

School's farm plan hinges on zoning

● Bath councilors want to consider the impact that Hyde School's proposal may have on plans for a bypass road.

From staff reports

BATH — Hyde School's proposal to create a working farm at its High Street campus has been put on hold while the city considers the consequences of a zoning change that could adversely affect its plans for commercial development there.

The City Council tabled a request Wednesday night from Hyde School officials to rezone commercial land near Hyde's soccer fields to allow for agricultural uses.

Councilors will take up the proposal on Oct. 3 after the city has had time to evaluate its impact on plans to someday build a business parkway that would connect Route 1 with Route 209. Such a bypass would have to go across athletic fields behind the private, boarding school.

The city envisions a bypass lined with commercial uses capable of bringing in new property tax revenue. It would also be

a way to relieve downtown traffic congestion created by shift changes at Bath Iron Works.

"It doesn't make sense to change the zone now and then have to change it back again at some point in the future," City Planner James Upham said.

Last month, the Planning Board recommended the Hyde School property be rezoned from commercial to low density residential, a permanent change that would allow the school to create a one-acre organic farm behind its campus. However, Upham believes an arrangement that would allow Hyde to have its farm while preserving the commercial zone can be worked out.

"We should keep as much commercial zoning as possible, but I don't think we should have a bypass going through the middle of the Hyde School campus," Councilor Edwin A. Rogers said.

Upham said the exact alignment of the bypass has not been determined.

Eric Stirling, Hyde's assistant director of education, and Carl Young, the school's financial director, hope the city will find a way to accommodate their plans.

They want to create a one-acre organic farm that would be used to teach students

character — one of Hyde's guiding principles — and the environment. Stirling said the farm, which might include a shed, would benefit all of the school's 235 students.

"It would be a great way to teach kids about work ethic and responsibility. It would also teach them humility, that all things in this world are not under their control all the time," he said.

In other business, the council unanimously approved a liquor license and special amusement permit for Smitty's at 166 Front St.

Paul and Emily Freeman of Bowdoinham plan to open a family-oriented restaurant and bar at the former Harbor Lite Cafe. The bar, which was also known as Shooters, closed in May. Over the years, the Harbor Lite developed a reputation as being a trouble spot where brawls and disturbances were common, but Emily Freeman, in an interview before the council meeting, said she wants to change the bar's image.

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