

City of Keene
New Hampshire

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 12, 2019

3:30 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room

Commission Members

Catherine (Kit) Souther, Chair
Councilor Bettina A. Chadbourne, Vice Chair
Charles Daloz
Kira Wadsworth
Allen Raymond
Mark Florenz

Staff Present:

Members not present

Aaron Moody

1. Call to order

Chair Souther called the meeting to order at 3:33 pm and roll call was conducted. Members stated that AGC still needs an alternate member. Councilor Chadbourne stated that there are currently seven eligible and appointed members.

2. Approve May 8, 2019 Minutes

Councilor Chadbourne moved to approve the May 8, 2019 minutes with revisions, Mr. Daloz seconded and the motion was passed unanimously.

Revisions are as follows:

Page 2, top paragraph, change: "Conservation Supported Agriculture" to "Community Supported Agriculture."

3. Member Orientation – Tom Mullins, City Attorney

Mr. Mullins introduced himself as the City Attorney. He said the City has been working with Boards and Commissions in respect to what their obligations are under the "right-to-know" law. He said people are often surprised to find that the rules associated with a public body are very different from private or public run entities. He stated that AGC is a public body and must comply with RSA-91A, which is the "right-to-know" law. Mr. Mullins noted that the "right-to-know" law requires that committees meet with enough people in the room to meet a quorum, which represents the total number of members eligible to sit on the entity. Mr. Florenz entered the meeting. Mr. Mullins stated that quorum must be the majority plus one of the number of members that are eligible to sit on the board or commission, so in the case of AGC, they would need at least four members to operate. Amanda Littleton entered as a guest. Mr. Mullins stated to the commission that it is important to show up to meetings and if individuals cannot show up to

please let the Chair and the City know. He said there have been issues with respect to quorum with AGC in the past.

Mr. Mullins handed out a copy of the Standard Rules of Procedure that apply to boards and commissions and other legislative bodies. He stated that legislative bodies differ from quasi-judicial bodies, the latter of which has a much higher risk factor with respect to the City. However, he said that although the risk factors of legislative bodies are lower than quasi-judicial bodies that does not mean they are not important or do not have to comply with the rules. He noted that generally the decision-making factors are such that they will not end up in the Supreme Court.

Mr. Mullins noted that the Standard Rules of Procedure are based upon the RSA-91A law and provides a guide as to what legislative bodies should do and how to do it. He stated that next month he will ask that members formally adopt the rules of procedure with a motion and a vote, however, he encouraged members to review the rules of procedure in their entirety and then at the next meeting, the Chair will sign off on them and they will be formally adopted.

Mr. Mullins briefly reviewed some of the more important aspects of the rules of procedure. He stated the rules require that meetings be posted at least 24 hours in advance, as the public has the right to attend, but not necessarily the right to speak, as that is ultimately up to the Chair and the body. He noted that there are minute requirements and the City provides a professional minute-taker. He encouraged members to review minutes before meetings but not to spend a lot of time on the minutes in context of grammatical errors as that takes up a lot of meeting time and they should instead focus on substantive changes. Councilor Chadbourne stated that they can also submit grammatical changes in advance to the Clerk's office and Mr. Mullins agreed.

Mr. Mullins re-emphasized that it is very important to comply with quorum requirements. He said if members cannot attend in person, they could also participate by telephone, although the rules for telephone participation are fairly strict and interested individuals should contact his office or the Community Development Department for instructions. He noted that generally individuals can participate by telephone as long as everyone in the meeting can hear the call; however, they cannot use telephone activity to form a quorum, as a quorum must always be physically present in a meeting.

Mr. Mullins stated that the biggest issue for him to discuss with the commission is in regard to conflicts of interest. He said, for example, if a member on the committee has a direct financial interest in something that is being considered, that individual would then be required to disclose that information and be recused due to a conflict of interest. He said recusal is different from abstention, which is voluntary and not permitted except in cases of direct conflicts of interest. Mr. Mullins said there should be no reason that they would go into a non-public session, however, they would need to contact the City through the Attorney's office to walk them through that process but it is not common.

Mr. Mullins stated that it is also important to discuss the creation of subcommittees. He noted that ad hoc subcommittees of the full commission are also public bodies and are subject to the same rules of procedure as boards and commissions. He said the problem has been that members make decisions in these working groups without regard to proper decision-making structure and he encouraged members to review paragraph 17 to understand the rules of procedure for creation of a subcommittee.

