

City of Keene  
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURE COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 11, 2018

3:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room

**Commission Members:**

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

**Staff Present:**

Rhett Lamb, Planning Director  
Michele Chalice, Planner

**Guests present:**

Roe-Ann Tasoulas, Director of Monadnock Farm and Community Coalition.

1) **Call to order**

Chair Wilton called the meeting to order at 3:33 pm and roll call was conducted.

2) **Approve February 14, 2018 minutes**

Chair Wilton asked that the minutes have page numbers in the future. Revision as follows: *Item 6, first paragraph, OMIT last sentence.*

Councilor Chadbourne moved to approve the minutes as amended, Mr. Daloz seconded and the motion was passed by unanimous vote.

3) **SPEAKER: Roe Ann Tsoulas, Monadnock Farm and Community Coalition**

Ms. Tasoulas introduced herself as Director of the Monadnock Farm and Community Coalition, a regional coalition with 84 member organizations plus 48 individual members. She said they have quite a variety of constituents within the coalition. She stated that the Coalition was established in 2013; however, prior to the establishment, there were numerous stakeholders around the Monadnock region led by the Cheshire County Conservation District and some farmers, specifically talking about the need for a coalition to meet regularly to talk about the local food system. She stated that specific

projects included helping the Keene Farmer's Market to grow and to develop a Co-Op and her group is the one that accrued grant money to establish the Monadnock Co-Op. Ms. Tasoulas said her group created a three-year strategic plan for 2013-2016, and this year they will start revising the plan. She said that driven by their strategic plan, they have been bringing groups together since 2013, four times per year. The Coalition's Mission is to support a sustainable local food system *"by cultivating community action and building collaborations to implement effective programs, projects and policies to create a robust, sustainable local food system in the Monadnock region"*

Ms. Tasoulas stated that the Coalition is composed of farmers, nonprofit organizations, programs dealing with public health like Healthy Monadnock and food programs like WIC. The Coalition was created to provide a venue for stakeholder involvement in quarterly forums in working group meetings to bring stakeholders together regularly to work towards completion of identified goals which are informed by the strategic plan.

Ms. Tasoulas stated the Coalition has **4 primary goals:**

- 1-To increase food production within the area by improving infrastructure to increase local food access to all income levels.
- 2-To advocate for policy supportive of agriculture
- 3-Educate the public that physical and environmental health and local food are connected
- 4-Working groups focused on **Education, Infrastructure, Policy, Farm to School**

Ms. Tasoulas stated that they have a Farm to School ad hoc committee looking to do a forum this summer. She explained that Farm to School means getting locally produced food in the bellies of local students and bringing together local farms and the children of the region. For the purposes of the Coalition, she said they work primarily on Harvest of the Month, a statewide project, which the region applied for the state grant. The Harvest of the Month initiative provides education and curriculum for teachers to integrate into their lessons that teach children about how local food is raised, provide taste tests and marketing materials to promote seasonal eating so children learn what is grown locally. Harvest of the Month provides free marketing for retail venues, restaurants, PTOs and schools with the aim of getting the conversation going so that it may eventually lead to buying clubs at schools, for example, by ordering through Monadnock Menus.

Ms. Tasoulas explained that Monadnock Menus is a truck that serves mostly institutions that goes around to smaller farms to pick up customer orders and delivers fresh food. She stated that Monadnock Menus was originally piloted through the Conservation District, which is also the Coalition's fiscal sponsor, and is now sponsored by a Vermont-based organization called Food Connects who is working more on a regional hub. She said the focus is about getting farms to be connected to a local food hub in the region and eventually expanding outside the region.

Ms. Tasoulas pointed to member organizations, including Archway Farms, Antioch University New England, Monadnock Conservancy, Franklin Pierce and Keene State College. She explained their 2018 quarterly forums focused on Farmers and Infrastructure and how to market, label and brand their produce. They are also working

on a Farm to School conference. She said every year for the last couple of years they host a feast during the local Film festival as a venue to educate folks on their mission on local food and why people should care.

