

Minutes MA Food Policy Council

May 7, 2021, 9:30 – 11:30 am

In attendance:

Representative Daniel Donahue
Senator Jo Comerford or Jared
Amy Kershaw, Commissioner DTA
Anna Darrow for Representative Hannah Kane
Amanda Kinchla, UMASS Food Safety
Jason King, Office of Senator Fattman
John Lebeaux, Commissioner DAR
John Lee, Farmer
Bobby Malinn, HED
McKenzie May, Central MA Buy Local
Lea Susan Ojamaa, MPH
Danah Tench, MassDEP
John Waite, WMPC

The remote hosting of this meeting is thanks to the Franklin County Community Development Corporation.

9:33 Called to order by Chair and MDAR Commissioner Lebeaux. **Acceptance of Minutes:** Chair & MDAR Commissioner Lebeaux asked each Council member to vote. In favor, Representative Donahue, Senator Jo Comerford, Commissioner Kershaw, Anna Darrow for Representative Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Jason King, Commissioner John Lebeaux, Bobby Malinn, McKenzie May, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Danah Tench, and John Waite. A motion to approve was made by Commissioner Kershaw, seconded by John Waite, and passed unanimously.

Officers Reports: Commissioner Lebeaux:

Jason King, legislative director for Senator Fattman, has a degree from Brandeis with a focus on poverty and food insecurity, important issues to him and Senator Fattman.

Commissioner Lebeaux provided an update on open positions on the MA Food Policy Council. Distributor candidates have been forwarded to Boards and Commissions. Community Health candidates have been interviewed. Candidates for the Healthy Soils position (appointed by EEA Secretary) are moving forward. Prior to the next Council meeting expect to have potential candidates for all the positions. This process is routine for any Boards and Commissions position, with the appointing authorities making their decisions independently. Council members can also communicate directly with Boards and Commissions. Comment: Diversity is a priority for new candidates.

John Waite shared an update on the MA Food Trust Program which has provided more grants than loans this past year which makes sense. The program also supported the FSIG with loans.

Bylaws, Structure and Council Roles committee: Vice Chair John Waite & Secretary Danah Tench

The Co-chairs presented the following agenda for this section:

- Possible 2021 priorities and strategies to measure progress
- Discussion of a process for the Council to provide letters of support
- Input for bylaw changes

Council members were asked to discuss and share their priorities which included fully funding HIP, a circuit rider position, Representative Donahue's legislation for full time staff for the Council, climate change, support for UMASS Extension, food as medicine and with wide support, greater racial equity in the food system. Support for UMASS was highlighted by several Council members.

Comments:

One question raised: Is the Council more advocacy or action oriented? A priority is a COVID recovery agenda, including exposing racial equity in the food system. There should be a focus on support for food system and food access. Priorities could be reframed to provide broad benefits rather than just individual programs.

Advocacy and action are both important parts of making recommendations. The Council may not need to get too focused on dollar amounts for programs for example, but instead focus more broadly, and on topics that cut across multiple agencies and industries. Letters of support are an example.

The statute says, "to develop recommendations and advance the following food system goals for the Commonwealth..." They are both broad and specific, including to make recommendations according to the bylaws, and benchmarks for measuring progress.

It is difficult to choose priorities since they're all important but racial equity, climate change and UMASS are issues where the Council could be helpful and could use more attention.

COVID taught us more about things that we knew already existed. A focus on the long term makes sense, root causes rather than quick fixes. We were already in a food insecurity position – part of it is systematic racism, so much of this all ties together.

We should focus on the four goals in our statutory requirements, rather than individual goals Racial equity isn't an initiative onto itself but rather an overriding value.

Be mindful of the other resources: MA Local Food Action Plan, Collaborative and Caucus and how they relate.

Letters of support can be considered recommendations and would be timely. Buy in for letters of support requires agencies to confer through their legislative process, which means the process may take 2 – 3 meetings. How could a letter of support be helpful? The committee that the legislation is assigned to would see our organizational support which could help it move it through the slow legislative process and draw attention to the issue. A letter of support could be substantial and useful from this diverse body of representatives. If there are timely matters, committee work could occur between meetings.

What do the agency members need to be able to sign on? A draft to share with senior management would be helpful to get buy in between two meetings. Agencies can abstain if needed.

A letter of support could be signed by the Council's chair but should come from the body with Council member follow-up. Perhaps Council letterhead would be needed with the minutes attached with a record of the vote. An issue for agencies is support for specific dollar amounts. A general concept of increasing the funding would work better for the agencies, while recognizing though that the specific amount is important from an advocacy perspective. Agencies may be able to get support to vote if content changes are not substantive.

This timeline works for legislators since it is pretty early in the process. Racing to get a letter of support for full HIP funding might not be needed since there is already wide support. This is a policy council, which means longer term support of these programs. There is also wide support for FSIG though it is not clear if it will be in the states FY22 budget. There may be federal or other dollars, so a letter of support is not an immediate need.

