

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, November 17, 2016 3:30 PM 2nd Floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Sarah Wilton, Vice Chair
Bettina Chadbourne, Councilor
Charles Daloz
Mark Florenz

Staff Present:

Michele Chalice, Planning

Members Not Present:

Alan Bettler, Chair
Full Member Vacancy
Full Member Vacancy

1) Call to Order

Vice Chair Wilton called the meeting to order at 3:46 PM.

2) Approve October 20, 2016 Minutes

Vice Chair Wilton asked for comments on the minutes. Mr. Daloz stated that he does not disagree with the way they are written but they raise issues the commission wants to talk about. Ms. Chalice replied that that would be a suggestion for next month's agenda.

Councilor Chadbourne made a motion to approve the minutes of October 20, which was seconded by Mr. Daloz. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

3) Next Steps – Commission Project Prioritization

Mr. Florenz made a motion to table this topic until December. Councilor Chadbourne seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

4) Review Urban Chicken Brochure Ideas

Ms. Chalice stated that initially they thought folks would bring in drafts for the group to discuss but it seems like there are still decisions to be made about what the general content would be. Councilor Chadbourne stated that the template they have is good. Mr. Daloz replied that he likes the samples that were included in the agenda packet. Vice Chair Wilton stated that the template she provided is her attempt at capturing the three examples that Ms. Chalice submitted. She continued that the first part gives people guidance, and she feels there is no point in doing the brochure unless they give guidance. The second part is how to obtain a permit, which is a consolidation of the three examples. Each component raises lots of questions. The back of the brochure has her suggestion of putting in businesses that support the chicken industry, such as Horse & Buggy.

Mr. Daloz asked what it costs to produce, say, a thousand of these. Ms. Chalice replied that she will look into that. Councilor Chadbourne asked if the City has the tools for this. Ms. Chalice replied no, but they have photocopiers, and they could make a small amount of color copies, send them out, and see what kind of feedback they get. She does not think there would be a problem with the Planning Department printing 10 to 30. Councilor Chadbourne suggested approaching businesses. Mr. Florenz replied yes, 20 copies to each feed store might be a good idea and they might help with the costs. Councilor Chadbourne asked about the possibility of local printers assisting. Discussion ensued about the potential price and potential ways to get the brochure printed.

Mr. Daloz stated that the first question is what they put into the brochure. He continued that he agrees with Mr. Florenz that they should be as least intrusive as possible in a governmental sense. Can they get this information out without forcing anyone (to follow a set of rules)? Councilor Chadbourne replied that they do not have the authority to force anyone anyway. Mr. Florenz stated that it should be about how to raise chickens in the city without angering your neighbors. He continued that there are plenty of general resources on how to raise chickens, but there is no guide on how to raise chickens without your neighbors calling the police or Code Enforcement. They do not want to create regulations if they can encourage people to be considerate neighbors.

Mr. Daloz stated that he has concerns about pollution - the drains go into Beaver Brook and animal waste would pollute the water. Mr. Florenz replied that it would have to be a large amount of chickens in a small space, for that to happen. In most instances it will not be an issue. He thinks roosters are the biggest issue, and confining versus not confining chickens will be something else people have complaints about. Mr. Daloz stated that a large area could be fenced. Mr. Florenz stated that the Agriculture Commission's biggest recommendations could be to not get roosters, and to fence chickens in. Vice Chair Wilton replied that she thinks they should give recommendations about space. Ms. Chalice replied that maybe it could be a range - "X square feet to X square feet is normally considered appropriate." Vice Chair Wilton and Councilor Chadbourne agreed.

Mr. Daloz asked if they want to comment on eggs. Councilor Chadbourne replied that they cannot do that. Mr. Florenz replied no, they do not want to get into that. He continued that they want to encourage people to have chickens, and be good neighbors, so the City does not get a lot of complaints and there is no need to regulate it. Councilor Chadbourne stated that the Agriculture Commission does not have the authority to create regulations, although they could make recommendations if they choose to and there would be a whole process to go through. That would be different than an educational pamphlet.

Vice Chair Wilton asked if the City Council has to approve an educational brochure. Ms. Chalice replied that the Planning Department would have to approve the brochure and she does not think it has to go to the City Council but she will check. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she thinks it would be a good idea to go to the City Council. Mr.

Florenz agreed – it would be good to tell the City Council about how they are trying to be proactive and avoid complaints, and show them the brochure in case they get questions or complaints about chickens. Councilor Chadbourne stated that it would be proper etiquette to go through the City Council even if it is not required. Vice Chair Wilton spoke more about how she feels the brochure needs to at least advise or inform people.

