

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 8, 2017

3:30 PM

2nd floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Sarah Wilton, Vice Chair
Charles Daloz
Mark Florenz
Megan Straughen
Aaron Moody

Staff Present:

Michele Chalice, Planning

Members Not Present:

Councilor Bettina Chadbourne

1) Call to Order

Vice Chair Wilton called the meeting to order at 3:35 PM.

2) Approve November 17, 2016 Minutes

Vice Chair Wilton said that there was question raised at the last meeting about the amount of locally sourced food in Cheshire County. She suggested that a statement from the Historical Society on this issue be added to the Minutes for a clarification. She said that according to the Historical Society's report on farm trends in the 21st Century, 8.8 percent of the food sales in Cheshire County are made directly to local communities, a much higher percentage than the national average. She said that trend in Cheshire County may be the result of local farms being too small to sell products to larger markets.

Mr. Florenz made a motion to approve the minutes of November 17, 2017, with the additional statements proposed by Chair Wilton. It was seconded by Mr. Daloz, and was passed by unanimous vote of the Commission.

3) Election of Officers

Mr. Florenz asked for an explanation of the roles of those who serve in the chair and vice chair positions. Mrs. Chalice said that the chair's duties include: moderating and conducting meetings, assisting with setting meeting agendas, working with staff liaison to interpret the minutes of

meetings to ensure that the agenda reflects the Commission's intentions for the next meeting. She said the vice chair fills in when the chair is not available.

Mr. Florenz made a motion to nominate Vice Chair Wilton as chair, which was seconded by Mr. Daloz and approved by unanimous vote.

Mr. Florenz made a motion to nominate Mr. Daloz as vice chair, which was seconded by Ms. Straughen and approved by unanimous vote.

4) Monadnock Co-op's Approach

Ms. Straughen, Sustainability Coordinator for the Monadnock Food Co-op, presented a report to the committee on the Food Co-op education and sustainability efforts. She stated that the co-op is working with six "end statements," listed in a document she submitted to the committee.

In response to a question from Mrs. Chalice about how the co-op reaches the most vulnerable citizens, including farmers, Ms. Straughen identified the following programs:

- Healthy Food for All, a 10 percent discount on all purchases for people in low income households who qualify for various federal and state programs (such as SNAP, WIC, or Social Security) or have a letter qualifying need from the Community Kitchen. An estimated \$12,000 was the amount of discount that went out to people using this program last year.
- Membership for All, a fund supported by donations from members of the community intended to help anyone who cannot afford the \$200 investment in the co-op. Under this program, the fund contributes \$125 of the \$200 investment.
- Food selection, an effort focused on providing healthy food at a range of prices, by making available bulk food staples and produce, and by offering "Good, Better, Best" spectrum of food at a range of prices and also a line of food known as Co-op Basics.
- Truckload Sale in the spring and fall, offering caseloads of products that can be purchased at lower prices.
- Educational workshops on a variety of topics (such as canning, fermenting and seed-starting.) Also a series of demonstrations by Keene State College Dietetic Interns called "Delightfully Healthy" focusing on seasonally appropriate, healthy food that is relatively low-cost. Informational Brochures are made available that explain ways to lower food bills.
- Robust donation programs such as the Round-Up Change Program, which last year amounted to \$17,000 for non-profits, and the Twin Pines Cooperative Fund, which w operates like an endowment, making investments locally in non-profits.
- Support for local farms, such as the Monadnock Co-op Farm Fund, allowing farmers to apply for grants to be used on infrastructure improvements geared toward increasing wholesale production. Also, the co-op diverts food waste to farmers for pig food or chicken feed.

Chair Wilton expressed appreciation for the diversity of the co-op's programs and suggested the co-op reach out to churches and other community groups, informing them of the co-op's programs. Ms. Straughen said the co-op is always looking for opportunities to collaborate with groups in the community, but that more might be done through churches.

Chair Wilton noted that the co-op's approach to democratizing the food system focused on the consumer, and she suggested it consider ways of working toward democratization on the producer and employee sides of the system.

Ms. Straughen said the co-op is a member-owner co-op, not a worker-owner co-op, but noted that the employees can be member owners. She explained that the co-op shared profits through patronage refunds, and this is the first year that it has reached a level of profitability allowing it to provide refunds to its members. Under the system, she said, a percentage of the profit from member sales is returned to members. She said the total being refunded is \$30,000, or \$15 per member on average, which represents 20 percent of the total co-op's profit derived from member owners for last year.

In response from a question from Mr. Daloz about coop's interactions with the rest of the community, Ms. Straughen mentioned her involvement on the Agriculture Commission and on the CCP Commission, and the co-op's involvement with community events, such as the Earth Day Fair.

