

MA Food Policy Council Meeting (virtual)

Friday, January 12, 2024

9:30 - 11:30 AM

In attendance:

Senator Jo Comerford
Representative Daniel Donahue
Representative Hannah Kane
Amanda Kinchla, Food Safety
Rob Leshin, ESE
Mackenzie May, Direct to Consumer
Commissioner Jeffrey McCue, MDTA
Deputy Commissioner Winton Pitcoff, MDAR
Jessica del Rosario, MA DPH
Caro Roszell, Soils Specialist
Danah Tench, MassDEP
Ayn Yeagle, Community Health
John Waite, Food Processing

Not in attendance: Senator Fattman, Anne Gobi, Torry Stamm Katsiroubas, Phoebe Walker

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Mackenzie May at 9:32 AM. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Senator Comerford, seconded by Representative Kane, and passed by voice vote: Senator Comerford, Representative Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Commissioner McCue, Winton Pitcoff, Jessica del Rosario, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite.

MA Food System Collaborative: Becca Miller reported on eight priority bills. The annual Food System Forum in December had 250 in attendance, with up to a half attending for the first time. The plenary session focused on connections between natural weather disasters and supporting resiliency and food security. There was a question about possible suspension of the HIP program. Commissioner McCue shared that thanks to support from food system advocates, the administration is committed to funding full HIP for 2024. There will not be any suspension or interruption this year for this important program. He thanked the MA Legislative Food System Caucus including Senator Comerford, Representative Kane and Schmidt, agency Commissioners, the MA Food System Collaborative and other advocates for their galvanized efforts to support this program.

MA Legislative Food System Caucus: Senator Comerford and Representative Hannah Kane shared an update. Senator Comerford noted her appreciation for the strong advocacy for HIP. Senator Bruce Tarr has been welcomed as a co-chair for the Caucus, important for his long-term commitment to the fisheries sector. The Council has long sought having fisheries represented on the Council. The Caucus has been inspired by DESE's Tasty Tray program. Information on this program has been shared with Caucus members to celebrate universal school meals and the increasing focus on nutrition and its impact in our schools. There is enthusiasm for the MA Farmland Action Plan and the implementation of key policy and program provisions. The second February in Wednesday is when most committees must make decisions about legislation to move forward. Health care is an exception with a March 10 deadline.

Nominating Committee: There was a vote to accept the slate of Nominating Committee candidates including Mackenzie May (chair), John Waite, Caro Roszell, Rob Leshin, and Ayn Yeagle. A vote to accept the slate of was made by Senator Comerford seconded by Representative Kane, and passed by voice vote: Senator Comerford, Representative Donahue, Representative Kane, Amanda Kinchla, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Winton Pitcoff, Jessica del Rosario, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, John Waite.

Advisory Committee: Ayn Yeagle introduced any Advisory Committee members in attendance, Marcos Beleche, Four Corners Main Street Dorchester, and Casey Burns, Greater Worcester Community Health Improvement. Alicia Klein, Grow Food Northampton, and Meg Gennings, UMass Agriculture Animal Science & Mass Farm Bureau, are the other two new members. Ayn invited Council members to their in-person and virtual meeting on January 25, 3 - 5 PM. An orientation will take place prior to the next meeting.

Bylaw Committee: Danah Tench led a discussion about possible bylaw changes. Being able to provide stipends for the Advisory Committee is of interest and would require changes in the statutory language. Another recommendation would be adding a seat for the Division of Fish and Wildlife, an amendment to the current language. The statute was amended in the past to add a soils specialist. The Office of Economic Development has changed their name which should be updated. As written in the statute and bylaws, the body composition is very prescriptive. Should there be language that gives more flexibility to the advisory committee for who is on the committee? Representative Kane shared that traditionally, bylaws are prescription. Q: Is there any opportunity to avoid Open Meeting Law for the Advisory Committee? A: It's unlikely though we could check in with MDAR legal staff. The Bylaws Committee will meet prior to the Council's March meeting, in order to make recommendations.

Local Food Policy Council grant awardee reports:

Mill City Grows: Enrique Vargas. Grass roots recruitment, diverse participation, implementing recommendations from the food assessment which include expanding membership, advocacy for the HIP campaign, Food Literacy, and Universal School Meals are a focus. There are established priorities for Council work including policy recommendations and program implementation. The partnership is community based with time spent on long-term sustainability. A mission statement, bylaws, and a guiding document have been developed. A first public policy event has been organized. Beneficiaries include food partnership members and organizations that were not connected before. The group works through consensus-based decisions but may need to change as membership increases. Frances Slater from Mill City Grows was a consultant to develop bylaws.

Somerville Food Security Coalition: Lisa Robinson, City of Somerville, Alexis Sarpong from Cambridge Health Alliance, and Maggie Joseph, Somerville Food Security Coalition committee member. The Coalition recruited an advisory board, hired a facilitator, met five times, reviewed and updated their mission, values, and structure, and hosted a public meeting. They also created a steering committee and an actionable work plan. There are seven steering committee members who are leading the work, with future ambitions for the groups to work independently.

Program:

John Fischer, MassDEP: Food Waste Diversion, Progress, and Trends. Food waste is the largest portion of our solid waste. MassDEP's 2030 goal is to reduce food waste by 780,000 tons by continuing to implement the food waste ban. There has been a steady increase in food waste diversion since the program started, with a focus on business and institutions. Since 2014, businesses that work with food waste haulers has been documented, now about 31,000 businesses with expectations for additional growth. The initial strategy was based on businesses that generate over 1 T of food waste. The next focus is on business that generate between .5 - 1 Ton of waste per year, which will be followed by residents, depending on the community, and small businesses. Waste bans are done via regulation under MassDEP's statutory authority. MassDEP offers statewide assistance, compost site technical assistance, grants to cities and towns and grant/loans for businesses managing food waste.

Member updates

Ayn Yeagle reported that U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is having a first Food is Medicine Summit, January 31, 2024. The full-day event for policymakers, advocates, researchers and food system stakeholders with equities in the Food is Medicine space will engage during the meeting about why food is medicine is important, what actions are being taken to promote this concept, and what stakeholders can do to bolster this work.

Caro Roszell reported that Healthy Soils Advocates were thrilled that the State Commission for Soil, Water and Related Resources will have up to \$6M of American Rescue Act Plan funding that may be made available to the Commonwealth's Healthy Soils Program. This would provide critical assistance to the Commonwealth's farmers, foresters, and other land managers to advance initiatives that improve the capacity of our natural and working lands to be more resilient to climate change impacts, to act as a natural carbon sink, and, when implemented on agricultural lands, to improve regional food security and food quality. In addition, the Healthy Soils Challenge Grants RFP, put out by EEA, is currently receiving applicants, with the deadline at the end of the month. These projects will advance healthy soils in Massachusetts.

Announcements

Meeting of the MA Food Policy Council (virtual and in-person) March 15, 2024, 9:30 – 11:30 AM
MDAR Southboro Office, 3rd Floor, 225 Turnpike Rd, Southborough, MA 01772

Public Comment

A vote to adjourn the meeting was made at 11 AM by Ayn Yeagle, seconded by John Watie and passed by voice vote: Rachel Klein for Senator Comeford, Amanda Kinchla, Rob Leshin, Mackenzie May, Commissioner McCue, Winton Pitcoff, Caro Roszell, Danah Tench, Ayn Yeagle, and John Waite.

55 in attendance