

Minutes **MA Food Policy Council**
January 31, 2020

Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Visitor Center, 9:30 – 12:30, 3 Paul Clancy Way, Worcester,
MA 01607 BlackstoneHeritageCorridor.org

Representative Daniel Donahue
Bill Fredericks, Office of Senator Ryan C. Fattman
Representative Hannah Kane
Commissioner Amy Kershaw, DTA
Amanda Kinchla, UMASS
Commissioner John Lebeaux, MDAR
John Lee
Rob Leshin, DOESE
Jared Freedman, Office of Senator Jo Comeford
Bobby Malinn, OHED
Mackenzie May, Central MA Buy Local
Lea Susan Ojamaa, DPH
Danah Tench, DEP
Eric Stocker
Sam Wong, Local Public Health

The meeting was called to order at 9:50 AM.

Introductions: Welcome, Dave Maloney, Visitor Center Manager, Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Visitor Center. The Council and attendees were enthusiastic about this new public space for meetings with some local history portrayed in lobby exhibits.

Acceptance of Minutes: With a minor correction, a motion was made to accept the minutes by John Lee, seconded by Danah Tench and unanimously accepted.

Officers Reports: Chair and Commissioner Lebeaux welcomed new DTA Commissioner Amy Kershaw. Previously, Kershaw served as the Assistant Commissioner for Policy and Practice Innovations at the Department of Children and Families, where she focused on developing policy and practice guidance for front line social workers and developing key policies governing departmental processes. Prior to her tenure at DCF, Kershaw held leadership positions at the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, first as the Associate Commissioner for Coordination and Outreach, then as the Deputy Commissioner for Programs, where her primary work focused on developing and implementing policies to streamline access for children and families and leading an organizational restructuring. Kershaw has a Bachelor of Arts from Williams College and a Master of Public Administration from Syracuse University. Kershaw and her family live in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Commissioner Lebeaux shared a warm thank you to Jeff Cole, a longtime member of the MA Food Policy Council for his tireless contributions over the years, as he retires from his Direct to Consumer position. He has worked with several MDAR Commissioners and council members, the Advisory Committee to the Council, and was very involved in the years of planning and advocating for a Massachusetts Food Policy Council. His efforts are very much appreciated. He will continue to be a resource to the Council with his

important institutional memory and contributions as a staff member of the MA Food System Collaborative.

The new appointee to the Direct to Consumer position was introduced. Mackenzie May, sworn in on January 17, was welcomed and shared some background. She coordinates the Central Massachusetts Buy Local organizations.

Commissioner Lebeaux: Over the course of the year, a focus will be on climate change and the food system, an interest of EEA. Agriculture may be contributing to climate change but agriculture can also be a part of the solution.

MA Food Caucus update: Representatives Hannah Kane and Daniel Donahue

The Food System Caucus was established a year ago. A current focus is a review of the past year, and the status of legislation, plans and budget requests. The Caucus celebrates having 126 members out of 200, the 2nd largest of the delegations. Food access, insecurity and farmland protection continue to be priorities. All 6 co-chairs met with Commissioner Kershaw re: HIP. Representative Donahue commended Representative Kane for all her work.

MA Food System Collaborative Update: (Commissioner Lebeaux in the absence of Winton Pitcoff)

- The Forum was the biggest ever and generated lots of ideas for future work, particularly around food system education and equity issues related to access to local foods.
- The Collaborative published a report on food waste, "Reducing Food Waste in Massachusetts: Local Successes Informing Statewide Solutions," which includes a set of case studies of food waste reduction efforts around the state, an analysis of existing policies that support these efforts, and a set of proposals for strengthening them. The report is available in the resources section of the Collaborative's website.
- The Collaborative is working to get funding in the supplemental budget for HIP to try to avoid a suspension and have set \$10.5 million as the request for FY21. This would allow for year-round operation as well as the addition of some farm vendors in areas of the state that are currently underserved by the program. HIP Lobby Day at the state house will be March 19, 2020.

Hannah Kane commemorated the Collaborative's Forum. At the event, she presented a citation to Winton Pitcoff for his work, crediting him with the plan to develop the Caucus. She praised him and his strong advocacy work.

