

**2nd Meeting of the
Cass-Clay Food Systems Advisory Commission
May 13th, 2015
Fargo Commission Chambers**

Members Present:

Heidi Durand, Moorhead City Council, Chair
Mike Thorstad, West Fargo City Commission
Jim Aasness, Dilworth City Council
Mike Williams, Fargo City Commission
Andrea Baumgardner, At-Large Member
Janet Paul, At-Large Member
Jessica Arneson, At-Large Member
Dana Rieth, At-Large Member
Jon Evert, At-Large Member

Members Absent:

Arland Rasmussen, Cass County Commission
Jenny Mongeau, Clay County Commission

Others Present:

Megan Myrdal, Project Coordinator
Kim Lipetzky, Fargo Cass Public Health
Rita Ussatis, North Dakota State University Extension
Noelle Harden, University of Minnesota Extension
Aby Gold, Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative
Deb Haugen, Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative
Whitney Oxendahl, Cass-Clay Food Systems Initiative
Adam Altenburg, Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments

Chair Durand called the meeting to order at 10:30 AM.

2. Approve Order and Contents of the Overall Agenda

A motion to approve the order and contents of the overall agenda was made by Ms. Baumgardner and seconded by Mr. Aasness. The motion was voted on unanimously approved.

3. Review and Action on Minutes from March 25, 2015

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Evert and seconded by Ms. Paul. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

4. Process Framework for Opening a Session

Ms. Gold asked both Commission and Steering Committee members to pair up in small groups to take part in a process framework discussion. Ms. Gold explained that the purpose of the discussion was to better understand how the Commission may be able to bring about effective change regarding food systems issues in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area and how the Commission may better achieve its purpose of assuring that residents have access to safe, nutritious, and affordable foods. Ms. Gold stated that that groups would be asked to consider two questions: "What words would you use to describe this group and its purpose?" and "What is one area of agreement that this Commission

could use to build a foundation for moving food systems work forward?” Chair Durand asked that groups spend several minutes discussing these questions before sharing their thoughts with the group.

Words that group members shared to describe the Commission and its purpose included: energetic, passionate, cross-functional, metro-wide representation, coordination and collaboration, guiding, informed, inclusive, solution-focused, diverse, balance between government and private entities, innovative, proactive, and community-minded. Group members stated that there were still unclear aspirations for the Commission, whether it is meant to be an advisory as the name suggests or whether it should be an advocate for promoting various food systems issues. Areas of agreement that group members shared included giving focus to local growers, viewing community education as a top priority, removing barriers to local food access, and improving economic development opportunities for local food entrepreneurs.

5. Proposed Issue Identification Process and Discussion

Mr. Altenburg shared with the Commission the proposed four-step issue identification process for assessing the food system in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. Mr. Altenburg explained that this process had been developed in response to the first Commission meeting and subsequent meetings with the Steering Committee. Mr. Altenburg stated that this process would assist in how recommendations are proposed and ultimately adopted by area jurisdictions.

Mr. Altenburg explained that the first step would be for the Steering Committee to identify issues to be considered by the Commission based on criteria including the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan, task force input, public and online community input, and Commission or additional input by area jurisdictions. Mr. Altenburg explained that the second step would be that the Steering Committee would develop a draft blueprint on a proposed issue that would include background information, current zoning or policy information, a framework evaluation of potential benefits, and other areas as recommended. Mr. Altenburg stated that the third step would be to issue and review the draft blueprint with the Commission and post it to the Let’s Eat Local website for community discussion. Mr. Altenburg concluded that the fourth step would be asked for Commission discussion and a recommended action or actions as to how an issue should move forward in respective jurisdictions.

6. Urban Agriculture Education and Discussion

Ms. Gold stated that urban agriculture includes, but is not limited to, urban growing, farming practices, urban animals, sales, and food safety and processing. Ms. Gold stated that urban growing includes many types of gardening activities including but not limited to community gardens, residential gardens, apartment gardens, rooftop gardens, and gardens in parklands. Ms. Gold went into depth about different gardening models and examples, including The Food Project in Boston which produces a quarter-million pounds of food a year with over half being donated to local area shelters. Ms. Gold stated that there are seven community gardens in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan area and that several different models exist. Ms. Gold also explained the concept of pop-up gardens seen in different neighborhoods in Chicago which utilize empty lots until they are developed. Ms. Gold stated that backyard gardens are restricted in some areas of the community and that there is potential to promote apartment gardens, especially to New Americans who may be accustomed to growing much of their own food. Ms. Gold stated that several examples of rooftop gardens exist in downtown Fargo, including the Hotel Donaldson, and that numerous examples can be seen in larger cities in the United States.

Ms. Gold informed the Commission on urban animal keeping and described how the Steering Committee has already taken a look at two potential areas: urban chickens and bees. Ms. Gold stated that in addition to the chickens and bees, urban animals may include other smaller animals such as

rabbits, ducks, pigs, goats, and lamb. Ms. Gold described how the Red River Valley could potentially provide food for the entire state of Minnesota if it focused on the cultivation of smaller animals and plant foods. Ms. Gold stated that North Dakota is the largest honey producer in the United States. Ms. Gold told the Commission that a book entitled "Farm City" by Novella Carpenter includes stories on urban animal keeping in Oakland, California.

Ms. Gold informed the Commission of examples of farming practices including high tunnels which are greenhouses that are placed on the ground that extend growing seasons. Ms. Gold stated that the Red River Valley is a perfect area for high tunnels and that both NDSU and U of M are currently conducting more research in this area. Ms. Gold also spoke of rainwater harvesting techniques and stated that River Keepers has been involved in promoting practices in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area.

Ms. Gold explained briefly what soil safety is, including keeping dogs and cats away from gardens so that soil is safe to work in. Ms. Gold spoke about composting and food waste programs and explained that over 90 communities in the United States had municipal food scrap recycling programs, many with nominal costs to municipalities.

Ms. Gold stated that an area of urban agriculture that is expanding rapidly is aquaponics and hydroponics. Ms. Gold provided an example of hydroponic growers in St. Paul who utilize abandoned or unused buildings for extensive operations.

Ms. Gold explained that farmers markets may be an area that the Commission would want to pursue and if it is something that the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area is interested in expanding. Ms. Gold stated that, with regard to sales and farmers markets, people in the Cass-Clay area will travel to the farmers market in Grand Forks since they know they will sell out. Ms. Gold also spoke of farm stands, for growers that prefer to go it alone, and direct out-of-garden sales.

Ms. Gold stated that there were two main issues related to food safety, individual household safety and education to vendors to sell and market their food safely.

Mr. Williams asked what the Commission might do to facilitate farmers markets, including a larger central market in the area and whether it may be beneficial to look at the example in Grand Forks. Ms. Gold stated that the Steering Committee is currently looking at different options to address farmers markets and that it may be included in a draft blueprint. Ms. Arneson stated that she really enjoys the farmers market in Grand Forks and that it includes entertainment, artists, and diverse products. Mr. Williams reiterated that inclusiveness needs to be a priority.

Chair Durand asked if fees are a determinant to inclusivity and if it is an area that is being considered. Ms. Gold stated that the Steering Committee is aware of the issue.

Mr. Thorstad asked how outreach with the park boards or areas with restrictive covenants in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area would be handled. Ms. Gold stated that the Commission would provide recommendations on best practices on how municipalities could approach those issues. Mr. Williams stated that the program Growing Together started 11 years ago as a faith-based program that has now begun working with area parks. Chair Durand stated that the City of Moorhead was close to establishing a neighborhood garden at Romkey Park but was unable to find an organization to help as a facilitator.

7. Review Organizational Structure of Draft Blueprint – Urban Bees

Ms. Oxendahl explained that the Steering Committee and the Commission would be developing blueprints to address current gaps and needs with regard to food system issues in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. Ms. Oxendahl shared a draft blueprint on urban bees and describes its format which included background information, an evaluation framework that looked at health, environmental, economic, and social domains, concerns and possible solutions, and an appendix of example ordinances. Ms. Oxendahl explained that the Commission was only considering the format and layout of the blueprint and whether the information was what the Commission would like to see in future blueprint.

Mr. Thorstad asked if it would be possible to compare blueprints to areas of comparable size in addition to larger metropolitan areas. Mr. Thorstad stated that access to urban agricultural practices may not be as limited in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area compared to more urbanized areas. Ms. Oxendahl explained the reason she included some larger metropolitan areas is that those she included had recently updated their policies and that their information was more up-to-date. Mr. Williams stated that it would be good to have a range since good ideas may come from both smaller and larger communities. Ms. Baumgardner iterated that she liked the example ordinances included as they were much more detailed and gave a good amount of needed information.

Chair Durand asked the Commission what other metropolitan areas should be considered. Ms. Lipetzky stated that the City of Fargo has currently begun looking more at Sioux Falls, SD and Lincoln, NE.

Ms. Paul stated that it would be good to include potential examples of why an urban agriculture issue may have been rejected by a community, especially for people who may not know as much about a particular issue. Chair Durand gave support to this comment in that it would help elected officials to better understand both sides of an issue, including potential legal issues.

8. Urban Agriculture Prioritization

Ms. Myrdal stated that, based on the proposed issue identification process discussed earlier in the meeting, one of the issues that has aligned with the five criteria identified by the Steering Committee in bringing issues forward to the Commission is related to urban agriculture. Ms. Myrdal asked the Commission members rank the five different urban agriculture areas discussed earlier, as well as each of the categories included under each issue.

Chair Durand asked if Commission should rank each individual item under the five categories or simply pick their top three. Ms. Myrdal asked that Commission members rank each individual item based on how many were listed. Ms. Gold clarified that number one would be Commission members' highest priority and so forth.

Chair Durand asked that the Commission take several minutes to finish the urban agriculture prioritization.

9. Online Community Input

Ms. Lipetzky informed the Commission that over the past months, Fargo Cass Public Health had received numerous emails and phone calls on urban agriculture issues, most of which were related to community gardening, urban chicken keeping, and farmers markets. Ms. Lipetzky explained that the Steering Committee would be sharing comments with the Commission on a continuing basis and that a comment form is now available on the Let's Eat Local website.

10. Public Comment Opportunity

Chair Durand informed the Commission that 15 minutes would be allotted for public comments.

Mindy Grant, citizen from West Fargo, asked that the Commission address specific needs or problems in the community rather than looking at other communities and what they are doing.

Mara Solberg of Solberg Farms and Prairie Roots Co-op described the food chain she sees raising small animals on her farm and asked that the Commission to be a strong supporter of local growers and a proponent of a robust farmers market. Ms. Solberg also said she would be interested to see a garden and farmers market in downtown Fargo.

11. Commission Roundtable

Chair Durand asked for the Commission to share updates from their jurisdictions.

12. Commission Action Steps

Ms. Myrdal asked that Commission members share information about the online community input opportunity through the Let's Eat Local website. Ms. Myrdal also asked the Commission hand in their prioritization of urban agriculture practices to be discussed at the next meeting. Ms. Myrdal stated that the next meeting would be July 8th in the Fargo City Commission Chambers.

Chair Durand adjourned the meeting at 11:55 AM.