

**Farmers Market Advisory Council (FMAC) Meeting**  
**January 25, 2021, 5:30pm**

**FMAC Members Attending** - Mike Gleeson, Rebecca Vadas, Suzanne Mann, Mara Lea Rosenbarger, Janice Lilly, Whitney Schlegel, Lynn Schwartzberg, Cortland Carrington (late arrival due to technical difficulties)

**FMAC Members Absent**

Melanie McQueen (submitted resignation)

**Parks Staff Attending**

Leslie Brinson, Sarah Mullin, Julie Ramey

**Members of the Public Attending**

Elaine Gaul

**Call to Order**

Meeting called to order. Leslie announced that Melanie McQueen from Shawnee Hill submitted her resignation letter yesterday, so there will be a vacancy for a vendor representative this coming season. We'll wait until we get vendor approvals processed. We also have 2 vacancies for food and beverage representatives.

**Approval of Minutes**

Janice Lilly motioned to approve the December FMAC minutes. Becky seconded. No objections.

**Old Business**

*Vendor Applications and Food & Beverage RFPs Available*

Vendor applications and food & beverage artisan RFPs went out on January 19. We moved to electronic forms this year. We also mailed applications to those who don't have email access. We currently have 11 applications - 10 returning and one new. Hopefully having it online simplified the process. There were a few new questions. Becky Vadas loved the new application once the kinks were worked out. RFPs went out to past participants and to anyone who requested throughout the last season. We have one new one already. Typically we've had advisory members help us review RFPs. Let Leslie or Sarah know if you're interested in helping with that. All vendors have until February 22 to submit their application. This deadline is so that people can reserve a space at the space reservation meeting. Most likely, we will be able to accept vendors requesting a day space into the season, as long as space is available.

*Contract Template Approval at Jan 26 Park Board Meeting*

Farm vendor contract, handbook and price change will be presented at the park board meeting tomorrow. Vendor fees will be a \$3 flat rate increase. The Parks department decided to wait for the coordinator to offer input on a longer term fee structure change (percentage vs flat rate that we have been discussing in past meetings). Parks doesn't want to make a change and not be able to follow through in the future.

Whitney asked where we're at with the coordinator position. Leslie said that the post is out and closes on Feb 2. She cannot see who or how many have applied until that closes. The post closes on 2nd, they plan to review applications on the 3rd, and conduct phone interviews around Feb 10. They will then narrow down the field to 2-3 people and conduct in-person interviews on Feb 24. (This year the interviews may be through Zoom). They hope to be able to make an offer by the end of Feb/First of March and have a start date by mid-late March. They will first need to do reference checks, go through HR processes, etc. She would like to have an advisory council member on the panel and she thought the President of the Advisory Council, Cortland, would be a good fit, but she hasn't asked him yet. Rachel Beyer will sit in as well. She's a farm vendor and food chain coordinator with the City.

(Cortland was able to log in to the meeting after some technical difficulties)

Leslie continued, there were no substantial changes to the food & beverage contract from 2020. They will be paying a 7.5% fee that they didn't pay last year. Legal has asked all contracts to have covid 19 language, so that is an addition.

The farm vendor contract has limited changes. Dates and Covid 19 language were added/updated. The wording around SNAP was changed on the application. Vendors now have to opt out of programs as opposed to opting in, as a way to encourage all vendors to participate.

The farm vendor handbook has some substantial changes, some were made just to simplify the document. There was a lot of information. We tried to gear it specifically toward farm vendors, so we removed information on info alley, food and beverage, a fair of the arts, etc. Took out items that weren't contract-based such as the market history and adjusted language around dates so they wouldn't need to be updated as often. The main content areas of interest to farm vendors are concerning the vendor point system. We are not getting rid of the point system. We will still use it for the space reservation meeting. We weren't ready to put in how it's going to work going forward. We may possibly research other point systems. Parks sees the need to reward/honor those who have been with us for many years, they're just not sure this is the way to go.

