

The Town Clerk's Office: A Wealth of Useful Land Information

Zoning: While Vermont law exempts certain agricultural practices from local zoning restrictions, zoning bylaws in some towns set aside areas for uses other than agriculture. Each town in Vermont has different zoning laws, and some towns have no zoning. The town office can confirm whether or not there are zoning laws. Zoning can give you a sense of how land is used nearby a parcel you are looking at, and how friendly an area might be towards farming. It can also help you identify what kinds of issues related to nuisance laws a farm in that area might encounter.

Current Title/ Ownership: Changes in land ownership for every piece of land in a town are "listed" or recorded in publicly available records in every Vermont town. Researching these records can reveal who or what entity currently owns the property, the history of transactions or changes involving the property, its geographical delineation, and any easements that exist on the property.

Easements: These legal restrictions on the use of the property are documented in town records, kept chronologically. It may be time consuming to sift through multiple books to search for the complete picture, but can be worth it, considering the details that can be revealed. For example, the record of a right-of-way through the property that a power company bought 70 years ago might be the only way to determine how many feet on either side of the power line is included in the right-of-way on the property. Building farm infrastructure or planting perennials within this right-of-way might be a costly mistake.

Taxes: Town offices keep tax maps and provide property tax rates. Property taxes depend on area property values, whether the land has been developed (residential housing, buildings, etc), and whether it is enrolled in the state's Use Value and Appraisal Program. The town clerk or lister can provide assistance with pulling together these details. The State of Vermont also levies a one-time "Property Transfer Tax" on all changes in property ownership. The buyer is responsible paying the fee, which ranges from 0.5% to 1.25% of the purchase price, depending on various criteria.

The information in this bulletin was compiled by Ben Waterman, who served as land access coordinator for UVM Extension's Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

This fact sheet is part of a suite of resources available through the **University of Vermont Extension's New Farmer Project.**

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