

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, July 21, 2016

3:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Alan Bettler, Chair
Sarah Wilton, Vice Chair
Bettina Chadbourne, Councilor
Charles Daloz
Mark Florenz, Alternate

Staff Present:

Michele Chalice, Planning

Members Not Present:

Kathy Harrington
Marcia Duffy

1) Call to Order

Chair Bettler called the meeting to order at 3:33 PM.

2) Approve June 2016 Minutes

Ms. Wilton stated that Alison Welsh is no longer a member and they need to take her off the Members Not Present list in the June minutes. Councilor Chadbourne replied that the City Council did not approve Ms. Welsh's resignation until July, so at the time the June minutes were written, Ms. Welsh was still a member.

Ms. Wilton noted a correction to the June minutes: on page 4, the 2nd sentence in the 5th paragraph states, "...as the rationale for having agriculture in the CMP" and it should instead read "...as the rationale for having an Agriculture Commission."

Councilor Chadbourne made a motion to approve the June minutes as amended. 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 John Rogers drafted something that will go to the City Council tonight. He continued that they will most likely refer it to the Planning, Licenses, and Development (PLD) Committee. Ms. Chalice replied that that PLD Committee meets at 6:30 PM next Wednesday if anyone wants to be there. Mr. Florenz added that Mr. Rogers seemed optimistic. Brief discussion ensued about the City Council's summer schedule. Councilor Chadbourne stated that she anticipates this passing. Mr. Florenz stated that Mr. Rogers recommends a \$100 fee and he is fine with that. Discussion continued. Ms. Chalice stated that \$100 would be similar to what the fee is in

surrounding communities. Mr. Florenz stated that he is happy this process is moving along so quickly.

4) Proposed Agriculture Commission Goal Amendments to Keene Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP)

Ms. Chalice reported that she talked with Planning staff in regards to the other committees and their current efforts to do similar work. She continued that the method other committees (such as the Conservation Commission and Bicycle Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee) are taking is to write and submit their own master plans. That is the recommendation, if the Agriculture Commission wants to see this happen sooner – to work on a plan now, for when the CMP gets updated. The update is on its way and there will not be an amendment process for any topic. This type of presentation is still extremely relevant and important, and it would broach the subject of this committee feeling the need for and wanting to write an Agriculture Commission Master Plan.

Chair Bettler replied that their presentation to the City Council would then be informational, saying that the Agriculture Commission is interested in writing a master plan. Councilor Chadbourne asked if they need to present a proposal to the City Council. Ms. Chalice replied that they can present it when it is done. Discussion ensued. Chair Bettler stated that Ms. Wilton did a lot of work on the presentation. Councilor Chadbourne praised Ms. Wilton's work.

Chair Bettler stated that this presentation would be informational now, as opposed to trying to persuade the City Council to make amendments. He asked what the time frame is. Ms. Chalice replied that the commission can determine that. Chair Bettler asked if the other entities are doing something similar and doing presentations. Ms. Chalice replied that the other committees and commissions are still in the beginning steps/process of creating master plans, not doing presentations. It is a lot of work. She wonders if the Agriculture Commission wants to put the information out there in some other format; it does not have to be a master plan. Councilor Chadbourne replied that they can present to the Joint Committee (PLD/Planning Board) without having a master plan. Ms. Chalice agreed. She continued that they can tell the City Council that they feel agriculture is important to include in the CMP Update. Chair Bettler stated that since they now have this new information, the content of the presentation may need to change a little before they present it to the Joint Committee, since it was written with the idea that they would be pushing for an amendment.

Ms. Wilton asked why they would present it to the Joint Committee. Councilor Chadbourne replied that that committee has a lot of input on the CMP, wanting to make sure it is being implemented. She continued that people present to the Joint Committee all the time to weigh in on projects or ideas for the future. It would be appropriate for the Agriculture Commission to present to them. Agriculture did not make it on the Joint Committee's priority list (of the most important topics to address from the CMP). Ms. Chalice replied that keeping agriculture on the Joint Committee's radar would be a good thing for the commission to do. Councilor Chadbourne stated that they are talking about the Marlboro St. redevelopment project and one of the plans is to allow farm animals in

that area. That is an example of agriculture within the city limits. It would be good to get the Joint Committee thinking about agriculture more. Mr. Florenz stated that it would be good to educate the City Council on what the commission is and what they do. Councilor Chadbourne replied yes, maybe if they help get agriculture to the forefront of their minds, their priorities will shift. Discussion continued about reasons for presenting to the City Council. Councilor Chadbourne and Mr. Florenz spoke more about the benefits of giving the City Council further information and education about agriculture.

