

Buffalo and Erie County Food Policy Council Meeting Minutes

August 29, 2017

Present:

Kelly Asher
Kelly Fletcher
Julie Barry
Nathan Attard
Cheryl Thayer
Mike Raleigh
Elias Reden
Connie Erwin
Della Miller
Rob Free – through teleconference
Lucia Leone – through teleconference

Guests:

Mick Kubik
Beth Machnica – through teleconference

This was a special meeting of the Food Policy Council called regarding the Food Systems Grant Program – Request for Information

Cheryl Thayer called the meeting to order. Everyone signed in and introduced themselves. Kelly Asher told the group that there is an opportunity for funding if applied for as a Council. Kelly Fletcher looked at the proposal from the United Way that wants to focus on areas on food access, food justice, and food sovereignty (ownership of a food system given to the people); that is the item it was thought the council should focus on. There are many different voices on the council where we could accomplish this. They came up with a mission to involve citizens in producing, preserving and preparing their own food; so as to decrease dependency on an extraneous food system. This will be giving citizens the ability to do so in ways that are utilizing our council talents. We want to involve block clubs, churches, community groups and student organizations. The sustainability of any initiative we do we want to make sure it gives back to the people, so that they own it when we step away. Kelly Fletcher said that an outline was done on a few ways to accomplish these goals. It is a two year grant so they were thinking of applying for \$100,000. In year one we are looking to establish four community gardens. The reason they selected the four sites were because of high obesity rates in the regions. They are the City of Buffalo, City of Lackawanna, Village of Depew, and North Collins. They want to establish the four community gardens by support through block clubs, church, community groups or organizations so that the block clubs essentially own the community garden. We empower them to have them do this in the first year. By targeting these food desert areas we are providing residents with an alternative healthy food source that they are growing and owning. For those individuals who would like to do their own garden at their homes we could offer community workshops on how to do a raised bed garden or a container garden and provide them with supplies to do so. In year two we would move into teaching people skills with demonstrations

and workshops, and focusing on skills that we have as a Council. These would include composting, soil, water raised beds, seedlings etc. These are suggestions in the workshop topics included on the proposal. The block clubs, churches and community organizations could host the workshops. We have spoken to our working groups on procurement, healthy food retail, market gardening and education. We would like to get input from the council regarding this proposal. Kelly Asher asked the group for their thoughts.

Cheryl Thayer asked if anyone else's organization was applying for money through this grant. Cooperative Extension is applying for a grant to help cost offset (through insurance agencies) with CSA's (Community Supported Agriculture). No one else was applying, however Kelly Fletcher wanted to speak to Lucia Leone regarding the healthy corner store initiative. Lucia was joining the meeting on a teleconference call at a later time. We will contact Grass Roots Gardens to inquire if they will be applying.

Connie Erwin said that one of the things that she thought worked well and would place us in a unique position is if we could come up with an end goal. She thought this would get more participation and it heightens the level of success. As an example of this, Ms. Erwin told the group that when she teaches food handling workshops, she goes to a local restaurant and inquires if she can bring her students in for an event; so that they can work in the restaurant when they have their food handling certificates. As she is teaching she has everyone engaged because they will be able to work in the restaurant at the completion of the course. This keeps the students motivated and ties everything together. Kelly Asher said that the vegetables are actually for the people growing them to teach them ownership of their own food system.

Mick Kubik said that something bigger than an event would be an idea of where you want to go with this so that people buy into the idea. Ms. Erwin said that 40% of her participants are in the hospitality field, then went on to obtain jobs. She would like to see us try to drive toward some end result. Her position is education. She went on to say that it is a great idea to grow produce, but we are talking to a population that has no idea what to actually do with it. Kelly Asher said that perhaps jobs in agriculture could be an incentive.

