

City of Keene  
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

3:30 PM

2nd floor Committee Room

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Members Not Present:

**1) Call to order:**

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

**2) Approve March 8, 2017 minutes**

A motion was made by Mr. Moody to approve the minutes of March 8, 2017. It was seconded by Mr. Daloz, and was passed by unanimous vote of the Commission.

**3) Good Chicken Neighbor Brochure Status**

Mr. Florenz reported that he and Chair Wilton had met and started to get content together. He said he had developed a first draft in pamphlet form but that he hadn't submitted it to Ms. Chalice, city planner, in time to be included in the packet for the April meeting. He said the draft should go through another round of revisions before it is submitted to the Commission for review at the May meeting.

Ms. Straughen volunteered to take a look at the draft and help with the editing and layout. Chair Wilton said that the brochure should refer specifically to Keene.

Mr. Florenz made a motion to table this item until the next meeting. It was seconded by Councilor Chadbourne and was passed by unanimous vote of the Commission.

**4) 2017 Agricultural Commission Project Prioritization Exercise; Initial Project Ideas:**

Chair Wilton distributed paper ballots with a list of proposed priorities. She explained the procedure for considering the items and for voting (with a range of 1 for top priority to 5 for the lowest priority).

a. **“Bent Court – KHS Urban Agriculture”**

Vice Chair Daloz proposed that the Commission follow the approach used with the Bent Court project with other projects. He said he believe the Commission should determine how it could facilitate the achievement of priority projects by connecting projects to the entities within the city willing and able to proceed with the necessary work. In the case of the Bent Court property, he said that Andrew Bohannon, director of Parks and Rec, pointed out the need for work at the Bent Court site and the Ag Commission brought in the Keene High School Horticulture Program (an offering of the high school’s Cheshire Career Center).

Mr. Florenz said it is important for the Commission to know the interested parties. For instance in the case of Bent Court, he said it would be beneficial to have the supervising teacher meet with the Commission to explain what they are doing. Mr. Florenz said the fact that a connection was made between a high school program and the Bent Court project was a significant achievement for the Ag Commission and should be listed among the group’s accomplishments for the year.

Ms. Straughen noted that the email from Ms. Chalice to the Ag Commission indicated that there would an on-site meeting on April 24<sup>th</sup> between Mr. Bohannon and John Mitchell, instructor at Keene High School, “to make sure that the basic parameters of the project are reasonable for the City before it goes forward.” The email went on to say that Mr. Mitchell will be invited to the May meeting of the Ag Commission if all goes well.

b. **“Cross fertilization with Keene's Sister City of Einbeck, GER.”**

Vice Chair Daloz said he didn’t think this was a high priority, but that it would be interesting to look into what they know about agriculture in Einbeck that could be incorporated in Keene. Mr. Daloz said he had attended a meeting of Keene’s Partner Cities Committee and there is some interest on that committee in engaging in agricultural exchange.

Wilton said she thought that the Partner City relationship was more about cultural exchange than the kind of issues that concern the Ag Commission. She said that Keene potentially could gain more by connecting with other cities nearer and more similar to Keene than Einbeck. Mr. Daloz said he basically agreed with Chair Wilton.

Vice Chair said the Partner Cities Committee is investigating the possibility of pursuing Einbeck’s program of raising sugar beets. Councilor Chadbourne said that the kinds of exchanges taking place between Keene and Einbeck occurson a variety of levels, including emergency services and athletic in addition to cultural.

This led to a discussion of the longterm vision of Ag Commission, with Mr. Moody raising question about the large framework within which the Commission functions. Ms. Straughen said she could forward the document, *Sustaining Agriculture in the Granite State*, that Chair Wilton had sent to her that explains the mission of the agricultural commissions.

**c. Shift to Edible Landscaping (originally also “Fruit Trees for Keene”)**

Vice Chair Daloz said the idea for this came from Northampton, MA, where they have planted fruit trees and other small fruit (berry) bushes along that city’s trail system. He said he contacted Northampton about this program but never got a reply. Mr. Daloz said he thinks there are problems with it, including dropping fruit and maintenance of the plants.

Ms. Straughen suggested an idea that she had been thinking about in terms of community gardens: Like with the adopt-a-highway programs, there could be an adopt-a-fruit tree or adopt- a-garden program in Keene. An entity such as a downtown business would commit to taking care of a tree or one small garden and identify itself with a sign. Commission members said they thought that was a good idea.

Mr. Florenz said that Mr. Bohannon should be contacted about this idea to see if some of the Parks and Rec plantings could be shifted to edible landscape.

**d. Community Gardens (added as a priority by the group)**

This led to a discussion of community gardens, with Mr. Florenz pointing out that this issue has been the focus of work by the Ag Commission in the past. He cited the effort by a group of Antioch students to identify sites used for community gardens and sites that potentially could be put to that use.

