

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, July 9, 2015

3:30 PM

2nd Floor Committee Rm, City Hall

Members Present:

Councilor Carl Jacobs, Chair
Alan Bettler
Mark Florenz, Alternate
Sarah Wilton
Allison Welsh

Staff Present:

Michele Chalice, Planning

Others Present:

Members Not Present:

Marcia Duffy
Kathy Harrington

1. Call to Order

Chair Jacobs called the meeting to order at 3:30 PM and conducted roll call.

2. Approve April 19, 2015 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Welsh made a motion for the minutes of April 19, 2015 to be approved.

Mr. Florenz noted a correction: the acronym "MSFC" on page 3 should say "MFCC." Chair Jacobs noted that on page 3, there is a sentence that does not make sense, with "the prospects are" highlighted in yellow. Discussion ensued about how to correct it. Chair Jacobs suggested, "Ms. Chalice stated that the City does not have a grant writer but there are resources available."

Mr. Bettler seconded the motion to approve the minutes as amended. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

3. Rules of Procedure - Adoption

Ms. Chalice stated that the commission can adopt the rules of procedure by Chair Jacobs signing the document. Discussion ensued, and commission members expressed that they did not receive copies of the document and thus are not ready to adopt the rules of procedure today. Chair Jacobs stated that this is tabled until the next meeting. He asked Ms. Chalice to make the document available to the commission online, with a link in next month's agenda packet.

4. Roe-Ann Tasoulas, MFCC, to discuss commission's involvement with their "Urban Farming Food For All" forum in July – has not yet confirmed

Chair Jacobs noted that Roe-Ann Tasoulas is not present today. Ms. Chalice replied that she has an email from her, which she read out loud to the committee. The email is asking the Agriculture Commission if they want to have a booth or table at the Urban Farming Food For All event. Ms. Chalice continued that there is a week left, and it is up to the commission to decide if they want to have someone there to talk about the commission and drum up interest. The event is described in an attachment in the agenda packet. Chair Jacobs stated that he had planned on attending the event but did not know about having a table. He asked what the tabling situation is like. Mr. Florenz gave more information about the event.

Discussion ensued about how to go about tabling. Mr. Florenz offered to talk with Ms. Tasoulas and get information. Ms. Chalice offered to print out copies of the commission's charge and information from the commission's website, and a list of commission members, as handouts for the public. Discussion continued, and per Mr. Bettler's suggestion, Ms. Chalice will also get a pad of yellow paper for people to write down their ideas and topics that they want the commission to address. Chair Jacobs offered to pick up the materials from Ms. Chalice if she could have them available by 2:00 PM the day of the event. Ms. Chalice agreed and will put the materials on Lee Llangella's desk in the Planning Department. After more discussion, Mr. Bettler stated that he will talk with Ms. Tasoulas about the table and to see if Antioch University New England (AUNE) will have information about the Keene Community Gardens. The commission decided a tablecloth was not necessary. Ms. Chalice stated that she will look into making a small banner with the Agriculture Commission's name. Ms. Wilton stated that she can be at the event, too.

5. Election of a Vice Chair

Chair Jacobs stated that Eleanor Vander Haegen resigned. He continued that they have a vacancy on the commission. He will ask the Mayor to make Mr. Florenz a full member, because he has been very dedicated and participates as much as anyone. He asked for a nomination for Vice Chair.

Ms. Welsh nominated Mr. Bettler for Vice Chair. Chair Jacobs seconded the motion. He continued that Mr. Bettler is very committed and he supports his candidacy. The motion passed by unanimous vote.

6. Process For Designating Future Agenda Items (listed in the Rules of Procedure)

Chair Jacobs read aloud from the Rules of Procedure, which explain how to get items put on the agenda. He stated that topics for the agenda should be given to the staff liaison, and nothing will be discussed at a meeting if it is not on the agenda – it will be placed under "New Business" for discussion at the next meeting.