Whitney said that old time vendors understand it and that it should be a conversation that includes vendor input (not just the FMAC). Whitney suggested maybe a town hall structure. To discuss what would be fair and equitable. Leslie said that is a great idea and another reason why Parks didn't want to make a big change without that kind of input. She said maybe the points system makes more sense when spaces were super competitive, so maybe it's a good time to re-evaluate since the need and use is different than 5 years ago. She agrees that it is worth a conversation. Whitney said a lot of thought went into how new vendors could accumulate points quickly and that there are a lot of nuances to the current point system. Whitney asked if there was a plan to make changes before the space reservation meeting or will we move forward with what we have? Leslie said that the space reservations will be based off of 2019 points to determine spaces for 2021 (since no one accumulated points in 2020). Whitney

asked what structure was used for July 2020 space reservations. Leslie said they used points from 2019 and chose spaces over Zoom. It will probably be very similar in March. Leslie reiterated that she didn't want to make it seem like it's not a good system - It has worked for many years, but we're going through a lot of change, so it seems like a good time to take a fresh look at it. She said she certainly doesn't know all the nuances and why things were developed the way they were. She just knows that when she looks at it, it's a little mind-boggling. It's a lot to continue the upkeep of those numbers for vendors, but if it's a system that works for everyone, if it's fair and equitable, we can certainly continue it. She thinks it's just worth some discussion. Cortland said that he appreciates the mind power. He thinks it's a great time to evaluate as little mistakes can upset people for sure.

Cortland asked how are we trending on applications right now (he joined the meeting a little late). Leslie said that they have 11 now and she's assuming some are waiting to see the contract and handbook.

Leslie said the other big change in the handbook is the addition of the complaint policy and process. The language is similar to that of Fishers Farmers Market, but they added an appeal process to the policy language. Legal changed some language around just a bit. They added that unsigned complaints would not be addressed and that complaints must be signed by individuals with direct knowledge of the events. They added language that if there is an issue around a farm product or farm that it would be looked into within 21 days. They did not put a deadline on when they would investigate vendor to vendor complaints because there's a lot that could go into those. They included language about mediation and said that they would handle complaints efficiently, fairly and discreetly as possible. She said that investigations are done directly and privately and a summary finding would be placed in market files and given only to parties involved. However, she added that if there was a public records request, they would have to provide that information. It's important for people to understand that. There are obviously limitations that legal has but for the most part, information is pursuant to public records requests. She said that violation of the rules is cause for imposing sanctions, up to and including expulsion from the market, but expulsion isn't necessarily where you'd go. It just could happen.

Janice asked if we ever got a copy of the processes from other (area) markets. Leslie said, no, we did not.

Becky Vadas asked what some other sanctions could be. Leslie responded that it could be a suspension for a certain amount of time, or maybe asking someone who's been involved in inappropriate behavior, like a stand assistant, not to return.

Leslie outlined the updated timeline. Whereas in the past vendors would receive the application and contract together and pay for the application fee and space reservation at the same time, it made more sense to adjust it to accept applications which are due on February 22nd, send out acceptance letters and contracts on the 26th, and they'll need to be returned by March 22 if

they're selling in April or prior to their first day if they're selling later. It's a more systematic process where you apply, get approved, then sign your contract and pay.

Whitney asked if we will still accept payment for just ½ season up front. Leslie said that it might be easier for people to pay ½ especially in the uncertain times that we have. Whitney said it was appreciated. Cortland said a lot of farmers' cash reserves might be depleted in the early spring so they can join with less money down. Cortland asked if there is anyway that vendors can pay their booth fees online. He suggested the square invoice account that he has. Leslie said that it's probably not a surprise that payment isn't always the easiest when it comes to the City. It may be a little tricky due to everyone paying different fees - there are a lot of options from small to large spaces, paying for half year or full year, senior pricing, renting multiple spaces, etc. Sarah & Leslie will look at how to pay online. Whitney said that there are drop down menus on Square and Pay Pal. Leslie said the City is particular about what forms they use. She said it's great because vendors and customers can pay quickly with their cards, but they have seen a huge increase in credit card fees and bank fees as well. It's a real catch 22. It's something they're working on internally. Square is probably the best option right now.

Becky Vadas asked about April Market Leslie said we can most likely do it so that people list their preferences and we assign spots and the actual space reservation would just be for May-October. Leslie said that once the board hopefully approves the documents, the handbooks and a read-only copy of the contract will be available on the website for vendors to review.

## **New Business**

### *Financial Assistance Program*

Leslie said that if this of interest, maybe some members of the FMAC could form a committee to decide how you'd like to move forward with this proposal. In December we briefly discussed that there was a \$5,000 donation to use as we wish, which was called a diversity fund. We could possibly develop some sort of financial assistance program funneled through the FMAC where farm vendors or food & beverage artisans could apply for assistance. The funds could be used to cover farm vendor fees or training or conferences. The committee could set limits and the process. It could help new vendors get a jumpstart if there is a financial barrier to their attending.

Whitney and Cortland think it's a great idea. Whitney said it could be a mini-grant program that we could consider what the guidelines would be. If it's successful, we may be able to get more funds for this. Mike said, one concern he has is timing. Requests sometimes have tight turn-around times. There may have to be email communication or a small group meeting. Mike said we should do it tonight so that it can help address fees for this season. Cortland said it's a good idea, but we will have to write some ground rules. Whitney said set parameters for the use of the funds and the quantity available - A simple one page application. It would also be important to make people aware of the timeline for receiving the funds. A subcommittee would probably be good. She sits on other boards where they have similar grants and she could provide some examples.

Cortland asked should it be for anyone or just for new vendors. Janice said she has some concern that if it was set up as a diversity fund that we would get blow back if it wasn't spent on increasing diversity. Leslie said that she will look into the intention of the funds. She said that diversity is a lot of different things. A new vendor falls under diversity just as trying to encourage different cultures to join the market. She said she will look into what the intention of the donation was.

Mike asked what the upper limit for vendor fees would be. Leslie said that a farm vendor with a reserved large space would pay \$567 for May-October.

Sarah asked if this is something that should only be considered for current vendors or would it be something that prospective vendors who are trying to build a business could use. Another idea is that the funding could be used to purchase things like tools on the farm.

Mara said it seems like there should be a rubric for what the intention is to support and room for people to come forward with something that we hadn't thought of. Mike said he thinks it should be tied to participation in the market. Whitney said that she'd consider it a cost share. Think about how many people we anticipate wanting to help with this money. It could be used for business practices, market fees, professional development, licensure costs. It would be open to artisan food vendors as well and there are unique costs associated with that, as well. She would be inclined to look at it as a fund that wouldn't necessarily cover the entirety of a cost, but help support the vendor. Lynn agrees that there should be some commitment or buy-in from the individual so that it's actually put to use for what was funded. A percentage of a project is a really important idea.

Mike said initially limiting it to only being used for a portion of vendor fees, given the amount of money we're talking about. Whitney said she'd like to advocate for business practices. Customers would like to use debit cards/alternative payment. It might be helpful for the market as a whole as well as those vendors. Cortland said he gets the sense that everyone is interested in a financial assistance program. We have a lot of work to do to design the scope and applicability. He'd like to put this on the agenda for next month so we have time to jot down some thoughts and reconvene. Mara Lea asked Whitney about ways to support vendors moving from cash to other payments. Whitney said she thinks there's interest and that vendors might need assistance through mentoring or training. She thinks it'd be good for the health of the market. First, though, we need to find out what the intention was for those funds. Leslie said she will find out and send out an email to the group.

### *Space Reservation Process for 2021*

Leslie said that we've already covered a lot of this in some of the earlier discussion, but we are still ironing out exactly how the space reservation meeting is going to work. We don't anticipate being able to meet in person, but we want to do some vendor orientation - discuss some rules, some challenges, the anticipated COVID 19 set up with limited attendance. We will use the 2019 points to work through the selection process. We will get out info from the health

department, and hopefully have an update on the use of the new parking garage, which will hopefully be done by the time market opens.

Sarah asked if there are any brief training sessions that vendors need like redemptions for SNAP and gift certificates, etc. Whitney suggested having the health department address COVID specifics. Review of COVID guidelines. Janice suggested mentioning the Plant a Row/Farm to Family programs. Becky Vadas said we should encourage vendors to tag the city's social media since she sees it as free advertising, and it has worked for her business. Sarah said that one thing we asked for on the application this season is vendor Facebook/Instagram handles. This will help the social media team be able to highlight what vendors are doing.

Leslie said there are still funds remaining for tripling WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program again.

### **Public Comment/Unrelated to Agenda Items**

Cortland asked what the status of council members' terms are. Leslie said that we have one farm vacancy because Melanie resigned. She said that Suzanne's term is up in March, and everyone else's term carries through 2021. We also have 2 food and beverage artisan seats available that we hope to fill after we make vendor selections.

Cortland said he's gotta ask if anyone would want to be the vice chair, in case he has more technology issues. There was no response.

There was a request for other public comment or unrelated items. There were no other public comment or other unrelated items

### **Adjournment**

Whitney motioned to adjourn. Cortland seconded. There was no opposition. Adjourned at 6:51pm.