

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURE COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 10, 2017

3:30 PM

**City Hall, Second Floor Conference
Room**

Members Present:

Sarah Wilton, Chair
Charles Daloz, Vice Chair
Councilor Bettina A. Chadbourne
Mark Florenz
Aaron Moody

Staff Present:

Michele Chalice, Planner

Guests Present:

Jori Johnson, Keene Housing

Members Not Present:

Megan Straughen

1) Call to order

Chair Wilton called meeting to order at 3:35 pm.

2) Approve April 12, 2017 minutes

Mr. Moody made the motion to approve the April 12 minutes, Mr. Daloz seconded the motion and it was passed by unanimous vote.

Chair Wilson proposed to move agenda item number 3 to number 5.

3) Jori Johnson, Keene Housing's Community Gardens

Ms. Johnson introduced herself as the new Community Garden Coordinator with Keene Housing Community Gardens, a new program that started last year in May. Until now, the program has had 3 properties with community garden infrastructure and one of them is an 11-12 bed property at Harper Acres on Castle Street at an elderly and disabled community which has been run solely by a dedicated volunteer for years prior to Ms. Johnson's arrival.

Ms. Johnson described her position as twofold: she spends half her time managing the farm to family buying club, and the other half managing the community gardens. When she started in 2016, there were 24 beds across several properties and her job was to identify interest and infrastructure that she could develop based on location of other interested parties. She spent the months of January through April 2016 meeting at 6 properties with any interested

residents of Keene housing, identifying interest areas and water locations. She learned that out of 3 properties, the beds were already built but 2 of them lacked a close water source and were unusable. For example, the beds built at the North Street-Gilsum Street family property, the water is located 300 feet away behind the building and involved dragging a heavy hose from a locked garden shed to the raised beds and leaving the hose out caused damage to the property. Ms. Johnson stated that careful consideration bed placement near a water source would have prevented this sort of damage from occurring.

Ms. Johnson stated that this year the project is establishing 53 raised beds and all of them are already built except for 8 beds. She referred to the project brochure, *Riverbed Will you Grow*, and described it as the project's marketing campaign. She stated that the Community Gardens project gauged interest in target communities by marketing directly to their residents. Each meeting was specifically planned out with topics and took place in the evenings from 5:30-6:00 pm. During these brief meetings, she guided residents of the 6 new properties in selecting a garden name, defining their "big dream" and crafting a mission statement. She conducted 4 meetings per property which she admitted was a lot of work.

Ms. Johnson also stated that the water issue at the North-Gilsum property she discussed earlier has since been remedied by digging a trench and having an irrigation specialist come to the property and there is now water access right next to the garden beds. That effort prompted 3 families that previously did not want to be involved to now be interested in gardening and Ms. Johnson is assisting them with growing. Referring to the campaign brochure, Ms. Johnson stated that the previous year she performed all of the gardening and donated all of the food in a theme garden format, however, this year families are assuming ownership of the gardens at that site.

Ms. Johnson stated that the 13 raised beds run by the dedicated volunteer at the Harbor Acres property on Castle Street will be cultivating their extra bed as a community garden bed and donating all of the food grown to their community room to be available free of charge to community residents.

Ms. Johnson discussed that the original vision for the 5 raised beds at the Forest View family property was a children's' gardening program, however, after one year of running the program the residents decided they did not have the time to continue it. Currently, there is a dedicated resident who will be cultivating the garden beds for her own family but will also give away extra food to residents of the property and also attempt to engage the resident children in gardening activities as she is a mother of two young children herself.

Chair Wilton suggested that the link for the Community Gardens brochure be posted with the minutes for the meeting and Ms. Johnson agreed to share the link with the committee for this purpose. Ms. Chalice also agreed to share the pdf of brochure as the original plan was to show the brochure on a screen but plans had changed.

Ms. Johnson discussed 5 Central Square Terrace- a 99 apartment property downtown with a great deal of interested gardeners. Located behind the back door of City Hall and Luca's restaurant, the property currently has a perennial bed and pot gardens that they utilize mostly as a social space. However, she stated that residents are currently looking for urban gardening space where they can grow tomatoes and cucumbers and a few foods for themselves.

Vice Chair Daloz asked about the empty gravel lot at the corner of 93rd and Church streets – close to Beaver Brook and next to the new and existing senior housing building. Ms. Johnson stated there are existing beds there and that she had walked down there with residents and would be interested in establishing beds there if possible. Ms. Chalice suggested talking to property owner through Southwest Community Services with Keith Thibault. Vice Chair Daloz asked committee to return to Ms. Johnson's presentation but to return to this idea at a later time as he would like to see gardens established on city-owned property.

