

DRAFT
Meeting Minutes
Inter-agency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council

DATE: March 3rd, 2014

TIME: 3:00 PM

LOCATION: Lower Level DOC Conference Room, Rhode Island Department of Health

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Janet Coit, Director, Department of Environmental Management (DEM); Michael Fine, MD, Director, Department of Health (HEALTH); Allison Rogers, Policy Director, Department of Administration (DOA)

ATTENDEES: Catherine Taylor, Division of Elderly Affairs; Sandra Powell, Department of Human Services; John Rogers, Food Service Director, Department of Corrections; Ellen Cynar, City of Providence; Ken Ayars, DEM; Nicole Pollock, DEM; Michael Walker, Commerce RI; Christopher Ausura, HEALTH; David Heckman, HEALTH; Daniel Majcher, DOA; Ashley Biller, HEALTH; Amanda Martin, DOA; Aleatha Dickerson Division of Elderly Affairs; Leo Pollock, RI Food Policy Council; Kimberly Clark, RI Food Policy Council/Farm Fresh RI; Gemma Gorham, RI Food Policy Council; Kayla Ringelheim, RI Food Policy Council/Farm Fresh RI

1. Approval of October 29, 2013 meeting minutes

- Dr. Fine, Council chair, called the meeting to order at 3:08 PM.
- Dr. Fine called for a motion to approve the October 29, 2013 meeting minutes.
- Director Coit made a motion to approve.
- Alli Rogers, acting as Director Licht's designee, seconded the motion.
- Dr. Fine called for discussion and hearing no discussion approved the minutes.

2. Public comments received

- Dr. Fine called for public comments. No public comments were received.

3. Rhode Island Food Policy Council Update

- Dr. Fine called on Leo Pollock from the Rhode Island Food Policy Council (RI FPC) to provide an update on the recent activities of that Council.

- Leo Pollock provided a memorandum from Ken Payne, the current Chair of the RI Food Policy Council; and a Summary of Findings from the Harvard Law and Policy Clinic regarding land linking efforts. The memorandum and Summary of Findings will be uploaded to the Secretary of State's website and/or will be available upon request.

- Leo highlighted that RI FPC will be working with DEM to implement the Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Grant program, which is \$100,000 of State funding being matched by \$100,000 of local philanthropic funding. A request for proposals was released February 17th. DEM and the FPC will be providing technical assistance

for applicants throughout March; and the deadline for applications is April 1st 2014. Awards will be announced May 1st as part of the Ag Day celebrations at the RI State House.

• Leo stated that the Harvard Law Policy Clinic is working with the RI FPC on two issues, and today he wanted to provide some information on the issue of land linking. Rhode Island has seen a 22.7% increase in small farms, farms less than 10 acres, over the past 5 years. However, Rhode Island has the highest cost of land in the nation at \$13,600 per acre which is 3 times the average cost in the North East, and 6 times higher than the national average. This high cost of land is making it essentially impossible to have larger scale or viable farm businesses in the State. This is why the RI FPC requested that the Harvard Law Clinic look into the issue of land linking to find ways to connect new or expanding farmers with private or public land-linking using 3 different types of land linking services.

1. Listing: presenting available farm properties to prospective buyers
2. Linking: an application, screening, and exchange of information
3. Matching: hand on assistance where a third party provides the introduction, and assistance with the transaction

These different services are frequently provided by a nonprofit, but in some states the state provides these services. Connecticut and New Jersey both have land linking which is run through their department of agriculture. Public land linking is where government entities provide access to publicly owned land to private parties. This is primarily through a lease, but sometimes through purchases, typically because it provides a secondary benefit such as increased agriculture production or improvements to the environment. The Harvard Law Clinic found that 61,000 acres, about 10% of the total land mass of RI, is State owned public land. Almost the entire coastline, 384 miles, is publicly owned as well. If purchase of land is inaccessible, then access to farm land is something which needs to be addressed. The Harvard Law Policy Clinic had seven recommendations:

1. Conduct an inventory of State, municipal, and land trust lands which includes urban locations that would be appropriate for farming. This would require some type of GIS mapping, but could potentially be a student led project.
2. Research the demand for farmland in Rhode Island. Although there is a growing farm sector, it is unclear what land these farmers need.
3. Create a program that goes beyond real-estate matching and educational resources.
4. Ensure sufficient staff to administer the program.
5. Ensure the land-linking database is accessible and open to all. This is especially important in relation to technology since not all farmers have web access, or aren't technologically savvy.
6. Increase the length of time of leases. Generally the current lease time in RI for State owned land is 5 years, and this short period of time reduces investment from the farmers, and reduces access to grants.
7. Determine whether the standard conversion easement language sufficiently supports farming; conduct outreach to land trusts and state agencies to educate them on the benefits of farming and assist them in re-drafting their easements.

The priority of the Harvard Law Clinic and the RI FPC was to create an inventory to ensure we fully understand the existing landscape of the land access issues.

- Dr. Fine asked whether the RI FPC would be completing this assessment, or is this something that the State would be required to do.
- Leo responded that the FPC would welcome the ability to work with the State, and it would open up possible funding streams to complete the work; but the RI FPC would need assistance from the Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC) to complete that work.
- Director Coit asked if this was the only work which the RI FPC would like the IFNPAC to hear.
- Leo responded that this was the FPC's major topic of intersection with the IFNPAC, but the memorandum from RI FPC Chair Ken Payne provided additional information pertaining to the activities of the RI FPC.
- Director Coit stated that she had a couple of comments on what was presented:
 1. She would like the Harvard Law Clinic Report to be provided to the Members of the Council.
 2. She would like to think over the issues surrounding the mapping of accessible land. Although it fits with what DEM is currently pursuing, there may be other opportunities to align this work with the existing State mapping projects of the Division of Planning. This may be an opportunity to elevate the issue of food systems and agriculture to a level of higher priority in those efforts, although there was no official proposal made, she felt it would be best to investigate the best possible strategy for leading this work.
- Dr. Fine called for a motion to defer the recommendation to the staff for an evaluation and recommendation back to the Council at the next meeting.
- Director Coit stated that she did not feel that a recommendation for the staff to pursue was necessary at this point since the RI FPC was not requesting such a recommendation, but was rather informing the IFNPAC of the existing work. She then asked Leo to clarify whether the RI FPC was requesting such an action.
- Leo replied that he did not feel that there was any official request for action, but rather that this was meant to inform the IFNPAC of the efforts of the RI FPC around this issue, and to share the findings of this report to better align the work of the RI FPC with the work of the IFNPAC.
- Dr. Fine stated that he is looking to the RI FPC to provide specific recommendations to the IFNPAC to better inform the decisions made by the IFNPAC as the IFNPAC works within the realm of State government to better support the needs of the community; and that in the future if the RI FPC does bring specific

recommendations to this body they would hear those recommendations, consider them, and attempt to adjudicate them as best they could.

- Alli Rogers stated that she had spoken with Director Licht regarding the issue; that DOA would like to look into the topic of land linking; and to get a better idea of what the options are for utilization of public lands. It would be helpful to assess what our surrounding states are doing to support farming on state owned lands. If we could work on a report of that nature it would help to better support any requests to pursue that type of strategy here in Rhode Island.

- Mike Walker stated that he just left a meeting with 3 individuals who are looking to find farm suitable land that is not state owned, and who will be looking to take out responsible loans to purchase that land, and sell it back to land trusts and easements to use for increased food production.

- Director Coit stated that Ken Ayars will be presenting on land linking concepts, but there are issues around the amount of available staff time; and that the idea of allocating a full time person to the topic of land linking with support from USDA to identify open space suitable for farming is very exciting.

- Leo added that this was also the same idea which came out of the Commerce RI/RI Foundation report. The issue of access to land, in conjunction with increased technical assistance and business development assistance, helps to ensure these businesses are viable and successful. Creating supports to develop successful business is critical to the growth of the food economy.