Mr. Mullins stated that individuals cannot communicate business by email, for example, an individual cannot comment on agenda items outside of the public environment. He said they can also get together socially; however, they should not discuss matters pertaining to the commission outside of meetings as those conversations are not publically noted and are in violation of the statute. Mr. Daloz asked Mr. Mullins, if for example, they have a recommendation or letter, should they should send it to the Community Development Department and then they will distribute it. Mr. Mullins agreed and noted that directing information up and down the City structure is fine; it is when members move laterally that it becomes a problem and is not recommended. Councilor Chadbourne asked Mr. Mullins if it is okay to send group emails to an individual on the commission and Mr. Mullins replied that is a problem as well as there is a provision in the statute that specifically pertains to going around quorum as a violation and that may be interpreted as such. Ms. Wadsworth asked if she has a question about a meeting, should she wait until the next meeting and Mr. Mullins replied that she should ask to have it placed in the next month's agenda. Mr. Daloz asked if he wants to discuss with a member the value of composting outside of a meeting, can he not do that. Mr. Mullins said not to discuss those things by email but if they run into each other in person and chat about an idea it is not generally a problem. He emphasized that when items are discussed for the purpose of avoiding a quorum that it becomes problematic. Mr. Mullins said the statute has penalties associated with it and the penalties can lead to imposition of fees if it is determined that an individual violated rules willfully. However, he noted again that the risk factors for AGC are fairly small as they are not quite statutory and not quite legislative. Mr. Mullins said he is available for questions or appearances and members can contact him through the Chair. Mr. Mullins left the meeting.

4. Agriculture Awareness – Current Events

Chair Souther introduced Ms. Littleton as a guest speaker for today's meeting. Chair Souther said AGC has been talking about the grant that Ms. Littleton's organization received and invited her to hear more about it. Ms. Littleton said last fall they found out about an opportunity through their National Association for Conservation Districts. She said there is a Conservation District in every county in the state of New Hampshire and they are set up by State statute as well and have to follow the same rules of procedure as AGC. She said the Conservation District has a National Association that gives out grants from time to time so they applied for an Urban Agriculture grant through them. She said they thought it would be an opportunity to work on some different topics and a different audience than they typically work with. She stated that the Conservation District typically works with farmers and forest landowners on stewardship of natural resources, farm viability projects for market expansion and they do some community work as well. Ms. Littleton said they have an equipment rental program for medium-sized farms, as larger scale farms do not usually need the equipment. She said most of the equipment is for things that they tow behind a tractor (40-70 horsepower).

She said they have been told that there is a whole sector of home gardeners, homesteaders and small farmers that they have not been providing equipment or technical assistance. She said this grant is aimed at making equipment available to urban gardeners and small farmers, for example, gardeners under two acres. She said one component of the project is to get equipment and tools and make it available to that scale of farmers. She said the other component is to provide technical assistance and education and they hired Ms. Rachel Brice, a recent Antioch University (AUNE) graduate who manages their Westmoreland Community Gardens. Ms. Littleton said she is working with the Conservation District 20 hours a week for one year. She said Ms. Brice will

have office hours once per week at the Keene Public Library to provide one-on-one technical assistance and field questions from gardeners and farmers. She said Ms. Brice will also set up garden visits for people with technical questions about how to set up their gardens. Councilor Chadbourne asked if gardens would need to be a certain size to qualify for a garden visit. Ms. Littleton replied no, and that it just needs to be a garden and their objective is to provide education, technical assistance and tool and seed resources to help more people grow their own food, increase connectivity and access to food and assist with community resilience.

Mr. Florenz asked Ms. Littleton how she sees this project overlapping with the UNH Cooperative Extension. Ms. Littleton replied that the Extension's Educational Educator, Mr. Mayeski's focus is forage management and small gardening and fruits and vegetables is not really his specialty and the closest person with that knowledge is in Merrimack County. She said although he is an amazing resource, they see this as a way to supplement and add capacity, and because it is building around AUNE's Community Garden Connections (CGC) work. She said they envision continuing this type of assistance through CGC after the grant has been administered. Councilor Chadbourne asked if they provide a list of small gardeners and farmers and Ms. Littleton replied that Ms. Brice would be the first point of contact to ask those questions and even if she is not the expert on a topic, she can certainly provide those resources. Ms. Littleton said the Conservation District is a small organization with only two staff members, so they may not always have the expertise to answer questions but they often serve in a sort of Chamber of Commerce role for natural resource questions and connect people out to those community resources that have the answers. She said they see this as a capacity building extension of the Conservation District where they can partner with other community entities such as CGC, the Keene Public Library, the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) who has an office in Keene and is offering some technical assistance as well. She said Ms. Brice is offering a series of workshops at the Keene Public Library, the CGC Westmoreland garden and the CNS/YMCA gardens. She said they are centering workshops in Keene to make them more accessible to the urban center.

