

Community Guidance to Maintain Working Farms & Forests

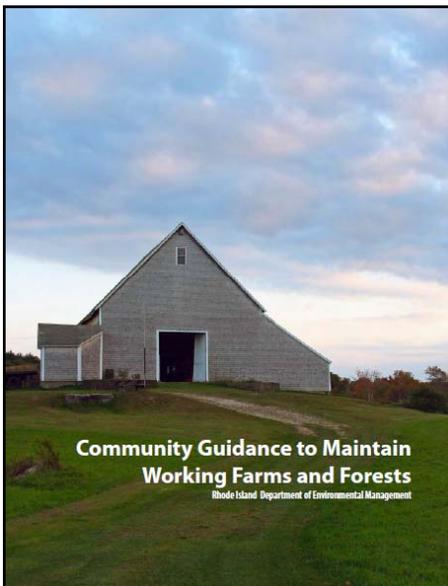
Why is the guidance needed?

Since the advent of zoning, communities have segregated commercial and residential uses into distinct districts. Most business uses are precluded in a residential zone. As a result, commercial activities are directed to arterial highways where automobile-dominated strip development creates traffic problems and replaces scenic views with parking lots. Meanwhile, large landowners who historically were able to use their land for a variety of businesses can no longer do so – hampering their ability to make a living for themselves or create jobs for other people in the community. For many landowners, splitting off a few house lots from time to time becomes the only way to keep up with expenses.



The economic pressures on large landowners, combined with the restrictions of traditional zoning, contribute to a haphazard, sprawling pattern of development that is often at odds with a town's goals to protect rural character and quality of life while encouraging appropriate economic development. Moreover, it has been well documented that the costs to provide community services to residential development is much more expensive than maintaining working farms and forests.

What does the guidance do?



The purpose of the guidance is to help towns provide economic incentives for large landowners to preserve their farms and forests from being subdivided into house lots. The focus of this effort is to identify appropriate business uses of farm and forest lands, and to explore how towns might encourage such activities through changes in planning policies, zoning and other regulations. The primary objectives include:

- > Identifying business uses that will help maintain the viability of our farms and forests.
- > Developing performance standards for these business activities that will allow them to coexist within residential zones.
- > Crafting regulatory guidance that communities can use to shape local ordinances.

How does the guidance work?

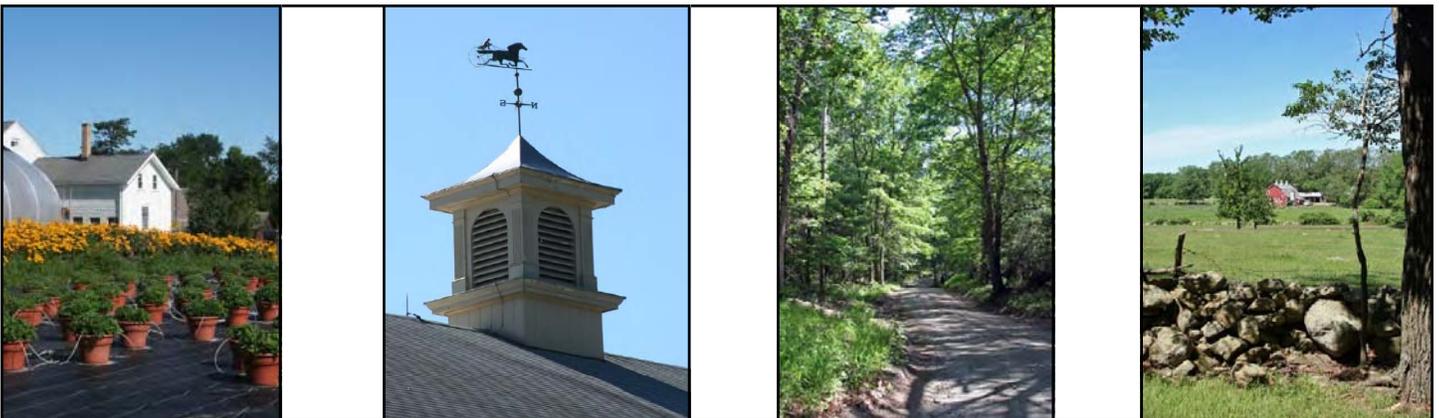
The guidance represents a performance-based approach to local land use regulation. Therefore the guidance relies less on **what the uses are**, but more on **how they perform** on the particular site and the context of the existing neighborhood. To implement this approach, the guidance follows four basic steps:



- 1) **Eligibility:** Based on the definition of a “farm lot” or a “forest lot”, is the property owner eligible to participate in small business development?
- 2) **Allowed Use:** Categories of uses are provided (e.g. on-site retail; personal service business; etc.) Providing these broader categories is consistent with a performance-based approach and will allow communities to get away from how to classify very specific uses (i.e. “What is it?”) and focus more on the potential impacts to the neighborhood (i.e. “How does it perform?”).
- 3) **Classification:** Once a property owner determines that he or she can potentially perform the desired use, the use must be “classified”. A series of use intensity thresholds is provided to determine the proper classification for the proposed use. Uses may be ranked from “Class I” (least intense) to “Class IV” (most intense).
- 4) **Applicable Standards:** Once a property owner knows the use is allowable *and* the intensity classification, he or she must build and/or operate the use in accordance with the performance standards associated with each classification.

For a copy of the guidance go to:

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bpoladm/suswshed/pdfs/farmfor.pdf>



For questions or to schedule a training in your community contact

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