Ms. Wilton read the conclusion slide from the draft presentation, stating that it seems to be the point they need to emphasize first – why the Agriculture Commission is important. She continued that the rest of the presentation seems to be background. Chair Bettler agreed and stated that he thinks they should move forward with this, pointing out that agriculture is missing in the CMP. They can use a lot of what has been drafted already, with a few small changes. Councilor Chadbourne asked if they could just leave it, saying that this is what they are thinking about for the future. Ms. Chalice replied that it could be advocacy for making sure agriculture does not get missed the next time around. Ms. Wilton suggested that maybe instead of using the CMP as the dependent variable they use something else, like the City priorities. They could take references to the CMP out of the presentation, since an amendment to that is no longer what the commission is asking for. Chair Bettler agreed. He continued that it is good to let the City Council know that the commission is here. It would be more of a presentation of what the commission is, and they would have the CMP be just one subject instead of the whole point.

Discussion continued. Councilor Chadbourne asked if the group feels prepared for this presentation now. Discussion ensued about the City Council meeting schedules and agendas. Ms. Chalice stated that September would probably be the next meeting that the commission could try for. Chair Bettler suggested that they try for the September meeting, taking another month to revise their presentation. Others agreed. Ms. Chalice replied that the commission would have to approve the content at the commission's August 18 meeting and they would not be able to make any changes to it after that.

Mr. Daloz asked if they want to write an Agriculture Commission Master Plan at some point. He continued that this is the first blast of that – they say they will set forth their vision. Ms. Wilton replied that the presentation already has it broken down into smaller topics, and she listed the topics. Discussion continued. Mr. Daloz stated that the presentation is now changing from “Please can we...?” to “This is what we are doing.” Mr. Florenz replied that it is about reminding the City Council of what is important and saying something about the long term plan of getting agriculture in the CMP. Councilor Chadbourne stated that there is a committee to work on updating the land use codes. She continued that the fact that the City is talking about changing the code so they can change the landscape of a neighborhood, with the inclusion of farm animals, is significant. The Agriculture Commission should be in the loop. She will bring information next month. The commission can emphasize to the City Council that this is important and that the commission needs to be part of the loop. Chair Bettler suggested they add to presentation with information about ways that commission can be involved.

Chair Bettler continued that the presentation can go onto the commission's website. Mr. Daloz suggested Cheshire TV. Ms. Chalice replied that the Mayor has a monthly TV program that he does with Chris Coates and the commission could request to be interviewed, if they want. Councilor Chadbourne added that Mr. Coates has various guests on the radio, and the first Monday of every month, the Mayor is on another show giving updates about the City. Discussion ensued about potential media sources they could use to get their message out.

Chair Bettler summarized that they will work on the presentation a little more and change a few things. He thanked Ms. Wilton and Mr. Daloz for all of their hard work on this. Mr. Daloz asked if they will go through the presentation as a group now or task the subcommittee with making the changes. Chair Bettler replied that he recommends that the subcommittee do it. Ms. Wilton asked if this will be the beginning of the creation of an Agriculture Master Plan and if they are introducing it to the Joint Committee first to anticipate areas where the commission may contribute to other policies. Chair Bettler replied yes to the second part. He continued that he does not want to commit them to writing an Agriculture Master Plan.

