

City of Keene  
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, May 8, 2019

3:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room,  
City Hall

**Members Present:**

Catherine (Kit) Souther, Chair  
Bettina A. Chadbourne, Vice Chair  
Charles Daloz  
Kira Wadsworth

**Staff Present:**

Rhett Lamb, Planning Director

**Members Not Present:**

Aaron Moody  
Mark Florenz

**1. Call to Order**

Chair Souther called the meeting to order at 3:30 pm and roll call was conducted.

**2. Approve April 10, 2019 Minutes**

Chair Souther moved to accept the April 10 minutes with revisions, Mr. Daloz seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

*Revisions are as follows:*

- Spell out the acronym for Monadnock Economic Developmental Corporation the first time in document.
- Throughout the document, the acronym MEDIC should be changed to MEDC.

**3. Guest Speaker – Rhett Lamb, Assistant City Manager, Community Development Director**

Ms. Wadsworth introduced herself as the newest AGC member and stated she had applied about a year ago when she first started her composting business in Keene and became interested in local agriculture. She recently completed her Master's degree at Antioch University New England (AUNE) and her business is currently trying to partner with local farms. She is also a full-time front house manager at Machina Kitchen and Art Bar where they do responsible, local purchasing as well.

Chair Souther introduced herself and stated she is involved with the local 4-H, she is an advocate and customer of the Keene Farmer's Market, as well as a participant in the Community Gardens Connections. She said she was raised in agriculture and has experience working on a farm.

Councilor Chadbourne introduced herself as a City Councilor and stated she was once a 4-H kid and now she mainly gardens at home. She would like for the City to bring greater attention to the importance of agriculture in the Keene community.

Mr. Daloz introduced himself and stated that he used to teach horticulture in Jaffrey and run local Community Supported Agriculture and he is now retired. He said he aims to bring more attention to local food production as Keene's low percentage (5%) of locally produced food is not enough. He said the Co-op is not enough as the other five supermarkets in the City import food from New Jersey.

Mr. Lamb introduced members to the Community Development Department's activities, which he said include long-range planning work for the City, permitting and development review, issuance of building permits, as well as provide support for City Committees and Commissions and conduct housing inspections. He said for a year now they have combined the Health, Code Enforcement and Planning Departments in an effort to look more holistically at how those series of programs are run. He said he has been with the City since the mid-1990s doing everything from long-range planning to smaller-scale projects and planning, providing advice to the City Council, providing advice to Planning Board, as well as involvement in the Conservation commissions and more traditional sides of City government.

Mr. Lamb stated that when the AGC was initially created they did the work to set up the Ordinance and build the support at City Council to create it. He said City involvement since then has been to provide staff support when available. However, in the past couple of years they have had a staff shortage. He said Ms. Michele Chalice was providing assistance previously but they have not had anyone to fill that position since her departure. Mr. Lamb stated that they still provide the administrative support to produce the agenda, send out notices, and post on the website, among other things.

Chair Souther asked how they could get the AGC website page updated. Mr. Lamb replied to email either him or Lee Langella in the Community Development Department and they will communicate with the IT Department if they cannot fix things directly. Mr. Daloz asked if members have suggestions about the website, should they funnel it through the Chair and then the Chair can email the Department. Mr. Lamb agreed and said they can alternately place an item on the agenda to discuss it as a Commission. He said if there is a new idea to promote they would want to discuss it together first. Councilor Chadbourne asked if there is currently an updated AGC page and Mr. Lamb replied the page mostly has resources and a list of books. Chair Souther said they could add links to the USDA and other organizations working on agriculture-related issues. Councilor Chadbourne suggested also placing the Chicken Brochure on the web page with an option to download it. Members agreed. She said they also came up with a power point presentation on the history of agriculture in Keene that they should place on the web page as well. Councilor Chadbourne stated that they have to report to a Committee in a year and Mr. Lamb replied it was scheduled for January and the City asked the Clerk to reschedule it to give AGC time to reestablish themselves as a commission. Councilor Chadbourne asked to be informed in advance about the date.

Mr. Lamb stated that over the years, they evaluate the amount of time staff puts into the Commission in a supportive role and measure it against the commitment of the membership. He said if there is a board or body that has a very strong work plan and commitment, then the City will ramp up their support. He stated that the last evaluation cycle gave consideration to whether or not AGC should continue. Mr. Lamb stated that the Mayor has brought new members on at the request of the membership so the commission should be on the upswing. However, he cannot

commit to staff support right now. He said it all depends on the work that is being done by the Commission. He stated that the Heritage Commission wanted the City to adopt an Ordinance that ended up being defeated so the City decided to scale back staff support. In turn, the Heritage Commission came up with a new program focused on outreach and education and reset their target to help the community generate interest in Keene's heritage through programming such as working with owners of historic buildings to promote workshops and parties.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that the Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) only touches on agriculture and AGC would like to expand on that section of the CMP, however, they were told they could not add to that section until the next CMP cycle. Mr. Lamb said that the next time the CMP will be looked at is in 2022. He said the existing CMP sets up the challenge of local food production and the Climate Adaptation Plan had even more goals for local agriculture and AGC sort of sprang up from those goals. He said there is a consensus about the need to address the subject. Councilor Chadbourne asked if Lee Langella (Community Development Department) could send a link to the CMP. She asked Mr. Lamb how the rezoning of the City will impact the agricultural zone. Mr. Lamb suggested having Ms. Kessler and Mr. Kopczynski come in to give a more specific presentation on that subject. Mr. Lamb said the land use regulations that the City adopts are very influential in how people use property and they are doing a top to bottom reorganization. He said fundamentally they are reorganizing it because the rules and regulations are very hard for the average person to digest so they are aiming to make rules more understandable, usable and centrally located and to avoid duplications. Mr. Lamb stated they are also looking to maintain consistency between what the rules say and what is in the CMP.

Ms. Wadsworth asked if onsite composting on farms will be affected and Mr. Lamb said he does not think it will unless the scale of it is too large and no longer considered an accessory use. Councilor Chadbourne asked if that would imply different zoning and Mr. Lamb replied that he is not sure as the rules were written a long time ago when large scale composting was not done. Councilor Chadbourne stated that backyard chickens seem to have no zoning and Mr. Lamb said it is allowed, however, they do get complaints about activities that are permitted. Councilor Chadbourne said they went through a period of considering a chicken ordinance because of the number of complaints fielded, however; they decided there are not enough complaints to warrant going down that path. Mr. Lamb said Keene has a guaranteed "right to farm" in the New Hampshire statutes. Chair Souther added that in other states they are fighting to homestead whereas in Keene homesteading is permitted so they are already ahead of the curve. Mr. Lamb stated that there are few limitations to homesteading in Keene.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that there are plots of land that are available that can be turned into community gardens or pollinator fields. She asked if the AGC would need to contact Mr. Bohannon for more information. Mr. Lamb said the City already operates a community garden in at least one location, but they can discuss what is taking place there. Mr. Daloz added that there are still a lot of open plots in the garden. Ms. Wadsworth stated that she tried having a garden there and it was very hard to water as there is no water supply. Mr. Lamb replied that would be a great project for AGC to determine how to get a water supply to the garden. Mr. Daloz said they can lay a pipe out there and they can talk to Mr. Bohannon about it. Mr. Lamb said they can go out there now and check out the building and the waterline. He encouraged members to get in touch with Mr. Bohannon. Councilor Chadbourne asked where the garden is located and Ms. Wadsworth said it is located off of Park Avenue towards the YMCA near the Pizza Pie and the cemetery.

Chair Souther stated that Community Garden Connections (CGC) just got a grant and they can perhaps bring the water supply to the garden to their attention. She said the same grant is being used by the library for a seed bank, tool lending and educational seminars. She said the grant is also for developing pollinator habitats and they might consider the library as a potential site. Councilor Chadbourne and Mr. Daloz suggested Bent Court could be another option. Mr. Lamb said each project is unique but if it is through the City they would have to request funding. Councilor Chadbourne stated that they are discussing grant money from CGC and Mr. Lamb said most of the sites will be on City property so there is a liability process to consider. He said they can talk to Mr. Bohannon for a team to put it together and then offer to donate the materials and go through City Council. Councilor Chadbourne asked if they need to talk to Mr. Bohannon about the pollinator habitats as well and Chair Souther said they first have to find out if CGC is willing to allow AGC to use the funds for pollinator habitats. Councilor Chadbourne asked how many acres are around Bent Court and Mr. Daloz replied that there are many. Mr. Lamb said Bent Court is difficult to get to as there is a stream to cross, so they need to come up with a plan and then talk to Mr. Bohannon.

Councilor Chadbourne asked Mr. Lamb about ideas regarding a permanent place for the Farmer's Market on Gilbo Avenue as Monadnock Economic Developmental Committee (MEDC) is in discussions about using that location for another project. She said the City has been discussing a permanent site for the Farmer's Market for a long time. Mr. Lamb agreed that they have put a lot of time in that idea over the years, including creating sketches of features and structures and a variety of concepts. He said the one that was most fully developed was on Water Street but never came to fruition. Mr. Lamb said the other site was the Ashuelot Green Space behind Mascoma Bank Plaza, which was purchased by three parties 5-6 years ago. They bought it with the idea of it being an expansion of the City Park, which is more of an arboretum, so they saw the green space as a place for active play and park space for kids. He said part of the design included a pavilion or gathering area and a Farmer's Market. However, the Farmer's Market likes the Gilbo Avenue spot and the City has never created a design there for a market as it is a combined use area. Mr. Lamb said the MEDC project is less defined as it involves an expansion of the Colonial Theater building and include both sides of Gilbo Avenue. Chair Souther asked if there is a community center idea involved and Mr. Lamb said he has not heard of that. Mr. Daloz said he envisions a Farmer's Market like the one in Brattleboro. Mr. Lamb suggested AGC advocate for MEDC putting the Farmer's Market on their list. He said MEDC is in early stages of planning and they have arts and culture as their plan so they may be open to the Farmer's Market. Councilor Chadbourne said that they hired an Economic Development Coordinator and one of the ideas was to create a community calendar to coordinator events. She asked how agriculture could be included on the community calendar. Mr. Lamb said to call the Coordinator as the position is being housed and managed at MEDC. He suggested requesting what will go onto the calendar for each day. Chair Souther asked who to contact about what their plans are for Gilbo Avenue. Mr. Lamb recommended they call them up and ask if there is a Farmer's Market included. Councilor Chadbourne said it needs to be an all-season market so they have a winter market space. Mr. Lamb said that space is very competitive, for example, the skate park will be placed back there as well.

Councilor Chadbourne asked Mr. Lamb if the changes in zoning would allow residents on the Marlborough Street corridor to have small farm animals. Mr. Lamb replied that the zoning changes are not unique to just Marlborough Street corridor. He said that the project created three

zoning districts that were new, allowing mixed uses, neighborhood scale retail and modification of the residential zoning there as well. He said as long as it is a use that does not create a huge amount of nuisance for neighbors than the City will not intervene. He said if erosion, manure or water flow ends up in the street or neighbors' yards then there is a problem.

Mr. Daloz asked if the City would waive the Farmer's Market parking fees based on value of the Market to the City. Mr. Lamb said they are already getting a flat fee but it is worth investigating more. Councilor Chadbourne stated that there are other communities like Hanover, NH where they do not charge fees. Mr. Lamb replied that it is hard for City Council to pick a winner. Mr. Daloz said perhaps it is better to focus on MEDC right now. Ms. Wadsworth stated that she needs to leave the meeting and meeting lost quorum.

**4. Membership Agriculture Awareness – Current Events**

**5. Agriculture Commission Brochure**

Chair Souther stated that she added some resources at the bottom of the brochure and if anyone has suggestions they can send them to her. Mr. Daloz suggested placing the Resources on the back page. Councilor Chadbourne suggested pulling bullets over to the left and placed a link for UNH Cooperative Extension or other links to find contact information. Chair Souther said she could also add a photograph. Councilor Chadbourne said she does not care where the links are placed as long as they are put in the brochure. She asked if Dusty Dog is on West Street and they may have changed their name. She said it may be called Dusty Dog Horse Farm now. Chair Souther replied that she will change that on the brochure. She thanked everyone for attending. Mr. Lamb stated that there are two new members and one vacant members spot. He said there is another member that has not sworn in yet and if they see him they should encourage him to do so. Councilor Chadbourne said they also have one more alternate seat available. Ms. Wadsworth asked about the rules of communication in the commission and Mr. Lamb replied that as long as they are not making decisions over email or other communication that is acceptable. Mr. Daloz stated that he has a plan for the community garden and the budget and asked where to direct that information. Mr. Lamb replied to send it to the Community Development department. Councilor Chadbourne stated that the Mayor needs a letter from the potential member from Dusty Dog Horse Farm in order to accept her as an alternate.

**6. Agricultural Plan from Southwest Region Planning Commission**

**7. Threats and Opportunities in Local Agriculture**

**8. New Business**

**9. Next Meeting – Wednesday, June 12, 2019 at 3:30 PM**

**10. Adjournment**

Respectfully submitted by,  
Ayshah Kassamali-Fox, Minute Taker

Reviewed by Rhett Lamb, ACM/Comm. Devel. Dir.  
Edits, Lee Langella