Elias Reden questioned if there would be a way to rather than having cooking classes and demonstrations in the second year after everything has been established, have it intertwined in the whole project. As food is coming off the plantings, there could be classes on what needs to be done to prepare it, the kind of meal that could be cooked, and how to do it etc. Mick Kubik also said in the CSA's food shares come some produce that people are not familiar with. Food preparation in cooking healthy and using the produce that is not familiar would be beneficial. Kelly Asher said that this needs to all be integrated.

Kelly Fletcher asked Cheryl Thayer if they were targeting CSA's for new sites. To which she responded that the idea was born years ago. The Extension met with a few insurance agencies and it did not come together at that time. The idea is to help spark continued growth with the existing CSA's. One of the challenges that CSA's have with their customer base is that it is a very focused base. It is difficult to come up with money, so that the CSA's are not for the entire population. They want to be able to open up the opportunity for lower to middle income people. It is challenging even for the middle income people; a lot of money has to be put up. The cost

offset has been proven very successful in order to do it. Ms. Thayer said that she did not know if we should drive new CSA's. If the market can support it that would be a good thing. If not this might help to bring in a new customer base to our existing CSA farms and/ or help them expand their membership base. For the Extension the first year is planning for it, the second is executing in a pilot. The education piece is very important. How to prepare, cook, and store food; as well as if the food can be stored are all important issues.

Kelly Fletcher said that the United Way is looking for groups that are blending together with what others are doing. We need to reach out to Grass Roots Gardens to see what they are planning. They have the expertise to set up the Community Gardens. Perhaps we should partner up with Cooperative Extension, and the CSA's to provide education in the drop sites with the workshops.

Mike Raleigh said that also working with Cornell, another way to create value is if we try to figure out how big the demand is or how many would buy into CSA's if there were more subsidies. There are city farms that actually have their own CSA's. We can establish that there is a market demand and a lot of people who would buy into it. We could then say we could develop city farms into producing for this, to help people step into it in a year or two; and growing to support this type of market. He thought that some kind of demographic data would be beneficial. Mr. Raleigh asked Ms. Thayer how many CSA's there were in Erie County. To which she replied that there are 15 to 20 in our five county region; however this was as of several years ago, the list should be updated. Ms. Thayer said this grant is specific to Buffalo and Erie County. Many of the CSA's that are serving Buffalo and Erie County residents are not from Erie County. There is a handful, but there are also some from Wyoming, Genesee, Niagara as well as the southern tier. If we did get funding and they were okay with it; this may support a larger agricultural base outside of Buffalo and Erie County but the offset would be for residents of Buffalo and Erie County. That is how we would target back to this geographic area. The number of CSA's has probably gone up and this does not include some of the smaller city operations that need to be focused on. Looking at the city farms could be an opportunity to expand the market garden mentality, or CSA models.

Kelly Asher thought that some of the city sites could be used for education. Mike Raleigh thought that establishing a market where people could be serving and employed at, could be a first step in business planning for people to be moving into this type of field. Cheryl Thayer said their first step would be in determining supply and demand. What the demand would be for CSA membership among their target population. There are models across the country that do a couple of hundred dollar offsets. Is this enough to help drive participation or does it need to be more. Who are our current CSA farms, we do not want to create a situation where we saturate the market and end up competing with our existing CSA's but we would like to see if there is more opportunity for growth.

Kelly Asher inquired as to how many CSA's there are in the City. Mike Raleigh answered that there are 4 or 5. Ms. Asher said that instead of creating more community gardens we should focus on the existing ones. These gardens are located primarily on the far west side, and the east side (Broadway-Fillmore). Connie Erwin said that there are some deserts there also. She suggested making the gardens more equitable throughout the city by establishing some where

there are none. She thought that selling a bag of food for perhaps \$5 would be a simple plan and providing information for learning how to do this, and how to get engaged in an agricultural business. Kelly Asher reiterated the education path, how to use the food, how to access food inexpensively, how to make it and how to make a living off of it.