Ms. Wilton replied that she agrees but thinks they would be part of another group and get input from City experts in various areas when that time comes. Ms. Chalice asks if she means for the update to the CMP. Ms. Wilton replied no, if they were going to commit to writing an Agriculture Master Plan they would need information from City experts. Ms. Chalice replied there is no Agriculture expert in the City. Ms. Wilton replied that she was thinking of experts/people with experience in the five CMP topics she and Mr. Daloz identified that agriculture fits into, like Health and Wellness or Open Space and Greenways. Mr. Daloz replied that people from the Conservation Commission is an example. Councilor Chadbourne replied that they could ask City staff members to be guest speakers about certain topics, like how Mr. Rogers came to a meeting. Discussion continued about potential ways to write the master plan. Chair Bettler agreed that they would need advisement if they decide to take that on. He continued that he recommends their current presentation not mention an Agriculture Master Plan. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she thinks they should talk about wanting agriculture to be a part of the amended CMP, and start that process now, even if it does not happen for several years. Mr. Daloz replied that the City Council may ask the Agriculture Commission to set forth their visions like the other commissions are doing.

Chair Bettler asked for a Doodle poll to set up the next subcommittee meeting. Ms. Chalice replied that she will send out that poll.

5) Additions to the Agriculture Commission Webpage

Ms. Chalice reported that she added two items to the Agriculture Commission's webpage: photos of a recent exhibit about Keene's agricultural history, and a suggested reading list that Ms. Wilton put a lot of work into. Discussion ensued about potential photos to add to the webpage, and about the IT Department's involvement and limitations, and the ability to have the photo at the top match the page's topic instead of being random. Ms. Chalice replied that she will ask about the latter.

Chair Bettler asked how they decide on what to add to the webpage. Ms. Chalice replied that the commission can choose content and staff will put it up as long as it is reasonable. Chair Bettler stated that if anyone sees anything that needs to be changed or added they can talk about it at meetings. Ms. Chalice replied that she decided on her own to put the 300 Years of Agriculture up there, but if the commission wants her to take it down, she will. Chair Bettler stated that he thinks it is okay for her to do that, and if anyone objects they can just talk about it. He asked if everyone thinks that is okay. The group agreed. Discussion continued about webpage formatting.

Ms. Chalice asked if Ms. Wilton is going to submit photos to her for the website. Ms. Wilton replied yes and briefly described the type of photos she has. Ms. Chalice replied that she should make sure she has permission from the photographers or the entities that own the rights to the photos, if Ms. Wilton is not the one who took the photos. Discussion continued about the possibility of having one agricultural photo at the top, instead of the random ones that cycle through right now.

Chair Bettler stated that the webpage looks great. He thanked Ms. Chalice for her work.

6) New or Other Business

Councilor Chadbourne asked if the Agriculture Commission ever considered a chicken ordinance. She continued that as a City Council member, she receives complaints about all kinds of things, and citizens have questions and concerns about chickens in Keene, such as wanting to know if the local eggs being sold are safe, and wanting something done about loud roosters waking people up in the morning, and un-fenced chickens that wander where they are not wanted. Other towns have chicken ordinances.

Mr. Florenz replied that there has been a lot of discussion about this in Fitzwilliam and he thinks they went through the process of developing an ordinance about chickens. Discussion ensued. Mr. Florenz stated that he thinks it would be good to set guidelines on good chicken management, as opposed to banning chickens. Councilor Chadbourne asked if the commission is interested in looking at this. Members replied yes. Ms. Chalice offered to get examples of chicken ordinances from other communities, for the commission to look at next month. Chair Bettler agreed that this would be good for them to consider. Mr. Florenz agreed and discussion continued. Councilor Chadbourne spoke about complaints she has received, and how the chicken owners and neighbors should both have rights. She continued that this is a great time to look at creating an ordinance, now that the idea is to allow farm animals when the Marlboro St. area is redeveloped. There are a lot of issues to figure out.

Ms. Chalice stated that it is a particular process to go through, to propose an ordinance for the City Council's consideration. She can see the commission coming up with a set of recommendations and presenting to the Joint Committee. They would direct staff to draft the ordinance and then the community would have the opportunity to comment on it, to help the Joint Committee evaluate it and make adjustments as needed. Councilor Chadbourne replied that it would probably go to the PLD Committee after that.