She stated that this year they are working on Farm transition and retiring farmers, most of who are at retirement age. She said there is a real problem with what will happen to the land as farmers retire as they often cannot find the right type of people to take over and secure tenure to retire, which is a big problem that will surface in the next 20 years. She said the suicide rate among farmers is one of the highest among professions.

Ms. Tasoulas said the last forum is Scaling up Your Farm Business/Planning for Wholesale Success and a Meet your Buyer event in December—all of which are focused on infrastructure.

Ms. Tasoulas informed committee of the feast at the Film Festival as they are always looking for sponsors for films. This year they have chosen the feature film “Saturday Night at Stonewall Farm.” She said they will be having a Pop up Film Festival at Hannah Grimes on Friday and will showcase a bunch of shorts on farming and they are looking for someone to sponsor a film on Thursday. She said a sponsor like AGC would promote their film, perhaps perform a Q&A panel after the film and MFCC asks for a \$50 donation to market the film. She said through her experience they have historically had a really hard time engaging people in Keene on agricultural issues, with the exception of Mr. Rhett Lamb and Councilor Carl Jacobs who have shown up to policy events. Ms. Tasoulas said they are currently working on school board, school administration and City awareness. Councilor Chadbourne asked if AGC could sponsor the Coalition. Ms. Tasoulas replied of course, however, they expect promotion of the film, a \$50 donation for collective marketing with the other films. However, she said it is a good way to get AGC’s name out there.

Ms. Tasoulas said they are currently organizing the Monadnock Farm Tour for the second year on August 25, 2018. She said last year included 19 farms and was very successful.

Ms. Tasoulas shared the Coalition website link: [www.mfcommunitycoalition.org](http://www.mfcommunitycoalition.org). She said she looked at AGC’s brochure and stated that they had a forum last fall specifically for Agricultural Commissioners. She directed committee to the website’s Get Involved and Policy Advocates tabs, which lists all of the Agricultural Commissions in the area, as well as a great video about Right to Farm law, a description of what Agricultural Commissions are about, a list of projects, a link to a forum that they hosted last September as well as a bunch of different resources for Agricultural Commission funding opportunities. She said there is a webinar, Right to Farm statutes, updated bills that are relevant to local farms and alerts to local policies on their Facebook page.

Chair Wilton asked what is under the section Preparing Local Food and Ms. Tasoulas replied that it includes facts and an interactive map of farm stands and CSAs. She said member organizations work with people to show them how to prepare local food, Nutrition Connections goes into schools, Stonewall Farms offers camps, and Cornucopia

Institute has a show program. She said the Monadnock Food Co-Op also is aiming to offer cooking classes.

She encouraged committee to spend some time perusing the website as well as the strategic plan to see how AGC's Mission can dovetail with the Coalition's. She said some of the problems they have identified in Keene is the Keene Farmer's Market which has historically had a problem with consistency and buy-in, Community Gardens, Community Kitchen study needs to be done, promotion of Harvest of the Month ([www.harvestofthemonth.org](http://www.harvestofthemonth.org)), more buy-in from schools, education to parents, writing pieces that feature voices about the importance of eating local food because there are so many programs out there working hard to make local food accessible and affordable for all income levels. She said a gap she has identified is collective marketing about local agriculture, the Farm Tour, House Bills coming up, among other things. Monadnock Table and Shopper do great things, but she said a more consistent voice integrating some of the programs into the towns is needed.

Ms. Chalice asked if it would be of benefit if AGC decided to table at events happening in town with all of the materials that relate to existing programs. Ms. Tasoulas replied absolutely and the Coalition will be tabling at the Monadnock Co-Op Earth Day event and the Greener Borough celebration in Peterborough in May. She expressed that one of the goals for the policy group is to promote the Coalition by linking to various City websites and she would like help in getting the Coalition website linked to the City of Keene website as a form of advocacy and support of Coalition members.

