

**3rd Meeting of the
Cass-Clay Food Systems Advisory Commission
July 8th, 2015
Fargo Commission Chambers**

Members Present:

Heidi Durand, Moorhead City Council, Chair
Arland Rasmussen, Cass County Commission
Mike Thorstad, West Fargo City Commission
Jenny Mongeau, Clay County Commission
Jim Aasness, Dilworth City Council
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:

Mike Williams, Fargo City Commission

Others Present:

Megan Myrdal, Project Coordinator
Kim Lipetzky, Fargo Cass Public Health
Gina Nolte, Clay County Public Health/PartnerSHIP4Health
Rita Ussatis, North Dakota State University Extension
Noelle Harden, University of Minnesota Extension
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. Paul and seconded by Mr. Evert. The motion was voted on unanimously approved.

3. Review and Action on Minutes from May 13, 2015

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

4. Results of Urban Agriculture Prioritization Surveys

Ms. Myrdal explained that at the Commission meeting in May 2015, members were asked to complete an urban agriculture prioritization survey ranking the five areas of urban agriculture, as well as the specific individual topics within those areas. Ms. Myrdal stated that the Commission had chosen urban growing as the most important issue followed by sales, farming practices, food safety/processing, and urban animals. Ms. Myrdal informed the Commission that a similar survey was created online for members of the community and that the Steering Committee had received 117 responses. Ms. Myrdal stated that community members had also chosen urban growing as the most important issue to

pursue followed by farming practices, urban animals, safety/processing, and sales. Ms. Myrdal explained that there were minor differences to the survey that the Commission completed and the survey community members completed. Ms. Myrdal stated that community gardens, a topic within the urban growing category, was ranked highest by both the Commission and the community.

Chair Durand expressed that she was happy to see that the community had ranked urban growing similar to that as Commission members.

5. Community Garden Education

Ms. Myrdal presented an overview on community garden programs including the purpose, common structures, types, and different programs in the region and nationally. Ms. Myrdal explained that gardens can be sponsored by any number of different organizations including city departments, civic organizations, non-profits, and religiously-affiliated groups. Ms. Myrdal explained that community gardens provide a number of benefits including fresh produce, physical activity, neighborhood improvements, sense of community, improved food security, a venue for sharing food production knowledge, and a connection to the environment.

Ms. Myrdal explained that there are five types of community gardens. Ms. Myrdal stated that donation and shelter gardens provide nourishment to people who may be in need of fresh, healthy produce. Ms. Myrdal explained that school and youth gardens concentrate on educating and encouraging youth to garden and help to instill a healthy lifestyle and that some of the produce may then be utilized in school cafeterias. Ms. Myrdal stated that communal gardens are where groups of people work together on a garden with an equal sharing of the crops produced. Ms. Myrdal explained that allotment gardens are for people who wish to individually rent a plot for independent use. Ms. Myrdal concluded with information on market gardens which facilitate the earning of money from the sales of the produce.

Ms. Myrdal shared two examples of community garden programs in the United States: Community Crops in Lincoln, Nebraska and P-Patch Community Gardening in Seattle, Washington. Ms. Myrdal explained that Community Crops includes 12 community gardens, training farm, CSA program, youth garden, cooking education program, and a produce stand at the local farmer's market. Ms. Myrdal explained that Community Crops is supported by five full-time staff, three AmeriCorps volunteers, a number of farmers and other volunteers, and a 14-member Board of Directors. Ms. Myrdal explained that funding comes from a variety of sources both locally and nationally including the USDA, AmeriCorps, and the United Way.

Ms. Myrdal explained that the P-Patch program in Seattle, Washington functions under the Department of Neighborhoods with 88 garden locations encompassing 32 acres throughout the city. Ms. Myrdal explained that, because of high demand, the city passed a parks and green space levy which allocated \$2 million in funding for an additional 28 gardens over 8.1 acres of land.

Ms. Myrdal shared information on Growing Together – A Community Gardening Ministry sponsored jointly by Olivet Lutheran Church and Fargo First United Methodist Church. Ms. Myrdal stated that the program has run for right years, with over 200 individuals and families coming together each week during the growing season to tend to the gardens. Ms. Myrdal stated that many of the individuals that grow and harvest produce from the gardens are New Americans. Ms. Myrdal informed the Commission that Jack Wood, coordinator for Growing Together, was in the audience to answer additional questions on the program.

Ms. Myrdal also shared information on Probstfield Organic Community Gardens, which encompasses three acres with 100 plots and 80 gardens for individual use. Ms. Myrdal stated that Probstfield Organic Community Gardens has been in operation since 2003 and that it is host to Legacy Gardens, a successful market garden business.

6. Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area Community Garden Map

Mr. Altenburg informed the Commission of an updated map Metro COG had developed which documented existing gardens in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. Mr. Altenburg explained that gardens had been categorized according to whether they were allotments – which are gardens available to the general public as plots; or communal – which are available only to specific groups such as New Americans or religious organization. Mr. Altenburg explained that in addition to these, school gardens at local area elementary and high schools were also included. Mr. Altenburg stated that this map was developed to better inform the community garden blueprint developed by the Steering Committee.

7. Review Draft Blueprint – Community Gardens

Ms. Oxendahl explained to the Commission that the Steering Committee was developing a blueprint on community gardens as that had been one of the highest ranked priorities by both the Commission and the community through online surveys. Ms. Oxendahl explained that the blueprint looked at the most common types of community gardens in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area – allotments and communal.

Ms. Oxendahl explained that allotments are usually fee-based where individuals work a small area for their own benefit. Ms. Oxendahl explained that allotments are usually outside a resident's current neighborhood. Ms. Oxendahl explained that communal gardens are usually free of charge, where individuals work a garden together, with produce sometimes donated if it is a donation garden. Ms. Oxendahl stated that communal gardens are more likely to be found closer to where a person lives. Ms. Oxendahl explained that of the seven allotment gardens in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area, they are not well dispersed, especially in southern portions of the area.

Ms. Oxendahl explained the framework for evaluating community gardens including health, environment, social, and economic domains. Ms. Oxendahl explained that health benefits of community gardens included stress-relief, increased food security, access to fresh food, promote healthy eating, and increased outdoor activity. Ms. Oxendahl explained that community gardens also provide a diversity of urban plants for pollinators, promote positive social interactions, beautify neighborhoods, reduce crime and vandalism, and may increase property values.

Ms. Oxendahl shared that the sustainability of community garden management is often a concern in the long-term. Ms. Oxendahl explained several examples of how local governments in other communities have strengthened the local community garden system. Ms. Oxendahl stated two ideas for strengthening a local community garden system include creating a municipal garden program or trust such as Seattle's P-Patch Community Garden Program or a municipally funded non-profit such as Chicago's Neighbor Space. Ms. Oxendahl listed other examples for strengthening systems include allowing zoning for community gardens, creating a community garden committee, providing an accessible inventory of vacant lots and open space, utilizing grant funding such as the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), and providing tax breaks for property owners who are willing to turn over all or part of their land for gardening purposes.

Mr. Thorstad asked if any jurisdictions have developed programs which encourage private plots at multi-family residences or apartment complexes. Ms. Oxendahl stated that she believed that would be

analyzed in a different residential blueprint. Ms. Myrdal stated that some of the concerns with private land would be liability and how land owners would respond to the possibility of the public using such plots. Mr. Thorstad clarified that plots would still be private but that, instead of dedicating land and/or cash to parks, multi-family developers could also dedicate land to garden space. Chair Durand brought up the point that retirement living facilities may have these types of gardens and that it would not be dissimilar to the idea proposed by Mr. Thorstad. Ms. Haugen stated that another option would be for apartment owners to plant fruit trees around their properties.

Ms. Paul asked whether developers could preclude the development of community gardens in covenants contrary to what city codes may say. Chair Durand stated that she believed that would be the case.

Ms. Nolte stated that many of these questions could be addressed in an upcoming blueprint that focuses on residential gardens and looking at incentives for developing gardens in new developments.

Ms. Baumgardner stated that she believed that a type of governing or key support structure would be advantageous in that it could coordinate and support community garden development in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area.

8. Community Garden Discussion and Recommended Actions

Chair Durand opened up discussion on what ideas the Commission had to create a successful and sustainable program on community gardening development.

Ms. Arneson stated she appreciated the work the Commission was doing but felt it would be good to respect the sovereignty of each neighborhood each with their individual assets and strengths.

Ms. Baumgardner stated that one central structure with regard to community gardens would assist with funding opportunities, including federal funding, while still respecting smaller groups and organizations.

Mr. Wood from Growing Together, a community garden ministry, stated that on May 30 their organization recognized Community Garden Day. Mr. Wood stated this brought additional volunteers to nine gardens in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. Mr. Wood stated that New Americans made up 75 percent of the organization while 25 percent were volunteers.

Ms. Mongeau stated it would be beneficial for Commission members to have conversations with their respective jurisdictions and speak with their city or county administrators about adding language to codes that may better promote community gardening. Chair Durand asked what would be a plausible timeline for these discussions to occur. Mr. Thorstad felt that the current surveys were limited in gauging public interest. Mr. Thorstad also stated that it would be necessary to involve park departments in discussions on community gardens on the North Dakota side. Chair Durand stated it may be beneficial to take the surveys back to their jurisdictions and incorporate it into future city notifications.

Mr. Thorstad suggested it would be helpful to know what prior surveys have been conducted in each of the jurisdictions with regard to demand for community gardening. Ms. Mongeau stated she would like to see clarification in how each of the jurisdictions addresses community gardening. Ms. Lipetzky stated that the Go2030 Comprehensive Plan for the City of Fargo included questions on whether residents would like to see more gardening opportunities or not. Ms. Arneson stated it would be good to know how many of those respondents lived in multi-family units versus single-family homes.

Ms. Nolte asked Commission members what information would be helpful to bring back to their jurisdictions. Ms. Mongeau stated that the information provided in the blueprint would be helpful to begin with.

Mr. Evert asked for clarification on the blueprint on whether community gardens were prohibited in Dilworth as opposed to Moorhead and Clay County where the issue is simply not addressed. Ms. Oxendahl stated based on the Metropolitan Food Systems Plan and recent conversations with each of the jurisdictions that the information is currently accurate as they had not given any additional information.

Chair Durand asked whether Commission members wanted to set a timeframe to discuss community gardens and related urban agriculture issues with their respective jurisdictions. Chair Durand stated that a timeline would hold Commission members more accountable and responsible. Chair Durand stated that she felt September would give Commission members adequate time to discuss issues within their jurisdictions. Ms. Mongeau stated that that timeline seemed appropriate to have discussions.

Mr. Thorstad stated it would be beneficial to know what the expectations would be for whoever was providing space for community gardens for items such as water, upkeep, and security, and the possible costs associated for each. Chair Durand stated that these would be similar question asked of her at the Moorhead City Council meeting.

Mr. Wood stated Growing Together is responsible for all of its expenses for its gardens such as tilling, cleaning and maintenance, and water usage fees. Mr. Wood felt that the Commission would not get very far if it were to ask jurisdictions directly for funding or infrastructure development. Mr. Wood stated that it may be better to locate properties such as churches that may want to start a garden and may be willing to donate basic materials, with recent examples such as the New Life Center and Churches United.

Chair Durand reiterated Mr. Wood's comments that cities may be reluctant to become involved in community gardening activities. Chair Durand related her experiences with the Moorhead Park Board when a plan to turn neighborhood open spaces into neighborhood gardens was shot down because of concerns of who would supervise and provide the necessary upkeep. Chair Durand stated that the City of Moorhead did not want to have any part in provide maintenance but did say they would be willing to lease land for a very nominal cost if and organization could be identified that would provide the necessary management and upkeep. Chair Durand stated that it would be important to engage the jurisdictions as there is a lot of open space which could potentially be available for lease. Chair Durand reiterated Ms. Baumgardner's earlier comments that an organization or some type of third-party set up to help with management of community gardens would have a better opportunity at securing funding for garden needs.

Ms. Mongeau asked whether other jurisdictions in Clay County had been contacted on their language regarding community gardens. Ms. Oxendahl stated that she would contact Barnesville, Hawley, and Glyndon to see if their ordinances include language on community gardens.

Ms. Paul posited that an ad hoc committee be formulated to develop best practices that could be provided to organizations that would like to form or manage a community garden, including best practices on governance and support opportunities.

Chair Durand asked the Steering Committee about the questions and comment the Commission had. Ms. Nolte stated that she could understand the hesitation jurisdictions may have with regard to management for community gardens. Ms. Nolte stated that Mr. Wood would be a good resource for the Steering Committee and the Commission to contact with regard to best practices. Ms. Nolte believed that Growing Together may have already developed a toolbox with information that may help with how to approach the different jurisdictions in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area about the topic. Ms. Lipetzky stated that it would be good to hear from the jurisdictions to see their thoughts on leasing land and whether they would be open to having an outside group or groups help with the management of community gardens on public lands. Chair Durand stated that any program would have more success if there were jurisdictional buy-in.

Chair Durand asked for Commission members to approach their respective jurisdictions about their feelings on expanding community gardening opportunities, whether additional surveys would be beneficial to gauge community interest, and what level of involvement each of the councils or commissions would feel comfortable with.

Ms. Oxendahl asked whether the Commission would like the Steering Committee to look at budget information regarding community gardens before the next meeting. Mr. Thorstad stated that it would be sufficient to highlight the expectations of the jurisdictions and that the less that would be expected for jurisdictions to provide, the better the chance a project would be able to move forward.

Mr. Rasmussen stated that maintenance costs are going to be important to anticipate. Mr. Rasmussen gave an example of a potential lot that did not have water access and how a jurisdiction may not want to provide the additional infrastructure to provide water.

Ms. Arneson stated that the will and the want will be needed and that the Commission and potential organizations be ready to support gardening actions with tools and best practices.

9. Online Community Input

Ms. Lipetzky informed the Commission that a permanent site has been established at the Let's Eat Local website for online community input. Ms. Lipetzky stated that several additional comments had been received including utilizing urban agriculture measures to help create extricity and uniqueness in the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Area. Ms. Lipetzky explained that another comment received was for the allowance of backyard chickens with stipulations. Ms. Lipetzky stated that another comment was in regard to potential concerns for the allowance of animals in urban areas.

10. Public Comment Opportunity

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

Mr. Wood stated that Growing Together has become a self-sustaining project through the help of community grants and holding produce sales towards the end of the growing season. Mr. Wood stated it would be beneficial for jurisdictions to clarify if such sales would be allowed that could help with the sustainability of garden projects and not having to rely on the jurisdictions themselves.

11. Commission Roundtable

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

12. Commission Action Steps

Ms. Myrdal stated that the Steering Committee would share the Growing Together toolkit at the next Commission meeting. Ms. Myrdal also asked for Commission members to return to their jurisdictions

to gauge interest in community garden development and to return with any potential concerns or questions. Ms. Myrdal stated that the next meeting would be September 9th.

Chair Durand adjourned the meeting at 11:46 AM.