

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 15, 2015 3:30 PM City Hall, Second Floor Conference Room

Members Present

Councilor Carl Jacobs, Chair
Sarah Wilton
Charles Daloz
Mark Florenz, Alternate
Kathy Harrington (Arrived at 3:33)

Staff Present

Michele Chalice, Planner

Members Not Present

Alan Bettler
Marcia Duffy
Alison Welsh

Others Present

Gallagher Hannon, Greenspace Project
Lou,
Susan Park-Sutherland, Windgate Farm
Rebecca Holland, Holland Homestead Farm
Owen Coursin, Antioch student
Bruce Bickford, Abenaki Springs Farm

1. Call to Order

Chair Jacobs called the meeting to order at 3:30 PM. The Committee Members introduced themselves.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting: September 10, 2015

Ms. Wilton made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 10, 2015. Mr. Daloz seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

3. Keene's Farmers Market Presentation/Discussion

Chair Jacobs stated that the Farmer's Market is an important part of Keene's agriculture and the Committee would like to be supportive on behalf of the city. He continued, stating that a more suitable location for the Farmer's Market is being discussed. Chair Jacobs stated that there is currently no room for growth at the current location. He continued, stating that the city looked at several potential locations for the Farmer's Market.

Chair Jacobs stated that the lot near Ashuelot River Park is a suitable location for the Farmer's Market. He continued, stating that Green Space is currently looking to transform this area.

Chair Jacobs stated that he hopes the new location would be available by 2017 for the Farmer's Market but in the meantime there is time to discuss. Chair Jacobs stated that this Committee is here for advocacy and to facilitate the conversation. He gave an example of the restriction of prepared foods at the Farmer's Market. Chair Jacobs stated that the decision is made by the city and in that instance the Committee could be an advocate for the Farmer's Market.

Ms. Harrington asked how the Committee can assist the Farmer's Market. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that prepared foods would be very beneficial. She continued, stating that her farm produces pig products and eggs and wanted to offer breakfast sandwiches at the market. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that there were several obstacles to this and Mr. John Rodgers stated that a food truck would have to be present. Ms. Harrington stated that the city of Keene is a self-regulated city and wonders how the Pumpkin Festival is able to offer prepared foods.

Mr. Bickford stated that vendors have to go through many department including the Health Department and Fire Department. He continued, stating that this is a special event however. Mr. Bickford stated that this event was brought up some time ago at City Council in reference to the Farmer's Market being a special event.

Chair Jacobs stated that infrastructure, like the pavilion in discussion with Greenspace, could provide space to cook foods. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that dealing with the grease was an issue. Chair Jacobs stated that refrigeration is also limited. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that cooking the food beforehand was allowed by the City. Chair Jacobs stated that inviting John Rogers to the Committee may be helpful.

Ms. Harrington asked if the city follows State RSAs. Mr. Bickford stated above and beyond State RSAs. Ms. Harrington gave an example of her work with Stonewall Farms. She stated that raw milk was not allowed in stores and state regulations were pushing back but ultimately the farm was able to get this decision overturned. Ms. Harrington stated that that there is a way around things and advocacy is necessary.

Mr. Bickford stated that the Farmer's Market once had more prepared foods but there were limited ingredients from the local area. He continued, stating that because of this experience, the Farmer's Market instilled the 25% rule for prepared foods and crafts because bakeries and prepared foods from outside of the area were making the majority of the money. Mr. Bickford stated that prepared foods can work but it has to have the right kind of spirit. Mr. Bickford stated that prepared foods are currently limited to 25% of the total vendors. This was created to protect the farmers. Lou stated that farmers were being forced out of the

Farmer's Market due to low sales. Chair Jacobs stated that if it was a larger space then more vendors can come through. Lou replied, yes but there is only so much money that comes into the market. He continued stating that the vendors are not selling out of food.

Mr. Bickford stated that sales from the Farmer's Market have been stagnant for 3 years and more customers are needed. He continued stating that advertising for the market needs to improve. Chair Jacobs stated that if the location was an attraction then it may bring more customers. Ms. Park-Sutherland agreed and stated that the Farmer's Market would act like an event. Ms. Harrington asked if the Brattleboro Farmers Market is appealing to them. There were conflicting views. Ms. Harrington stated that this gets to the question of what the Keene Farmer's Market wants to be.

Ms. Holland stated that she does not favor the Brattleboro Farmer's Market and focuses on prepared foods too much. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that she went to the Farmer's Market once but her partner has been there many times. She continued, stating that produce vendors can sell without applying. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that vendors reported the prepared foods brought customers. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that the Brattleboro Farmer's Market owns the land and can do whatever they want however. Ms. Hannon stated that owning the land does not allow the market to override regulations. She continued, stating that having refrigeration would be helpful. Lou stated that he is not in favor of moving the Keene Farmer's Market. He continued, stating that he had never been down to Ashuelot Park before now and if the market moved, it would have to be a destination spot. Lou stated that it takes the farmer's time to recover when they move to a new location.

Ms. Wilton asked why there is a drop off in sales. Lou replied that the Coop and CSA's are taking business. Lou stated that by having prepared foods at the market, you are basically telling people that they do not have to cook their own food. Mr. Bickford stated that he is not too familiar with Brattleboro Farmer's Market. He continued, stating that there has been a change since the Coop opened. He continued, stating that a beautiful location would be beneficial but there has to be marketing and advertising. Mr. Bickford stated that Gilbow Avenue is attracting new people. He continued, stating that at the moment farmers are hanging on by a thread. Mr. Bickford stated that he has been at the market for 12 years and there have been a lot of changes. He continued, stating that each year the market has to pay more money to the city and the bylaws of the Farmer's Market constitutes the majority vote for changing things.

Mr. Coursin inquired about crafters and that many craft vendors are interested but do not feel like they can apply. Lou stated that the amount of space at the market is a factor and the crafters do not sell enough as it is. Chair Jacobs stated that prepared foods should be discussed again and bringing someone from the city could be helpful. Chair Jacobs stated that it sounds like a bigger space is appealing but depends on customers and the money following to the new location. He continued, stating that advertising would be necessary. Mr.

Bickford stated that advertising was previously promised to the market by the city but he did not see this being met.

Ms. Harrington asked if the majority of the vendors from the Farmer's Market feel hesitant to move to a new location. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that she cannot speak for them. Mr. Florenz stated that the Committee does not need an answer right now. Chair Jacobs stated that the location needs to be discussed further and a new site can be an attraction. Ms. Harrington suggested getting a consensus from the vendors via email. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that it is premature to ask vendors about moving when the site is not finalized.

Ms. Hannon stated that there have been some changes. She continued, stating that they are working towards a finalized design in order to get to the fundraising process which will be a lengthier process. She continued, stating that it would be great to have the Farmer's Market as part of this fundraising and outreach. Ms. Hannon stated that this design process will be finishing up in the next couple of months. She continued, stating that the uses of the space can be flexible and there is no specific deadline yet.

Chair Link asked if a working plan can be sent out to the vendors for some feedback. Chair Link asked Ms. Hannon if a draft plan can be ready for the November 19th meeting. Ms. Hannon replied, yes and agreed that an email poll would be helpful.

Ms. Harrington stated that the poll would help build the Greenspace's vision. Chair Jacobs stated that there is no commitment; it is a conversation to helping each other. He continued stating that there is time to make these decisions. Ms. Hannon stated that there are constraints on the site and there are other uses for the site, specifically the playground. She continued, stating that the space for the Farmer's Market will be used for other events as well.

Ms. Hannon went over the criteria requested by Farmer's Market vendors including, a covered pavilion with room to grow, open green space, bathrooms, a performance area, water, sewer and power, parking for patrons and vendors, and storage. Lou requested the Farmer's Market have a designated spot and not be bumped for another event. Ms. Park-Sutherland stated that parking is important and ample handicap access. Mr. Coursin suggested a bus stop in the area to increase accessibility. He continued, suggesting direct contact should occur to patrons of the Farmer's Market in reference to a change in location. Mr. Coursin suggested collaborating with other events as well. He gave the example of Art in the Park. Ms. Park-Sutherland agreed and suggested the Farmer's Market collaborate with other organizations as well.

Mr. Florenz stated that adequate signage would be helpful to advertise the location from West Street. Ms. Hannon stated that cleaning up the site will help with visibility. She continued, stating that if it is a spot used by other people it will bring customers. Chair Jacobs stated that Greenspace will have a status report for the November meeting and reiterated that there is no commitment on anyone's part. Chair Link asked if John Rodger's

should be invited. The representatives of the Farmer's Market believed that another day would be best for the discussion of prepared foods. Ms. Chalice stated that she will contact Mr. Rodgers. Ms. Wilton asked about the prepared foods. Chair Jacobs recapped the previous comments.

Mr. Bickford stated that Mr. Rodgers has been very helpful to the market and made it possible to have meats and eggs. Chair Jacobs stated that the city is committed to the Farmer's Market and wants to continue the relationship. Ms. Hannon asked what the best way to get the information out to the farmers is and if a presentation of packet would be helpful. Ms. Chalice stated that she will email the information to Ms. Park-Sutherland and she will send it out to vendors.

Mr. Florenz stated that the Agricultural Commission is still interested in working with the Farmer's Market even if they do not want to change location.

4. **"A Consideration for the Keene Agricultural Council"**

5. **New Business:**

Ms. Chalice stated that Parks and Recreation Director, Andy Bohannon asked to be a part of the meeting next month. Chair Link stated that the December meeting would be best in addition to a written proposal. Ms. Chalice stated that he wanted potential ideas for open lots.

6. **Next Meeting:** Next meeting date: November 19, 2015

7. **More Time:**

8. **Adjournment**

Chair Link adjourned the meeting at 4:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

Lana Bluege, Minute-taker

October 15, 2015