

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

3:30 PM

2nd floor Committee Room

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Michele Chalice, Planning

Members Not Present:

Councilor Bettina Chadbourne
Mark Florenz

1) Call to order

Chair Wilton called the meeting to order at 3:34 PM.

2) Approve February 8, 2017 minutes

Vice Chair Daloz suggested two changes to the minutes: the last sentence on page 3 be deleted and that the statement on page 5 regarding methane digesters in Einbeck, Germany be changed to indicate they are being used in many homes there.

Ms. Straughen said the reference on page 2 to Organic Basics should be Co-op Basics.

Ms. Straughen made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. It was seconded by Mr. Moody, and approved by unanimous vote of the committee.

3) Good Chicken Neighbor Brochure Status

Ms. Chalice said that the brochure does not have to be submitted to the City Council for approval, but it will be subject to review and modification by the Planning Director.

In response to a question from Chair Wilton about paying for printing, Ms. Chalice said that the Planning Department could print 100 brochures. She suggested that the committee could solicit for donations if funding is needed.

Chair Wilton said that 100 would suffice to start, but that the committee could confront the issue of producing more copies in the event they are needed.

In response to a question from Chair Wilton, Ms. Chalice said the city has a dog policy but no dog brochure. Ms. Chalice said she would provide the committee with that policy. The committee had expressed interest in using the city's dog policy as a model in developing the brochure on raising chickens in the city.

Chair Wilton suggested that the committee form a subcommittee to draft a brochure that could be brought to the next Ag Commission meeting for consideration. Vice Chair Daloz suggested that Mr. Florenz be enlisted to work on the brochure based on his expertise and that Chair Wilton work on it with him. Chair Wilton agreed provided Mr. Florenz also agrees.

Ms. Chalice said she would send the brochure template to Mr. Florenz and Chair Wilton. Then the two of them would send the revised brochure to Ms. Chalice, who would include it in the packet of documents for the April meeting.

4) **Bent Court Demonstration Project Proposal, Charles Daloz**

Chair Wilton said that she had submitted about six pages of minutes related to the Bent Court property, and Ms. Chalice said she sent them to commission members. Chair referred to page one of the minutes summary (March 17, 2016), namely correspondence between then Chair Bettler and a Keene High School horticulture teacher in which the teacher expressed interest in having students become involved with work on the site across from the high school.

Vice Chair Daloz reported that he talked with the Keene High School teacher, who indicated that he is willing to work on the project and has a curriculum set up. Vice Chair Daloz said the teacher, John Mitchell, is an arborist and is interested in looking at the timber on the property and talking with the students about how to improve it. He said the teacher is interested in cleaning up the site, clearing brush, pruning, and rehabilitating old trees. Vice Chair Daloz said the site potentially could be used for planting a productive garden sometime in the future.

Vice Chair Daloz suggested that the Ag Commission draft a letter saying that the commission is interested in and likes the project, and that the commission is hoping that the high school will take it on. Cheshire career center, which has oversight of the horticulture program, needs some sort of indication from a city entity that the project is acceptable. He suggested that the letter be drafted by Ms. Chalice.

Ms. Chalice said that normally the commission would need an idea of what is being proposed. She recommended that the commission invite the teacher to the Ag Commission meeting in April to explain what he has in mind.

Chair Wilton suggested that Andy Bohannon, Parks and Rec director, be invited to the meeting as well.

Ms. Chalice said she could invite both the teacher and the planning director to the next meeting.

It was pointed out that the site is city-owned land under the purview of the Department of Public Works.

Vice Chair Daloz said the large field takes up most of the site, but that it is a wellhead site for the city and therefore needs to be left undisturbed. He added that someday in the future, if all else goes well, students could perhaps plant wild flowers there.

Ms. Chalice explained that Donna Hanscom, of the Public Works Department, is concerned that the site as a wellhead protection area that could be used to grow something but cannot be fertilized with any kind of fertilizer. Ms. Chalice said the pollinator project for the site was considered because that project would involve native seeds that did not require fertilizers. She noted that clover was the predominant component of the native seed mix recommended by Amanda Littleton, of the Cheshire County Conservation District. Ms. Chalice said that Ms. Littleton had a grant application ready to go for a pollinator project that the commission could consider next fall.

Chair Wilton if either the teacher or the planning director cannot attend the April meeting, then the commission wait until the following month to have them both come in. Ms. Chalice said she would be unable to attend the April meeting, but that another staff member would be present.

5) New or Other Business

In response to a question from Chair Wilton, the Commission confirmed its meeting schedule as the second Wednesday of the month at 3:30.

Ms. Chalice reported on two “very exciting” agriculture related projects being crowd funded by Monadnock Crowd Funding: 1.) Plan for Mr. Florenz’s farm to create a sausage cart to bring to the farmer’s market and to events. 2.) A new small animal farm at Stonewall Farm. Ms. Chalice encouraged members to attend the event at Stonewall Farm on Saturday, March 18th, when they will be talking about the efforts. In addition, she suggested that the committee consider inviting Jen Risley, from Monadnock Crowd Funding, to speak at one of its meetings.

Ms. Chalice pointed out that a recent edition of *The Shopper* ran an article about raising chickens.

Chair Wilton announced that there would be a Future of Farming conference sponsored by Cornucopia on March 25th.

