

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD - Talking points

DISCUSSION POINTS FOR THE BOROUGH AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD
RECOMMENDING THE ADOPTION OF A NEW **OPTIONAL** TITLE 23 CHAPTER ALLOWING
LIMITED SUBDIVISION OF AGRICULTURAL PARCELS WITHIN SPECIFIED CONDITIONS TO
SUPPORT INCREASED AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY, PRODUCTION, AND SUCCESSION

SECTION 1: PURPOSE AND INTENT OF THE NEW CHAPTER

The intent of this program is to:

- **Create opportunities for new and beginning farmers** by allowing existing land owners to divide their farm units one time (or one additional time) up to four parcels not less than 10 acres, for others to buy or lease, making more agricultural land available to purchase;
- **Encourage agricultural productivity on smaller acreage**, reflecting modern agricultural practices whereby increased farming is happening on smaller parcels;
- **Support aging farmers** by creating a way they can separate and sell smaller portions of their land for income or retirement security;
- **Encourage and conserve the long-term agricultural viability** of lands within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, with de minimis loss of agricultural land.

SECTION 2: CURRENT REASONING

WHEREAS, agricultural land in a Borough ag program (Title 13, 15, or 23) may not be divided creating parcels of less than 40 acres;

WHEREAS, existing agricultural operations are experiencing generational transition challenges, including aging farm operators and barriers to entry for new and beginning farmers, including limited available farmland; and

WHEREAS, there is a growing need to offer flexibility that:

- enable land sales or leases of parcels smaller than 40-acres while maintaining agricultural productivity; and
- encourage smaller-scale, modern agricultural operations consistent with current market practices; and
- supports farm succession planning and financial sustainability.

- **WHEREAS**, allowing limited, controlled subdivision of agricultural land with covenants can increase access to farmland while preserving long-term agricultural use; and

WHEREAS, safeguards are necessary to prevent development of non-ag activity, loss of productive soils, and conversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural uses;

SECTION 3: PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AND STRUCTURE

1. Participation shall be **voluntary** and initiated at the request of the property owner.
 2. Eligible agricultural parcels may be subdivided:
 - Into a **maximum of four (4) total parcels**;
 - With each resulting parcel measuring **not less than ten (10) acres**.
 3. This subdivision option shall be a **one-time election per original farm unit**.
 4. Upon participation, the **entire farm unit and all resulting parcels** shall be subject to the provisions of the new Title 23 chapter.
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SECTION 4: REQUIRED AGRICULTURAL COVENANTS

Participation shall require recording of binding covenants, including:

1. **Continued Agricultural Use**
 - The property owner shall agree that all parcels remain in **active, productive agricultural use**.
2. **Limit on Non-Productive Status**
 - Agricultural land shall not remain fallow or non-productive for more than **two (2) consecutive years**, unless expressly approved in writing by:
 - Borough Land Management,
 - Borough Manager, or
 - The Borough Assembly.

3. Minimum Assessed Value Floor

- Agricultural land enrolled in the program shall be assessed at a value **no less than \$750 per acre** [land only—discuss amount/acre and improvement assessment criteria] and remain consistent with borough-wide agricultural land valuation policies and future adjustments by the Assessor.

4. Annual Proof of Agricultural Activity

- Property owners shall submit **annual documentation** demonstrating agricultural productivity, including:
 - Federal Schedule F,
 - Schedule C, or
 - Other documentation deemed acceptable by the Borough Assessor.

5. Non-Compliance and Reversion

- If a parcel remains out of compliance [as determined by periodic Borough inspection or documentation] for more than **[two (2)] years**:
 - The agricultural use valuation discount shall be revoked; and
 - The property shall revert to full **fair market value assessment**, to prevent financial benefit with non-compliance.

6. Farm Plan Requirement [Discuss who will review & approve farm plan: Ag Board, Land Mgt, Soil Conservation, etc.]

- Owners must submit a farm plan for borough review outlining:
 - Intended agricultural uses
 - Operational approach with site map
 - Land management / stewardship
 - Any significant changes – submit new farm plan for review
 - Owners shall sign an agreement stating they understand and will comply with all provisions of the new Title 23 program.
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SECTION 5: DEVELOPMENT LIMITATIONS AND LAND USE PROTECTIONS

To preserve agricultural integrity and prevent misuse:

- **Impervious Surface Limitations** [Discuss limits (percentage, acreage, home size limits, etc.)]
- The Borough should establish reasonable limits on **impervious surfaces**, including:
 - Residential structures;
 - Paving and driveways;
 - Barns and ancillary buildings.
- Such limits should ensure agricultural use remains the **primary function** of the land.

2. Anti-Speculation Measures

- Covenants and deeds to restrict agricultural land from residential subdivision use;
- Restrict against conversion of farmland into non-agricultural developments.

3. Use Prioritization

- Residential and non-agricultural improvements shall remain **secondary and incidental** to agricultural production.