

Minutes: Eighth Massachusetts Food Policy Council Meeting
Friday, March 1, 2013 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Worcester Union Train Station, Union Hall, CMRPC

In attendance:

Kerry Bowie, Department of Environmental Protection
Michael Hunter, Undersecretary, MA Dept. of Housing and Economic Development
Amanda Kinchla, UMASS Extension
Steve Kulik, State Representative
John Lee, Farmer
Frank Martinez Nocito, Department of Transitional Assistance
Alex Rittershaus, Representative Ferguson's Office
Greg Watson, Commissioner, MA Department of Agricultural Resources

Cheryl Bartlett, Interim Deputy Commissioner, MA Department of Public Health; Manny Costa, Costa Produce; and Alex Rittershaus, Representative Ferguson's Office, planned to attend but could not due to unexpected events.

Reporting on recommendations from the Advisory Committee: Cris Coffin, American Farmland Trust; Christa Drew, MA Food Policy Alliance; Phil Korman, CISA; Brad Mitchell, MA Farm Bureau; Ellen Parker, Project Bread; Winton Pitcoff, NOFA

The meeting was called to order at 11:24 AM. Commissioner Watson thanked Trish Settles, Central MA Regional Planning Council, for the meeting space. He distributed copies of State Ethics Recusals and Disclosures to FPC members. Amanda Kinchla agreed to be the Secretary, with Jeff Cole's absence. James Arena-DeRosa - Northeast Regional Administrator, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, was introduced since he had to leave early. Some \$1.7 billion comes into MA for Food and Nutrition programs. His presentation was postponed to June 7th, 2013.

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Representative Kulik, seconded by Kerry Bowie, and passed on unanimous voice vote.

Report from the Chair: Commissioner Watson discussed legislation being proposed to enhance food access and will work for coordination and collaboration. US Senator Mo Cowan has been assigned to the Ag Committee, the first time for MA since 1879. The interim senator toured food and ag businesses in Massachusetts in late February, and was very enthusiastic about urban and rural agriculture, and the opportunity to have an impact on the Farm Bill.

Reports of Standing Committees: Cris Coffin and the MA FPC Advisory Committee members in attendance reported three strategies for next steps in the development of a statewide food systems plan: 1. To amend the MA FPC statute to provide the authority to receive and spend both private and public funds for the purpose of advancing a food systems plan in MA, and create a trust fund within a state entity to enable contracts for project services and expenses. 2. To detach the planning process from the FPC and move it to one or more existing or newly created entities, with recommendations shared at a public meeting. 3. Pursue both.

The Advisory Committee recommended #1: That language is developed to amend the statute to give the FPC authority to act a fiduciary agent and hold and administer funds and contract for services, which it

currently lacks. It would allow the possibility of receiving state and private funds. The Advisory Committee also recommended that the strategic planning process be under the auspices of the FPC since it is considered neutral, has gravitas and represents an important cross section of public agency and private sector representation, grounded in legislation and statutory structure.

Discussion: Language can be developed to be attached as a Budget Rider by July 1. Representative Kulik's office can solicit input as needed. Simultaneously, the Advisory Committee, as content specialists, can begin to research and develop draft content for the strategic process including an RFR for a facilitating entity, to be time efficient and take advantage of content expertise. Input can be solicited through public meetings. The FPC can sign off on an RFR for an entity to facilitate the strategic plan, and make the selection. The RFR can include a role for both the FPC and the Advisory Committee.

A motion for a statutory change to the FPC statute to establish a trust fund for the purposes of collecting and administering funds through MDAR or another agency was made by John Lee and seconded by Kerry Bowie.

Discussion: State procurement guidelines need to be followed. The procurement process is subject to open Meeting Law if a government organization receives funds, however language can be crafted to support the process. The facilitating entity selected would not be a government organization.

The facilitating entity for the statewide strategic plan could be a private group or individual, based on how the RFR is structured. MDAR could receive funds since it currently administers funds for several groups. The details would be designed as to what would be most expeditious. The funds could come from any source, based on the enabling legislation. Supermarket access legislation is being considered and includes a fund, which may be a model. The FPC has ultimately responsibility. Legislation could include some funds directed towards administration costs.

Commissioner Watson commented that the FPC is one of the top priorities for MDAR and for the Governor. Capacity issues at MDAR need to be reviewed but the agency is open for consideration, based on the importance of this work. There are traditional investors interested in sustainable agriculture and partnering with non-profits. Investors would respond positively to a strategic plan.

Michael Hunter commented that there may be opportunities to maximize resources that exist within state government such as Mass Development. He asked if there would be any restrictions placed on private sources of funding. Commissioner Watson replied that it would be up to the discretion of the FPC.

The motion was restated to amend the FPC enabling statute to give it the authority to receive and expend both public and private funds for the FPC projects through a trust fund administered by MDAR or another state agency to enable contracts for project services and related expenses for the purpose of advancing a strategic food systems plan, by Representative Kulik, seconded by Kerry Bowie and passed by unanimous vote.

Representative Kulik will work with the House Council to draft legislation. The Council can solicit input from the FPC and the Advisory Committee for comments, and will start soon since the house budget will be debated in April.

The Advisory Committee has three open positions which need to be filled. Commissioner Watson and Representative Kulik will continue to work to fill those positions, as well as discuss the addition of other positions.

Public comment and response: Consumers should be included in the process. There is total agreement that there should be wide engagement and inclusion. Young farmers are working creatively and should be included. Urban Ag constituents should also be integrated into the process.

Commercial fisheries should be a part of the plan, considering the economic impact of fishing and processing in Massachusetts. The plan can clearly support aquaculture which falls within the purview. It makes sense to acknowledge commercial fisheries and processing as part of the food system but there are many separate issues. There is overlap but it may be kept separate, except for the parallel with marketing through CSAs and farmers markets. The process design aspect is an area of expertise with facilitating entities that can be sure that the process is targeted and not duplicative.

Unfinished Business and General Orders: Commissioner Watson and Undersecretary Michael Hunter discussed current legislative initiatives and their interest in collaboration through the processes in response to the Grocery Task Force Report.

Program: Presentations were given by John Read, Boston Redevelopment Authority, "A Blueprint for Urban Agriculture," and Alex Risley Schroeder, Massachusetts Workforce Alliance, "Local Food, Local Jobs," a new report.

Member Announcements: The next meeting will be on June 7, 9:30 – 12:30 Union Hall, Worcester Union Train Station.

Member Observations: DEP recognizes the importance of the health of soils and the impact on urban agriculture. A MA Contingency Plan, Chapter 21, is open for comments.

John Lee moved to adjourn at 1:45 PM, second by Kerry Bowie. The motion passed.