Local Food Policy Council: Initiatives and outcomes relating to climate change: Cambridge Public Health Department, Dawn B. Olcott, MS, Manager, Public Health Nutrition Services, Healthy Eating/Active Living

The Council was appointed by the city managers with 20 members and went from a food policy council to a food and fitness council, considering the importance of activity. It's part of MA in Motion. The group is embedded in the city of Cambridge. Work groups are formed as needed. Including urban ag, snap matching, and a water coalition. The Council recommends priorities.

There is a policy, systems and environmental changes focus. The Council advises on strategies, activities and action plans, and is involved in the work groups. A lot of food and fitness work becomes part of the action plans and feeds into city staff work, being very circular with benefits for partnerships between the city departments.

An overall goal is improving health through access and activity. Racial justice, climate and community resilience are also priorities. Climate change is part of all discussions. The DPH and city have been monitoring body mass indexes, which are improved, but disparities are disturbing. Black and Hispanic students have not improved while others have. What can be done? There is a focus on early childcare programs, including a review of the menus and physical activities. The Council is looking at more plant-based and vegetarian foods which tie into climate change mitigation, and fewer sugary drinks, and bringing all the concerns together. Current and on-going projects focus on healthy eating and urban agriculture. School food and a wellness policy has been a priority. The foodservice improvements are impressive.

A recent article in the journal Lancet suggests the single biggest lever for climate change is food. There is a tap water task force to promote water as a beverage of choice and reduce bottle use and sugary beverages. Cambridge has an established food rescues system, Food for free. Cambridge also has a climate change zoning ordinance and public health regulations for urban agriculture.

There is also a SNAP match program (\$30,000) which includes three markets. The matching funds of \$15 per shopper come from a Community Development line item in the budget (\$20,000) and the remainder through fundraising (\$10,000).

A first climate project was to promote cycling and walking in the city and includes a bike share program. Bicycling and walking safety for second and sixth graders are programs as well as strengthening the safe routes to school in the policy.

An urban ag task force has existed since 2013 with a zoning ordinance and public health safety and sanitation regulations. MAPC has been an important partner with a Health Lens Analysis to maximize positive health impacts. Urban ag is also looking to expand the area where it is allowed re: zoning and rooftop and community farms, and hydroponic farming to better enable those who want to grow their own food. Ecosystem Impact is part of the analysis and a strong focus on access in low income and affordable housing. There is a community engagement team that is part of city staff. There is not a separate budget for the Council; rather, it's embedded in all the work.

Program: Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC): Farming and climate change report, Jeanette Pantoja, MAPC Public Health Planner; Heidi Stucker, MAPC, Assistant Director of Public Health; and Dave Dumaresq, Farmer Dave, tbc.

MAPC has ten years of working on climate resiliency experience, using flexible funding for a Climate Perspectives project. Four focus groups were held including a farmer group. They are experiencing more unpredictability in temperatures, with significant impacts. There are several state and federal programs to support climate resiliency including MDAR's Agricultural Environment Enhancement Program AEEP, Ag Climate Resiliency and Efficiency (ACRE). Rewards for growers using more resilient practices should be considered. Some regulations may be outdated and do not account for changing climate conditions. This is tied to the MA Local Food Action Plan via direct goals in land, inputs, and farming. The report is on the MAPC website at Mapc.org/resource-library/climate-perspectives

The MAPC artist in residence, Hortense Gerardo, shared how to embody the data findings from the project. Fish were created made by materials used by each of the focus groups, with thought bubbles based on excerpts from the focus groups. In addition, short videos were made to share experiences from focus group members.

Farmer Dave shared comments: The amount of food produced in US has declined: 35 percent of produce and 50 percent of fruit are imported. Eating more local has an important impact on climate change. The climate has a big impact on our production. Climate irregularities are becoming more consistent. New construction and technology are helping with these topics but is expensive. The timing of the HIP suspension has been problematic. Legislative issues can have a negative impact on markets, in this case with HIP. Comment: The distribution of food allows a healthy diet and employs many along the way. A: About 4% of what we eat locally is from MA. The idea is to maximize production while relying on a national and global supply chain. The US has some of the lowest food cost and highest food workers. Comment: Most people have no clue about what's local. A: The disconnect with our food system is getting worse.

