

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, September 15, 2016 3:30 PM 2nd Floor Conference Room

Members Present:

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

Staff Present:

Michele Chalice, Planning

Members Not Present:

1) Call to Order

Chair Bettler called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

2) Approve August 18, 2016 Minutes

Councilor Chadbourne made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Mr. Florenz and passed unanimously.

3) Review of the Agriculture Commission's Presentation to the Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee on September 21, 2016

Mr. Daloz reported that the subcommittee "met" via the Internet and made just a few changes, mostly agreeing that the presentation was fine. Ms. Wilton spoke about some typos she fixed. Chair Bettler agreed with the change. Mr. Daloz stated that now they need to practice the presentation. Ms. Chalice replied that they have all been invited to the Planning, Licenses, and Development (PLD) Committee meeting, although normally it is the Chair that does that type of presentation. Mr. Daloz suggested they have a run-through of the presentation now. Discussion ensued about the set-up of the PLD Committee meeting. Chair Bettler stated that he will give the presentation unless Ms. Wilton wants to; she has done so much work on this. Ms. Wilton replied that Chair Bettler can do it or they can have two people do it. Discussion continued about who will present. Ms. Wilton suggested that the presenter not repeat the words on the slides. Per Mr. Daloz's request, she gave an example of how she would present a certain slide. She spoke more about her recommended presentation style, as an example, and recommended wording, to make the presentation understandable and enjoyable.

Mr. Daloz made a motion for the Agriculture Commission to accept the presentation to the Planning, Licenses, and Development Committee, as revised. The motion was Ms. Wilton and passed by a unanimous vote.

4) Residential Chicken Management Discussion

Ms. Chalice asked if everyone got the materials she sent, as examples. Councilor Chadbourne spoke about other examples from NH communities, that get really specific, about things like how many chickens allowed per acre, how close they can be to public parks, whether or not roosters are allowed, and so on and so forth. Other communities' ordinances are really basic like "Tell your neighbors you have chickens and pay a \$10 fee." Ms. Wilton asked how she found those. Councilor Chadbourne spoke about the resources she found online, and which towns' ordinances she looked at. Ms. Wilton proposed they put some of the links on the Agriculture Commission website. Ms. Chalice replied that today they are starting the discussion about the City of Keene having an ordinance about chicken management. Ms. Wilton replied that the public might have comments. Councilor Chadbourne asked what the intent would be of putting the links on the website. Discussion continued.

Chair Bettler asked if the ordinances from different communities were different or similar. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she was surprised how many allowed roosters – that is something she hears a lot of complaints about in Keene. Some people are woken up at 5:00 AM by roosters and that is difficult in an urban setting. Ms. Wilton replied that this is not a major urban area. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she means that it is a concern closer to downtown Keene, not necessarily in the rural part of Keene. Mr. Florenz replied that they would have to define "rural" vs. "urban." Councilor Chadbourne replied that she is not even suggesting that they create an ordinance; she is just asking that they discuss it and look at it. For instance, they can look at whether the noise ordinance covers the rooster issue. Ms. Chalice offered to have next month's agenda packet include the chicken ordinances that Councilor Chadbourne found in other communities (as examples) and the City of Keene's noise ordinance, for the committee to review. She asked which ordinances Councilor Chadbourne would recommend looking at. Councilor Chadbourne replied Epsom, Plaistow, Manchester and Rochester as examples; that surprisingly, they all allow roosters – even Manchester, which is much bigger than Keene. Ms. Chalice suggested they look at how to specify "urban," street by street in Keene, in regards to roosters being allowed or not. Councilor Chadbourne named several of the NH towns that have chicken ordinances and asked if anyone knows which are most similar to Keene, in size, for comparison purposes. Discussion ensued about the content of various towns' ordinances.

Chair Bettler stated that today they can talk about whether they think that the Agriculture Commission should suggest that City of Keene have a chicken ordinance. He continued that they can look at other communities, but right now it is most important to see what City of Keene has on the books now. There is agriculture in Keene, but not in all areas. Is there zoning associated with animals? Ms. Chalice replied that she will look into that for them. What she can say is that any animal is allowed as long as it is a pet. Councilor Chadbourne stated that some communities require a permit and others do not, and some require fencing and others do not. Discussion continued. Mr. Daloz spoke about why he likes the Madison, WI ordinance. Councilor Chadbourne spoke about why she did not. Ms. Chalice noted that the city

has an agricultural zone. Mr. Florenz replied that in that zone there are no restrictions on chickens, so the question is what restrictions there are or should be in the other zones. Ms. Chalice replied that she is not aware of agricultural restrictions in the urban zone. Mr. Daloz asked her to check on that. Mr. Daloz asked how many complaints Councilor Chadbourne is receiving. Councilor Chadbourne replied so far three in one year, but these complaints are new, because more and more people are starting to get chickens. Mr. Daloz brought up other farm animals and bees. Councilor Chadbourne replied that the chicken ordinances have addressed other farm animals but not bees. Ms. Wilton replied that she thinks they should look at bees, too. Discussion continued.

Chair Bettler stated that all of those details are important to talk about, but in general, does the Agriculture Commission think that having an ordinance would be a good thing or a bad thing for the City of Keene? Others replied that they need to do more research and discuss it more, before making that decision. Mr. Florenz stated that they could consider creating recommended guidelines that are not an official ordinance. Mr. Daloz spoke about how that could work, and about how it would be nice if it could be handled on a citizen-to-citizen level. Ms. Wilton replied that they could gather some anecdotal information, from places that sell chickens, for example. Councilor Chadbourne replied that Mr. Florenz was talking about creating a brochure with helpful guidelines. Ms. Wilton suggested Horse and Buggy as a resource. Mr. Daloz replied that they might have brochures about chicken guidelines. Councilor Chadbourne stated that even if the guidelines already exist, some people are not following them. These are recent complaints because more and more people are getting chickens. Mr. Daloz replied that that is great that people are getting chickens. Councilor Chadbourne replied that it is balancing the needs of a diverse culture – the people who love and encourage it, as well as the people who are bothered by it. Ms. Wilton replied that this is part of the local food movement, with people increasingly growing their own food. Councilor Chadbourne replied yes, they want to encourage that, but also be respectful of the needs of surrounding people.

Chair Bettler asked about the nature of the complaints she receives – would they be covered by the noise ordinance? Councilor Chadbourne replied that she has the same questions. Ms. Chalice replied that roosters might not reach the decibel level that the noise ordinance covers; she can get more information about this for the commission. Councilor Chadbourne stated that the Police Department is having a conversation about complaints about dogs. A “nuisance” dog is handled by the Dog Officer during the day, and if it is noise at night, the noise ordinance kicks in at 10:00 PM, and there are different fees associated. She does not think the Police have had to address rooster noise complaints yet, but the Agriculture Commission is looking towards the future. She is not looking to increase bureaucracy, but this is just something to discuss, as more and more people get chickens. She does not know if other City Council members have received complaints but it is good to have a conversation and be proactive. A starting point could be information on the Agriculture Commission website and a brochure – maybe that would be a foundation for if an ordinance is needed in the years to come.

Ms. Chalice asked if the commission wants to create a questionnaire to City Council members to see if they, too, are aware of community concern about chickens. Mr. Daloz suggested they wait a while; they have a lot more to learn first. Councilor Chadbourne agreed. Chair Bettler suggested they work on creating something about best practices, as a starting place. Councilor Chadbourne added, and create guidelines or suggestions to put on the commission's website. Ms. Chalice stated that if anyone finds an example of best practices and sends it to her, she can attach it to the next agenda packet. Chair Bettler stated that he thinks the top three problems are noise complaints, odor, and un-fenced chickens roaming. Councilor Chadbourne replied yes, people get territorial about not wanting other people's animals to wander into their yard – even cats. Mr. Daloz asked if there is a State level “right to farm” something-or-other that might supersede something the City of Keene puts in place. Mr. Florenz replied that he does not think so; mostly the State is concerned with commercial agriculture.

Ms. Chalice asked for people to please send her any resources for the agenda packet within the next two weeks.

5) Regional Drought Impacts

Chair Bettler stated that the agenda packet includes information about the effect of the drought on local dairy farms. The Agriculture Commission cannot do anything about a drought, of course, but this is good information for them to be aware of – 19 dairy farms statewide had to shut down operations. Mr. Florenz stated that all agriculture commodities are at historical lows, not just dairy, and then the regional drought on top of that drives up feed prices. New Hampshire's only commodity farming is dairy, which is why dairy is what they are talking about, but it affects all the other segments as well. Ms. Chalice asked if the grass-fed dairy farms are affected, too. Mr. Florenz replied yes. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Daloz asked for an update on the Monadnock Farm and Community Coalition. Mr. Florenz replied that Wednesday, September 28 is a Policy Forum, at Stonewall Farm, which will touch on this a little bit. Ms. Chalice replied that she will put the information on the Facebook page if he sends it to her. Mr. Florenz spoke more about the Federal policy that is in place to help dairy farmers when they are hurting, and the State's role. Discussion ensued. Ms. Wilton spoke of how local food security is the reason agriculture commissions exist, according to the Agriculture in the Granite State document, and the drought is a threat to the food supply even beyond dairy. There could be other disasters. The question is what authority agriculture commissions have and how they respond. Chair Bettler replied that they do not have any authority, but what they can do is raise awareness, promote local food systems, and encourage people to buy local dairy products and other local products as much as possible.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that the drought affects not just local farmers, but people with backyard gardens, too. Mr. Daloz stated that the drought is expected to get worse. Mr. Florenz stated that the Agriculture Commission should promote backyard gardening, and that helps people have a better understanding of what growing food is like, and thus,

a better understanding/support of local farmers. Councilor Chadbourne stated that having a backyard garden gives one a tremendous appreciation for what farmers do, and spoke of her experiences gardening and canning for the first time, and how much work goes into it.

Ms. Wilton suggested they keep a rolling agenda item about food security, local food systems, etc. Mr. Florenz replied that it would be good to stay aware of what is going on and support policy and action when they can. He does not know if the Keene Agriculture Commission has influence on State representatives, but they could advocate for agriculture issues and funding at the State level. Ms. Chalice spoke of how the City of Keene is working to stay aware of and respond appropriately to drought issues – staff from the Public Works Department recently spoke to the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee about how they are staying on top of this issue and Keene’s water supply. Staff was feeling fine last month about City of Keene’s water supply but as the drought continues the City has begun using wells along with the reservoirs and it is expected that the City Council will ask the Public Works Department staff back for another report. Mr. Daloz suggested that the Agriculture Commission be involved somehow in the efforts to protect Keene’s water supply. Discussion ensued.

Chair Bettler stated that any items members want to discuss, or any resources they find, they can send the information to Ms. Chalice and she will add it to the agenda packet. Councilor Chadbourne stated that if a member has a pressing issue they could request that it be put on the agenda. Chair Bettler replied that new topics could be brought up in “New or Other Business,” too.

6) New or Other Business

Mr. Daloz stated that Keene State College (KSC) and Antioch University New England (AUNE) have students for all kinds of projects, and he has approached the Geography Department to see if there are students who would like to do a project to see what Keene’s internal demand is for food. He spoke more about how this would make a great student project. He asked how he would go about this. If some student was interested, could he ask them to present to the Agriculture Commission? Ms. Chalice replied that normally the Planning Department would initiate the request to a professor. He could suggest the project to the Agriculture Commission, and if the Agriculture Commission decides to pursue it they could request that the staff liaison explore the option. AUNE has just laid out its project parameters and she will put it in the packet for next month. It is a solicitation for projects that groups of graduate students could consider. With KSC it is more about contacting a professor to see if they have a class looking for projects. Normally professors plan one or two semesters ahead. Mr. Florenz stated that they have had success in the past with students doing projects.

Mr. Daloz spoke more about his recent conversations with an AUNE professor teaching a new class, Sustainable Agriculture Initiative. He suggested to her that she make Keene the example and share any report that comes at the end with the Agriculture Commission. Ms. Chalice replied that if the commission wants, she can draft a letter to the professor on the commission’s behalf, making that request, and the commission could look at the draft

next month. Mr. Florenz wondered if she would come speak with the Agriculture Commission. Mr. Daloz spoke of the benefits of Agriculture Commission trying to connect more with these students and what it could look like. Councilor Chadbourne asked if he has specific ideas for what the students could do. Mr. Daloz replied that he has several ideas but wants to know if he should make the suggestions as a private citizen or on behalf of the Agriculture Commission. Ms. Chalice asked if he wants to make a motion. Mr. Daloz replied that he will think about it more and they can talk about it next month. Discussion continued. Councilor Chadbourne stated that it would be great to talk with the professor of the Sustainable Agriculture course as soon as possible.

Mr. Daloz made a motion for the Agriculture Commission to direct City staff to contact Libby McCann, professor of the Sustainable Agriculture course at Antioch University New England, to invite her to come to the next Agriculture Commission meeting to discuss student projects. Councilor Chadbourne seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that the City Council received and approved resignations from Ms. Harrington and Ms. Welsh. She continued that she has not seen a resignation letter from Ms. Duffy come to the City Council. Ms. Chalice replied that she will check on that; she remembers that Ms. Duffy's letter came a while ago. Discussion ensued about membership openings and potential new members or places to find new members. Councilor Chadbourne clarified that the State requires all members to live in Keene. Ms. Wilton asked how they could get a waiver for that. Mr. Daloz replied that they should try getting Keene residents first. Councilor Chadbourne stated that she will contact the Monadnock Food Co op and see if anyone is interesting joining the commission (and if so, they can express their interest to the Mayor). She suggested that everyone choose an entity to contact. Mr. Daloz replied that he will ask at AUNE. Discussion continued about other places.

Mr. Florenz made a motion for the Agriculture Commission to direct staff to invite Dee Pratt of Keene Housing Authority to come to an Agriculture Commission meeting. Councilor Chadbourne seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

7) Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Chair Bettler adjourned the meeting at 4:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by
Britta Reida, Minute-taker