Mr. Florenz raised a question about the co-op's relationship with the farmer's market, adding that the Ag Commission would like to see both organizations be successful. Ms. Straughen said the co-op would like to find opportunities to collaborate with the farmer's market and would be open to suggestions from the Commission. Mr. Florenz pointed out that the farmer's market is facing challenges and might benefit if there could be cooperation between it and the co-op.

Chair Wilton suggested holding a joint meeting with representatives from the co-op and the farmer's market to find ways that the Commission could support both entities. She mentioned that the CSA farmer with whom she does business contends that the farmer's market and co-op in Brattleboro both thrive.

Ms. Straughen invited the Ag Commission come up with a list of ideas for collaboration as a starting point in discussion with the farmer's market and the co-op.

~~Mr. Daloz suggested the Commission table the subject of the farmer's market for informational purposes.~~

Ms. Straughen stated in conclusion that the co-op is attempting to find ways to get the word out that the co-op is a good choice for a wide range of shoppers, and not primarily for the more affluent shopper.

5) Good Chicken Neighbor Brochure Status & Chicken Photos

Regarding the plan to develop a brochure on raising chickens, Chair Wilton said she synthesized questions for which the commission needed answers in order to proceed. The issues she mentioned that require further consideration at the commission's next meeting, included the cost of producing the brochures, procedures for getting approval for the brochure, and task of gathering material such as photos of local chicken raising.

Dawn Kopczynski, a Keene resident who raises chickens in her yard, gave a presentation on chicken raising in the city. Mrs. Kopczynski explained that her family has been raising four chickens in her 75-foot by 150-foot yard (about ¼ of an acre) for the past six years.

She mentioned the following issues associated with raising chickens:

- The need to avoid overgrazing the land – a minimum of 10 square feet of space per chicken is suggested.
- The desirability of stipulating that no roosters be allowed because of the noise.
- The ongoing and consistent requirements for care and feeding, similar to those required with having a pet.
- The special needs for the maintenance of dry, draught-free, clean hutch.
- The benefits for children having close contact with their food source.
- The desirability of having a fence to protect chickens and keep the chickens in place, as well as sufficient shelter.

Mrs. Chalice said that there had been no complaints registered with the city Codes Department about chicken keeping, but she said that Councilor Chadbourne had received calls from people with concerns.

Mrs. Kopczynski agreed to send the Commission digital copies of photos that could be used in the brochure.

Mr. Florenz said that as a member of the Ag commission he felt that chicken ownership is an activity that the Commission should encourage, and in doing that put out guidelines to minimize the potential problems that might develop with neighbors. He said it would be beneficial to have brochures available in a variety of places in town.

Chair Wilton asked if the city had a brochure dealing with the regulatory procedures for dogs, and Mrs. Chalice said she would check.

The Commission thanked Mrs. Kopczynski for her presentation.

Mr. Florenz said that the Commission could table the issue of the brochure until the next meeting. Chair Wilton followed up by saying that at the next meeting the Commission could put together a subcommittee to do a draft brochure.

6) Bent Court Demonstration Project Proposal

Mr. Daloz reported that the teacher working with students at the Cheshire Career Center has said they are willing to work on the project. Mr. Daloz said that it would be helpful if the Ag Commission would write a letter expressing its desire and appreciation for the help of the Cheshire Career Center in managing this piece of city-owned land.

Mrs. Chalice said she would bring a map of the Bent Court property to the next meeting for discussion of the topic, noting that the Ag Commission will need to get clearance from the Parks and Recreation Department.

Mr. Daloz said that he has been in contact with a representative from the Ag Council in Einbeck, Germany, Keene's partner city. He reported that this contact informed him about a program in Einbeck that uses methane digesters in the back of many homes to produce gas, which they create using household waste and sugar beets. He said he would like to establish some contacts with them to find out more about what they are doing in Einbeck.

Mrs. Chalice said that at this point Mr. Daloz can explore what Einbeck is doing as an individual to see how that information could be shared with the Commission. She said that there might be a video presentation or a link that could be shared with the group.

7) New or Other Business

Chair Wilton said there would be an Ecological Alliance on March 8th and 9th looking at agricultural and ecological landscape issues. Ride-sharing was mentioned for any members interested in attending.

Chair Wilton reminded members that the Commission has determined to investigate the amount of food not sold through visits to six different supermarkets. She said this investigation, intended to determine how much food is needed for this community, needs to be taken up at a future meeting.

8) Next Meeting

Wednesday, March 8, at 3:30 PM.

9) Adjournment

Chair Wilton adjourned the meeting at 4:40.

Respectfully submitted by,

Kathleen Fleming, Minute-taker