Question: How much of your energy is solar? A: Between 75-100%. Comment to Farmer Dave: You are successful because your personality brings people to your farm. Farmers must develop a bit of a personality beyond the quality of the produce. You must do more than grow vegetables - you must sell yourself and your product.

Comment: We are seeing huge swaths of younger consumers buying local food who are interested in environmental issues. What about CSA's? A: CSAs have grown and are stable. In some cases, it's not complementary to consumer's lifestyles. Farmers Markets remain steady. Farmer's markets sales in lower income neighborhoods result in a higher volume. We also sell through MEFAP. It would be great to have more of the fund focus on local, now it's about 10%. We also donate to food pantries and did a Facebook post to donate excess product. Comment: Legislation on food donations would allow tax donations and is part of the Food System Caucus.

Question: Could MA encourage transparency in labeling so those who do care about local could make a choice? There can be a huge variation in the flavor and nutritional profile of food based on the soil. Soils sequester more carbon. Could farmers get credit for carbon sequestration? Europe has payments for growers to get reimbursed for sustainable practices including the health of the soil. The soil is the future of the farm.

Jared Freedman: Last night the senate was debating climate change. Senator Comerford is the lead for the healthy soils bill re: cover cropping and carbon sequestration, to support farmers needing to adopt and how the legislature can support that adaptation. A priority is to support predictability as much as possible. Any support for the healthy soils bill is much appreciated.

Healthy Beverage Campaign: Rebecca Toutant, Registered Dietitian, Certified Diabetes Educator, Personal Trainer, Cambridge Health Alliance - Wellness Manager

There are a broad range of health programs provided through 18 locations. Research about sugar sweetened beverages shows them as a major contributor towards obesity and diabetes.

A goal is to shift what is being provided and to make the healthy choice the easy choice. WHO and AHA recommend no more than 6 t of added sugar. A 20 oz bottle of soda for example, contains 16 t of sugar, more than double. Several choices: eliminate all, choice limitation, or reduce portion size. The decision was made to go with full elimination to stop putting it into the community at all, because of the health implications. It's not a ban, but not sold in the facilities or at events. Patients had access to sugar beverages for emergencies re: low blood sugar or other clinical needs. A communication program shared the plan, provided education, implementation and evaluation. It took six months to roll out.

Question: What about chocolate milk? A: We did keep all varieties of milk but not chocolate milk.

Question: Was there any research re: water fountain proximity and how it affects beverage choices? A:

No. Question: Might a behavior shift might be that employees and patients are bringing in their own beverages, and could educational materials reflect how communities of color are more aggressively marketing to? A: We haven't addressed disparities of how different communities are affected by sugar.

Question: Are others doing this? A: No one has done this, but many are color coding or using a traffic light system for example.

Policy Update Sugary Tax Campaign, Allyson Perron Drag, Government Relations Director, American Heart Association

A little change can make a big difference! Make healthy choices should be an easier choice. Sugary drinks are the single leading source of sugars in the American diet. The AHA proposes taxing by sugar content (successfully done in the UK). Across the country there have been several sugary tax beverage proposals. Mexico has had some good results. Exemptions: Milk is not taxed, and 100% fruit juices are exempt. A sugary drink tax in the Commonwealth could generate \$280 M in revenue. The revenues from a tax could go back into the community.

Claims against the tax say it's regressive and will cost jobs. Low income individuals are highly targeted by the industry – 2.5 times more than peers in other income levels. Tobacco used all the same arguments. There haven't been job losses.

Question: What has been the reception from the legislature? A: The Governor is not supportive. People understand there is a cause and effect but not how bad it is which is even worse than tobacco. There has been more support from the legislature the past year and generating revenue to support communities at risk.

Announcements:

Massachusetts Food Policy Meeting: Friday, March 27, 2020, 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Fish & Game, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Room 103, Westborough, MA 01581

Massachusetts Food Policy Meeting: Friday, May 8, 2020, 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Tower Hill Botanical Garden, Boylston, MA

Public Comment: None

Adjournment: The Meeting was adjourned at 12.40 PM with a motion by Amanda Kinchla, seconded by DTA Commissioner Kershaw and passed unanimously.