Councilor Chadbourne asked how the Coalition could link to the City Of Keene website and Ms. Chalice replied that it could potentially be linked to the Human Services page so that people with services can be linked to programs that provide local food. Councilor Chadbourne mentioned that she observed at the Co-Op that EBT benefits no longer include prepared foods and asked if vegetables from farm stands are affected by that change. Ms. Tasoulas replied that fruits and vegetables are not impacted by the change. Mr. Florenz agreed that it is the difference between prepared food and fresh foods. Ms. Chalice said the Agriculture Commission has a Resource page and the Coalition could be listed there, however, it may be still buried under layers of other information. She said perhaps some of the events could be listed on the City's webpage as Public Events and notices and said she would be willing to find out what the possibilities are.

Ms. Tasoulas again suggested spending time on the website reading, especially the Get Involved and Local Food Access pages. Councilor Chadbourne asked if AGC is listed on the Coalition's sponsor page. Ms. Tasoulas replied no, however, all AGC would need to do is go on their website and sign up. Councilor Chadbourne said she could submit a request to the Council but they would need to get a vote from the full Council. Chair Wilton stated that AGC also needs more members and asked if Coalition members are interested they could collaborate. Ms. Tasoulas replied that she believes getting AGC's name out is the best way to attract people to being active and engaged. Chair Wilton stated that in her eight years in Keene she has never met people that do not show an interest in local food and it is not going to be difficult engaging people, however,

preparing local food is a challenge. Ms. Tasoulas replied many people garden as a source of local food; however, they simply do not think they can afford locally-produced food. She believes local food is quite competitive in season but there is a large constituency of people in Keene who do not know that and will instead buy higher quantities of lower quality foods. Mr. Florenz added that consumers are driven by price or convenience and both are challenges from a local food perspective. Ms. Tasoulas emphasized that there is such a great argument for buying local food because it is more sustainable, environmentally friendly and healthier, and she believes education is the piece they are lacking. She said they are currently looking at a USDA grant for collective marketing to address this challenge. She said she knows an incredible cook who is a great teacher in the region as well.

Mr. Daloz said given the difficulty of getting funds, the City should be promoting high quality food for the population. Ms. Tasoulas shared that there is a Facebook page called Monadnock Farmers and Producers and Monadnock Local Food and Products and she will send the link to Ms. Chalice. She said Dusty Dog posts there and other farms and social media is a great way to spread information. Chair Wilton said she is interested in creating a Facebook page for AGC to invite farmers and other members of the agricultural community. Ms. Tasoulas suggested AGC could also join the Monadnock Farmers and Producers because it is already going and they can repost information to their own page. Chair Wilton stated that increasing demand on the Keene Farmer's Market is necessary and Ms. Tasoulas replied that the Mondanock Food Co-Op impacted their sales for better or for worse. She said she just attended the NH Food Alliance, a statewide local food alliance bringing all the players across the entire state together, that meet in action teams. She said if you go to the Brattleboro Co-Op's website, Vermont receives \$600,000 per year to fund their website. Mr. Florenz said Vermont funds things and New Hampshire does not. Ms. Tasoulas said they created the NH Food Alliance in response, however, the State will not fund a website in the way Vermont and Massachusetts does. She thanked AGC members for their time and offered her assistance in fostering AGC projects into the future as there is much work that needs to be done.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that she could recommend to Council that the AGC be placed on MFCC's member list. Mr. Daloz said that is a good idea to remind the Council that agriculture is an important part of the economic life of the City. Chair Wilton stated that to have both the City of Keene and AGC represented there is confusing as the two are connected. Councilor Chadbourne said the Keene Agriculture Commission could be a group of citizens so they could request to Council that they change the name. Chair Wilton said they serve to advise the Mayor of the City of Keene. Vice Chair Souther said if they could get both done it would be a good idea. Councilor Chadbourne said she will ask Councilor Jacobs. She said instead of having Keene Agriculture Commission and City of Keene, they could instead have "City of Keene Agriculture Commission." Ms. Chalice said if they wanted to change it to "City of Keene Agriculture Commission" they might need City Council approval. Mr. Daloz said they could make a motion that the AGC wants to be changed to the City of Keene Agriculture Commission on the MFCC website. Councilor Chadbourne said it is important to bring it before Council to raise awareness of the AGC's connection to the larger agricultural community as an

organizational member of the MFCC. Chair Wilton said she welcomes discussion or debate about their authority to change their name on the MFCC website.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that she will investigate the possibility of the City of Keene becoming a member of the Monadnock Farm and Community Coalition (MFCC).

