

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

FINAL MEETING MINUTES

September 14, 2020

Supervisors: David Williams, Patrick Hearn, Kathie Becker, Elizabeth Austin, Associate Supervisor. Kathie joined at 7:13 and had intermittent connectivity.

Contractors: Susan Lavigne Thomas, Frances Gillespie (present through part of FY 2019 EEA grant discussion) Amy Tarlow-Lewis (present through the end of the finance discussion).

Partners: Heidi Ramsey, Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), present for her report

Volunteers: Liz McGuire

Quorum: Chairman David Williams confirmed there was a quorum and opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

David shared some updates while latecomers arrived:

- Hillside School Farm is trying to get their high tunnel up and need the assistance with irrigation, but may not be able to do the forestry this year due to lower enrollment and the lack of student assistance.
- Dick Gelpe will be attending the tour and has agreed to help with the 75th anniversary celebration.

Minutes: The July 13th meeting minutes were approved with Liz M's edits tendered before the meeting. Elizabeth A. made the motion, Patrick seconded and all were in favor. 7:05 p.m.

September Tour: All set for the 21st and the weather looks good. Discussion about how to handle dinner. The group decided it would be too late and dark to eat outside after the tour, although that option remains open, and out of an abundance of caution, to bring their own food and beverages to eat in the car as time allows. Sue will send out a confirmation with directions.

Kathy arrived at 7:13 and Frances and Heidi shortly thereafter.

Plant Sale Coordinator's Report: David asked if Frances needed more help at the sale and volunteered to try to recruit some, including Dick Gelpe. Patrick volunteered. Elizabeth A is already signed up. Orders are up a lot from the previous average of 120. We have received 188 this year. As a result, Frances is scrambling to acquire inventory from both wholesalers and retailers, who also are selling out. Volunteers are also a bit less certain this year, so with the

extra work, more help would be appreciated. Frances explained where the Bathhouse Pavilion at NARA park is and that outdoor space may also be useable if spacing becomes an issue. She will have signage, so people unfamiliar with the site can find it. Frances expects to be finished packing between 1 and 2 on Thursday and is accommodating people who need early or late pick ups outside of normal hours.

District Conservatoinist Report: Heidi reported that the end of the fiscal year has been especially busy this year. NRCS has obligated 22 new contracts, 16 from Middlesex County. Jack and Bob are working in the office. It has been a terrific year with more obligations this year than last, despite Covid-19.

Heidi has organized a Massachusetts Urban Agriculture Webinar for Wednesday with as many as 200 people from across the Commonwealth and nation attending. Sue is registered. Others are welcome.

Heidi also addressed an inquiry the District received today from a prospective property buyer and farmer/livestock owner who wanted to resolve discrepancies between the soil maps of the land from two sources. Sue had asked Heidi to give a little tutorial on our responsibilities with regard to Personally Identifiable Information(PII). This is an example of a situation where PII and privacy can get tricky because the inquiry is not coming from the owner. While soil map data is public, and generally about 90% accurate, an NRCS Planner can only sample for the owner, or share results, or even the fact of NRCS work with the person who contracted for it. The current owner can than share that info with the prospective buyer if they choose.

Stepping back, Heidi explained that **PII** applies to information that uniquely identifies someone and generally is a name in combination with another piece of data, such as:

- **Social Security Number**
- **Place of Birth**
- **Date of Birth**
- **Biometric Data**
- **Medical Data**
- **Criminal History**
- **Employment**
- **Credit Card Information.**

Public Information, like a name in combination with an employee ID, phone numbers, address, email, resume information, salary, biographical information/credentials are not included.

PII must be locked up in the office and MCD staff and volunteers must protect PII forever. This is important to remember when talking casually with people. Assistance is sensitive, both because some people don't want the public to know they are receiving it, and also because there are criteria for receiving it that make it competitive and this information can seed resentment among neighbors.

FY 2019 EEA Grant Review: As promised, Sue and Amy developed a slate of potential workshops that MCD could pursue under this grant.

Amy presented a library program, where the District can create a trove of relevant and curated information on the web site relevant to our mission and current resource issues.

Amy also presented information on how MCD can present webinars along with a selection of topics in divided into 4 areas: Healthy Soils, Backyard Growers, Food Insecurity and Cross Functional Programs that attract and/or require professionals and individuals from an array of backgrounds in addition to our usual Erosion and Sedimentation workshop which focuses on a specific set of continuing education credits. Sue added that programs could also be developed that target Conservation Commissioners and Agricultural Commissioners who may need or want to get up to speed on best practices or about current topics. Commissioners seemed to support this idea. Food Insecurity is a different and much larger category this year than it has been in the past, both for farmers themselves and their customers.