Ms. Johnson shared that there are 8 families getting ready to garden beds at Meadow Road family property. The Community Gardens project provided mulch and compost for them as well as a new shed. Residents have wanted gardening space but previously did not have a space to grow and are now developing plant lists which include foods like ginger, mint and citronella. This particular gardening group has suggested planting a bed in an area where neighborhood kids pass through so that kids can pick vegetables from that garden instead of looting private gardens.

Ms. Johnson talked about creating 8 raised beds for Stone Arch Village, a combined family and elderly property as a solution for elderly residents with limited mobility who are unable to get down on the ground. These beds come with insect covers and cold frames which Ms. Johnson said they have not purchased yet due to budget constraints. She also pointed out pictures of raised beds and seed jugs and stated that they started most of their cold crops this year using this method.

Ms. Johnson discussed the new Employee Garden behind the Green Wagon farm which has 12 raised beds with about a dozen people interested in planting them. Employee gardeners have decided that each bed will be communal and contain a different crop, for example, a tomato bed, and any employee gardener can pick from each bed. Ms. Johnson described to committee members the milk jug method of starting seedlings by creating a sort of terrarium environment in the milk jug through condensation, allowing hundreds of seedlings to grow in each milk jug which can then be spread all over property.

Ms. Johnson discussed her efforts with Keene Housing at redesigning Stone Arch Family into a nature or garden-centered playground. She would like to create living arches like willow trees to reflect the history of the Stone Arch bridge. Ms. Johnson also offered ideas of innovative gardens from other cities, such as repurposed tire worm and herb bins for kids to interact with, telescopes mounted on flower balls for kids to study plant growth from a cellular level and mirrors used as a teaching tool in a sound garden. She said there is a lot of red tape to pass through as redesign project has to be officially engineered and must pass City of Keene regulations. Ms. Johnson stated that she is hopeful she can make the project happen as it is all within the budget and feasible.

Ms. Johnson stated that her biggest vision for the future is to develop a significant collaboration between the Community Garden Coordinator and the Farm to Family Buying Club. She would like to buy less food from Monadnock Menus to serve residents and instead have residents grow more food to provide for themselves. Ms. Johnson suggested if there is enough community interest, she could apply for High Tunnel grants to grow food year round and providing residents with local, healthy food year round. She also mentioned the Food

Forest idea and that although Keene Housing possesses the available land resources, seriously interested parties are needed to commit to idea to make it happen.

Ms. Johnson talked about Chicago's Parade of the Cows art installation where artists were given a life-sized cow to paint and the cows were then placed strategically across the city to encourage people to walk the city streets. She proposed the idea that the City of Keene use plants and agriculture to promote living art in the community, perhaps designed by landscape architects. She used Ikea's food orb as an example of how living art could be used to create connections between food and community. Ms. Johnson also shared other ideas from multiple cities including walkway planting, a curbside planting initiative started by a Los Angeles-based artist who planted edible plants for the community on city-owned parkways in front of his home, self-watered vertical planting created in gutters and planting in feed bags. Ms. Johnson cited a GIS map from a 2014 study conducted by Antioch University New England created for the Agriculture Commission which identified areas where community gardens could be placed in the city of Keene, although she is unsure where actual locations are. Ms. Chalice said that her office has access to the map.

Ms. Johnson shared with the committee the method she uses to organize her community gardeners using a square-foot gardening plan. Using this plan, she said that gardeners first identify plants they want to grow, then look plant up alphabetically and determine how many plants they could fit inside a square foot. She then provides gardeners with square foot gardening maps that they can place crops into and determine how many days until harvest. Once they have an empty square the next month, they can look up ideas for what to plant next. She said that once gardeners are finished organizing their gardens this way, she provides them with a blueprint. Ms. Johnson stated that this method is a good starting point for organizing novice gardeners for this year.

Councilor Chadbourne asked why she chose raised beds if there is so much land available. Ms. Johnson explained that her project is attempting to remove any obstacles to gardening that may turn people off to gardening such as upkeep and weeding. Chair Wilton asked if the wood used for raised beds is sustainably sourced. Ms. Johnson explained that construction was performed by a 12 person maintenance crew using wood from Hamshaws. Ms. Johnson said that the vision originated with the Executive Director at Keene Housing.

Chair Wilton asked Ms. Johnson to explain the activities of Keene Housing. Ms. Johnson explained that Keene Housing provides government subsidized housing to low-income residents or an income-based voucher based on what residents are able to afford. She explained that Keene Housing is not run by City of Keene and that Joshua Mann is the Executive Director. Ms. Johnson also explained that the Board of Commissioners which oversees Keene Housing's activities is made up of business people around town. She also stated that all of the activities at Keene Housing are governed by Housing Urban Development (HUD).

