements, the agricultural practice requirements would follow a set of guidelines that are the product of an agency such as NRCS. The primary focus would be in sustainable practices that protect groundwater, soil health and wildlife.

**Evaluation: Priority Dashboard**

Any of the mechanisms considered for the preservation of agricultural land, should ideally have a set of “test” metrics that guide the committee’s discussion. This could take the form of a Priority Dashboard or similarly high-level evaluation tool. Characteristics might include things such as: long term impact, scale or high impact, can be achieved “In-house”, has an obvious “stacked” public good, can be done without public \$, can be done without private \$, can be achieved near term, has positive impact on environment and minimal “losers vs winners”. A green, red or yellow check would be assigned to help the committee build a “funneled” list of priorities, both for general concepts and specific projects going forward. The priority dashboard should be deliberated and refined in order to get a clear and focused set of recommendation and help minimize bias.

**Example**

Preservation Option	long term impact	large scale	in-house	public benefits	no public \$	near term impact	positive environmental impact	minimal city management	minimizes "winners and losers"
Purchase of Agricultural Easements	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
1:1 Mitigation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
PLCD Incentives/Requirement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
City Tax or levy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Agricultural Easement- Ag Zoned Land bonus PID	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Conversion of existing “Open Space” or Parkland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
1:1 Mitigation + PLCD + Ag Zoning Bonus PID= PALD	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Once the proper framework for making decisions about land that has the potential to exit production is complete, the city can decide if further actions need to be explored in helping the entry of new farmers. This can be of value to the residents and the surrounding community. The form and details of the evaluation tool has endless possibilities.

## Questions for further discussion

Assuming the burden to preserve farm land is primarily the city's responsibility, how can we best partner with farmers to identify possible avenues- Survey, focus group, etc.

How might feedback from people help understand if Afton residents favor open space or farm fields?

Should Afton consider a rezoning plan that promotes ag preservation and what would that look like?

Do PLCD's give farmers/landowners more incentive to sell to developers than to another farmer?

Should preferential treatment be given to certain types of farming?

Should landlords be incentivized to hold farmers to a "best practice" standard if given incentives? Crop rotation, no till, spot spraying and fertilizing, erosion control, etc.?

## *Summary*

Preserving and promoting Afton's rural farming heritage in all its forms is deeply important to the members of this committee. The members of this committee brought a variety of perspectives, ideas, personal experiences and priorities, to this discussion. Much of those perspective center around what does it mean to "preserve a sustainable farming community". Should we focus on encouraging and attracting new small farming operations? Should we address this issue primarily as an anti- development strategy? Should we be thinking in terms of "environmental" impacts when a parcel changes hands? We considered these questions and many others as we sought to gain a consensus of ideas to prioritize. This report is an attempt to boil down some of our discussions into an actionable plan. Further work may be best suited for smaller "break-out groups" that can dive deeper into more niche areas of interest once the City Council has a more clear-eyed vision for next steps. We look forward to engaging the City Council in a cooperative effort moving forward.

## **Resources: Agencies that Support Agricultural Preservation**

### **Minnesota programs**

Unfortunately, Minnesota does not have a robust program to support and encourage local government agencies with their efforts for protect and preserve their agricultural lands

<https://www.lrl.mn.gov/docs/2018/mandated/180302.pdf>

- Minnesota FarmLink – a web-based tool connecting prospective farmers with retiring farmers.
- Beginning and Transitioning Farmer Resource website – a directory of programs and services offered by farm-related organizations in Minnesota, including services for all sizes and types of farming and farmers. Services range from assisting in finding land, finances, farm management planning and scholarships, legal services, networking and mentoring.
- Technical assistance on planning and zoning issues concerning diversified agricultural operations in the urban fringe areas, including issues affecting immigrant farmers.

### **Federal programs are explained in the two links below**

- These docs highlight available grant programs: Managed thru NRCS: EQIP, ACEP, CRP

<https://bwsr.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2018-11/Appendix%203%20-%20Farm%20Bill%20Opportunities%20for%20Working%20Lands%20Final%20Report.pdf>

<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R40763.pdf>

**Foundations and Organizations that support preservation of Agricultural Lands- Others certainly exist and should be included**

<https://farmland.org>

<https://landstewardshipproject.org>

<https://mosesorganic.org/farming/farm-finances/funds/>

### **Resources and Examples of Comprehensive Agricultural Preservation Plans**

<https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/home/genpub/comprehensiveplans.html>

<https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/home/genpub/franklinsomersetplan.pdf>

<https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/home/genpub/Bedminster%20Somerset%20plan.pdf>

<https://www.co.eau-claire.wi.us/home/showpublisheddocument/2574/635503479178170000>

City of Afton  
3033 St. Croix Trl, P.O. Box 219  
Afton, MN 55001

## Meeting Date March 31, 2022

### Council Memo

To: Mayor Palmquist and City Council Members

From: Ron Moorse, City Administrator

Date: March 24, 2022

Re: Policy Regarding City Newsletter Articles

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The City Newsletter is a key method of providing information to the community. Newsletter articles are generally written by staff or involve sharing information provided by other organizations, with the exception of the Mayors Notes, and more recently the Dashboard. There is an understanding that the information in the Newsletter is to be objective and is not to reflect a specific political viewpoint. To ensure this continues to be the case, it would be beneficial to have a policy that clarifies and reflects this understanding.

City of Afton  
3033 St. Croix Trl, P.O. Box 219  
Afton, MN 55001

## Meeting Date March 31, 2022

### Council Memo

To: Mayor Palmquist and City Council Members

From: Ron Moorse, City Administrator

Date: March 24, 2022

Re: Ordinance Amendment Regarding Small Lot Simple Subdivisions for Lot Line Rearrangements

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The review and approval process for lot line rearrangements, through which a portion of a lot is subdivided off and added to an adjacent lot, generally involves staff and Council through a simple subdivision process. However, if either or both of the lots are nonconforming either before or after the lot line rearrangement, the lot line rearrangement requires a minor subdivision process, which involves a public hearing and recommendation by the Planning Commission and final approval by the Council. Staff has dealt with a number of lot line rearrangements that involve very small lots and very small portions of lots. These required a minor subdivision process, although their impacts were very small. Staff would like to amend the simple subdivision ordinance to allow lot line rearrangements that involve small lots and/or small portions of lots to be processed as a simple subdivision although one or both of the lots are nonconforming prior to the lot line rearrangement. The ordinance amendment would include standards related both to lot size and to the size of the area to be divided off and added to an adjacent parcel.

**City of Afton**  
**3033 St. Croix Trl, P.O. Box 219**  
**Afton, MN 55001**

# Meeting Date March 31, 2022

## Council Memo

To: Mayor Palmquist and City Council Members

From: Ron Moorse, City Administrator

Date: March 24, 2022

Re: Use of Council Chambers

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The Council Chambers has not generally been used by groups outside of the city organization. In recent years, the City has received inquiries from small public organizations regarding the use of the Council Chambers. These have not resulted in specific requests. Recently, the Lower St. Croix Partnership Team, on which Mayor Palmquist serves, has requested the ability to use the Council Chambers for its quarterly meetings. They will meet in the Council Chambers for the first time on March 30. Because Mayor Palmquist will be participating in the meetings, the security of the building will not be an issue, but it would be if an organization did not have a city representative at its meeting. The meeting will involve the use of the City's A/V system, which will involve the organization paying the cost of the City's videography operating the A/V equipment.

It would be beneficial to create a policy that identifies the parameters and the requirements related to another organization using the Council Chambers, to guide decisions regarding the use of the Council Chambers and to ensure the organizations are aware of the requirements so that plans and preparations can be made to ensure all requirements are met.

**City of Afton**  
**3033 St. Croix Trl, P.O. Box 219**  
**Afton, MN 55001**

# **Meeting Date March 31, 2022**

## **Council Memo**

To: Mayor Palmquist and City Council Members

From: Ron Moorse, City Administrator

Date: March 23, 2022

Re: City Administrator Updates

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The City Administrator will provide updates on items regarding which the Council needs to be advised.