Ms. Chalice stated that commission members can send her topics for the agenda. She continued that she tends to send the draft agenda to Chair Jacobs more than five days in advance to get his feedback, so she can then send it out to the commission well in advance of the meeting. It might be cutting it close to accept agenda topics until five days before the meeting. Chair Jacobs

replied that it says five business days, so it is really a week. He continued that he thinks it would be okay.

7. Monadnock Farm & Community Coalition Representation

Chair Jacobs asked if this is regarding whether the commission would formally join the Monadnock Farm & Community Coalition (MFCC). Mr. Florenz replied that they already are a member – the only distinction now is the MFCC is asking for money from its members. Discussion ensued. Ms. Chalice noted that the commission does not have a budget. Mr. Florenz replied that the dues are not mandatory. Mr. Bettler stated that the MFCC would like someone from the commission to attend the MFCC’s quarterly meetings. Ms. Chalice replied yes, her impression from Ms. Tasoulas is that the MFCC wants participation. Mr. Florenz agreed that the MFCC would appreciate the commission’s involvement.

Discussion ensued about whether and how to give money to the MFCC. Chair Jacobs spoke in favor of the commission requesting \$50 for this – forming the Agriculture Commission is an example of the City’s commitment to promoting agriculture, and as a City Councilor he would not hesitate to approve \$50 for this.

8. Farmer’s Market – Ideas to Suggest?

Mr. Florenz stated that he was disappointed this spring when the farmer’s market did not have a place and the commission did not have more of a role in that conversation or help out. He continued that he wants the commission to be more proactive and help them - maybe take a more active role in facilitating or looking for grant money.

Discussion ensued. Chair Jacobs stated that the farmer’s market folks need to decide what they want - people have been offering them different options (for a permanent location) and for one reason or another farmer’s market folks have not chosen any of them. Mr. Florenz replied that they are not the most cohesive group.

Ms. Welsh asked about the option of having farmer’s market at Ashuelot Greenspace, which is a good option, and about the Railroad Square option. Chair Jacobs replied that the Railroad Square option is no longer in play, but Ashuelot Greenspace is interested in farmer’s market being there. Ms. Wilton spoke of reasons why farmer’s market folks are concerned with that option. Mr. Florenz spoke of the distinction between what is in the best interest of the city, not necessarily what is in the best interest of the specific group of farmers.

Charles Daloz stated that there is a free map showing development of the east side of Keene. He continued that there is a yellow square saying “farmer’s market.” Ms. Chalice replied that that map shows the feedback the City gathered at a public forum; it shows the location where the public *wants* farmer’s market to be. Chair Jacobs replied that the location shown with the yellow square is privately-owned land, and would require a series of events, a process which has not started.

Ms. Wilton asked about the status of Ashuelot Greenspace. Chair Jacobs replied that he thinks they will soon be digging up the pavement of the parking lot. He continued that their overall

landscape plan includes the potential for farmer's market. Farmer's market people have questions about that.

Ms. Wilton asked about the status of the parking lot (where farmer's market usually is). Ms. Welsh replied that it is almost finished. Ms. Wilton asked if farmer's market will stay there. Chair Jacobs replied that the farmer's market folks seem to like their temporary configuration; they will have to see what happens. The assumption is that they would return to the parking lot, but many of the problems they had with the parking lot location are now resolved with the current configuration.

Ms. Wilton stated that the commission should work on getting the farmer's market moved to Ashuelot Greenspace long-term. Chair Jacobs agreed. He continued that Ashuelot Greenspace people tried to meet with farmer's market people and were told that it was not a good time. Mr. Florenz suggested the commission step in to assist, explaining that moving to Ashuelot Greenspace is in the best interest of the city, and let the farmer's market people work on the day to day issues.

Regarding the concern some farmer's market people have about their customers not being able to find/access the market as easily if it moves out of the downtown area, Ms. Welsh spoke about how populated and successful the Brattleboro Farmer's Market is, even though it is not downtown. She continued that it includes a lot of well-loved restaurant stands, which the Keene one cannot have because the Keene Farmer's Market has rules about how every ingredient must be locally grown.