Mr. Daloz asked what will happen when HUD is no longer funded and how economically sustainable Keene Housing is. Ms. Johnson stated she is not entirely sure but that they do work off of government subsidies to provide rental subsidies. Mr. Moody asked Ms. Johnson if her specific role is grant-funded and she explained that her previous role was funded by a one-year grant but when that ended Keene Housing secured money elsewhere and that

currently her position is integrated into the budget. Ms. Wilton asked what the Keene Housing hierarchy is. Ms. Johnson clarified that Keene Housing reports directly to HUD and that there is no city or state intervention.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that absent committee member Ms. Straughen could have benefited from Ms. Johnson's discussion as she works as Sustainability Coordinator for the Monadnock Food Coop. She stated that the Coop is considering establishing raised beds on their property and that Ms. Straughen is involved in brainstorming that effort but the main issue is maintenance. Ms. Johnson suggested that Keene Housing's residents would be happy to maintain those edible plant gardens and Ms. Chalice said that would be a bit far for them to access. Vice Chair Daloz mentioned the elderly housing close to the Coop but Ms. Johnson said the ones on Railroad Street are not associated with Keene Housing. However, Ms. Johnson stated she spoke to the owner of those beds and they will be planted this year.

Mr. Florenz asked Ms. Johnson if there was currently any collaboration between Keene Housing and Community Garden Connections (CGC) at AUNE as they share similar missions. Ms. Johnson stated that CGC were the original builders at two of the sites Keene Housing currently manages, however, there is not much coordination between the two groups currently. She said that CGC does send a graduate student at least once a month to Harper Acres to assist gardeners at that site.

Councilor Chadbourne asked Ms. Johnson if Keene Housing was looking to the City of Keene for help with land resources. Ms. Johnson explained that especially for the Central Square Terrace they have hit a sort of road block in terms of accessing space. She said Keene Housing has money in the budget for Central Square Terrace to have raised beds but she has nowhere for them to put the beds and again water access is an issue. She has contacted AUNE for advice and is also appealing to committee for any advice they might have regarding this issue. Mr. Daloz mentioned that the International Order of the Elks has a plot and they might be interested in helping oversee plots or allow Keene Housing to put plots in there based on their community mission. He emphasized the importance of having institutional support.

Ms. Chalice stated that she was hoping that additional timber, raised planning beds in the concrete area between the city right of way and the Central Square property could be also used as seasonal planting beds. Ms. Johnson said it could be possible but Keene Housing owns the building down to the barber shop and is attempting to rent the empty spaces and they do not want too much more infrastructure in that area. She stated that there is also a bus stop there that they need to take into consideration. In addition, they are planning a new crosswalk in that area. Mr. Florenz suggested the idea of rooftop gardens in Central Square and Ms. Johnson said they had considered it but the population density in the area is an obstacle to the rooftop garden planning as it would impede access.

Mr. Daloz asked what role the Commission could play in assisting with Ms. Johnson's efforts. Ms. Wilton recommended that the Commission brainstorm the ideas covered in Ms. Johnson's presentation as they are very much aligned with the commission's priority areas. She also suggested that Keene Housing Community Gardens' activities be featured in the Keene Sentinel for more publicity. Chair Wilson said she would contact Keene Sentinel about featuring the new community gardens debut of 52 beds this May-June. Councilor

Chadbourne said the committee can approach Mr. Bohannon at City Parks and Recreation about available land plots including downtown Keene area as well as make a recommendation to the Council. Ms. Johnson agreed that would be a great idea. Mr. Florenz stated that they should revive the work they did a few years back assessing good community garden locations. He said the main issue they encountered then was having an organization that drives the ideas. Councilor Chadbourne asked for a copy of the map as she was not on committee during the years it was created. Ms. Chalice said she could provide 11x17 prints for next month's meeting along with the report. Councilor Chadbourne said they might not even need to make a recommendation to the Council as she will talk to Mr. Andrew Bohannon at the Parks and Recreation Department and put them in contact with Keene Housing to begin a relationship between two groups. Mr. Florenz stated that Mr. Bohannon already runs a community garden at Monadnock View Cemetery and Councilor Chadbourne said he also ran 8 beds at the Keene Recreation Center as well.

Mr. Daloz offered the idea of creating a subgroup committee for reestablishing their interests and politely asked Minute Taker to not take notes on what he was about to say, but Councilor Chadbourne interjected to remind Mr. Daloz that he cannot legally dictate what is captured by the Minute-Taker. Ms. Chalice also suggested to Mr. Daloz that he refer strictly to the agenda items at today's meeting and refrain from offering new ideas in order to stick to the agenda. Mr. Daloz apologized and withdrew his suggestion.

Committee thanked Ms. Johnson for her presentation. Ms. Chalice made one final suggestion to Ms. Johnson in reference to a privately-owned piece of land purchased by Ken Stewart and the Putnam family. She explained the owners of the property approached the Ashuelot River Advisory Board a few years back about ideas for the area, for example building a playground and gardens with the intention of ultimately donating land to the City. Mr. Florenz stated that they had presented to the Agriculture Commission in the past. Ms. Chalice said they were on final funding stages the last she had heard.

4) Results of the Commission's Project Priorities Vote

Chair Wilton distributed a handout to committee with one side detailing results from project priorities vote from last month's meeting and the other side correspondence with Bent Court which is one of the top priority issues. She stated that the project priority votes were based on a point system where the minimum number of points was the highest priority issue (6 points), and the maximum number of points was the lowest priority issue (36 points). Chair Wilton stated that based upon the numeric data, the highest priority issue was Education and Outreach which received 16 points. She said she interpreted the data results as an indication that the commission needs more marketing and public relations in order to promote their ideas. She said they need to have guest speakers, brainstorm tasks and prioritize. Vice Chair Daloz stated that he is unaware if the community knows about the Commission. Chair Wilton stated that the priority is communicating to the public about what direction Keene is moving in in terms of agriculture. Ms. Chalice suggested that if Education and Outreach is the top priority, the next steps are to make that item a priority on agenda for next month or the following month, and begin to assign tasks to committee members to begin the process of moving forward. Councilor Chadbourne agreed that in order to do the outreach there is a need to develop a "product" to market to public. Councilor Chadbourne suggested that one of the tasks be to educate public about agricultural projects happening in the city. Vice Chair

Daloz asked if they needed to make a motion for an agenda item. Councilor Chadbourne said it is not necessary to make a motion for an agenda item and that Chair can recommend making it an agenda item. Chair Wilton agreed to put brainstorming and task generation for Education and Outreach as priority on agenda for next month.

5) Status: Urban Agriculture Project @ Bent Ct.

Chair Wilton stated that on April 24 they had met with John Mitchell from Keene High School and he explained his vision for creating an agriculture program called Urban Arborists. She said Mr. Mitchell would like to use Bent Court as a sort of laboratory and Chair Wilton thinks it is “a win-win situation” because the City obtains student labor and on-the-job training and students receive real world training as part of their curriculum. She refers to handout and said that the wording Mr. Mitchell used requires more details for City Council, for example, describing specific tasks students will be performing so they are assured students are not just playing around. Ms. Chalice added that the original meeting involved Chair Wilton, Mr. Bohannon, Mr. Mitchell and herself and that Donna Hanscom was not able to make the meeting. She stated that property is under jurisdiction of Public Works because of the water catchment area. Ms. Chalice said that Mr. Bohannon explained that due to the previous arrangement between the two organizations, he and Donna would sit down and go over the idea and that Donna could make final judgment call. Mr. Florenz added that he did not think this needed to go to City Council as students will primarily be climbing trees and cutting branches. Chair Wilton said students would probably perform a survey, prune trees and other similar activities. Ms. Chalice stated that as long as Ms. Hanscom understands what students will be doing on city property, Ms. Hanscom should be able to handle it from there.

Ms. Chalice stated she will create a memo based on more feedback from Mr. Mitchell. Ms. Wilton said in theory this program could have started in May and become an ongoing part of his classroom instruction. Mr. Florenz said he did not think it would be a problem as the proposal benefits both sides, the city and the school, and will not harm property. Councilor Chadbourne asked if committee should make a motion for action to follow through with Mr. Mitchell. Ms. Chalice said that is a good idea and stated that the commission needs to direct staff to create a memo for consideration by the Public Works department.

Chair Wilton made a motion to move the memo forward, it was seconded by Mr. Moody and passed by unanimous vote.

6) Status: Monadnock Agricultural Crowd-Funding Projects

Mr. Florenz stated that Monadnock Buy Local is starting an initiative, partnering with the Local Crowd, a Wisconsin-based crowd-funding platform specifically targeted at local development. He said that Monadnock Buy Local is the local organization that is testing out the platform in the Monadnock region. On a trial basis, they put out a request for proposals, and Archway Farm and Stonewall Farm are the two local crowdfunding projects. Stonewall Farms raised money to help fund a new animal barn and Archway Farm raised a little over \$5,000 to help purchase a new sausage cart. He stated that the marketing exposure from the platform was great as was the funding aspect. Mr. Florenz said Archway Farm is available at the Coop and will be a guest vendor at the Keene Farmer’s Market as well.

7) **New or Other Business**

Councilor Chadbourne asked if there are still openings on the Committee and Ms. Chalice said there is one opening available but perhaps one other Alternate position as well.

8) **Next Meeting – Wednesday, June 14, at 3:30PM**

9) **Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned was at 4:38.

Respectfully submitted by,

Ayshah Kassamali-Fox, Minute Taker