There will be a bylaw focus at the next committee meeting, some are statutory and others are technical. Considering committees, is there a need for an advisory committee? The advisory committee has not been active since the planning and review of RFR's for the MA Local Food Action Plan. The Caucus and the Collaborative did not exist when the advisory committee was created.

Commissioner Lebeaux opened this part of the meeting to Public Comment:

The Council is not very diverse and representative of the food system. What about smaller farmers and advocates of color? I am waiting for the 300 farmers and farmers of color to be represented on the Council. Perhaps there is an important opportunity to engage broader folks through the advisory committee. It could be of benefit to those not on the Council to have a voice.

The advisory committee has defined positions that should be reviewed to see that the food system is reflected. The Council has the authority to change the committee composition. The Collaborative has been acting in an advisory role. The Advisory Committee could be part of the lens for the Council for racial equity but shouldn't be a substitute for diversity on the Council.

The nominating committee would suggest positions/names for the advisory committee.

Public comment: As a person of color that has been coming to these meetings for years, I've excited about the Advisory Committee helping to provide diverse voices. The intent to change the body of the Council for more diversity is important but could take a long time. In the meantime, the Advisory Committee could add more diversity. The pandemic illuminated the systemic racism in the food system. It makes a difference when we're at the table.

MA Food Policy Council member updates

MDAR Commissioner and Council Chair Lebeaux shared that there is new guidance re: growing cannabis on agriculturally protected land. Anything that supports farm resiliency is always of interest. A provision in state law that prohibited growing hemp on the 70,000 acres of protected land has been changed. Hemp may now be grown on any protected land in MA. Marijuana can be grown on land with no federal funding components. This supports farm diversity and their business resiliency, a tenant of the Plan.

MA Legislature's Food Caucus: Senator Jo Comerford and Representative Daniel Donahue

It is a busy time on the House side with many successes on the House side. There wasn't an increase for UMASS but there are efforts to get it into the Senate budget, and to maintain numbers on the House side. The Caucus will be at APEX Orchards in western Massachusetts for a legislative briefing. The Collaborative helped the Caucus write a letter to Senator McGovern re: HIP that might help with national models.

On the Senate side, efforts will focus on maintaining House funding on food system legislation and including UMASS. Senator Comerford thanked Representative Kane for her backbone leadership on the Caucus. Priority legislation from the Caucus was sent separately to Council members. The Senate is overflowing with legislation that supports the food system. The Caucus isn't able to prioritize and endorse them all, however there is acute attention being paid to the intersecting issues.

MA Food System Collaborative: Winton Pitcoff

The topics described by the Caucus are supported by the Collaborative including HIP, UMASS Extension, UMASS in Motion and the FSIG program. There has been strong support from community-based organizations. The Collaborative is offering training and workshops on seven legislative topics - how to support these topics, craft language, speak to legislators and reach out and tell the stories. Some are reaching out for the first time and enjoying the process. An in-person meeting is being planned by the Collaborative.

Announcements

May 12, 10 – 11 AM - Local Food System Priorities in the Fiscal Year 2022 State Budget. A briefing for stakeholders, registration required. Coordinated by the MA Food System Collaborative.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom-join?meetingRef=1234567890>

May 26, 2021 12 – 4 PM - USDA Food Loss and Waste Innovation Fair, May 26, 2021 12 – 4 PM A virtual, free Food Loss and Waste Innovation Fair [Registration is required.](#)

TBA, Bylaws, Structure and Council Roles committee meeting. Anyone is welcome to attend this public meeting.

July TBA, 9:30 – 11:30 MA Food Policy Council meeting

John Waite: – MA Food Trust Program – more grants than loans this past year which makes sense. We, appreciated and also teamed up with the Food Infrastructure Program and gave them a loan and then they can pay back the loan with our program.

Public Comment

From Healthy Waltham, having letters of support content in advance would be helpful and support the work that is being done.

UMASS Extension very much supports the goals that have been articulated, and the continuing support that the Council has provided.

There is a new position in production agriculture to support growers. Please circulate this opportunity. Diversity in the applicant pool is important. UMASS Extension appreciates the Council's strong support.

A meeting of the **Bylaws, Structure and Council Roles committee** will be announced and posted. Anyone is welcome to participate in this public meeting that will be held remotely.

A very positive feature on the Worcester Public Market was recently on Channel Five.

11:08 A **motion to adjourn** was made by John Lee, seconded by Senator Comerford, and passed unanimously: Representative Donahue, Senator Comerford, Commissioner Kershaw, Anna Darrow, Amanda Kinchla, Commissioner Lebeaux, John Lee, Bobby Malinn, McKenzie May, Lea Susan Ojamaa, Danah Tench, John Waite.

11:08 adjourned

On March 10, 2020, Governor Baker, acting pursuant to the power provided by Chapter 639 of the Acts of 1950 and Section 2A of Chapter 17 of the Massachusetts General Laws, declared a State of Emergency due to the outbreak of the 2019 coronavirus ("COVID-19"). In accordance with the State of Emergency, the Massachusetts Food Policy Council ("MFPC") meetings are being conducted through virtual means to allow real-time public access.