Ms. Chalice reported on an email received by Mr. Florenz from Jori Johnson, community garden coordinator for Keene Housing, inquiring about the availability of space nearby the apartment building at 5 Central Square that could be used for gardening. She said she had tenants in the building who were interested in finding nearby sites where they could grow gardens. She said the building is home to elderly and the disabled people. She said the Ms. Johnson is seeking ideas from the Ag Commission for possible sites, which would need to be walkable.

Ms. Chalice said the committee could make a motion that she look into the status of a proposed redesign for downtown with the intention of determining if agriculture or community gardens could be taken into account in the proposal.

Mr. Moody made a motion that Ms. Chalice find out the status of the downtown redesign. It was seconded by Vice Chair Daloz and approved unanimously by the members.

Chair Wilton said that while she recognizes the positive benefits of increased agriculture in Keene, there is a downside in that increases in the amount of produce grown locally can have the adverse effect of reducing prices for existing farmers. She pointed out that there is no future for farmers unless they can make a living.

Mr. Straughen said that it is important to be mindful of what is being grown. She said she thought there continued to be substantial capacity yet to be realized in terms of food produced locally and did not see a problem of prices being driven down by too much local agriculture. She added that problems can arise at times when an excess of certain crops are made available to the market. She said that it is hard to plan for the gaps in the market and the periodic surpluses of certain items because of the unpredictable nature of agriculture. She said she would re-raise the idea with the Monadnock Food Co-op of having a gap and saturation list.

Chair Wilton said that the goal in her estimation should be to have a locally sourced food system because bringing in food from other places requires inefficient transport in the form of trucking. The lack of mass transit, such as rail, is a national issue, she said.

Mr. Moody said consumer education is needed to counter the impulse of consumers to buy out-of-season items year round.

Ms. Chalice asked the committee what it wanted her to do in response to the request from Jori Johnson regarding gardening spots for residents in Keene Housing at 5 Central Square.

Ms. Chalice said that in some other communities, community plots were established alongside a main trail system, sometimes using raised beds. She mentioned a potential site for additional gardens on a corner property owned by Southwest Community Services on Railroad Street along the brook. There are currently two community gardens for the Montessori school. Ms. Chalice said she had drawn up a proposal for a number of uses to be made of that area because it is a dead-end and because of its proximity to senior housing. Ms. Chalice thought that area would be a good location for an enlarged community garden.

Ms. Chalice said that she would be willing to come up with a design for the area that it could evaluate and propose to Southwest Community Services if the committee directed her to do that. Vice Chair Daloz made the motion suggested by Ms. Chalice. It was seconded by Ms. Straughen, and approved by unanimous vote of the Commission.

Ms. Chalice said the proposal she previously had drawn up for that area called for a variety of activities for senior citizens. She offered to modify that proposal to do more with community gardens submit to the Ag Commission for review.

Ms. Straughen said that near Railroad Square senior housing there are a couple of small raised beds that could be expanded, adding that the residents of the nearby senior housing could band together to work on the gardens.

Ms. Chalice suggested that the committee invite Jori Johnson to speak about what she is doing and to see if the committee's efforts could be coordinated with those of the Southwest Community Services.

Ms. Straughen said she was interested in the idea of putting small raised beds around the Co-op as well, but a partner would be needed to take ongoing responsibility for the management of the gardens. She said that she thought the idea of having community gardens around the Co-op would be well-received, and that it was an idea she had discussed with Community Gardens Connection (CGC) at Antioch. She said they CGC could help with the initial work of setting up the gardens but not with the ongoing maintenance. She said if the people in Keene Housing would be interested in maintaining the gardens that would be a plan she could bring up to the Co-op.

Ms. Straughen suggested that bringing in Jori Johnson as a first step, and also of making a call to touch base with the CGC on the plan. Ms. Straughen said in her talks with the CGC, she had been told that CGC could help build the beds, but wouldn't be involved with the ongoing maintenance.

Ms. Chalice pointed out that the ongoing maintenance will be the challenge, and Ms. Straughen said that the expansion of community gardens at the Co-op could be started with just one bed.

Ms. Chalice said that one of the considerations for gardening for physically challenged people is the use of raised (thigh-high) beds, and it might be suggested to have raised beds replace ground-level gardens. Chair Wilton agreed, pointing out that Keene like New Hampshire generally has a graying population that needs to be considered in plans for the future.

Vice Chair Daloz had put together a list of priorities for the Ag Commission, which was emailed to members as part of the packet for the March meeting. Chair Wilton said that during the upcoming week members could email suggestions for additions to that list.

In response to a question from Mr. Moody about the Farmer's Market and the Co-op, Chair Wilton said it was one of the items on list of priorities compiled by Vice Chair Daloz that would be taken up by the Commission.

Vice Chair Daloz suggested that the Agriculture Commission draft a letter, thanking the Parks and Rec Department for its interest in expanding the water system at Monadnock View gardens

and expressing encouragement for this kind of gardening behavior. He asked that the draft letter be included in the packet for the April meeting.

Ms. Chalice asked the committee if it wanted her to find out what is being done at Monadnock View before the Commission considers sending a letter, and the committee agreed.

6) **Next Meeting**

Wednesday, April 12, at 3:30PM

7) **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 PM.