4) **Agriculture Commission Brochure - Draft Review**

Ms. Chalice announced that she did not get any comments from committee on the AGC brochure draft.

Councilor Chadbourne said that the statement “*help resolve farm related problems or conflicts*” sounds too legal in nature. Vice Chair Souther said she quoted that information from the Cooperative Extension and it implies providing resources.

Mr. Daloz said the Farmer part can be put under Assistance to Farmers part. Ms. Souther said she could change final blank panel to a Resource Page. Ms. Chalice said she spoke with the Chair of the Farmer’s Market, Mr. Bruce Bidford, and he is interested in reviewing it and adding his input. Mr. Florenz said Mr. Bidford’s input is good but he is not on the Keene Agriculture Commission himself. Ms. Chalice said if anyone else provides revisions she will have the final draft by next month’s meeting.

5) **Pollinator Habitat Discussion – New City Sites Map**

Mr. Daloz referenced a pollinator map he had access to and stated that there are many places in Keene where pollinator habitats can be placed. He asked why they are thinking of pollinator habitat. Ms. Souther said they are pursuing it because one their February guest, Mr. Therriault, requested assistance with identifying pollinator habitats. She said she asked for a map so they could promote sites if anyone did want to take on pollinator habitats. Mr. Daloz asked if Mr. Therriault was affiliated with an organization. Ms. Souther replied that he is working on it as a personal project and is testing several different locations to see how the project performs in different areas of town.

Mr. Daloz said certain areas on the map would be tough as they are not open; however, numbers 5 and 6 (on pollinator map) are thick and cannot be walked through which is good habitat for wildlife. He said it would be nice to put little gardens around the City and mobilize neighborhoods to care for them. Mr. Daloz said between Surry Road and Old Walpole Road there is an old farmhouse and someone has taken over to recreate as a farm. He said he could envision three acres of sunflowers placed right at the end of Court Street which would be beautiful; however, they would need someone to take ownership over that project. Chair Wilton asked who manages the landscaping around the City of Keene. Ms. Chalice replied the Parks and Recreation department handles management of landscapes. She said AGC could have them come in and discuss different sites, however, she encouraged AGC to be clear about their intentions. Chair Wilton said they are discussing pollinator habitats. Mr. Florenz agreed that unless they have volunteer resources or grant funding, the question is who is going to manage these projects over

time. Councilor Chadbourne stated that Mr. Bohannon came in to AGC and talked about parcels that they contract with farmers to keep in hay so that the soil is stabilized, but discussed how they can no longer find as many farmers who are willing to do that. Ms. Chalice said he came in to talk about what to do with patches of land alternatively and Cheshire County Conservation District has a grant template.

Chair Wilton stated that she is more concerned with urban gardens and yes, funding is an issue, however, if there were a plan crafted there might people looking for volunteer work or making a garden in dedication. Ms. Chalice stated that Mr. Bohannon would need to know who the entity is that would be responsible for maintaining the gardens over time. She shared that Home Depot built a pollinator garden at the Keene Recreation Center and there are volunteer groups that maintain the gardens, however, the City will not commit to maintenance or project. Chair Wilton said she would like to learn more about what that would entail and Ms. Chalice said she would ask Mr. Bohannon to come in and explain that process.

6) **Next Meeting – Wednesday, May 9, at 3:30PM**

Chair Wilton stated that they would roll the outstanding agenda items to next month's meeting.

7) **Adjournment**

Chair Wilton adjourned meeting at 4:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Ayshah Kassamali-Fox, Minute-Taker