

MA Food Policy Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 11, 2014, 9:30 AM - 12:15 PM

Framingham Public Main Library, Framingham

In attendance:

Lee Dillard Adams, MA Depart. of Environmental Protection Regional Director, designee

Cynthia Taft Bayerl, MA Depart. of Public Health designee

Marion Browning, MA Depart. of Education designee

Jeff Cole, Federation of MA Farmers Markets

Amanda Kinchla, UMASS Food Science

John Lee, Allandale Farm

Frank Martinez Nocito, MA Depart. of Transitional Assistance designee

John Waite, Western MA Food Processing Center

Greg Watson, Commissioner, MA Depart. of Agricultural Resources

Representative Steve Kulik had a change of schedule and was not able to attend. Representative Paul Smidt was in attendance. Minutes were recorded by Bonita Oehlke, MA Depart. of Agricultural Resources.

The meeting was convened at 9:50 AM by Commissioner Greg Watson. Without a quorum, the minutes were not adopted.

Cris Coffin reported on the MA FPC Advisory Committee, held 12.9.14 in Worcester. Three issues were addressed. What slice of the food system is addressed in terms of local? Which descriptions can replace food system jargon for clarity? Would a context statement and rationale for the plan make sense to address relevant external forces?

1) There is recognition that the Massachusetts Food Systems planning is largely about increasing state production, consumption, profitability. On the food side, questions about food access and access to fresh food are much larger and are affected more by a larger food system. As this process progresses, the Work Groups will define where the context of their issues starts and stops. Outreach is needed to be sure that specific groups and communities are at the table. The FPC can provide contacts and expertise to the Work Groups. The Advisory Committee did not suggest an alternative to the project title, The Massachusetts Food Systems Plan.

2) Regarding messaging, there is jargon that is vague such as "lenses and cross cutting topics". Draft definitions were discussed, and the MAPC planning team was asked to summarize the information into a one page document. The resulting document will be used on websites, for the Work and Advisor Groups and for stakeholder engagement.

3) There is a need for the case statement as part of the plan, as a preface or introduction. The 1974 plan was focused on the external forces.

Comments:

Urban Ag is important to be inclusive as part of the food systems planning. There is a need for a systems approach. The scope ultimately will be up to Working Groups to decide what is practical and actionable from a MA perspective with a focus on local and state actions that can be change. The subject matter experts that reside in the Working Groups will identify the breadth of the discussion.

Knowing the role of the FPC would be helpful and a direct understanding of what is needed to support the work and outcomes of the Work Groups. Several FPC members volunteered that if they clearly know what is needed, they are happy to assist. It has been difficult to get business representatives on the Work Groups, however the failure of some sectors to participate doesn't constrain the opportunity to make recommendations. A failure to participate in the process is not a reason for a topic to be left out of the process. With regards to underrepresented sectors, it may not be possible to reach everyone, but it's important to think creatively about how to engage folks, including farmers and retailers. There might be other opportunities for these folks to react, perhaps through a survey or interviews.

Marc Draisen, Executive Director, MAPC, shared a draft of a MA Food System Plan draft document for review and discussion for clarity, agreement, and consensus, based on the FPC Advisory Committee meeting earlier in the week. Ideally a project summary should stand on it's on and not require explanation. Participants had a moment to read the document.

Food safety and regulatory issues fit into this plan, especially in regards to local food production. There isn't a more prominent issue that food safety. The Department of Public Health is revising 9 regulations into one, as of March 2015. Food safety is a topic for each of the Work Groups and an opportunity for partnerships between regulation, education and technical support. A specific mention of food safety isn't required in the draft document however; all the Work Groups are looking at issues that loom large. Immediate opportunities and challenges and challenges are highlighted but not specific issues. The more specific you are, the more it is possible that something is left out.

There are challenges but this is an important opportunity to take advantage of interest in local foods and expand ag in MA, including urban, suburban and rural agriculture.

The Food Systems planning will include strategies to conserve energy resources. Sustainability is implied in the food systems planning. Subsistence fishing is important for some immigrant populations.

Strategies may address reducing hunger. There is a difference between access to hunger and access to fresh food. A focus on food quality is important.

The document can be sliced and diced and wordsmithed, but the document should be clear to share with stakeholders and used for outreach to be able to move forward and not get bogged down in detail.

Commissioner Watson stated FPC agreement that the discussion held took into account all comments. MAPC will make changes which will be circulated back to the FPC for final comments. There will not be deliberation between FPC members; the responses will go directly to MAPC. The FPC will meet in

January to adopt the language from the document. In the interim, the document with MAPC changes incorporated will be used.

An update on the project in general was presented by MAPC. Handouts were shared relating to research based on MAPC's internal team, findings from universities based on and RFI for student research, Work Group guidelines, and metrics developed to date.

Fertile Ground and the Boston Food and Fitness Collaboration are on contract to help identify hard to reach stakeholders in the food access and security arena, and to attend relevant meetings for outreach.

Documentation of this will be in a final summary and report.

An on-line interactive project page is close to being launched that will help to collect information with targeted questions. There will be a draft version of the food systems map to help identify specific issues.

Commissioner Watson shared his appreciation for this meeting, an iterant process which will change over time and evolve. "With the best faith effort, we are trying to find the best solutions worked on by the best people through an open and inclusive process." He encouraged attendees to join a Working Group and be a part of the process. "The NE Food Vision adds to the discussion. It points to the potential for what we might do with our land base. It's all a part of what we are trying to figure out what is achievable though it doesn't mean the process is without challenges."

The meeting ended at 11:50 AM.