Ms. Straughen noted that in Ms. Chalice’s email to Commission members, she said she had asked Jori Johnson, Keene Housing Community Garden Coordinator, to come to speak to the Commission on June 14. Ms. Johnson had contacted Mr. Lorenz seeking assistance in locating sites for additional community gardens downtown.

**e. “Outreach for Agricultural Commission”**

Vice Chair Daloz said the Commission needs to make more people aware of the existence of the Agriculture Commission and of agriculture in Keene. He suggested that the Commission consider having a presence at some upcoming events such as a program at Agway on April 24<sup>th</sup> and an Earth Day event (Earthfest) on April 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Co-op. In addition there is opportunity for outreach to other Ag Commissions of the region through the Monadnock Farm and Community Coalition.

Discussion ensued about the possibility of sharing a table with the Cities for Climate Protection Committee at EarthFest. The idea of the two groups sharing a table had been discussed at the previous meeting of CCCP, which Mr. Daloz had attended as a guest. Ms. Straughen, who is an organizer of the event, said she would contact the chair of CCCP about the idea.

**f. “Zero Food Waste in Keene”**

Chair Wilton said that according to Feeding America ([www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)) \$218 billion are wasted annually on food waste, 72 billion pounds of food, and 21 percent of material going into landfills is food waste. She mentioned the policies by the Co-op in Keene and Starbucks nationally have Zero Waste policies. She said the idea would be to bring together farmers, businesses, and non-profits, to look at the status of the Keene food disposal policy and to consider to reduce food waste in the city.

Ms. Straughen said she had just attended a meeting for composting stakeholders in Concord about how to reduce food waste, about permitting requirements – the current status and potential improvements. She said that Duncan Watson, Assistant Public Works Director/Solid Waste Manager, has reported that no fewer than five groups of Antioch students have done feasibility studies on composting in Keene, but the transportation and cost piece is just so prohibitive that they can’t find a way around it.

Mr. Florenz said that he saw food waste as a product of the industrial food system, and that there were no industrial farmers in this area. He questioned whether the Agricultural Commission should be focused on this, saying that he would rather the Commission turn its attention on supporting agriculture in this area.

Councilor Chadbourne suggested that the Commission invite Mr. Watson or other experts on the subject come to a meeting so that the members could become more informed about the subject.

Ms. Straughen said that she agreed with Mr. Florenz that food waste might not be the most appropriate priority for the Agricultural Commission. However, she suggested that a presentation by Mr. Watson would provide a view of the bigger picture. Councilor Chadbourne agreed that it would be useful to invite Mr. Watson to an Ag meeting.

Councilor Chadbourne raised a question about whether the Commission should brainstorm about other priority ideas beyond those on the list under consideration. Chair

Mr. Florenz said he saw outreach as the group's primary objective: the question is to what groups and in what order should the Ag Commission reach out?

Ms. Straughen said it is important to seek ways of achieving tangible outcomes, especially when groups are new. She said outreach should be in the background of everything the group does, but that the group needs to have an issue or project that is the reason the Commission is doing outreach.

Mr. Florenz said that a certain amount of the group's role is proactive is reaching out and talking with interested groups to develop an awareness of what is going on in agriculture locally. In addition, he said, the group's role is also reactive when necessary, but there's not a huge development or some other challenge threatening agriculture now.

Councilor Chadbourne said that the group is still formulating its mission, determining goals, is still in the "gathering stage" of its development.

Mr. Moody said he thinks the group should be looking at how to increase production of the right kind of food and to make sure people get it.

Councilor Chadbourne asked about the materials that the Commission would have to display on a table for an event such as the Earthfest. Ms. Straughen said the group might use that as an opportunity to get ideas from people. Mr. Florenz said the table could be just a way to let people know about the existence of the Ag Commission and get their questions and concerns. Mr. Daloz said Commission had a display board showing community gardens, and pamphlets and brochures related to agriculture. Mr. Moody pointed out that there is a lot of interest in local food and it is an opportunity to support the movement.

Chair Wilton noted that in the Commission's review of the city's Master Plan it identified its five goals: food security, agriculture heritage, agribusiness, protecting environmental corridors and education. She said the Master Plan only vaguely alluded to agriculture, but these goals were derived from studying the places in the Plan where agriculture could have been included. The priorities under consideration by the group were ways of promoting those five goals, she said.

Councilor Chadbourne said that in discussion in the city about rezoning the city, there has been consideration of allowing for some kind of farming on Marlboro Street.

**Voting:** The group filled in the written ballots, voting on the priorities.

**5) New or Other Business**

On tabling at the EarthFest, the group decided it did want to have a table – shared with CCCP if that group was doing a table. Ms. Straughen said she would follow up with CCCP and would arrange that a table would be available for the Ag Commission.

**6) Adjournment. Next Meeting – Wednesday, May 10, at 3:30PM**

The meeting adjourned at 4:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Fleming, Minute-taker