Ms. Littleton said they recently acquired a two-wheel, walk-behind tractor, as well as sorts of implements for soil health management and production. She said the project she is most excited about is partnering with the Keene Public Library to start a tool lending library in the new Maker Space. She said they will provide tools to borrow for individuals who do not have access to them. Ms. Littleton said the beautiful new atrium in the Keene Public Library includes a Maker Space where they have vinyl printers and laser cutters for free use. She said they will also be adding a seed library resource to the Maker Space in an effort to remove as many barriers as possible for small scale gardening. Councilor Chadbourne asked if she is concerned about people taking advantage of the seed packets. Ms. Littleton replied that she is not too concerned, although they are asking people to limit themselves to five seed packets. She said although there are people who may take advantage of the seed library, they bought one thousand seed packets and have the money to buy seed for the next year so they will try it out and see how it goes.

Mr. Florenz asked if the Sustainability Project did a seed swap. Ms. Littleton replied that AUNE Master's Student, Ms. Turkel, is setting up the Seed Lending Library and part of her internship work plan is to do interviews with more experienced community gardeners with the objective of community members supplementing seed in the future so they will not have to always supply the library with bought seed. She said the library is very excited about the seed lending library and there may be opportunity for a great partnership with AGC to do education at the Keene Public Library as well.

Ms. Littleton said the last piece is trying to create some educational sites at the CGC Westmoreland site, which used to be a Master Gardner's educational plot. She said AUNE recently put up a high tunnel with irrigation at the site, which allows for increased production and season extension, as well as creates opportunities for education around small farms and urban gardens. She said they aimed to create an outdoor classroom at the site and set up some granite benches and kiosks with chalkboards to be used as part of an outdoor education program. She said their goal this year is to work with the Keene Public Library to install raised garden beds at the library; however, there are concerns on the City side about the aesthetics and management of the garden beds. She said CGC is interested in taking the Library on as a site and help manage them but they are still waiting on approval from the City and they plan to know by the end of the year.

Mr. Florenz asked if there are plans to expand the YMCA garden because they have a lot of potential given the location and their partnership with C&S Wholesale Grocers. Ms. Littleton replied that they just did a bed-building workshop to rebuild the beds that were in disrepair but she is not sure if they are looking to expand them and that would be an AUNE-CGC question. She said the beds at the YMCA are in partnership with the YMCA and the C&S beds are in partnership with C&S. Mr. Florenz said the Westmoreland site is great, however, the C&S site is on a bus route and is more accessible, as well as the potential Keene Public Library site.

Councilor Chadbourne asked Ms. Littleton for more details about the rental tools available. Ms. Littleton replied that they have a BCS-walk-behind tractor and the implements that go with them are a flail mower, a drop seeder, a wood ash and lime rotary spreader, a power harrow, regular harrow, and a roller crimper. Mr. Raymond asked if there is a demonstration on that crimper today and Ms. Littleton replied that Stonewall Farm did a demonstration on the roller crimper on Monday. She said Picadilly Farms will do a demonstration on the bigger tractor-pulled equipment tomorrow.

Councilor Chadbourne asked Ms. Littleton if her organization would be interested in collaborating on a pollinator project on municipal property. Ms. Littleton said she would be interested as they have done big pollinator projects in the past. However, she said the challenge with City municipal property is that you are not eligible for farm bill programs; however, they could apply for a Moose Plate Grant (Conservation Program) as they are not picky about private or municipal land. Mr. Florenz said the City has open land that is not actively used and they have had discussions about better using that land through pollinator gardens. Councilor Chadbourne said that AGC has had specific conversations about pollinator gardens in the past. Ms. Littleton said the seed library will not only include vegetable seeds, but also pollinator seeds (native plants) and cover crop seeds (soil health measures). She said pollinator seed can be expensive. Mr. Raymond asked if they are sourcing truly local seeds and Ms. Littleton replied that they are sourcing from Vermont and Massachusetts and the company Ernst, which is transparent about where the pollinator seeds are collected from, however, unfortunately they have not stuck to seeds harvested on a very local scale.

Councilor Chadbourne asked if there is a minimum of acreage for the Moose Plate Grant. Ms. Littleton replied that they could ask for no more than \$24K. She said the grant applications are due in September so they are on track with timing and they can begin by getting letters of support and commitment from the City and put a budget together that suits their goals and priorities. Ms. Littleton said she would be interested in collaborating on a pollinator garden grant

with AGC if there is enough interest. Chair Souther replied that there is a lot of local interest in pollinator habitats for example, the Butterfly Park has been popular and the Parks and Recreation Department has shown interest in having a pollinator garden placed on City property. Mr. Daloz added that there is a pollinator garden at the CGC site; however, it is suffering from a lack of attention. Ms. Littleton said the pollinator gardens do suffer from a lack of attention, as it is different from doing a garden from plugs as it is on a field scale. She stated that they partnered with the City of Keene about 8 years ago on the installation of rain gardens and placed them at a few public schools and some of them exist still and others do not. She said they were a lot of time and energy and she has become more apprehensive about gardens as they end up getting destroyed unless someone has ownership over them. Councilor Chadbourne said one of the problems with the rain gardens was that they allowed people to “adopt” them that did not understand how to maintain them and cut them down.

Councilor Chadbourne agreed with the idea of putting together a grant for a pollinator garden. Ms. Littleton said the deadline is in September so they would have an application put together by August. She said they will not know if they are approved until November and they will not be able to start planting until the spring.

Councilor Chadbourne stated that the first step is to speak with Mr. Bohannon, Parks & Rec. Director, to see if the land is still available. She said there were 5-7 different spots and she would like to see them focus on one and see how it goes. Mr. Daloz said that the site at Bent Court is a good spot although it has to be managed organically because of the water resources underneath it but it is a good test case and big enough to be a big field. Mr. Florenz asked how they prevent the field from turning into woods. Ms. Littleton replied that it must be cut every few years or annually. She said the typical recommendation is to cut the field into thirds to preserve the floral resources each year although it largely depends on the site and the soil characteristics. Ms. Littleton stated that it is a big financial investment to create a pollinator meadow and there are often already many floral resources present such as goldenrod and pollinators like those too. She said sometimes all it takes is to change mowing practices to select for milkweed, for example, and she said there are considerations.

Mr. Daloz asked how they would go about establishing a pollinator garden as a priority. Councilor Chadbourne replied that they would first have to establish mutual interest on the Commission and then engage the City staff. She said because there is money involved with the grant they would probably have to go through City Council. Ms. Littleton asked if City Council has to accept grants even if AGC is not the actual “grantee.” She said the Conservation District could be the “grantee” if it makes the process easier as they pursued this avenue with their grant application with the Keene Public Library so this might be a similar case. Councilor Chadbourne said she is unsure about the role of the City maintaining the property so she will look into it.

Councilor Chadbourne asked if there is interest on the Commission for the pollinator garden. Chair Souther said she is in support of the idea and she could talk to Mr. Bohannon. Mr. Daloz said he already spoke to him yesterday and Mr. Bohannon said he is ready to come to speak with AGC next month. Mr. Florenz stated that he prefers the idea of adopting management practices that would encourage pollinators over the investment of seed money as it seems more realistic and less expensive to work with parks on adjustment of their mowing practices. Ms. Littleton replied that maintenance can be written into the grant and contracted so that should not be a hindrance. She said the fact that the Bent Court site has access issues may present a challenge.

Councilor Chadbourne asked Ms. Littleton if she would like to be part of the conversation next month. Ms. Littleton replied that she could be available; however, the next step is to speak with Mr. Bohannon to identify a location that makes sense for him. Councilor Chadbourne agreed and said after that step they can set up a time for them to communicate that information. She said she will check in with the City Manager on what the process would entail. Ms. Littleton said they can also consider an educational project with community signs and encourage people to change management of their own properties to encourage pollinator meadows. She said especially in Keene there is a lot of opportunity for people passing by to see the signs and learn about the value of pollinator meadows. Councilor Chadbourne and Chair Souther agreed with that idea. Ms. Littleton also suggested enlisting the support of the Keene Public Library to create awareness in partnership with AGC. Councilor Chadbourne replied that she would like to see both happen: the educational piece and the signs as well as the pollinator field. She said it fits well into the Master Plan and the City's goal of increasing agricultural use of land and assuming a role model position in respect to agricultural leadership. Mr. Daloz asked if there are other urban agriculture initiatives. Chair Souther announced that the meeting has gone over time and they will wrap it up. Members thanked Ms. Littleton for sharing her experience.

5. **Water for Community Gardens**
6. **Agriculture Commission Brochure**
7. **Agricultural Plan from Southwest Region Planning Commission**
8. **Threats and Opportunities in Local Agriculture**
9. **New Business**

Councilor Chadbourne stated that she would talk to the City Manager and Mr. Bohannon to get information for next month's meeting. Mr. Daloz said that he would look into Bent Court and asked Mr. Florenz what the technology and mowing procedures would be. Mr. Florenz said he is unsure and they should just set it as an agenda item for next month. Ms. Littleton said they just need a brush hog to stop the trees from growing every few years. Mr. Daloz stated that they should do selective mowing to encourage the growth of pollinator beneficial flowers. Mr. Florenz suggested they table this item as well.

10. Adjournment - Next Meeting is Wednesday, July 10, 2019 at 3:30 PM

Chair Souther adjourned the meeting at 3:44 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,
Ayshah Kassamali-Fox, Minute Taker

Edits, Lee Langella
Additional Edits, Katie Kibler