

CAFOs

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations

Role of the Extension Educator on the Plan Commission



GENERAL ISSUES

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To view the entire series, visit <http://www.ansc.purdue.edu/CAFO/>.

Introduction

Indiana plan commission members make decisions related to requests by livestock operators who want to build or expand current livestock facilities. The foundation for those decisions is based on a comprehensive plan and a zoning ordinance that have been approved by both the plan commission and local elected officials. The landowner must request any change to the zoning designation by completing local forms, meeting publication deadlines, and participating in a public hearing.

During the hearing, a landowner presents the case for a change in zoning or variance from the zoning regulations. Those who are opposed to a change will have an opportunity to present their concerns and ask questions.

The role of the Agricultural & Natural Resources (ANR) Educator as a plan commission member is to help plan for the orderly development of the county as an advisor and voting member in regard to the changing land use in that county. It is the job of the plan commission, and the ANR Educator as a member, to act as an impartial, unbiased decision making public body to make decisions based on what is best for the health, safety, and welfare of all residents. Extension ANR Educators bring expertise of the broader areas of agriculture and natural resources and provide insight into the impact on these two areas when there are proposed changes in land use and county growth. As a full member of the plan commission, the ANR Educator must serve the board by voting on issues, serving on committees, and taking

leadership roles on the plan commission as needed.

Three Types of Commissions

Plan commissions in Indiana were created by law. There are three types: Advisory (County), Area, and Metropolitan. In counties where there is a County (Advisory) Plan Commission, the Agricultural and Natural Resources (ANR) Extension Educator is required by law (Indiana Code 36-7-4-208) to serve on this plan commission. If the locality adopts an Area

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Plan Commission, the state code describes an option for the county to appoint either the ANR Educator or the County Surveyor to the Area Plan Commission. When serving on the County Plan Commission, the ANR Educator is one of nine members of that county board, and one of six or more members when serving on the Area Plan Commission. A Metropolitan Plan Commission does not designate a position for the ANR Educator, but Educators are encouraged to serve on the Metropolitan Plan Commission if asked to do so by that board.

There are several benefits to the state-wide network of Purdue Extension Educators who serve on plan commissions. The knowledge gained from serving on the plan commission enhances an Educator's ability and opportunity to develop educational programs for the public and elected officials. The information received from the public about their concerns and interest in land use issues helps the Educators understand local interests and growth. Because of the connections Educators have with other staff across Indiana and the nation, they have an opportunity to learn about similar situations and solutions that may have been addressed in other counties. This provides an opportunity to work directly with and in support of public officials. It also helps local officials to see the value of the Educator's contribution to critical issues.

An Unbiased Professional

ANR Educators do not serve on a plan commission as an advocate, nor should they be perceived as an advocate, for any one individual or interest group. As knowledgeable people on the broader agricultural and natural resources of the counties, they help make sound decisions about the best use of these resources during the planning process. It is the job of the ANR Educator to know and understand the county master comprehensive plan, the ordinances of the county,

and to work within the parameters of the ordinances. In addition, ANR Educators have an educational responsibility to explain to individuals and the general public the overall process that the plan commission uses to become better informed and be active participants in the planning process. As a Purdue employee who has access to research-based information and facts, the Educator provides accurate information and resources to the commission as a part of the decision-making process.

Conflict Management Assistance

To assist Educators in this critical role, Purdue Extension is committed to professional development for the ANR Educators who serve on plan commissions. They can participate in seminars and training sessions conducted by leading state and national planning personnel. In addition, specific educational information about land use issue is continually being developed for their use. Legal counsel with liability protection is available for the Educators.

The ANR Educator's role goes beyond voting and the planning process. Many ANR Educators have been trained in facilitation and conflict management and can help commissions move through controversial issues. Purdue ANR staff can help elected officials, plan commission members, and state agency staff members enhance their knowledge regarding land use issues.

The Indiana legal requirement that ANR Educators serve on plan commissions is unique. As a result, they are able to help the public improve their awareness and knowledge of land use issues, understand the role of local government in land use decision making, provide information on specific topics such as urban sprawl and farmland preservation, and contribute to the process by which the plan commission operates.

For more information and resources, visit www.ces.purdue.edu/anr/landuse