Discussion continued about the city's or commission's role regarding the farmer's market, and what the next step might be. Ms. Chalice suggested the commission come up with recommendations for the City to consider, regarding the farmer's market. Ms. Welsh asked what the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) says. Chair Jacobs replied that the CMP definitely calls for a farmer's market. He continued that the City is very committed, which is why he thinks they could find the \$50 in the budget to give to the MFCC. In many ways the issues with farmer's market are logistical, and it boils down to what the City's role and/or authority is in regards to it.

The commission discussed conversations they have already had with farmer's market people, and how to engage with them further. Chair Jacobs suggested the possibility of having a Keene resident from the farmer's market join the commission. He continued that today the commission should be mindful of giving ideas about what would be in the city's best interest regarding the farmer's market, not necessarily talking about the specific group of people that currently operate the farmer's market, so they are not talking about people not in the room.

Mr. Florenz stated that having the farmer's market at Ashuelot Greenspace is in the city's best interest. That is the most viable of the options they have looked at. Also, they would like to see the City involved in the management. Ms. Welsh added that it is also in the city's best interest for the farmer's market to be more open and accessible. Discussion continued about why Ashuelot Greenspace is the most viable option, such as the availability of space, parking, the fact that it is relatively close to downtown, the beauty of the area, and the Ashuelot Greenspace people's willingness/desire to have farmer's market there.

Ms. Chalice suggested the commission write a recommendation to the City Council with an introductory paragraph and then bullets explaining the reasons why they are recommending this. Chair Jacobs agreed and stated that he will contact the Ashuelot Greenspace folks to make sure they are still interested, as they were a couple months ago when they made their presentation.

Ms. Welsh asked about looking at the current rules of the farmer's market, regarding who is allowed to sell or not. Discussion ensued about communicating with the farmer's market people, and the commission's confusion with who makes decisions on behalf of the farmer's market, since there are/have been multiple coordinators.

Chair Jacobs summarized from the discussion: the commission wants the farmer's market folks to know that they, the commission, are interested in helping the farmer's market find a permanent location, and they recommend the Ashuelot Greenspace. The commission would like to better understand what the farmer's market's organization is – who makes decisions? What are the farmer's market's issues that need to be addressed? What is their long-range plan for, say, the next five years? Do they have a board? What is their mission statement? Chair Jacobs concluded that the commission wants to invite people from the farmer's market to come talk with them so the commission has a better understanding of the organization and its representatives, so they can better help the farmer's market, because it is in the city's best interest.

Ms. Chalice stated that this is the growing season and thus a very busy time for the farmers. She continued that they might not have the time to attend a meeting during the growing season. Discussion ensued about when to invite the farmer's market people for a meeting. Ms. Welsh spoke of the City Council's desire for the commission to start making proposals. Mr. Bettler agreed and spoke of the need for a list of recommendations, such as Ashuelot Greenspace. Mr. Florenz agreed with that location and suggested they also give recommendations on farmer's market's rules of governance and how the City should be involved. Discussion ensued about the fact that the long-range plan is for Ashuelot Greenspace to be a City park, and what this means. Ms. Wilton suggested the commission get more precise information from Ashuelot Greenspace about their plan and timeline. Chair Jacobs replied that he will talk with Ken Stewart about that. Discussion continued about the Ashuelot Greenspace plan.

Chair Jacobs stated that he will talk with Mr. Stewart. He continued that if the information he receives looks reasonable (regarding the timeline and Asheulot Greenspace's continued interest in the farmer's market), he will work with Ms. Chalice to draft a statement that captures what the commission wants to say to the farmer's market people, regarding their interest in better understanding the farmer's market's goals and organizational structure, and furthering the goals of the City, and that they see Asheulot Greenspace as the best option. He continued that the commission can talk about the draft statement at their next meeting, and decide on it.

Ms. Welsh went online via her smart phone and found the farmer's markets rules, which she read portions of out loud to the commission, regarding which vendors qualify. She stated that the rules seem strict and she wonders if they can open it up a little more. Discussion ensued.

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Commission members had different points of view about the farmer's market's rules, and of the commission's or City's role in addressing the rules.

Chair Jacobs stated that what the commission does seem to have consensus on is that Ashuelot Greenspace is a good option for a location, so he will talk with Mr. Stewart and see where they are at. Ms. Chalice replied that she will set up a meeting with Chair Jacobs. She asked who will invite farmer's market people to talk with the commission. Mr. Florenz replied that he will talk with Amanda Littleton, who knows all the farmers, and see if she can communicate to who she thinks best. Chair Jacobs stated that the commission does not want to mandate how the farmer's market does business – the commission wants them to know that the City wants a farmer's market. Mr. Bettler added, with a permanent location and a long-term plan. After more discussion, Chair Jacobs stated that they will talk more about this at their next meeting.

9. New or Other Business

Chair Jacobs reported that the next meeting is August 13, 2015. Ms. Chalice asked if that date will work with people's vacation schedules. Ms. Welsh replied that she does not know yet. Other members replied that the date is fine with them.

Chair Jacobs stated that he will communicate with the Mayor, regarding making Mr. Florenz a full-fledged member. Ms. Chalice invited Mr. Daloz to contact the Mayor if he is interested in joining the commission.

Chair Jacobs asked if there was any new business. Ms. Wilton asked if anyone would be interested in seeing a video about bee-keeping and global politics, from one of her classmates who studied global politics in Brazil. Ms. Chalice replied that if she sends her the link, she will send it out to the group.

Ms. Welsh asked if the commission should talk about the egg shortage. Ms. Wilton replied that she wonders if there are any experts available to talk with them about it. She continued that she noticed egg prices increasing at the Co op. Mr. Bettler asked if the way to address topics between meetings is to send information to Ms. Chalice to send to the group. Ms. Chalice replied yes, but they cannot start talking about it until the next meeting – what she sends out would be considered a resource. Discussion ensued about the rules of procedure, which clarify these issues.

Chair Jacobs stated that a couple people mentioned to him the issue of food security. Ms. Chalice distributed a handout from the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Committee – a list of items mentioned in the Climate Action Plan from 2009 that have a relationship to agriculture. She stated that the CCP is distributing the tasks to commissions and committees as appropriate, to keep in mind as they move forward with their work. Brief discussion ensued about the handout. Ms. Wilton stated that she thinks these items are from the MFCC.

Chair Jacobs asked Ms. Chalice to invite the CCP to come talk with the Agriculture Commission about how they can be helpful. Mr. Florenz replied that he can see addressing food security, but they might want to focus on doing one thing well, versus trying to discuss every possible

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agriculture related topic. Chair Jacobs replied that he thinks they should at least listen to what the CCP has to say before making up their minds.

Ms. Welsh asked if there is a way to make a list of what people write on the pad of paper at the commission's table at the MFCC event, regarding topics people want the commission to address. Ms. Chalice replied that she will put that list in next month's agenda packet if someone gives it to her. Chair Jacobs asked Ms. Welsh if she would be willing to compile the information. Ms. Welsh replied yes.

Ms. Wilton stated that she does not want the commission to get diverted on all tangential issues, but global issues do impact on the local communities. She continued that last year it was the Food Safety and Modernization Act, and now, the Trans-Pacific Partnership may affect local control that farmers have on selling their produce. The commission should at least devote one meeting to talk about the global issues coming up over the next year.

Mr. Bettler reported that he talked with the City Attorney, who says that the commission does not have to wait until a meeting to work on something like creating a brochure. He continued that commission members can meet and work on that, as long as they are not making decisions that need to be publicly noticed. He would like to see movement on that. Ms. Chalice replied that she will come up with examples of other agriculture commissions' brochures and put them in the agenda packet. Mr. Florenz asked if Mr. Bettler is talking about an agriculture commission brochure, or one about the community gardens. Mr. Bettler replied community gardens. Ms. Wilton replied that the commission was getting ready to finalize what their yearly goals would be and then that did not happen. Mr. Bettler replied yes, so rather than missing a month or two months, if one of their meetings does not have a quorum, they can meet in the interim. Ms. Welsh replied that they can submit interesting examples to Ms. Chalice and then maybe create a subcommittee and move forward.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker