



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
May 4, 2023.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

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

MEMBERS PRESENT: Michael Goldman, Jim Harper, Jefferey Zabel, Beth Wilkinson, and John Rice

MEMBERS ABSENT: Cheryl Lappin, Lori Yarvis, and Patrick Costello

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Sue Bottino (Executive Director), Paul Holt (Co-President), Dede Vittori (Co-President)

STAFF: Brenda Belsanti, Planning & Development Department

• **Financials Q1, 2023**

- Sue Bottino reviewed the financials of Q1, 2023 and fielded all questions.
- All Summer CSA shares are sold out.

• **Farm Operations**

- Incredibly busy with projects and into the growing season.
- Both heated and ventilated greenhouses are up and running.
- The two high tunnels are in place.
- Production is great and seedlings are growing better than ever before.
- Both greenhouses are full due to improved growth and moved some hardier things outside.
- 27,000 seedlings for the Farm and Seedling Sale
- Seedling Sale May 20 & 21 from 12:00pm -3:00pm
- Crops have been planted.
- Two assistant growers have joined – Andrea & Grace (temporary).
- Summer CSA sold out and will begin distribution in June.
- Lots of volunteers and an intern for administration duties.
- Still hiring for farm stand, field work, and supervisor for high school interns.
- Still taking applications for high school program, but it's almost full.
- Listed Saturday volunteer hours – most Saturdays are 10:00am-12:00pm
- Offering a flower CSA this year with a partner.
- This year will accept HIP in addition to SNAP.

- Dede has been working with a high school group studying how HIP and SNAP work, finances, and food insecurity in Newton and difficulty in accessing benefits.
 - Lucy Billings is coordinating education programs. She has a teaching background in STEM and children with learning disabilities.
 - Attended the Earth Day Festival and spoke to roughly 150 people about the Farm and worm composting.
 - Lucy attended an event at Newtonville Books and spoke about worm composting.
 - Started a book group in January that meets every other month. Books are related to farming, food, nutrition, and gardening.
 - There is a new Storywalk. The current one is about insects in natural places.
 - New signage with historical information about the Farm done with a grant.
 - MA Agriculture Commissioner, Ashley Randel, will be attending the open house.
 - Mayor Fuller will be attending the open house.
 - Participating as a site for Newton Serves on Sunday, May 7th.
 - Lucy is beginning to go off-site with school trip and there is a group of special needs children and their aides coming to the Farm for a field trip.
 - Gardening Circle begins in June.
 - Container gardening program with Newton Housing Authority.
 - Pollinator gardening program with Newton Neighbors will continue this year.
 - Dr. Walt Willett, Professor of Epidemiology at Harvard, a world-renowned expert on nutrition, will be at the Farm June 1st at 7:00pm-8:30pm and speak on what to eat that is healthy for self and to be climate friendly for the planet. It will also be live-streamed and recorded.
 - Sustainable florist class in July.
 - Crack in the watermain line coming into the Farmhouse and is being repaired Monday.
 - New bike rack
 - Farm has applied for some grants.
 - The Barg family offered to match up to \$7500 in donations for supplies. Bought new stainless-steel tables.
 - Sponsors for the Open House and seedling sale. Have about 11 sponsors between the two events. Most are new sponsors.
 - Wegman's will be funding to make the programming have different price points – below, at, and above cost, plus scholarship program.
 - Wegman's send employees to learn about the Farm and volunteer.
 - Deer Fence is doing well at keeping the deer out.
 - Electrical work on the house is finished – electrical and sump pump is working great. Hoping to get a heat pump water heater.
- **Solar Project Update**
 - Battery backup is not working – a new one is being sent.
 - City is withholding some funds until the new battery is installed and working.
 - Everything else is done so Farm can apply to MDAR.
 - The solar array is working, and the electric meter is moving backwards.
 - Farm should capture enough solar to cover electric for the year.

- The project cost was \$74,000 with MDAR covering roughly \$50k and City covering \$24k using Energy Restabilization Funds. City will be reimbursed \$22k federally from the Anti-Inflation Act. The whole project ended up costing the City roughly \$2k!
- **Opus Blasting**
 - Sue reviewed the letters and video that had been distributed.
 - Met with Opus2Life, contractor, and City Traffic Engineer.
 - The project will take over two years and blasting will take place for two months.
 - Farm expressed concerns over traffic, noise, and safety and did not feel heard.
 - Weekly updates were received every Friday for upcoming weeks operations.
 - Placed equipment at the Farm to measure vibrations under state law and wanted to do it without anyone present, but Farm was present when measurement was done.
 - Blasting began. April 13th there was a giant blast that rocks went into the street and showered onto the Farm and caught it on video. There was damage to the greenhouses, seedling trays, and other areas.
 - Opus2Life initially denied responsibility.
 - Fire Department responded. Stopped the blasting and reported to the State Fire Marshall.
 - The Board had an emergency meeting and Paul and Dede wrote letters and engaged the City Councilors and Mayor.
 - Fire Department finished investigation and now getting better warnings, traffic stopped, police detail and fire detail during blasting.
 - Blasting company was found liable and apologized.
 - They will be blasting through June, but will not blast Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday afternoons due to the Farm Stand and CSA hours of operation.
- **Insurance**
 - Dede reviewed the insurance coverage regarding the new greenhouses, public space, etc.
 - Pro bono insurance reviewer reviewed the policy.
 - Underwriter informed the insurance company will not cover the City owned property on the Farm.
 - Cleaning up policies to makes sure anything under the Farms control is covered.
 - Does not have assurance from the City that the City owned areas have property/casualty coverage.
 - The Commission needs to get written assurance from the City that these things are covered.
 - Board will reach out to the City to see if Farm is in compliance with their license/agreement with the City and if the City is insuring City owned areas/buildings.
- **Meeting Minutes from February 2, 2023**

A motion was made to approve of minutes by Jefferey Zabel. This motion was duly seconded by Jim Harper. This motion passed 5-0.
- **Adjournment**

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Jim Harper. This motion was duly seconded by Beth Wilkinson. This motion passed 5-0.

Meeting adjourned 7:59 p.m.
Next meeting – **August 3, 2023.**

Respectfully submitted,
Brenda Belsanti, Staff