- Director Coit called on Ken Ayars to provide any additional information pertaining to this topic.

- Ken stated that the mapping effort was relatively far along at this point, DOA and DEM are making good progress.

4. Senior Meals Presentation

- Dr. Fine called on Director Taylor from the Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA) to present on Senior Nutrition.

- Director Taylor stated that she wanted to update the IFNPAC on the ways which the DEA provides food for seniors in the State; both how the food is distributed, and the nutritional guidelines which they follow. Director Taylor provided a brief on the program titled “Senior Nutrition Services” which will be posted to the Secretary of State’s website, and/or will be available upon request.

- Director Taylor introduced Aleatha Dickerson as the point person for Senior Nutrition to answer any questions which she could not. The DEA’s mission is to preserve the independence and dignity of the elderly and disabled population in RI. They are the designated State Unit on Aging in RI and receive funds from the

Administration on Aging, under the Older Americans Act (OAA) which is where they draw their funding for Senior Meals. Beyond food and nutrition this program helps to improve appetite, and ward off loneliness and depression, which are risk factors as you age. There is a congregate program in 67 locations across the State, and there is Meals on Wheels to provide meals to homebound residents. All RI residents 60 years and older may participate in the senior meals program, and residents under 60 may participate if they meet the eligibility requirements. There is no cost, but a voluntary contribution of \$3 per meal is requested; the SNAP program benefits can be used to pay this contribution. Funding is from the Older Americans Act, Title 3C1 (congregate) and 3C2 (home delivery) since 1981. The grant is supplemented by the Federal Performance Based Nutrition Services Incentive Funds, the more they provide the more funds they receive the following year. In total the DEA issued \$2,896,447 in congregate and home delivered meals over the course of 2013. The providers for the meals are:

Home-delivered – Meals on Wheels – catered by Lindley Food Service

Congregate –Meals on Wheels (Capitol City Café) – catered by Lindley Food Service (Bridgewater MA)

Westbay CAP (Westbay Café) – catered by Lindley Food Service

East Bay CAP (East Bay Café) – catered by Cranston Senior Services

Blackstone Health (a division of VNA/Care New England) (Blackstone Café) – catered by Cranston Senior Services

Woonsocket Senior Services, Inc. (Northern RI Café) – self-catered

The Division of Elderly Affairs partners with:

Narragansett Indian Tribe – receives \$10,000 annually for OAA meals

HEALTH – provides time of state nutritionist for required oversight of IIC program nutrition guidelines

DEM – Farmer’s Market Vouchers

DHS -- SNAP

FarmFresh RI: Healthy Servings for Seniors; Farm-to-Senior pilot program

Select IHOP and Newport Creamery restaurants, as well as Friendship Café, have collaborated with Meals on Wheels of RI and East Bay CAP to provide vouchers (for a \$5.00 donation) to individuals who prefer dining in a restaurant setting. This option expands access to breakfast, evening and weekend meals as well as meals shared with younger family or friends. However, there is a limited menu for the reduced cost meal.

They have also developed targeted sites for specific demographics: Kosher Café, SEDC site for South East Asians, Progresso Latino, and LGBT Café

Senior meals will be undergoing a face lift and the congregate meal sites will be re-named as café’s. Meal offerings will follow this new style with names like pub options, spa options, etc.

- Dr. Fine asked if there are any restrictions or guidelines for the vendors to purchase food from local sources.

- Director Taylor responded that there are no regulations or restrictions on where the vendor purchases the food since the caterers enter into an agreement with the site.

However, they are exploring the opportunities to increase the amount of locally sourced food provided to seniors, they are partnering with FFRI to pursue these efforts. Director Taylor requested Kayla Ringelheim from FFRI speak to the work they are doing.

- Kayla stated that in Woonsocket, they are working with their distributor, Wojcik, to provide local produce from their farm in Northern RI, and FFRI is encouraging the distributor to better track the percentage of food provided which is sourced locally.
- Director Coit stated that she greatly appreciates all of the participation and interest that Director Taylor has shown in local food. She asked whether there was any work at the state level to increase the amount of food seniors are able to grow themselves.
- Director Taylor stated that there is currently no program through the State, but it is something which DEA would be very interested in pursuing.
- Director Coit stated that this could potentially be an area we explore further using some of the urban gardening strategies which have worked across the State.
- Director Taylor stated that it would be beneficial to public health since gardening not only increases access to healthy food but provides exercise as well.
- Aleatha Dickerson stated that there was interest from one of the CAP programs to provide seeds to seniors since SNAP benefits can be used to purchase seeds, but at this point no coordinated effort has been undertaken.

5. Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Presentation

- Dr. Fine called on Ken Ayars from DEM to present on the Local Agriculture and Seafood Act (LASA) grant.
- Ken stated that Leo Pollock had summarized the grant well, but wanted to add the fact that this public private partnership is rather unique. Grants will be due April 1st, and that this is the first time that State funds have been sincerely invested into the local food system. There are two grant programs currently being issued, one with federal funds, and one with State funds, and that \$400-500,000 total will be invested into the State's food system this year. In many areas there are increasing partnerships across various levels of State government. Ken felt that this Council is operating as it should. The increasing prevalence of food and agriculture in RI is an exciting development.

6. Department of Environmental Management Bond Presentation

- Dr. Fine called on Director Coit to present on the DEM Clean Water Open Space Healthy Community bond.
- Director Coit stated that the Governor requested a \$75 million bond to support initiatives around Clean Water, Open Space, and Healthy Communities. She

distributed a document titled “Clean Water, Open Space, & Healthy Communities Bond Fact Sheet” which will be posted to the Secretary of State’s website, and/or will be available upon request.

- Director Coit stated that there were two call outs, the issue which Leo brought up earlier around land linking, and that there was \$3 million in the bond proposal for DEM to purchase land suitable for agriculture, and either re-sell or lease the land back to entering farmers at affordable rates. There is a need to develop a more sophisticated way to identify suitable land, and match that land to the appropriate farmers. The other exciting piece of the bond was \$500,000 to invest in capital development to support the LASA grants in the coming years. There will be a hearing March 4th for this bond. Beyond this specific issue she felt that it was critical to increase the dialogue between all of the different areas of work we are currently pursuing to ensure continued growth and development of the local food system. Simply listening to what our partner agencies across the state are doing provides vital information to improve our interaction with the food system here in Rhode Island.

7. Draft Findings and Recommendations

- Dr. Fine called on Christopher Ausura to read draft finding and recommendation 4.a. and 4.b.

- Chris Ausura read: **Draft Finding 4.a.** - State government spending has the potential to enhance the Rhode Island food economy due to the impact state contracts have on the food system. The system of state purchases could be modified to allow for the purchasing of local food, and a study to evaluate the effectiveness of this shift could be performed. The results of that study could be used to leverage state resources to create additional state purchasing guidelines to account for the indirect benefit of dollars spent, which should allow purchasing agents greater flexibility to buy more food locally.

Draft Recommendation 4.a. – We recommend that a report be developed to determine the existing baseline for state funds spent on local food and food products; and to identify food and food products industries that could support an increase in state purchasing of local food and food products. Once the baseline is established, we recommend that the state MPA 435 include a provision to substantially increase the state’s purchasing of healthy, locally produced food.

- Dr. Fine called for discussion

- Director Coit asked if someone could clarify what specific changes were made from the previous version of this finding and recommendation.

- Chris Ausura clarified that the changes were to remove the proposed baseline and the date for which that change to the level of local purchasing would occur. The wording was kept nearly identical without the baseline, and called for an assessment of the existing levels to better set a baseline for change in the future.

- Dr. Fine called for a motion on finding and recommendation 4.a.
- Allison Rogers motioned to approve.
- Director Coit seconded the motion.
- Dr. Fine called for discussion, and upon hearing none approved the motion.
- Dr. Fine called on Chris Ausura to read draft finding and recommendation 4.b.
- Chris Ausura read: **Draft Finding 4.b.** – Federal dollars in excess of \$340 million per year enters Rhode Island to be spent on food and food products. Those dollars are frequently spent on commercially produced, processed food products; which negatively impacts the growth of the state’s economy, as well as the health outcomes of the most vulnerable part of the state’s population. An investigation into potential solutions for the increased investment of those dollars into healthier, local sources is critical.

Draft Recommendation 4.b. – We recommend that an assessment of the potential for the diversification of federal food benefit dollars should be completed by the IFNPAC to better understand the spending patterns of these programs; to determine areas of potential investment into healthier, local products; and to determine the affordability of local foods to the federally subsidized population. That assessment should be used to coordinate the expenditure of federal benefits on locally produced food to create sustainable economic growth.

- Dr. Fine called for a motion to accept the finding.
- Allison Rogers motioned to accept.
- Director Coit seconded that motion.
- Dr. Fine called for discussion on the motion.
- Director Coit asked Chris Ausura for clarification of what changes had been made to ensure the Council fully understood the changes.
- Chris Ausura stated that the changes which were made to the finding were to remove unnecessary language; and that the changes to the recommendation were to remove the baseline percentage and date, and to modify the language to create an assessment.
- Dr. Fine called for further discussion, and hearing none passed the motion.

8. Council Recommendations Update

- Dr. Fine called on Ashley Biller to provide an update on recommendation 3.
- Ashley Biller introduced recommendation 3, breastfeeding in State buildings, to update attendees on the goals for the recommendation; and outlined the major goals of the strategic plan developed to support recommendation 3.
 Step 1 was to determine what existing lactation accommodations existed in state buildings.
 Step 2 was to develop a statewide lactation accommodation policy.
 Step 3 was to implement/create lactation accommodations in State buildings. A survey was sent to all State Agency directors to determine the existing accommodations in their buildings.
 So far 17 agencies out of 27 have responded, but only 2 agencies have existing policies. Only 4 rooms were reported, and although 4 out of 17 would not be bad, when looking at the satellite offices, it is 4 rooms in a total of 78 buildings. A reminder letter will be sent with another email to achieve a 100% response to the survey. The draft of the State policy is currently under review internally and will be available for this Council to review at the next meeting.
- Dr. Fine thanked Ashley for the update, and called on Dan Majcher to update the Council on the activity surrounding Master Price Agreement 435, the prime food vendor contract.
- Dan Majcher stated this follows closely with finding and recommendation 4.a. DOA is hoping to have the request for proposals (RFP) for MPA 435 posted within the next week. There was some discussion about what constitutes local, and how we classify that in the RFP process. They decided to track by determining if it is grown, raised, or caught in RI; grown, raised, or caught in NE; or if the food is touched by a RI company through the procurement chain. The winning bidder would have to report where the product came from, and we would then determine what improvements could be made. The contract is broken out to solicit perishable and non-perishable products to further encourage the use of local products.
- Director Coit asked if Dan could clarify the purpose of the language in the new contract. Was it to meet a local sourcing percentage, or to better understand how much food comes from sources we could consider local?
- Dan Majcher stated that the purpose of the language in this contract is to develop a baseline to determine how much food purchased by the State in some way interacts with the local/regional food system. The goal first is to track, then we will be looking into the opportunities to increase the amount of food sourced locally.
- Director Coit stated that her second question was, considering the current media attention to this topic is there any way for this Council to promote the work that has occurred, and to help promote participation in the RFP process.

- Dan Majcher stated that it was a good idea, but what they typically do is to develop a list of applicable vendors and send this opportunity to the vendor; but a press release sounds like it could be helpful to get the word out.
- Dr. Fine asked if DOA would like to take the lead on the development of the press release and volunteered the assistance of HEALTH's communications team.
- Dr. Fine called on Chris Ausura to provide additional updates from the Council's recommendations.
- Chris Ausura stated that the last remaining issue was to re-launch the Healthy Eating at Events policy. Chris requested each Director identify a point person within their own agency to help implement the policy moving forward. This person would work with the existing staff member tasked with the work of the Council, but should have the ability to push the policy forward within their agency. There will be additional tools and support coming from HEALTH to ensure successful implementation, and we are going to patiently roll this out to ensure its success.
- Director Coit stated that DEM working on a Green Events Policy, but at this point the policy is not up on their web page, and is still in development.
- Dr. Fine stated that the Healthy Eating at Events Policy should be sent out as part of the confirmation package for his attendance at meetings and events. If each of the agencies replicate this practice it will significantly help the successful implementation of this policy in their agencies.

9. Expansion Update

- Dr. Fine called on Allison Rogers to update the Council on the legislation to expand the Council.
- Allison Rogers stated that the bill H-7579 has been introduced which would include Directors Powell and Taylor in the Council if passed, but at this point she had not seen a Senate companion for the bill.
- Dr. Fine asked if there was any update on the inclusion of the Departments of Corrections and Education.
- Director Coit stated we could add a Sub-A to the legislation if it hasn't been heard.
- Allison asked that the legislative liaisons meet after to discuss the logistics of the approach.
- Director Coit asked if there was any additional legislation that would impact this Council.

- Allison Rogers stated that there are a few Food Residuals Recycling bills in committees in both chambers.
- Director Coit stated that the Governor has a bill set to be heard to increase the amount of food diverted from the central landfill.
- Director Taylor asked if composting or food residual recycling is part of the Council's work to date.
- Chris Ausura stated that it was called out in the initial report of the Council last March, but to date no actions have been taken.
- Dr. Fine requested that the staff prepare some information for the next meeting for the Council to consider regarding composting.
- Nicole Pollock stated that H-7494, the Healthy State Employee Act, introduced by Rep. Kazarian was similar to the Healthy Eating at Events Policy, but would apply to all state agencies.
- Chris Ausura stated this would apply to purchases as well.
- Ken Ayars stated that there was a market manager meeting recently, and that DEM is interested in working closer with DHS to increase SNAP benefit redemption at farmers markets.
- Dr. Fine asked if Ken could share the list of market managers so they could be added to HEALTH's distribution list for HEALTH's Health Connections publication for food service professionals.
- Ken responded that he would forward the list.
- John Rogers stated that Director Wall sent along his support of the work of this Council, and is very interested in continuing to participate in the efforts of the Council. He also stated that the Gardentime Gardening program and the Second Chance technology grant were both items which DOC is supporting.
- Leo Pollock stated the RI FPC is working to support access to farmers markets to SNAP recipients and there was a call with the federal delegation to discuss the opportunities laid out in the latest Farm Bill to increase access to technology for SNAP redemption. The federal delegation stated that they are currently waiting for some additional direction from USDA on how those funds will be distributed.
- Director Taylor stated that for elders in the meal sites it is challenging to have Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) access since the machines to accept EBT are so expensive to operate, and that any technology that breaks down that barrier would be welcomed by DEA as well.

- Chris Ausura stated that HEALTH and FFRI have been working in tandem on a related project to increase SNAP access in the farmers market environment and that the staff at DHS has been extremely supportive and helpful every step of the way.
- Director Powell stated that she was pleased to hear all the great work, and at a later meeting would like some time on the agenda to discuss the opportunities regarding the health impact of SNAP benefits. She is interested in possibly collaborating to address access issues; using public land since participants can buy seeds with SNAP benefits, and to discuss some spending pattern research they are pursuing with Brown University.
- Director Coit stated that on March 11th there will be a “Women in Agriculture” meeting.
- Michael Walker stated that there will be two composting events the week of March 17th.

10. Adjournment

- Dr. Fine called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.
- Director Coit motioned to adjourn.
- Allison Rogers seconded the motion.
- Dr. Fine adjourned the meeting at 4:19 PM.