

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, November 19, 2015 3:30 PM City Hall, Second Floor Conference Room

Members Present

Councilor Carl Jacobs, Chair
Sarah Wilton
Charles Daloz
Mark Florenz, Alternate

Staff Present

Michele Chalice, Planner
Andy Bohannon-
Parks and Recreation Director

Members Not Present

Alan Bettler
Marcia Duffy
Alison Welsh
Kathy Harrington

Others Present

1. Call to Order

Chair Jacobs called the meeting to order at 3:38 PM.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting: October 15, 2015

Chair Jacobs made a motion to approve the minutes of October 15, 2015. Mr. Daloz seconded the motion which carried unanimously with the following corrections:

Ms. Chalice asked what Lou's last name is. Mr. Daloz replied Brockelmann but is unsure of the actual spelling.

3. Andrew Bohannon; seeking farmers for City parcels/Hay Field leases

Mr. Bohannon approached the Committee. Mr. Bohannon noted that the Parks and Recreation Department also oversees cemeteries. He continued, stating that a section of Monadnock Cemetery is hayed each year by a private organization that pays the city of Keene a small portion of money. This section is roughly 20 acres. Mr. Bohannon stated that whoever leases the land must install a bridge as well. He continued, stating that this lot went out to bid later than usual this year and Fenceline Corporation in Alstead won the bid. Mr. Bohannon stated that the

company delayed signing the agreement until the end of September. He continued, stating that the second cut was approaching and the department decided not to pursue this partnership. Mr. Bohannon stated that this decision was brought to the City Council in the beginning of October. The second bid was not approached.

Mr. Bohannon stated that he decided to approach the Agricultural Committee and discuss other farmers or prospective companies to lease the land. He continued, stating that Parks and Recreation Department cut the field last week in order to have next year's crop come in. Mr. Bohannon asked the Committee if they have any suggestions on how to use this land.

Chair Jacobs asked how the land was advertised to the public. Mr. Bohannon stated that the process starts with the purchasing department and goes out in the public notice with the Keene Sentinel. Mr. Florenz stated that there are few people who hay on a large scale like this. He continued, stating that through word of mouth the Committee could reach out to people. Chair Jacobs stated that the purpose is to maintain the fields and allow people to take the hay. He continued, stating that there is usually not payment to the land owner. Chair Jacobs stated that the hay field has to be maintained or else it will become unkempt. Mr. Florenz suggested the city have a contract for mowing the area instead of the farmer.

Mr. Bohannon wondered if this field is worth the effort and noted that there were suggestions to create a wildflower space in the area and increase pollinators. Mr. Bohannon stated that he tried to work with NRCS and Amanda Littleton but the grant did not go through. He continued, stating that flower seed would also be a substantial cost for the size of the land. Chair Jacobs stated that it is important to maintain the fields and Ms. Littleton would be able to get the word out to people for hay. Mr. Florenz stated that the Agricultural Committee can reach out to her as well. Mr. Bohannon stated that he has worked with Ms. Littleton in the past. Ms. Chalice asked if she provided information for other grants. Mr. Bohannon noted that the grant in discussion came through in an email and he had contact Ms. Littleton.

Mr. Florenz asked if the Keene participated in the farmer/conservation connection. Mr. Florenz noted that *Land for Good* held a workshop. Mr. Florenz stated that he would like to see an increase in active farming. Mr. Bohannon stated that there are public gardens in the back of the cemetery as well. He agreed and stated that there are other pieces of land in the city to use for that purpose like the Well site. Ms. Chalice stated that she can put together a map with the various parcels. Mr. Florenz stated that there may already be a map of this.

Chair Jacobs stated that the Agricultural Committee can help with the networking. He continued, suggesting parcels be used for livestock as well. Mr. Florenz suggested utilizing Antioch students for a vegetable farming project. Chair Jacobs stated that there are agriculturally historic parcels that can be great opportunities for the right people. Mr. Daloz suggested asking those that lease the land to improve the land if the city decided to waive the fee. Mr. Florenz suggested partnering with *Land for Good* as well. Mr. Daloz stated that Monadnock Conservancy is putting a map together of agricultural lands.

Chair Jacobs restated that getting an inventory of the parcels in discussion is the first step and then the Committee can bring together people that may be interested. He continued, noting that

someone may be interested in mowing the land as well. Mr. Bohannon stated that he will continue to work with Ms. Chalice on this item. Chair Jacobs asked to get information together for the next Agricultural Committee meeting. Mr. Bohannon stated that he has a prior commitment with the Senior Center Board at this time and may not be able to attend another meeting but will keep communication with the Committee.

4. Continued: “A Consideration for the Keene Agricultural Council”

Mr. Daloz stated that this is a private citizen letter but wonders how the Committee wants to deal with it. Chair Jacobs stated that this item also relates to Mr. Bohannon’s concern with the city’s lands. Mr. Daloz stated that there is land available and a large number of crops can be grown here. He continued, asking if the Committee wants to begin laying the groundwork for having more agricultural production. Mr. Daloz noted that Keene once shipped out food and the land is now poorly managed. He continued, asking if there is anything the Committee can do to encourage utilization of this land.

Mr. Florenz stated concern about getting food to the market and if it is affordable. Ms. Wilton brought up John Forti who designs gardens and focuses on the slow foods movement. She continued, stating that the slow food movement focuses on people learning how to use local produce. She stated that it is a cultural issue rather than a land issue. Chair Jacobs noted that the Historical Society is having an exhibit on 300 years of agriculture. Chair Jacobs discussed the changing of times with food, agriculture, refrigeration etc. He continued, stating that Keene had a viable agriculture in the area until about 50 years ago. Chair Jacobs noted that New Hampshire does not have favorable soil and it is hard to compete with other areas. He continued, stating that there is an open reception for the exhibit tomorrow.

Ms. Wilton discussed the difficulties and concerns with agricultural distribution on a global scale. Mr. Daloz noted the difficulties with increasing gas prices as well. The committee discussed the benefits of agricultural education and having people know where food comes from. Chair Jacobs stated that many people come to the agricultural/food issue from different points of views like clean air, exercise, eating local etc. Ms. Chalice stated that educating people does not have to be complicated. Mr. Florenz stated that it is important to focus on how the Committee gets those involved who are not involved with food and agriculture.

Mr. Daloz asked where the Agricultural Commission comes into play with these issues. Ms. Wilton suggested bringing groups together like the Community Kitchen and the Farmers Market. Mr. Florenz stated that Peterborough Agricultural Committee is starting a program with the school as well. He continued, suggesting the Committee partner with schools and local farmers. Mr. Daloz stated that the Committee can help coordinate this or partner with similar groups. Mr. Florenz stated that the Committee needs to pick a project and go with it. Mr. Daloz asked what the Committee’s vision is. Chair Jacobs stated that the Committee should review the Keene Master Plan and work on the items specific to agriculture. Chair Jacobs stated that the Keene Master Plan has a broad view of the community and was accepted by City Council and this would be a good guideline. The Committee agreed to discuss the topics discussed in the Keene Master Plan at the next meeting.

5. New Business:

Chair Jacobs stated that there is an update with the Ashuelot Green Space and the Farmers Market. He continued, stating that both parties have decided that the partnership will not work. Chair Jacobs stated that the building and parking requirements of the farmers market was not possible for the Ashuelot Green Space to accommodate. He continued, stating that the farmers market was asking for very specific things and the Ashuelot Green Space did not want it to overtake the space.

Chair Jacobs noted that the prepared food question was brought up at the previous meeting and it is a possibility. He continued, stating that the city needs to make sure that it is safe for the public however. Ms. Wilton stated that she did not get the impression that the Farmer's Market wanted prepared foods. Chair Jacobs stated that some farmers were interested in this at the last meeting but there was not a lot of discussion on this matter. Ms. Wilton stated concern with having prepared foods and taking away from the produce section.

Chair Jacobs noted that the Farmer's Market has some prepared food including wine, cheese and jam. Mr. Florenz noted that it is not for the Committee to decide if the Farmer's Market has prepared foods but to help understand the necessary procedures with the city. Chair Jacobs noted that the Farmer's Market still does not have a settled location. Mr. Florenz stated that the Coop will continue to take business away from the Farmer's Market until the market has a designated space for people to go. Chair Jacobs stated that people have brought up the Kingsbury property as a possibility. Mr. Florenz noted that he would like to see the farmers market have more enthusiasm on this matter. Ms. Wilton noted that the Farmer's Market needs to define who they are. Mr. Daloz stated that the Committee should keep an open line to the Farmer's Market and allow them to come back on their own terms.

Ms. Chalice suggested continually sending the Farmer's Market the Agricultural Committee's agenda. Chair Jacobs agreed to this suggestion. He stated that the Agricultural Committee should be part of the conversation if the Farmer's Market decides to change location and signs a new lease. He continued, stating that he wonders where the market will be in 2017. Chair Jacobs asked Ms. Chalice to look into who the Farmer's Market signs a lease with. Mr. Daloz stated that the Farmer's Market previously stated concern with finances.

Chair Jacobs stated that the Farmer's Market's current location is also a safety concern. Mr. Florenz agreed and stated that he is also concerned with long term viability as well. Mr. Daloz asked the ramifications of Agricultural Committee members attending Farmer's Market meetings. Chair Jacobs stated that each member would go as a concerned citizen who is also part of the Agricultural Committee. Ms. Chalice asked if the market meets on a regular basis. Chair Jacobs was not sure but noted that there is currently a winter market on Saturdays.

Mr. Daloz asked about the Keene Renewal Agricultural Plan. Chair Jacobs stated that this will be discussed at City Council but he is not sure of the current status.

6. **Next Meeting:** Next meeting date: December 17, 2015

7. **More Time:**

8. **Adjournment**

Chair Link adjourned the meeting at 4: 45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by:

Lana Bluege, Minute-taker

November 19, 2015