A final option is targeted, small group outdoor programming and/or programming built around the plant sale. Frances and Liz both explained that soil testing, a program with the Herb Pharmacy and with landscape designers had all been offered in the past at sales and people did not stay for them. Amy wondered if that was because they did not commit the time in advance. Frances feels that, too has, been tried. Patrick wondered, with regard to soil testing, if it wasn't the test itself, but the individualized advice and interpretation that people would find valuable (this is what WCCD provides with Joel, their planner). All of us are unclear if Covid may have changed the audience and their expectations/demand.

In general, the Supervisors liked the list. Supervisors expressed an interest in soil testing programs, healthy soil programs, possibly using NOFA contacts, and pollinator programs. Patrick had reservations about a mosquito and tick control workshop as he is not confident that science has come up workable solutions to this resource and health issue yet and is concerned about introducing any politics that might undermine the credibility of MCD. While Sue and Amy both feel helping for profit farms help with the food insecurity issue this winter is a vital community need, Supervisors were quiet about the topic. Kathi offered to ask her fellow Agricultural Commissioners if they had a strong preference or identified need for assistance. David supported the idea that Conservation Commissioners often have a steep learning curve.

Sue pointed out that we will have to choose two or three programs this year and asked the Supervisors for their preferences with regard to the final two categories. When they were quiet, she asked Liz M how choices had been made in the past, and Liz described a strategic planning process.

Ultimately, Web site design (in order to build a library and catalog it, attract and serve audiences, and serve as a foundation for workshops), the customer database and a focus on timely topics will drive the grant work this year. Amy concluded by outlining these resources required for MCD to provide workshop content and achieve the goals of the annual plan supported by the grant. She described a good web site as place for story telling which illustrates the District's work and relevance. Sue tied that to a hero program or feature program where we can honor our long time customers by featuring their experiences with us, as well as profile our Board and staff, as is usual with organizations like MCD.

Web Site Redesign and Constant Contact: Sue spoke about the example web sites and constant contact email blast examples from WCCD that she had shared with the Board and that they have liked as examples of what MCD could do if we can find room in the budget to support these upgrades/products. Sue also explained that she would like to send our plant sale customers an email asking them to opt in or opt out of receiving other emails in addition to adding a place on the website where visitors could subscribe to District information emails. Amy shared that in her experience, we really want to have the email require them to do something to opt out and default to having them receive all emails unless we plan to rebuild our mail list over several years. This does not mean that we would require everyone to get anything and everything. The goal would be to develop a contact list that is specific to the needs and desires of our constituency, however, right now they only know us with regard to plant sales, so if we can acquaint them with our new content before having them actively opt out, that might be more effective for all concerned. Amy left at the end of this discussion; approximately 9:10 P.M.

Treasurer's Report: Patrick made the motion to approve the reports, David seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Budget: Sue is still working on the budget for FY 2021. She asked that the Board take a close look at the revised draft she sent them in preparation for the new revenue discussion in October, at which time she hopes we can vote on the budget and a plan to support it. We should also have a good idea of where we stand with regard to the fall bulb sale.

FY 2020 EEA Grant Review: Sue reported that there is a lot of work to do with regard to the basic (District Administrator) grant and that it is a challenge to keep her hours in check so we do not exceed the budget. With regard to the Innovative grant, there are a lot of data gaps due to

informal arrangements. She has been attacking the topic from several angles and is working her way through composters, landscapers and towns. She explained what may already be obvious: land and farming in Middlesex County has become fragmented so that livestock is aggregated in one place often without pasture or other farmland and vegetable farmers no longer have livestock. Feedstock for animals is no longer produced on the farm. This specialization has led to a rise in two expensive trends: off site composting and trucking. It also means composters do not know if feed stock, and therefore manure, and by extension, compost, has herbicide in it. The market for compost is primarily higher end: residents and landscapers, not farmers who do not have the margins. Sue also spoke with KimLafleur in Plymouth county about their Innovative Grant regarding manure. They are working on an agreement with NRCS, but Sue does not yet have the details. Kim shared that they are trying to work with horse owners to avoid regulation, as has happened in the Chesapeake Bay area where all manure must be trucked out to avoid polluting the Bay.

FY 2021 EEA Grant: Sue submitted the proposal in July and Tom acknowledged receipt. She has had no further news, but she is not surprised giving that the Commonwealth has been operating on 1/12 budgets and most recently passed a budget only through the end of October with an extended Legislative Session.

Recruitment update: Sue and Patrick finalized the recruiting document and sent it out. Sue has not had any inquiries, however, Julie Weiss may be interested and Sue is staying on top of that. David is hopeful that Yvonne, with the Hillside School Farm might be persuaded to join us and is hoping the tour might be an opportunity to recruit her. Patrick wondered if a composting professional might be interested.

NOFA Conference Highlights: Patrick shared his 30 pages of notes and an enthusiastic review of the conference and suggested we all stay connected with this organization.

Kathi made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:37 p.m. David seconded, all were in favor.

Minutes recorded and respectfully submitted,

Susan Lavigne Thomas

District Administrator

