

URBAN AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE (UAC)
MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday January 8, 2025
Grand Rapids Public Library (111 Library St NE)

Call to Order – Meeting was called to order at 5:42

Roll Call

Present: Carlos Calderon, Connie Bohatch, Evvia Marshall, Kimberly Moore, Muriel Lutes (Dolli), Robert Cloy

Absent: Steve Krogman

Other: Annabelle Wilkinson – City of Grand Rapids, Chief Sustainability Officer

Approval of Agenda

Motion made by Connie, supported by Carlos, to approve the January 8, 2025, agenda as presented.
Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Carlos, supported by Connie, to approve November 13, 2024, minutes as presented.
Motion carried.

Public Comments

Round Robin Announcements

Committee Members

- **Robert:** Continuing watershed work. Looking forward to Spring and Summer 2025 to get back out and engage with community.
- **Carlos:** Officially launched micro-grant from the USDA to award up to 24k during a three-year grant period, serving City of Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Muskegon, and Holland. A little flexibility in redefining the urbanized area vs just using municipal boundaries. There will be adjusting and evolution over the years. WMEAC is going through a leadership change currently. Shouldn't be a huge impact, but folks are taking on more responsibility.
- **Dolli:** Citizen Climate Lobby Environmental Justice group and C4 are working on restoring the forest floor in urban areas, somewhere near Garfield park. Looking to connect with faith-based communities as they are the third largest landowners in the City.
- **Evvia:** Thinking about seed starting giveaway and swap. Looking to support community interested in doing this individually. Working with the Farris State Grand Rapids Alumni Council to do service projects. Proposing to start a community garden – looking at Garfield park, but there's a garden in there. Looking to bring together an egg sale hub so that folks can buy local eggs from those with chickens in the City.
- **Connie:** Launched notice of intent to apply for neighborhood match funds. Look to see if you have programs to align with those eight outcomes. Put in a notice of intent to apply as a first step. From then on you will be invited to formally apply. This initial application process was created to avoid the hassle of a large application process for local organizations.
- **Victoria:** List of gardens community gardens:

- Ball Perkins – edible: Parks winterizes water source and turns it on/off, works on capital improvements
 - Pleasant Park – nonedible: Parks provides landscaping work and cares for the raingarden
 - Martin Luther King Park – edible (temporarily closed for park construction): Parks provides financial programming support and capital improvements
 - Garfield Park – edible (temporary location of MLK Park garden): Parks provides financial support for programming
 - Highland Park – nonedible: Parks provides water and trash bags
 - Briggs Park – nonedible: Parks provide capital improvements as needed
 - Westtown Commons – edible (herb garden)
- **Kim:** Kicking off the year busy with yearend giving. Received 100k from a donor to begin providing sack supper to Kent County HeadStart weekend program - must raise match funds to kick that off. Meeting with Kent County Food Policy Council to talk about the food policy plan timeline and needs to get that started. Secured a building to have a standalone facility in Muskegon and increase what is being served in the 2025 school year. Meeting with Shannon Harris of OCC to join their network leadership council and looking at grant opportunities to partner on.

Agenda items

2025 Chair & Vice Chair election (*Action Item*)

- Carlos volunteers for Chair. Unanimously approved.
- Kim volunteers for Vice Chair. Unanimously approved.

2025 Meeting Schedule (*Action Item*)

- Kim offers to host the May 14th meeting at Kids Food Basket. Unanimously approved.
- **Carlos:** Let's table the meeting location discussion for the July and September meetings. We will discuss it at the next meeting. Need to identify locations in 1st and 3rd ward.

Update on Ordinance Amendment (*Discussion Item*)

- Connie: Move forward with getting rid of the seat designation of GRPS, Kent County, and Blanford and downsizing to 9 members. We're also proposing a change in the number of appointments from the City manager and Mayor, reduce City staff member requirements, and include sustainability to the staff member list to support work moving forward. Brought the recommendations forward to the Committee on Appointments and who voted to move the recommendations forward to the Committee of the Whole on January 14. The City Commission will review and approve or deny. Where this committee is hosted (Parks or Sustainability Department) is an operational change and won't require an amendment.
- Carlos: Would the commission members be willing to have any conversations with the committee in terms of what the committee's direction should be?
- Connie: Committee should think about what they'd like to work on and provide that list to City leadership. Then there could be more productive conversation. There is an opportunity to do a briefing from the committee to Commission desired.
- Kim: There doesn't seem to be much about Urban Ag in the City's Community Master Plan.
- Connie: There are some vague points of supporting urban ag work and the committee.
 - Victoria to list recommendations regarding urban ag in the minutes:
 - 1.C.5: Improve accessibility to fresh foods throughout the community, with a focus on food deserts and economically challenged neighborhoods.

- 1.C.6: Continue to support community gardens and promote an edible landscape.

Parks and Recreation Update: Environmental Justice Grant (*Discussion Item*)

- Victoria: The Parks and recreation Department received an Environmental Justice Impact grant through EGLE to support urban agriculture work in the City of Grand Rapids. Brief project summary: “The City of Grand Rapids is seeking funding to bolster the current efforts of the community organizations implementing urban agriculture projects in our community parks. We are requesting \$500,000 to support Urban Agriculture projects throughout our community in the following parks located within EJ Communities: Alexander, Ball Perkins, Campau, Dickinson, Douglas, Garfield, Joe Taylor, Kensington, Mary Waters, MLK, Oakdale Gardens, Plaster Creek Family, & Roosevelt. Through community engagement efforts and collaboration, we seek to support organizations' efforts to bring urban agriculture opportunities to disadvantaged populations, so they may reap the benefits of reduced food costs, improved air quality, healthier food practices, and education.” This is sort of a catalyst grant for organizations in the City that are seeking financial support to expand their capacity and implement/program a community garden in the park spaces that are in environmental justice zones (as defined by EGLE). The Parks Department will be hiring a part-time employee for the grant period to provide support for awardees.
- Carlos: How does this committee fit into that work?
- Victoria: Spoke to the grant manager, Parks Superintendent, Joe Sulak, to identify areas of opportunities for this committee to be involved. There are several things that we identified including using your networks for grant outreach, reviewing grant applications, setting up a sustainable system to offboard organizations from grant funding, and much more. We should have more details at the next meeting.

2025 Priorities (*Discussion Item*)

- Carlos: Community gardens could be a priority.
- Robert: It seems like there has been talk of having an official inventory of community gardens? Within the City.
- Evvia: We should be aware of those gardens and if they need help, supplies, or funding. There should be some ways to be connected with them.
- Kim: Are there grant opportunities that could support more education?
- Connie: Last time there was talk about how to do some strategic planning. I’m willing to look into resources to have some kind of planning session. Committees typically don’t have a budget, but once you have a plan, you can strategize to make work happen.
- Carlos: The communication piece should also be a priority because some of the work is happening, but folks just aren’t aware.
- Dolli: Building on that one of the things needed is more people, so communication could grow those connections.
- Robert: Recruitment should be a priority for this year.
- Carlos: We need three more people for a full committee.
- Kim: How would someone get an application for the committee out?
- Connie: The form is online, and then you can let Victoria know if someone you know has applied.
- Carlos: We could reach out to Creston and Roosevelt Park Farmer Market organizers.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Robert and supported by Kim. Meeting adjourned at 6:49

Next Meeting – March 12, 2025.