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Creating Useful Work Plans

A Guide for Massachusetts Agricultural Commissions



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OVERVIEW – PILGRIM RC&D PROGRAM

The purpose of the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program is to accelerate the conservation, development and utilization of natural resources, improve the general level of economic activity, and to enhance the environment and standard of living in the Pilgrim RC&D Area (Plymouth, Bristol, Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket Counties). RC&D improves the capability of local, state and tribal units of government, local nonprofits and community organizations to plan, develop and carry out programs for resource conservation and development. RC&D also establishes or improves coordination systems in the communities served. Current program objectives focus on improvement of natural resources conservation and community development which leads to sustainable communities, prudent use (development), and the management and conservation of natural resources. RC&D areas are locally sponsored areas that are designated by the Secretary of Agriculture for receipt of technical and financial assistance.

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Creating Useful Work Plans – A Guide

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Introduction

A work plan is a road map an Agricultural Commission (AgCom) can use to meet its mission or charge. It is a necessary tool for planning and implementing actions to achieve goals during a specific period of time.

An AgCom Work Plan creation process involves the following steps:

- Considering their charge/mission/purpose (usually written into the bylaw) or Developing a mission statement (if not explicit in the bylaw)
- Identifying issues or problems to be solved in their community
- Establishing goals
- Setting priorities regarding what they want to accomplish at the end of a year
- Generating the steps and actions needed to meet their priorities

Some town AgCom bylaws state that their work shall be guided by a work plan.

EXAMPLE #1: AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION - Town of Falmouth, MA

Mission:

To represent the Town of Falmouth's agricultural community and interests.

The Selectmen and AgCom shall develop a Work Plan to guide the AgCom's activities. Activities shall include but are not limited to:

- Serving as facilitators for encouraging the pursuit of agriculture in Falmouth;
- Promoting agriculture-based economic opportunities for the Town;
- Acting as mediators, advocates, educators, and/or negotiators in an advisory capacity on farming issues for established Town Committees and Departments;
- Working for the preservation of agriculture lands owned by the town; and
- Pursuing all initiatives appropriate to creating a sustainable agriculture community.

Creating a work plan is recommended for all AgComs, as it serves as a guide to focus activities and achieve success.

The work plan creation process requires a group effort. When all members of an AgCom are involved in preparing a work plan, they are more likely to “own” it and use it.

Once developed, work plans are meant to be revised and updated.

AgComs will need to take time to ask, and answer,

"What are the most important issues?" and "How shall we respond?"

Responses to these questions should be used to update the work plan to make sure it remains a timely and relevant guide for the AgCom.

GUIDE OBJECTIVES:

- To provide users with recommendations and guidance for creating a 12 month work plan.
- To provide users with thoughts on why plans are important in guiding the work of an organization and how to use their work plan effectively.

Chapter 1

Why Create a Work Plan

Work plans are the means by which the future is planned. Plans help you get from where you are now to where you want to be.

Work plans have several purposes, according to Phil Bartle, PhD. “The main purpose, however, is often forgotten; it is a **planning and management tool** which provides a framework for planning work, and is a guide for carrying out that work.”¹

A work plan may also be used by funding organizations as a document for justifying the release of money. It is also a useful document contributing to the transparency (openness) of an organization, as copies of the work plan can be given to people or organizations that have a need or a right to know what you are doing, and why.

“A work plan serves the needs of implementers (the AgCom-those doing the work), beneficiaries (farmers, residents, natural resources, the economy-those benefiting from the AgCom’s work), town boards and committees,”² and “outside” organizations.

A work plan provides logical steps to solving problems. Work plans are useful when:

- There is a problem, or problems
- These problems call for solutions
- The solutions are the work plan; goals and actions; timelines and responsibilities

BENEFITS OF CREATING A WORK PLAN

A work plan:

- Enables an AgCom to communicate its goals
- Creates a direction the AgCom can take to achieve its goals
- Helps the AgCom better determine what time is required to implement actions and achieve goals
- Helps the AgCom assign the needed resources to accomplish goals

¹ Phil Bartle, *Guidelines for Preparing a Work Plan*, p. 3.

² Ibid. p.3.

Chapter 2

Creating a Work Plan

WORK PLAN LENGTH

“A work plan should cover a timeframe of six to twelve months. A three-month plan would be too short, considering the amount of time and effort needed to prepare the plan. A twenty-four month plan may be too long, because conditions can change over two years and priorities may become different.”³

WORK PLAN STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Many techniques exist for successfully developing a work plan. The basic steps generally include:

- Clarifying the AgCom’s charge/mission or its’ purpose
- Analyzing the existing situation, brainstorming and prioritizing issues (problems)
- Setting and prioritizing goals (what you want to accomplish)
- Determining action steps (how you will accomplish goals) includes prioritizing and sequencing actions
- Identifying resources and availability (people, funds etc.) to implement actions (who is to do what)
- Establishing a timeline for accomplishing actions and goals (who is to do what by when)

THE CREATION PROCESS

FACILITATION & PARTICIPATION

Using a facilitator is recommended. A facilitator will guide the AgCom through the process of creating a work plan. Those who work with organizations have learned over the years the need for effective facilitation skills and facilitators.

“The dictionary defines facilitate as “to free from difficulties or obstacles; make easier, aid, assist.” That is the role of the facilitator – to design and manage a process that helps a group accomplish its work while minimizing problems within the group.”⁴

All AgCom members should participate in the work plan development process. In some towns, it has been helpful to also include AgCom advisors, a representative from the Board of Selectmen, and town staff such as the town planner, conservation commission agent and/or the health agent. The AgCom members should discuss and decide whom they would invite to participate in the planning process.

³ Ibid. p.4.

⁴ Ibid. p 2.

In the forward to *A Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making*, by Sam Kaner and Michael Doyle, two important lessons learned are presented about participation.

“Lesson one: if people do not participate in and ‘own’ the solution to problems or agree to the decision, implementation will be half-hearted at best, probably misunderstood, and more likely than not, fail.

Lesson two: the key differentiating factor in the success of an organization is not just the products and services, but the organization’s ability to elicit, harness, and focus the vast intellectual capital and goodwill in their members and stakeholders.”

When these get energized and focused, the organization becomes a powerful force for positive change in today’s environment.”

THE FACILITATOR

Facilitating a meeting is different from leading a monthly organizational meeting. A facilitator is a neutral guide who takes an active role in guiding a process, while adhering to principles of effective facilitation. The facilitator is usually someone from outside the group and may have no vested interest in the outcome.

The facilitator and AgCom members share responsibility for progressing toward the goals of the group. The facilitator serves as a guide to the group. They are responsible for:

- meeting preparation
- meeting facilitation
- follow-up

Key principles of quality facilitation include:

- Believing that groups can make good decisions
- Ensuring participation
- Convening people as a neutral guide
- Sharing a sense of group goals
- Using effective processes
- Working together with trust
- Progressing toward goals

Preparation

A good facilitator knows that the success of a meeting begins with good planning before the AgCom gathers.

The facilitator should:

- Communicate with the AgCom chair regarding time needed in planning process
- Lay out an agenda

- Make room arrangements, know the room, make sure there is adequate wall space and seating for the AgCom (does the room have an atmosphere of openness and encourage group involvement?)
- Gather needed supplies and equipment
- Determine the group planning process to be used

The facilitator should request that the AgCom set time aside at three consecutive meetings to develop a work plan. The plan will include a mission statement, goals and action steps, responsibilities and a timeline.

The first meeting (2 hours) involves reviewing the agenda, process and proposed outcomes; revisiting the mission statement or creating one, brainstorming and prioritizing issues.

The second meeting (2 hours) involves setting goals, brainstorming, prioritizing and sequencing action steps, assigning responsibilities and time lines – creating the plan.

The third meeting (1/2 – 1 hour) involves reviewing and adopting the work plan as the AgCom’s framework planning and carrying out their work.

CREATING AN AGCOM WORK PLAN

AGENDA MEETING #1: INTRODUCTIONS, PROCESS REVIEW, MISSION STATEMENT, ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

Supplies:

Flip Chart Stand
 Flip Charts
 Tape
 Markers
 Index Cards (3 x 5 cards)
 Pens and Pencils
 Blank Post-It Notes

The facilitator is responsible for preparing the room prior to the meeting. AgCom members should be seated so they can see each other, the facilitator, and the walls where records of their discussions will be posted. The agenda should be written on a flip chart and hung on a wall.

At the first meeting the facilitator introduces him/herself, has the participants introduce themselves, reviews the process that will be used for creating a work plan, reviews the agenda and planned outcomes for the three meetings, and asks the group if they understand and are ready to move ahead.

All comments are recorded on flip charts by facilitator or a recorder. All AgCom members, alternates and advisors participate. Town staff and representation from the Board of Selectmen can be very useful at these meetings.

Room Arrangements:

- Agenda is printed on a flip chart and hung on wall
- Mission/Purpose is printed on a flip chart and hung on wall
- Seating is arranged so participants can see each other, the facilitator and the flip charts on walls

Step 1. Mission/Purpose - AgCom members begin the planning process by:

A. Reviewing existing charge/mission/purpose (if written into the bylaw)

1. Mission/Purpose (from AgCom bylaw) of AgCom is placed on a flip chart and posted on wall throughout the planning process.
2. The facilitator leads the group through the review of their mission. They read the mission statement/purpose to the group and ask for any needed additions, clarification, comments etc. giving the group time to think and discuss – changes are recorded on flip chart and the mission statement is rewritten, if necessary and finalized.

B. Developing a mission statement (if not explicit in the bylaw)

The Mission Statement

A facilitator should be prepared to lead the AgCom through creating a mission statement. Facilitating the development of a shared mission statement is important. Everyone on the AgCom should know what the group intends to accomplish.

A mission statement is a brief, formal declaration that describes the specific purpose of the AgCom. It specifies, in general terms, what the organization is trying to accomplish. “An effective mission statement contains three elements:

1. It defines why the AgCom exists
2. It describes what the AgCom should be doing
3. It identifies who will receive the benefits of the AgComs efforts”⁵

To create an effective mission statement, AgCom members should work together to answer the following questions:

1. What does the AgCom do? (What is the nature of the AgCom’s business? Why does the AgCom exist? What purpose does the AgCom serve?)
2. What are the desired results of the activity (Primary goals)?
3. For whom does the AgCom perform its functions? (Who is/are the primary beneficiaries of the AgComs efforts?)

The facilitator asks these questions of the group and records the responses on a flip chart. The group then is asked to formulate the responses into one mission statement. Begin by writing “The mission of the (town) Agricultural Commission is to...” then the participants complete the statement from their previous responses to the facilitator’s questions.

⁵ Tyrone A. Holmes, Ed.D., *How to Facilitate the Strategic Planning Process*, p. 270.

EXAMPLE: Harwich Agricultural Commission Mission Statement as written in their bylaw

To represent the Town of Harwich’s agricultural community and interests; facilitate and encourage the pursuit of agriculture in Harwich; promote agricultural-based opportunities; act as mediators, advocates, educators and/or negotiators in an advisory capacity on farming issues for established town committees and departments; work for the preservation of agricultural lands currently owned by the Town; and pursue all initiatives appropriate to creating a sustainable agricultural community.

(The mission defines why the AgCom exists, describes what the AgCom should be doing, and identifies who will receive the benefits of the AgComs efforts)

Step 2. Issues Facing The AgCom

The Nominal Group Process is a technique that can be used to produce a large number of issues, problems, and challenges facing an AgCom. The process generates these ideas in a relatively short period of time. It encourages contributions from everyone by allowing for equal participation among group members.

A question is posed to the group. Individually and silently, each participant writes down his/her ideas or responses on a 3x5 card. In a round robin fashion, each member supplies a response until all ideas are shared. For most of this session, group members do not interact, rather they generate ideas. The process is used:

- To generate many, creative ideas
- To ensure that everyone is heard
- When there is a concern that some people will not be vocal
- To build consensus

Procedure:

1. **Introduction:** The facilitator explains the purpose of the group exercise, the process to be followed, and how the results will be used.
2. **The facilitator presents a question:** *What agriculture related issues are you/the community facing that the AgCom can/should address?*

The question is presented verbally and written on the flip chart – the facilitator should clarify as needed.

3. **Silent generation of ideas:** Each participant silently thinks of and writes down (3x5 card) as many responses/ideas as possible. Allow five to 10 minutes.
4. **Record ideas/responses:** In turn, each participant reads aloud one idea. It is numbered and recorded on a flip chart for the group to see.

1. Continue until all ideas are depleted
 2. At this point, discourage discussion, not even questions for clarification
 3. Encourage “hitch hiking” i.e., expanding upon another’s statement. Ideas do not have to be from the participant’s written list
 4. A participant may pass a turn and then add an idea at a subsequent turn
 5. Discourage combining ideas from individuals unless they are exactly the same
5. **Group discussion:** After all ideas are recorded, discuss each idea in turn for the purpose of clarification. The person who suggested the idea is given the opportunity to explain it further.
- Wording may be changed if the originator agrees
 - Ideas are deleted only by unanimous agreement
 - Restrict discussion to clarify meaning; the value or merit of ideas is not discussed
 - This process provides an opportunity to present the logic behind an idea, disagreement or misunderstanding
6. **Duplicates are combined.** On the flip chart, cross out duplicate ideas, upon permission of the group.
7. **Voting, Scoring, Ranking, Setting Priorities.** The purpose of this step is to allow the participants the opportunity to judge the ideas and then to determine relative importance of the individual ideas.

- The facilitator should give the following directions:

“We have completed our discussion of the entire list of ideas, having clarified each. At this time I would like you (AgCom members) to judge the most important ideas/issues on the list.”

Each person is provided with 5 index cards.

You are being asked to select the 5 most important items from the list. As you review the list of ideas/issues and find an item which you think is important, record the item on the index card.

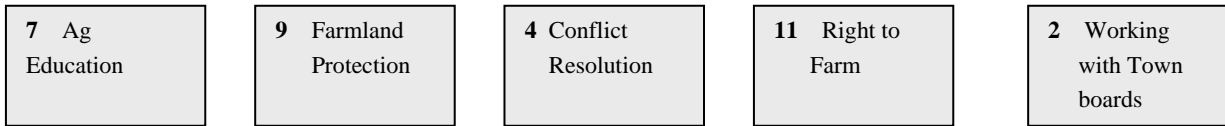
Please place the number of the item in the upper left-hand corner of the card. For example: if you think Item #7 is very important to you, write 7 in the upper left-hand corner of the card, then write the identifying words or phrase on the card.

Do this for each of the five most important items from the total list.

When you have completed this task, you should have five cards, each with a separate phrase written on the card and with numbers associated with the item number on the flip charts. Do not rank order the cards yet.

Spend the next few minutes carefully selecting the five items. We will rank-order the cards together.

Example:



Spread the cards out in front of you, so that you can see all 5 cards at once.

Looking at your set of 5 cards decide which one card is the most important.

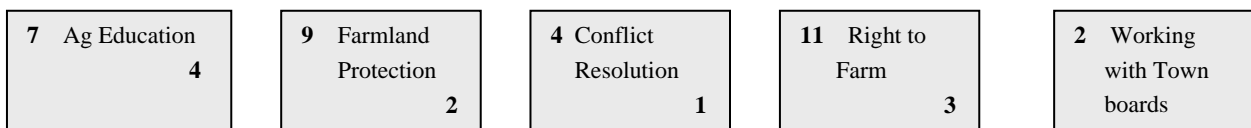
Which card is more important than the other 4 cards? Please write the number 5 in the lower right-hand corner of the card. Turn that card over and look at the remaining four cards.

Of the remaining four cards which is the least important? Write a number #”1” in the lower right-hand corner. Turn that card over.

Now choose the most important of the remaining three cards and write the number “4” in the lower right-hand corner. Turn that card over.

Now choose the less important of the remaining two cards and write the number two in the lower right-hand corner. Turn that card over.

Now write the number “3” in the lower right-hand corner of the remaining card.



The facilitator collects the cards from all of the participants.

One participant is asked to read the idea/issue number and the number of points from each index card while the facilitator records the score next to the item on the original flip charts.

An example of the results of scoring issues follows:

Example: AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION – Issues & Scores

NUMBER	TOTAL SCORE	ISSUE
1 & 9	6	Zoning Laws, Wetland Laws: Define Wetlands and Ag Exemptions Research town Zoning Change (formerly entire town zoned ag – How was it changed, how does change affect ag, grandfathered? Property transfers?
(2,3,4,7)	35	Stable Permit Application (Draft Exists) BOS Charge Commission to Finalize, Equine: MGL How fits into Ag, State Res, Town Regs; How are Equine Operations regulated State and Town; Research existing Best Management Practices i.e., # animal units per acre, nutrient management...
5	15	Define Agriculture for Town and Ag Use for Town (How same or different from Federal and State Definitions)
6&10	12	Educate non-farm Residents – What Agriculture is, Neighbor Relations – Living Near a Farm, Exemptions... Educate Public about Trespassing Laws (how police???)
8, 11 & 12	25	Work with Town Boards: Educate: Ag, Ag use, exemptions... Develop Good Working Relationships with Town Boards (Con Com, BOS, BOH... and staff)
13	10	Inventory Lands, land use, and owners, protected unprotected (private and town-owned)
14	20	Review and Draft Local Right to Farm By Law
15	10	Educate ourselves (AgCom) about Ag definitions, how they apply in different situations, exemptions, ...
16 & 17	2	Encourage agriculture retention and development in town - Educate public about benefits of agriculture in Town and be proactive Be more engaged in planning and execution of Farm Festival (date change, cranberries define town historic character, Market ag as historic character, use to secure funds)
18		Develop "Circle of Friends" Residents involvement with AgCom activities
19	1	Survey farmer/grower Needs
20 & 21	8	Connect (AgCom and farmers) to technical assistance/resources, people and organizations re: BMPs, waster management, conservation planning...
22	4	Improve Communication via Web: Navigate Federal, state, Regional services (GIS, planning, regulations, model bylaws)
23	1	Improve Towns ability to exercise right of first refusal when P&S signed on Ch 61 land (understand process used now, recommend process that engages ag comm.)
24	1	Develop working relationship with Town Land Trust

The facilitator sums the scores for each of the ideas/issues to identify those ideas/issues which are highly rated by the group as a whole. The highest scores constitute the rank of most favored or highest priority group issues.

Example: AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION – Issues, Scores & Rank

RANK	SCORE	ISSUE
#1	35	(#2, #3, #4, #7) Develop and Finalize Stable Permit Application (Draft Exists) BOS Charge Commission to Finalize Equine: MGL How fits into Ag, State Res, Town Regs; How are Equine Operations regulated State and Town Research existing Best Management Practices i.e., # animal units per acre, nutrient management...
#2	25	(#8, #12) Develop Strong Working Relationships with Town Boards (ag comm. charge, roles, responsibilities...)
#3	20	(#14) Review and Draft Local Right to Farm By Law (*abutter notification) Prepare for Town Meeting
#4	15	(#5) Define agriculture and agricultural use for Town
#5	12	(#6, #10) Public Education A. Educate non-farm Residents – What Agriculture is, Neighbor Relations – Living Near a Farm, Exemptions... B. Educate Public about Trespassing Laws (how police???)
#6a	10	(#13) Inventory Lands, land use, and owners, protected unprotected (private and town-owned)
#6b	10	(#11, 15) Town Board Education A. Educate AgCom (re: ag definitions, Ch.61, laws, regs affecting ag and ag use...Fed, state and local) B. Educate Town Boards - Definition of Ag, how applies in town and in relation to Board activities and decision-making, ag exemptions Con Comm, BOH, BOS, Planning and staff
#7	8	(#20, #21) Farmers understand where to get technical assistance regarding waste/manure related issues Connect (Ag Comm and farmers) to technical assistance/resources , people and organizations re: BMPs, waster management, conservation planning...
#8	12	(#1, #9) Understand Zoning Laws, Wetland Laws affecting agricultural use: Define Wetlands and Ag Exemptions Research town Zoning Change (formerly entire town zoned ag – How was it changed, how does change affect ag, grandfathered? Property transfers?
#9	4	(#22) Improve Communication via Web: Navigate Federal, state, Regional services (GIS, planning, regulations, model bylaws)
#10	2	(Combines #16, #17) Encourage agriculture retention and development in town - Educate public about benefits of agriculture in Town and be proactive Be more engaged in planning and execution of Farm Festival (date change, cranberries define town historic character, Market ag as historic character, use to secure funds)
#11a	1	(#19) Survey farmer/grower Needs
#11b	1	(#23) Improve Towns ability to exercise right of first refusal when P&S signed on Ch 61 land (understand process used now, recommend process that engages ag comm.)
#11c	1	(#24) Develop working relationship with town Land Trust
#13		(#18) Develop “Circle of Friends” Residents involvement with Ag Comm activities

After the ranking has been reviewed – the first of the work plan development meetings adjourns.

Prior to convening the second meeting, the facilitator transfers all flip chart information into table format, emails and/or mails results of first meeting to all the participants. Prior to meeting #2 Tables are transferred onto flip charts.

AGENDA MEETING #2: ESTABLISHING GOALS, ACTIONS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND TIMELINES

The facilitator is responsible for preparing the room prior to the meeting. AgCom members should be seated so that they can see each other, the facilitator, and the walls where records of their discussions will be posted. The agenda, mission statement, and ranked issues should be written on a flip chart and hung on a wall.

The facilitator reviews the process that will be used for creating a work plan, reviews the agenda and planned outcomes for the second meeting.

Step 1: Establishing Goals

The facilitator provides handouts of tables and briefly reviews the work completed at meeting #1.

The participants are asked to convert each issue into a goal statement. A goal is a declaration of a desired end state. It specifies where you want to be at a specific point in the future. Effective goals should be written using the *SMART* goal method. SMART is an acronym that describes the five characteristics of a well-written goal: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

The facilitator reads each ranked issue out loud. Goals statements are recorded on flip chart.

Example:

ISSUE	GOAL STATEMENT
Develop and Finalize Stable Permit Application	Develop and Finalize Stable Permit Application by end of fiscal year
Develop Strong Working Relationships with Town Boards	Develop a strategy for creating Strong Working Relationships with Town Boards and begin implementing by November
Review and Draft Local Right to Farm By Law	Pass Local Right to Farm Bylaw @ Spring Town Meeting
Define agriculture and agricultural use for Town	Define agriculture and agricultural use for Town
Public Education A. Educate non-farm Residents B. Educate Public	Develop a public educate campaign targeted to educate the non farming public about the values and benefits of agriculture in the Community by January
Inventory Lands, land use, and owners, protected unprotected (private and town-owned)	Complete an inventory of agriculture in town by Spring Town Meeting

Step 2: Action Planning

Once the AgCom has created their mission statement and identified and prioritized their goals the next step is to create actions that outline how each of the goals will be accomplished. These actions are a list of specific steps that need to be accomplished to achieve a goal. Each action should identify the person responsible, the action to be taken, and a completion date.

An AgCom needs to be able to measure their successes (and understand their failures) and state clearly what is to be done, by when, and by whom. Action steps are a very important component of the plan. It is likely that there will be more actions listed in the early years of the planning than in future years. This is fine, and as the AgCom continues to plan, it will add goals and actions to accomplish in future years.

Using the goals recorded on the flip chart it is now time for action planning.

Procedure:

Use a similar process as in Meeting #1 to establish action items for each goal.

1. Facilitator presents a Goal statement:

Ex: **Pass Local Right to Farm Bylaw at Spring Town Meeting.** The facilitator asks the participants what actions are needed to achieve this goal.

2. Silent generation of ideas:

Each participant silently thinks of and writes down (3x5 card) as many responses/ideas as possible. Allow five to 10 minutes.

3. Record ideas/responses:

In turn, each participant reads aloud their action list and it is recorded on a flip chart for the group to see.

a. Continue until all ideas are depleted

b. At this point, discourage discussion, not even questions for clarification

c. Encourage “hitch hiking” i.e., expanding upon another’s statement. Ideas do not have to be from the participant’s written list

d. A participant may pass a turn and then add an idea at a subsequent turn

e. Discourage combining ideas from individuals unless they are exactly the same.

4. Group discussion:

After all action ideas are recorded, discuss the actions in turn for the purpose of clarification. The person who suggested the idea is given the opportunity to explain it further.

- Wording may be changed if the originator agrees

- Ideas are deleted only by unanimous agreement

- Restrict discussion to clarify meaning; the value or merit of ideas is not discussed

- This process provides an opportunity to present the logic behind an idea, disagreement or misunderstanding

5. **Duplicates are combined.** On the flip chart, cross out duplicate ideas, upon permission of the group.
6. **Place action items in logical order**
7. **Assign a “key” person to each action**
8. **Assign a completion date to each action**
9. **Repeat with each goal**
10. **Review the Work Plan and consider the following questions:**
 - Are the major action steps in the "right" order?
 - Are the completion dates realistic?
 - Are there critical starting points and interim steps that should be listed?
 - How will we know when we have accomplished this goal?
 - What will determine whether we have been successful?
 - What are some of the weaknesses and threats that will affect the AgCom's ability to complete each step? How can they be dealt with, and are additional steps needed in order to ensure the organization can accomplish its goals?
 - What resources (e.g., time, personnel, talent, and money) are needed to accomplish each step? Are these resources currently available to the AgCom or must they be acquired? If they must be acquired first, then they should be identified as such.

Writing the Plan

Immediately following Meeting #2 and prior to Meeting #3 the facilitator assembles the information into a coherent document that reflects the key decisions of the AgCom members. An example of the format, structure, and content of an AgCom Work Plan is presented here:

Example: 2006 CARVER AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION WORK PLAN

Mission: To represent the Town of Carver agricultural community and interests; facilitate and encourage the pursuit of agriculture in Carver; promote agricultural-based economic opportunities in the town; act as mediators, advocates, educators, and/or negotiators; act in an advisory capacity on farming issues for established town committees and departments; pursue all initiatives appropriate to creating a sustainable agricultural community; and encourage the pursuit of agriculture as a career opportunity and lifestyle.

GOAL	ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
A. Develop an Inventory of Agriculture in the town	1. Research available data: a. Contact Dartmouth AgCom (about the process they used), Assessors, office, MASSGIS, SRPEDD, Census, MA Dept. of Agricultural Resources, Farm Bureau... b. Collect and synthesize data on: Land in agriculture	G.G.-Committee Chair Seek grant funding for Goals A and B	3.01.06

<p>A. Cont.</p>	<p>Land use Owners, operators Permanently protected, CRs, APRs etc. Ch.61 land use Economic impact= Cost of community services, jobs, multiplier effect Benefits: open space, environment, historic and cultural</p> <p>2. Develop a Working Map and Database of Agriculture in Carver</p> <p>3. Update regularly</p>		
<p>B. Educate Residents of Community about: Farming Normal farm practices Living near a farm</p>	<p>1. Develop Educational Materials (Utilize inventory data) a. Fact Sheet/Flyer: Living Near a Farm b. Fact Sheet/Flyer: Normal Farming Practices & exemptions c. Develop “Farming 101” Cable Programming for community Seek Grant Funding to support development</p> <p>2. Distribute Materials & Provide Education a. Develop Distribution Plan b. Produce and Air Community Cable Programming c. Distribute Materials to Town Boards at their meetings d. Distribute Materials at Community events e. Post on Town Website f. Provide to legislators...</p>	<p>G.G. Committee Chair</p>	<p>7.01.06</p>
<p>C. Educate Residents of the Community about: the economic value of agriculture and the benefits provided by agriculture</p>	<p>1. Collect information (utilize inventory data) already available and organize data from communities “like” Carver. Contact American Farmland Trust</p> <p>2. Develop a brochure</p> <p>3. Distribute Materials: at Community Events: Old Home Days Merchants Edaville Railroad Post on Town Website</p>	<p>G.G. Committee Chair</p>	<p>7.01.06</p> <p>Distribution: throughout year</p>
<p>D. Develop a youth Education Strategy</p>	<p>1. Develop/Format Farming “101” Video for CCAT targeted toward children</p> <p>2. Provide opportunities for youth to work on farms</p> <p>3. Develop Hands-On Projects & Programs for youth Bog-in-a-Cup Seed germination Contact ag in the Classroom – access Work Plans Contact-Connect to Bristol Ag. HS; Connect with Scouts Connect to ongoing youth activities and investigate how ag comm. can assist.</p> <p>4. Organize and Conduct: a. Bog/Farm Tours b. Farm Education Days c. Provide for Seasonal Farm activities</p> <p>5. Revitalize 4-H in Carver a. Serve as supporters</p> <p>6. Link to Universities, TV, Press and Legislators</p>	<p>D.W.</p>	<p>1.1.07</p>
<p>E. Develop and Implement Strategies for Farmland Protection</p>	<p>Using Information from Inventory of Agriculture:</p> <p>1. Work with Town Departments and Boards to strategize for passage of Community Preservation Act (CPA) in FY '07 (town meeting '06)</p> <p>2. Work with American Farmland Trust (AFT) to develop presentation for all town boards, departments and citizens re: farmland protection methods and tools...</p> <p>3. Participate in making recommendations as the town pursues its right of first refusal on Ch. 61 land with P&S</p> <p>4. Serve as a catalysts for preservation of working farms/landscapes</p>	<p>D.W. T.P.</p>	<p>6.1.06</p>
<p>F. Provide Conflict Resolution Services</p>	<p>Work to resolve conflicts at earliest stages between: Neighbors and farmers Residents (community) and farmers</p>	<p>C.M.</p>	<p>9.1.06</p>

F. Cont.	<p>Town boards and farmers Farmers and farmers Residents (community) and ag industry (issues relate to helicopter use, noise, pumps, pesticide use, manure, odors...)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify AgCom member(s) to call when questions arise 2. Contact Dartmouth and Westport for their procedures 3. Develop Fact Sheet : Neighbor to Neighbor explain right to farm, exemptions, normal farming practices 4. Receive training in Conflict Resolution-Facilitation to resolve conflicts at earliest stages 5. Provide Conflict resolution facilitation when called upon (ag-related issues) 6. Provide education to public on Normal farming practices (cable, fact sheets and flyers) 		
G. Create Public Relations & Communications Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordinate information about and publicize agricultural related activities/events (farm markets, cranberry products etc) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promote agriculture at established functions (community events, harvest festivals...) 2. Develop a Website 3. Advocate/Educate Legislators 4. Develop/distribute and air quarterly cable programming and seasonal newsletters 	S.W.	9.01.06

Suggestion: Include a timeline for reviewing and updating the AgCom Work Plan

AGENDA MEETING #3: REVIEW COMPLETED WORK PLAN AND DISCUSSION

Steps:

1. Facilitator posts the final work plan on flip charts and provides hard copy handouts for each member
2. Review the mission statement, goals, actions, timelines and responsibilities
3. Discussion – remind members that this plan is a guide and should be updated when necessary
4. Facilitator provides Chair and/or Secretary with an electronic version of the work plan (disk/CD)
5. **Adopt the Plan:** The plan should be formally presented for adoption by the AgCom.

Recommendation from AgComs in southeastern Massachusetts:

Although your AgCom work plan may have many goals and actions, **focus your work on one or two at a time.** Achieve small successes, tackle “doable” actions that will empower members, gain visibility for the AgCom and inspire the confidence of town residents. When those are done, move to the next action to get sense of empowerment. Understand that there will be two steps forward, one backward, resulting in overall success with steady effort.

Reviewing and Revising the Work Plan

Once the AgCom has adopted its' work plan, the plan should be used.

Plan to check the progress on accomplishing the plan's goals and actions. Work plan review should be an important part of the AgCom's business on a regular basis.

AgCom members should bring the work plan to regular business meetings. Checkpoints for work plan review should occur at business meetings, perhaps every two or three months. The time for checking may vary with the nature of the actions. Time should be allotted on the agenda for review of mission, goals and actions with updates provided by those identified as responsible for the actions.

The AgCom will need to ask and answer, "What are the most important issues?" and "How shall we respond?" Responses to these questions should be used to update the work plan to make sure it is timely and relevant. Issues and priorities may change. The AgCom should discuss these changes. Revisions to the work plan, priority goals, actions and timelines should be approved by the members and recorded onto the plan.

Record progress.

Document success.

Revise as needed.

Agricultural Commission Work Plan Examples:

WESTPORT

Westport Agricultural Commission Goals for 2005-2006 (draft)

Mission: To facilitate the pursuit of agriculture in Westport, and to promote agricultural-based opportunities in town.

GOAL	TASK	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TIME FRAME
I. Maintain Improved Relations with Town Boards			
A.	Send monthly meeting minutes to BoH, ConCom, BoS	BH	Monthly
B.	Annual Report	GC and BH	End of calendar year
C.	Mediation	All	Ongoing
II. Improve AgCom Operations and Communication with Farm Community			
A.	Dinner for Friends/Advisors	EF	Fall-Winter
B.	Farmers' Dinner with Dartmouth	SR	Winter
III. Advocate for Farmer's Issues and Needs			
A.	Rethink "Living Near a Farm" pamphlet	Agenda item, then Friends if change	September meeting
B.	Explore possibilities of farmstead ad valorem tax relief	Agenda item BH to invite Assessor.	October meeting
C.	Explore effective communication of estate planning issues	Agenda item Trip to lead discussion	November meeting
D.	Explore building permit fee relief	Agenda item EF to invite Bldg Inspector	December meeting
E.	Investigate joining Farm Bureau as an AgCom	BH	August
IV. Explore specific value-added products and marketing vehicle for farmers and the region			
A.	Steering group exploration	Group reps: BH, RR, KS, EdF	Fall 2005
B.	AgCom feedback and involvement. Go/no-go decision	All	By December 2005

HARWICH

Harwich Agricultural Commission 2005 Work Plan

Mission: To represent the Town of Harwich's agricultural community and interests; facilitate and encourage the pursuit of agriculture in Harwich; promote agricultural-based opportunities; act as mediators, advocates, educators and/or negotiators in an advisory capacity on farming issues for established town committees and departments; work for the preservation of agricultural lands currently owned by the Town; and pursue all initiatives appropriate to creating a sustainable agricultural community.

GOAL	ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
A. Develop & Finalize Stable Permit Application	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organize Stable Permit Application Sub Committee 2. Collect existing/current applications/process info/resource materials <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contact Harwich BOH- Obtain latest application/draft application b. Contact Middleboro Ag Comm c. Contact Cape and Islands Farm Bureau County Model Application <p style="text-align: center;">or</p>	TD -Chair LC BC	

<p>A. Cont.</p>	<p>d. Contact Bill Clark, Extension (County Model) (Model draft due ~ April 15)</p> <p>e. Interview Existing stable Owners And others in Equine</p> <p>3. Research BOH and Zoning regs relative to paddocks, fencing, structures, setbacks...</p> <p>4. Draft Harwich Stable Permit Application</p> <p>5. Review Draft with : MDAR General Counsel: MA Farm Bureau: BOH Others?</p> <p>6. Revise accordingly</p> <p>7. Conduct Public Hearing: Prepare for Public Education Event, Fully describe intent, Describe ag in the town, describe the equine industry in town, need for application revision, benefits, research supporting the information requirements in the application</p> <p>8. Further Revisions?</p> <p>9. Stable Permit Application Adoption by BOH</p>		<p>May 1</p>
<p>B. Develop Strong Working Relationships with Town Boards</p>	<p>1. Develop an Agricultural Commission Fact Sheet (Mission, Members, Work Plan etc.)</p> <p>2. Access Town Board Meeting Rosters and Membership bring to March 16th Meeting (John)</p> <p>3. At March 16th meeting secure ag comm. member volunteers to attend board meetings (get on agenda)</p> <p>4a. Prepare presentation language so that each member is delivering the same message (who you are, benefits of communication, how best to communicate among boards and members)</p> <p>4b. Prepare examples of ag related situations where the ag comms involvement would be beneficial, describe best ways to communicate...)</p> <p>5. Assign Ag Comm liaison for each Board/Committee</p> <p>6. Begin Meeting attendance in April BOH, Planning, Board, Con. Comm., Assessors, Building, ZB of Appeals, BOS ...</p>	<p>AH-Chair JS</p>	<p>March 16</p> <p>March 29</p> <p>April & May</p>
<p>C. Inventory Ag Lands, Use, Owners</p>	<p>1. Contact Ag Comms that have done this to find out how they collected information, where they got the information, what was the final form of the information (maps, data base...)and how they have been able to use the information</p> <p>Dartmouth Middleboro</p> <p>2. Benefits of Inventory: Use to develop Public Relations Strategy Ag Comm knowledgeable about those they serve, understand who is involved in agriculture, where they are, types of</p>		

C. Cont.	<p>agriculture, acreages, economic benefits. Information can be used to survey ag operators about needs, issues, to mail/email newsletters, have them access websites, resources ...communication and technical transfer...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Complete Inventory 4. Develop Method for regular updates 5. Data valuable during Development of Town Right to Farm Bylaw and in Public Education Strategy for Right to Farm Bylaw Town Meeting vote. 		
D. Pass Town Right to Farm Bylaw at 2006 Town Meeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collect existing Right to arm Bylaws (Dartmouth, others?) and State Model Right to Farm Bylaw. 2. Compare, review, discuss, deliberate in detail 3. Draft Bylaw for Harwich 4. Develop and Implement Public Education Strategy draw on contacts from inventory, discussions with town boards...Identify benefits to the town, why people should care. What you want them to do (vote for...) 5. Get placed on Town Warrant 6. Present at Town Meeting 	AH Chair Entire commission	
E. Develop a Public Relations/Education Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Draw on Elements of Public Relations/Education Efforts with Town Boards and Right to farm to develop strategies for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Enhancing Farm-Neighbor Relations b. Addressing Trespassing Issues c. Others... 		

PLYMPTON

**PLYMPTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
WORK PLAN 2006**

Mission:

- *To preserve and promote agricultural-based economic opportunities in Plympton*
- *To act as advocates, educators, mediators and/or negotiators on issues relating to farming*
- *To work for the preservation of agricultural lands*
- *To pursue initiatives related to creating a sustainable agriculture community*

GOAL	ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
A. AGRICULTURAL LAND PROTECTION (41) And RURAL CHARACTER PROTECTION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PASS COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Collect information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The act • What have other towns done or are doing: Westport, Duxbury, Carver, Dartmouth, Rehoboth b. AgCom makes decision to sponsor or support CPA c. AgCom participate on CPA Committee and assist with drafting article (R. B represents AgCom) d. Submit Article to BOS e. Develop Public Education Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist CPA Committee with organizing a Public Information Meeting • Draft letters and send to all town boards and 	RB RN AgCom RB CPA Comm and AgCom	ASAP By March 27 By March 27

<p>A. AGRICULTURAL LAND PROTECTION And RURAL CHARACTER PROTECTION (continued)</p>	<p>committees: explaining CPA, Benefits and request their support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend Town Board and Committee Meetings – Introduction – Meet AgCom, Mission, Work Plan priorities CPA benefits, request support Develop Flyers for handouts, town meeting etc. <p>f. Implement Education Strategy</p> <p>g. Present/Support at Town Meeting</p> <p>h. Upon passage of CPA – See that farm-friendly members are appointed to the CPC – Community Preservation Committee.</p> <p>2. PASS RIGHT TO FARM BYLAW</p> <p>a. Collect existing Right to Farm Bylaws (Dartmouth, Rehoboth, Westport etc.) and State Model Right to Farm Bylaw.</p> <p>b. Compare, review, discuss, deliberate in detail</p> <p>c. Draft Bylaw for Plympton and Submit to BOS for Town Warrant</p> <p>d. Develop and Implement Public Education Strategy \</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider “piggybacking” strategy with CPA education campaign Organize a Public Information Meeting Draft letters and send to all town boards and committees: explaining RTF, Benefits and request their support. Attend Town Board and Committee Meetings – Introduction – Meet AgCom, Mission, Work Plan priorities RTF benefits, request support Develop Flyers for handouts, town meeting etc. <p>e. Present at Town Meeting</p>	<p>CPA Comm & BRB and RN</p> <p>All AgCom members</p> <p>CPA Comm & AgCom</p> <p>RB & AgCom w/ BOS</p> <p>LS</p> <p>LS</p> <p>LS</p> <p>LS And AgCom RB</p>	<p>By April 15</p> <p>April – May 17</p> <p>May 17</p> <p>From March until appointments are made</p> <p>March 15</p> <p>March 15</p> <p>March 27</p> <p>April – May 17 May 17</p>
<p>B. DEVELOP STRONG WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TOWN BOARDS & STAFF (35)</p>	<p>1. EDUCATE TOWN BOARDS, COMMITTEES AND STAFF: PLANNING BOARD, CONSERVATION COMMISSION, BOARD OF HEALTH, BOARD OF SELECTMEN, FINANCE COMMITTEE etc. on:</p> <p>The Value And Benefits Of Agriculture And Farmlands To The Community</p> <p>a. Develop and Implement Education Strategies for Educating Boards about the AgCom, CPA and</p>	<p>RB RL RN RP</p>	<p>By May 17th and Then meet with boards throughout the year</p>

	<p>Right to Farm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make arrangements for AgCom members to attend Board and Committee meetings • Prepare Introductory letter and copies of AgCom mission and Work Plan (include letters/flyers re: CPA & RTF) • Attend Town Board and Committee Meetings – Introduction – Meet AgCom, Mission, Work Plan Priorities, RTF benefits, request support • Discuss the interest of the AgCom in knowing when they are considering issues that affect agriculture in town, and that the AgCom would like to be informed of those situations in a positive advisory capacity • Make arrangements for how the boards/commissions will communicate with each other. <p>The Natural Resource, Environmental Benefits of Agricultural Lands.</p> <p>The Environmental Impacts Of Farmland, and Lands Associated</p> <p>With Farmland, Loss To Non Farm Uses. Ex: Reduced Stormwater Storage And Infiltration, Increase Runoff Velocities And Volume, Resource Fragmentation – Wildlife Impacts Etc.</p> <p>How Land Use Changes Affect The Resource Base For Agriculture</p> <p>2. UNDERSTAND/RESEARCH/IMPROVE GUIDANCE/PROCESS USED FOR DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS FROM PROPOSAL STAGE THROUGH CONSTRUCTION AND STABILITZATION (PROCESS, BOARDS, AND PERMITS)</p>		
<p>C. ESTABLISH A CONFLICT RESOLUTION/ MEDIATION PROCESS (17)</p>	<p>1. ESTABLISH A PROCESS FOR: NEIGHBOR-FARMER CONFLICT RESOLUTION; TOWN BOARD – AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION CONFLICT RESOLUTION FARMER-FARMER CONFLICT RESOLUTION</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Attend Conflict Management Training for AgComs (March 18th Regional AgCom Gathering. Collect information on processes used in other towns (Dartmouth, Westport, Harwich...) Develop process for Plympton. Identify 2 Contact People Publicize: Inform farmers of service and process Inform town boards, committees and staff of service and process 	<p>RB LS</p> <p>RB LS</p>	<p>March 18</p> <p>September '06</p>

<p>D. UNDERSTAND ANIMAL KEEPING GUIDELINES (includes rights and responsibilities of horse owners, horse farms, stable operators etc.) (22)</p>	<p>1. DEVELOP LIVESTOCK BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE (BMP) GUIDELINES (emphasis on horses)</p> <p>a. Organize a committee – committee provides updates on progress at monthly AgCom meetings</p> <p>b. Research and gather existing guidelines from other towns, state, federal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manure Management • Fencing • Animal Disposal • Building Placement <p>c. Draft BMP Guidelines</p> <p>d. Present to Board of Health</p> <p>e. BOH and AgCom make guidelines available to animal owners</p> <p>f. Develop and implement and Education Campaign re:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of guidelines • Content of guidelines 	<p>RB & LS Co-Chairs</p> <p>Members: GB PR GB</p> <hr/>	<p>January 1, 2007</p> <p>January 1 2007</p> <p>Throughout 2007...</p>
<p>E. INVENTORY AGRICULTURE IN PLYMPTON</p>	<p>1. COMPLETE AN INVENTORY AGRICULTURE IN PLYMPTON</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers, contact information • Farmland (acreages, land use, Ch 61, protected, etc.) • Types of farms <p>a. Collect information on how other towns have completed Inventories: Dartmouth, Carver – First Pioneer presentation March 18</p>	<p>RL</p>	<p>January 1, 2007</p>
<p>F. FARMER EDUCATION (12)</p>	<p>1. COLLECT AND PROVIDE INFORMATION TO FARMERS ON RESOURCES, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THEM (Local, State Fed, Etc.)</p> <p>Technical assistance: natural resource conservation, stewardship production practices, pesticide application and management, business assistance</p> <p>Fund Availability: grants, loans</p> <p>Labor issues:</p>		
<p>G. EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY ABOUT AGRICULTURE (1)</p>	<p>1. EDUCATE THE NONFARMING PUBLIC ABOUT FARMERS RIGHTS</p> <p>2. PROMOTE THE VALUE OF HAVING AGRICULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY</p>		

H. HELP FARMERS MARKET THEIR PRODUCTS	A. CREATE AN AWARENESS OF FARM PRODUCTS AVAILABLE IN TOW		
I. RESEARCH AND UNDERSTAND FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS THAT RESTRICT PRODUCTION OR AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS ENTERPRISES			