Mr. Florenz asked if they could do something less formal than an ordinance, like the commission's recommendations for keeping chickens. He continued that it would not have a legal basis but it would be something people could point to as the Agriculture Commission's ideas. It would be less complicated. Chair Bettler replied that he thinks that is a good idea. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she thinks an actual ordinance would be a good idea, since they are changing the land use code and talking about bringing farm animals into the City. It would help to have something in place so everyone can cohabitate peacefully. Ms. Wilton replied that they could also bring up the topic of bees – balancing the rights of bee-keepers and people who are allergic or do not want to be around bees.

Ms. Chalice suggested they ask staff to advocate for this to be part of the land use code update. Mr. Florenz replied that he thought they talked about this a few years ago when the idea of the land use code update was just starting. Ms. Wilton asked where they can go for expertise. Chair Bettler replied that like Ms. Chalice suggested, they can look at other communities' ordinances. Mr. Florenz stated that he will look up state-level guidelines and send the information to Ms. Chalice.

Discussion continued about whether it should be an actual ordinance recommendation or not. Councilor Chadbourne advocated for them to suggest an ordinance. She stated that guidelines are separate. She wants the Agriculture Commission to come up with recommended law, not just guidelines on a website. Chair Bettler asked if she wants them to just ask for an ordinance instead of suggesting guidelines. Councilor Chadbourne replied both. Discussion continued about how chickens are a growing issue in the city.

Ms. Wilton stated that goats could be an issue as well. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she is only hearing about chickens. She continued that there are also people concerned with chickens being properly taken care of, so the ordinance could include protections for the chickens, the chicken owners, and the neighbors. Discussion ensued about animal protection laws, and how it applies to dogs, and how it is enforced.

Ms. Wilton stated that she thinks recommending an ordinance is a good idea. Chair Bettler replied that the Agriculture Commission cannot create the ordinance but they can advocate for there being one. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she suggests they advocate for having an ordinance but they do not necessarily need to write it. Chair Bettler replied that he thinks the Agriculture Commission can come up with recommendations as well as advocate for an ordinance.

Ms. Chalice suggested they survey the community, online, and take those results to the City Council committee that they talk to about this. She continued that she could do a press release to encourage people to fill out the survey. The group agreed but replied that the first step is to discuss it among themselves and look at example ordinances at the next meeting. Mr. Florenz stated that they need to distinguish between farms and just backyard chickens. Discussion continued. Mr. Florenz talked about State-level bills. He

stated that there could be unintended consequences to proposed laws that seem straightforward.

Councilor Chadbourne asked if the Mayor has asked anyone for suggestions on new members or said what he will do about the vacancy. Ms. Chalice replied that the Mayor has not made any requests, but commission members have names that she could pass on to the Mayor. Chair Bettler stated that he called Marcia Duffy, who is stepping down, and has spoken with the Mayor. Ms. Chalice replied that she needs to submit her resignation in writing. Ms. Chalice stated that Mr. Florenz is a full member now. Chair Bettler stated that he left a message for Kathy Harrington but has not heard back from her. Discussion continued.

Councilor Chadbourne asked if anyone has names to suggest to the Mayor. Ms. Wilton replied that she knows a few people who may be interested. Ms. Chalice replied that she will send the suggested names to the Mayor. Discussion ensued about whether members can live outside of Keene. Ms. Chalice replied that the Mayor will consider people outside of Keene if they have relevant expertise. Councilor Chadbourne asked about farmers who may be interested. Ms. Wilton spoke about some farmers she knows through CSAs. Chair Bettler stated that they need to make sure they have official vacancies before they contact the Mayor. Ms. Chalice replied that she will confirm to be sure, but they do have a vacancy right now. Ms. Wilton stated that they have a vacancy for an alternate now that Mr. Florenz is a full member. Mr. Florenz suggested other people and groups to reach out to. Ms. Chalice asked if someone could do that through social media. Councilor Chadbourne suggested they each choose someone to approach. Discussion continued about the importance of reaching out to farmers.

Ms. Chalice asked for someone to write a paragraph. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she will. Ms. Chalice replied that she will send it out to the whole group then for them to read, and they can vote on it at their next meeting. Ms. Chalice asked if “New Membership” should be on the next agenda. Chair Bettler agreed.

7) Next Meeting – Thursday, August 18, 2016 at 3:30 PM

8) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Bettler adjourned the meeting at 4:51 PM.

Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker