



Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts
Department of Planning and Development
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459

Telephone
(617) 796-1120
Telefax
(617) 796-1142
TDD/TTY
(617) 796-1089
www.newtonma.gov

Barney S. Heath
Director

NEWTON FARM COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

August 3, 2023.

Hybrid Meeting in person at Farm and via Zoom

Meeting opened at 7:04 p.m. with the following attendees

MEMBERS PRESENT: Michael Goldman, Paul Costello, Jefferey Zabel, Beth Wilkinson (ZOOM), Cheryl Lappin, Lori Yarvis, and John Rice

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jim Harper

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Sue Bottino (Executive Director), Paul Holt (Co-President), Dede Vittori (Co-President), and Barbara Seal (Co-Treasurer), Marietta Joseph, Laura Bishop (co-clerk)

STAFF: Brenda Belsanti, Planning & Development Department

• **Financials Q2, 2023**

- The Commission reviewed the financials of Q2, 2023 and Sue, Dede, and Barbara fielded all questions.

• **Farm Operations**

- Newton Climate Smart Program – we received a small microgrant for purchase of another cart.
- Newton Community Pride – we received an unrestricted \$750 beautification grant due to the recent thefts.
- Dedham Savings Foundation – we received \$5000 to put towards a used pick-up or van.
- Needham Bank – we received \$1500 for general support.
- Brookline Bank – we received \$2500 for produce donations.
- Pomroy Foundation – we will receive \$8500 for produce donations.
- We are still waiting to hear from MDAR and Whole Foods Market on our grant applications.
- We met the match from the Barg Family toward the greenhouse table & chairs.
- We received many donations in support of the Farm after the plant theft – some will be used to increase security measures.
- Working on getting sponsors for the Fall Family Fest in October
- The Open House Event was wonderful. We had approximately 200 attendees to celebrate the dedication of the Dr. Eugene Rubin greenhouse, the new solar array, new historical sign,

and the storywalk. Expenses were less than \$100. Mayor Fuller and AG Commissioner Randle both gave remarks and the Rubin/Barg families were please with the dedication. Member of the Angino and Truesdale family were also in attendance.

- Produce – we are in the middle of the summer CSA pickups. We are the Newton Farmers’ Market and the Farm Stand is open. There have been some challenges with the heat, rain and flooding. Tomatoes are starting to ripen. The Farmers’ Market is accepting SNAP and HIP.
 - Currently a pickup site for 14 flower shares for another farm.
 - Produce donations are strong. Weekly donations to the Newton Food Pantry and Freedged. In less than one week the Boston area Gleaners harvested 185 pounds of spinach, 167 pounds of turnips, 44 pounds of sugar snap peas, and 4 pounds of lettuce for neighbors in need.
 - Fruit shares from Autumn Hills Orchard are on sale now. We supplement that with Asian pears and grapes we grow.
 - Late Fall CSA shares are on sale now.
 - The Seedling Sale was an amazing success. Saturday afternoon was a wash out, but we had 400 transaction prior to the weather. Sunday was a beautiful day. We accepted SNAP and HIP for the sale. We exceeded our budgeted goal.
 - Small on-line follow up sale of perennial herbs and soil amendments.
 - Donated leftover seedlings to Waltham Community Farm who had lost many of their seedlings due to the cold because they had to take down their greenhouse.
 - Donated seedlings to local girl scout troop for a garden they created at a shelter for homeless survivors of domestic abuse and addiction in Cambridge.
 - Donated seedlings to Newton Conservators for the annual meeting centerpieces and the Newton Plant Swap on June 10.
 - We are fully staffed. Three new team members for the field crew/farm stand and summer internship supervisor.
 - Grace, Spring Assistant grower, was temporary and extremely helpful. She worked ~16 hours/week from mid-March through mid-June at a cost of ~\$5000 and should consider doing the same for next year.
 - Lucy, Program Coordinator, is leaving at the end of August.
 - Chickens – at the end of May, 26 chicks arrived from Iowa and are doing well. They are allowed to venture out of the coop. They are now flying around in little bursts. They will probably start laying eggs at about five months old and that’s when they can be mixed with the older hens.
 - Interns -- we finished session 1 with four high school students. Next week four new students start.
 - Weed crew volunteers are doing a great job under Laura’s leadership.
 - BIG news – Sue Botino will be leaving as Executive Director this fall. She voiced her appreciation for the support and guidance of the Farm Commission. The Farm will miss her terribly!!
- **Solar Project Update**
 - MDAR Solar Grant – the City has been reimbursed by MDAR for the solar project
 - Solar battery was installed on June 18 and our first bill from Eversource was a negative credit!

- **Recent Activities**

- Greg ran an onsite workshop for fellow farmers on growing in greenhouses for the EMASS CRAFT group.
- May and July book groups were hybrid virtual/in-person meetings. For September 14, we're reading "We Are the Ark."
- The event with Walter Willett on June 1 was terrific. It was recorded and is available online. We had a pre-event gathering in the barn with appetizers by Thistle & Leek and Wegmans for 50 people, plus 50 households watched from home live.
- Lucy visited Meetinghouse Childcare Center, where she led a hands-on exploration of worms and decomposition with the 3–4-year-olds.
- Seven students from the Zervas school's STRIDE program for students with autism visited the farm, where they dissected seeds in the learning garden.
- Lucy will do a worm demo at Newtonville Books next week.
- We had a very successful sustainable floristry class for adults at the Farm on July 15.
- We had 4 volunteers for Newton Serves Day and we cleared the sunflower patch, moved soil to it from the Learning Garden, and weeded and mulched the mini apple orchard.
- We had a table at Newton North High School on Tuesday, May 23 to talk with students there as part of their "Sustainability Day" program.
- We attended the Newton Conservators' annual meeting on Wednesday, May 24 and had a poster about the farm and the microgrant we received from them toward our garden cart.
- The Newton South High School Seniors finished their work on SNAP/HIP and we visited the school to see their poster presentation on Wednesday, May 24.
- Two NewTV interns did a story about solar at the Farm. NCF was featured in a recent Newton Patch article and in Solar Building on the solar installation.
- Lucy is working on developing two tour options for the farm: a basic, behind-the-scenes tour with a focus on sustainability and a family-friendly, kid-focused tour.
- Our free Gardening Circle group met on Wednesday, July 26, 6:30–8 pm.
- Meeting House Preschool came for a fun field trip with about 20 students at the Farm in late June.
- A small group of Newton high school students visited with their aides and volunteered at the Farm.
- We will host local author Tammy Inman who wrote "New England Desserts" on August 24, 6–7 pm for a book talk, book signing, and dessert samples.
- Lucy and an employee from Joanne Langione School of Dance are doing alternating preschool storytimes at the farm every other Tuesday morning 10:30-11:00am in July and August
- We are new members of a group discussion run by Newton Wellesley Hospital called Nutrition Security and Equity Community Group. We meet three times per year.
- Mid-year backflow inspection passed. Working on getting annual building inspection done now but a new lighting inspection by a certified electrician is required first.
- Fire extinguishers inspected. Emergency lighting inspected and batteries replaced as needed.

- Aanika, our high school business intern, has created a slide deck about the farm that we will send to prospective sponsors, post on our website, etc. She is currently working on fundraising research on individual donations and business sponsorships.
 - A local middle school student, Caitlin, is doing her bat mitzvah project by collecting nonperishable food donations for Newton Community Freedge. NCF will be a donation drop off site from August 7–18. We will have collection boxes in the CSA bay and in the mid-level of the barn.
 - I have started an executive director leadership training program through Foundation for MetroWest
 - Theft Update -- There have been no credible leads submitted to the police department. The outpouring of support from the community was tremendous and we've had offers of volunteer labor and seedlings from so many farms and individuals. We received a lot of media coverage in print, online, on the radio, and on tv. Many more people know about this little farm and our email and social media lists have grown. We have been working with security camera companies on a plan for camera installation. We will also be locking doors and taking additional security measures. We had some disruption in the produce we offer in the short-term, but we were able to start seeds and replant some of the crops that were stolen. Overall, we will recover as we turn over beds and plant more crops as the season goes on.
- **Opus/2 Life**
 - We received payment for our claim for damages from Maine Drilling and Blasting. Opus/2Life has finished their blasting work and the vibration monitor has been removed from the property.
 - Construction of the structure/s onsite has begun. Nightwork installing utilities underground started on 7/17. Workers have started digging into the intersection of Nahanton and Winchester Streets.
- **Insurance**
 - Dede reviewed the insurance coverage regarding the new greenhouses, public space, etc. and we are finalizing coverage, deductibles, and cost. It will be a bit more in terms of cost.
- **DEI/EBT Update**
 - Ample outreach to those that are food insecure.
 - Expanding with SNAP, WIC, and HIP
 - Prioritizing at the Farmers' Market. Usage has gone from 5-7 people/week to 20+ people/week.
 - Students for a school project on sustainability came up with a series of recommendations.
 - Committed at least 10% of produce to Food Pantry
- **Meeting Minutes from May 4, 2023**

A motion was made to approve of minutes by Pat Costello. This motion was duly seconded by Jeffrey Zabel. This motion passed 7-0.

- **Adjournment**

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Cheryl Lappin. This motion was duly seconded by Pat Costello. This motion passed 7-0.

Meeting adjourned 7:59 p.m.

Next meeting – **November 2, 2023.**

Respectfully submitted,
Brenda Belsanti, Staff