Councilor Chadbourne suggested going before the City Council with the product, prior to any publication of it on the website or otherwise. She continued that she would feel more comfortable if Ms. Chalice would confirm that they can even take that much leeway. Do they need permission from the City Council to put it on the website? Ms. Chalice replied that they need permission from the Planning Department and she will check about the City Council.

Mr. Daloz stated that the Agriculture Commission's presentation has not yet gone to the City Council and maybe it should. Councilor Chadbourne replied yes, it did. She continued that the Planning, Licenses, and Development (PLD) Committee is a City Council committee, and they make a recommend to the City Council and the following week the City Council votes on it. Mr. Daloz replied that some City Council members have not seen it yet. Councilor Chadbourne replied that they either watched the meeting video, read the meeting minutes, or have attended the PLD Committee meeting. Ms. Chalice replied that she is not sure what the criteria is but some topics do rise to the level of going before the entire City Council. Mr. Daloz replied that if the PLD Committee's recommendations go to the City Council then that works. Councilor Chadbourne clarified that everything that goes to a City Council committee always goes to the full City Council. Discussion continued.

Vice Chair Wilton asked how they should determine the content of the brochure. Ms. Chalice replied that typical practice is for a working group to generate a draft and then have it reviewed by the whole committee. She continued that she thinks Vice Chair Wilton's draft is a good starting place and ready to be marked up. Mr. Daloz replied that he will go to the ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture website; he thinks they have templates to use. Ms. Chalice asked if they have a brochure template, because she is not hearing they are trying for a proclamation. She wonders if there is a template for a good neighbor booklet. Mr. Florenz replied that he searched online and did not find anything.

Vice Chair Wilton asked if they need to break up into smaller groups to do this. What are the physical rules and recommendations? What is the process? Is there going to be a license fee, for example? Or is it just come as you are, do what you wish, everyone for himself? She thinks those are critical questions that have to be resolved. Mr. Florenz replied that to him this is purely educational. One section could be "Why Keep Chickens," and it could be about how keeping chickens is a good thing, and yes you can do it in the city, and here are guidelines to be a good neighbor, and here are some resources for information and best practices for chicken care. Those general sections are what he is thinking about. They do not want to go down the road of permits and requirements. Ms. Chalice replied that they cannot do anything about permits unless there are regulations in place. She continued that she thought they already decided to not

go down this path. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she thought the group decided not to recommend an ordinance. Ms. Chalice replied that there cannot be a permit process without an ordinance. Permits are based on ordinances.

Mr. Daloz replied that it seems like what they are trying to say to people raising chickens is that there are best practices and ways to be good neighbors, and if people do not follow those guidelines, the City may have to clamp down and impose ordinances. Mr. Florenz replied yes, the idea is to try education first, and then if complaints continue and increase, they would consider ordinances.

Councilor Chadbourne suggested having a photographer get local pictures of chickens to use in the brochure. She continued that she can approach someone that she knows.

Mr. Daloz made a motion for the Agriculture Commission to ask Councilor Chadbourne to solicit local photographs of chickens to potentially put in a brochure. Mr. Florenz seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Chalice stated that what she hears the committee saying is that brochure categories should be: pros and cons of keeping chickens, how to be a good neighbor, and best practices. Councilor Chadbourne asked if they need permission to put it on the website and how they do that. Ms. Chalice replied that she personally puts the Agriculture Commission's materials on the website. She continued that she has been told that the City's entire website is being redesigned and it will offer even more flexibility. There is caution and etiquette that is wise; it is a nebulous area.

Vice Chair Wilton stated that she has a different interpretation other than this being an educational project. She continued that she thought they were anticipating people getting more and more chickens and that the Agriculture Commission should be proactive in giving them guidance to forestall future problems. To her, the point of this was to do more than educate people. Councilor Chadbourne replied yes, they do need to be proactive. Vice Chair Wilton stated that maybe that is their critical question because it will govern what is in the content.

Mr. Daloz replied that these are questions that may change. He continued that he would rather avoid making any semi-regulatory things. He suggests they not make rules until they have proven they cannot do this by education and common sense. Mr. Florenz stated that he does not think they have had a huge amount of complaints. Councilor Chadbourne stated that when she gets complaints or questions about dogs she gives people a brochure that the City Clerk's Office created about the ordinances, like the scoop the poop law, etc. Ms. Chalice suggested she bring it to the next meeting so they can look at it as an example.