Mick Kubik said in the area where he resides, there had been a produce stand. It has now turned into a CSA. He thought that from their prospective it is a good business model. The CSA is then guaranteed their operating expenses up front. He mentioned that the upfront price of the CSA could be daunting. The market gardens would be accessible to many more people.

There was mention of food deserts in rural areas. Connie Erwin thought that perhaps we should apply for more than \$100,000. Kelly Fletcher thought that perhaps the initial plan is too ambitious and maybe we should start at a smaller level. It was suggested to reach out to Grass Roots and MAP to see what they are doing.

Julie Barry felt that the first step should be reaching out to other organizations to see what they are doing as we do not want to be stepping on any toes. She thought that putting something together on a generic sense would be a good idea. Then there would be time to reach out to see what others in the community are doing.

Rob Free asked what the date was when United Way was taking proposals. Kelly Fletcher said that the initial letter of interest must be in by Sept. 7. They will then invite selected groups to write a full proposal by the end of the year. Cheryl Thayer said that formal awards will be done in March 2018; this is when the money will be dispersed with awards. Mr. Free thought that this should be kept more generic, then we can build onto it. Be simple and do our due diligence, then we can find out what others are doing.

Elias Redden asked how much of the money that we are asking for will be put into building community gardens. A plot of land in the city can be obtained inexpensively. If we want to serve as a community garden in a way where we could hit all of the points where there is food available, education and sales opportunities. Kelly Asher said that a simple idea to promote people to have their own garden, container gardens, or to have a garden behind their church. This is all sustainable. Plot acquisition would have to be accomplished through one of the partner groups.

Elias Redden said that through the FPC we are looking to make changes in policy and looking to support organizations that are doing work around the community gardens and the CSA systems. If we are looking at systemic changes is it possible to use county property for some of these endeavors. Perhaps saying that each public health clinic have a garden. Mick Kubik said there is not enough land around clinics to accomplish this.

Cheryl Thayer said that a vague letter be submitted and then finding out what our community partners are doing. We cannot do programming as a council, as we are a volunteer council. Is there a way that we can support someone else's proposal and add value to it in some capacity. Such as education, community events, can we attach this to an existing idea and build upon it. To reiterate finding out what others are doing and adding to it. Lucia Leone teleconferenced in.

Kelly Fletcher said in hearing everyone's thoughts, building in an internship program into the education piece. Or something that can be sponsored by the council, i.e. a scholarship program, or resources to train more people in the community to attend workshops. The end goal would be for people to set up their own market gardens, using all the partner organizations, and we could facilitate. Kelly Asher said that we could use the money to promote this collaboration and work together to attain this end result. We need to bring all the pieces together by hosting conferences and having the organizations work together to facilitate and attain a work plan to accomplish certain end goals. Nate Attard said that we could include local government officials, and planners at the municipal level for workshops.

Lucia Leone said that they are working on Healthy Corner Stores. They are not doing one for UB specifically but they will do something related to our Food Policy subgroup. They are thinking about putting together a system for connecting people to the information that they hope to have eventually on their website with a map and data base of all the different resources for accessing healthy food ranging from getting a snack with WIC benefits to finding a healthy corner store or a farmer's market in the community. And connecting this with being an on-line platform to bring a text messaging system where people can connect with information on various topics. On access to healthy food, and to have a follow-up regarding places they went to and community feedback. It was thought that this would be a unique way to highlight what groups are doing in Erie County. This would show that we are being more collaborative and promoting what others are doing.

Rob Free said that the restaurant association was going to implement having some workshops for local restaurants on how to source locally and get more involved in buying local. He mentioned that there seems to be a disconnect between restaurants and local farmers. At this point this is just a concept. Cheryl Thayer said that she would forward information to him regarding a buyer/grower meeting on September 25 at 42 North, from 7-9. They are doing a focus on restaurants and institutional markets. This might be a good pilot if they could get some interest from restaurants to show up. Lucia Leone asked if there would be any involvement of corner stores in this endeavor. The focus could be expanded to corner stores if interest was expressed. Cheryl Thayer said that the goal of Cornell is to create networks between the buyers and the growers who are not meeting on their own or connecting; and to feature food that can be grown in New York State at an institutional level price competitively. This information will be sent out to the Food Policy Council and to the Restaurant Association.

Mick Kubik said from his perspective with Erie County is that he does not want to forget about working with the community that we are trying to serve and putting this into the hands of people that would not be a part of. Cheryl Thayer said that the focus of the grant is food access, justice and sovereignty; getting people to take ownership in their own food system. It was also mentioned that this was a great proposal but it needs to be framed as a demonstration project on some areas where this is being done by other organizations. Kelly Fletcher thought that instead of establishing four community gardens without any of us having the experience to accomplish this, the focus should be to target churches and to plant small gardens that could feed the church for community events. They could come to the church to learn how to cook, and host for, as well as hold food demonstrations. The churches and block clubs could be facilitating the farm shares and pooling money for it, this could be shared among themselves. This would broaden the CSA

target group. Cheryl Thayer said that if there was one community garden and it would serve as a demonstration site, then there could be a series of educational programming built around it. The garden is more of a vehicle to deliver the educational programming around it to a particular audience. If there is interest and there is a model that works and there is some type of evaluation that shows that folks that run through the program learned more about healthy food, what to do with it, how to prepare it, this could be the program itself. The community would pull in different agencies with expertise. We could talk about composting at the local level, food preparation and calling up our community partners who have expertise in these particular areas. Kelly Fletcher said that as an example you could pull in how to collect rain water along with Buffalo River Keepers. Cheryl Thayer said that not every participant will become a water conservationist or a composter, or gardener, or food preparer but they might take away one or two skills that are most important to them and relevant to their family.

Julie Barry suggested that perhaps there should be one urban and one rural garden to leave it more general and to see who is interested in the plan. She also said that the EC Dept. of Environment and Planning is presently conducting nine different comprehensive plan updates with different municipalities around the County. The village of North Collins is one, Holland, and some rural areas as well as Lancaster-Depew and Newstead. Part of the plan update is to address agriculture and food systems.

Mike Raleigh said that in his background initiating several garden ventures, he would advise against starting a new site. He thought that we should try to partner with someone who has an established site where you could plug people in to learn immediately. Establishing a new site requires a lot of work involved, i.e. leasing or buying. The first year you will not grow much, as you must transition from open space to something that is producing. There are sites all over the city. Grass Roots gardens have leases all over the city. Kelly Fletcher said that they are not accepting applications for the current year for more community gardens; they are attempting to place people in the existing gardens to learn. Kelly Asher that there are food deserts in some villages in rural sites, she thought that we need to definitely select a rural site. She did not know if there were any existing community gardens in rural sites. Kelly Fletcher said that this would be part of the process.

Connie Erwin asked if there was an opportunity to bring people together across different ethnicities and demographics in general. Food is a universal language. She thought that we could make a biggest impact with Grass Roots. We can bring organizations together, but what will we accomplish that is different, bring people together and improve the vitality of our city? Kelly Asher suggested having a central site closer to downtown. Connie said that a transportation component may have to be addressed in bringing people together. Kelly Fletcher suggested conducting urban farm tours where we could pay for facilitation for transportation; and develop a relationship with a farm.

Mick Kubik suggested a community garden fest. We could publicize events for this around the city. Connie Erwin brought up the garden walk. That is now spreading out to other communities within the city to bring people who ordinarily would not go to the community, or Slow Roll that is bringing people into communities that they would not ordinarily go into. She said that we have an opportunity with this grant to do something similar. This adds to the greater good of the

city. Julie Barry also said that since she is new to the council she had never been to a market garden but would certainly like to understand more about urban farming. She thought that our role would be to highlight what is already going on in urban gardens in the city.

Connie Erwin brought up the parties where different courses of a meal were served at different houses of the participants. She suggested taking this idea to organizations and taking a course at each farm. Such as composting at one, raised beds at another etc. Education and music could also be provided, and the culmination would be you get to sit down and eat the meal, where you have gathered up people as we go. It was suggested that Grassroots Garden could be a part of the tour.

Cheryl Thayer said that for the letter of intent we put together who we are, and what we are trying to do, she thought that it should be vague. We are trying to bring the community into the food system, different types of food system opportunities, education. We need to speak with our community partners and find out what they are doing. If they are applying for the grant, and how we can again add value to an existing proposal or add value to an existing coalition of organizations on what they do. Basically how to connect the dots between what is already being done, and add value to it. Without taking up too much of our time and resources. Kelly Fletcher said we could use the block clubs and church groups to get to the different parts of the community so we could recruit from them and we could pay for transportation. Connie Erwin said that many of the churches have vans that could be utilized. And as long as they are transporting their own members there is not an insurance issue. We would set up the times and the dates. The events could include farm fresh food, tabling opportunities with our community partners, and everyone leaves with a bag of food. Kelly Fletcher said that we will give background on the Food Policy Council and touch on buzzwords such as food access, justice; and explain how we are going to involve the community. In-kind support will come from the council members and how the end goal is to help citizens in producing, preserving and preparing their own food, taking more ownership of their food system.

Kelly Fletcher suggested that after we host the community event we should do a pre and post knowledge change. We could do what the entry level is of all the topics we are going to touch on in the van tour and at the end ask if any new food was tried. Would you purchase and use it. Would you have purchased without going to the event. Mike Raleigh said that in terms of timing, this time of year next year would be perfect. Maximum production and surplus produce would be available. In year two we could have the participants commit to perhaps Grassroots Gardens. There must be some tangibles and a cost to plug into. We could take the people that have gone through our workshop and train them to teach their community, a train the trainer event. We are then empowering people to sustain it. Then they should commit to hosting two workshops the following year. This could be written into the grant.

We should reach out to other organizations to see what they plan on applying for. Even if we do not get the grant we could support what they are doing. Kelly Asher said she would contact MAP, Cheryl Thayer said that she would contact Grass Roots Gardens and some others. Cooperative Extension, the Restaurant Association are both applying; as well as Healthy Corner Stores. Lucia said that they are looking for a paid coordinator that is based at one of their partner

organizations, also some support for marketing, possibly some money for purchase of produce for initial store purchase and incentives. There will also be a community engagement piece that ties in but will not conflict.

Della Miller said that the Broadway Market is applying for equipment. Kelly Asher commented that the grant allows for many things, i.e. capital purchases. Della also said that the Broadway Market has a roof top garden. Kelly Asher said that we could possibly utilize that site for events. It was also mentioned that we could write in that we would like to potentially want to work with all of the grantees to bring additional people from various networks to these opportunities.

Mike Raleigh said that in Market Garden policies we asked for a policy coordinator for the City of Buffalo. He suggested getting a small grant to fund the position for a year or two. It was suggested that perhaps the City or the Wellness Institute be involved. Mike Raleigh will be involved with contacting Phil Haberstro regarding this issue.

Kelly Fletcher said that upon hearing all the input, we act as a convener of everything that is going on so that it is a wrap around for the United Way, We essentially sell our package and we take everyone that is working on this grant and basically let the community know what is going on. Cheryl Thayer reiterated that we need to provide skills training, and education, not just information. She did like the idea of everything culminating in an event where everyone gets together in a final gathering. One of the biggest challenges involved is getting people to show up at the events and participate. We will need to include marketing in our budget.

Kelly Fletcher told the group that she would draft up a document today and send it out to the members. She asked that everyone send comments back by Thursday, August 31st by noon. We will create a deadline of 9/6 to reach out to organizations so that we can ensure we are not duplicating anything. The meeting was then adjourned.

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