

Bloomington Community Farmers' Market Advisory Council

Monday, Sept 17, 2012
5:00 pm

Parks Conference Room

Advisory Council Members Present

Bruce McCallister (Chair), Janice Lilly (Vice Chair), Geoffrey Grodner, Julia DeBruicker Valliant, Bobbi Boos, Michael Salem, Daniel Young, Susan Welsand. Notified absent: Sarah Ryterband

Market/City Staff

Marcia Veldman, Les Coyne, Nicole Wooten and Robin Hobson.

Public

Christine Vosters.

1. Call to Order

Janice called the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Minutes

The August 2012 minutes were approved.

3. Public Comment

None

4. New Business

A. Introduction of Nicole Wooten

Nikki Wooten is a graduate SPEA Fellow who will be working with the Market and Community Gardening Program for the next two years. She is from Tennessee and is new to Bloomington. She is the first SPEA fellow to work in this capacity in the Department. Introductions were made all around and Marcia and Robin were glad to have her on board.

B. Preliminary Consideration of Proposed Changes for 2013

1. Vendor Point System

Discussion resumed from prior meetings regarding the phrasing of the vendor survey question on this topic to ensure the heart of the matter is being addressed. A draft version for the survey asks Vendors, in a two part question, "Do you think perfect attendance should be rewarded and do you think it is in the best interest of the Market to reward perfect attendance and, if so, what would be an appropriate reward? Janice's recollection of the previous meetings' motion was only to ask vendors how they felt about the first part of the question - the current policy (being able to take days off Market and still get 22 maximum points for the season) and whether 4 or 5 was an appropriate number of days and not the second part about what is an appropriate reward. Julia reminded that the question should be phrased as an FMAC request for feedback. Janice opined that if perfect attendance is rewarded, then you are essentially telling people they can't take Saturdays off. Additionally, in one draft of the question there is a preamble that states, "The Farmers' Market Advisory Council would like your input on a couple aspects of the Farm Vendor Point System" which lets the Vendors know the question's origin. Les asked to be reminded of the compelling reason why this merits being examined. Susan replied that Vendors who don't miss any Markets [in more

recent years] and have not missed markets in each season are being passed in points by Vendors who have missed several, but who have been attending longer. Les asked what the Market/public interest gain by changing the current policy or is it an issue concerning the Vendor population only? Geoff offered that potentially large numbers of Vendors might choose to take the same day off creating a dearth of Vendors. Marcia said this never happens and offered that the Market is full of ample numbers of Vendors and changes made in recent years free up space for Vendors, i.e. when Market is full and in overflow Vendors do not get a second space and days off from Market allow other Vendors to get spaces and therefore keeps Vendor offerings diverse and the Market open to new Vendors. Susan reported that she hears from Vendors who still do not understand the points system, one even had a modified version of the system. Janice pointed out that every year Marcia offers an explanation of the system as well as an invitation to meet with anyone who requires further explanation. Robin asked if we reward a Vendor who comes every time May-October, what do we have to offer a Vendor who comes every time April –Nov? Marcia does not see the need to reward perfect attendance –to connect and make money is in itself is a reward for coming to Market. Vendors should not feel compelled to attend only to keep up points. Les said the points system should operate on the least amount of stress for all parties. If there is not a compelling reason to change the policy, why introduce more stress? Janice recalled that the way the Council decided to come to a recommendation on this was to gather Vendor input and then make a recommendation. Marcia stated the current system acknowledges longevity and rewards current vending. Julia said the question could be framed as a check in. Susan agreed that it would get the opinions of those Vendors who have come on board since 2005. Several question formats were posed and informally voted upon. Geoff wished for the question to include opinions on perfect attendance being rewarded, as that was the original question and not to focus on what people think of 4 or 5 days off. Susan said in her conversations with Vendors who tend not to miss any Markets that they felt there should be a reward for perfect attendance. Bobbi noted that she has attended every single May-Oct Markets for many years (save only a couple) for years plus a good number of April and November Markets. She did not have any issues with the points system as it stands. Her customers come to her after finding her after the first week, she gets a reserved space and she is satisfied. She noted that if she had to come to Market to garner the maximum points, she would do so even if she had only a handful of product. Daniel asked how many Vendors attend every Market. Marcia replied in 2011, there were 20 out of 151 Vendors who attended every time. Bruce counseled that we attend to what will benefit the Market the most, not what is “fair” to everyone with an agenda and does not support changing the current policy although he supported gathering feedback. Julia motioned that neither of the questions be asked at this time. Motion was seconded. Susan wanted to ask the question through the survey to get the opinions of Vendors who may not otherwise present their opinion. Motion was defeated. Geoff moved to ask the first question as part of the survey and it was seconded. Motion was carried by a majority vote.

2. Prepared Food Vending

Chris Vosters, who brings Kettle of Corn to the Market, attended the meeting to present her circumstances as one who currently grows and prepares food at Market and to examine her options to switch to becoming a Prepared Food Vendors (PFV). The reason given for this were that she is prohibited by a number of circumstances from viably growing enough of her own corn to pop as she has in the past. She asked if the FMAC would consider making a special allowance for her to operate as an additional (11th) PFV, so that she could purchase Indiana corn to pop as her crop this year will not support her needs next year. Marcia noted there are specific site considerations that prevent her from taking part in PFV activities in that area dedicated to that. Smoke and grease from her kettle that gets left on the pavement, the configuration of her Market hauling rig and time it takes her to set up make the site of her space an important consideration each year. Chris is a popular, long-standing Vendor who

often has a long line of customers. She is an anchor to the end of the Market that is outlying to the main aisles and often people drive by to see if she is in her spot, which is visible from Morton St., in order to decide whether to stop at Market or not. Marcia sought to find out if the FMAC thought there was reasonable way for Chris to continue vending in light of what is best for the Market overall. She asked the group to consider space E10 to be a dedicated 11th PFV spot for kettle corn. Signage would be provided to indicate Indiana-grown corn is used in that PFV space and all other PFV caveats would apply. Potentially, all Vendors would be notified prior to the space reservation meeting that E10 is a PFV space for the coming year. Geoff asked: What would happen if Chris was able to return to popping all her own corn in the future in the same space if her hiatus causes her to lose the ability to reserve that space as a regular farm Vendor? Marcia replied the space is not very popular for most other vendors given its outlying location. Les noted Chris would clearly qualify as a PFV, but from the vantage of the wider Market, this space assignment point becomes an individual fairness issue as well. Some of the fairness issue is mitigated by the fact that E10 is not in high demand and the fact that it could be supported as a temporary change to accommodate the greater good of the Market. Les stated he would be willing to support this variation to the Parks Board. Concerns on the part of the group included the removal of one regular vending space and precedent issues as they might extend to the same circumstances. Again, the uniqueness and value of the product and the method by which it is produced make this an issue worthy of special consideration. When Bruce asked how Chris would find the 10% fees she said she would be willing to pay it. His reservations lie in the possibility of flipping back and forth between farm and PFV. He would be most comfortable with a determination of one way or the other. The group agreed to further consider this proposal and give a decision by December.

3. Closing at Noon on 100 Degree Days

Marcia brought up the topic of closing the Market on days when, the Friday evening prior, the predicted temperature at noon is at or above 100 degrees. Staff plans to survey Vendors on this question to gather input. Susan asked if Vendors could opt to stay if they wish, and Marcia responded they could if they want, but that the small number of people at Market on those days would clear out as soon as the whistle blows and vehicles start to move about. Geoff asked about the thunderstorm policy. Marcia told him the Handbook details recommended action for Vendors and the public, but that we do not close Market under these circumstances. Geoff asked if we don't have a policy to close the Market in a severe storm, why would we close the Market at 100 degrees or under other conditions. Bruce noted heat is a rare set of circumstances to consider. Les promoted the idea of contacting City Legal to see what the Market Master's discretion would be with certain guidelines as far as closing the Market. Robin related the Market was inspected by Indiana Homeland Security this summer over weather related contingency preparation and, upon hearing the current weather protocols, passed the Market. Susan says that a 100 degree Market is just another day to her. Marcia noted that hot weather tends to be unchanging in a day whereas a rainstorm or wind can come and go and customers return once conditions are better. Robin suggested identifying a set resource for the forecast. Bruce thought it was reasonable for the staff to have discretion in this matter. Bobbi asked for an early exit option on hot days.

4. New System for Counting Customer Attendance

Staff is considering a change in how customers are counted at Market. Currently it takes a lot of the Market Master's time to count six times per day. This time could be better utilized by staff for other purposes. The need for these detailed figures is not as important as it once was, i.e. when the Market moved in 1998 or when Market hours were adjusted. Les and Julia suggested Nikki research how other Markets gauge crowds. Staff will develop a more efficient way of gathering counts and report back to the group.

5. Old Business

A. Informational Tabling Fee

Marcia has had internal discussions within the Department and has heard Council input on the subject as well. There are now 90 groups signed up, the space is heavily utilized, there is a free area and the area is of more benefit to the info groups than it is to the Market as a whole. Customer surveys do not indicate that the public attends the Market to gather information from this area. Staff's intention is to recommend to the Parks Board that we continue this policy in the future with the same fee structure that was implemented in 2012.

B. Time Location of the December Meeting

The group discussed whether they want to continue holding the December meeting over dinner at a bar like Nick's or whether an optional dinner with a meeting to follow would suit better. The December meeting is more of an extended meeting. A few locations were discussed. Having a small group space would be more a more conducive atmosphere for the Council's purpose. Farm, Upland, Bloomingfoods and Finch's were ideas on the table. Location will be decided in the future.

7. Adjournment

These minutes respectfully submitted by Robin Hobson