Vice Chair Wilton stated that at the next meeting they will determine the process for creating the brochure, after they determine what they are doing with it, and they will compare their theoretical approach about chickens with whatever materials exist regarding dogs.

5) Food Security – Local Food Systems

Mr. Daloz stated that to him this is part of the revamping of the Master Plan. How will they do this over the next 50 years in the region? The Woodlands and Wildlands brochure, by the Monadnock Conservancy, says X% of New England land should be forest, and so on and so forth. He continued that the City of Keene does not say anything like that, and does not say anything about how much agriculture land there is and how much food is needed.

Vice Chair Wilton replied that questions are how much of the region's food feeds the region's population; how much is imported or exported.

Councilor Chadbourne asked how they would get that information. Vice Chair Wilton replied that the Historical Society's presentation on the past 300 years of regional agriculture said that about 8% of food is sourced locally. Mr. Florenz replied that he thinks the figure is lower. Ms. Chalice asked if that information was on one of the panels. She continued that there should be a source of where the Historical Society got that information and maybe it is on their website. Vice Chair Wilton replied that she has not seen it there. Councilor Chadbourne replied that they should see if they can find it. *Vice Chair Wilton was subsequently able to confirm 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.*

Councilor Chadbourne stated that the person in charge of sustainability at the Monadnock Food Co op is Megan Straughen. She continued that Ms. Straughen would be a perfect fit for this commission. The Coop's General Manager is willing to allow her to come to these meetings as part of her job, but this meeting time does not work for her. She is a Keene resident. She might be a resource for some of these questions they have.

Mr. Daloz stated that he was interested in going to the local six supermarkets and asking how many cases of lettuce they go through in a week or a month, to add it up and see how much food is coming in here, and break it down by what could be produced locally. He continued that then they have a target. Vice Chair Wilton added, and figure out how much is thrown out.

Ms. Chalice suggested asking the gleaning person, Sarah Harpster. Mr. Florenz replied that the Community Kitchen gets food from the supermarkets; it is not through the gleaning program. Ms. Chalice asked if the commission wants Ms. Harpster to come talk to them. Vice Chair Wilton replied yes, on gleaning and the percentage of food that is wasted. She continued that she read that France has a national law that no food can be disposed of. If it is usable it has to go to community kitchens, then it goes to animal feed, or compost. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she used to volunteer at the Community Kitchen. Each grocery store has its own policy and some are not allowed to donate food.

She knows someone who picks up truckloads of imperfect produce at Hannafords to feed to her farm animals. It is based on what stores do or do not want to do.

Mr. Florenz suggested they have Pheobe Bray, the Executive Director of the Community Kitchen come in. Vice Chair Wilton replied that Ms. Harpster, Ms. Bray, and Michelle Moore are all potential invitees. She asked if Ms. Bray would talk about general policies in Keene and how it affects the Community Kitchen and how they get their food. Mr. Florenz replied that Ms. Harpster would not know firsthand the information about the grocery stores. Gleaning does not include the grocery stores. Ms. Chalice asked what order she should invite them in. The group agreed whoever can come can be first.

6) New or Other Business

Mr. Florenz stated that he spoke with Aaron Moody, Chair of Stonewall Farm's board of directors. He continued that he is interested in joining the commission and will submit a letter to the Mayor. Councilor Chadbourne asked what the group thinks about Ms. Straughen joining. She cannot make this meeting time. Mr. Florenz asked if she can come to one meeting to see how it goes, before they shuffle their meeting schedule. Ms. Chalice stated that she can invite Ms. Straughen to come speak to the commission.

Ms. Chalice reported that Ecological Landscape Alliance is a new group. She read their credo aloud. She continued that their annual conference will be March 8 and 9 in Amherst, MA. If the group is interested she can send last year's agenda as an example of the kinds of talks that they held. Vice Chair Wilton replied yes, that would be good. She continued that in the past the group has talked about taking a field trip and this might be a good opportunity. Councilor Chadbourne agreed.

Councilor Chadbourne asked if the group discussed approaching the UNH Extension, on West St., in regards to potential members. Vice Chair Wilton replied no. Mr. Daloz stated that he does not think the people there live in Keene. Discussion ensued about who may or may not live in Keene and what their positions are. Vice Chair Wilton will talk to Christine Parshall there. Councilor Chadbourne replied that maybe if Ms. Parshall cannot be a member she can recommend someone else.

7) Next Meeting – Thursday, December 15, 2016 at 3:30 PM

8) Adjournment

Vice Chair Wilton adjourned the meeting at 4:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker