

**URBAN AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE (UAC)
MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, March 12, 2025
Grand Rapids Public Library (111 Library St NE)**

Call to Order 5:47 pm

Roll Call

Present: Connie Bohatch, Evvia Marshall, Kimberly Moore, Robert Cloy

Absent: Carlos Calderon, Muriel Lutes (Dolli)

Other: Kristof Nieschwitz - Office of Sustainability, Eleanor Moreno – Kent County Food Policy Council, Erin Sloan-Turner – Kent County Conservation District

Approval of Agenda

Motion made by Robert, supported by Connie, to approve the March 12, 2025, agenda as presented. Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Robert, supported by Evvia, to approve January 8, 2025, minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Public Comments

- Eleanor – Wants the Kent County Food Policy Council to be on the agenda to present the Food System Plan. They'd like to work more closely with the committee to be better collaborators with urban ag.
- Kristof – Interested in helping to support the alignment of urban ag to the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan.
- Erin Sloan-Turner - Native plants order now through May 10. The Kent Conservation District is a unit of local government with a focus on soil and water health (run off and chemicals). Landowners can connect with programs at kentconversation.org

Round Robin Announcements - *Committee Members*

- Evvia – Created the Grand Rapids Urban Farmers Facebook group to help bring together people who are interested in urban ag. Attended urban ag summit at MSU. Detroit had a heavy presence, and it seemed like they led the work on that side of the state. Detroit has more space due to vacant land. It seems like the Grand Rapids land bank is prioritizing affordable housing, so it will be interesting to see what the opportunities are to use some of that land for urban agriculture. Working with GR Food Co-Op to diversify membership and get more black/brown members, they're at 900 members, and 1500 members is the sweet spot to open a store. Doing a seed starting class on March 27 at Garfield, and on May 10 there will be a seed and plant swap. Anyone is welcome to come, you do not have to be a Co-Op owner.
 - Kristof: What is the difference between urban farmers and community gardens?
 - Evvia: The Size and land they're working on. Community gardens are on public land. A lot of people don't really know how to plant, so community gardens are a great way to learn.

- Connie – The Economic Development Department has always had a community garden policy (Connie will have a conversation with the director and see what kind of opportunities are available for land that cannot be developed on for housing or other purposes).
- Kim – It’s “Go Orange Month” at Kids Food Basket (orange represents childhood hunger). Fundraisers and awareness to take schools off the waiting list for service. Kids Food Basket hosted two legislative events for local government and state government to learn how things are going and give updates to folks who have long supported Kids Food Basket. Also attended the urban ag summit at MSU – one of the many things takeaway is that there have been a lot of good changes, but a lack of public awareness. There should be dollars behind raising awareness about the changes to the public.
- Robert – Spring is coming, and work is getting busier. Partnering with districts to give out saplings in the last two weeks of April. Work has been affected by some of the policy changes happening at the federal level three weeks ago; some grants have been paused, but none have been pulled back. Also, signed up to be an owner of the Food Co-Op. Annual Spring Forum event May 15-17.
- Connie – The Kent County Food Policy Council’s Food System Plan was presented to the City Commission, but unfortunately, it was near the end of the agenda, so engagement might not have been the best. Made sure to share with the Commission about the work of the committee. Hoping that the committee can create some type of plan to support the implementation of all of these City and County plans. Proposed seat changes to the committee have been approved.

Agenda items

Environmental Justice Impact Grant:

- Victoria: No real update at this point. The Parks Dept is still waiting for the MOU language from the State. After we receive that information, Parks will bring the awarded grant to City Commission for approval.

Strategic Planning and Direction:

- Connie: Victoria put together a list of where urban ag comes up in the City’s Community Master Plan, the Food Systems Plan, and the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan. Jennifer VanHorsen, responsible for innovation for the City, is available for a strategic planning session. The thought is that we could meet in April. Victoria will work to organize the date for that session.

Committee Engagement – Neighborhood Summit, May 17, 2025

- Kim: Proposal to table at Neighborhood Summit. Motion made by Robert, supported by Evvia. Motion carried.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:01 pm.

Next Meeting – May 14, 2025.