

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, August 18, 2016

3:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Alan Bettler, Chair
Sarah Wilton, Vice Chair
Charles Daloz
Mark Florenz

Staff Present:

Michele Chalice, Planning

Members Not Present:

Bettina Chadbourne, Councilor

1) Call to Order

Chair Bettler called the meeting to order at 3:37 PM.

2) Approve July 21, 2016 Minutes

Chair Bettler asked if anyone had corrections or edits for the minutes. Ms. Wilton replied that she does not have changes to the minutes, but regarding the discussion in the minutes about the webpage with the list of resources, some of them are hyperlinks but the hyperlinks do not work. Brief discussion ensued.

Mr. Florenz made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of July 21, 2016. Ms. Wilton seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

3) Status of Request to City Council to Create a New Food License Class

Mr. Florenz reported that this is complete – the City Council approved the new food license class. Ms. Wilton asked if there was any negative feedback. Ms. Chalice replied that she heard that there was no negative feedback or concerns from the City Council and the Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee voted 3-0 to recommend approving it. The City Council voted unanimously to adopt the ordinance. Mr. Florenz stated that a City employee came to his farm this morning for the licensing. He thanked everyone for their support in making this happen. Brief discussion ensued.

4) Draft Agriculture Commission Presentation to the Joint Committee on September 12

Ms. Chalice asked if the subcommittee met. Ms. Wilton replied no. She continued that to her it is politically intuitive that the Agriculture Commission must have a specific reason to bring this presentation to the Joint Committee or City Council – e.g. there needs to be something the City Council is doing that makes this presentation relevant. Ms. Chalice asked if the commission as a whole feels that this presentation is worthwhile.

Discussion ensued. Mr. Florenz stated that he thinks they do not need a specific issue and it is worthwhile just to inform the City Council about the commission's presence and about what the commission sees missing from the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP). He continued that they can remind the City Council to keep agriculture issues in mind when considering topics such as zoning changes or the Marlboro Street development. Chair Bettler agreed and stated that the presentation is worthwhile because it is part of the mission of the Agriculture Commission to keep the appropriate people in the City informed about their work and their goals, as the other committees and commissions do.

Ms. Chalice stated that the commission could present to a City Council committee if they want, or do a public presentation at the Keene Public Library or other venue. She continued that the commission, along with every other City committee and commission, is required to give a yearly update to the PLD Committee but they have already done that this year. If they choose, they could wait to give this presentation at their next annual update. Mr. Florenz replied that the annual updates are about what the commission has been working on, not what their vision is. Chair Bettler stated that they originally thought of presenting to the City Council but they could do it at another venue or put it on their website. His opinion is they should move forward with it.

Mr. Daloz stated that the first slide, which currently says "Amending the Master Plan," needs to change because that is not the goal of this presentation and they need to focus on why they are presenting. He thinks the rest of the slides are good. Discussion ensued. Ms. Wilton suggested adding a slide with information about the commission's accomplishments, such as mapping the community gardens, the new food license class, and dialogue with the farmer's market. Ms. Chalice asked if Ms. Wilton will create that slide. Ms. Wilton replied yes. Chair Bettler stated that this is best done by subcommittee instead of the whole group. He continued that the subcommittee did not meet last month because the members did not receive the email with the poll for scheduling.

Chair Bettler stated that at the beginning of this conversation they were uncertain about why to present. He asked if everyone now agrees that the presentation is still important. Members replied yes.

Ms. Chalice asked Ms. Wilton to submit the new and/or edited slides to her so she can include it/them in the next agenda package for the Agriculture Commission. She continued that since the next commission meeting is September 15, it might make sense to push the Joint Committee presentation to October if that is okay with everyone. Commission members replied yes.

5) Residential Chicken Management Discussion

Ms. Chalice reported that Councilor Chadbourne could not come today and requested that the Agriculture Commission wait to discuss chicken management next month so she can be part of this discussion.

Mr. Florenz reported that the NH Agriculture Incentive Zoning publication (a PDF from a State group) has case studies from communities in NH and might be relevant to the

chicken management topic. Ms. Chalice recommended that the commission members consider going to the Code Plus event at Heberton Hall. The City is soliciting ideas from the community on how zoning should change. This would be a perfect opportunity for the commission to make their case. Brief discussion ensued. Mr. Florenz asked whether that is the best avenue for the commission to give their input. Ms. Chalice replied that it is the only avenue, at this point. The committees and commissions have not been invited to give input to this project team in another way. Mr. Florenz asked if they should go to that meeting with specific recommendations, or general. Ms. Chalice replied that she was thinking they would advocate for zoning that is more supportive of agriculture in Keene, as commission members. She continued that there might not be opportunities for the commission to assist. Discussion continued. Ms. Chalice stated that she will find out if there is a venue for commissions to participate further at a later date. Discussion continued about what the forum will be like.

Chair Bettler stated that they can still discuss the chicken ordinance topic at a future Agriculture Commission meeting, even if they bring the topic up at this public forum. Ms. Chalice agreed. She spoke more about the City's effort to re-write the Zoning Code and how big of a project it is. It will take a long time. The commission could advocate for an ordinance to be created separate from that, the way the food licensing one was done.

Chair Bettler asked what, specifically, they want to say. He continued that they should be in agreement, so that if one person goes to the forum and proposes something, it is something the others agree with. Ms. Wilton replied that they could speak as private citizens instead of on behalf of the Agriculture Commission. Chair Bettler replied that if they are not making an official proposal at the meeting, as a group, they do not have to come up with an agreed upon statement. The others agreed.

Chair Bettler stated that they will discuss chicken management next month.

6) Correction to Membership Qualifications

Chair Bettler reported that he spoke with Kathy Harrington and she is resigning from the commission due to not having enough time, and she apologized for missing so many meetings. He continued that he told her to send in a signed resignation letter to the Mayor. Mr. Florenz asked if they are short a member, now that Allison Welsh and Marcia Duffy also stepped down. Chair Bettler stated that someone from the City said that members had to live in the City of Keene and something about a vacancy. Ms. Chalice replied that there is one vacancy. She continued that she was wrong when she said, last month, that members can be from outside Keene. The City Clerk says no. The State statute requires that for the Agriculture Commission and some other commissions and committees. Committees that do not fall under the RSA may have leeway.

Chair Bettler asked how many members they are supposed to have. Ms. Chalice replied that she does not know, but Helen Mattson told her there is an alternate position available, and when Ms. Harrington officially resigns there is a full member slot available. Discussion continued.

Ms. Chalice stated that they can take suggestions for potential new members who live in Keene. Mr. Florenz spoke of a good connection he made with someone at a local farm. Ms. Chalice asked if they want her to send a solicitation to farmer's market people in Keene. Chair Bettler suggested they put a notice on the Agriculture Commission website. Ms. Chalice replied that they may be overstepping because the Mayor is the one to appoint members. Mr. Florenz asked if she can find out if they can announce that there is a vacancy and ask people to contact the Mayor. He continued that it is worth asking farmer's market people if anyone lives in Keene. He can reach out to that group via email. The other members agreed. Ms. Wilton suggested they reach out the Monadnock Food Co op and Community Kitchen, too. Chair Bettler suggested Healthy Monadnock, Antioch University New England, or other similar organizations. Mr. Florenz stated that he could have the Monadnock Farm Community Coalition announce the vacancy on their Facebook page, telling interested people to contact the Mayor.

7) New or Other Business

Ms. Chalice stated that there is a camp in Marlboro with its own farm, and a new farmer who came from Orchard Breadworks. She continued that she or someone else there told her that the Federal government has programs and potential funding that they are providing to communities regarding agriculture and food safety, as part of Homeland Security. She thought she would toss it out there, for the Agriculture Commission to investigate. They thought the funding was being utilized in communities, similar to the war effort when everyone was encouraged to have their own garden.

Ms. Wilton replied that she thinks it is connected to the Food Safety and Modernization Act, which dealt with the concerns that terrorists could spoil the food supply, so regulations had to be tightened on all fresh produce, which would impose a great liability to farmers' markets and local farms. Ms. Chalice replied that this is different – the government is advocating for more residential farms and gardens within communities. Ms. Wilton replied that generally, the Federal government is not really helpful to a local food system. She will check into this, but she thinks it is related to the Food Safety and Modernization Act, if it is sponsored by Homeland Security. Their concern is protecting the corporate food production. Chair Bettler replied that he remembers that there were concerns for small farmers and farmers market, and how that law would restrict small farms. This would be something to look into.

Chair Bettler stated that they will continue their conversation about the presentation. He continued that they should schedule a subcommittee meeting. Ms. Chalice replied that she will try again with the Doodle poll. Brief discussion ensued about schedules. Chair Bettler stated that he may not be able to make it to the next two commission meetings, or they could try to have the meeting at a different time. Ms. Chalice replied that she would not recommend changing the meeting schedule if they are just talking about two months. She continued that the last time they talked about there did not seem to be another time that worked for everyone, but maybe with the new members, there will be.

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Ms. Chalice stated that the presentation will be in the September agenda packet so they can finalize it for an October presentation to the Joint Committee.

8) Next Meeting – Thursday, September 15, 2016, 3:30 PM

9) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Bettler adjourned the meeting at 4:24 PM.

Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker